

MS HARRIET TUBMAN
HONORARY MEMBER, MI HALL OF FAME



Harriet Tubman was born a slave known as Araminta Ross in the early 1820s on a plantation on the Eastern Shore in Dorchester County, Maryland. In 1849, she escaped to freedom in Pennsylvania and, thereafter, led a number of trips to free upwards of 80 fellow slaves. She is undoubtedly most famous for her Underground Railroad activities. However, from 1862-1863, she also acted as a spy and scout for the Union Army, operating against Confederate forces and their civilian supporters in South Carolina, Florida, and Georgia.

In approximately January 1862, Governor John Andrews of Massachusetts, a staunch abolitionist and friend of Tubman's, asked her to travel to South Carolina to teach newly freed slaves in Union camps practical life skills. Once arriving in Beaufort, South Carolina, in the spring of 1863, she worked as a cook and nurse for the Union army. She recruited at least nine former slaves, who could easily maneuver around and mingle with Confederate troops and sympathizers. These spies collected intelligence concerning enemy positions and strengths, movements, and fortifications in Confederate controlled areas. Tubman also collected tactical

intelligence through systematic questioning of escaping slaves.

One of her most daring and important missions took place in June 1863, when Tubman and her spies collected vital intelligence about Confederate reinforcements and heavily mined waters along the Combahee River north of Beaufort. MG David Hunter, Union commander of the Department of the South, provided Tubman with a pass which allowed her to travel throughout the Union controlled area unencumbered. COL James Montgomery, Commander of the Second South Carolina Volunteers of African Descent, not only used the intelligence collected by Tubman's network of spies but, at General Hunter's suggestion, gave Tubman a leadership role and took a couple of her spies on the successful raid of six Southern plantations on the River. The raid liberated an estimated 750 men, women and children held in bondage, seized or destroyed millions of dollars of Confederate staples, and opened the river for Union boats. It is estimated that at least 100 men freed in this raid later joined the Union Army as soldiers. Reporting on the raid to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, Brigadier General Rufus Saxton, the Military Governor of Beaufort, said, "This is the only military command in American history wherein a woman, black or white, led the raid, and under whose inspiration it was originated and conducted".

After the Combahee River Raid, Ms. Tubman returned to Beaufort to serve as a nurse at a segregated hospital, continuing to collect information as available until the end of the war. At that time, Harriet returned to her pre-war home in Auburn, New York, where she lived the rest

of her life as community activist, humanitarian, and suffragist. She died of pneumonia on March 10, 1913, and was buried with military honors at Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn.