



Civil war Bluejackets

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## Northumbria Contributes to Groundbreaking Research Using AI to Explore American Civil War History

**Northumbria University, in collaboration with the University of Sheffield, is leading an innovative citizen science project that leverages artificial intelligence (AI) to uncover untold stories of common sailors during the American Civil War.**

Led by Professor David Gleeson at Northumbria, a specialist in American history, and Dr Morgan Harvey in Information Science at Sheffield the study

examines primary source materials, including muster rolls and ship logs, to shed light on the lives and experiences of the Union Navy's bluejackets – so called for their short shell jacket uniforms. The work follows on from the success of [Project Civil War Bluejackets](#) – a funded research programme started in 2021 by Professor Gleeson to investigate immigrant and African-American sailors serving during the American Civil War

In collaboration with international partners including the University of Koblenz and the United States Naval Academy Museum, this latest AI-focused research aims to bridge the historical knowledge gap about the rank-and-file sailors who played pivotal roles in the Union's success during the Civil War. While historians have traditionally focused on prominent naval figures, this research is uncovering the contributions of thousands of sailors whose names and stories were previously overlooked.

Using advanced AI tools and citizen science methodologies, researchers are analyzing extensive archival data to identify patterns and personal stories among the sailors. Professor Gleeson explained: *“This research is revolutionizing how we study history, combining modern technology with historical analysis to bring the voices of ordinary bluejackets to the forefront. It’s not just about the war effort—it’s about understanding the social, cultural, and personal dimensions of their lives.”*

COMPLETE LIST OR MUSTER ROLL of the Crew of the U. S. S. Commodore on the 1st day of April, 1863.

Note: This name should be absolutely correct, with the names in the left. Care should be taken that every column be correctly filled.

NAME	RANK	DATE	REGIMENT	COMPANY	REGIMENT	COMPANY	REGIMENT	COMPANY	REGIMENT	COMPANY
97 Henry Jones	1st Lt	Apr 1	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
201 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 2	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
118 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 3	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
119 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 4	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
120 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 5	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
121 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 6	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
122 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 7	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
123 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 8	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
124 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 9	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
125 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 10	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
126 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 11	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
127 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 12	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
128 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 13	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
129 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 14	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
130 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 15	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
131 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 16	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
132 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 17	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
133 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 18	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
134 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 19	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
135 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 20	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
136 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 21	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
137 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 22	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
138 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 23	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
139 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 24	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
140 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 25	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
141 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 26	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
142 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 27	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
143 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 28	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
144 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 29	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st
145 Amos Jones	1st Lt	Apr 30	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st

(Example of a muster sheet that the machine is reading and transcribing for the project)

The project has already revealed fascinating insights, such as the diverse origins of the Union sailors, including immigrants and African Americans, and their role in shaping naval strategies and post-war society. By engaging citizen scientists, the research also fosters public involvement in historical scholarship, creating a collaborative model for future studies. Those interested in helping the project through checking the machine-learning can do so by signing up [here](#)

Professor Gleeson added: *“By democratizing access to research, we’re not only enriching our understanding of the Civil War but also empowering communities to connect with history in new and meaningful ways. The stories of these sailors resonate far beyond the battlefield, illustrating resilience, camaraderie, and the pursuit of a common cause.”*

Northumbria University’s involvement underscores its commitment to advancing interdisciplinary research and harnessing technology to deepen historical understanding. This project reflects the university’s dedication to fostering global collaboration and innovation while highlighting lesser-known aspects of history that continue to shape modern perspectives.

Professor Gleeson and fellow researchers have published a blog in *The Journal of the Civil War Era* entitled: Civil War Bluejackets: Citizen Science, Machine Learning, and the US Navy Common Sailor, which you can view [here](#).

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