

Fort Scott

National Historic Site
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

First to Serve

FIRST KANSAS (COLORED) VOLUNTEER INFANTRY REGIMENT

During the Civil War, Kansas was the first Union state to officially recruit and train military units comprised of black soldiers. Between July 1862 and October 1863, the 1st and 2nd Kansas Colored

Volunteer Infantry Regiments were recruited in eastern Kansas and mustered into the Union Army at Fort Scott. They compiled a proud campaign record in Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas and the Indian Territory.



RECRUITMENT

Kansas Senator (General) James H. Lane pioneered the recruitment of black soldiers in the midwest. Most of the soldiers of the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment were from Fort Scott, Leavenworth, Mound City, Wyandotte, and Lawrence, Kansas. The **Fort Scott Bulletin** (newspaper) reported:

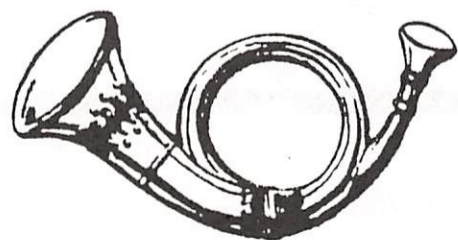
July 26, 1862

"An effort is being made in Leavenworth to raise a regiment of negroes. There are contrabands enough in Fort Scott to fill up two companies. . . ."

August 16, 1862

"Colored Regiments—Gen. Lane is still going on with the work of organizing two Colored Regiments, notwithstanding the refusal of the President to accept black soldiers. Last Tuesday about fifty recruits were raised here. . . ."

ORGANIZATION

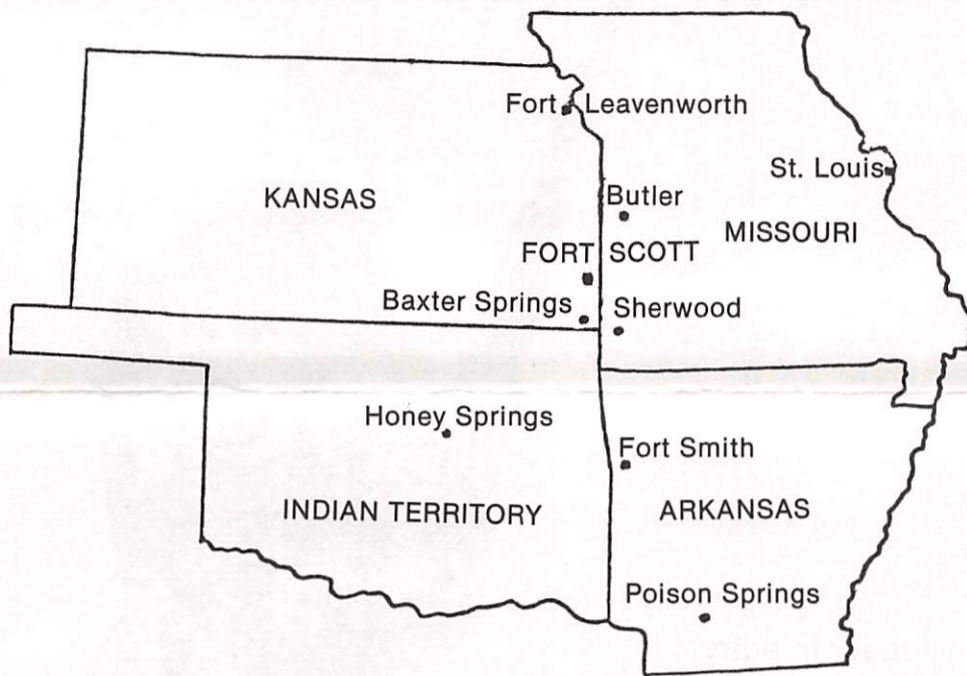


The 1st Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment was mustered into the United States Army on January 13, 1863, at Fort Scott, Kansas. It was the fourth black regiment to enter the Union Army (three regiments from Louisiana preceded the 1st Kansas on the official rolls). Colonel James M. Williams, who had helped recruit the regiment, became the commanding officer. Throughout the Civil War, white officers normally commanded black regiments.

However, a few black soldiers eventually became officers and many others became non-commissioned officers (corporals and sergeants).

CAMPAIGN RECORD

The 1st Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment achieved an excellent combat record during the Civil War, and it also performed garrison, engineer, and escort duty. The Regiment saw action at:



ENGAGEMENTS

Island Mound; near
Butler, Missouri
October 28, 1862

Reeder Farm; near
Sherwood, Missouri
May 18, 1863

Cabin Creek, Indian
Territory
July 1-2, 1863

Honey Springs, Indian
Territory
July 16, 1863

Poison Springs,
Arkansas
April 16-18, 1864

Flat Rock Creek, Indian
Territory
September 16, 1864

Timber Hills, Indian
Territory
November 19, 1864

REPUTATION

Union Officers recognized the excellent combat reputation of the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment:

Major General James G. Blunt—July 26, 1863

“The First Kansas (colored) particularly distinguished itself, they fought like veterans and preserved their line unbroken throughout the engagement. Their coolness and bravery I have never seen surpassed.”

Lt. Colonel John Bowles—July 20, 1863

“In conclusion, I feel it but justice and my duty to state that the officers and men throughout the entire regiment behaved nobly, and with the coolness of veterans. Each seemed to vie with the other in the performance of his duty, and it was with the greatest gratification that I witnessed their gallant and determined resistance under the most galling fire.”

Brigadier General John McNeil—November 2, 1863

“On Saturday I reviewed the First Arkansas Volunteers, First Colored Infantry Kansas Volunteers, and Rabb’s Battery. The negro regiment is a triumph of drill and discipline, and reflects great honor on Col. Williams, in command. Few volunteer regiments that I have seen make a better appearance. I regard them as first-rate infantry.”

Colonel James M. Williams—April 24, 1864

“The officers and men all evinced the most heroic spirit, and those that fell died the death of a true soldier.”

DISCHARGE

The 1st Kansas Colored Regiment, mustered out in October 1865, incurred the most casualties of any Kansas regiment. Five officers and 173 enlisted soldiers were killed in action and one officer and 165 enlisted soldiers died from disease.

SUGGESTED READING

The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865, Dudley Taylor Cornish.

The Civil War in the West, Jay Monaghan.

The Negro’s Civil War, James M. McPherson.

Army Life in a Black Regiment, Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

The Negro in the Civil War, Benjamin Quarles.