



A Regiment of Slaves: The 4th United States Colored Infantry, 1863-1866

Edward G. Longacre

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The 4th United States Colored Troops (USCT) regiment saw considerable action in the eastern theater of operations from late 1863 to mid-1865. The regiment—drawn largely from freedmen and liberated slaves in the Middle Atlantic and New England states—served in Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler’s Army of the James, whose mission was to capture the Confederate capital at Richmond. From May to December 1864, the 4th saw action in the Bermuda Hundred and Richmond-Petersburg campaigns, and in early 1865 helped capture the defenses of Wilmington, North Carolina, the last open seaport of value to the Confederacy.

Citing recently discovered and previously unpublished accounts, author Edward G. Longacre goes beyond the battlefield heroics of the 4th USCT, blending his unique insights into political and social history to analyze the motives, goals, and aspirations of the African American enlisted men. The author also emphasizes how these soldiers overcame what one of their commanders called “stupid, unreasoning, and quite vengeful prejudice” and shows how General Butler, a supporter of black troops, gave the unit opportunities to prove itself in battle, resulting in a combat record of which any infantry regiment, black or white, could be proud.

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