

Black Facts!

The Central Branch Home located in Dayton, Ohio (now known as Dayton VAMC) was the first to admit African Americans after the Civil War. Veterans of the U.S. Colored Troops were admitted in March 1867; several of them were former slaves.

- The first government hospital established exclusively for African American Veterans was Tuskegee VA Hospital in Alabama. Originally known as the “Hospital for Sick and Injured Colored World War Veterans,” it operated as an all-black Veteran’s hospital for 31 years--from its opening on Feb. 12, 1923 until it was desegregated by the VA in 1954.
- Dr. Howard W. Kearney became the first African-American director to integrate leadership at VA hospitals (excludes Tuskegee). Dr. Kearney became the VA hospital director at East Orange, N.J., July 1962. He had been director at the Tuskegee VA hospital since 1959 prior to his assignment to East Orange.
- Vernice Ferguson was the first African-American director of VA’s Nursing Service. The status of the nursing service improved with the elevation of Ferguson to the new position of deputy assistant chief medical director for nursing programs in 1980.
- There are two VA Medical Centers named after African Americans: The Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago was named after Jesse Brown, a Vietnam War Veteran appointed by President Bill Clinton to serve as VA’s Secretary; he served from 1993-1997. Secretary Brown was also the first African American to serve as VA Secretary.
- The Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in Charleston, S.C., was named for Marine Corps Pvt. Ralph H. Johnson, who was killed in action during the Vietnam War and awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. <http://www.charleston.va.gov/page.cfm?pg=16>
- The nation’s first full-figure, “in-the-round” (360 degrees) monument to honor Civil War U.S. Colored Troops is located at the Nashville National Cemetery in Tenn. The monument was dedicated in 2006 to the United States Colored Troops who fought in the Civil War. 1,447 known and 463 colored soldiers are buried at Nashville.
- Memphis National Cemetery has the most U.S. Colored Troops burials at approximately 4,209; followed by Natchez (2,200) and Nashville (1,910).
- Fort Scott National Cemetery -- A granite monument was erected in 1984 in memory of the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry. The soldiers

were stationed at Fort Scott during the Civil War.

- Barrancas National Cemetery (Florida) -- Sections 1 through 12 contain the remains of Civil War casualties and include: U.S. Colored Troops, known: 154, unknown: 98
- Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery -- In 1939, the remains of 175 officers and soldiers of the 56th U.S. Colored Troops Infantry were removed from a cemetery at the former Koch Quarantine Hospital in St. Louis, and re-interred at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery. The men died of cholera in August 1866. The monument to the 56th U.S. Colored Troops was moved from its original location at Koch hospital and re-erected with a new sandstone base, new dowels, and a new plaque. The monument was dedicated in May 19, 1939. (Section 57, Grave 15009)
- Beaufort National Cemetery -- Nineteen Union Soldiers of the all black Massachusetts 54th and 55th Infantry were removed from Folly Island, S.C., and re-interred at Beaufort National Cemetery in S.C., with full military honors on Memorial Day, May 29, 1989.

Medal of Honor Recipients at Beaufort National Cemetery

- Private First Class Ralph H. Johnson, (Vietnam War) Company A, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division (Rein), FMF. Near Quan Duc Valley, Republic of Vietnam, March 5, 1968, (Section 3, Grave 21).
- Master Sergeant Joseph Simmons, 25th Infantry Buffalo Soldiers, World War I and II, fought on three fronts in France, and was awarded the Legion of Honor Medal by the Republic of France (The French Legion of Honor Medal is equivalent to the United States Medal of Honor), died Sept. 24, 1999 (21 days prior to his 100th birthday). He is buried in Section 2, Grave 2.