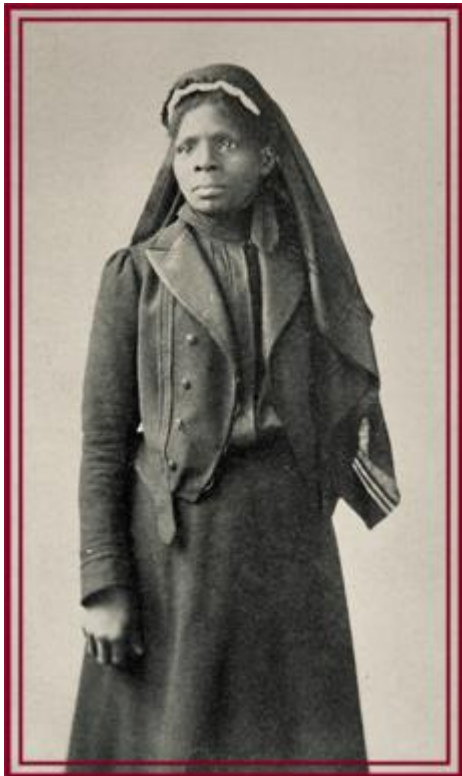


Susie King Taylor

Civil War, African American Nurse

Susie King Taylor was born a slave and, while slaves were not taught to read or write, she was secretly taught to read and write. Her memoirs are the only known published recollection of the experiences of an African American nurse during the Civil War. In a letter to Taylor, reproduced in her book, Lt. Colonel Trowbridge, commander of the regiment, praises her "unselfish devotion and service through more than three long years of war in which the 33d Regiment bore a conspicuous part in the great conflict for human liberty and the restoration of the Union."¹



Susie King Taylor's abilities proved invaluable to the Union Army as they began to form regiments of African American soldiers. Hired by the 1st South Carolina Colored Volunteers as a laundress in 1862, her primary role was nurse to wounded soldiers and teacher to those who could not read or write. Taylor served for more than three years working alongside her husband, Edward King, a sergeant in the regiment.

The following are excerpts from her memoirs *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp* published in 1903.²

¹ <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/bindingwounds/nursing.html#taylor>

² Taylor's memoirs are available for download at <https://archive.org/>

REMINISCENCES OF MY LIFE IN CAMP

WITH THE 33D UNITED STATES
COLORED TROOPS LATE 1ST
S. C. VOLUNTEERS

BY

SUSIE KING TAYLOR

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES
LIBRARY

BOSTON
PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHOR
1902

To
COLONEL T. W. HIGGINSON
THESE PAGES
ARE GRATEFULLY DEDICATED

3

³ Taylor's book free download thru <https://archive.org/>

PREFACE

I HAVE been asked many times by my friends, and also by members of the Grand Army of the Republic and Women's Relief Corps, to write a book of my army life, during the war of 1861-65, with the regiment of the 1st South Carolina Colored Troops, later called 33d United States Colored Infantry.

At first I did not think I would, but as the years rolled on and my friends were still urging me to start with it, I wrote to Colonel C. T. Trowbridge (who had command of this regiment), asking his opinion and advice on the matter. His answer to me was, "Go ahead! write it; that is just what I should do, were I in your place, and I will give you all the assistance you may need, whenever you require it." This inspired me very much.

In 1900 I received a letter from a gentleman, sent from the Executive Mansion at St. Paul, Minn., saying Colonel Trowbridge had told him I was about to write a book, and when it was

published he wanted one of the first copies. This, coming from a total stranger, gave me more confidence, so I now present these reminiscences to you, hoping they may prove of some interest, and show how much service and good we can do to each other, and what sacrifices we can make for our liberty and rights, and that there were "loyal women," as well as men, in those days, who did not fear shell or shot, who cared for the sick and dying; women who camped and fared as the boys did, and who are still caring for the comrades in their declining years.

So, with the hope that the following pages will accomplish some good and instruction for its readers, I shall proceed with my narrative.

SUSIE KING TAYLOR.

BOSTON, 1902.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION BY COL. THOMAS WENTWORTH	
HIGGINSON	xi
LETTER FROM LIEUT.-COL. C. T. TROWBRIDGE	xiii
I. A BRIEF SKETCH OF MY ANCESTORS	1
II. MY CHILDHOOD	5
III. ON ST. SIMON'S ISLAND, 1862	11
IV. CAMP SAXTON — PROCLAMATION AND BARBECUE.	
1863	18
V. MILITARY EXPEDITIONS, AND LIFE IN CAMP	22
VI. ON MORRIS AND OTHER ISLANDS	31
VII. CAST AWAY	37
VIII. A FLAG OF TRUCE	40
IX. CAPTURE OF CHARLESTON	42
X. MUSTERED OUT	45
XI. AFTER THE WAR	53
XII. THE WOMEN'S RELIEF CORPS	59
XIII. THOUGHTS ON PRESENT CONDITIONS	61
XIV. A VISIT TO LOUISIANA	69
APPENDIX.	
Roster of Survivors of 33d Regiment United	
States Colored Troops	79
A List of the Battles fought by the Regiment	82

INTRODUCTION

ACTUAL military life is rarely described by a woman, and this is especially true of a woman whose place was in the ranks, as the wife of a soldier and herself a regimental laundress. No such description has ever been given, I am sure, by one thus connected with a colored regiment; so that the nearly 200,000 black soldiers (178,975) of our Civil War have never before been delineated from the woman's point of view. All this gives peculiar interest to this little volume, relating wholly to the career of the very earliest of these regiments, — the one described by myself, from a wholly different point of view, in my volume "Army Life in a Black Regiment," long since translated into French by the Comtesse de Gasparin under the title "Vie Militaire dans un Régiment Noir."

The writer of the present book was very exceptional among the colored laundresses, in that she could read and write and had taught children to do the same; and her whole life and career were

most estimable, both during the war and in the later period during which she has lived in Boston and has made many friends. I may add that I did not see the book until the sheets were in print, and have left it wholly untouched, except as to a few errors in proper names. I commend the narrative to those who love the plain record of simple lives, led in stormy periods.

THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON,

Former Colonel 1st S. C. Volunteers

(afterwards 33d U. S. Colored Infantry).

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.,

November 3, 1902.

LETTER FROM COL. C. T. TROWBRIDGE

ST. PAUL, MINN., April 7, 1902.

MRS. SUSAN KING TAYLOR :

DEAR MADAM, — The manuscript of the story of your army life reached me to-day. I have read it with much care and interest, and I most willingly and cordially indorse it as a truthful account of your unselfish devotion and service through more than three long years of war in which the 33d Regiment bore a conspicuous part in the great conflict for human liberty and the restoration of the Union. I most sincerely regret that through a technicality you are debarred from having your name placed on the roll of pensioners, as an Army Nurse; for among all the number of heroic women whom the government is now rewarding, I know of no one more deserving than yourself.

Yours in F. C. & L.,

C. T. TROWBRIDGE,
Late Lt.-Col. 33d U. S. C. T.

II

MY CHILDHOOD

I WAS born under the slave law in Georgia, in 1848, and was brought up by my grandmother in Savannah. There were three of us with her, my younger sister and brother. My brother and I being the two eldest, we were sent to a friend of my grandmother, Mrs. Woodhouse, a widow, to learn to read and write. She was a free woman and lived on Bay Lane, between Habersham and Price streets, about half a mile from my house. We went every day about nine o'clock, with our books wrapped in paper to prevent the police or white persons from seeing them. We went in, one at a time, through the gate, into the yard to the L kitchen, which was the schoolroom. She had twenty-five or thirty children whom she taught, assisted by her daughter, Mary Jane. The neighbors would see us going in sometimes, but they supposed we were there learning trades, as it was the custom to give children a trade of some kind. After school we left the same way we entered, one by one, when we would go to a square, about a block from the school, and wait for each other. We would gather laurel leaves

and pop them on our hands, on our way home. I remained at her school for two years or more, when I was sent to a Mrs. Mary Beasley, where I continued until May, 1860, when she told my grandmother she had taught me all she knew, and grandmother had better get some one else who could teach me more, so I stopped my studies for a while.

I had a white playmate about this time, named Katie O'Connor, who lived on the next corner of the street from my house, and who attended a convent. One day she told me, if I would promise not to tell her father, she would give me some lessons. On my promise not to do so, and getting her mother's consent, she gave me lessons about four months, every evening. At the end of this time she was put into the convent permanently, and I have never seen her since.

A month after this, James Blouis, our landlord's son, was attending the High School, and was very fond of grandmother, so she asked him to give me a few lessons, which he did until the middle of 1861, when the Savannah Volunteer Guards, to which he and his brother belonged, were ordered to the front under General Barton. In the first battle of Manassas, his brother Eugene was killed, and James deserted over to the Union side, and at the close of the war went to Washington, D. C., where he has since resided.

I often wrote passes for my grandmother, for all colored persons, free or slaves, were compelled to have a pass; free colored people having a guardian in place of a master. These passes were good until 10 or 10.30 P. M. for one night or every night for one month. The pass read as follows:—

SAVANNAH, GA., March 1st, 1860.

Pass the bearer ——— from 9 to 10.30. P. M.
VALENTINE GREST.

Every person had to have this pass, for at nine o'clock each night a bell was rung, and any colored persons found on the street after this hour were arrested by the watchman, and put in the guard-house until next morning, when their owners would pay their fines and release them. I knew a number of persons who went out at any time at night and were never arrested, as the watchman knew them so well he never stopped them, and seldom asked to see their passes, only stopping them long enough, sometimes, to say "Howdy." and then telling them to go along.

About four o'clock, July 2, the charge was made. The firing could be plainly heard in camp. I hastened down to the landing and remained there until eight o'clock that morning. When the wounded arrived, or rather began to arrive, the first one brought in was Samuel Anderson of our company. He was badly wounded. Then others of our boys, some with their legs off, arm gone, foot off, and wounds of all kinds imaginable. They had to wade through creeks and marshes, as they were discovered by the enemy and shelled very badly. A number of the men were lost, some got fastened in the mud and had to cut off the legs of their pants, to free themselves. The 103d New York suffered the most, as their men were very badly wounded.

My work now began. I gave my assistance to try to alleviate their sufferings. I asked the doctor at the hospital what I could get for them to eat. They wanted soup, but that I could not get; but I had a few cans of condensed milk and some turtle eggs, so I thought I would try to make some custard. I had doubts as to my success, for cooking with turtle eggs was something new to me, but the adage has it, "Nothing ventured, nothing done," so I made a venture and the result was a very delicious custard. This I carried to the men, who enjoyed it very much. My services were given at all times for the comfort of these men. I was on hand to assist whenever

needed. I was enrolled as company laundress, but I did very little of it, because I was always busy doing other things through camp, and was employed all the time doing something for the officers and comrades.

After this fight, the regiment did not return to the camp for one month. They were ordered to Cole Island in September, where they remained until October. About November 1, 1864, six companies were detailed to go to Gregg Landing, Port Royal Ferry, and the rebels in some way found out some of our forces had been removed and gave our boys in camp a hard time of it, for several nights. In fact, one night it was thought the boys would have to retreat. The colonel told me to go down to the landing, and if they were obliged to retreat, I could go aboard one of our gunboats. One of the gunboats got in the rear, and began to shell General Beauregard's force, which helped our boys retain their possession.