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**African Americans from Maury County in the Spanish American War**

Accident or treachery? That was the headline of *The Columbia Herald* Friday the 18th of February 1898. The U.S.S. Maine, an armored cruiser, mysteriously exploded and sank in Havana Harbor, Cuba on February 15th. 266 American lives were lost – included 22 black sailors. If it was an accident, an armed conflict could be avoided.¹ If proven to be treacherous, the *Herald* aptly remarked that war between the Spain and the United States of America would doubtless follow.² War fever was rampant throughout the country, with the battle cry of “Remember the Maine” echoed by hawks from coast to coast, but this sentiment was not universal. F.D. Lander, Editor of the *Herald*, expressed the oppositional views of the paper less than a month after the sinking of the Maine. “The Herald”, Lander strongly argued, was opposed to war.” He believed war was legalized murder, a relic of a barbarous past centered on legalized robbery.³ Anti-war protest aside, the die had been cast. War was imminent. Citizens of Maury County, Tennessee, white and black, enlisted under the banner of the United States and participated in the country’s last major conflict of the 19th century.

Befitting a democratic tradition, citizens of the United States held negative notions to a large-standing armed-forces. The Regular Army comprised less than 30,000 men trained and.

² *The Columbia Herald*, “ACCIDENT OR TREACHERY? The Battleship Maine is Blown into Small Pieces, And Two Hundred and Sixty American Sailors are Numbered With the Dead—It May Cause War.” February 18, 1898, 4.
³ *The Columbia Herald*, F. D. Lander, Editor, March 4, 1898, 4.
armed at the start of 1898 with units spread mostly in western outposts. On 11 April 1898, President William McKinley sought approval from Congress for the use of armed-force against Spain, and was granted war powers. With the severance of diplomatic relations with Spain on April 21 followed by the country’s official declaration of war two days later, the United States was forced to form a national volunteer force from scratch. President McKinley issued a call for 125,000 volunteers; 25 May 1898, he issued a second call for 75,000 more. To supplement the Regular Army force, the Federal government called-upon State militias the furnish men for enlistment in the United States Volunteer regiments. When the local militias were not able to furnish enough men, newly created volunteer units were authorized. Tennessee organized four regiments for service in the war: the 1st-4th Tennessee Volunteers. White citizens of Maury County enlisted in the four Tennessee regiments, but through the initial wave of war fervor and formations of volunteer units across the country, African Americans were excluded from Uncle Sam’s call.

Black soldiers comprised a large segment of the Regular Army soldiers being reorganized and directed to the Caribbean Theater of War: Cuba. The Buffalo soldiers, the sobriquet applied to all African American soldiers in blue, comprised the segregated 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry and 24th and 25th U.S. Infantry – over 5,500 men. These units included in the first invasion of the Spanish held territory of Cuba. U.S. Regular and Volunteer forces organized for departure at two major sites in the South--Chickamauga, near the Tennessee border and Tampa, Florida—the

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7 Regular Army soldiers (black and white) spearheaded the landing and campaign against Spanish forces in Cuba. Their experience over the less-trained volunteer forces were relied upon to seize battle against the enemy; volunteer forces supplement the Regulars through the initial phases of the campaign. Regulars were career Army as oppose to volunteer that signed up for a length of service—completion of the war or discharged earlier—and lacked the training and experience of the former.
central concentration of men and material embarking on transport ships to Cuba. Race riots, confrontation between the Regular black soldiers and white citizens was precursor to the treatment volunteer Negro regiments would receive in the deep-South. “No Niggers and Dogs Allowed in Here” signs were placed at public venues and businesses illustrated the overt racism black soldiers received from the residents. President McKinley’s call for 10,000 more Black soldiers was thwarted, albeit for the moment, by scathing newspaper reports of the Regular African American soldiers and their behavior in Florida. Inspired by racism, the Columbia Herald included a leading editorial form the Washington Post calling for the withdrawal of Black soldiers from the South due to their “pernicious influence on the negro population”. 6,002 soldiers of African descent volunteered for Federal service in response to McKinley’s call; the majority would not see action. In short order, with the inability and unpreparedness of U.S. forces to adapt to the jungle climate and disease in the Caribbean Theater, a call for new units (white and black) with immunity from disease was made: Maury County, Tennessee responded to the request.

By the second week of May 1898, 56,000 men had been mustered into volunteer service for the United States. The Columbia Herald noted that the number would increase to 100,000 by the end of the following week. The Tennessee units the 1st-4th enlisted at a high rate. 16,000 Regular Army soldiers, including the Buffalo soldiers, spearheaded the incursion into Cuba.

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10 Black Regulars reaffirmed for white citizens the inferiority of African Americans as a whole; resisting the call for black volunteers—ill-trained Negroes lacking military discipline and experience—prematurely denied the call for African American volunteers. This changed as the President and War Department needed more men.
11 The Columbia Herald, Negro Volunteers: They Will Not be Accepted Under the Present Call”, April 29, 1898, 4.
13 Refer to citation No. 10 for the shift of discouraging black enlistments to the need for African American volunteers, particularly from the Southern regions of the United States.
Upon arriving on the island, the campaign to capture major Spanish held ground and garrisons slowed to a steady death-march. Thousands of soldiers fell from the ranks due to exposure and disease: yellow fever and malaria and spoiled rations. In response, as reported by the *New York Times* in late April, Secretary of War Russell Alger formulated a plan to recruit “at least half a dozen special regiments of yellow fever immunes for service in Cuba.” With the approval on Congress, which settled on the organization of 10,000 men, President McKinley authorized “an additional volunteer force of not exceeding ten thousand enlisted men possessing the immunity from diseases incident to tropical climates.” The new bill [S.R. 4266] referred to as the Immune Bill specified the number designated for the new units but did not specify the race of the men who were to enlist in the regiments (whites and blacks from the humid regions of the South, presumably already exposed to yellow fever, were desired for enlistment). General Order No. 55, Series 1898 detailed the formation of the immunity regiments: five white, later revised to six and four colored units [7th-10th U.S. Volunteer Infantry (Colored)]. The new regiments, white and black were recruited from the South and comprised of Americans who were not able to enlist in the Regular or Volunteer units, and believed to be inoculated from diseases decimating the troops in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines; U.S Army physicians later reported that the men were not immune to tropical diseases, and suffered similar to the other Regular and volunteer troops (4,327 African Americans volunteered for service in the Immune regiments). Issued by the War Department, General Order No. 60, issued on June 1, 1898 divided the South into

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18 Fletcher, *The Black Volunteers in the Spanish American War*, 49.
recruiting regions and assigned commanders within geographic regions for enlistment duties. Major, later promoted to full Colonel, Eli L. Huggins Medal of Honor recipient of the 6th Cavalry, would recruit African Americans from Kentucky, eastern Tennessee and West Virginia. Consolidation (combining the separate companies to form the regiment) of Maj. Huggins’s 8th Immune Regiment was at Fort Thomas, Kentucky—a short distance from Cincinnati, Ohio—and included four companies from Tennessee: Greenville (C), Harriman (D), Murfreesboro (E), and Columbia (F). Co. F, 8th Immune Volunteers was enlisted from Maury, County Tennessee. Lt. Colonel Arch M. Hughes, second in command to Col. Huggins, was dispatched from Washington to Columbia with the purpose to enlisting the recruits from the geographic region assigned to the 8th.

Co. F, 8th Immune Volunteers was enlisted from Maury, County Tennessee. Lt. Colonel Arch M. Hughes, second in command to Col. Huggins, was dispatched from Washington to Columbia with the purpose to enlisting the recruits from the geographic region assigned to the 8th. The Columbia Herald noted the news of Hughes arrival, detailing the assignment of field level officers from Huggins down the chain of command to captaincy, positions to be held by white men. Officer John Jackson (white) was appointed to raise and command Co. F from Columbia with assistance from Luke Bonner (colored) who was supplied with the enlistment papers. The Herald affirmed that “colored men are responding promptly, and the company will be raised in short order.” In contrast to the traditional company formation of army regiments, the newly created Immune units companies consisted of eighty-two enlisted and three officers, as

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21 The Columbia Herald, “COLORED VOLUNTEERS. Col. Arch M. Hughes Will Raise A Battalion in Tennessee: One Company Will be Recruited From Colombia, with John Jackson as Captain.”, June 10, 1898, 2.
compared to the usual 100 men infantry structure.\textsuperscript{22} The ages of the enlisted volunteers were between the ages of 18-45 for two years of service unless discharged at an earlier date.\textsuperscript{23} On the first day of July 1898, recorded the \textit{Columbia Herald}, Col. Hughes spent several days observing the recruitment of Company F. There was enough black recruits to form two separate companies, but the number of able-bodied men was reduced with the arrival of Col. Huggins and examining officers through medical and fitness tests.\textsuperscript{24} A week later, the paper recorded sixty-six volunteers were examined by Col. Hughes, with only eighty-two enlisted in the company; further examinations would continue the following day. \textsuperscript{25}Lt. Col. Roger D. Cunningham, USA Ret., details the makeup of the African Americans from Columbia that enlisted in Co. F for the National Museum of the United States Army article: The Black “Immune” Regiments in the Spanish American-War. The men were primarily semi-skilled and unskilled workers—in line with the other immune regiments—Cunningham notes, with only two percent having white-collar jobs. Laborer was the most common occupation—over three fifths of the men for each company—with farming, cooking, mining and waiting (food service) as the other four prominent occupations. More than one third of the men were illiterate. The “Xs” placed on the Company muster-rolls illustrate this number.\textsuperscript{26} The men fortunate to be appointed to an officer ranking, just twenty-five Regular Army Black soldiers were elevated to the rank of first lieutenant, their promotions expired with the end of service in the volunteer rank. “This is discrimination pure and simple . . . They could have been promoted in their own companies [Regular units] instead

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\textsuperscript{22} Immune companies were authorized three officer and eight-two enlisted men (Smaller than traditional one hundred men companies of state volunteers; traditional regiments numbered nominally 1100 enlisted and officers, Immune regiments (10 companies – 46 officers and 992 enlisted men) Cunningham, \textit{The Black Immunes}, 3.

\textsuperscript{23} Cunningham, \textit{The Black Immunes}, 3.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{The Columbia Herald}, “Colored Volunteers.”, July 1, 1898, 5.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{The Columbia Herald}, “COLORED SOLDIERS: The Company From Colombia is Being Examined.”, July 8, 1898, 5.

\textsuperscript{26} Cunningham, \textit{The Black Immunes}, 4.
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of sending them to colored regiments” wrote a black newspaper nothing the deference to white officers.27

With the completion of recruitment, Co. F proceeded to Fort Thomas, Kentucky and consolidated with the Companies A-M and officially organized as the 8th U.S. Volunteer Regiment (Colored). African Americans from Washington D.C., New Jersey, and other cities in Tennessee with the Columbia recruits formed the 8th. By 1 July, Major General William R. Shafter, commanding the Fifth Army Corps, had the last major Spanish stronghold at Santiago encircled. He faced a potential prolonged siege but because his force was crippled by yellow fever, malaria and spoiled rations, requested the immediate transfer of immune regiments to Cuba to replace his exhausted and sick men. Santiago soon fell, but Shafter insisted on the black regiments to garrison (occupy key strategic positions and former-Spanish strongholds against insurgent attacks, and keep peace) the captured enemy ground and remove the men of his corps from the “zone of infection”.28 On 3, July, the United States and Spanish forces on Cuba agreed to a truce; two weeks passed before the official surrender of Spain on the Caribbean island.29 From their base at Fort Thomas, Col. Huggins reported to Brigadier General Henry C. Corbin—Adjutant General of the Army—that “the regiment is now ready to go on short notice.” Attached to the 8th Regiment were two companies of colored volunteers from Indiana which formed the fourth and separate battalion to the regiment for service that was to last five months.30 They went

27 Fletcher, The Black Volunteers, 49.
The black newspaper’s argument centers on the promotion of African American Regular positions with volunteer units (temporary) and their promotions would expire when the volunteer units were mustered out of Federal service; also, by promoting outside of Regular Army, Blacks in immune regiments would be reassigned to their Regular unit without raising in permanent rank.
30 Cunningham, The Black Immunes, 4.
to Georgia. The cessation of major hostilities, and the contact with the white citizenry brought the 8th’s service to a premature end.

In October, the regiment was transferred to Camp George H, Thomas, at Chickamauga, Georgia with the expectation that Tampa would be the final trek of the journey before Cuba. Upon arrival, and central to the future status of the regiment, the regiment was inspected by Regular Army officers. Lt. Col. Marion P. Maus observed that “[t]he men appeared and marched fairly well, and seem to be respectful, and generally well contented.” Maus’s report that “the regiment would not be fit for duty” due to “very poor and insufficient clothing” and “badly worn and unfit shoes” was critical and can be seen as a major factor in withholding the 8th from the active theater of operation. There was a common mistrust and dismissive attitude for Regular Army officers toward volunteers; they believed raw recruits lacked discipline and obedience to military structure and proper subordinate protocol. This attitude could be applied to Colonel Maus’s report of the 8th, but he affirmed the competency of officers as “fairly well suited for the performance of their duties.” He did, however, recommend three black lieutenants for discharge. His scathing review of the field level officers of the Indiana companies attached to the 8th reveal a degree of Regular Army exceptionalism over racial discrimination (Regular Army preference to volunteers—both white and black), describing the men as “very poorly and insufficiently educated to hold commissions” and that “there was an objection shown to having these men companies with the 8th, as it might be considered that they were a part of their organization.” Maus’s recommendation that the two Indiana companies be mustered out of volunteer service may have played an important role in thwarting a large role for the 8th in the Caribbean.31

31 Ibid, 5.
The regiments’ stay in Georgia was marked with military activity and racial prejudice. The black regiments were segregated from their fellow white comrades in arms, and felt the full weight of Jim Crow injustice. Members of the 8th, feeling slighted after being forced to the rear of a railcar, proceeded to a train station, assaulted two passengers and vandalized freight trains. Tensions were high, and for the African American soldiers, many armed for a first time, were able to deflect vehement racism with American rifles by responding to their treatment with violence. In November, as reported in the *New York Times*, Edmund Watkins, Major of Chattanooga, informed Secretary of War Alger that “their [8th U.S. Vols.] presence near the city is undesirable and prejudicial to good order.” Colonel Huggins defended the conduct of the regiment and attributed exaggerated press reports to the misconduct of soldiers of the Indiana companies and associating them directly with the 8th. In a report to Adjutant General Corbin, Huggins wrote “My colored officers and men have quietly submitted to slights and insults which would not patiently be borne by white troops and I hope to they will continue to do so in the future.”[^32] The report was written prior to the train incident, but violent incidents and continued racism between white locals and black soldiers increased; news reached Tennessee of the soldiers’ alleged misconduct: retribution would be paid. White Tennesseans believed the ill-conduct of the African Americans soldiers reflected poorly on their state, and responded with violence when the 8th returned home.^[33]

At the end of 1898, with the major fighting in the Caribbean Theater at its end, volunteer regiments, both white and black, were being mustered out of the army. The attached Indiana companies were mustered out of Federal volunteer service in January 1899. Would this be the

[^33]: Fletcher, *The Black Volunteers*, 52.
fate of the 8th and the men of Co. F Columbia, Tennessee? At the time of the Indiana’s companies disbandment, no. The Columbia Herald reported on 3 February 1899 that Luke Bonner, the colored recruiter returned from Chickamauga on furlough. The two sentence brief ends with the belief that the regiment will leave for Cuba within a few days. This proved to be a false report. By March, the regiment was mustered out of volunteer service and ordered home. For months, the local press published reports documenting the “turbulent misconduct of negro soldiers wherever and whenever they had the opportunity” which inflamed white residents back home, and provided their excuse to welcome the soldiers home in a barbaric fashion. One news press reported that “a number of men, who had in some way secured revolvers, began to discharge them in the air and into sheds and vacant houses” resulting in the wounding of three local men as the regiment traveled on train from Chattanooga. Upon arrival, “armed men stood at the car windows whilst others armed with revolvers and police clubs entered and beat the men, most of whom were asleep, over the heads and bodies, and robbed some of money and tickets.” The Police force were a part of the mob and met the ex-soldiers with force; the New York Times described that they “presented a battered appearance” upon arriving in Louisville. The 8th U.S. Immune was not provided the opportunity to gain any battle honors or attach campaign banners to their colors; they were not alone, of the original ten Immune regiments organized, only the 9th U.S. Volunteers was transferred to Cuba and formed a brigade with two black units form Illinois and Kansas. They took on garrison duty after the end of major hostilities in 1898.

34 The Columbia Herald, “AROUND TOWN.”, Friday, February 3, 1899, p. 5.
36 Cunningham, The Black Immunes, 5.
37 Ibid, 5.
38 Ibid, 6.
For the African American volunteers from Columbia, Tennessee, the war provided the opportunity for many to seek a higher measure of equality during an era of rapidly deteriorating racial and social standing. Segregation followed the soldiers from the farms and streets of Maury County to the United States Army. The social and racial doctrine that would not be subverted for another five decades. For white citizens of Maury County, there was an opportunity to be unwelcoming to the black soldiers at. In late May of 1899, the Columbia Herald documented and proposed a project to relocate not only returning soldiers, but the entire population of African Americans in the county to the Philippine Islands. Black soldiers would lead the exodus after a few years of service and move their entire families to the Pacific. Forty acres and a mule, similar to the Homestead Acts of the 1860s was the land-lease project the paper suggested. The article was published after the 8th mustered out of service and returned home. The plan never came to fruition, but illustrates the social and racial atmosphere of the city and county that received the soldiers. It must be noted that African American units, the Regular Buffalo Soldiers of the army served with great distinction during the war, specifically in Cuba: five soldiers were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor—the highest honor bestowed to servicemen, and the Colonel Theodore Roosevelt—later President of the United States—recognized the contribution of the 9th US. Cavalry and their valor at the Battle of San Juan Hill. The 8th U.S. Volunteer Infantry Colored did not serve in active combat or garrison duty, but enlisted to defend the country when African Americans continued their fight for equality at home.

40 Kraecynski, “The Spanish American War and Aftermath: Spain Surrenders”
Enlistments: Company F 8th U.S. Vol. Inf. (Col’d)

Baggett, Arthur (Private)\(^{41}\)

Baker, Joe Charged with murder of a Negro who was found dead in the road, riddled with bullets; caught in Chattanooga and turned over to Alabama authorities.\(^{42}\)

Bonner Luke L. (Private)\(^{43}\)

Flippin James A. (Served with 24th Inf.; discharged 8/26/1901; from Maury County; Age 24; Student; 5’9 black eyes, black hair, dark complexion; Remarks: “Excellent” Died: 7/22/54 Manila, Philippines.\(^{44}\)

Huggins, Henry (Private)\(^{45}\)

Rankin, Charles/Charley (Private) Died at Chickamauga of pneumonia; deceased was a son of Martin Rankin, and was liked by both white and colored. Marriage License Issued: October 8, 1898, Charley Rankin and Jennie Watkins\(^{46}^{47}^{48}\)

Rankin, Lesley (Private-Corporal); Co. M; relation to Charles(y)?\(^{49}\)

Yancey Clarence A. (Private; Age 29; 5’5; black eyes, black hair, black complexion; Read and Write: Yes; Miner; Single; Enlisted at Greenville, TN; Born: Tennessee—Maury County?\(^{50}\)

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\(^{42}\) *The Columbia Herald*, “STATE NEWS.”, Friday, February 24, 1899, 4.
\(^{46}\) *The Columbia Herald*, “Died at Chickamauga.”, Friday, February 3, 1899, 2.
Loving, Walter H. (Chief Musician, Company Band; previously 2nd Lt. 48th U.S. Inf. Maury County?)

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