

A New Meaning for the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch

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The Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch commemorates the men from Hartford who fought and died in the Civil War. According to the inscription on the Arch, about four thousand men from Hartford went to fight in the Civil War, and approximately four hundred died.

As a young, black male citizen of Hartford, I was interested in the black military participation, and so I found out that there were two black regiments from Connecticut, according to IN AND ABOUT HARTFORD by Marion Hepburn Grant.

Information about one of these black regiments, the 29th, was found in the book HARTFORD, AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF CONNECTICUT'S HISTORY by Glenn Weaver. He writes, "Perhaps the proudest day for Hartford blacks was the return of Connecticut's Twenty-Ninth Regiment at the end of the Civil War. The regiment had been created in 1863, had fought in several battles, and was one of the first Union regiments to enter Richmond at the fall of the Confederate capital. The regiment's return to Hartford was a day of rejoicing, with a parade, a reception in City Hall, and a splendid banquet."

More information about the two black regiments was given to me by David O. White, Director of the Raymond Baldwin Museum of Connecticut History in Hartford. He told me about William B. Wooster, the Colonel of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment, and Mr. White showed me Colonel Wooster's battle sword currently on display in the museum. Mr. White also told me that there were flags for the two black regiments and that they will soon be back on display at the Capitol of Connecticut.

In the state library I found the HISTORY OF THE TWENTY-NINTH (COLORED) REGIMENT C.V. INFANTRY and the HISTORY OF THE THIRTY-FIRST REGIMENT U.S.C. INFANTRY (ORIGINALLY KNOWN AS THE THIRTIETH COLORED REGIMENT C.V. INFANTRY).

The Twenty-Ninth Regiment bravely fought in the following military engagements:

- Petersburg, Va., Aug. 12 to Sept. 24, 1864
- Chapin Farm, Va., Sept. 29, 1864
- Richmond, Va., Sept. 29 to Oct. 1, 1864
- Darbytown Road, Va., Oct. 13, 1864
- Kell Town, Va., Oct. 27 to Oct. 28, 1864

Out of the four hundred seventy (470) soldiers of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment, twenty-four (24) were killed, six (6) died from accidents, eighteen (18) were fatally wounded, one hundred thirty-five (135) were wounded, four (4) were accidentally wounded, one was captured, one hundred seventy-eight (178) died of diseases, one hundred and three (103) were discharged for disabilities, and one was mustered out (discharged).

The other black regiment, the Thirty-First Regiment, consisted of one hundred eighty-two (182) soldiers. The Thirty-First Regiment's military engagements were as follows:

- Petersburg Mine, Va., July 30, 1864
- Fort Sedgwick, Va., Oct. 1864
- Remuda Front, Va., Nov. 18 to Dec. 20, 1864



Surrender of General Robert E. Lee, Va., Apr. 9, 1865

Out of the one hundred eighty-two (182) soldiers of the Thirty-First Regiment, eighteen (18) were killed, fourteen (14) were missing in action, one died from accident, six (6) were fatally wounded, forty-four (44) were wounded, two (2) were accidentally wounded, seven (7) were captured, three (3) died in prison, fifty-one (51) died of disease, twenty-six (26) were discharged for disability, and ten (10) were mustered out.

The facts are clear that blacks had a significant role in the abolition of slavery and the saving of our nation through their participation in the Civil War. Two books were written by black soldiers who served in these regiments and are further proof that blacks had a role in the military. Mr. J.J. Hill wrote A SKETCH OF THE TWENTY-NINTH REGIMENT, and Mr. A.H. Newton wrote OUT OF THE BRIARS. According to black historian Carter G. Woodson, even black slaves were forced to fight for the South; but in the North, however, free blacks volunteered. Blacks also built roadblocks, blockades, and roads, etc. More importantly, many black soldiers were sergeants and corporals in the Union army.

Because the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch is dedicated to the memory of Hartford's Civil War soldiers, it is important to note here that out of the two black regiments, the Twenty-Ninth and the Thirty-First, there were one hundred and twenty-eight (128) black soldiers from Hartford. It is a fact that is generally unknown to the average person, and means a great deal to a young, black male citizen such as I.

It is very important to notice that the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch gives no recognition at all to the one hundred twenty-eight (128) black soldiers from Hartford who fought in the Civil War. The only depiction of the black man's role in the Civil War is a statue on the west tower of the Arch showing a black slave being freed — NOT a black soldier coming back victoriously from the war.

Therefore, I propose that in the restoration of the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch, recognition of the black soldiers of Hartford be finally given. To commemorate the participation of the black warriors, I suggest that there either be another statue erected, depicting the black soldier, or a plaque commending the black soldiers be added for all to see. Let us not forget the sacrifices of all the soldiers, because they not only helped to abolish slavery, but they helped our country stay united.