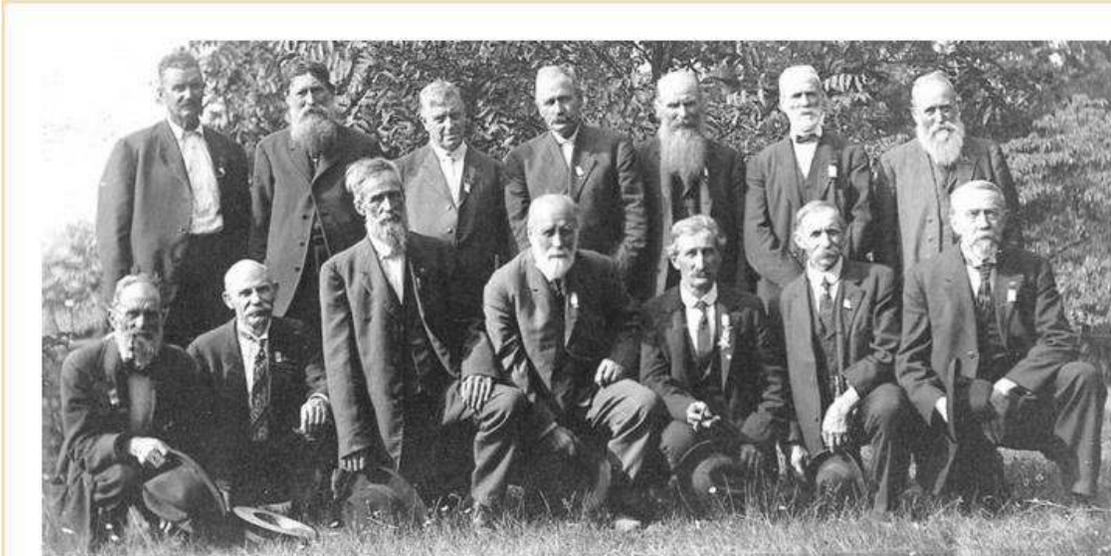


## II. THE CIVIL WAR IN LOUDOUN COUNTY



Loudoun Rangers Reunion, Waterford, 17 Sept 1910

*Like the neighboring northern counties of Virginia that would soon break away to form West Virginia, Loudoun was bitterly split over secession. In some northern and western areas (Waterford, Lovettsville, Hamilton), support for the Union remained strong, but after Fort Sumter, over two-thirds of the County voted to ratify secession in May 1861 (1,626-726). The scene was set for internecine warfare as communities and families fractured over competing loyalties to North and South.*

*Although none of the Civil War's major battles took place in Loudoun County, one of the first significant clashes between the Blue and the Gray occurred at Ball's Bluff in October 1861. A botched incursion by poorly led Union troops across the Potomac near Leesburg resulted in a humiliating defeat at the hands of local and Mississippi Confederate units; one-half of the approximately 2,000 Union troops were killed, missing, wounded, or captured. Loudoun's strategic location as a transportation hub and its proximity to Washington meant that far larger Union forces would soon return, occupying Leesburg and sizeable sections of the County for much of the war.*

*Their presence, however, did not go uncontested, as Confederate armies occasionally swept through Loudoun, notably to and from Antietam (September 1862) and Gettysburg (July 1863), as well as during Gen. Jubal A. Early's retreat from Washington in July 1864. During Antietam, Union artillery bombarded Leesburg to drive out rebel units in the area of the Courthouse, and Confederate cavalry under Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart battled with Union troops in Unison to protect the rebel retreat from the Shenandoah Valley. Likewise, on the way to Gettysburg, Stuart's forces ran into Union troopers in some of the war's largest cavalry battles*

*near Aldie, Middleburg, and Upperville, resulting in several hundred casualties. Moreover, active partisan units, notably Mosby's Rangers, continuously harassed and raided Union positions in Loudoun and neighboring counties.*

*The war devastated much of Loudoun County. Troops on both sides regularly requisitioned or plundered local farms, running away with cattle, horses, sheep, hogs, corn, hay and other crops at will. Early in the war, in June 1861, Confederate troops under Stonewall Jackson burned the County's three bridges spanning the Potomac to Harper's Ferry (a major Union garrison, armory, and transportation junction), Brunswick (then Berlin), and Point of Rocks, cutting major trading arteries. Railroads were also torn up. Worse, in November 1864 Union cavalry units under orders of Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, in retribution for Mosby's raids, invaded Loudoun and commenced a five-day "burning raid" that culminated in the slaughter or confiscation of more than 10,000 cattle, sheep, hogs and horses, and the burning of 230 barns, eight mills, 10,000 tons of hay and 25,000 bushels of grain.*

*The engagement of Loudoun's rebel soldiers is commemorated in several historical accounts, local battlefields, cemeteries, and memorials. Less well known is the role of Loudoun's sons, both black and white, who fought for the Union. As Union armies invaded the County, numerous enslaved individuals fled for freedom. About 250 of the formerly enslaved and free blacks born in Loudoun joined the Union Army or Navy, and similar numbers of white Loudouners who were loyal to the Union entered the Loudoun Rangers and Potomac Home Brigade to attack Confederate troops and partisans.*



**Gravestone of William Taylor, First U.S. Colored Infantry,  
one of four African American Civil War Veterans buried in Leesburg's Mt. Zion Cemetery**

## **LOUDOUN'S UNION SOLDIERS: THE COLORED TROOPS, THE LOUDOUN RANGERS, AND THE POTOMAC HOME BRIGADE**

**William E. Wilkin**

Evidence exists to support the participation of Loudoun residents in the Union Army and Navy during the American Civil War. The three major groups include African Americans, the Loudoun Rangers, and the Potomac Home Brigade.

First, research by Kevin D. Grigsby indicates 248 African Americans born in Loudoun County served in the Union Army and 11 served in the Union Navy. [*From Loudoun to Glory: The Role of African-Americans from Loudoun County in the Civil War*, (2012).] Proof of linkage to Loudoun County may be drawn from three sources. First, the military record of the individual may state his place of birth, as may pension documents or widow's claims. Second, the Clerk of Court of Loudoun County maintained an official document, the Register of Free Negroes. If an individual soldier or sailor had been listed in the Register before the war, his link to Loudoun is clear. [*Register of Free Negroes: 1844-1861*; also *Abstracts of Loudoun Virginia: Register of Free Negroes 1844-1861*, edited by Patricia B. Duncan] Third, several Union veterans are buried in Loudoun County with gravestones issued by the War Department. The process of awarding that honor was in itself an administrative finding of honorable service.

Second, research by Taylor Chamberlin and John Souders established that Loudoun County men served in the Loudoun Rangers, a unit of the Union Army. [*Between Reb and Yank*, Waterford Foundation (2011)] Lee Stone compiled a roster of 249 members of the unit showing place of birth. [*The Independent Loudoun Virginia Rangers: The Roster of Virginia's Only Union Cavalry Unit*, Waterford Foundation (2016)]

Third, research by Travis Shaw, librarian at the Thomas Balch Library, has identified 42 men from Loudoun County who served in the Union Army's Potomac Home Brigade. [*Archives at Thomas Balch Library*]

As background, African Americans were not allowed to join the Union Army until the effective date of the Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863. Several states formed regiments of African Americans such as the famous 54<sup>th</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts. The national government formed other regiments which were known as United States Colored Troops (USCT). Loudoun men served in both state regiments and the USCT. There was no one unit for Loudoun African Americans; the Loudoun men served in various regiments with different roles in the war. If listed together, Loudoun men were in campaigns and battles from the Carolina coast to the Mississippi valley, from Florida to the taking of Richmond.

The years leading up to the War were marked by the sale and forced migration of thousands of enslaved men, women and children from Virginia to enslavers in the Deep South. The enslaved, largely American-born, were torn from their places of birth, shattering lives and families at great profit to their sellers. This mass-migration has been coined "The Second Middle Passage" by author Ira Berlin, underscoring the sheer numbers of people affected and the resulting devastation to individuals, families and communities. Thus, it is not surprising that the service records of these

Union African American veterans attest to enlistment far from Loudoun. Some veterans did return to Loudoun County and actively contributed to the new communities of freedmen.

The Loudoun Rangers were a unit formed by Union sympathizers who resided in Loudoun County. The unit was authorized by the War Department on June 8, 1862. Their commanding officer was Captain Samuel C. Means, a resident of Waterford. Though the county was evacuated by Confederate forces in February 1862, the Army of Northern Virginia operated in the county during the Maryland campaign of 1862, the Gettysburg campaign of 1863 and Early's campaign of 1864. Means' Loudoun Rangers were also confronted by the commands of John S. Mosby and Elijah White, which operated in the area with considerable local support. Their service is a long list of hard fights and ambushes on both sides of the Potomac. The Loudoun Rangers had a notorious fight in Waterford on August 27, 1862 at the Baptist Church losing against Elijah White's cavalry. The Loudoun Rangers were based several times at Point-of-Rocks. Most valuable as scouts, the Loudoun Rangers also fought at Monocacy. Many left Loudoun County after the war. They and their families gave up a great deal for their decision to stand with the Union.

The Potomac Home Brigade was a predominantly Maryland unit formed to guard the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in late 1861. Some Loudoun Union men who had fled the county due to threats from their pro-Confederate neighbors enlisted in the Potomac Home Brigade. The unit was trapped at Harpers Ferry during the Maryland campaign and was exchanged. The unit fought at Culp's Hill during the battle of Gettysburg. They also fought at Monocacy on July 9, 1864. Like the Loudoun Rangers, the elements of the Potomac Home Brigade (especially Cole's Cavalry) had hard fights against Mosby, White and other Confederate units. Some members of the Potomac Home Brigade did return to the county after the war.

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