



FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM — AGAIN



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THE 29TH C.V.I. (COLORED)

The 29th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry (Colored), as it was officially designated, served with distinction as part of the Union Army during the Civil War. George Williams, in *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion* (1888), wrote:

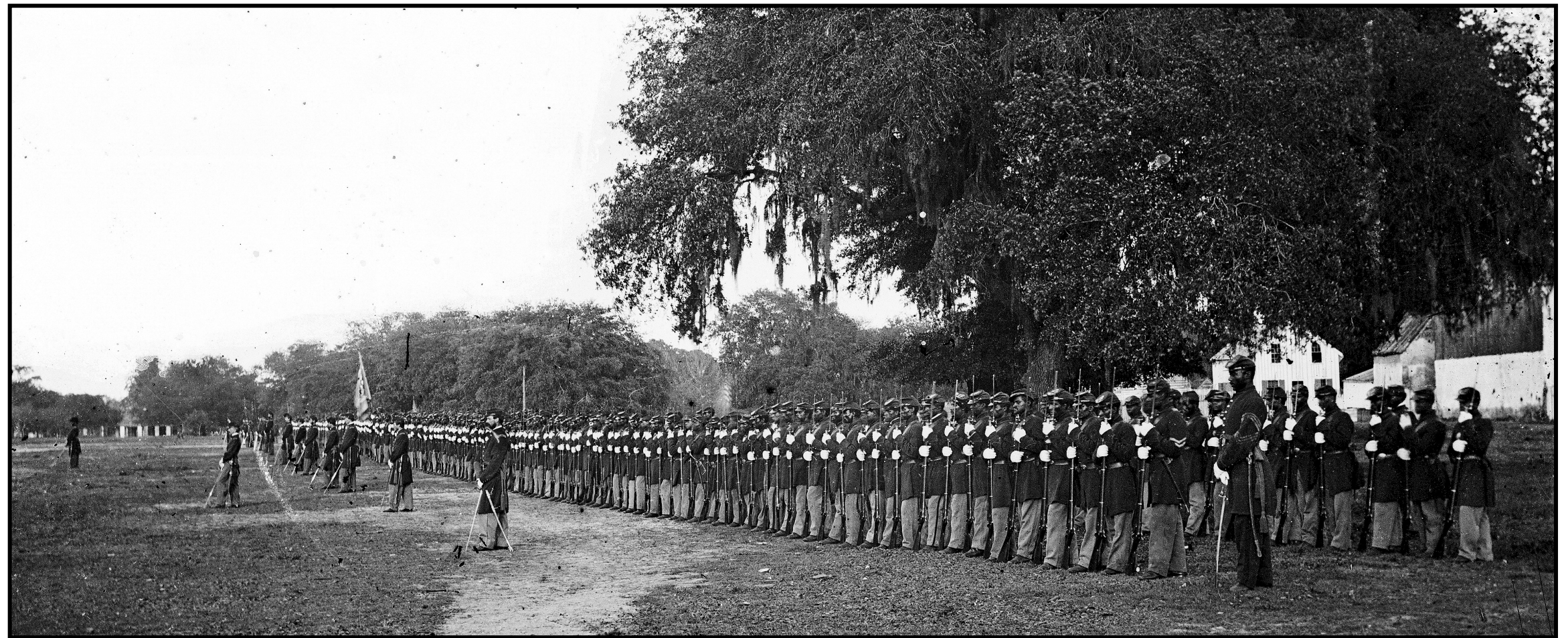
On the 19th of November, 1863, the War Department authorized the Governor of Connecticut to raise a regiment to be designated as the "Twenty-ninth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers" (colored), to serve three years, or during the duration of the war; on the 23rd of November, in General Orders No. 17, the work of recruiting this regiment was officially begun at Hartford. This regiment made a splendid reputation, losing nineteen enlisted men killed, two officers wounded, one hundred and twenty-one enlisted men wounded, one enlisted man missing, making total casualties one hundred and forty-three.

There is a monument to the 29th C.V.I. in New Haven, CT.

The Regiment mustered on March 8 in Fair Haven, CT. So many Connecticut African American men wanted to enlist that the state decided to create a second Regiment, the 30th C.V.I. When the 30th did not reach a full regimental compliment of 1,000, it was combined with other "Colored" Companies from other states to form the 31st United States Volunteer Infantry (Colored). The 29th was full, though, so on March 19, 1864, it left Connecticut for Annapolis, MD, under the command of Col. William B. Wooster of Derby, CT, who had volunteered for the assignment. Like all of the 29th's commissioned officers, Wooster was white. Before leaving Connecticut, the Regiment heard orations by Governor Buckingham (who by then had become a firm supporter of the idea of Black soldiers) and Frederick Douglass. In April, the Regiment left Maryland for duty at Beaufort, SC, where it participated in the tail end of the Sea Islands campaign. The photo of the 29th (right) was taken in Beaufort.

In August, the 29th moved into the thick of things, joining the Union Army's big push to destroy Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and capture the Confederate capital of Richmond, VA. Determined to end the war sooner rather than later, Union General Ulysses S. Grant threw everything he had at the Confederates, including the 29th. Union troops advanced as two armies, the battle-scarred Army of the Potomac from the north and the smaller Army of the James from the southeast, crushing the Confederates in a vice. The 29th joined the Army of the James. Marching inland along the north bank of the James River in humid August heat, the 29th was present at Bermuda Hundred, Deep Bottom, and Strawberry Plains, although in reserve. It joined the trenches (the Civil War was the first real example of trench warfare) at Petersburg, and in September was sent to New Market, Chaffin's Farm, and Darbytown, although again, in reserve. Through it all, it carried its battle flag, now restored by the State of Connecticut.

At the end of October, 1864, Hall the 29th saw their first combat at the Battle of Fair Oaks. Acting as the skirmish line for their Division, the Regiment suffered 80 casualties. From there it settled into trenches around Richmond, helping to garrison a line of forts along the Newmarket Road, from November 1864 through April 1865. At the beginning of April, Richmond finally fell. The 29th was the first Union infantry to enter the defeated Confederate capital. Companies C and G were the skirmishers. With Richmond taken and his army surrounded, Lee surrendered and the Civil War neared its conclusion. With fighting over in Virginia, the 29th was brought back to the Union rear near Washington, D.C., and given the task of guarding prisoners. In June it sailed for Texas, where it joined the 31st U.S.V.I. (Colored) in mop-up operations. In November it was sent home, the survivors honorably discharged at New Haven, CT.



Above: The 29th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry (Colored) at Beaufort, South Carolina, 1864. Sam A. Cooley. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/cwpbh.03373/>, public domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=117745997>.

CORPORAL CAESAR HALL, JR., 29TH C.V.I. (COLORED)

Caesar Hall, Jr. was born c. 1828 in the small farming community of Chaplin, CT. He was named for his father, an African American farm laborer. Caesar, Jr. grew up in a large household. Besides himself and his father, there were his mother Susan, who was also African American, his older brother Henry, and younger brothers James, Charles, George, John, Gilbert, and Edwin. Sometime during the two years after Caesar, Jr. was born, the Hall family moved from Chaplin to the neighboring town of Hampton, also predominantly rural, where they would remain. An 1855 wall map shows a house labeled "C. Hall," right along Hampton's eastern border with Brooklyn, CT. The house did not sit directly along a road, as did all of the other houses in Hampton, nor was it near any other houses. The Halls were keeping their distance from the rest of the community. Perhaps it was safer that way.

Caesar Hall, Jr. appeared in official Connecticut records for the first time in 1850, in the federal Census, when he was 23 years old. The 1850 United States Census was a milestone for historians, because for the first time it recorded the names of everyone, not just the heads of household, as had previously been the case. According to the Census, Caesar, Jr. was a farm laborer, like his father. He resided in Hampton, but not as a member of his father's household. Instead, he lived with Willard Talbot, a white farmer, along with Talbot's wife Maria, the three small Talbot children, and a young white woman named Elizabeth Bunn. Caesar, Jr. and Elizabeth would have been servants, and Caesar probably did much of the household's farm labor, probably working alongside Talbot. Shortly after the Census, Caesar, Jr. married an African American woman named Julia and moved out of the Talbot household. Caesar and Julia's marriage record could not be located, but the 1860 United States Census showed them living in their own household in Hampton. Now 31, Caesar, Jr. was still a farm laborer. He could read and write. At 32, Julia was a year older than her husband. And there were three children: Nancy N., 9; William P., 3; and Susan E., 1. Nancy attended school.

Caesar Hall, Jr., enlisted in the 29th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry on December 3, 1863, at Norwich, CT, the nearest large city to his home in Hampton. Caesar was 36, a bit old for a soldier, but this was the Civil War, fought mostly by citizen soldiers whose ages ranged from their mid-teens into their 50s, a large proportion of whom were married with children. Caesar's recruitment papers indicate that he was relatively tall for the time, although short by today's reckoning, at 5' 5 1/2". He was recorded as having black hair and black eyes. Caesar was assigned to Company H. He mustered in on March 8, 1864, and on April 30 was promoted to full private. He served through to the end of the War, mustering out on October 24, 1865.

A DOCUMENT

SAMUEL BOWERS, of New-York, a volunteer at the camp on Grapevine Point, attempted to desert on Friday night, by running the guard. CAESAR HALL, of Co. A [sic], Twenty-ninth Connecticut Volunteers, (colored) on guard at the time, ordered him to halt, when BOWERS threw snuff in his eyes. HALL pursued and closed with the runaway; he bayoneted him badly through the arm, broke his gunstock over his head, and brought him back to camp. BOWERS was sent to the hospital, and will probably recover. HALL was, this morning, promoted to be corporal.

New York Times, January 1864

JOHN C. HARRIS, 54TH MASSACHUSETTS VOLUNTEER INFANTRY (COLORED)

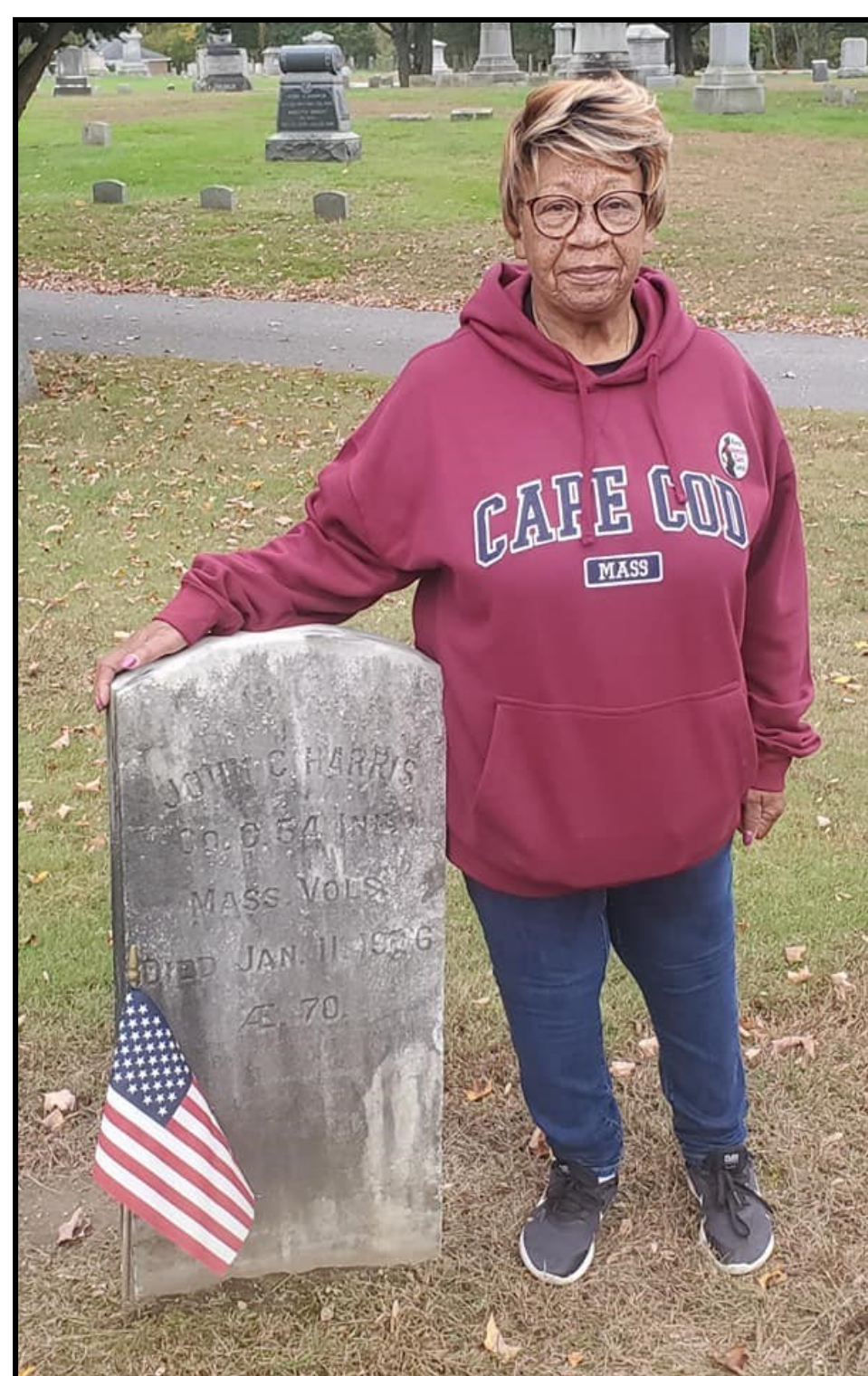
John C. Harris served in the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry (Colored). The 54th was the first "Colored" regiment to be formed, and it is featured in the movie *Glory*. A resident of Sheffield, MA, Harris moved to Willimantic, CT, in 1891 and is buried in the Old Willimantic Cemetery. His descendants still live in Willimantic. Harris was born in New York City c. 1843. He appears in official records living in Sheffield in 1855, when he was 12, as a laborer on a farm owned by Frederick Cooper, who was white. Harris also appears in the 1860 U.S. Census, age 17, as a laborer on the Cooper farm. Also living on the farm was Emma Freeman, also Black, an 18-year-old domestic servant. Birth records indicate that Emma gave birth to a daughter, Flora Freeman Harris, in 1862. John Harris enlisted in the 54th in late 1863, mustering out in August 1865, at the end of the Civil War. His rank was Private. He returned to Sheffield and, in 1866, married Emma. Their marriage records indicate that John was a laborer, and that Emma had been born in Walcottville, CT. The story of how John and Emma Harris came to move to Willimantic is told elsewhere in this exhibit.

SOME OTHER AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS FROM WINDHAM

James Buck. Co. C, 31st U.S.V.I. The son of Abby Buck and nephew of Lyman and Clarissa Jackson, who are mentioned elsewhere in this exhibit. Born c. 1846. Father unknown. Mother died in 1850, so James was raised by Lyman and Clarissa. After the War, James moved to Boston, where he married Nellie Cunningham in 1875. He worked as a steward on passenger steamships. James and Nellie later moved to New York City.

Joseph Davis. Co. E, 29th C.V.I. Laborer. Born 1835. Living in Windham, CT, in 1850. Inmate at the CT State Penitentiary in Wethersfield in 1859, serving a sentence for burglary. In 1870 he was living in Norwich, CT, working as a farm laborer and married to Julia, who was 23. He still lived in Norwich in 1880, but Julia was gone by then. Died in 1892. Buried in the Windham Center Cemetery. His older brother Samuel Davis still lived in Windham at the time.

Marvin Smith. Co. B, 29th C.V.I.. Brickmaker. Died 1894, age 50. Buried in the Windham Center Cemetery.



Above: Gravestones of Caesar Hall and John C. Harris in the Old Willimantic Cemetery.

Left: Regimental colors of the 29th C.V.I. (Colored). War Department. <https://connecticuthistory.org/the-29th-regiment-connecticut-volunteer-infantry-flag-and-display/>. Wiki Commons: public domain.

