

FINDING PRIVATE THOMAS GREEN



The book said “Thomas Green, an escaped slave from Missouri who served in a Wisconsin artillery regiment during the Civil war”. The sign under his portrait read “13th Wisconsin Heavy Artillery, Co. F”. Thomas Green had come to Grant County Wisconsin as an escaped slave in 1863 with his parents and siblings. I looked in the Roster of Wisconsin Volunteers, War of the Rebellion 1861-1865, but I found no Thomas Green matching the information given and no 13th Wisconsin Heavy Artillery. The book, Zachary Cooper’s *Black Settlers in Rural Wisconsin* also said that Thomas was drafted into the Union Army at Prairie Du Chien in October 1864. I had a mystery. Was this information wrong?

I went to my local library website and using my library card went to Badger Link, and the Access Newspaper Archive.



There I found an article in the Capital Times of June 28, 1931 headed “Lancaster Has State’s Oldest Colored Veteran”. It said that Green had enrolled at Prairie Du Chien on October 1, 1864 as a private in the Heavy Artillery, Co. F, 13th regiment, and that he was discharged Nov. 18, 1865 at Louisville Ky. It didn’t say 13th Wisconsin regiment, so I decided to look further.



I found that until President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863 African Americans were generally not allowed to enlist.

There were some exceptions, mostly in Louisiana. After Emancipation, African Americans actively recruited for military service in the west and northwest. The War Department issued General Order Number 143 on May 22, 1863, which established the Bureau of Colored Troops. They began enrolling units into the Federal Army, and these units became known as U.S. Colored Troops (USCT).



Thomas Green when an old man

Over the last two years of the war 175 regiments were formed, and 178,000 free African Americans and former slaves served. I found at the National Archives website that there were online records at the National Park Service's Civil War Soldier and Sailor System. I put "Green, Thomas, and Union" in the query page and got 303 Thomas Greens'. Ours was number 142 which read

"Green, Thomas Union Artillery 13th Regiment, United States Colored Heavy Artillery" There he was, in Co. F, just as the old article said.



Museum Exhibit

The unit information page said:
"UNITED STATES COLORED TROOPS, 13th Regiment, United States Colored Heavy Artillery. Organized at Camp Nelson, Ky., June 23, 1864. Attached to Military District of Kentucky, Dept. of the Ohio, to February, 1865, and to Dept. of Kentucky, to November, 1865. SERVICE.-Garrison duty at Camp Nelson, Smithland, Lexington and other points in Kentucky till November, 1865. Mustered out November 18, 1865".
 Thomas Green's name is on Plaque number B-28 at the African American Civil war Memorial in Washington, D.C.

