

Introduction

I am really proud that my great-great-great grandfather, Sandy Wills, **emancipated** himself and enlisted in the Union Army during the **Civil War**. I didn't have the privilege of knowing about Grandpa Sandy's inspiring journey from **slavery** to **freedom** when I was a child. Thankfully, I was later able to research Grandpa Sandy's history and share with you my children's books about my family, including *The Emancipation of Grandpa Sandy Wills*, *Emma*, and *Emancipated: My Family's Fight for Freedom*. It's a special thrill to again continue this series based on Grandpa Sandy's military experience with this exciting book, *Juneteenth Freedom*.



Sandy Wills

As you read this story, you will learn about **Fort Pillow** in western Tennessee. On October 13, 1863, the Civil War was in its third year, and President Abraham Lincoln allowed black men to fight to help save the Union. It was a **strategic** move, and approximately 200,000 black men, both **enslaved** and free, enlisted.

Black soldiers proved to be both strong and brave even in the face of danger. On April 12, 1864, Confederate soldiers, led by General Nathan Bedford Forrest, attacked Fort Pillow and killed hundreds of **Union soldiers**, most of them black. Many were killed even after they surrendered. The **massacre** became known as one of the most horrific events of the Civil War.

After four long, bloody years, the Civil War ended in April 1865, but many soldiers, including Sandy, were still on duty. They had to keep the peace throughout the South as some **rogue Confederate soldiers** refused to surrender.

And perhaps even more shocking, some enslaved people did not know they were free. Blacks in Galveston, Texas, were unaware that President Lincoln had signed the **Emancipation Proclamation**, and they had not gotten the news that the Civil War had ended.

On June 19, 1865, thousands of black soldiers from the **United States Colored Troops** arrived in Galveston, Texas, and marched into the town as a show of force for the black folks who would hear the news they had long been hoping for.

For decades, the heroic acts of the United States Colored Troops have traditionally been reduced to a mere footnote, but this story illustrates why it's important to honor the black men who liberated themselves and, in turn, helped liberate America from **chattel slavery**. The Juneteenth story is bigger than Galveston, Texas; the story of emancipation belongs to us all.

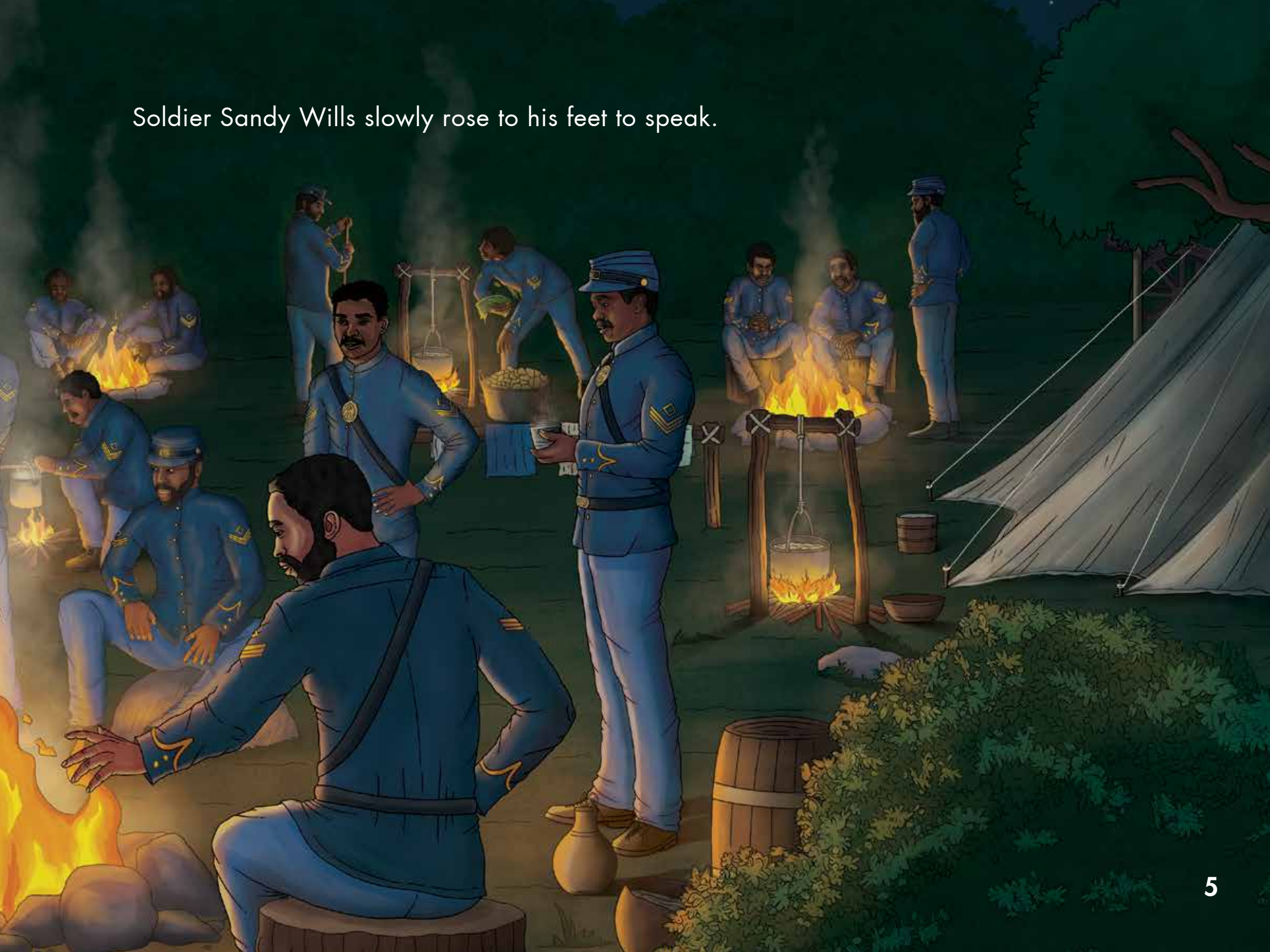
Cheryl Wills

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Independence Day in 1865 was extra special for soldiers with the United States Colored Troops! Not only were they celebrating the end of the Civil War, but they were also celebrating freedom from slavery! Hundreds of Union soldiers gathered around a roaring campfire at Fort Pillow in Tennessee to ring in a new era!



Soldier Sandy Wills slowly rose to his feet to speak.





"Brothers, we've come a long way!" Sandy said softly.
"We are no longer slaves!" he continued. "We've seen a lot of bloodshed right here at Fort Pillow when the Confederate army attacked us without mercy after surrounding the fort in a surprise morning **ambush**. Soldiers wearing grey uniforms terrorized soldiers in blue. General Nathan Bedford Forrest led the attack, which left nearly three hundred Union soldiers dead. It was a national tragedy," Sandy continued.