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Bob Luke and John David Smith, *Soldiering for Freedom: How the Union Army Recruited, Trained, and Deployed the U.S. Colored Troops*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2014. Pp. x, 131. ISBN 978-1-4214-1359-4.

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In *Soldiering for Freedom*, a recent installment in its publisher's "How Things Worked" series, independent scholar Bob Luke¹ and historian John D. Smith² (Univ. of North Carolina-Charlotte) attempt not to break new ground, but to familiarize a wide readership with the findings of current scholarship on black soldiers in the Union Army. For the most part, their succinct book admirably achieves this aim.

The prologue to the volume wisely begins with the assault of the all-black 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, in July 1863. This action is well known to filmgoers from the acclaimed 1989 movie *Glory*.³ The book's five chapters then branch out to provide a wider introduction to the service of blacks in the Civil War.

Chapter 1, "How Racism Impeded the Recruitment of Black Soldiers," tells the now familiar story of black men in the North being turned away when they tried to join the fight as soldiers at the start of the Civil War. While whites in the North and South were of one mind on little else, they seemed to agree that African-Americans were ill-suited for military service. The authors describe how the door to the Union Army opened for determined black volunteers when the Abraham Lincoln administration found in fall 1862 that it could not readily meet its military needs solely from the shrinking supply of white volunteers. After Lincoln's preliminary announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation late that September, even the most racist Union supporters could perceive the value of allowing African-Americans to serve, even if merely as cannon fodder to save white men's lives.

In chapter 2, "How Slaves and Freedmen Earned Their Brass Buttons," Luke and Smith relate how the nearly 180,000 black men who joined the Union Army (and the eighteen thousand who served in the Union Navy) proved their worth by their positive contributions, dispelling the myth that African-Americans would not fight. Prominent black leaders like Frederick Douglass appealed to northern blacks to enlist, while Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas began to encourage newly liberated slaves in Union-held areas of the South to do the same. These recruits (with a few notable exceptions like the 54th Massachusetts) were eventually organized into federalized regiments under the auspices of the Bureau of Colored Troops. Recruitment of African-Americans continued for the remainder of the war, even extending into the loyal slave states, where the enlistment of slaves had earlier been forbidden in order to ensure the continued allegiance of Unionist slaveholders. But such was the unquenchable demand for fresh troops that even this restriction was eventually lifted and military service became a path to freedom for black men and their families in certain slave states even before passage of the 13th Amendment.

The authors devote chapter 3 to the question of "How White Officers Learned to Command Black Troops." Even after white racism in the North eased sufficiently to allow black soldiers to join the ranks, it still prevented their commissioning as officers, especially if there was the slightest possibility they might gain direct authority, however temporary, over white troops. Whites, the authors explain, were willing to command African-Americans for several reasons. Some were abolitionists eager to lead black troops in lib-

1. He is the author of two books on the African-American experience in baseball's Negro Leagues: *Willie Wells: "El Diablo" of the Negro Leagues* (Austin: U Texas Pr, 2007) and *The Baltimore Elite Giants: Sport and Society in the Age of Negro League Baseball* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U Pr, 2009).

2. His previous books include *Lincoln and the U.S. Colored Troops* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U Pr, 2013) and *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction* (Lexington: U Kentucky Pr, 2013).

3. Directed by Edward Zwick, the film starred Matthew Broderick, Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman, and Cary Elwes.

erating their race and to help them secure citizenship and equality. For others, the only way to become officers was to accept a commission in a black regiment; they did not necessarily feel any particular sympathy for African-Americans and might even be hostile to them. Whatever their motives, nearly all the would-be officers of black troops had to undergo vetting by the so-called "Casey Board" to obtain commissions. This test, unknown in white units, arguably produced a higher caliber of officers than those of white regiments, whose selection was often made by popular vote of the soldiers they would command. A school was even set up to prepare would-be officers of black soldiers for their examination by the board.

Chapter 4, "How Blacks Became Soldiers," moves on to the training of black troops: "A uniform, a weapon, and a tent do not a soldier make. Not until he internalized the values, attitudes, and behaviors of the soldier did a recruit become a soldier" (70). The authors observe that this transformation from civilian to soldier was much the same for blacks as for other Civil War soldiers. It involved intensive training and socialization, with a heavy emphasis on drill, and positive and negative incentives to promote proper military behavior. During training, white officers looking out for potential noncommissioned officers found material for corporals and sergeants among African-American recruits, but also discovered that the illiteracy of many black soldiers—a legacy of their years in slavery—often meant they could not be assigned the administrative tasks typically performed by white noncommissioned officers. Some sympathetic white officers established schools to teach their troops basic literacy skills. Many black soldiers were eager to learn: "The act of learning to read—formerly outlawed by the southern slave codes—empowered Lincoln's black troops as soldiers and men" (77). Yet, they could likewise be demoralized by fatigue duty, especially when they were detailed to more and harder work than white units or were being kept from combat, where they could prove themselves as men.

In chapter 5, "How Black Troops Gained Glory and Paid the Price," Luke and Smith show that African-American troops in blue were uncommonly eager for combat, which seemed to be the only way they could show the injustice of the discrimination they faced—the unequal pay, extra fatigue duty, inferior equipment and camp conditions, and countless other indignities. But whatever hostility black troops faced in the Union army paled beside the visceral hatred that their enemy felt for them. Civilians and soldiers of the Confederacy saw them as insurrectionary slaves and massacred black POWs on a number of occasions, most infamously at Fort Pillow in Tennessee in April 1864. Yet black soldiers, rather than being cowed by such atrocities, responded with valor, showing time and again they could fight as bravely as whites, even in the futile and bloody frontal assaults that occurred so often in the Civil War. Though such attacks wasted the lives of all soldiers, black Union troops saw them as moral victories, as their stalwart performance in the face of death made converts of white observers who had doubted African-Americans' will or ability to endure combat.

Again, Bob Luke and John David Smith's *Soldiering for Freedom* will provide nonacademic readers with an excellent, engaging, well written presentation of the findings of recent scholarship on black Union soldiers in the Civil War. This is not to say, however, that the book is without flaws. In particular, its epilogue does not adequately describe what became of black veterans following the war.⁴ Instead, the authors write more about the fate of African-Americans *generally* rather than the experience of black soldiers after their service ended. This is unfortunate, for their readers thereby miss the postwar battle of black veterans, especially in the Reconstruction years, to preserve the gains they had helped to win for their race during war, for which they had paid with their blood and their lives. Beyond their status as heroes of the black community, most black veterans who sought membership were able to join the Grand Army of the Republic, the leading Union veterans' organization, a notable exception to the general exclusion of African-Americans from white-organized fraternal organizations in the late nineteenth century. And, too, they received Civil War pensions on an equal basis with their white counterparts. These men did not meekly accept discrimination against them either within or outside the veterans' fraternity, any more than they had during the war. Their story is not the same as that of African-Americans generally and deserves more focused attention than it gets in this book.

4. On which, see my *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2004).

While the lack of coverage of black Union veterans' postwar experience is disappointing, that does not undermine the value of *Soldiering for Freedom* for readers interested in a well-informed story of the valiant service of black soldiers against all odds in the Civil War.