

ROANOKE ISLAND FREEDMEN IN THE UNION ARMY

In April 1863, President Abraham Lincoln authorized Brigadier General Edward A. Wild to organize four black regiments in North Carolina--three infantry and one heavy artillery. Wild began recruiting on Roanoke Island in June. Descriptive books for the three infantry regiments indicate at least 139 freedmen on the island were recruited for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd North Carolina Colored Infantry Volunteers, which were later renamed the 35th, 36th, and 37th U.S. Colored Troops. Since many of the soldiers whose families settled on the island were recruited elsewhere, and some of the freedmen from the island enlisted elsewhere, it is hard to know how many of the soldiers in Wild's regiments had ties to the freedmen's colony.

Missionaries in the Roanoke Island freedmen's colony noted that all the able-bodied men were away from the island serving in the Union army. Freedmen from Roanoke Island fought in battles throughout the South, including Olustee, Petersburg, and New Market Heights. Many died or sustained life-shattering disabilities.

Projects:

1. Read materials on the U.S. Colored Troops from North Carolina. Why were many white people in the North against enlistment of black troops? Why did the freedmen enlist? What sort of retribution from Southern soldiers did black soldiers face if they were captured?
2. Read *Time Full of Trial: The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony, 1862-1867*, chapter 2. Discuss how you would go about estimating the number of black soldiers who had family ties to the Roanoke Island freedmen's colony.
3. Using Descriptive Book information found on the Web at the U.S. Colored Troops from North Carolina site, describe the Roanoke Island freedmen who served in the 35th, 36th, and 37th U.S. Colored Troops. What was their average age, height, etc.? How many were wounded in the war? How many died? What caused the deaths?
4. Using material found at the U.S. Colored Troops from North Carolina Web site, especially the service records for U.S. Colored Troops from North Carolina, write a history of either the 35th, 36th, or 37th U.S. Colored Troops.