

Were There, Or Were There Not, Black Confederates?

By Marjorie Ann Reeves

Even with proof many still will not accept the fact that there were black men who fought for their home in the South. The first to organize when Louisiana seceded were the black freemen of Louisiana forming the 1st Louisiana Native Guards. The Tennessee Legislature authorized blacks into service and in three months several hundred blacks proudly marched through town. The 8th TX Cavalry was accompanied by as many as 500 servants that repeatedly proved their worth to the Confederates.

It is true that many slave owners took black servants with them to war and the black men stayed through the engagement such as Tom Moore cared for the horses, cooked, took care of the clothes for Colonel Benjamin Moore. These jobs were essential part of the war effort that entitled the servants to call themselves Confederate Veterans and attend Confederate Veterans reunions. In 1892, the Mississippi legislature made it possible that all soldiers served in the Confederate armies including servants should receive same pensions as private soldiers.

Essex Lewis with Colonel Nick Lewis saw action in Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia. After the war, Essex was a loyal member of the Egbert Jones Camp of the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) and was chosen to represent the Huntsville Camp at a Confederate reunion in Richmond, Virginia. Matt Gray was well-known because he always wore his old gray uniform every



day. He was also a member of the Confederate veterans camp. There was a special chair reserved for him at the monthly meetings. Silas Chandler who was freed by the Chandlers but insisted on going to war with Andrew, the white family member that Silas grew up with was a Confederate veteran. Andrew stated that "Silas was very much an equal, displaying just as much hatred for the yankees as anyone in the whole unit." Reuben Patterson sold himself into slavery and went to war with Josiah

Patterson. After the war, Reuben donned his Confederate suit (gray suits of military style worn by veterans) to attend Confederate reunions rarely missing one. Mingo Evans went to war with Joe Evans who served in the 9th AL Cavalry. When Joe was shot, Mingo took his gun and continued to fight. Henry Bolden killed five Union Soldiers with a stick knocking them in the head. Private Frank Bailey, 34th NY Infantry wrote "There is no mistake but the Rebels have black soldiers for I have seen them brought in as prisoners of war."

Frederick Douglass wrote to President Lincoln, "There are at the present moment, many colored men in the Confederate Army doing duty not only as cooks, servants and laborers, but as real soldiers, having muskets on their shoulders and bullets in their pockets, ready to shoot down... and do all that soldiers may do to destroy the Federal government." Union Brigadier General Stuart wrote in official records that, clearing the road for a crossing "had to be

prosecuted under the fire of the enemy's sharpshooters, protected as well as the men might be by our skirmishers on the bank, who were ordered to keep up so vigorous a fire that the enemy should not dare to lift their heads about their rifle-pits; but the enemy, and especially their armed negroes, did dare to rise and fire, and did serious execution upon our men."

Horace Greeley wrote in 1863, "For more than two years, Negroes have been extensively employed in belligerent operations by the Confederacy. They have been embodied and drilled as rebel soldiers and have paraded with white troops at a time when this would not have been tolerated in the armies of the Union." Dr. Lewis Steiner, US Sanitary Commission, wrote in 1862 when the Rebels began to leave Frederick, Maryland, there were many black soldiers in the ranks. He estimated there were 64,000 Confederate soldiers and 3,000 of them were negroes that were an integral part of the Confederate army. General Forrest's command was composed of some former plantation slaves who rode for their freedom which General Forrest gave to them in 1863. All his slaves volunteered to serve, many as teamsters. Still they stayed with him until the end of the war. LTC Parkhurst, 9th Michigan, surrendered his command to 8th TX Rangers and 1st GA Rangers. He wrote in his report, "There were also quite a number of negroes attached to the Texas and Georgia Troops, who were armed and equipped, and took part in the several engagements with my forces during the day."

The Harpers Weekly ran a picture of Black Confederates on picket duty drawn by a northerner giving proof there were blacks that fought for their home in the South.

Library of Congress



Blacks that support the history of black Confederates are attacked by blacks and whites. Anthony Hervey of Mississippi was killed in 2015 defending the Confederate Monument in Linn Park at Birmingham, Alabama. Hervey was outspoken in his support of the Confederacy. H.K. Edgerton, was once president of a NAACP group in North Carolina, is attacked at every event he participates in support of his Southern heritage. He states, "If we Southerners don't stand together, we will lose our culture, heritage, religion and region to outsiders who sadly have no appreciation of the unique culture of being Southern."

Al Arnold wrote in his book about his ancestor, "I am a descendent of a proud Black Confederate and a former slave." His great, great, grandfather was Turner

Hall, Jr. He was owned by Nathan Bedford Forrest and served Robert E. Lee as an orderly in the War Between the States. Turner was very proud of his service in the war and was a honored member of his community for his service. Arnold believes “African Americans dishonor their ancestors by attempting to destroy Confederate heritage and by neglecting the historical impact that slaves had on both sides of the War” Between the States. Leonard Haynes, Southern University, wrote “When you eliminate the black Confederate soldier, you’ve eliminated the history of the South.”

In the *Forgotten Confederates*, the authors wrote, “Regardless of attempts to explain away black support or to camouflage or to ignore black efforts in behalf of the Confederacy, there is ample evidence that thousands of black Southerners voluntarily supported the Confederate cause, ignoring an offer of Federal freedom and took up arms to defend Dixie.” An important fact about the South is blacks are a part of our lives. Southerners whether they owned slaves or not were around blacks, we did not grow up afraid or feeling they were not apart of our lives like the northerners have. There was and still are more discrimination in the North then the South. Our cultures are different and the blacks have always been a part of ours, that is why we have better food and music in the South.

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