Susie King Taylor Biography

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Biography

During the Civil War, African American nurse Susie King Taylor (1848-1912) aided the Union Army. She later helped freedmen and Civil War veterans.

Susie King Taylor was born into slavery on Aug. 6, 1848, on a farm near Savannah, Ga. She learned to read and write, although slaves were prohibited from doing so. During the Civil War she and her uncle escaped from slavery by fleeing to a Union army in Georgia. She joined the all-black 1st South Carolina Volunteers (which later became the 33d U.S. Colored Infantry) as a nurse, teacher, and laundress.

In 1863 she married Sgt. Edward King, also a former slave, and served with him in the South Carolina Sea Islands. They participated in the 1865 capture of Charleston. She bravely attended to the needs of both black and white soldiers. Though King frequently encountered combat, she always remained brave, and her courage and cheerfulness were a source of inspiration to soldiers of both races. She also taught many illiterate Union soldiers to read and write.

Mustered out of the army in February 1866, King and her husband returned to Savannah. She opened a school for free blacks but closed it after her husband died at the end of 1866. She operated a school in Liberty Country, Ga., in 1867-1868 but returned to Savannah in late 1868 to open a night school. With the opening of new public schools for freedmen, King closed her school and worked for a wealthy family.

Moving to Boston, King married Russel L. Taylor, a former Union soldier, in 1879. She remained interested in the plight of Civil War veterans, both black and white, and in 1886 helped organize Corps 67 of the Women's Relief Corps auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic. She served as guard, secretary, treasurer, and president (1893) of the Corps. During the Spanish-American War she furnished and packed boxes for wounded men in hospitals.

Taylor's well-written autobiography, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp* (1902), detailed her wartime experiences and the contributions of blacks to the Union cause. It also criticized racial discrimination in the United States, particularly in the South. Taylor noted that blacks had contributed greatly to the preservation of the nation and were entitled to full equality.