



1 – Opening credits : Glory

Robert Gould Shaw, the son of wealthy Boston abolitionists, was 23 years old when he enlisted to fight in the war between the States. He wrote home regularly, telling his parents of life in the gathering Army of the Potomac. These letters are collected in the Houghton Library of Harvard University.

2nd chapter : battlefield → 8 minutes 10 secondes

What were the characteristics of the Union army (men, corps, weapons ...)

Men were white and generally young. They came from western and eastern States to stop the Southern States from seceding.

There was a cavalry, infantry, artillery.

The soldiers had rifles (muskets) with bayonets. The officers have swords.

How did a battle run ? Antietam Creek, Maryland, September 17th 1862

The two armies are facing each other : one is standing in dug trenches or behind barricades. The other one is walking towards her.

The artillery is shooting shells in order to provoke the maximum damage and in Antietam, Federal artillery overpowered the Confederate guns. At Antietam, the rolling terrain was of benefit to the artillerists of both armies. Placing their more than 500 cannons on high ground, blue and gray alike were able to effectively strike enemy troop positions at great distances. So intense was the cannon fire, Confederate Colonel Stephen D. Lee, who commanded the key artillery position, referred to Antietam Battlefield as "artillery hell."

Troops keep on walking towards the enemy line which keeps on shooting with their muskets.

It is the same tactic as during the napoleon wars. At that time the musket was a weapon of limited range and accuracy. If the attacking soldiers ran fast enough they could try to avoid the bullets. As soon as they reached the enemy line they would use their bayonets and if more numerous could win the battle.

But the Civil War muskets were rifled and this made an enormous difference. It was still a muzzle-loader but it had much more accuracy and a far longer range. An advancing line could therefore be brought under killing fire at a distance of half a mile → the casualties were enormous and it took the generals a long time to learn that a new approach was needed.

The cavalry intervened at the end of the battle but it was of secondary importance. In this field, Southerners dominated Northerners because horseback riding was linked to social prestige, whereas in the North it wasn't so important and considered as expensive.

What was the Blacks' role during the battles ?

Black people were used to pick up corpses and bury them. Indeed, enslaved African Americans ran away to Union army camps in record numbers, where they served as labourers, guides, scouts, cooks, nurses, laundresses, and in other occupations.

3 – Medicine during the Civil War → 9 minutes 19 secondes

What were a wounded soldier's chances of surviving during the Civil War ?

Not only would a soldier be badly hurt because of the killing efficiency of the new weapons, but he would encounter an incredibly imperfect science.

Few medical men knew why wounds become infected or what causes disease. When the wound was dressed, doctors expected it to suppurate which was supposed to be a good sign.

Stitches were ignored and limbs were cut off without hesitation and without anaesthetics. Furthermore, sterilisation was unknown. At the best, the surgeon's instrument would be rinsed between two operations. Therefore the chances of survival were remote.

4 – Back home → 14 minutes 08 secondes

How were some non-fighting northerners trying to help the Blacks' cause ?

White and blacks working together (rare)

Freedman's relief association :

This Association originated at a meeting held on the 20th February, 1862, in response to an appeal from Gen. Sherman who had observed the helpless condition of the blacks within the vast area occupied by the forces under his command. He was calling upon the benevolent and philanthropic of the land for aid (teaching, housing, find work ...)

Some influent black men as Frederick Douglass are listened to → **FIGHTING REBELS WITH ONLY ONE HAND** (Douglass' Monthly, September 1861)

"What on earth is the matter with the American Government and people? Do they really covet the world's ridicule as well as their own social and political ruin? What are they thinking about, or don't they condescend to think at all ? (...) Our Presidents, Governors, Generals and Secretaries are calling, with almost frantic vehemence, for men.--"Men! men! send us men!" they scream, or the cause of the Union is gone, the life of a great nation is ruthlessly sacrificed, and the hopes of a great nation go out in darkness; and yet these very officers, representing the people and Government, steadily and persistently refuse to receive the very class of men which have a deeper interest in the defeat and humiliation of the rebels, than all others. (...)Men in earnest don't fight with one hand, when they might fight with two, and a man drowning would not refuse to be saved even by a coloured hand."

Indeed, as soon as April 1861, a lot of free black men living in the north had tried to enlist to become soldiers. But the War Department denied their requests to form or join a regiment on the argument that it was a white men's war.

At the end of 1862, Lincoln began to accept the idea of recruiting black soldiers → the 54th Massachusetts Regiment who would be composed of volunteers would be armed with rifles and not with pikes. A young white newly promoted colonel was placed at the head : Robert Gould Shaw.

5 – 6 – Forming the 54th Massachusetts 21 minutes 04 secondes

What were the characteristics of this coloured regiment

Mostly illiterate (don't know their left from their right)

A lot of them being poor (no shoes)

Different social statuses : free men, runaway (fugitive) slaves working in the fields or houses.

Were being sneered at by the white soldiers.

7 – Drilling → 28 minutes 45 secondes

What was Colonel Shaw's major problem ?

The volunteers were anything but soldiers → they drilled most of the day to learn how to march in correct formation :

- a division moving along a country road would go generally in columns of four (that is eight wide and a mile long)
- when reaching the battlefield, it would transform length in width and form a series of lines
- once in action the fighting line had to learn how to :
 - swing to the right or the left like an immense gate
 - advance or retreat
 - toss a swarm of skirmishers out in its front or on either flanks

What was at stake after Lincoln's Emancipation declaration ?

The Confederate congress replied, warning the Negroes that all those caught wearing a Union uniform would be executed and so would be the white officers commanding them.

8 – 9 – 10 – First shots and the need for shoes → 48 minutes 44 secondes

Apart from walking and getting into position what did the new soldiers need absolutely to know ?

The soldiers had to learn how to shoot, reload and shoot again very fast (three in a minute) and under fire. The average regiment didn't get a lot of target practice, on the belief that an American man knew how to handle a rifle. It was quite true for Southerners but not as true for Northerners.

They also had to learn to use the bayonet and fight with their bare hands.

How could one command a regiment during the Civil War ?

Some officers came from West Point, the leading military academy. But some others had been appointed by the State governor for reasons of politics. Others were even elected by their soldiers. This can explain why a lot of officers weren't really qualified for the job. Therefore, the most conscientious often had to buy military textbooks and study them during the nights. In fact, soldiers (coming from the south or the north) asked their officers to be good leaders and to be able to stand up under fire. Those who did it were respected and obeyed.

What was the usual treatment for slaves ?

Whipping (flogging)

The law provided slaves with virtually no protection from their masters. On large plantations this power was delegated to overseers. These men were under considerable pressure from the plantation owners to maximize profits. They did this by bullying the slaves into increasing productivity. The punishments used against slaves judged to be under-performing included the use of the whip. Sometimes slave-owners resorted to mutilating and branding (marquer au fer rouge) their slaves.

11 → 18 – New shoes, bad pay and no fighting → 1 heure 14 minutes 40 secondes

What was the difference between a white regiment and a black regiment during the war ?

No material

Black regiments had great difficulty getting supplies and uniforms; some regiments served for months without uniforms or shoes. Often their uniforms were made of shoddy materials: shoes and clothing fell apart easily and were not replaced by the army. Weapons were defective or old models. The officers had to fight to get uniforms for their coloured regiment, or even to permit them to fight.

Less salary

Of all the injustices that black soldiers faced, perhaps the worst was unequal pay. In 1863, white soldiers were paid thirteen dollars a month with an additional three dollars clothing allowance for their uniform. Black soldiers had been promised the same pay.

But, when the black soldiers lined up to receive their first pay, they discovered that their pay was only ten dollars a month. Furthermore, the three dollars for the uniform would be taken out of their pay, not added to it! So, the black soldier would actually earn seven dollars instead of the thirteen dollars he had been promised.

Many black soldiers and their white officers protested to the army, to the secretary of war, and to President Lincoln. Some wrote editorials and letters to the editors of northern newspapers. The black soldiers wrote that they did the same army work as the white soldier, lived in the same miserable camp conditions, and faced the same chances of death from bullet or disease.

When their protests didn't get any action, a number of regiments refused to accept any pay until it equalled the pay of white soldiers. One of the first regiments to do this was the 54th Massachusetts. The white officers of the Fifty-fourth supported the black soldiers.

Not until August of 1864, only a few months until the end of the war, did Congress pass a law equalizing the pay of black and white soldiers. At last, the men of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts regiment accepted their pay and sent money home to their families.

They were not considered as a useful or an efficient military force →

They were only used to loot, terrorise, burn or work.

Black soldiers were assigned an unequally large portion of military labour, called fatigue duty. Many worked for eight to ten hours a day at hard, physical labour. They dug trenches and latrines, built corduroy roads and fortifications, and unloaded supplies. Whenever possible, black soldiers were given the jobs no one wanted, like burying dead from the battlefield and hospitals. The army excused this unfairness by saying that they were saving the white soldiers for fighting.

These were the same jobs that black men had done for the army before they were permitted to be soldiers. Many of the black soldiers felt that they were still slaves, even though they were emancipated and wore the blue army uniform. The fatigue duties sapped their strength, their health, and their morale. Many black regiments had no time to drill or keep themselves, their uniforms, and their weapons clean and fit. The black soldiers protested to President Lincoln, who responded by issuing orders for the protection and proper military use of coloured troops.

Why does the decision taken by colonel Shaw to promote the character played by Morgan Freeman seems to be so important ?

Although all the soldiers in these regiments were African American, all their officers were white. No African American soldier could be a commissioned officer, that is a lieutenant, captain, or general. Commissioning a black man would mean that as an officer he might have authority over white soldiers, and the United States Army was not willing to let that happen. During the Civil War, a few African American soldiers became sergeants and corporals, but that was as high as they could rise.

19 – Fighting at last → 1 heure 52 minutes

What were black people fighting for ?

Honour, freedom, citizenship, be equal to the white men.

They are not afraid to die for freedom, die standing up to help abolish slavery. They want to be men.

Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass eloquently expressed this viewpoint:

Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship.

Why was the 54th regiment so important during this war ?

It proved that coloured people could respect orders, fight as bravely as white men.

It convinced Congress to finally raise black troops throughout the Union → over 180 thousand volunteered. They helped turn the tide of the war after Gettysburg and two years of defeat for the Union.