

**Name:** *Alex Christopher Meekins*

**Title:** Editor – *North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865: A Roster*  
Historical Research and Publications Office  
NC Office of Archives and History

**Email:** [chris.meekins@ncdcr.gov](mailto:chris.meekins@ncdcr.gov)

**Abstract Title:** Volunteers or Volun-tolds? African American “hands” at NC coastal fortifications in 1861

**Abstract Description:** Simultaneous with President Abraham Lincoln’s April 1861 call for troop to put down the rebellion, North Carolinians seized United States forts on their coast. Succession fever brought on a second fever – volunteering for defense of the state. Upon inspection, seized forts were found to have been neglected and in want of repairs. Volunteers responded and soon men and materials were streaming to Fort Macon, Fort Johnston, and Fort Caswell. White volunteers organized into military units. African Americans were placed only as laborers. After an assessment of defensive needs on the coast – the addition of forts and batteries at all inlets – the military issued a call for the impressment of African American labor, free or enslaved. This call ensnared hundreds of men. This paper seeks to provide context for the African American laborers, to understand their impressment and their experience as “hands” in support of North Carolina’s defense.