

# 3. THEMES, PEOPLE, AND EVENTS

## African American Civil War Soldiers

While most of Alabama saw little action during the Civil War, North Alabama was targeted by both the Union and Confederate armies. The Middle Tennessee River Valley constituted a major economic waterway for the South. Similarly, the railroad that traveled east and west across North Alabama was the first on the west side of the Appalachian Mountains, a vital lifeline supplying Tennessee and Georgia. The cities of North Alabama, including Huntsville, Florence, Athens, and Decatur, were the sites of skirmishes and battles. In Morgan County, the Battle of Decatur



occurred in late October 1864 when the Union Army met the Confederate Army in along the Tennessee River. It was part of the larger Franklin-Nashville Campaign after the Battle of Atlanta.

While there were nearly 200 U.S. Colored Troop (USCT) Regiments in the Union Army, only the 14th U.S. Colored Infantry (USCI) was involved in the Battle of Decatur. This regiment consisted of former slaves and was led by white officers, including Col. Thomas J. Morgan, who had organized the regiment at Camp Stanton near Nashville on November 16, 1863. The regiment was garrisoned in Chattanooga, Tennessee until November 1864, when they marched to Dalton, Georgia, where they were involved in skirmishes on August 14th and 15th of 1864. Regardless of minimal training and having only experienced combat once before, the 14th USCI succeeded in rebuffing the Confederate artillery line and disabling some of the artillery. After the Battle of Decatur, the 14th USCI returned to Nashville, where they fought in the two-day Battle of Nashville before being mustered out of service on March 26, 1866.

Of the hundreds of men in the 14th USCI, only three had been born in Morgan County: James Raven, Thaddeus Rogers, and Isham Troup. These men most likely ran away from their plantations and enlisted in Tennessee in either late 1863 or early 1864. Within a year, the three were back in Morgan County, fighting their former oppressors. Enlistment papers for half of the regiments of the USCT are available on Ancestry.com provided by the National Archives and Records Administration. While some files are more complete than others, the papers record the men's descriptions including their age, height, complexion, eye and hair color, as well as their place of birth and occupation.

(Bottom Far Left) "Hoe Culture in the South." Photograph by Dorothea Lange. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division (Below) (Left) James Raven, 14th USCI, Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1863-1865 (Center) Thaddeus Rogers, 14th USCI, Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1863-1865 (Right) Isham Troup, 14th USCI, Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1863-1865 (Ancestry.com via National Archives and Records Administration)

James Raven was 32 years old when he enlisted in the Union Army on February 20, 1864 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He was described as "yellow" in complexion. His occupation is listed as a fireman, and it is noted that he was owned by Mrs. Sarah McKay of Huntsville, Alabama. Thaddeus Rogers' record says he was born in Decatur County, Alabama. However, Decatur County had been absorbed by Madison and Jackson counties in the

