

**October 10, 1864 - Report on U. S. Colored Troops in Tennessee; Excerpts from correspondence from Col. R. D. Mussey, 100th U. S. Colored Infantry, to Maj. C. W. Foster:**



HDQRS. COMR. FOR ORGANIZATION U. S. COLORED TROOPS,  
Nashville, Tenn., October 10, 1864.

Commissioner for Organization of U. S. Colored Troops in Nashville, to Maj. C. W. Foster, Assistant Adjutant-General, Chief of the Colored Bureau, Adjutant General's Office, Washington, DC



Maj. C. W. FOSTER, Assistant Adjutant-Gen., Chief of the Colored Bureau, Adjutant-Gen.'s Office, Washington, D. C.:

MAJ.: In obedience to instructions from your office dated September 29, ultimo, I have the honor to submit the following report of the operations of this office during the past year. In so doing I shall, for the sake of unity and to facilitate my work, commence with the arrival of my predecessor, Maj. G. L. Stearns, assistant adjutant-general, commissioner for organization U. S. colored troops in the Department of the Cumberland:



~ ~ ~

**AT THE OUTSET.**

Maj. Stearns, on reporting at Nashville to Governor Johnson, with whom he was ordered to co-operate, found that the raising of colored troops was, if not opposed, regarded with distrust and suspicion by influential loyal Tennesseans, and some time elapsed before harmonious relations were established between Maj. Stearns and these gentlemen. By the last of the month, however, the work began.

**WHAT HAD BEEN DONE.**

~ ~ ~

One regiment had been raised—the present Twelfth U. S. Colored Troops, then named the Second Alabama. This regiment was largely composed of laborers upon fortifications about Nashville, the remnants of the large force impressed in the summer of 1862 for the service. It does not come within the province of this report to comment upon the treatment which this body of men while laborers received. Special reports upon this matter have been made to the War Department. It is sufficient to say that the change from the irregular and irresponsible treatment they received as laborers to that they had as soldiers was very grateful to them.

These men were mustered in by Capt. Howard E. Stansbury, U. S. Army, assistant commissary of musters for the department, who to a certain degree superintended the organization. A second regiment had been begun at Murfreesborough. Almost all of these men were, or had been, laborers in the staff departments at Clarksville, Gallatin, Murfreesborough, or other points.

**SYSTEM OF RECRUITING.**

Maj. Stearns brought with him several experienced recruiting agents, whose expenses, as well as those of an extraordinary character not allowed from the Government recruiting funds in raising troops, were defrayed from a private fund raised chiefly in Massachusetts. Maj. Stearns stationed these agents at various eligible points and directed recruits to be brought to Nashville, to which place the fragment of the second regiment (now the Thirteenth U. S. Colored Troops) was ordered. His agents, by public meetings, by personal appeals, and by the employment of colored assistants, procured recruits freely. It was upon the 24th of September, 1863, that recruiting began; upon the— of— the Thirteenth U. S. Colored Regt. was filled.



~ ~ ~

Recruits came in so freely that Maj. Stearns decided to raise four other regiments of infantry—respectively designated the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, Sixteenth, Seventeenth. The Fourteenth was organized at Gallatin, the Fifteenth was started at Shelbyville, the Sixteenth at Clarksville, and the Seventeenth at Murfreesborough.



It was a part of Maj. Stearns' plan to have the officer who was to command the regiment appointed first, that he might shape and tone the regiment from the beginning. The persons so appointed were in all cases commissioned officers, and though they did not draw pay as of the grade to which appointed, their local rank sufficed to give them command and the pay of their old grade to support them till entitled to muster in. Capt.'s were to stay with their companies; the subalterns to recruit, if thought best.

His plan is developed in General Orders, No. 1, headquarters Commissioner for Organization U. S. Colored Troops, appended.<sup>Note 1</sup> Frequent scouts were ordered to be made by the nascent regiments. Upon these scouts all who desired, of the negroes found on the way, were recruited; none were pressed.

Troops, as soon as organized, were generally assigned to some duty at the post where raised, and their practical acquaintance with the duties of soldiers began at once.

#### LABOR.

The Twelfth and Thirteenth regiments were stationed on the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad as laborers, and as guards to other laborers.

About November 20, 1863, Gen. Meigs, Quartermaster-Gen., then at Chattanooga, requested of Maj. Stearns what colored men could be spared for fatigue duty at Bridgeport, Ala. In accordance with this request four companies of the Fourteenth U. S. Colored Infantry were sent from Gallatin. They remained at Bridgeport engaged in fatigue duty till about the 1st of February, 1864, when the regiment was reunited at Chattanooga. At Chattanooga the regiment was set to work upon fortifications.

The Sixteenth Regt. U. S. Colored Infantry was ordered to Chattanooga about the 1st of April, 1864, and also set at work upon the fortifications. The

Fifteenth U. S. Colored Infantry late in March, 1864, reported to Lieut. Col. J. L. Donaldson, chief quartermaster, for duty at this place. The Seventeenth U. S. Colored Infantry reported to him for the same duty early in April of the same year. I subjoin a report from Brevet Brig.-Gen. Donaldson, showing the amount of duty performed by these men and the manner in which it was done. **Note 2**



In February, 1864, Adjutant-Gen. Thomas authorized the formation of an invalid or laboring regiment at this post, to be composed of men unfit for field duty, but fit for ordinary garrison duty. This regiment, the One hundred and first, has done fatigue duty, and some of the so-to-speak business duties of soldiers.



The Adjutant-Gen. also authorized the formation of such a regiment at Chattanooga about the same time. This regiment (the Forty-second) has been engaged chiefly the last summer in the hospital gardens. The Forty-second U. S. Colored Infantry did considerable fatigue duty at Chattanooga during its organization.



#### OTHER REGIMENTS.

The Forty-second and One hundred and first are invalid or laboring regiments, composed of men unfit for field duty but fit for ordinary garrison duty, either enlisted as such or transferred to these from other regiments. The Forty-second Regt. was organized at Chattanooga, the One hundred and first Regt. at Nashville. There are in the Forty-second Regt. about 400 men, and in the One hundred and first about 600. The One hundred and first furnishes guards for the contraband camp at this place and Clarksville.

The Forty-fourth Regt. was authorized to be raised by Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas, commanding Department of the Cumberland, under date of March 2, 1864. It was at Chattanooga for some time, but about the middle of July moved to Rome, Ga., where it was rapidly recruited to the minimum. It is now garrisoning Dalton, Ga.

The One hundredth Regt. is composed of the first colored men openly recruited in Kentucky. It was organized in June last. It was ordered to report to me for recruiting duty by the Adjutant-Gen., but there being a demand for more troops on the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad, on the 9th of August last it was turned over to Brig.-Gen. Webster, chief of staff to Maj.-Gen. Sherman, and now nine companies are on that road. The other company is doing duty at Camp Foster, at this place.

The Fortieth Infantry have their history prior to Maj. Stearns reporting here. Governor Johnson had begun to raise a regiment of Tennessee troops (colored); one or two companies were formed. These were turned over to me by the adjutant-general of the State, Gen. Gillem. I proposed to use them as the nucleus of the Ninth U. S. Colored Artillery, to be raised under orders from the Adjutant-Gen., but circumstances induced me to request that the regiment be retained as an infantry regiment. This was ordered by the Adjutant-Gen. upon

the recommendation of the chief of the Colored Bureau. Two companies of the Fortieth are on duty on the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad. A detachment is doing duty upon the Louisville and Nashville Railroad near Gallatin. The regiment has about 400 men.



When Maj.-Gen. Grant was at Knoxville last winter Gen. Davis Tillson applied for permission to raise a regiment of colored artillery (heavy) for the defense of Knoxville. Gen. T. wished a regiment of artillery, that he might retain control of it more readily than if it were an infantry regiment. Gen. Tillson was referred to this office by Maj.-Gen. Grant, and the requisite authority and designation obtained from the Colored Bureau.



Recruiting has been conducted there as here, and assisted by the money of the Boston committee. The regiment now numbers about 1,700 men. A roster of officers is appended.<sup>Note 3</sup> The Ninth U. S. Colored Artillery (Heavy) was authorized by the Adjutant-Gen. last February. Desires to fill up regiments already organized prevented recruiting for this until recently. A company has been recruited at Clarksville, Tenn., and some 380 recruits sent from Ohio have been assigned to this command, filling the battalion which now is under the command of Maj. Grosskopff. There are some men for the second battalion. Josiah V. Meigs, a native Tennessean, received permission in January last to raise a battery of light artillery at this place. This is Battery A, Second U. S. Colored Artillery (Light). The battery is full and has been stationed here. It has but recently gotten horses. The men are pretty well advanced in the school of the piece and have had a few mounted drills.



#### RECRUITING.

I stated before that no impressment had been allowed in recruiting. In February last Adjutant-Gen. Thomas authorized the impressment of negroes for military purposes. This, however, was soon countermanded.

The present rules governing recruiting are that any loyal owner resident in Kentucky and Tennessee may put his slave into service, and that any slave desiring to enlist may be recruited. Certificates, Forms No. 1 (Colored Bureau), are awarded whenever the owner desires. Frequent inquiries, by the way, are made as to the payment of the \$300 compensation.

#### EXAMINING BOARD.

As already stated, upon Maj. Stearns reporting here he found that an examining board had been in session at Stevenson. A tabular statement annexed shows their operations.<sup>Note 4</sup>

The examining board at Nashville was originally organized in August, 1863, by Gen. Gordon Granger, commanding District of the Cumberland, under orders from Maj.-Gen. Rosecrans, commanding Department of the Cumberland. Subsequently the department commander assumed the control of it.

Brig. Gen. R. S. Granger; Col. Lum, Tenth Michigan Foot Volunteers; Col. Stoughton, Eleventh Michigan Foot Volunteers; Col. Hull, Thirty-seventh Indiana Foot Volunteers; Lieut.-Col. Crane, Eighty-fifth Indiana Foot Volunteers; Maj. Dutton, One hundred and fifth Illinois Foot Volunteers; Maj. Grosskopff, Ninth U. S. Colored Artillery; Capt. Kramer, Fifteenth Pennsylvania Cavalry Volunteers, and Capt. John O'Neil, Seventeenth U. S. Colored Infantry, have been, respectively, connected with the Board. Of these Col. Lum, Lieut.-Col. Crane, and Maj. Dutton were for the longest time members of the Board.

At present Col. Hull, Maj. Grosskopff, and Capt. O'Neil constitute the Board. Attention is invited to Maj. Grosskopff report hereto attached.<sup>Note 5</sup>

This Board, though not definitely under my orders, has reported weekly to me the results of its examinations, and persons desiring to appear before it make application to this office. A board for the examination of applicants for commissions in colored troops was organized last winter at Chattanooga. The names of the members of the Board and their action are but imperfectly known to me, no direct reports having been made. I believe, however, that Col. Mindil, Thirty-third New Jersey Foot Volunteers, and Lieut.-Col. Dunn, of an Indiana regiment, have presided over the Board. From the imperfect reports made to me I have compiled a table.

#### MEDICAL EXAMINING BOARD.

A medical examining board was organized here by the army medical director Department of the Cumberland last fall. Upon the request of Maj. Stearns, Surgeons Lawton and Taylor, U. S. Volunteers; Farquharson, Fourth Tennessee Volunteers; James, Fourth Ohio Cavalry Volunteers; Assistant Surgeons Gray and Bodine, U. S. Army, have been connected herewith. I have upon their recommendations appointed six surgeons, seven assistant surgeons, and one or two hospital stewards.

#### APPOINTMENTS.

A full list of appointments to regiments of colored troops made at this office is annexed.<sup>Note 6</sup> The total number made of all grades is 359. Besides these, between fifty and sixty names have been furnished to the Adjutant-Gen. of the Army for appointment into Kentucky and other regiments, and also a few names to Brig. Gen. A. L. Chetlain, commanding U. S. colored troops in Tennessee, for appointments into regiments in West Tennessee.

By far the largest portions of these appointments have been of men who have passed an examining board.

A number are of men deserving, according to their commanders, a higher rank than that originally given to them.

~ ~ ~

When recruiting stations were opened at Gallatin and Clarksville slaves ran away from their owners in Kentucky—some came as far as from Louisville—



to enlist. Eventually the Kentuckians saw that this losing of men to their quota did not pay. In March and April last I consulted with the acting assistant provost-marshal-general of Kentucky as to enlisting slaves there openly, and suggested that if under the new enrollment act negroes were drafted or volunteered they might be organized here, inasmuch as the people of Kentucky did not seem to be willing there should be armed negroes in their State. This was acceded to, and the recruiting was begun there in April.

~ ~ ~

### THE PROSPECTS IN TENNESSEE.

I do not think it advisable after the regiments now authorized here are completed to begin others. There can still be recruiting here, but not in such numbers as to warrant the formation of new regiments.

My plan for such recruiting, and it is sanctioned by Brig. Gen. A. Johnson, Military Governor of Tennessee, is:

First. To have all colored recruiting in this State placed under the control of one person. As it is, there are recruiting parties from the old regiments of whose whereabouts, operations, and success I know nothing, unless they stumble into some place where I have parties recruiting for the new regiments.

Second. To have all recruits obtained sent to the general rendezvous here for examination, enlistment, and some drill before they are sent to the commands for which they are enlisted.

Third. To make recruiting successful here an armed force of one regiment or more is necessary. When Maj. Stearns came here his agents could recruit at the posts where troops were stationed. That source of supply has been exhausted, and the garrisons of the majority of the posts are too small to warrant them in making scouts for recruits. Wherever we have been able to send a force of, say, 80 or 100 men for a few days into the country, we have always got men, and the good conduct of the men upon such scouts has left a favorable impression on the people.

Fourth. Recruits should have some assurance that their families will not suffer from the abuse of disloyal owners whom they have left to enlist. I respectfully invite attention to the point here suggested.

### MILITARY EFFICIENCY OF THE TROOPS.

Of the efficiency of these troops in action we have had but few opportunities to judge.

~ ~ ~

During the present raid of Forrest the Fourteenth and Sixteenth Infantry have been in one fight to my knowledge where they behaved well, and at Lebanon during Wheeler's raid a detachment of the Fortieth U. S. Colored Infantry showed pluck.



For the appearance, drill, discipline, & C., of these regiments reference is respectfully made to the inspection reports of Gen. Chetlain. The general sentiments of the people and those of the army with whom these regiments have been brought in contact is favorable to them. The material has been found plastic to a degree, the men all appear eager to learn and willing to do their duty, and, as a rule, the officers have been good; many have been weeded out, however, and there is still room for change for the better.

My experience in this work convinces me that these regiments can be made for many duties superior to white regiments. As guards they are remarkably faithful.

A regiment of colored troops did interior duty as guards in this town. When they were relieved by white troops the change was regretted by the officers in charge of the public stores where these men had stood sentries. For raiders in the enemy's country these colored troops will prove superior. They are good riders, have quicker eyes at night than white, and know all the byways.

#### CONTRABAND CAMP.

When Maj. Stearns came into this department there was no organized provision for contrabands. Some were collected at Decherd, some at Stevenson, and about every army depot a crowd of blacks were congregated. The policy of the Governor and of army officers was to repress their coming into our lines. As we enlisted the able-bodied men, the women and children required care, and contrabands came upon our hands. Maj. Stearns procured a deserted chapel a mile from the city, into which he put a few women and children, soldiers' families, for whom no other provisions could be made. Rations were drawn for them, and as fast as possible they were hired out. This was a mere makeshift.

Telegraphic orders from the Secretary of the War Department upon the 19th of December, 1863, directed Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas to receive destitute women and children at Stevenson and Nashville and supply their necessities. Some rude provision was made at Stevenson by the post commandant. On January 26 last about a hundred infirm men and women and children were sent by rail from Stevenson to this place. They were dumped at the Chattanooga depot and left for hours between the tracks. I called at Gen. Grant's headquarters and stated the fact. An order was issued directing the post commandant to provide for them. Capt. Ralph Hurst, then in charge of the convalescent camp, was charged by Gen. Granger with the execution of the order. While the location, & C., of a contraband camp were being discussed the Adjutant-Gen. visited this place and issued Order No. 2, placing Capt. Hurst in charge of the contrabands in the Department of the Cumberland. It was the intention to have the camp properly located somewhere near Gallatin, and to have here only a camp of reception and distribution, but Capt. Hurst established the permanent camp here.

The management, & C., of this and other camps having been made the subject of investigation by the Hon. Messrs. Hood and Bostwick, special



commissioners of the War Department, their report will show, I think, that the terms of Gen. Thomas' order as to the erection of huts and the detail of inspecting lieutenants were never complied with. When Capt. Hurst's term of service expired in June last Capt. Barnard, Nineteenth U. S. Infantry, was appointed his successor and was also appointed colonel of the One hundred and first Infantry. I subjoin reports of his, showing the number of camps now under his charge, & C. <sup>Note 7</sup> Legitimately and of detail I have never had anything to do with these camps. But as Col. Barnard's regiment is not organized yet and still reports to me, I have had a quasi control of the matter, which I have endeavored to use to the best interest of the poor people.

The Treasury agents have in but one or two cases attempted to control or regulate contraband camps in this department. Military control seems the most appropriate for them.

I have endeavored to select for officers of the One hundred and first U. S. Colored Infantry, from whom chiefly came the superintendents of these camps, men who have had experience in their old regiments as quartermasters and commissary sergeants, as possessing a better knowledge of business than other applicants.

#### SCHOOLS.

Maj. Stearns' policy was wise and large. He deemed the question of colored troops to involve the question of the elevation and improvement of the race, and accordingly he endeavored to establish and foster a desire for education among the colored troops and among the colored people.

Accordingly, efforts were made to procure teachers for colored schools here; money was also raised through Maj. Stearns' exertions to establish on a permanent basis a school for colored girls in this city. The chaplains of the various regiments were also directed to make the instruction of the regiment a part and the principal part of their duty. Mr. W. F. Mitchels, a competent and hard-working gentleman, has been appointed by the Pennsylvania Freedman's Aid Association to superintend the establishment of schools in East and Middle Tennessee and in Northern Georgia and Alabama. The association employs able teachers, has ample funds, and will do, I trust, very much good. I have endeavored to aid it as well as all other similar organizations, though there are about this Pennsylvania association elements of moneyed security and of practicability which in my judgment render it superior to others. One of the teachers whom they have sent here, by the way, is the widow of the late Col. Fribley, U. S. colored troops.

#### PUBLIC OPINION.

I have stated that when Maj. Stearns first began his work here he encountered opposition from prominent loyal Tennesseans. Maj. Stearns, however, received



assistance and encouragement from some citizens of standing, and with the assistance of these he endeavored to influence public opinion in the State.

*OR*, Ser. III, Vol. 4, pp. 763-772.



**Note 1:** Omitted.

**Note 2:** Omitted.

**Note 3:** Omitted.

**Note 4:** Omitted.

**Note 5:** Omitted.

**Note 6:** Omitted.

**Note 7:** Omitted.

