

**Collection #s**  
**M 1038**  
**OMB 0134**

**ZENAS HARRISON BLISS**  
**CIVIL WAR COLLECTION, 1864-1891**

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Processed by

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## COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	One-half document case, 1 photograph folder, 1 oversized box, and 2 large flat folders
COLLECTION DATES:	1864-1891
PROVENANCE:	Karl and Donna Bliss Jonas (great-granddaughter of Zenas Harrison Bliss)
RESTRICTIONS:	None
COPYRIGHT:	
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained from the Indiana Historical Society.
ALTERNATE FORMATS:	
RELATED HOLDINGS:	<p>P 0455 Indiana Civil War Visual Collection <a href="http://images.indianahistory.org/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/dc008&amp;CISOPTR=228&amp;CISOBOX=1&amp;REC=2">http://images.indianahistory.org/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/dc008&amp;CISOPTR=228&amp;CISOBOX=1&amp;REC=2</a> (Includes a composite photograph of the white officers of the 28<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops. Donors identified the officer in the back row, third from the left as Captain Zenas Bliss. OVC Graphics: Box 2, Folder 2)</p> <p>Jonas, Karl R. <i>Bliss Family to Jonas Family: 1530-2012, A Single Bloodline of Fathers and Sons through Thirteen Generations with a Mayflower Connection</i>. Baltimore, Md.: Otter Bay Books, 2012.</p> <p><b>Located at other institutions:</b> Misc 102 Zenas H. Bliss Correspondence, 1862-1866. Leahy Library, Vermont Historical Society located in Barre, Vermont</p> <p>Captain Zenas H. Bliss Artifacts, Photographs and Ephemera, The Albuquerque Museum of Art and History in New Mexico</p>
ACCESSION NUMBER:	2012.0165
NOTES:	Biographical sketch of Zenas Harrison Bliss and historical sketch of the 28 <sup>th</sup> USCT written by Wilma L. Moore.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Zenas Harrison Bliss (September 12, 1842–January 26, 1929) was born and grew up in Johnson, Vermont. Prior to the Civil War, he attended secondary school at the Peoples Academy in Morrisville, Vermont while boarding with a local family in the nearby town of Calais.

In June 1862, Bliss enlisted as a private with the Ninth Regiment, Vermont Infantry Volunteers, Company I. After being formally mustered in at Brattleboro, Vermont, the regiment left their camp to help secure Washington, D.C. The Ninth joined other regiments under the command of Brigadier General Julius White.

Less than three months after joining the Union Army, Bliss became one of over 12,500 soldiers who, as part of an exchange program, were ordered to surrender to be paroled for a subsequent trade. Awaiting an official exchange, these prisoners were sent to Camp Douglas in Chicago. Although his regiment was formally exchanged in January 1863 (the same month that Bliss was promoted from Private to 5<sup>th</sup> Sergeant of Company I), they did not leave Illinois until the spring of that year. The Ninth regiment travelled to City Point, Virginia. After arriving in Virginia, Bliss received a position with the Brigade's quartermaster. Over the next year he got several promotions and by July 1864, he was a quartermaster sergeant.

Zenas Bliss was recommended for a commission in July 1864. He received an official discharge from his service with the United States Army, enabling him to get an appointment as a white officer with the United States Colored Troops. Bliss was mustered in as the Captain of the 28<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops (USCT Infantry), Company K on September 18, 1864. Like the Ninth, the 28<sup>th</sup> USCT was assigned to guard duty at City Point. Located on the James River, this was the site of General Ulysses S. Grant's headquarters during the siege of Petersburg. Bliss continued quartermaster duties and commanded the company. [For a regimental history of the 28<sup>th</sup> USCT, see below.]

In December, 1864, Zenas Bliss took a 15-day leave of absence from his war service to marry Sarah Ann Shelden. Both of them had attended the Peoples Academy. After the war Zenas and Sarah had eight children. They were: Nina Lee, Bertha Zelle, Deane Shelden, Myrtie Cairn, Blanche Tryphena, Inez Marion, Sarah Mabel, and Zenas Evan. The family lived in Vermont and New York. During the late 1880s they relocated to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

### ***Historical Sketch of the 28<sup>th</sup> USCT***

During the American Civil War, the United States War Department issued General Order #143 creating the Bureau of Colored Troops on May 22, 1863. Under the command of Major Charles Foster, the Bureau's task was to handle recruitment, training, and placement of troops and officer selection for the Union Army. After the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, recruitment of black troops in Indiana and other states escalated. In November, 1863, Foster informed Indiana governor, Oliver P. Morton that the Secretary of

War had authorized him “to raise one regiment or infantry to be composed of colored men, to be mustered into the United States service.....” The regiment became the 28th United States Colored Troops. Prior to that, many Indiana blacks travelled to Massachusetts to fight with that state’s 54th and the 55<sup>th</sup> black regiments.

The 28<sup>th</sup> USCT was mustered into service in December, 1863 at Camp Fremont on the near south side of Indianapolis. This land was owned by attorney and businessman Calvin Fletcher and the camp was named in honor of John Fremont, an explorer, an 1856 presidential nominee, and a Civil War general.

When anxious and willing blacks were unhurriedly organized and permitted to fight for the Union army midway through the war, they were separated into segregated regiments that were commanded by white officers. Many of these officers had hailed from the northeast, and some had settled in the Midwest. Born in Massachusetts, Captain Charles S. Russell who had served with the 11<sup>th</sup> Indiana and the 11<sup>th</sup> United States Infantry was commissioned as a Lt. Colonel and was placed in charge of the 28<sup>th</sup> USCT. (By the war’s end, Russell who had briefly served as a brevet brigadier general was a full colonel.) Several companies were formed under Russell and attorney William P. Fishback. Zenas H. Bliss, who hailed from Vermont, received his commission as a captain in the 28<sup>th</sup> USCT, Company K, while he was serving as a Union soldier in Virginia.

On April 25, 1864, under the command of Lt. Colonel Russell, the 28<sup>th</sup> left Indianapolis for Maryland. The regiment engaged in several battles in Virginia and ended its service in Texas. In July 1864, the 28<sup>th</sup> was one of several black infantry regiments to fight at the Battle of the Crater (Petersburg, Virginia). Suffering many casualties during the disastrous battle, the regiment was decimated losing soldiers to death, wounds, and disease.

The 28<sup>th</sup> was actively engaged at Hatcher’s Run during the fall of 1864. It was attached to the 25<sup>th</sup> Corps, Army of the James and was given duty in the Quartermaster’s Department at City Point, Virginia. It was among the first of the Union troops to enter Richmond when the city fell on April 2, 1865. Afterwards the regiment was assigned to guard Confederate troops at City Point.

Leaving City Point in mid-June 1865, the regiment boarded the *Ariel* and *New Jersey*, two transports that had been used throughout the war to move troops on the waterways. Companies B, E, and K stationed on the *Ariel* arrived at Santiago, near the mouth of the Rio Grande on July 1. The next day they went to Indianola, but later orders rerouted them to Corpus Christi, Texas where they remained until the end of their service. Union troops were sent west for occupation duty in Texas, as a response to unrest at the war’s end. The soldiers also represented a show of force along the Texas-Mexico border to thwart a threat of invasion, since France had recently seized control of the Mexican government.

The 28<sup>th</sup> USCT mustered out of service in Texas on November 8, 1865. After leaving Texas, the regiment travelled overland to New Orleans where the soldiers boarded a steamer and went up the Mississippi to Cairo, Illinois. They then went by train to Indianapolis. On January 8, 1866, two days after their return to Indianapolis, the soldiers of the 28<sup>th</sup> received public honors on the south side of the courthouse square.

Six weeks after the surrender of the Confederate forces at Appomattox on April 9, 1865 (formally ending the Civil War), a huge two-day parade celebrated the Union victory in Washington, D. C. On May 23–24, 1865 none of the units from the United States Colored Troops participated in the celebration. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* editorialized “Their time will yet come.”

In July 1998, their time came when ceremonies were held for the first national Civil War monument dedicated to the black troops and their white officers. Activities included a Civil War Symposium for Descendants; Memorial Services at Arlington National Cemetery; a Freedom Ball and a Salute to the Sculptor, a Re-Enactor’s Parade, and the unveiling of the *Spirit of Freedom* sculpture. The monument was sculpted by Edward Norton Hamilton. The nine-foot, 3,000-pound bronze sculpture is located on a triangular plot at 10<sup>th</sup> and U and Vermont streets in the Shaw neighborhood in northwest Washington, D.C. The area was named to honor Robert Gould Shaw, a white colonel who served as commander of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, one of the first activated regiments of black troops. Captain Zenas H. Bliss’s name is listed among the officers on the memorial. He is on the Wall of Honor on Wall B, Plaque 44.

#### Sources:

Material in the collection.

Clark, George and Shirley. “Heroes Carved in Ebony: Indiana’s Black Civil War Regiment, the 28th USCT,” *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History*, Summer 1995.

Forstchen, William R. “The 28th United States Colored Troops: Indiana’s African-Americans Go To War, 1863–1865.” Ph. D. dissertation, Purdue University, 1994.

Glatthaar, Joseph T. *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers*. New York: The Free Press, a division of Macmillan, Inc., 1990.

Jonas, Karl R. *Bliss Family to Jonas Family: 1530-2012, A Single Bloodline of Fathers and Sons through Thirteen Generations with a Mayflower Connection*. Baltimore, MD: Otter Bay Books, 2012.

Moore, Wilma L. “Everyday People: Researching the Civil War,” *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History*, Summer 2010.

Terrell, W.H.H., Indiana Adjutant General’s Office. *Report of the Adjutant General of the state of Indiana*. Indianapolis: A.H. Connor [etc.] State Printer, 1865-69.

Thornbrough, Emma Lou. *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850–1880*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1989.

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## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Zenas Harrison Bliss Civil War Collection is a compilation of official forms, orders, descriptive supply lists, as well as correspondence, pertaining to Company K of the 28<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops (USCT) Infantry, the black Indiana regiment. Zenas H. Bliss served as captain of Company K. The majority of the documents are from the last two years of the Civil War, dating from July 1864 to December 1865. Post-bellum items, which include receipts from the Second Auditor's Office of the Treasury Department, a proof of disability claim, and letters from Bliss, date from January 1866 to June 1891.

The documents, which are printed and/or handwritten, are categorized by subject and then organized by form number (when applicable) and date. Categories include muster and descriptive rolls of enlisted men, detailed inventory reports of camp equipment and supplies, orders instructing behavioral measures aboard the *Ariel*, and the discharge paper of Bliss. There are also files on insubordinate privates, departmental papers including Treasury Department and Department of the Interior forms, War Department circulars, and form letters addressed to Bliss from the Ordnance Office's Property Returns Division.

These descriptive rosters, departmental forms and receipts, handwritten/typed letters, as well as supplementary materials from the donor, are organized into the following five series: Correspondence, Departmental Office form letters and Circulars, Official Adjutant General's Office (A.G.O.) Forms, Official Forms, and Official Orders, Lists, and Notes. The correspondence in this collection is comprised of handwritten letters pertaining to Zenas Bliss and his work. It concerns board meetings, transmission of charges, vouchers, transportation costs, and travel requests. Departmental Office form letters and Circulars include documents from the Quartermaster General's Office, Headquarters Department of Virginia, Treasury Department, and the War Department. Official A.G.O. Forms include muster and descriptive rolls and inventory of effects lists. Official Forms consist of inventory forms as well as a Proof of Disability form. It is important to note that some of the identical forms, like Forms No. 3-(a.) and 7-(a.), are grouped together in the same folder.

Official Orders, Lists, & Notes contain three tiers of orders: Special Orders, General Orders and Orders. Special Orders pertain to enlisted officers and includes appointments, promotions, travel instructions, and a travel pass. General Orders comprise a host of instructions for conduct on land and at sea. For example, General Order No. 11 describes how enlisted men were to conduct themselves while aboard the *Ariel*. Orders mostly pertain to Captain Bliss, authorizing his designation as Brigade Officer of the Day, and the folder also includes instructions for Bliss, two other officers, and a detachment of 110 men to relieve another detachment in unloading a steamer. The series Official Orders, Lists, & Notes also contains detailed charges of enlisted men, as well as photocopies of papers compiled and gifted by the donors, Karl and Donna Bliss Jonas, which include a chronology and family tree of Zenas H. Bliss. Various names appear throughout the collection, especially in the form letters, Adjutant General's Office Forms, different orders, and the files on charges making this collection especially useful for researchers seeking information about Bliss and some of the men who served with the 28<sup>th</sup> USCT, Company K.

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Correspondence, 1864-66

Zenas H. Bliss

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Photograph  
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Assistant Quartermaster's Office and Quartermaster  
General's Office form letters, 1865-66

Department of the Interior - Pension Office Form  
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Headquarters Department of Virginia, Army of the  
James - Circulars, 1865

Ordnance Office – Property Returns Division form  
letters, 1864-66

Pay Department, U.S.A. receipt of payment, 1865

Treasury Department – Second and Third Auditor's  
Office form letters, 1869-72

U.S. Army General Hospital Form letters and Surgeon  
General's Office form letter, 1864-65

War Department, Adjutant General's Office form  
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### **Series 3: Official Adjutant General's Office Forms**

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A.G.O. No. 60 & 61 Muster and Descriptive Rolls, 1864-65 (and two with no date) OMB 0134  
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A.G.O. No. 90 & 91 Furlough Papers; and No. 99 Discharge Paper for Zenas H. Bliss, 1865 Box 1, Folder 9

A.G.O. No. 93 Voluntary Descriptive List and Account of Pay and Clothing, 1865 OMB 0134, Folder 5

A.G.O. No. 104 Inventory of Effects of Late Soldier, 1865 Box 1, Folder 10

A.G.O. No. 4 & 114 Muster and Descriptive Rolls, 1864-65 OMB 0134  
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Forms No. 3-(a.) and No. 7-(a.) For issues or transfers of Ordnance Stores, 1865-66 Box 1, Folder 12

Forms No. 9-(a.) and No. 10-(c.) Abstract of Materials, Etc. expended or consumed, 1864-65 Box 1, Folder 13

Forms No. 12 and No. 14 Statement of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores, 1864-65 OMB 0134, Folder 7

Form No. 23 Monthly Return of Quartermaster's Stores Received and Issued, 1865 OMB 0134, Folder 8

Form No. 27 list of articles transferred to Captain Zenas Bliss, 1864-65 OMB 0134 , Folder 9

Form No. 42 List of Stores Expended and No. 43 Articles Lost or Destroyed, 1865 OMB 0134, Folder 10

Form No. 51 Monthly Return of Clothing, Camp and Garrison Equipage, 1864 OMB 0134, Folder 11

Form No. 51 Monthly Return of Clothing, Camp and Garrison Equipage, 1865-66	OMB 0134, Folder 12
Form No. 52 Statement exhibiting the allowance of Clothing to each soldier, 1864-65	OMB 0134, Folder 13
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