**“FOUND” - The135th United States Colored Troop**

African Americans were misunderstood in the civil war. What historians now understand, as do we, from the study of the **135th United States Colored Troop**, is that emancipation and the colored troops enlisting in the union army was a defining moment in history for them. These men, join a pioneer corps, are known as Freedom Seekers, leave home for not only their freedom but for the liberty of the nation. *George Washington Williams* wrote in 1889, **“When the life of our nation hung upon the threads of uncertainty, the slave threw down his hoe, took up the musket, and saved the nation.”**

 The men of the pioneer corps with General William T. Sherman’s army, arrived in Goldsboro on March 21,1865. They were instrumental in driving the construction of the roads and bridges through the swamps and quicksand of the Carolina’s, wearing very little clothing and in some instances with no shoes. At times they worked through the night to move **Sherman’s, 60,000-man army, with his 2,500-wagon train of supplies and 600 ambulances,** during one of the worst winters in many years.

“March 27, 1865”

 The pioneers now strip and go through the ordeal of a physical examine, they’re given their slave owners last name, they are called to step forward, they raise their right hand and they took the oath that is still given today. The men of the **135th USCT** pledge their lives, to serve as volunteers in the United States Army, for a period of three years.

The new volunteers are given their blue uniforms, new shoes and socks and they live in tents while in Goldsboro. They drill and drill as a regiment, and perform other duties, assisting to unload the boxcars from the coast, carrying food and supplies, for Sherman’s massive army.

“April 11, 1865”

Sherman’s forces, march out of Goldsboro, in pursuit of General Johnston’s army, along with the newly formed **135th USCT**, and they **marched shoulder to shoulder leaving their picks and axes behind.**

Following General Johnston’s surrender, Sherman’s army, including the **135th USCT,** begin their march to Virginia**. “They marched day and night, were fed from the wagon train, and knew no Sundays.”** Reaching Washington DC in six weeks, after marching over 300 miles from Raleigh, to Washington DC, stopping along the way at Petersburg, Richmond, Fredericksburg and Alexandria Virginia. The **135th USCT** was about 1,154 men strong leaving Goldsboro however their unit was reduced by over 200 to disease and ended up burying some 68 men before reaching Washington DC. The “**Freedom Seekers” of the 135th** sacrificed for both family and country, under extremely raw circumstances – that was an example of shear **resolve and valor** in any man’s army.

“May 24, 1865”

The crescendo comes early morning, on the street before the United States Capital and down Pennsylvania Avenue – two miles long, and 170 feet wide. **Spectators are 10 deep with flowers and bands playing patriotic music,** — the **135th** lined up with their peers, one right after another, and marched sharply dressed in their blue uniforms, with brass buttons, shoulder to shoulder, and under their own regimental flag.

**“EYES RIGHT”** as they sharp step passed President Johnson in the Grand Review. General Sherman must have been proud of their transformation from slavery, from the plantations of the south, to marching as a Regular Army Unit in the Inspection Parade. Incredibly this event has been lost in history for over some 150 years.

What an honor it is to share the lives of these **brave men**, who sacrificed so much, to better this nation. **WE SLAUTE YOU!**

***Dear Phillip, Jack & Needham,***

*After service, most of the men of the* ***135th USCT*** *return home as proud soldiers, they are honored by their families and the neighborhood. There are three men of the 135th from Wayne county North Carolina that show us 153 years later what freedom looks like….*

Private Jack Sherrod, Private Phillip Fort and Private Needham Lewis, *show what value, freedom gives to the people of our country.*

*All these soldiers, in their pension records, say that they worked together in the turpentine fields, severed together in the* ***135th USCT****, came back to Wayne county together and became valued citizens. All are farmers and they worked hard to buy land in the northern part of the county. They married and raised another generation of successful citizens. Education was of great importance to them and especially to* ***Phillip Fort****. Phillip worked to send two sons off to college, one becoming a Doctor and the other a Teacher and Preacher.* ***Jack Sherrod*** *built a house on his land, it is still in his family today and service to the nation has been passed down to his descendants.* ***Needham Lewis*** *owned land in Selma and passed it to his descendants. They are all, buried together, in the Selma cemetery where you can visit them today.*

*These families are all connected by marriage to their children and grandchildren. We should honor men with this character, that were born and raised in Slavery, took a chance to serve the country, and excelled during the Jim Crow era. They show all of us the true meaning of the “****Freedom Seekers.”***

We are proud to have come to meet these brave men.

***Jay and Amy Bauer***