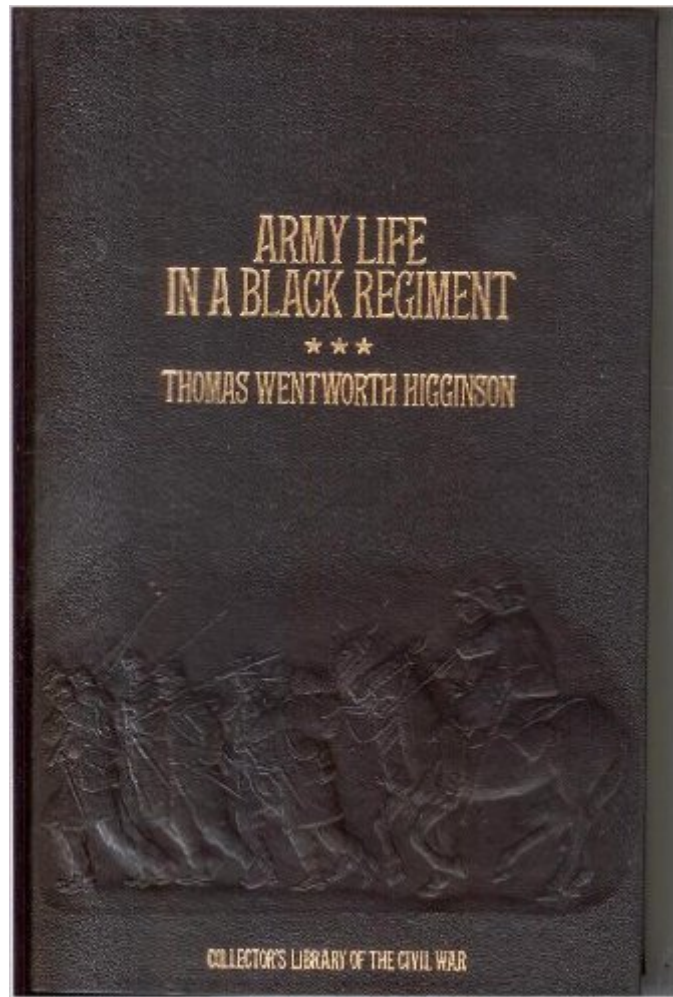


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Army Life In A Black Regiment (Collector's Library Of The Civil War)



Synopsis

"Army Life in a Black Regiment has some claim to be the best written narrative to come from the Union [side] during the Civil War. Higginson's picture of the battle which was the origin of "praise the Lord and pass the ammunition" and his reading of the Emancipation Proclamation to the black regiment are unsurpassed for eloquence." — historian Henry Steele Commager

Originally a series of essays, this important volume was written by a Union colonel from New England, in charge of African-American troops training on the Sea Islands off the coast of the Carolinas. A lively and detailed wartime diary, the book offers a refreshing portrait of life in the Union Army from an officer's point of view, recording opinions of other commanders and capturing the raw humor that develops among the men in combat. Higginson's descriptions of the soldiers, routines of camp life, and southern landscapes are unforgettable, as is the account of his near escape from a cannon ball. An unusual historical document intended to introduce new generations of readers to an American past that should not be forgotten, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* will be invaluable to students of Black History and the American Civil War.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Those familiar with the critical role that the recruitment of black troops into the Union Armies in the American Civil War usually think about the famous Massachusetts 54th Regiment under Robert Gould Shaw which has received wide attention in book, film and sculpture. And those heroic fighters deserve those honors. Glory, indeed. However, other units were formed from other regions that are

also noteworthy. And none more so than the 1st South Carolina Volunteers commanded by the arch-abolitionist Theodore Higginson one of John Brown's most fervent supporters and an early advocate of arming the slaves during the Civil War. He desperately wanted to lead armed blacks in battle and got his wish. I have remarked elsewhere (in a review of William Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner*) that while the slaves in the South, for a host of reasons, did not insurrect with the intensity or frequency of say Haiti, the other West Indian islands or Brazil that when the time came to show discipline, courage and honor under arms that blacks would prove not inferior to whites. And Higginson's book is prima facie evidence for that position. One should note that, unlike the Massachusetts 54th which was made up primarily of freedmen the 1st South Carolina was made up of units of fugitive and abandoned slaves. Thus, one should have assumed that it would have been harder to train and discipline uneducated and much-abused slaves. Not so. After reading a number of books on the trials and tribulations of various Union regiments, including the famous Irish Brigade, the story Higginson tells compares very favorably with those units. While Higginson's use of 'negro' dialect in the telling of his story which may not be to the liking of some of today's 'politically correct' readers of this book it is nevertheless a story worth reading told by a 'high' abolitionist and Civil War hero.

But Higginson was really more of an abolitionist. One of the secret six IIRC. His regiment, the 1st South Carolina, made up of "contrabands" from the sea isles and low country of South Carolina, was relegated mostly to garrison and picketing duties near Beaufort and Hilton Head. The action they saw with Higginson in command was limited to a few up river raids in SC and FL, and the occupation of Jacksonville FL for a short time. Higginson spends many pages with comparisons of the black and white troops, and engages in descriptions of his soldiers that seem to be directed at a circa 1860s New Englander who had never before seen many black folk. This book also contains one of the earliest known collections of slave songs. Much of the book is lengthy detailed descriptions of rather trivial camp events, such the visit of a fellow officers wife and child, or a night swim Higginson took between the lines. Higginson gives here no details of his personal life or experience before joining the regiment, or after (this book first published in 1869.) I would recommend this book if it's narrow perspective falls within a specific interest of the reader.

This is a February book, usually it is Black history week, month when I get intense in this kind of material, unless prompted by a special interest. However as I briefly scan the topics, I can tell this one is very good!

A little-known story of the first black soldiers for the Union and their camp in South Carolina. Wentworth Higginson was an abolitionist minister-turned-writer for The Atlantic Monthly when he was made colonel, backed by a rather thin CV for warfare. Nonetheless, he was a daring leader who recognized and appreciated the several daring and commanding black non-commissioned officers who were the black leaders. Sometimes amusing, the story's language is as lush as the south.

It was fascinating - I knew nothing about the black service in the Civil War and now I appreciate it more. This is not about big battles or famous events but everyday life in difficult circumstances,

i was not sure what expect when i first started reading this book. soon i found it captivated my interest. There is so many firsts in Black history. What grabbed me most of all was the honor these former slaves held themselves to. They set a standard in history that the present can really learn from.

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