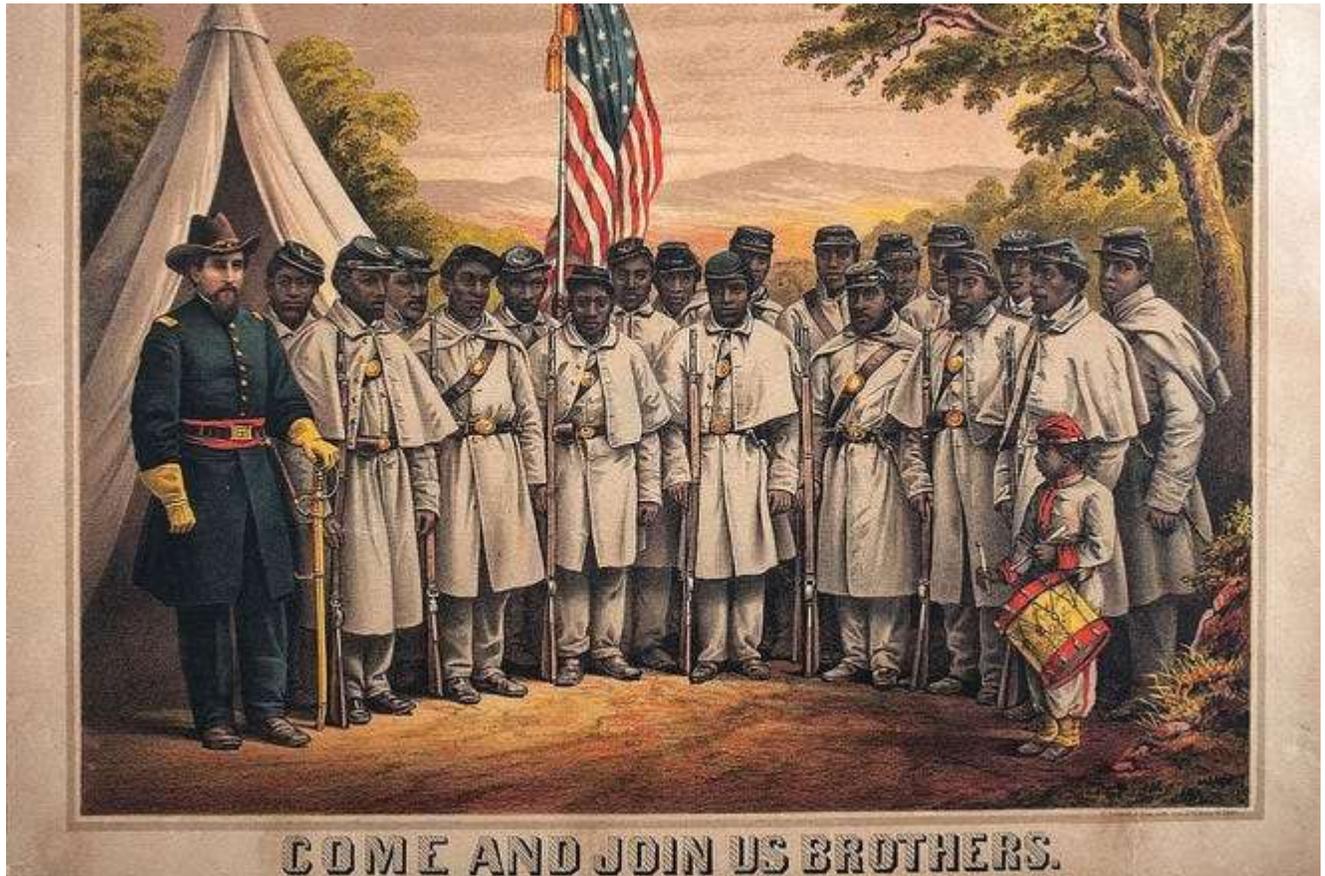


# Mansfield Memories - Mansfield and 5th Regiment Massachusetts Colored Volunteer Cavalry

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A recruitment poster encouraging Black men to enlist during the Civil War. Library of Congress *Library Of Congress*

The U.S. census of 1860 shows no African-Americans living in Mansfield at the outbreak of the Civil War. But town clerk records show that nine “colored” men enlisted from Mansfield. So who were these men who responded to the call to arms?

During the war the federal government set enlistment quotas for each state. They would have to produce a certain number of volunteers for the war effort. In turn the Commonwealth imposed a quota on every city and town.

Early in the war enthusiasm was high. Willing volunteers were easy to find. But they were harder to come by as the war dragged on. When towns couldn't

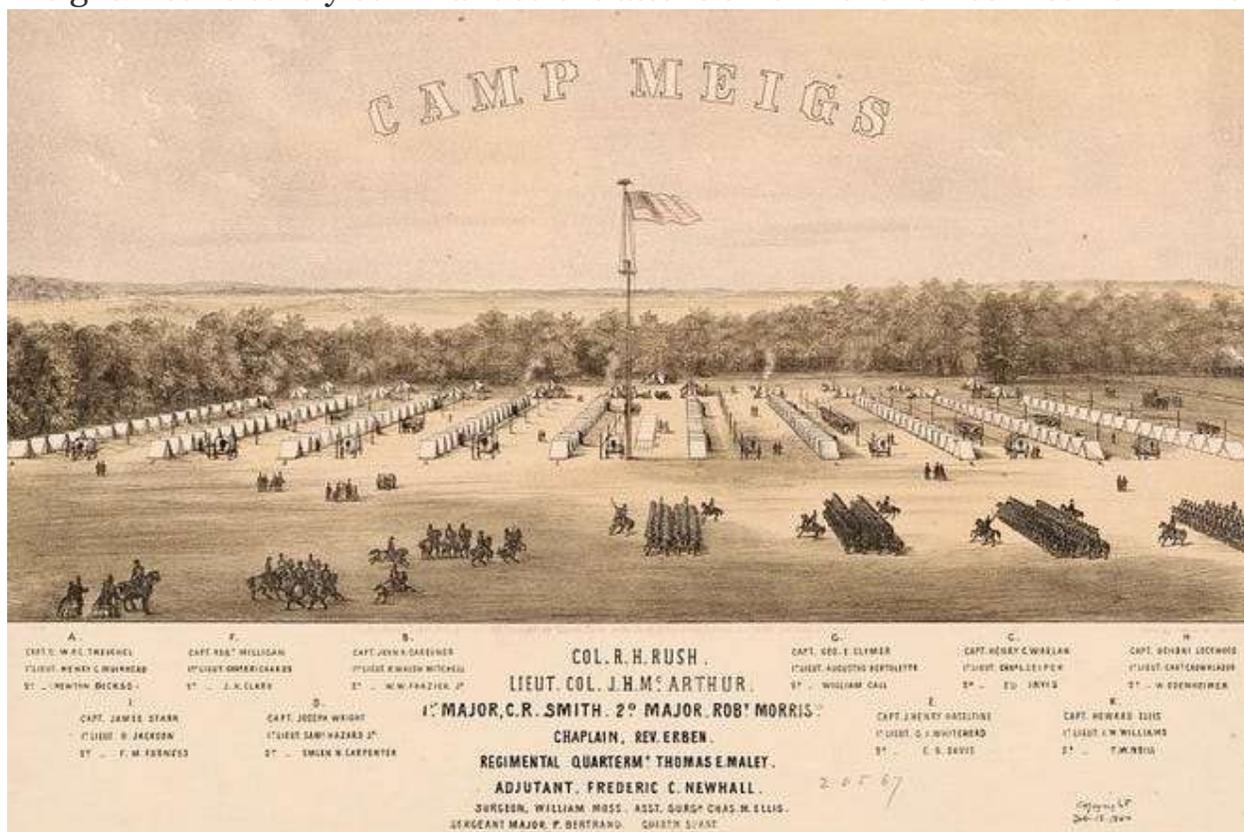
meet their enlistment quota they paid a bounty to out-of-towners who were “credited” to that town.

But Mansfield’s nine Black recruits were never paid a bounty. And their war pay was less than their white counterparts. They likely signed up to help end slavery forever.

There is much we don’t know about these men. They likely came to Massachusetts as it was the first state to form an all-Black regiment. But none of them settled in Mansfield after the war so we can’t be sure why they chose to enlist here.

Maybe they had some unknown connection to the town. Maybe it was simply because Mansfield was an early stop on the railroad line. But whatever the reason they enrich our local history with their call to duty. Here is what we know about these honorable servicemen.

George A. Brown was from New York City and stood just 5 feet, 2 inches in height. Yet he surely commanded the attention of his fellow servicemen in his



Camp Meigs in Readville, Hyde Park in Boston where new recruits reported for service during the Civil War. Library of Congress Library Of Congress

role as a bugler. Henry Downs was a farmer from Maryland who was 44 years of age when he enlisted in Mansfield.

George T. Fisher was born in Washington, D.C. His service records describe him as 39 years old with a black complexion, black eyes and black hair. After the war he lived in New Bedford and was awarded an invalid's pension in 1893. He died August 10, 1901 and is buried in Oak Grove Cemetery, New Bedford. His grave is marked by a simple white marble government headstone commemorating his service in the 5th Mass. Cavalry.

Samuel Johnson was an 18-year-old from New York State. He listed Massachusetts on his pension application so he might have moved to the Bay State after the war. George Middleton lived in New York State before and after the war. He died in 1903 leaving behind a wife named Mandana.

Lewis Miller was born in Baltimore, Maryland and was living as a farmer in Dundee, New Jersey when he enlisted in Mansfield at the age of 29. He served for a year before being discharged at a Virginia hospital with a disability.

James Davis, a 20-year-old from Pennsylvania, enlisted for just two weeks when he was rejected for service. We do not know why but surely he was disappointed.

The other two men credited to Mansfield did not report for service at Camp Meigs in Readville. It is unclear what became of them. But for the others it must have been a moment of great pride. All seven of Mansfield's soldiers enlisted in the Massachusetts 5th Cavalry, the only all African-American cavalry unit.

The Massachusetts 5th Cavalry was among the first to occupy Richmond at the end of the war. The war's conclusion in April 1865 did not mean rest for these troopers. The 5th was quickly dispatched to protect the Texas border for fear of looming difficulties with Mexico. Finally in October 1865 they were ordered home, landing at Gallup's Island in Boston Harbor, where they were given their pay and discharged from duty.