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CIVIL WAR TO CIVIL RIGHTS: CHARLES YOUNG (SLAVE, SOLDIER)

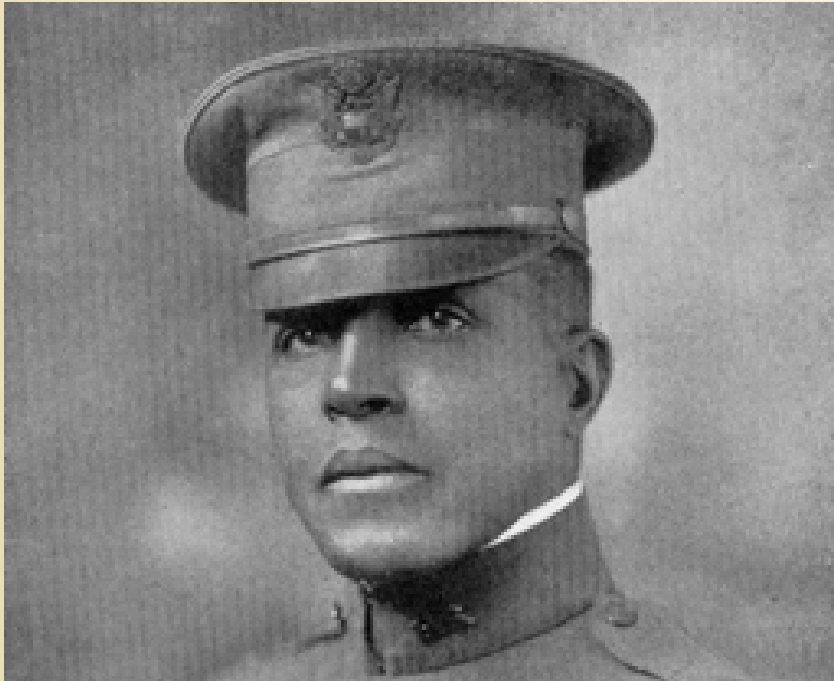


Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

MASON COUNTY — Charles Young was born into slavery in 1864 in Mason County. His father, Gabriel, sought his freedom by crossing the Ohio River and enlisted on Feb. 13, 1865, in the 5th United States Colored Heavy Artillery in Ripley, Ohio. The Young family later moved to Ohio where Charles graduated at the top of his class at age 16. Admitted to the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., in 1883, in 1889, he became the third African American to graduate from the prestigious institution.

Newly commissioned as a second lieutenant, Young first was assigned to the 10th and then the 9th U.S. Cavalry, both better known as the “Buffalo Soldiers,” and was stationed in Nebraska and Utah. A few years later, he became the first African American superintendent of a national park, overseeing operations at Sequoia and General Grant National Parks in California.

In the early 20th century, Young served as a military attaché to Haiti, spent time with the 9th Cavalry in the Philippines and was an attaché to Liberia. In 1916, he served with the 10th Cavalry against Poncho Villa on the Texas/Mexico border and was promoted to lieutenant colonel — the first African American colonel in the U.S. Army. Because racism within the armed forces prevented him from gaining promotion to the rank of general, Young taught military science and again served as an attaché to Liberia, where he died in 1922.

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