



**May 22nd, 1863**, the War Department issued [General Order 143](#), (GO 143) which changed the course of the Civil War, and the destiny of millions. This order established a bureau for the organization of “Colored Troops”, which would be in charge of recruitment and training of “colored troops” ( non-white and non-First Nation) and officers. Designated “[Regiment of U. S. Colored Troops](#)” (USCT), it was to be comprised of mostly free native men of African descent, led by mostly white commissioned officers. However, even before GO 143, some blacks were fighting in state units, militias, and many the Navy.

GO 143 fulfilled the provisions of the [Emancipation Proclamation](#), which overturned the restrictions of the [1862 Militia Act](#), and **allowed the use of Africans in any military capacity, including armed service** in the army. **This shifted the War’s center of gravity** from preservation of the Union to **freedom for slaves**. It also helped to discourage foreign intervention on the side of the Confederacy.

Over **200,000 Africans** fought in 166 USCT regiments, or in the Navy. The USCT fought in 449 battles, 39 nine of which would determine the outcome of the war. Counting black “blue jackets” (sailors), which numbered over 20,000, Africans fought in every engagement in the Civil War. They were awarded **26 Medals of Honor**, including one recipient who wasn’t a USCT, but fought in a white regiment. **Their courage and sacrifice lead to the adoption of the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery,**

On this 150th Anniversary, we stand on their shoulders. **Eighty thousand USCT purchased the freedom of 4 million Africans**, held in bondage, **with their lives**. In so doing, they gave rise to **African-American citizenship**, and to the 14th Amendment, making **citizenship an American birthright**.

Please share this proud national heritage at your schools, Memorial Day events, etc., and look for upcoming events though 2015 commemorating the military contributions of African-Americans in the Civil War.