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“We are an orderly body of men”: Virginia’s Black “Immunes” in the Spanish-American War

by Roger D. Cunningham

African American contributions to the American victory in the War with Spain were significant. The expeditionary force that deployed to Cuba included all four of the Regular Army’s segregated black regiments – the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth U.S. Infantry and the Ninth and Tenth U.S. Cavalry. These “Buffalo Soldiers” rendered distinguished service in the short campaign and were awarded five Medals of Honor and twenty-nine Certificates of Merit for their gallantry under fire.¹

Other black volunteer units also served during the war, but because only one of them actually engaged in combat, their contributions have received much less attention. Most of these units, which ranged from a single company to several regiments, were mobilized by eight states as part of their quotas for the 200,000-man Volunteer Army that was raised to augment the small Regular Army. Virginia, which had included black companies in its militia – the Virginia Volunteers – since 1872, was one of these states. In response to

President William McKinley’s “Second Call” for volunteers in May 1898, the Old Dominion organized the Sixth Virginia Volunteer Infantry from its two black militia battalions, but the regiment was plagued with race-related disciplinary problems and never deployed outside the United States.²

In addition to manning this regiment, black Virginians also comprised a large part of the Tenth U.S. Volunteer Infantry (Tenth U.S.V.I.). This was one of the so-called “Immune” regiments that were raised throughout the South to provide troops who were allegedly immune to the tropical diseases that prevailed in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines and which proved to be much deadlier than Spanish bullets. Like the Sixth Virginia, the Tenth Immunes never saw combat, but its story illustrates the rampant racial discrimination that black soldiers endured during the nineteenth century.³

On May 11, 1898, Congress empowered President McKinley “to authorize the

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Secretary of War to organize an additional volunteer force of not exceeding ten thousand enlisted men possessing immunity from diseases incident to tropical climates.” The resulting ten infantry regiments were segregated. The First-Sixth U.S.V.I. were white units, while the Seventh-Tenth U.S.V.I. had black enlisted men and white officers, except for their chaplains and the lieutenants in each of the twelve companies. This greatly expanded the opportunities for black officers. The Regular Army’s only black line officer, First Lieutenant Charles Young, was about to leave the Ninth U.S. Cavalry to command the Ninth Ohio Volunteer Infantry, and by mid-May the Regular Army’s only black officers would be four regimental chaplains.⁴

To organize the black Immune regiments, the South was divided into four recruiting regions. General Orders No. 60, dated June 1, assigned the states of Virginia and North Carolina to the Tenth Immunes, but the regiment eventually recruited men from almost half of the eastern seaboard – one company from the District of Columbia, four from Virginia, three from South Carolina, three from Georgia and one from Florida. Each of these companies was authorized eighty-two enlisted men and three officers, and the regiment was authorized an additional “field and staff” (headquarters) of ten officers and eight enlisted men, for a grand total of forty-six officers and 992 enlisted men.⁵

The twelve companies were mustered-in between 2-22 July (Table 1) and then proceeded by rail to the regimental headquarters, where they were given letters from A-M. Colonel Jesse M. Lee, the Regular Army officer who had been selected to command the Tenth Immunes, had originally designated Raleigh, North Carolina as his

headquarters but claimed that he was discouraged from doing this by Governor Daniel L. Russell. Colonel Lee then considered organizing his regiment at Charlotte but finally settled on Augusta, Georgia, where he predicted that an effective stand by the mayor and others would “cause opposition to subside.”⁶

Table 1.
Recruitment of the Tenth U.S.V.I., July 1898

Company	Location	Muster Date	Strength
A	Atlanta, GA	12 July	82
B	Richmond, VA	7 July	78
C	Alexandria, VA	6 July	82
D	Washington, DC	2 July	82
E	Pocahontas, VA	16 July	82
F	Hampton, VA	9 July	80
G	Augusta, GA	11 July	82
H	Spartanburg, SC	14 July	82
I	Rome, GA	13 July	76
K	Darlington, SC	19 July	82
L	Jacksonville, FL	20 July	75
M	Aiken, SC	22 July	81

The first of Virginia’s four black Immune companies was organized in Alexandria during the first week in July. The unit was mustered-in by Captain Albert J. Woude at Braddock House, a hotel at the intersection of North Fairfax and Cameron Streets. A Louisianan, Woude had several years of enlisted service in the Army and had also spent time as a lieutenant in the National Guard.



The Mansion [later Braddock] House, ca. 1863
Library of Congress

About two-thirds of his eighty-two recruits, who volunteered for two years of service, were from Alexandria. Twenty of the remaining recruits came down from nearby Washington, where the regiment's first company had been organized a few days before. The men were all blue-collar workers, most of them unmarried laborers in their twenties, and almost three out of every ten were illiterate and could only scribble an X as their mark on the muster-in roll.⁷

Infused with martial spirit, about seventy-five of the new recruits paraded on Independence Day, "headed by a colored brass band." By July 6, recruiting was completed, and the company left for Augusta at noon the next day. Before the men departed, Evangelist Randall made "a spirited address" to them, as well as to the large crowd that had gathered to see them off. Then Murray's Metropolitan Brass Band escorted the men to the railroad depot, where:

There was considerable weeping and wailing, the accompaniments of the goodbyes extended, and the cry "All aboard!" and the gliding from the depot of the train caused a flutter of squares of linen, cotton, calico and other fabrics. For some distance outside the city crowds of colored people gathered and saluted the company as the train passed.⁸

That same day, one hundred miles to the south, Captain Crandall Mackey finished recruiting a company in Richmond. Mackey had established his recruiting office at Sixth and Broad Streets on July 1, placing a prominent ad in the *Richmond Planet* headlined "Colored Volunteers Wanted". The state capital was also home to the Virginia

Volunteers' three-company First Battalion of Colored Infantry, and it too was in the process of mustering-in to the Volunteer Army, as part of the Sixth Virginia. Perhaps because of this competition, Mackey offered to feed his recruits as they signed-up, and he began quartering them shortly thereafter. This arrangement attracted 103 volunteers, but only seventy-eight of them passed their physical examination. All but one of these men were blue-collar workers (fifty-eight were laborers), all but six came from Richmond, almost half were illiterate, and only about one-sixth of them were married.⁹

On July 9, as Mackey's company left for Augusta, Captain Thomas B. Turney finished enrolling another company in Hampton, which provided twenty-eight of its eighty volunteers. Turney had recently been an ordnance sergeant in the Regular Army and had probably been stationed at Fort Monroe, since according to one newspaper, he was "well known to most of the colored people" in Phoebus and Hampton and enjoyed their confidence. His volunteers were all Virginians, all but one were blue-collar workers and about one out of every three were illiterate. Only three of the volunteers were married, making the Hampton company the largest group of bachelors in the regiment.¹⁰

The final Virginia company was mustered-in by Captain William R. Wharton on July 16, in the much smaller town of Pocahontas, which was almost adjacent to the West Virginia border, about seventy-five miles west of Roanoke. Unlike the other three companies, whose men were predominantly laborers, about seventy percent of these eighty-two volunteers were miners, who eked out a living in the coalfields of the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains. Only thirty-five of the men

Table 2.
Sources of Recruits for Virginia Companies in the Tenth U.S.V.I.

Company	Location	<u>Recruit's Residence</u>							Total
		Richmond	Alexandria	Pocahontas	Hampton	Phoebus	Virginia	Other	
B	Richmond	72					6		78
C	Alexandria		54				5	23	82
E	Pocahontas			35			19	28	82
F	Hampton				28	25	27		80
Total		72	54	35	28	25	57	51	322

actually came from Pocahontas, however, with the remainder hailing from other mining communities in Virginia and West Virginia, such as Elkhorn and Vivian. Four out of every ten men were illiterate, and only one-tenth of them were married.¹¹

The four companies' demographics are summarized in Table 2, which shows that 271 of the 322 men who originally volunteered to serve in them were Virginians. Of the fifty-one volunteers who hailed from other states, twenty-four came from West Virginia, twenty from the District of Columbia, five from North Carolina and two from Maryland. Six other Virginians (all but one from Alexandria) also served in Company D, from the District of Columbia, so almost thirty percent of the 964 original recruits in the Tenth Immunes' twelve companies hailed from the Old Dominion. Georgia and South Carolina furnished the next largest numbers of recruits to the regiment.¹²

The Virginia recruits' occupations, which were almost exclusively blue-collar, are summarized in Table 3. Well over half of the men (175 of 322) were laborers, with miners, cooks, barbers and drivers representing the next most common jobs. Only three men had white-collar occupations – a school teacher in Company B, a merchant in Company E and a pianist in Company F. About thirteen percent of the men were married, more than one-third

of them were illiterate, and most of them were in their mid-twenties, ranging in age from eighteen to forty-three. For single, young black men with such limited job skills, the prospect of free board and a private's monthly pay of \$15.60 was fairly attractive.¹³

As noted before, the officer corps for the Tenth Immunes was integrated. The captains that commanded the companies, as well as the regimental "field and staff" officers (except the chaplain) were white, while the first and second lieutenants in each company were African-American. Black America wanted to have all of the officer billets in state and federal black units opened to its men. Impassioned spokesmen such as editor John Mitchell of Virginia's preeminent black newspaper, the *Richmond Planet*, cried "No officers; no fight!" but only a few state governors were willing to accede to such demands, and in the Immune regiments, the War Department refused to commission black line officers above the grade of lieutenant.¹⁴

Although more than one hundred black officers had served during the Civil War and eight more had been commissioned in the Regular Army since then, most white Americans were very much opposed to the idea of appointing black officers and offered any number of reasons to justify their prejudice. In answer to John Mitchell's war cry, the *Richmond Dispatch* opined:

Table 3.
Vital Statistics of Recruits in the Tenth U.S.V.I's Virginia Units

<u>Occupation</u>												
Company	Laborer	Miner	Cook	Barber	Driver	Railroad Man	Farmer	Other	Total	Married	Illiterate	Ages
B	58		1	1	2			16	78	13	35	18-43
C	60		7	3		1		11	82	19	23	18-40
E	4	57	1		4	3	4	9	82	8	33	18-40
F	53		5	4		1	1	16	80	3	26	18-38
Total	175	57	14	8	6	5	5	52	322	43	117	

In short, the presence of shoulder-strapped Negroes in our army would be a constant source of embarrassment and weakness and we are forced to the conclusion that it would be better to do without the aid of colored troops altogether than to send them to the front officered by men of their own race.

Another southern newspaper wrote that having black officers created “especial opportunity for friction between the races, and lends encouragement to such negroes as have not sufficient intelligence to know that no office or rank can bridge the social barrier between the races in the south.” In the North, the press was equally biased. The *New York Times* raised the objection that:

There are grave doubts whether the colored troops will be as efficient under officers of their own race as under white officers. Confidence in his officers is everything with a soldier. It is pretty well known that the colored race has, as a rule, much more confidence in white men than in black.¹⁵

By ignoring these arguments and activating the four black Immune regiments, the government created a unique opportunity for

one hundred new black officers to be commissioned by President McKinley. As a rule, these officers were quite an impressive group of men and included two Medal of Honor recipients and two Certificate of Merit recipients. One of the army’s black chaplains later said of them:

The colored men who were appointed lieutenants in these regiments were generally either young men of ability and influence who had assisted in getting up their companies, and who in many cases had received some elementary military instruction as cadets in school, or men who had distinguished themselves by efficiency or gallantry in the Regular Army.¹⁶

The lieutenants in the Virginia companies were among the very best in the regiment, but only two of them were actually Virginians.

In the Richmond unit, which was designated Company B, both of the lieutenants had active duty experience. First Lieutenant Edward L. Baker, Jr. had been born in Wyoming in 1865, enlisted in the Ninth U.S. Cavalry in 1882 and then served as a noncommissioned officer (NCO) in the Tenth U.S. Cavalry, rising to the top enlisted rank of sergeant major. He was rewarded with shoulder straps a month after “leaving cover and rescuing, under fire, a

wounded comrade from drowning” near Santiago, Cuba – an act of gallantry that would be recognized with the Medal of Honor four years later.¹⁷



Edward L. Baker as a captain in the 49th U.S.V.I., circa 1899. National Archives.

Second Lieutenant William Blaney was a Virginian, who had enlisted in the army in May 1893 and then been assigned to Company H of the Twenty-fourth U.S. Infantry. After serving throughout the West, he was promoted to corporal in 1896 and discharged in May 1898 at Tampa, Florida, where his regiment was preparing to deploy to Cuba. Blaney then enlisted in the Tenth Immunes as a private and earned a commission before the end of July.¹⁸

The lieutenants in Company C (Alexandria) were James S. Smith from Washington, D.C. and David B. Jeffers, who had retired from the Regular Army as an NCO in 1897, after thirty years of service. Company E's (Pocahontas) lieutenants were William A. Hilton and another ex-Regular Army NCO, William H.

Givens, who had been the First Sergeant of Troop D, Tenth U.S. Cavalry, until he also distinguished himself in action in Cuba. Hilton had been born in Pocahontas during the Civil War and, after several years of study at the Hampton Institute, he had secured a job as a coal inspector for a mining company – “the only colored man occupying such a position.” In Company F (Hampton), the subalterns were Thomas Grant, from Atlanta, and Charles Burton, a North Carolinian. Grant had commanded a battalion in the Georgia militia in the early 1890s. Burton would later be court-martialed and replaced by William D. Pritchard, another North Carolinian.¹⁹

As soon as they were mustered-in, nine of the new companies boarded trains for Georgia, where they linked-up with units from Atlanta, Augusta and Rome. By July 13, half of the companies had arrived at Camp Dyer, the regimental headquarters established at Turpin Hill, near Augusta. Under the watchful eye of Lieutenant Colonel Charles L. Withrow, the First Battalion commander and senior officer present, the new recruits pitched their tents and began to learn what “soldiering” was all about. According to the *Augusta Chronicle*, they showed an eagerness for learning,” but the large number of “green men” made the training very trying for the officers who were patiently attempting to instruct them.²⁰

Although a Turpin Hill resident reported that “the best of order had been preserved” around Camp Dyer, it was inevitable that when they were off duty, some of the Tenth Immunes would get into trouble, such as Company C's Private Ernest Gant, who was jailed for being drunk and disorderly, or the private in Company D who later succeeded in killing a fellow private in Company A. Nevertheless, by the end of July, after all companies had

arrived in camp, received their equipment and been armed, the *Chronicle* was able to report that “the men are behaving themselves and paying strict attention to their business.”²¹

July also saw the integration of the regimental officers’ mess attract national attention. Just over half of the Tenth’s total number of authorized officers were black, and in “Jim Crow” America, it was deemed socially unacceptable for them to dine with the white officers. Colonel Lee was opposed to the War Department’s policy of commissioning black lieutenants and had written that “mixed company officers was an experiment which would not give satisfaction under all the varying conditions of service.” According to the *New York Times*, when Lee learned that his officers’ mess would be integrated, he decided to resign his temporary commission in the Volunteer Army and return to the Ninth U.S. Infantry in his Regular Army rank of major. A *Times* editorial approved of his decision, saying that:

His course is simply the course taken by practically the entire white population of the country, consciously or unconsciously, as often as the occasion for it arises. The complete failure of all the laws by which it was attempted to break down the color line proves the existence of a higher law which men obey. The delusion that the two races are socially assimilable is a little too antiquated.²²

The War Department quickly designated Colonel Thaddeus W. Jones as the new regimental commander. A Regular Army captain from North Carolina, Jones had graduated from West Point in 1872 and then

served continuously with the Tenth U.S. Cavalry on the frontier and in Cuba. His exemplary service with black regulars, in peace and war, made him an excellent choice for commanding the Tenth Immunes and sensitized him for the challenging task of organizing a black Volunteer Army regiment in the racist South.²³

On August 2, still weak from a bout with malaria that he had contracted in Cuba, Colonel Jones arrived at Camp Dyer to assume command of his regiment. A few days later, his men were paid for the first time, and many of them rushed into Augusta without passes and were promptly arrested. In an editorial, entitled “Disorderly Soldiers,” the *Chronicle* advised that local black citizens should not interfere with Augusta’s police when they arrested military men, yet the paper also spoke well of the Immunes, saying: that “it would seem that the soldiers of the Tenth Infantry are a far more decent lot than the people of Augusta had reason to believe they would be, and with a few exceptions they have behaved in a most excellent manner.”²⁴

An even greater sign of respect for the Tenth came on August 18, when the local black community presented the regiment with a new set of colors. For this ceremony, the men assembled by battalions before a platform in an open field, with a local black militia company and brass band also in attendance. After an eloquent speech by the Reverend Charles T. Walker and best wishes from Mayor Walsh, a lady presented the banner to the regimental color sergeant, the band played “Marching Through Georgia” and the Immunes proudly marched back to their camp. Although he had not selected the band’s music, Colonel Jones was later criticized by

some Augustans, who were indignant that he had allowed the band to play *the* tune forever associated with General William T. Sherman's infamous "March to the Sea."²⁵

A week after this ceremony, it was announced that the regiment would move its encampment to Murray Hill, about seven miles from the city. This new location would supposedly afford better bathing facilities for the men, but moving them farther away from the enticements of Augusta was probably an important consideration as well. Less than two weeks after this move, however, it was announced that the Tenth was moving again – to Lexington, Kentucky. There it would form a brigade with the Seventh Immunes and perhaps eventually be shipped to the Philippines, since Spanish forces in Cuba had already surrendered.²⁶

Before they left Augusta, the men were again paid – about \$30,000 for the whole regiment. Pay day occurred on a Sunday, so that they would not immediately have "a good opportunity to invest in liquor." The next day, an unidentified soldier in Company C fired his pistol at the provost guard and fled into Augusta, and about twenty other soldiers, mostly drunks, were arrested, but on the whole, the regiment's stay in Augusta had been a quiet one, and civil-military relations had been about as cordial as could be expected.²⁷

On September 18, most of the Tenth Immunes arrived at Lexington, Kentucky, where it was assigned to the First Army Corps. While the regiment was stationed in Lexington, some of the men were allowed to return home on leave. Sergeant John Solomon, a former laborer, returned to Alexandria in mid-October and was quoted as saying that

Company C was the best unit in the regiment and Dan Corbin, the quartermaster sergeant, was the best soldier in the company. To prove this point, Solomon said that almost every night Corbin passed under a tree in which a large number of chickens roosted, but that he never touched a chicken. Later, Captain Woude also visited Alexandria, speaking very highly of the local men's conduct and reporting that they were all in good health.²⁸

In mid-November the regiment was transferred back to Georgia, this time to Camp Haskell, a few miles from Macon, where three other black regiments – the Third North Carolina, the Sixth Virginia and the Seventh Immunes – were also soon stationed. The soldiers in all of these units dreaded the oppressive racial discrimination that they would encounter in Macon, and it only took some of them a few days to get into trouble with the local white authorities, who refused to modify the racist Jim Crow restrictions that they routinely imposed on their black community. C.W. Cordin, a member of the Seventh Immunes, wrote that "the hatred of the Georgia cracker for the Negro cannot be explained by pen."²⁹

Shortly after arriving in Macon, some of the Sixth Virginia's soldiers demonstrated that they would not passively submit to racist indignities. Several of them cut down a persimmon tree where some black men had supposedly been lynched, and this resulted in their regiment being disarmed and guarded by men from the Tenth. The *Richmond Planet's* simple explanation for this unique situation was the assumption "that a white guard would anger them and lead to serious conflict," which required that "the colored folks were put over the colored folks."³⁰

None of the black troops responded well to Macon's racism, but unlike the state units, the men of the Tenth avoided making headlines. In December, a private in the Sixth Virginia was shot and killed by a street car conductor, because he refused to ride in the "trolley" for black passengers that was attached to the rear of the regular car. Then, two men from the Third North Carolina were shot and killed in a Macon street fight. Such incidents caused one Sixth Virginia soldier to describe Macon as "this pest hole of the South" where a week never passed without some black soldiers being "justifiably homicided."³¹

After enduring several months of extreme discrimination, the Virginia and North Carolina regiments were finally mustered-out of federal service in late January and early February, and the Seventh Immunes followed suit at the end of February. The Tenth Immunes mustered-out on March 8, as news arrived that the day before, when the Eighth Immunes had passed through Chattanooga, Tennessee after mustering-out and heading home from a nearby camp in northern Georgia, "a number of the men, who had in some way secured revolvers, began to discharge them in the air and into sheds and vacant houses." This story marked the beginning of national press coverage painting a picture of violence and destruction left in the wake of two black Immune regiments, as they traveled home from Georgia.³²

According to the *New York Times*, the men of the Tenth "began to show their ill temper" as soon as their trains began to move out of Macon. The soldiers produced revolvers and other arms and began firing them from the windows, wounding a white teenager. When the regiment's first increment reached Griffin,

a town located about halfway to Atlanta, the soldiers began firing again and yelled like Indians. The city was reportedly "at the mercy of the negroes, who kept up a fusillade of shots until the train carried them beyond the city limits."³³

Before the second increment of the Tenth reached Griffin, Mayor W.D. Davis telephoned Governor Allen D. Candler and asked him to call out the Griffin Rifles, the local militia company. "Not receiving a satisfactory reply to his request," the mayor activated the unit himself, and its men were issued five rounds of ammunition and marched to the train station, where they were joined by nearly one hundred deputized civilians. When the Tenth's next trainload of rowdies stopped in Griffin, two hundred heavily armed and angry men ordered them to be quiet. The press reported that "the negroes were awed, and with a few exceptions were as docile as lambs. To those who proved fractious[,] cracked heads were administered." As the train pulled out of the station, however, the soldiers began shooting again, and the militia company supposedly fired a volley into the last car. This resulted in George L. Agee, a white brakeman, being fatally wounded, while one of the Immunes was slightly wounded.³⁴

There were no problems in Atlanta, but the Tenth's lack of discipline resumed as its men traveled farther north. Between Atlanta and Monroe, North Carolina, the troops reportedly shot a flagman in the heel, carried off about seventy-five packages of whiskey in Monroe and forced a "respected colored man" in Weldon to drink it until he collapsed and died. According to the *New York Times* "the riotous troops forced their way into stores and

saloons, taking whatever they wanted. A switchman who failed to run at their command was fired upon and people on the streets [were] insulted.”³⁵

When word of all this trouble reached Richmond, it was front page news for two days. The *Richmond Dispatch* was able to report, however, that the trouble had not continued into the Old Dominion. Police at the train depot in Petersburg had “prevented any demonstration” by the Immunes and, after being warned by the Weldon authorities, the mayor of Richmond had arranged for a trainload of the rowdy veterans to be routed around the city. The capital city’s group was met at the depot by police, “who kept them in check.” The *Times* noted that when the men saw their police “reception committee,” they “became quiet and conducted themselves in a most orderly and becoming manner.” It was also reported that:

A negro lieutenant from Salem [Lieutenant Blaney] who was with the Richmond negroes told Captain Angle [a policeman] that the disorder that had been created along the line was made by men from Washington and Alexandria, and that the Richmond darkies had had nothing to do with it.³⁶

In spite of this allegation, the homecoming of the Alexandria Immunes was every bit as peaceful as the Richmond company’s had been. The train bearing the men of Company C finally arrived at the Washington Southern Depot on Fayette Street early on the morning of March 10, after many of those who had gathered to welcome them had already gone home. A local doctor boarded the train and checked the men for symptoms of contagious disease, but the *Alexandria Gazette* reported

that “There was no disorder and the members of the company received a hearty welcome and at once proceeded to their homes.” One of these veterans, Magnus Gray, only lived for another eight days, dying of pneumonia at his home on March 18.³⁷

A similarly peaceful homecoming took place in the Norfolk area, where most of the men in Company F lived. At Phoebus, outside Fort Monroe, the men “were orderly and repaired to their homes without any demonstration,” while in Norfolk, it was reported that the men “may have been vicious further South, but were as docile as lambs when they arrived in Norfolk.... The negroes who arrived are very well behaved and patronize the local stores liberally, buying civilian’s outfits, now that they have been mustered out of the service.” It is likely that the men of Company E who returned to the Pocahontas area also behaved in an orderly manner.³⁸

Because the Immunes had already mustered-out of federal service and were no longer subject to military discipline, the War Department refused to get involved in investigating or making amends for the Griffin affray or any of the other alleged incidents. There was little doubt that some of the homeward bound black veterans had been drinking and firing privately owned weapons, but the extent of their misconduct and whether white citizens had greatly overreacted to it remained subject to interpretations that were predictably divided along racial lines. One black author wrote that from the best sources available, “it seems incumbent to say that the many charges alleged against the colored volunteers for excessive rioting and disorder were without proper foundation, and the assaults made upon them unjustifiable and cruel.” In Richmond, the *Planet* underscored

this second point, reminding its readers that there was no “clubbing or firing” upon the white regiments whose “conduct was alleged to be reprehensible.” It pointed out the example of the mid-March muster-out of the white Sixth Immunes at Savannah, Georgia, where the men’s pistol-firing was innocently attributed to the “exuberance of gladness at having escaped military discipline.” The *Planet* cited this favorable interpretation of white indiscipline as a clear example of a double standard applied by the press.³⁹

A few of the white Immune officers, whose role in the Griffin episode was also heavily criticized, publicly supported their men. Captain Charles L. Beatty, who had commanded the company from the District of Columbia, was quoted as saying that the men of the Tenth were model soldiers and that before they left the South, “the citizens bade us God speed and said they would be glad to see us return.” Lieutenant Colonel Withrow wrote Governor Candler from Washington to protest what had happened at Griffin. Withrow maintained that the Georgia militia had fired on a sleeping car for officers and their wives, who were seated at the windows in plain sight. He also pointed out that the brakeman who was shot was in plain sight at the rear door of the last car, and closed by saying: “We are an orderly body of men, peaceably making our way home, and we demand protection from the assaults of cowards who disgrace the uniform of your state and demonstrate their total unfitness to bear your commissions and your arms. Men never fire on women.”⁴⁰

Withrow’s insulting letter, which was widely published, incensed the citizens of Griffin. Lieutenant Davis, who had commanded the Griffin Rifles during the affray, admitted that

armed citizens had fired on the train, but he maintained that his men “most positively did not.” Governor Candler was in no mood to be criticized either. He strongly supported the reaction of white Georgians to the indiscipline of the Tenth, and in a feeble attempt to justify a lynching later in March, he complained that all of the Immune regiments “placed in the mind of the negro a spirit of boldness.” Candler also attributed an upsurge in crimes committed by blacks to the “baneful influence and example of these lawless rowdies, who disgraced the uniforms they wore.”⁴¹

Thus, the otherwise fine record of Virginia’s black Immunes was damaged beyond repair by their violent rail journey home, and the eight months of faithful service that these men had provided their country was completely overshadowed by the Griffin episode and its aftermath. Most white Americans, especially in the South, would always remember the black Immune regiments as undisciplined mobs that bore little resemblance to military units, and many racists would cite their indiscipline as clear proof that black men were unsuitable for military service. This attitude was underscored by the *Atlanta Constitution*’s declaration that the experiment of negro troops had been “a complete failure so far as the modern negro is concerned.” It maintained that the black troops who fought during the Civil War:

were, most of them, fresh from the discipline of slavery and no doubt made fairly good troops. The modern negroes are now in a transition state and it will be years to come before they come around to that conception of citizenship which enables the whites to submit to the discipline necessary to make good troops.⁴²

The *New York Times* thought that it was “fairly clear” that Congress’s creation of the “so-called” immune regiments was a mistake, because they were not immune from anything “but the obligations of law and discipline and decency.” After criticizing the Tenth Immunes, “who amused themselves on their way North from the camp at Macon by drunkenness and riot,” the newspaper decided to blame their performance on bad leadership, explaining that:

...the immune regiments alone among regulars or volunteers, were officered exclusively by “pull.” It would be quite absurd to expect that a lot of officers who owed their commissions to favoritism should know their business or be able to exert any influence over their men. All the officers of the immunes...are “prima facie” incompetent and worthless.⁴³

The War Department, however, was much fairer in its assessment of the Immune regiments. Although neither white nor black units had demonstrated any immunity to diseases – a total of seven officers and 241 enlisted men had succumbed to them – it was still commonly believed that black troops performed better than white troops in tropical climates, so in September 1899, two more black volunteer regiments – the Forty-eighth and Forty-ninth U.S.V.I. – were organized for service in the Philippine Insurrection. Eight former black officers from the Tenth Immunes were offered commissions in these new regiments, including five of the lieutenants from the Virginia companies Edward Baker, – William Blaney, Thomas Grant, David Jeffers and William D. Pritchard. The army’s Adjutant General reported that “it is believed that the best equipped men of our colored

citizens have been commissioned in these regiments,” but an even greater demonstration of official confidence was the fact that all of the companies in these two new regiments were commanded by black captains, including Baker and Grant. This was a small but very important step in the advancement of the race, not only in the army, but within society as well.⁴⁴

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NOTES

1. The black soldiers who received Medals of Honor for gallantry in Cuba were Sergeant Major Edward L. Baker, Private Dennis Bell, Private Fitz Lee (from Dinwiddie County, Virginia), Corporal William H. Thompkins and Private George H. Wanton, all from the Tenth U.S. Cavalry. The Certificate of Merit was awarded to enlisted men for distinguished service from 1847 until 1918. In 1934, Congress decreed that they could receive the army’s second highest decoration, the Distinguished Service Cross.
2. The only black state unit to see combat was Company L, Sixth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, which participated in the invasion of Puerto Rico; The other states that mobilized black units were Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, North Carolina and Ohio; The story of the Sixth Virginia is told by Willard B. Gatewood, Jr. in “Virginia’s Negro Regiment in the Spanish-American War: The Sixth Virginia Volunteers”, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 80 (April 1972): 193-209.
3. The service of black Immune and state units is summarized in Marvin Fletcher, “The Black Volunteers in the Spanish-American War,” *Military Affairs* 38 (April 1974): 48-53.

4. General Orders No. 44, dated May 13, 1898, in Adjutant General's Office, *General Orders and Circulars*, 1898 (Washington: GPO, 1899); Only eight black officers were commissioned in the Regular Army between the Civil and Spanish-American Wars – Henry Flipper (1877), John Alexander (1887) and Charles Young (1889), who were all line officers, and Chaplains Henry Plummer (1884), Allen Allensworth (1886), Theophilus Steward (1891), George Prioleau (1895) and William Anderson (1897). After Lieutenant Young accepted a major's commission in the Volunteer Army, only the last-named four chaplains remained on active duty. The four black regiments were the only regiments in the Regular Army authorized to have their own chaplains. All other chaplains were assigned to specific posts. For details, see Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 52-71.
5. Muster-In Rolls for Companies A-M, Tenth U.S.V.I., RG 94, National Archives (hereafter cited as NA); The eighty-two enlisted men in each company comprised a first sergeant, a quartermaster sergeant, four sergeants, eight corporals, two musicians, an artificer (mechanic), a wagoner and sixty-four privates. The officers and enlisted men in the regimental headquarters were a colonel, lieutenant colonel, two majors, surgeon (major), chaplain (captain), two assistant surgeons (lieutenants), adjutant (lieutenant), quartermaster (lieutenant), sergeant major, quartermaster sergeant, chief musician, two principal musicians and three hospital stewards, General Orders No. 55, dated May 26, 1898.
6. *Washington Bee*, June 25, 1898; Lee to Major Heistand, June 22, 1898, doc. file #218382, Adjutant General's Documents, RG 94, NA.
7. *Alexandria Gazette*, July 5, 6, 1898; *Richmond's Directory of Alexandria, for 1897-8* (Washington: Richmond & Company, 1897), 252; Compiled Military Service Record of Albert J. Woude and Muster-In Roll for Company C, Tenth U.S.V.I., RG 94, NA.
8. *Alexandria Gazette*, July 5-7, 1898.
9. *Richmond Dispatch*, July 2-9, 1898; *Richmond Planet*, July 2, 1898; Muster-In Roll for Company B, Tenth U.S.V.I., RG 94, NA.
10. Muster-In Roll for Company F, Tenth U.S.V.I., RG 94, NA; *The Times* (Richmond), July 10, 1898; Phoebus was a black community adjacent to Fort Monroe. It was incorporated as a town in 1900 and consolidated with Hampton in 1950.
11. Muster-In Roll for Company E, Tenth U.S.V.I., RG 94, NA.
12. Muster-In Rolls for Companies B-F, Tenth U.S.V.I., RG 94, NA. The Tenth's original 964 recruits belonged to the following states: Virginia (277), Georgia (260), South Carolina (229), District of Columbia (ninety-five), Florida (seventy), West Virginia (twenty-four), and other states (nine).
13. *Ibid.*; Laborer was the predominant occupation in every company of the regiment, except in Companies E (miner), H (hostler) and K (farmer). About one-third (325) of the regiment's men were illiterate, and only about one out of six (156) were married. No one was younger than eighteen, but at least two men were forty-four.
14. Six of the eight black state units had complete rosters of black officers, which included colonels in the Third North Carolina and the Eighth Illinois. In the Third Alabama, the only black officer was the chaplain, while in the Sixth Virginia, all of the officers except the commander, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Croxton, and one of the assistant surgeons were black. Croxton later directed that nine black officers be examined for competency, which caused them to resign and be replaced by white officers; Technically, an Immune chaplain was equivalent in rank to an infantry captain, but since the chaplain had no command authority, this caused no problems.
15. Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 279-80; *Richmond Dispatch* quoted in the *Richmond Planet*, June 11, 1898; *Augusta Chronicle*, July 26, 1898; *New York Times*, July 13, 1898.
16. Because of personnel losses, mainly due to resignations, at least 120 black Immune officers were eventually commissioned; Theophilus G. Steward, *The Colored Regulars in the United States Army* (Philadelphia: AME Book Concern, 1904), 291.
17. Muster-Out Roll for Company B, Tenth U.S.V.I., RG 94, NA; Adjutant General's Office, *Official Register of Officers of Volunteers in the Service of the United States* (Washington: GPO, 1900), 127; Although he was commissioned on August 2, Baker was delayed in joining the Tenth for several months because of rheumatism.

18. Declaration for an Original Invalid Pension, Pension Record for William Blaney, RG 15, NA.
19. Muster-Out Rolls of Companies C, E and F, Tenth U.S.V.I., RG 94, NA; *Official Register of Officers of Volunteers*, 125; *The Colored American* (Washington), April 15, 1899.
20. *Augusta Chronicle*, July 8, 12, 14, 17, 1898; The regiment's twelve companies were divided into three battalions, which were commanded by the lieutenant colonel and the two majors. Companies B and C were in Withrow's battalion, while Companies E and F were in the Second Battalion, commanded by Major E. Hawks.
21. *Ibid.*, July 17, 20, 29, August 6, 22, 1898.
22. Lee to the Adjutant General, June 29, 1898, doc. file #218329, Adjutant General's Documents, RG 94, NA; *New York Times*, July 13, 1898; On July 16, the *Augusta Chronicle* critiqued the *Times* editorial, maintaining that the white and black officers actually maintained segregated messes; Lee's resignation did not hurt his military career – he was promoted to brigadier general in 1902, Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army*, vol. I (Washington: GPO, 1903), 624
23. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary*, 582; The August 3, 1898 *Augusta Chronicle* also said of Colonel Jones that, "Being a southerner he would naturally understand the negro,...." Jones later served in the Philippines as lieutenant colonel of the Forty-eighth U.S.V.I. and commanded the Tenth U.S. Cavalry (1909-1912).
24. *Augusta Chronicle*, August 3, 8, 11, 1898.
25. *Ibid.*, August 19, 20, 1898; Reverend Walker had been selected to be the chaplain for the Ninth Immunes, which was then enroute to Cuba, but he was very slow in assuming his post; Sherman's 1864 March to the Sea passed well south of Augusta.
26. *Ibid.*, August 25, 26, September 9, 1898; The Seventh Immunes was primarily recruited in Missouri and Arkansas and proceeded to Lexington from Jefferson Barracks, near St. Louis, where it had been organized.
27. *Ibid.*, September 12, 13, 1898.
28. *Alexandria Gazette*, October 17, December 3, 1898.
29. The four black regiments arrived in Macon between November 16 and 23, *Correspondence Relating to the War With Spain*, vol. I (Washington: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1993), 609-27; Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "Smoked Yankees" and the Struggle for Empire: *Letters from Negro Soldiers, 1898-1902* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 163.
30. *Richmond Planet*, November 26, 1898.
31. Gatewood, "Smoked Yankees" and the Struggle for Empire, 154.
32. *New York Times*, March 8, 1899; The Eighth Immunes was primarily recruited in Tennessee and Kentucky. Its men were badly beaten by police when they passed through Nashville, Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History*, 88.
33. *Ibid.*, March 9, 1899.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, March 11, 1899.
36. *Richmond Dispatch*, March 10, 1899; *The Times*, March 10, 1899.
37. *Evening Star* (Washington), March 10, 1899; *Alexandria Gazette*, March 10, 20, 1899.
38. *Richmond Dispatch*, March 10, 1899; *Norfolk Dispatch*, March 10, 1899.
39. Steward, *The Colored Regulars in the United States Army*, 293; *Richmond Planet*, March 11, 25, 1899.
40. *Washington Bee*, March 18, 1899; *Atlanta Journal*, March 9, 1899.
41. *Atlanta Constitution*, March 10, 1899.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *New York Times*, March 11, 1899.
44. Of the 241 enlisted men who died from disease in the Immune regiments, only fourteen came from the Tenth, *Correspondence Relating to the War With Spain*, vol. I, 626-27; *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1899*, vol. I (Washington: GPO, 1899), 17.