



Camp William Penn (1865). The regiment on parade in this photograph is probably the 24th USCT, in the spring of 1865. With sixty-five New Jerseyans in its ranks, this regiment began to organize in January 1865 and did not leave for the South until May, when the war was essentially over. The regiment served on occupation duty in Virginia until October 1, 1865, when it was mustered out of service in Richmond. (National Archives)



Private George W. Keyes. Keyes served in Company F, 22nd USCT. (GAR Post 139 Collection, United States Army Military History Institute)



Sergeant Edward Richardson. Richardson, photographed here with an unidentified woman, was a member of Company A, 22nd USCT. (Susan Richardson Collection, United States Army Military History Institute)

AFRICAN AMERICANS SUPPORT THE UNION

With the outbreak of the Civil War, free African Americans across the North clamored to enlist in the Federal army. Their appeals, strongly supported by abolitionist leaders like Frederick Douglass, fell on the deaf ears of an administration concerned with retaining the shaky loyalty of border state slaveholders.

By 1863, however, changing political and military priorities resulted in the raising of African American military units, including the famed 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry and a large number of United States Colored Troops (USCT) regiments.

Black men from New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania joined the USCT at Camp William Penn, outside Philadelphia. On June 28, 1863, twenty-nine “stout, healthy young” Cumberland County African American volunteers passed through Bridgeton on their way to the camp. By November, a New Jersey newspaper proclaimed that “the colored soldiers have, by the unanimous testimony of every officer having charge of them, proven their valor and reliability”.

A total of 2,909 Jerseymen, including 37 white officers, served in the USCT, most of them in Camp William Penn regiments that fought from Virginia to Florida in the last year of the war. The 22nd USCT, with 681 New Jerseyans in its ranks, earned a distinguished combat reputation at Petersburg. Another 362 black Jerseyans served in the Union Navy.

New Jersey's black Civil War soldiers and sailors served their state and country with honor and valor, and the pride and patriotism they acquired in the process endured. In 1944, former First Sergeant George Ashby of the 45th USCT, still alert at the age of 100, followed World War II with interest. “Fighting's different nowadays,” said Ashby, “but if I were younger I certainly would enlist all over again.”

Sergeant Ashby died peacefully in his sleep at his home in Allentown on April 26, 1946. He was the last surviving New Jersey veteran of the Civil War.



First Lieutenant Myron N. Smith (ca. 1863) A Rutgers graduate and attorney in civilian life, Smith transferred from the 4th New Jersey Infantry, where he had served as a second lieutenant, to the 1st USCT, where he became a first lieutenant and regimental adjutant. He was mortally wounded at the battle of Chaffin's Farm, VA on September 30, 1864. All of New Jersey's black regiments were led by white officers. (John W. Kuhl Collection)