

Christian A. Fleetwood



Christian A. Fleetwood was one of 13 African-American soldiers who won the Medal of Honor at the Battle of Chaffin's Farm, Virginia, on September 29 and 30, 1864. At one time he had considered making a career in the army, but in this letter to his former employer he explains his disillusionment with the army and its treatment of black troops.

The original letter is located in the Carter G. Woodson collection at the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress.

Baltimore June 8th 1865
Dr. James Hall

Dear Sir:

I much regret that you disapprove or rather do not approve of my leaving the service at the expiration of my term of enlistment.

Be assured that in this matter I am actuated by the same motives which induced me to leave your office, and light & agreeable employment and take to the arduous & adventurous duties of the camp-some personal ambition to be sure but mainly from a desire to benefit my race.

From representations made by Col. [William] Birney and from the position assumed by our friends in Congress, you remember we were induced to believe or hope that on evidence of merit and ability to do our duty we should receive promotion, at least to the rank of company & regimental officers.-That I have well performed the duties of the office which I have held the past two years, it becomes me not to say, although I wear a medal conferred for some special acts as a soldier, yet am bold to say that no regiment has performed more active, arduous, & dangerous service than the 4th U.S. Cold. Troops.

Leaving Baltimore in September 1863 we reported at Yorktown Va. and in less than a week were ordered on a raid, making thirty (30) miles per day, with no stragglers. We remained at Yorktown until 1/64 engaging in similar expeditions once or twice in every month.

In April we were ordered to Point Lookout, Md. to guard the prisoners there, and remained until the organization of the first division of colored troops in the U.S. service, viz. the 3d Division, 18th Army Corps.

Leaving Fortress Monroe with the "James River Expedition" in May 64 we were the first ashore at City Point, and built works, held them and made reconnaissances from then to June 15th when the first serious demonstration was made upon Petersburg, losing on that day about two hundred and fifty (250) out of less than six hundred (600) men. Assisted in the siege of Petersburg until August when we were transferred to Dutch Gap working in the canal under the shelling of the rebel batteries until the latter part of September when we were ordered to Deep Bottom and under Major Gen. Birney on the 29th September, at the taking of New Market Heights and Fort Harrison, lost two thirds of our available force. Entrenching on the lines before Richmond, we remained until Gen. [Benjamin F.] Butler's Expedition to Fort Fisher, returned to our old camp and in a few days again embarked under Gen. [Alfred H.] Terry upon his successful expedition, and have taken part in all of the marches and fighting encountered by "Terry's Command" until the surrender of [General Joseph E.] Johnston's Army in April last.

Upon all our record there is not a single blot, and yet no member of this regiment is considered deserving of a commission or if so cannot receive one. I trust you will understand that I speak not of and for myself individually, or that the lack of the pay or honor of a commission induces me to quit the service. Not so by any means, but I see no good that will result to our people by continuing to serve, on the contrary it seems to me that our continuing to act in a subordinate capacity, with no hope of advancement or promotion is an absolute injury to our cause. It is a tacit but telling acknowledgement on our part that we are not fit for promotion, & that we are satisfied to remain in a state of marked and acknowledged subserviency.

A double purpose induced me and most others to enlist, to assist in abolishing slavery and to save the country from ruin. Something in furtherance of both objects we have certainly done, and now it strikes me that more could be done for our welfare in the pursuits of civil life. I think that a camp life would be decidedly an injury to our people. No matter how well and faithfully they may perform their duties they will shortly be considered as "lazy nigger sojers"-as drones in the great hive.

I have trespassed upon your time to a much greater extent than I intended but I wished you correctly to appreciate my motives for leaving the service.

Very truly & respectfully Yours
Christian A. Fleetwood
Sergt. Major 4th U.S. Cold. Troops

Source: [**Drones in the Great Hive: A Letter from an African-American Civil War Soldier**](#), Christian A. Fleetwood, *Civil War Times*.