



Sgt William H. Carney, Civil War Medal of Honor recipient

WILLIAM HARVEY CARNEY - 54th Massachusetts Infantry

I, William Carney was born a slave March 28, 1842 near Norfolk, Virginia. My father, also named William, used the Underground Railroad to escape, then sent word back me. Then I escaped using the same route, and joined my father in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Father and I worked on the docks and went to sea in whaling and cargo ships. We saved ou money and were able to buy the freedom of my mother and sister. I worked mostly as a sailor up until the outbreak of the Civil War.

I joined the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry and served in Company C. When the 54th made the first assault on Ft. Wagner in Charleston Harbor, S.C. on July 18, 1863, I seized the Colors (flag) from the fallen color bearer, held it aloft, and was immediately wounded four times. When the order to retreat was given, I was one of the last to leave the fort. Although seriously wounded, I was able to make it back.

When I arrived at the hospital tent, I said, "Boys, the old flag never touched the ground!" The men cheered!

My father was the first American of African descent to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Valor (Honor) for bravery. I was the last Civil War veteran to receive the award, forty-one years later, in 1904.