

Body Servants

Researched and written by Suzanne Parfitt Johnson

One hundred and fifty years after the American Civil War, historians, both professional and amateur, continue to write interpretations of its battles and the tactics of its leaders. Collections of private letters between soldiers and loved ones, being published for the first time, make it easier to understand the war's impact on civilians. One aspect of that war which seems to have been virtually ignored is the individual stories of African-Americans who supported the Confederacy as body servants. These Black Confederates (a term applied by author Charles Kelly Barrow) included slaves as well as 'free men of color,' and numbered between 30,000 and 50,000 during the course of the war. Little has been written, however, about these often heroic individuals who served in a capacity of valet to the soldiers who fought in the war. [Segars, J.H. and Charles Kelly Barrow, compilers/editors. *Black Southerners in Confederate Armies*. Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 2001, i.]

Most Confederate officers were accompanied and served by a body servant – generals, such as Brigadier General Maxcy Gregg of Columbia, often by two. Privates might join together, pool their resources, and have one body servant to serve three or four of them. The duties of the body servant included tending to his soldier's horse, cooking, laundering, and, in general, anticipating his "every want" and performing unpleasant tasks. If his master were ill or injured, he served as nurse. During a battle, he was expected to remain in the rear with the wagons, guarding his soldier's personal property. He might, however, if a battle lasted more than a few hours, take his soldier something to eat and fill his canteen during a lull in the battle. As rations became scarce, he might forage for food for both his master and himself. The body servant might assist the burial party after a battle, and perform other odious, but necessary, tasks, such as digging trenches and erecting breastworks. Although prohibited from carrying a weapon and participating in actual fighting, he was occasionally seen on the battlefield next to his master, and on not a few occasions was wounded during a battle, as in the case of Samuel Lee, body servant to Brigadier General Samuel McGowan of Abbeville. When twenty-four year old body servant Wade Chiles saw his master, 2nd Lieutenant James S. Cothran (First Regiment South Carolina Orr's Rifles) wounded on the field during the second battle of Manassas, he took to the field, lifted him over his shoulder, and carried him out of danger. [Barrow, Charles Kelly, et al, compilers and editors. *Black Confederates*. Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., 1995, 129.]

Who were these Black Confederates and why did they choose to serve a country which wanted to keep them enslaved? Although some Black Confederates were free men who leased their services, most often body servants were enslaved persons who had served before the war as a house servant in a "position of trust and privilege," and who had no choice in the matter. He might be anywhere from fourteen to sixty years old. Like his master who enlisted to fight an invading enemy, he too considered the Yankees his enemy and a threat to his homeland and his family. [Barrow, Charles Kelly, et al, *Black Confederates*, 71.]

An unknown number of men from Fairfield County served and risked their lives in the Civil War as body servants. Those whose names are known include Kelly Miller, John Pollack, Ed Boulware, Zack Brown, Henry Davis, Sam Egleston, Alex Leitner, Hiram Moore, John Young, Aleck (last name unknown), Andy Marion, (unknown first name) Mobley, and Isaiah Moore. It is time for the stories of these men to be told.

On March 7, 1923 South Carolina passed into law a bill to provide pensions to African-Americans who had served as body servants or cooks "for at least six months" during the Civil War. Among those who qualified and received approximately \$25 per year for their service to the Confederacy were Kelly Miller, John Pollack, Ed Boulware, Zack Brown, William P. Coleman, Henry Davis, Sam Egleston, Alex Leitner, Hiram Moore, and John Young.

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