

Sergeant Major Milton M. Holland a Medal of Honor recipient

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OUTLINE

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A colored Senior Noncommissioned Officer that earned the Medal of Honor during the Civil War on 29 September 1864 at Chaffin's Farm, Virginia (New Market Height). "Thirty soldier of the Union Army were awarded the Medal of Honor for their heroism in the battle against the Confederate forces during the September 29, 1864, battle of Chaplin's Farm, Virginia".

He was born on 1 August 1844 in Austin, Texas to Bird and Emily Holland. He was the slave and perhaps son of Bird Holland, who later became Texas Secretary of State. Mr. Bird Holland freed Milton M. Holland and his two brothers, James and William Holland and sent them to school in Ohio during the late 1850s. Milton Holland attended the Albany Enterprise Academy, a school operated by the Free African Americans. He was the third generation of African American born as slaves to the Holland Family Plantation.

On 22 May 1863, the War Department authorized the Bureau of Color Troops. By this time 30 Black Regiments were on active duty, and this number doubled by the end of the year, with the regiments mustered into federal service, as a part of the United States Colored Troops (USCT). On 6 June 1863 at age 19, he enlisted as a Private in the 127th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, which later designated as the 5th United States Color Troops (Infantry) in Athens, Ohio.

This was Ohio's outstanding contribution to the many Negro regiments in the Union Army. Most of his units were South and West were the 1st Kansas Colored Infantry (79th USCI), 1st Mississippi Cavalry (3rd USCC). While moving through the ranks, Sergeant Holland assigned to the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, organized in Boston, but was lost in the credits to their states. In the summer of 1863, Captain L. McCoy, the commander of the 115th Ohio Volunteer Infantry detailed by the Governor Tod to direct the recruiting of Negroes in Ohio and a camp established

in Delaware. In December of 1863, the unit moved to North Carolina; in January 1864, the unit moved to Virginia, camping near Yorktown.

Assigned to Fifth United States Color Troops (Infantry) took gallantly part as he mustered into the Union Army on 22 June 1863, in Delaware, Ohio. This was Ohio's outstanding contribution to the many Negro regiments in the Union Army. The Regimental Colors that the unit carried throughout the battles. Sergeant Holland saw considerable action in the swamps of North Carolina "capturing forage and emancipating slaves" under the recent Emancipation Proclamation. The United States Colored Troops (USCT) participated in 449 engagements in which 39 major battles. Most of his units were South and West were the 1st Kansas Colored Infantry (79th USCI) with 14 engagements, 1st Mississippi Cavalry (3rd USCC) with 10 engagements. Three regiments participated in The Battle of Olustee in Florida on 20 February 1864 in which the forces were defeated. Twenty-two regiments engaged in the Siege of Petersburg, Virginia from 15 June 1864 to 2 April 1865. Nine regiments in the Battle of Fort Blakely, Alabama from 31 March through 9 April 1865. While at James River Fleet his unit advanced on Richmond when his company was ordered to make the attack.

Many African Americans were organized and sent to assigned State or Corps designations and re-flag after the establishment of the Bureau of Colored Troops on 22 May 1863 under General Order No. 143 by order of the Secretary of War. The 3rd United States Colored Cavalry (USCC) Regiment was organized as the 1st Mississippi Cavalry Regiment (African Descent); the 79th United States Infantry Regiment, organized as 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers; the 78th United States Colored Infantry (USCC) Regiment, organized as the 6th Infantry Corps; the 5th United States Colored Infantry Regiment, re-flagged as the 127th Ohio

Infantry (African Descent). Many states increased their black soldier within their units by prisoners and slaves.

Then in the summer of 1863, one cavalry and twenty infantry regiments engaged the enemy at Chaplin's Farm (New Market Heights) just outside of Richmond. They struck the first blow at Petersburg, Virginia by capturing the Confederate flag, the signal station, and the officers at the station from 28 – 30 September 1864.

The Battle of Chaffin's Farm (New Market Heights), Virginia became one of the most heroic engagements involving African Americans. On September 29, 1864, the African American division of the Eighteenth Corps, after being pinned down by Confederate artillery fire for about 30 minutes, charged the earthworks, and rushed up the slopes of the heights.

During the hour-long engagement the division suffered tremendous casualties. Additionally sixteen African American soldiers who were awarded the Medal of Honor during the Civil War, fourteen received the honor as a result of their actions at Chaffin's Farm (New Market Heights). They captured the Confederate flag, the signal station, and the officers at the station from 28 – 30 September 1864.

He rose to the ranks very quickly from Private to Regimental Sergeant Major. He led a regiment of over 892 soldiers. Despite his accomplishments on the field of battle and the accolades bestowed on black soldiers by the press, politicians, and military leaders, black soldiers still faced staunch opposition from fellow soldiers. On 29 September 1864, his regiment was in front of Richmond at Deep Bottom where he, Sergeant Major, led his unit in the most

brilliant and daring fight of his career. With the officers (white) having been killed, and he himself wounded, they fought a fierce battle at Chaffin's Farm and New Market Heights, Virginia between 28 and 30 September 1864 (Johnson 34). It was here that Sergeant Major Holland's daring and courage earned him the highest award the Medal of Honor. Through discrimination at all levels, black soldiers like him served honorably. Thirteen United States Colored Troops were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor (Hunt 3). However, the record stated clearly that those soldiers of African descent, thousands who were once held in bondage and forced to remain illiterate, sought their freedom, fought, and died for the freedom of all Americans.

In a letter to his fellow soldiers on 19 January 1864, he wrote, "There is a brighter day coming for the colored man, and he must sacrifice home, comforts if necessary to speed the coming of the glorious day. I will close my letter in the language of the immortal Henry- "Give me liberty, or give me death!" (SGM Holland)

Sergeant Major Holland made his residence outside Washington, D.C. after being discharged on 5 October 1865. He served in the Army a total of 3 years, 3 months and 28 days. On 15 May 1910, he died of a heart attack at age 75 on a farm near Silver Springs, Maryland (William). Sergeant Major Holland was buried with full military honors in Section 23 of Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington Virginia. On his headstone in 1910 the citation read: "Took command of Company C, after all the officers had been killed or wounded, and gallantly led it". His headstone was updated on 30 September 2000 to a modern version (William).

I have given you information on Sergeant Major Milton M. Holland a Civil War Medal of Honor recipient. At Chaplin's Farm, Virginia on 6 April 1864 was awarded the Medal of Honor. Lest us never forget the deeds of Noncommissioned Officers of the past. Our heritage, traditions, and warrior ethos are based on their deeds.

Sergeant Major Milton M. Holland, a soldier that stood out in the Civil War for his heroism and gallantry. On 25 March our nation celebrates the National Medal of Honor Day. On that day remember those who have earned our nation's highest honor and that with their deeds our Army have proved to be the best in the World. "Lest us never forget". Despite Sergeant Major Milton M. Holland early party life, he was a Senior Noncommissioned Officer that we can be proud of and remember him as we go through our careers in the military.

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