

# LESSON 1: HEALING BLACK SOLDIERS

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## INTENDED AUDIENCE

High-school students; first- or second-year undergraduates in history, social studies, or science

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- *Describe how military physicians assessed the performance of black soldiers in comparison with whites, and what did they conclude.*
- *Describe how physicians evaluated the black male body as suitable for military service.*
- *Identify perceptions by United States Colored Troops of medicines (and diet), medical procedures, and physicians during the Civil War.*
- *Define the characteristics of the “Negro race” as articulated by military doctors relevant to military service.*

## TIME REQUIRED FOR EXERCISE

This lesson includes two activities, a discussion exercise and a two-part role-play. They are mutually exclusive activities. The discussion and analysis exercise can be tailored to a one-hour class session. The role-play exercise requires a minimum of 90 minutes. The debriefing question is intended as a supplementary exercise to provide broader context to the classroom discussion.

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

Readings that accompany this lesson.

## BACKGROUND

As African Americans officially entered military service in 1863, some members of the United States military and medical establishment questioned the use of black men. They argued that African Americans were inferior as men--on the mental and emotional level of a child--and thus inherently incapable of becoming courageous and dutiful soldiers. When United States Colored Troops (referred to as USCTs) were ordered into combat, they displayed all the virtues and weaknesses of white men in combat. The mere fact that African American soldiers were disciplined fighters who refused to run in the face of the enemy clashed with prevailing prejudices about black inferiority. The Northern medical community devoted considerable energy and intellect to trying to understand issues of African American health, since some 33,000 USCT soldiers died from sickness and disease out of a total of 179,000 black enlistees.

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*of The College of Physicians of Philadelphia*

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## 1. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS EXERCISE

Sanford B. Hunt, MD (1825-1884), was a military surgeon during the Civil War. He was very interested in assessing, from a medical perspective, how black soldiers performed during the war. This essay is an excellent summary of what Union Army physicians thought about United States Colored Troops with insights into relationships between soldiers and doctors and how doctors evaluated soldiers' health. Read Hunt's essay and discuss the following questions.

*Sanford B. Hunt, "The Negro as a Soldier," in Anthropological Review, Vol. 7, No. 24 (Jan., 1869), pp. 40-54. Available on-line: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3025007>*

### QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

- *Although Hunt's analysis is what we might call a scientific study today, remember that he is writing at a time when the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin are just becoming well known but paleontology (the scientific study of early life) does not yet exist as a scientific field, and the field of genetics has not been born. Can you identify any preconceptions or assumptions that Hunt believes about black people?*
- *Hunt's essay observes that there is no single, universal white or black soldier. Soldiers differ by upbringing, region, and education. If you were comparing their performance and behavior, how would you define a black or white soldier? How would you define race?*
- *In this study, what is the relationship between education and health? Education and capacity for intelligence ("intellectuality")?*
- *Hunt's study contains hints and observations about the relationship between USCT soldiers, many of them having formerly been slaves, and physicians. Describe this relationship. What can you infer from the study about how white doctors understood black patients?*

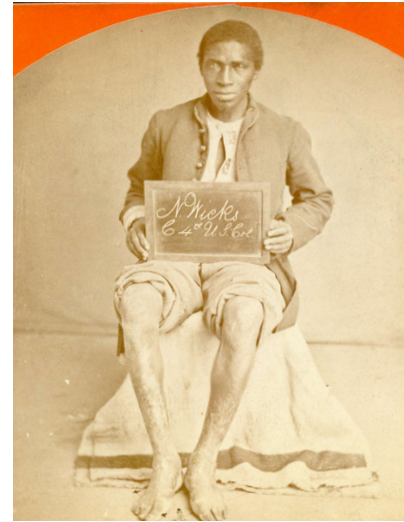


*Unidentified USCT soldier*  
Courtesy of Citizens for the Restoration  
of Historical LaMott (CROHL)



## QUESTIONS FOR ESSAYS OR FURTHER RESEARCH

- *In evaluating the intelligence of black soldiers, Hunt uses data from the measurements of Samuel George Morton, MD (1799-1851). His studies of intelligence and race influenced scientific discussions well into the 20th century. How did Morton evaluate the intelligence and physical attributes of black people? (The answer to this question is not found in Hunt's essay.)*
- *Hunt believes that sufficient information exists to form an opinion "as to the value of the negro as a soldier" regarding "his physique, his capacity to learn tactics, his providence or improvidence in the care and cooking of his food, his powers of resistance to hunger and fatigue, the diseases peculiar to him ..., his morale, including his courage, cheerfulness, and obedience, and finally his comparative intellectuality" (p. 42). Hunt's study is a medical evaluation of the Negro soldier. Why do you think that Hunt chose these categories for his analysis and comparison with white soldiers? If you set out to analyze the capabilities of black soldiers today, what categories of behavior or physiology would you select?*
- *The essay states that the Negro shows "some difficulty in maintaining animal heat" (p. 44). What does this mean? Research the term, "animal heat," and describe the theory of physiology (the study of the body, the functions of the organs and cells) where this term is used (it was called "humoral theory").*
- *In the movie Glory (1989), which depicts the exploits of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, the regiment was sent to South Carolina where it participated in a famous assault on a Confederate fort (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097441/>). The military sent the black regiment into the south in the belief that black bodies were more immune to tropical fevers (such as malaria or yellow fever) than white soldiers (see p. 44, Hunt). What does Hunt's study conclude about black resistance to tropical diseases? What were "malarial diseases" during the Civil War?*



*Stereograph portrait of N. Wicks, Company C, 4th Regiment USCT*

Courtesy of Library of Congress  
Prints and Photographs Division,  
Washington, D.C.

## 2. ROLE-PLAY

Create a board of inquiry of senior military officers and surgeons (up to five students). One student will function as chair of the board. This board will examine complaints about food and the related question of why illness prevails at a higher rate among black troops than white. Most doctors insist that black soldiers are predisposed to illnesses, a view shared by board members. The function of the board will be to hear the presentations, discuss them, and prepare a report of recommendations for the Secretary of War.

### PART ONE

The first report before the board will be presented by a medical inspector and his or her assistant. The students who will perform as the medical inspector and the assistant must read the following before appearing before the board:

“Medical Inspector of Black Troops to the Headquarters of the Superintendent of the Organization of Tennessee Black Troops in Ira Berlin, et al, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II, The Black Military Experience*, pp. 639-640.

#### [Lesson 1 Attachment 1]

Students should not read the essay to the board: students should prepare an outline of key points and present them with emphasis. The board may ask clarifying questions. The students' presentation should address: (1) the ratio of sick to healthy soldiers in the 4th US Heavy Artillery; (2) the amount of manual labor performed by soldiers; (3) the examination of recruits; (4) and the location and circumstances of their camp site.



*1863 poster published by the Supervisory Committee for Recruiting Colored Regiments, depicts U.S. troops at Camp William Penn, a training camp for black Union soldiers near Philadelphia*

Courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia

- *What is the state of health among black soldiers?*
- *Does a crisis exist, and what is it?*
- *What do the documents presented to the board tell us about how military authorities saw differences between black and white troops?*
- *How does the Sanford B. Hunt document help you to understand the topics and issues in the three role-play readings? [Assuming that the students, for the role-play exercise, have read the document for the first exercise.]*



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## PART TWO

The second report is also presented by a medical inspector and his or her assistant. Read the following report before appearing before the board:

“Special Examining Board to the Headquarters of the Department of Virginia,” in Ira Berlin, et al, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II, The Black Military Experience*, pp. 648-652.

### [Lesson 1 Attachment 2]

Do not have students read the document to the board: students should prepare an outline of key points and present them with emphasis. The board may ask clarifying questions. The presentation should address: (1) the problem or question raised by this report of a Special Examining Board; (2) the difference between a standard army ration and a civilian ration; (3) the beliefs of the report’s authors about the health of black troops. Be sure to read the “endorsements” that follow the report and make use of them also. Endorsements are comments by military officers in the chain of command.

## PART THREE

The third report is also presented by a medical inspector and his or her assistant. Students should read the following report before appearing before the board:

“Testimony by Superintendent of the Organization of Missouri Black Troops,” in Ira Berlin, et al, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II, The Black Military Experience*, pp. 637-38.

### [Lesson 1 Attachment 3]



*Members of the Guard of the 4th Infantry Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops, At Fort Corcoran Washington, D.C.*

Courtesy of National Archives



*“Two Brothers in Arms”, tintype of unidentified Union soldiers taken between 1860 and 1870*

Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Students should not read the document to the board; they should prepare an outline of key points and present them with emphasis. The board may ask clarifying questions. The presentation should address: (1) the beliefs of the report's authors about the health of black troops; and (2) specific dietary changes you are recommended.

The web links below about diet and nutrition during the Civil War may be helpful for students in preparing for this exercise.

Once the board has heard all three presentations, the board members meet briefly to discuss the recommendation they will make to the Secretary of War. The chair will write down recommendations and read them to the class. While the board is deliberating, the class should discuss what it has heard and also consider what recommendations to make to the Secretary of War. After the board has read its findings, the instructor should dissolve the board and the role play and guide a discussion around the following questions:

#### **DEBRIEFING QUESTION**

As soldiers risking their lives for the nation, black soldiers demanded control of their bodies as well as adequate care and production from the military. The letters from USCT troops at the front reveal the violence and intimidation used against them by surgeons. To conclude a multiple-class sequence on the topic of this lesson plan, conduct a guided discussion around the following readings:

"Anonymous Louisiana Black Soldier to an Unidentified Washington Official," in Ira Berlin, et al, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II, The Black Military Experience*, pp. 640-41. **[Lesson 1 Attachment 4]**

"Northern Black Soldier to the Adjutant General of the Army," in Ira Berlin, et al, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II, The Black Military Experience*, p. 644. **[Lesson 1 Attachment 5]**

The instructor should assign these two readings for a guided discussion. Some military terms in these documents will require explanation ("picket duty" and "breastworks").

- *What is the state of health among black soldiers?*
- *Does a crisis exist, and what is it?*
- *What do the documents presented to the board tell us about how military authorities saw differences between black and white troops?*
- *How does the Sanford B. Hunt document help you to understand the topics and issues in the three role-play readings? [Assuming that the students, for the role-play exercise, have read the document for the first exercise.]*

#### **QUESTIONS MIGHT INCLUDE:**

- *How did their claim for health care figure into African American assertions for citizenship in the nation?*
- *Explore the strategies of black soldiers in advancing their case for better care and the issues that concerned them the most. How can black soldiers speak up for themselves during wartime and within a disciplined military structure?*
- *Finally, how do the soldier/ authors' words challenge or affirm the racial assumptions found in the Hunt report?*



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jim Downs, *Sick From Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Margaret Humphreys, *Intensely Human: The Health of the Black Soldier in the American Civil War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008). Online at:

[http://books.google.com/books?id=nWP0VziThVkC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=nWP0VziThVkC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Gretchen Long, *Doctoring Freedom: The Politics of African American Medical Care in Slavery and Emancipation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012). Online at: [http://books.google.com/books?id=K4zru7Dc5W8C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=K4zru7Dc5W8C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

## WEB LINKS

### *Information on Sanford B. Hunt, MD*

<http://www.jerseyhistory.org/findingaid.php?aid=0021>

### *Information on race theories of Samuel George Morton, MD*

[http://chnm.gmu.edu/exploring/19thcentury/debateoverslavery/pop\\_morton.html](http://chnm.gmu.edu/exploring/19thcentury/debateoverslavery/pop_morton.html)

<http://www2.facinghistory.org/campus/rm.nsf/0/EF74E5855AECC09A85256FDE00789C1F>

### *Information on Civil War diet for soldiers*

<http://www.civilwar.org/education/pdfs/civil-war-curriculum-food.pdf>

<http://www.lincolnlogcabin.org/education-kits/Civil-War-Soldier-Lesson-Plans/Lesson-2.pdf>

<http://www.wcusd15.org/martens/civilwar/unitI/Unit%20I%20Reading--A%20Slave%27s%20Daily%20Bread.pdf> (a slave's diet)

<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/theses/available/etd-05262005-122146/unrestricted/CivilWarDiet.pdf>

### *Additional primary documents concerning black soldiers during the war*

<http://www.history.umd.edu/Freedmen/sampdocs.htm>

The key source of the attached readings is *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II, The Black Military Experience*, edited by Ira Berlin, Joseph Patrick Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

Pennsylvania Education Standards (see <http://www.pdesas.org/standard/views>)  
PA Core History and Social Studies standards

## 11TH GRADE

1.2.11.B-E; 1.6.11.A-B; 8.1.U.A-B; 8.3.U.A-B

## 12TH GRADE

1.2.12.B-D; 1.6.12.A-B; 1.9.12.B; 8.1.12.B; 8.3.12.B; 8.3.U.A-B

## COMMON CORE 11TH-12TH GRADES

CC.1.2.11-12.A-B; CC.1.4.11-12.I; CC.1.5.11-12.A; CC.1.5.11-12.D; CC.1.5.11-12.G;  
CC.8.5.11-12.A; CC.8.5.11-12.B; CC.8.5.11-12.F; CC.8.5.11-12.H; CC.8.6.11-12.



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**AUTHOR:**

**PETER CARMICHAEL, PH.D.**

*Robert C. Fluhrer Professor of Civil War Studies*

*Gettysburg College*

*Director of the Civil War Institute and Robert C. Fluhrer Professor of Civil War Studies*

Carmichael serves as co-chair of the Sesquicentennial Planning Committee on campus.  
His most recent book is *The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion*.

Carmichael has appeared in a number of media outlets surrounding the 150th anniversary of the  
Battle of Gettysburg, including the Associated Press, Pennsylvania Cable Network, C-SPAN,  
Popular Science, and a sponsored New York Times piece.

**EDITORS:**

**ROBERT D. HICKS, PH.D.**

*Director, Mütter Museum / Historical Library / Wood Institute for the History of Medicine*

*William Maul Measey Chair for the History of Medicine*

*The College of Physicians of Philadelphia*

**MARY ELLEN DONATELLI**

*Wood Institute Associate*

*The College of Physicians of Philadelphia*

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**MEDICAL INSPECTOR OF BLACK TROOPS TO**  
**THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE**  
**SUPERINTENDENT OF THE ORGANIZATION**  
**OF THE TENNESSEE BLACK TROOPS**

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**MEMPHIS TENN MAY 30TH 1864**

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Sir On the 26th inst the 4th US. Heavy Artillery was inspected when with an aggregate of 936 present there were 111 sick, a ratio of over 12 pr 100. A little explanation however will show that the present Sanitary condition of the regiment is better than these figures seem to indicate. The past winter was one of unusual severity for this region of country and during that season a comparatively large force was stationed at Columbus, Ky. and the 4th H. Arty being negros were made to perform all the labor required at the landing, government store houses &c in loading and unloading steamboats and storing supplies. This excessive labor and exposure combined reduced the standard of vitality in the men so as soon to swell the Sick List of the regiment to an unusual extent and many of those now in hospital are there because their physical powers were so broken down then as not to permit of their being put on duty since. Some of them will not be of Service again during their present term of enlistment.

There is yet another cause for the large number of men reported unfit for duty and that is that at the time of recruiting such was the anxiety to fill up the number necessary for a regimental organization that sufficient care was not taken in the examination of recruits, and many were admitted who should have been rejected as being physically disqualified for performing the duties of a soldier. Such of those as have not already died may almost be considered as fixtures at the Regimental Hospital.

Among the causes having a disturbing influence upon the sanitary condition of the regiment may be considered that of location. Fort Halleck occupies the summit of a hill or bluff upon the river-bank and almost completely surrounded by low swampy lands. Such situations are considered more unhealthy than the lower lands in the same vicinity.

There are two companies garrisoning a small detached work (Fort Quimby). They are quartered in huts but too crowded as to allow only about 150 feet (cubic) of breathing space pr man, Whilst 400 cubic feet is considered as the minimum that should be allowed in barracks. The police of quarters and grounds is good and both medical and line officers appear to take much interest in procuring the comfort and well-being of the men I have the honor to be most

Respectfully your obdt Servt  
John Rush

**SOURCE**

*Surg. John Rush to Capt. George Mason, 30 May 1864, Letters Received 4th USCHA, Regimental Books & Papers USCT, RG 94 [G-14]. Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s-1917.*

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**SPECIAL EXAMINING BOARD TO**  
**THE HEADQUARTERS**  
**OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VIRGINIA**

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**HEAD-QUARTERS, ARMY CORPS (VA), FEBRUARY 12, 1865**

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Colonel, The Undersigned, a Board, appointed by Special order, No. 37, of the 6th inst., from Head Quarters, Department of Virginia, beg leave to report.

On the question, "Should the ration vary in different regiments?" we report negatively.

The question "What should compose the ration for the U.S. colored Troops?" has received our most careful consideration. If we were called upon to recommend a ration for the use of troops in camps of instruction or of rendezvous for recruits, we would be inclined to make several important changes in the present issue. The army ration differs so widely in several particulars from the ordinary diet of the people as to require the exercise of more than ordinary judgment to prevent sickness among recruits arising from a total and sudden change of their habits of life. The derangement of the physical system by a change of food without any transition is the abundant cause of sickness among those new to the army. It seems to be well established that those recruits whose food has been for some time the same as that used by soldiers do not suffer much from sickness. The men who have labored in large numbers under contractors on the public works soon enjoy the immunity of the veteran. A larger mortality occurs among the young men who come from our northern farms; but the severest effects are witnessed among the class known as "contrabands," the freedmen from the rebellious or the border states, who do not obtain in the army a single article of their usual diet. Habituated to subsist on corn-meal, fresh fish, yams, potatoes and on the varied vegetable products of their garden patches, they have suffered greatly from being placed suddenly under the regimen of the army ration. Diseases of the stomach and bowels have been common among this class, and they have fallen victims to fevers of the types common in the army. Their physical systems have been low in tone from want of the habitual nutrition and have been without strength to react against disease. That the mortality among this class does not result from color but from a too rapid change in nutriment and habits of life is evident from the fact that there is no perceptible difference between the colored and white soldiers who come from the north and whose food has not differed widely before entering the army.

As most of the colored troops in the 25th Corps have been enlisted for several months, we propose to confine our recommendations to the ration to be used by soldiers seasoned to the field. The changes we have to advise are, therefore, inconsiderable being intended to obviate the slight tendency to scurvy perceptible among the enlisted men. All of them can be effected within the terms of War Department General Orders, No. 226, of July 8th, 1864.



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### ***The full Regulation allowance of beans***

- *Coffee six pounds (instead of eight) per hundred rations.*
- *Sugar the regulation issue*
- *Vinegar one half the regulation issue*
- *Candles one fifth less than the regulation ration*
- *Soap the full ration*
- *Salt, full ration*
- *Pepper full ration*

### ***The following additional articles are recommended***

- *Hominy ten pounds per hundred rations*
- *Dried fruit five pounds per hundred rations*
- *Molasses two gallons per hundred rations.*

The cost of the Government Ration as established by law, as I compute it, is about 35 1/2 cents per man. The cost as announced from Washington is at present 35 cents.

The money value of the articles proposed amounts to about 33 1/2 cents per individual exclusive of the diminution caused by the saving of two ounces of flour and one quarter of a pound of corn meal from each ration of those articles. Without these latter savings being counted we have a clear margin daily of 1 1/2 cents per man for the purchase of succulent fresh vegetables—or desiccated vgts. With them the margin for these expenditures is nearly three cents per man daily, which at present rates would give more than one pound of potatoes daily to the man, or an equivalent in other vegetable nutriment, or other anti-scorbutics.

I recommend that the report of the Board be adopted with the slight modifications herein indicated.

The low state of health of our colored troops and their proneness to disease and death (sickness as four to one, and deaths as seven to one as compared with the White troops) show that there is some radical evil which requires correction. We average in this army about eight deaths daily among colored troops.

In my opinion the principal cause of disease among these people is the Army ration, to which they have hitherto been unaccustomed. In this opinion I am borne out by the views of officers of experience with colored troops, and of Medical Officers of learning, experience, and common sense.

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We would earnestly recommend that the largest variety permitted in the present ration be carefully maintained by the Commissary Department in the issue.

***The following variety seems to be practicable without any change in the existing orders:***

<b>CORN MEAL</b> three times a week	<b>PORK OR BACON</b> three a week	<b>MACKEREL, OR IF ESTIMATED FOR, CODFISH</b> once a week
<b>FLOUR OR SOFT BREAD</b> twice a week	<b>FRESH BEEF</b> twice a week	
<b>HARD BREAD</b> twice a week	<b>MUTTON</b> once a week	

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***We respectfully submit the above views for the consideration of the Major General Commanding Department.***

**C. A. HECKMAN\***

**WILLIAM BIRNEY**

**GEORGE SUCKLEY**

*\*Gen. Heckman authorised me to sign his name to the above report, after he heard the first draught read. Wm. Birney, Brig. Gen., U.S.V. [United States Volunteers]*

#### **ENDORSEMENT**

Office of Medical Director Head Quarters Dept. of Virginia, ARMY OF THE JAMES. In the field, March 9, 1865. Respectfully returned. The within report having been referred to me partially as Medical Director, and partly because the only officer now present in the army who composed the Board framing it, for opinion and slight correction, I have the honor to return it with the following recommendations:

#### ***That the Ration as issued to colored troops be***

- Two issues of fresh beef weekly, one pound at each issue: three issues of pork or bacon weekly*
- 3/4 of a pound to the issue: one issue of mutton weekly one pound to the ration: one issued of salt fish (pickled) weekly, eighteen ounces per ration.*
- Three issues of corn meal weekly one pound per ration.*
- Two issues of flour weekly, one pound per ration: three quarters of a pound of hard bread twice a week.*



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I recommend that the report of the Board be adopted with the slight modifications herein indicated.

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In my opinion the principal cause of disease among these people is the Army ration, to which they have hitherto been unaccustomed. In this opinion I am borne out by the views of officers of experience with colored troops, and of Medical Officers of learning, experience, and common sense.

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***George Suckley Surgeon US Vols Medical Director, Army of the James:***

Note. It is well too late that the issue of mackerel once each week makes a difference of eleven 1/16 cents per man weekly, as a saving, making a handsome margin for vegetable food, which seems to have been over-looked by Captain Masser, CS US Vols., in his calculations.

**GEN. SUCKLEY, SURGEON & MED DIRECTOR**

**ENDORSEMENT**

Hdqrs. 25th A.C., March 10, 1865 My experience with and observations made after two years service with and near colored troops, leads me to approve the endorsement of Dr. Suckley

**G. WEITZEL, MAJ GENL US VOLS**

**SOURCE**

*Brigadier General C.A. Heckman et al. to Lieut. Col. E.W. Smith, 12 Feb. 1865, enclosed in M.G.E.O.C. Ord. to Col. M.R. Morgan, 10 Mar. 1865, O-34 1865, Letters Received, ser. 517, 25th Army Corps, RG 393 Pt. 2 [C4504]. Another endorsement. General Heckman was temporary commander of the 25th Army Corps; General Birney was a division commander in the 25th Army Corps; and Surgeon Suckley was medical director of the Army of the James. Records of the U.S. Army Continental Commands 1821-1920.*



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TESTIMONY BY THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE ORGANIZATION OF  
**MISSOURI BLACK TROOPS**

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ST. LOUIS, MO., NOVEMBER 29, 1863

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**Q.** How do the rations of the White soldiers suit the colored men?

**A.** They are not adapted to them, in my judgment. The rations could be changed, and the issue of subsistence modified, to cost the Gov't less, and yet be much better adapted to the negro, in consideration of his former habits.

**Q.** Do you think the negroes suffer in consequence of the change of food?

**A.** I am certain of it; especially in the derangement of the stomach & bowels. They have lived on corn bread all their lives, which they have baked themselves, mixing it simply with water and a little salt.

**Q.** What specific change would you recommend?

**A.** I would recommend the issue of corn meal, and a change in camp and garrison equipage to enable them to use it. This change I think is essential and important.

**Q.** Would you recommend any change of meat?

**A.** I would recommend the issue of more pork and less beef. Beef does not agree with them. I have often found that men under my charge had less diarrhoea when they could get corn bread and either fresh or salt pork, than when they used wheat bread, especially hard bread.

**Q.** Have you made any estimate as to the cost of the rations you propose compared with those now furnished?

**A.** The corn bread could cost a little over half what the wheat does, and the pork would cost perhaps an eighth less than the beef.

**Q.** At all events, it would not be more expensive?

**A.** No, Sir.

**SOURCE**

*Excerpt from testimony of Col. Wm. A. Pile before the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, [29 Nov. 1865], O-328 1863, Letters received, ser. 12, RG 94 [K-204]. Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s-1917.*

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**ANONYMOUS LOUISIANA BLACK SOLDIER TO**

**AN UNIDENTIFIED  
WASHINGTON OFFICIAL**

**BRAZOS SANTIAGO TEXAS AUGUST 20TH 1864**

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Dear Sir I take honor to inform you of the Ill treatment towards the Colored Soldiers in the line of medical attendance. hear on this Island the Sick are lying everyother tent covered with Sand all Over and are not able to wipe it from thier faces and they friends that they have here with them are on duty every day Guard pickett and on the breast works So they can not assistance and the doctors visits them about three times a week, and they do more harm then Good for they Poison the Soldiers. they are called doctors but they are not. They are only Students who knows nothing about issueing medicins Dr Webbs and Peaz and Saunds are call murderers they have mad many threats and have carried them in to exicution, for he told one Soldier of Company B. to Report to the Captain for duty and if he didt then he would never the man told him he was not able so he had him buck and gagged until 12. o'clock and then told the captain to Releace him and Send to the hospital and he gave him Som medicin and the next morning he was a Chorps [corpse] Most of the men are complaining of Swollen legs and with pain in leg and have to walk with a Stick and they Curses them. the officers See all this and dont Seem to pay any attention to it and there was One man of Company D. 87. crawl out of his tent to ease him Self Dr Peaze came up at the time and Cursed him and kick him in to his tent that night he died. and they was another in the hospital dieing and he Seem to Suffer very much and Dr Peaze Cursed him and told him god damn him if he was a going to die and dont So much fuss about it So my Deer friend for us and for the Sake of our Cuntry do not throw this a Side unnoticed I can not make the Complaint of all the men in this and if you will Send Some officer to investicate the mater you will find out matter Correctly nothing more

yours respectfully

P.S. please do not let the letter fall into they hands for there is So many ways to Seek revenge and they may find out who inform you of they misdeeds my writing is none of the best for Slaves are poorly learned

yours Res---tly

**SOURCE**

*National Archives of the United States; Unsigned to Sir, 20 Aug. 1864, A-332 1864, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94 [B-79]. Endorsement. Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s-1917.*

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**NORTHERN BLACK SOLDIER TO**  
**ADJUTANT GENERAL**

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**CAMP WM PENN NOV THE 28<sup>TH</sup> 1864**

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Honored Sir This is the Second letter that I have Sent in relation to this matter I will at first direct your attention to one particular point which is this there has been a number of Sick men of various diseases who have been Kept here for months after months under the treatment of the Doctor they can not be Cured they are Still lying here in the Same Condition one of the men that has been here lingering got to be So bad that they Sent him to the hospital he was there three days when he died previous to his Death he wanted to go home he is a man of family But he did not get to See them I wish to know if that is human treatment I do not Consider it treatment for a dog it is ridiculous a perfect Shame I only wish and pray that Some of you gentlemen that has Some Sympathy for human being to come and examine I wish those that has feelings for to See I Sometimes think that it is on Account of our Color if we was in Comfortable quarters So that we Could improve in health it would be a great deal better for us the Doctor that we have Cannot do us any good therefore we Shall never have our health while we remain here in this State the reasons why that I write to you I do not think that [you] are aware of all these transactions I am confident that there is Some other remedy besides keeping us here in this horrible condition last Sunday when at inspection of the Barracks the Major called the Straglers in line at the presence of the Major one of the men took a fit he asked a few questions in relation to this man they told him that the same man had been here for months in the Same Situation, fits every other day there has been men discharged here that was able to do duty and we that are afflicted have to remain there I suppose untill we are either dead or our time out we have to work as long as we can stand and then in bed they are here not able to do anything Some has been here Since march on crutches [crutches] all the time they will not allow them to go home to see how there family is getting along I scarcely know how to give you a discription of how things are going on I would rather be in my grave than to Stay here in this Barracks I hope that you attend to this matter Some of the men are actually loosing the use of their limbs they will not allow our friends to visit us. I expect to here from Some of you you will attend to this matter immediatly

Your Obedient Servant  
John H. Wilkison

**SOURCE**

*John A. Wilkison to Honored Sir, 28 Nov. 1864, W-945 1864. Letters Received ser. 360 Colored Troops Division, RG 94 (B-189) Endorsement, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s-1917.*