

## African-Virginian Soldiers

African-Virginians fought both as Union and Confederate soldiers and sailors, but in unequal numbers. Of 29,000 Confederates surrendered at Appomattox, only thirty were black. By contrast, 5,723 African-Virginians were recruited as Union soldiers in Virginia, and many others enlisted in northern states.

Despite their record of service in 1776 and 1812, little effort was made to enlist African-Virginians in the Confederate cause. A few served nonetheless. Many Confederate officers had body servants, some of whom enlisted in the Confederate army or navy, although usually they were unarmed. When it became clear that the war was being lost, General Robert E. Lee urged President Jefferson Davis to free slaves who would fight for Confederate independence. A few companies were recruited in March-April 1865, and some saw action, but the war soon was over.

Nine United States Colored Troop (USCT) regiments were formed during 1863-64 in parts of Virginia held by Union forces. The 1st Cavalry fought at Bermuda Hundred and Petersburg, the 2nd Cavalry fought at Drewry's Bluff and Chaffin's Farm, and the 36th and 38th infantry regiments (USCT) fought in the Wilderness and at the siege of Petersburg, producing six Medal of Honor winners.

Other African-Virginians served in units organized in the North, such as the 55th Massachusetts (USCT), which was 11% Virginian. A black woman, Maria Lewis, disguised herself as a man and served in the 8th New York Cavalry.