

Charles Young Chronology/Fact Sheet 1864-1922

Developed by Brian Shellum and provided by Floyd Thomas

Charles Young, **who had no middle name or initial**, was born to enslaved parents, Gabriel Young and Arminta Bruen, on March 12, 1864.

The log house slave quarters where Charles Young was born still stands on a farm along Helena Station Road near the small town of May's Lick in southern Mason County, Kentucky.

In 1865 Gabriel Young moved his wife and son to Ohio and then enlisted for one year in the Union Army and served in Company F, Fifth U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery Volunteers. Following his discharge he settled in Ripley, just across the river bordering Kentucky.

Young graduated from an integrated high school in Ripley, Ohio in 1881, and taught school in Ripley 1881-1884.

Young took the West Point entrance exam and in 1884 he accepted a nomination from Ohio's 12th District Congressman Alphonso Hart and entered West Point.

Though Young experienced prejudice, social isolation, and academic difficulties, in 1889 he became only the third African American to graduate from the Military Academy and the last until Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., in 1936.

In 1889, the newly commissioned Second Lieutenant Young was initially assigned to the Tenth U.S. Cavalry, but was reassigned to the Twenty-Fifth U.S. Infantry weeks later. At his request he was reassigned to the Ninth U.S. Cavalry without having actually served with the Tenth Cavalry or Twenty-Fifth Infantry.

As a Second Lieutenant, Young served at Ft. Robinson, Nebraska, and Ft. Duchesne, Utah, before replacing Lt. John Hanks Alexander as Professor of Military Science at Wilberforce University in Wilberforce, Ohio, on detached duty 1894-1898. Young effectively developed the first military training program for African American college students, which exists today as the integrated Marauder Battalion now headquartered on the campus of Central State University in Wilberforce.

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To secure promotion to First Lieutenant, Charles Young was transferred on paper to the Seventh U.S. Cavalry in 1896 while at Wilberforce University, but did not serve with the Regiment.

Following his promotion to First Lieutenant in 1896, Young was transferred back to the Ninth Cavalry in 1897.

In 1898 Young was appointed Major, U.S. Volunteers, in the Ohio National Guard to command its Ninth Infantry Battalion. During the Spanish American War, Young prepared his men for combat but his battalion was not sent overseas and he did not serve in Cuba with the Ninth Cavalry, his home regiment.

In 1899 Young was mustered out of the Ohio National Guard, returned to the Ninth Cavalry with his Regular Army rank of First Lieutenant, and served again at Ft. Duchesne, Utah.

Promoted to Captain in 1901, Young commanded a cavalry troop in the Ninth Cavalry and lead his men in combat in the Philippine Islands during the Philippine Insurrection.

Following his return to the U.S., Captain Young and the Buffalo Soldiers under his command served at the Presidio in San Francisco.

In 1903 Young was assigned the post of Superintendent of Sequoia and General Grant National Parks. The first African American to be appointed a superintendent, Young and the men he supervised accomplished more than the three previous superintendents combined. He built roads to provide public access to the parks and took measures to protect the natural wonders there. In 2003 the National Park Service celebrated the 100th Anniversary of Charles Young's tenure and the accomplishments of the Buffalo Soldiers in Sequoia, and a year later a giant sequoia was named in honor of Charles Young.

In 1904 Charles Young married Ada Mills in Oakland, California.

Charles Young became the first African American officer appointed to duty as a military attaché, serving in that capacity in Hispaniola (Haiti and Dominican Republic) 1904-1907.

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Following temporary duty in Washington, D.C., Young returned to the Ninth Cavalry and served at Camp McGrath in the Philippine Islands and Ft. D.A. Russell, in Wyoming 1908-1911.

Young served on detached duty as military attaché to Liberia from 1912 to 1915, where he was promoted to Major. Young developed the Liberian Frontier Forces, built roads, and was shot in the arm during a rescue mission in the interior of the West African nation. Young returned to the United States in 1913 to recuperate from his wound and blackwater fever at his home in Wilberforce, but returned to Liberia to serve out his tour.

Major Young was reassigned to the Tenth U.S. Cavalry in 1915 while in Liberia.

For his exceptional work in Liberia, the NAACP awarded Major Young its highest honor, the Spingarn Award, in 1916.

Young served in the Punitive Expedition in Mexico 1916-1917, and led his men to the rescue of American troops of the Thirteenth U.S. Cavalry. On several occasions Young took temporary command of the Tenth Cavalry. Based on his seniority and exceptional service, Young was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel on July 1, 1916.

With the approach of World War I, Young expected promotion and to command troops. General Pershing, with whom he served during the Punitive Expedition, recommended him for promotion and command.

During his promotion board to Colonel in 1917, he was found fully qualified for promotion, but a medical exam detected chronic nephritis, high blood pressure, and heart problems. He was declared physically unfit for promotion, but the board recommended that these conditions be waived so he could serve in the war.

Concurrently, some white officers had complained to their congressional representatives that they did not want to serve under a Black commanding officer. President Wilson informed the Secretary of War Baker of this concern and was told that the problem would be resolved because Lieutenant Colonel Young had medical conditions that would prohibit him from serving on active duty with the Regular Army. The Adjutant General decided to

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ignore the recommendation of the promotion board and Young was involuntarily retired and promoted to Colonel.

To prove his fitness for duty, Colonel Young rode (and walked) from Wilberforce, Ohio to Washington, D.C., but he was not recalled to active duty until days before the armistice ending the war was signed, too late for him to command troops in combat or to be promoted to Brigadier General.

Following the war Young was reassigned to duty as military attaché to Liberia. While conducting an intelligence mission in Nigeria he became critically ill and died in Lagos on January 8, 1922.

Colonel Young was buried in Lagos with full military honors. At the request of his widow, his body was returned to the U.S. in 1923. He was honored with a huge funeral procession in Washington, D.C., and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Young was the highest-ranking African American Regular Army officer from 1894 until his death in 1922.

Numerous American Legion posts across the country were named in his honor.

Young devoted his life to the training and education of his soldiers. Among the many men he mentored was Benjamin O. Davis, who was ultimately promoted the first Black general, an honor Young was denied.

Young represented to the African American community what could be accomplished despite the hostility and discrimination endured by Blacks in most every field of endeavor at that time.