



Civil war Bluejackets

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

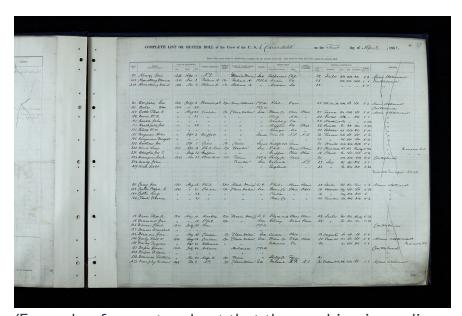
Northumbria University, in collaboration with the University of Sheffield, is leading an innovative citizen science project that leverages artificial intelligence (AI) to uncover untold stories of common sailors during the American Civil War.

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 <a href="Project Civil War Bluejackets">Project Civil War Bluejackets</a> – 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 Musuem, this latest Al-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."



(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 <a href="here">here</a>

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 <a href="here">here</a>.

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