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Another Kind of Glory: Black Participation and Its Consequences in the Campaign for Confederate Mobile

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IN RECENT YEARS the literate public has rediscovered the story of African American military participation in the Civil War. The popular success of the film *Glory* is only one indication of this trend, which has been prevalent among scholars as well. The tone of this writing is often upbeat, celebrating the achievements of the two hundred thousand African Americans who served in the armed forces. The influential volumes of *Freedom: A Documentary History*, for example, emphasize the political effectiveness of black military service in pushing a reluctant North toward racial equality.[1] Joseph Glatthaar's important study of African American participation, *Forged in Battle*, highlights the movement of white officers toward relatively enlightened racial views.[2] In contemporary writing on the Civil War, the prevalence of the self-emancipation theme has given black military service particular saliency. As Peter Kolchin recently observed, joining the Union army was the "most direct and obvious way" by which African Americans helped secure their own freedom.[3]

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[1] See especially Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *The Black Military Experience*, ser. 2 of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867* (New York, 1982).

[2] Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York, 1990).

[3] Peter Kolchin, "Slavery and Freedom in the Civil War South," in *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand*, ed. James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper Jr. (Columbia, S.C., 1998), 244.

This positive reappraisal is clearly overdue, but it obscures the more problematic dimensions of African American military participation. Battle between ex-slaves and their masters often degenerated into remorseless brutality. The Confederates were primarily responsible for this trend, but African American soldiers made choices to elevate the level of violence as well. Scholars have occasionally noted a tendency toward harsh treatment of Confederate prisoners of war by African American troops but tend to move past it quickly without pondering its lasting implications. Likewise, historians tend to stress the positive aspects of service in the United States Colored Infantry (USCI) in terms of nurturing postwar political consciousness and leadership, but the conspicuous heroism of the USCI troops in battle often left a troublesome local legacy. Given the level of animosity between freedmen and Confederates, participation on the front line left African Americans venomous enemies on the scene. And even effective performance on the winning side yielded ambiguous results for the stature of black troops in the minds of white Union soldiers.

Consider, for instance, the operations culminating in the capture of Mobile, the last major campaign of the Civil War. African American involvement was substantial, with black troops representing perhaps one-fourth of the troops in the decisive capture of Fort Blakely. At the time, their role in that battle was both widely noted and controversial, but historians have paid limited attention since. Joseph Glatthaar's brief treatment of their conduct in *Forged in Battle* is perhaps representative. At Blakely, Glatthaar notes, "black units charged without orders," and after taking the fort they acted "not much different from the behavior of Forrest's command at Fort Pillow," the action that included the most notorious Confederate slaughter of surrendering black troops.[4] De-

[4] Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 158.

spite Glatthaar's arresting observation, scholars have scarcely examined black participation at Blakely beyond stressing the valor of the troops.[5] Whatever happened in these engagements, the racial dimension of the topic remains volatile, especially for those who preserve its history for the citizens of southern Alabama. In the mid-1990s a local historical society pamphlet provocatively asked, "Was There a Massacre by Hawkins' Black Division?"[6]

This battle prompted some of the graver allegations of misconduct by black soldiers during the Civil War, and the circumstances of the violence provide a useful perspective on the psychological impact of black military service for members of both races. The goal of this essay is to delineate the events outside Mobile and to explore how they influenced racial attitudes as the war gave way to peace. As various scholars have noted, participation in battle inevitably transformed the black soldiers, serving as a sanguinary public rite of passage from servile status to manhood. More revealing in this specific instance was the response of their white compatriots. In victory white Union soldiers extolled the performance of their black colleagues at Blakely, often with considerable effusion. But the effect proved fleeting, and racist assumptions regained ascendancy as Union soldiers turned their attention to pacification duties and eventual departure. Their Confederate opponents developed a different, more static memory that focused on the events after Fort Blakely's capitulation. Few other Union soldiers were targets of the blind hatred that Confederates held for

[5] The basics of black participation in the battle are provided in Chester G. Hearn, *Mobile Bay and the Mobile Campaign: The Last Great Battles of the Civil War* (Jefferson, N.C., 1993); Noah Andre Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War* (Boston, 1998), 396–408; and Arthur W. Bergeron Jr., *Confederate Mobile* (Jackson, Miss., 1991), 173–92. In general, African American involvement in this last major confrontation of the war has received limited attention from historians.

[6] Roger B. Hansen and Norman A. Nicolson, *The Siege of Blakeley and the Campaign of Mobile* (Spanish Fort, Ala., 1995), 41–43. The inflammatory section title aside, the pamphlet's treatment of the subject is fairly reasonable, if brief.

black soldiers, the dimensions of which diminished little over time. In Mobile this persistent loathing fueled the violence that shook the city after surrender, as African Americans sought to make real the wartime promise of expanded rights. Thus participation of blacks on the Union side, precisely because it was so influential in the fall of the city, left an inflammatory local legacy as the region moved into Reconstruction.

The struggle for Mobile has received limited attention from scholars for several reasons. Compared to the decisive events farther east, Sherman's progress through the southern heartland and Lee's eventual surrender at Appomattox, the Mobile campaign was of secondary military significance. Admiral Farragut's capture of the forts at the mouth of Mobile Bay in August 1864 had eliminated the city's role as a port. Still, as the war approached its final season, Mobile was one of the South's last strongholds, the gateway to an untouched plantation hinterland. For Union strategists the city represented a major target, and Ulysses S. Grant himself expressed irritation over the delays in mounting an offensive. As Gen. E. R. S. Canby pulled together units from throughout the Gulf region in the winter of 1865, his force of about forty-five thousand men insured that the Union attackers would enjoy a large advantage in numbers. The Confederates had a garrison of nine thousand men, with several thousand more in the vicinity, and years of diligent preparation had provided the Confederates with extensive defenses. Canby decided to bypass the huge fortifications surrounding Mobile by crossing to the eastern shore, then working his way to the less defended rear of the city.

The road to Fort Blakely was a difficult one, and distinctive circumstances contributed to the prominence of black troops in the Mobile offensive. Members of the United States Colored Infantry assigned to Canby's command represented more than 5,500 effectives in some nine infantry regiments,

plus several support regiments of engineers and garrison troops. Canby mobilized one of the largest concentrations of black soldiers in the western theater, and to assemble this force he drew on outposts throughout the region, a step that marked a drastic change in the status of these troops. Serving in segregated units under white officers, African American troops had previously been assigned to manual labor or routine duty. They were generally dispersed in small units, often in unhealthy locations. Most had not seen battle for many months, and the consequent morale problems were severe. One USCI officer complained of the slow pace of black recruitment and attributed it to the labor needs and political pull of Louisiana planters.[7] Within the ranks the frustration was far worse. At Fort Barrancas, outside abandoned Pensacola, Sgt. William Barcroft was brought up on charges for refusing to do further labor. He told his superior officer that he had enlisted to fight, not work, and that he would rather be arrested than comply. Another sergeant was court-martialed for inciting a mutiny after a white officer physically disciplined a private to excess.[8] Exacerbating these issues was the sense of how much was at stake in the struggle that black soldiers witnessed from the sidelines. One USCI man wrote of the stream of runaways fleeing into Barrancas, women bearing scarred backs and tales of woe, and he vowed to fight on until slavery died.[9] Another soldier at the fort, Sgt. J. J. Harris, expressed more personal motivations. He repeatedly requested a "small favor" of his commanding gen-

[7] E. D. Strunk to D. Ullmann, March 5, 1864, Series 159, Generals' Papers and Books, Records Relating to Wars, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94 (hereafter cited as RG 94), National Archives, Washington, D.C. (NA).

[8] Court Martial of William Barcroft, September 6, 1864, Series 15, Court Martial Case Files, Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Army), Record Group 153, NA; Court Martial of St. Wm. D. Mayo, [1864], Letters Received, Series 12, Correspondence, RG 94.

[9] William H. Watson to Editor, *Christian Recorder*, March 18, 1865, in *A Grand Army of Black Men: Letters from African-American Soldiers in the Union Army, 1861–1865*, ed. Edwin Redkey (New York, 1992), 154.

eral, the loan of a detachment to liberate his extended family. "Sir," he urged, "it isnt more than three or four hours trubel," suggesting that long service in the Union cause had surely earned him some indulgence.[10]

Dissension largely resulted from the idleness of garrison duty. Time in camp wore especially heavily on the predominantly illiterate USCI troops, but the prospect of actual combat energized them. Many had never seen serious battle, and General Canby certainly had arduous service in mind for the taking of Mobile. He gathered most of his African American troops at Barrancas as part of a larger invasion force under Gen. Frederick Steele. Canby planned to send Steele's command northward through an almost uninhabited forest. Meanwhile, farther west Canby's main force would work its way northward along Mobile Bay supported by the navy, and the two columns would reunite for the final assault on the city's fortifications.

About half of the infantry in Steele's column was African American, a conspicuous concentration. Confederate officers monitored their presence and exchanged exaggerated accounts of USCI numbers as the campaign proceeded.[11] Previous events in the area magnified the explosive significance of their participation. Steele's first objective was the village of Pollard, Alabama, in an area that a USCI regiment had raided some months before. Confederate general St. John Liddell recalled that the black soldiers had fought well, but he emphasized the brutality of the operation: "They devastated the country, burning houses and stripping the people, women and children, of every means of subsistence. They

[10] Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom's Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War* (New York, 1998), 140; J. J. Harris to D. Ullmann, November 26, 1864, Series 159, Generals' Papers and Books, RG 94.

[11] St. Jno. R. Liddell to D. H. Maury, March 11, 1865, R. Taylor to Gov. T. H. Watts, March 12, 1865, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and the Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C., 1880–1901) (hereafter cited as *O.R.*), ser. 1, vol. 49, pt. 1, p. 1050.

often ravished the women." This latter claim, whatever its basis, suggests the inflammatory psychological impact of the appearance of black Union troops.[12] Given Liddell's personal attitude, it is not surprising that when Union detachments subsequently fell into his hands, "not a Negro surrendered or was taken prisoner."[13] The general's statement hints at the execution of black captives and at his personal lack of concern for their fate. Liddell himself would command the main defensive fortification before Mobile at Fort Blakely, which suggested that the battle to come would be without quarter.

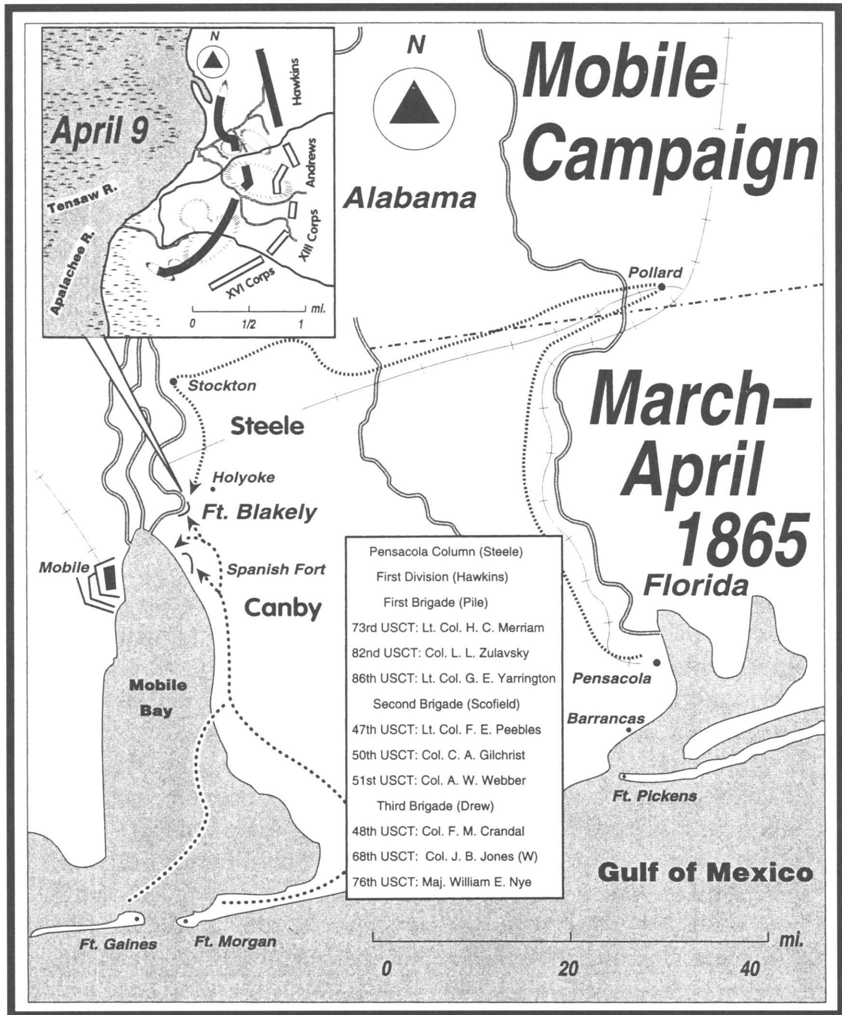
After weeks of preparation Steele's force started from the vicinity of Pensacola on March 20. Hindered by heavy rains and quicksand, the march was unbearably slow, covering only a few miles a day. Soldiers had to build miles of log "corduroy" roads on which the command's two hundred–plus wagons could move. Despite these troubles, Union cavalry operating in advance of Steele's infantry had success. They destroyed sections of a crucial railroad into Mobile and intercepted two trains. They also captured without bloodshed a carload of Confederate troops, one of several detachments to fall into their hands.[14] As they entered the Union camp these southern captives were conscious of the interracial character of their opponents. One claimed that the Confederates would soon have two hundred thousand black soldiers of their own. Showing confidence in the true allegiances of black southerners, a Union sergeant smilingly replied that he hoped it was true.[15] The South's slim remaining

[12] Report of Col. Jacob G. Vail, 17th Indiana (Mounted) Infantry, April 7, 1865, *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 49, pt. 1, pp. 449–50. The official reports on both sides of the raid make no allegation of misconduct toward civilians.

[13] St. John Richardson Liddell, *Liddell's Record,* ed. Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes (Baton Rouge, 1985), 191–92.

[14] A. B. Spurlind to C. C. Andrews, [1865], C. C. Andrews and Family Papers (hereafter cited as Andrews Papers), Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul (MHS).

[15] Thomas Brainard Marshall Diary, March 30, 1865, Civil War Collection, MIC 17, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus.



From *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War, 1862–1865* by Noah Andre Trudeau. Copyright © 1998 by Noah Andre Trudeau. By permission of Little, Brown, and Company (Inc.).

hope of victory was at stake, and the loyalties of prospective black troops were much on the minds of both armies.

Having completed the northward leg of the journey, Steele's column turned west toward Mobile Bay and encoun-

tered increasing opposition as they neared Fort Blakely. By now they were deep in desolate forest, encountering isolated Native Americans, presumably holdouts from the removals decades before.[16] Steele's men were again obliged to corduroy roads. Plans for resupply by river had miscarried, and with little prospect of living off the land, soldiers received orders to subsist on half rations, then on even less.[17] The diminishing supplies had to be split with a substantial number of prisoners and runaway slaves. Some malcontents reportedly predicted that they would have to abandon their artillery and supply trains in the swamps. Gen. John P. Hawkins, commanding the USCI division under Steele, redoubled efforts to prevent straggling and other breakdowns in troop discipline. Before the march began, Hawkins had prohibited the procurement of food by individual soldiers, even by purchase, on pain of trial. Hawkins characterized these orders as "very strict," and they were apparently more rigid than those issued to the rest of the command.[18] Now Hawkins added that if rations failed, Union officers must quickly send out forage parties of cavalry to secure adequate food. "If this cannot be done," Hawkins wrote, "general theft and outrage will prevail on our line of march."[19] Hawkins's comments suggest a heightened anxiety about controlling his troops' behavior, likely a reflection of the dangerous racial implications of any breach.

Hawkins's command faced added scrutiny, but they acquitted themselves well. Although they had yet to engage in the combat for which they hungered, the USCI troops functioned effectively on the difficult march. One chaplain thought they complained and swore less and demonstrated

[16] John W. Schlagle Diary, March 29, 1865, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis (IHS).
[17] Report of Surg. Plyn A. Willis, 48th Ohio Infantry, Chief Medical Officer, April 15,1865, *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 49, pt. 1, p. 285.
[18] General Orders Number Fifteen, March 6, 1865, General Frederick Steele Papers, M0191 (hereafter cited as Steele Papers), Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California.
[19] J. P. Hawkins to J. F. Lacy, March 27, 1865, Steele Papers.

more energy than their white comrades. He also thought they ransacked the few homes they encountered with less abandon, a sign of at least relative restraint. Furthermore, the chaplain had "never witnessed such a friendly feeling between white and colored troops."[20] This friendly feeling did not prevent one group of white troops from raiding the supply train of their black comrades, their own being too well guarded. "We helped ourself to the Darkie's coffee, hardtack & sowbelly much to their chagrin and sorrow," one soldier recalled.[21]

While Steele's interracial command labored inland toward the city, Canby's main army near Mobile Bay had an easier time of it. Most of the predominantly white force found the scene idyllic. Soldiers had been camped out on the beach for days, feasting, collecting shells, and watching porpoises play.[22] "The oysters were plenty," one wrote, "nothing much to do but gather, cook and eat them."[23] The men anticipated victory, confident that the war would soon end. They were, however, conscious of the racial composition of their army and somewhat uneasy at the consequences. One Wisconsin soldier wrote home that "Most of our boys are beginning to take on a *smoked Yankee* appearance occasioned by sitting in the smoke of a pitch pine fire, some of them are seriously thinking that they will be taken for darkie soldiers and no quarter given."[24] One might take this for levity save for the assurance of its literal truth. White troops understood the prospects their comrades faced if captured, and they feared sharing the same dire fate by mistake.

[20] Report of C. W. Buckley, April 1, 1865, Letters Received, Series 12, Correspondence, RG 94.

[21] George P. Boswell to C. C. Andrews, March 12, 1866, Andrews Papers.

[22] Ferdinand Kurz, "Reminiscences" (n.d.), unpublished English translation typescript, p. 15, Wis Mss 84S, Archives, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison (SHSW).

[23] John Kingsley Wood Diary, March 11, 1865, MHS.

[24] Byron T. Smith to "Mother," March 12, 1865, Byron J. Smith Civil War Letters, Wis Mss 134S, SHSW.

Canby's army headed by land and water toward the main Confederate fortifications, Spanish Fort and Fort Blakely, which were several miles apart on the eastern approach to the city at the head of Mobile Bay. Canby's troops met limited resistance as they moved north, but they had several encounters with escaping slaves who welcomed their arrival. An older woman greeted the column "half-crazed with joy," dancing, crying, and laughing all at once. Calling down the Lord's blessing, she urged the men on to Mobile to liberate her people. One soldier described being both amused and moved by her transports, wondering how much he and his Union comrades merited the enthusiastic welcome.[25] Canby's army received aid from some runaway slaves, including one woman who warned of land mines buried on the road before them.[26] Hundreds of slaves and captured USCI soldiers had escaped from labor on the Confederate fortifications, and they were only too happy to provide relevant information. Not all of these meetings were so pleasant, however. In one unfortunate instance sentries shot a jittery escapee who did not heed an order to halt, to the regret of one of the officers present who wrote defensively on the episode at length.[27] Despite such incidents, most encounters with runaways were positive, and these interactions inevitably influenced the attitudes of Canby's soldiers toward their black military comrades as well.

After a slow transit up the coast of Mobile Bay, Canby's forces began investment of Spanish Fort on March 27 and settled in to await Steele's arrival from the northeast. On April 1 the hungry column from Pensacola met resistance at the hamlet of Holyoke but soon forced a Confederate retreat to Fort Blakely. Steele's men followed closely on their heels,

[25] A. F. Sperry, *History of the 33d Iowa Infantry Volunteer Regiment, 1863–6* (Des Moines, 1866), 129–30. Other soldiers noted the woman as well; see Kurz, "Reminiscences," 16.
[26] *New York Herald*, April 9, 1865.
[27] H. Judd to C. C. Andrews, March 30, 1866, Andrews Papers.

invested the fort by April 3, and established direct contact with Canby's column the following day. Once rejoined, the Union forces formed an extended siege line encompassing both Confederate defenses. At Blakely, the larger fort, Steele's African American troops would occupy the extreme right of the Union position for the duration of the battle.[28] Confederate general Liddell noted the approach of "Steele with his negroes." To stiffen his men's resolve, Liddell announced that the force before them was "composed principally" of blacks who would not "spare any of our men" if captured.[29] The inflammatory statement certainly stoked racial hatred, but given the odds against the Confederates, such scare tactics proved double-edged. As defeat loomed, the prospect of mass execution became increasingly tangible, undermining the resilience of the southern defenders.

As the siege intensified, a personalized bitterness took hold between the contending forces, now almost in arm's reach of one another. One USCI sergeant described a quasi-duel that ensued after he managed to frighten away a Confederate sentry long enough to appropriate some of the man's food. The two subsequently exchanged insults and gunfire for most of a day.[30] This sort of animus proved typical. As one Confederate soldier recalled of the decisive battle, "I took deliberate aim every time I fired and must have killed $50,000 worth of Negroes that day."[31] The venom Confederates held toward their black adversaries was so obvious that even white Union soldiers noticed it. One of them observed that the "darkies" suffered most under enemy fire. He

[28] Report of Maj. Gen. Edward R. S. Canby, U.S. Army, June 1, 1865, *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 49, pt. 1, pp. 93–96.

[29] C. C. Andrews, *History of the Campaign of Mobile: Including the Cooperative Operations of Gen. Wilson's Cavalry in Alabama*, 2d ed. (New York, 1889), 120 n. 1; H. L. D. Lewis to Brigadier General Thomas, April 1, 1865, *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 49, pt. 2, p. 1188.

[30] Watson to Editor, 156–57.

[31] Ben H. Bounds, *Ben H. Bounds, 1840–1911, Methodist Minister and Prominent Mason: Biography and Highlights from His Early Life and Civil War Memoirs*, ed. Charles L. Bounds (Columbus, Ohio, 1962), 20.

reported rumors that they suffered artillery attacks with chains and railroad iron, projectiles he thought distinctly unchivalrous. These weapons, he concluded, were the southern means of venting their hatred for those who "dared fight for their freedom and their families' freedom."[32] Other white Union observers perceived the hostility toward this "poor persecuted race" and responded with sympathy. One soldier from the Pensacola column marveled at the USCI troops' eagerness to charge Fort Blakely. In praising their performance he too apparently started to write the word *Darkies*, then substituted a more respectful term.[33] This revision might suggest a dawning consciousness that denigrating language no longer suited the realities he was describing.

The attackers had a large advantage in numbers, but the Confederates were supplied from across the bay and well entrenched. Union troops suffered from heavy enemy artillery fire until they were able to dig in and reduce their exposure. For several days Generals Steele and Hawkins feared Confederate counterattacks in their sector, well after superiors thought such possibilities likely.[34] Union soldiers gradually dug their way closer to the defensive lines, while the Union navy became increasingly effective in targeting the Confederate fortifications. Spanish Fort was the weaker of the two positions, and as the defensive situation became urgent the Confederates placed slave laborers in exposed positions under enemy fire. According to the Confederate commander, most of the officers' servants actively participated in the defense.[35] He said they volunteered, but their oppo-

[32] "Frank" to "Susie," April 9, 1865, in Frank Ross McGregor, *Dearest Susie: A Civil War Infantryman's Letters to His Sweetheart*, ed. Carl E. Hatch (New York, 1971), 112.
[33] F. W. Bolton to "Friend Juiliet," April 5, 1865, Sarah Ratliff Papers, IHS.
[34] P. J. Osterhaus to Frederick Steele, April 3, 4, 1865, J. P. Hawkins to J. F. Lacey, April 5, 1865, William A. Pile to S. B. Furguson, April 5, 1865, all in Steele Papers.
[35] Report of Gen. Randall Lee Gibson, April 16, 1865, Randall Lee Gibson Papers, Mss. 2402, 2412, 2423, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge.

nents apparently doubted it. One Union soldier wrote that "nearly half the cannoners were negroes," adding that he was "afraid some of them got hurt."[36] From what they had seen of the preferences of runaway slaves, northerners could scarcely credit the notion of uncoerced service for the southern cause, even if it had some basis in fact.

Late in the afternoon of April 8, after days of intense pressure, Union forces made a decisive breakthrough at Spanish Fort. They breached the Confederate position at a crucial sector and then halted for the evening, perhaps not realizing the scope of their success. That night most of Spanish Fort's defenders managed to escape through causeways connecting them with Blakely. At dawn Union forces entered a mostly empty Spanish Fort while Confederate commanders puzzled over their next move. After considerable debate they withdrew the hard-pressed Spanish Fort evacuees immediately to Mobile. The Confederate command expected an imminent Union move against the city, but it proved a fatal misconception. Canby instead turned the bulk of the Union army toward Fort Blakely. Having watched the capture of Spanish Fort nearby, its now dispirited garrison of under four thousand men faced overwhelming odds and contemplated their officers' warnings of dire prospects that would follow capture by black troops.[37]

At Blakely the nine African American regiments occupying the right wing had waited impatiently, hearing the sounds of battle in the distance, but they were under orders not to attack until Spanish Fort fell. Many feared that the Blakely garrison would evacuate without a fight, depriving them of the opportunity to see combat. Rumors circulated that perpetrators of the Fort Pillow massacre were in the defenses; these reports, although apparently incorrect, gave

[36] Jas. K. Newton to "Mother," April 2, 1865, Abel D. Newton Papers, Wis Mss FW, SHSW.
[37] After the battle General Liddell was critical of the decision to send the Spanish Fort evacuees to Mobile; see Liddell, *Liddell's Record,* 195–96.

the prospect of battle a peculiar relish.[38] One officer recalled his men's "fast growing disposition to 'pitch in'—and not waste another day."[39] This inclination became crucial in the decisive battle on April 9, which by coincidence was the very day Lee surrendered at Appomattox.

The main advance was scheduled to commence at a signal to be given around five o'clock in the afternoon, late enough for reinforcements from Spanish Fort to be at hand. At about 4 P.M. Union general P. J. Osterhaus, Canby's chief of staff, ordered a small detachment forward on the right side of the line. His intention was to clear out the Confederate rifle pits below the main defenses, but in the course of giving instructions Osterhaus reportedly used some offhand phrase to the effect that "it was time to see if the Niggers would fight."[40] This taunt apparently enraged the officers and men, who promptly surged forward. Several regiments joined them, perhaps mistaking the preliminary operation for the projected main assault. One USCI commander observed that "it was too much for officers or men to stand still and see *any* portion of the line advancing, and the advance when begun soon became general along the entire front."[41]

After taking the smaller trenches, the attackers found themselves exposed to enemy fire from above. What precisely happened next is unclear, but discussion reportedly transpired among the USCI officers of the need for a speedy breakthrough so that the white Union troops nearby would not monopolize the credit for eventual victory.[42] On the ex-

[38] John Scott, comp., *Story of the Thirty-Second Iowa Infantry Volunteers* (Nevada, Iowa, 1896), 340. As far as can be determined by the author, none of the infantry defending Fort Blakely were actually involved in the capture of Fort Pillow, which was taken by General Forrest's cavalry.

[39] D. Densmore to C. C. Andrews, August 30, 1866, Andrews Papers.

[40] Charles W. Drew to C. C. Andrews, March 24, 1866, Andrews Papers.

[41] H. Scofield to C. C. Andrews, April 1, 1866, Andrews Papers.

[42] Henry C. Merriam, "The Capture of Mobile," in *War Papers: Read before the Commandery of the State of Maine, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States* (1908; reprint, Wilmington, N.C., 1992), 3:246.

treme right of the Union line, brigade commander Col. Charles Drew apparently decided that his energized men could take the fortifications—by themselves. A Union general concluded that Drew might have been "impelled by the enthusiasm of the moment" to order a charge, this at least half an hour before the main assault.[43] After the war one of Drew's subordinates, Lt. Col. Daniel Densmore, recalled his "great surprise" at seeing attackers rush by "like mad." He was even more startled to find his own troops joining in as Drew ordered men out of their trenches piecemeal. Densmore "*could not* comprehend the idea of the order, so entirely different from the plan and otherwise so inexplicable."[44] The reserves behind them were still lounging about in camp, with no idea that battle was imminent. Nevertheless, Drew shouted for the regiment to follow, and up Densmore and his men went.

Two regiments, the 68th and 76th USCI, made the attempt, battling their way through tripwires, wooden stakes, and various other obstructions. A few men actually made it to the redoubt on top, only to be killed immediately. A small detachment found cover just below the crest while the remainder worked their way to the right along the bluffs close by the water, hoping to get beyond the entrenchments. Taking shelter in a ravine, survivors counted nineteen officers and sixty-five enlisted men among them. "Officers in too great a proportion," one observer commented, the implication being that black enlisted men again had borne the brunt of enemy fire.[45] With such diminished numbers, the men concluded that they would not be able to hold the position if they took it, so they decided to stay put. They fired their guns and cheered in the hope of hurrying reinforcements, but none were in sight. "It began to look as though

[43] Andrews, *Campaign of Mobile,* 196.
[44] Densmore to Andrews.
[45] Andrews, *Campaign of Mobile,* 197.

we had been a little hasty in assuming the entire battle," Densmore concluded.[46] Descending the hill for reinforcements, Colonel Drew urged other commanders to join in with no success in the face of contrary orders. After loosing a "tirade of abuse" at his fellow USCI officers, Drew reluctantly signaled his men to withdraw.[47] The detachment got away with surprisingly few casualties, given that they were too angry to move very fast. Fifteen or so, isolated below the main fortification, never got the word to retreat, and they remained in position until rescued by the main assault.[48]

Drew's fellow officers ruefully concluded that his advance was "a little premature," but the maladroit move arguably provided a useful diversion.[49] Blakely's defenders were unsettled by so attractive a target—and the attackers' obvious zeal. One southerner recalled that in his eagerness to shoot the trapped men he jumped on top of his battlements, nearly getting himself killed in the process.[50] Racial animosity likely encouraged the Confederates to overreact to the premature assault. Massed above the black troops, they provided Union artillery a fine mark.[51] More important, the defensive concentration weakened adjacent sections of the Confederate line. One surrendering Confederate officer almost apologized to his captors for his feeble resistance, explaining that one of his regiments had been sent to oppose the blacks.[52] A Union officer described entrenched Confederates surrendering to a mere skirmish line of whites, within eyesight of the USCI assault.[53]

When the general advance finally began, after 5:30 P.M.,

[46] Densmore to Andrews.
[47] Report of Col. Charles A. Gilchrist, 50th USCI, April 13, 1865, *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 49, pt. 1, p. 294.
[48] Densmore to Andrews.
[49] H. Scofield to C. C. Andrews, October 5, 1866, Andrews Papers.
[50] Bounds, *Ben H. Bounds,* 19; Hearn, *Mobile Bay and the Mobile Campaign,* 192–95.
[51] A. Rowse to C. C. Andrews, March 7, 1866, Andrews Papers.
[52] S. T. Busey to C. C. Andrews, April 3, 1866, Andrews Papers.
[53] "Summary of Operations of the 83rd O[hio]. V[olunteer]. I[nfantry].," Andrews Papers.

the USCI troops joined their comrades in a race to the top. The enthusiasm was intense, one general recalled, as the men rushed forward with a yell, firing their guns to encourage those before them. Within minutes the black troops approached the top, the dread cry "Remember Fort Pillow" on their lips.[54] In the face of this assault, resistance on the defenders' left quickly collapsed. Some Confederate prisoners blamed defeat on "the weakness or want of bravery upon the troops from Mississippi," that is, those directly facing the USCI onslaught.[55] Remembering their commanders' warnings that capture by blacks meant death, the redoubt's terrified defenders fled toward the white Union soldiers entering the works on their right. One attacker recounted that he had never seen men so frightened, begging for their lives. Among those trapped in the redoubt, unable to escape, the panic was even more severe; they "crowded together in a little space & lay down upon the ground," pleading for protection. The abject display evoked a certain grim satisfaction among the victors. For days thereafter in camp, USCI men would repeat with pleasure the order of one surrendering Confederate officer: "Lay low & mow de ground! De d—d niggers are coming."[56]

Some of the Union officers later belittled such fears, but the captives inside Blakely were indeed at risk. Alone among the Union forces, USCI troops had suffered severely under fire, and some had revenge in mind when they entered the redoubt above them. Confederate eyewitnesses later alleged atrocities, stories that would circulate far and wide. One man claimed that more men were killed after surrender than in the battle, adding that "had it not been for the white Federal troops and the white officers of the Negro regiment, I would

[54] H. Scofield to C. C. Andrews, April 1, 1866, Andrews Papers.

[55] *New Orleans Times,* April 16, 1865; Hansen and Nicholson, *Siege of Blakeley,* 7, map facing p. 1.

[56] Scofield to Andrews, April 1, 1866.

not be here writing this incident."[57] He reported that a Union officer shielded him from a menacing black soldier and claimed that the officer eventually shot several of his own men. These accounts seem exaggerated, but some Union sources corroborate that the violence was nearly uncontrollable. Colonel Densmore conceded that "for a time matters seemed serious," noting that two Union officers stepped protectively in front of the surrendering Confederates, only to be wounded by their own men, one fatally.[58]

Sgt. Walter Chapman of the 51st USCI presented a fearful version of what happened. He wrote that "as soon as our niggers caught sight of the retreating figures of the rebs the very devil could not hold them[;] their eyes glittered like serpents and with yells & howls like hungry wolves" they charged the Confederate works. The defenders, in terror, fled in all directions. "The niggers did not take a prisoner," he concluded; "they killed all they took to a man."[59] Chapman's obvious bias notwithstanding, it is difficult to dismiss his eyewitness account of matters in his vicinity. A wholesale slaughter could not have occurred, for the overwhelming majority of Confederate captives survived. The USCI men safely conveyed hundreds of prisoners to the rear. Still, the evidence does suggest that some of the soldiers were reluctant to take prisoners.[60]

If unedifying, the victors' conduct testifies to the extraor-

[57] Bounds, *Ben H. Bounds*, 19.

[58] Densmore to Andrews. For a discussion of the dispute over alleged atrocities, see Trudeau, *Like Men of War*, 396–408.

[59] W. Chapman to Parents, April 11, 1865, Walter A. Chapman Papers (hereafter cited as Chapman Papers), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

[60] The Confederate casualty numbers appear imprecise. By one account the engagements at Spanish Fort and Blakely resulted in only 73 Confederate dead and 320 wounded, with approximately 3,700 captured (Hearn, *Mobile Bay and the Mobile Campaign*, 199). After the surrender at Blakely, General Hawkins reported that his USCI division captured 230 Confederate troops, which would suggest that the vast majority of those who fell into his men's hands survived (John P. Hawkins to J. F. Lacey, April 9, 1865, *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 49, pt. 2, p. 306).

dinary passion with which the African American troops engaged in battle. One officer reported that some of his men actually wept on being held in reserve during the final attack.[61] Here was their opportunity to confront the slaveholders, the chance they had long sought. A Union colonel recalled that after the assault, "a happier set of men than the colored soldiers were never seen," embracing each other at the top of the battlements. Many sang "The Battle Cry of Freedom," and others waved flags about in their enthusiasm.[62] One chaplain reported that twenty minutes after his regiment was inside the fort, a spontaneous prayer group was on their knees.[63] The soldiers believed they had proven themselves in battle, an assessment shared by their officers. One concluded the assault proved that "the former slaves of the South cannot be excelled as soldiers."[64]

The Union forces had indeed won a decisive victory at Blakely. Within days Confederates evacuated Mobile, and soon thereafter came news of Lee's surrender. Blakely proved to be the last major engagement of the Civil War, and in the weeks to come the victors had time to ponder the implications. For the black troops the mood was one of wholesale triumph, an exaltation that spread throughout the black population of Mobile. As one white Mobile woman complained, "*Sambo* boasts that the rebels could not be conquered until he took the field."[65] For their white Union comrades, however, the situation was more complex. Having witnessed the prominence of African American troops in the victory, the white soldiers gave thought to the racial implica-

[61] Report of Col. Hiram Scofield, 47th USCI, April 11, 1865, *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 49, pt. 1, p. 291.

[62] Scofield to Andrews, April 1, 1866.

[63] Report of C. W. Buckley, May 1, 1865, Letters Received, Series 12, Correspondence, RG 94.

[64] Report of Col. Charles A. Gilchrist, 294.

[65] Kate Cumming, *Kate: The Journal of a Confederate Nurse*, ed. Richard Barksdale Harwell (1866; reprint, Baton Rouge, 1998), 307.

tions of the bravery and skill demonstrated by the USCI. The midwesterners who composed Canby's army were probably among the more racist members of the Union army, but in diaries and letters home they reflectively pondered the performance of their fellow soldiers as peace loomed.

One possible criticism proved strikingly absent—few of the white soldiers complained about the mistreatment of Confederate captives by their comrades. By 1865 northern soldiers' attitudes had moved some distance toward hard war, and they were not easily shocked.[66] The circumstances surrounding the battle sharpened this tendency. For most Union troops the siege of Mobile had been their first exposure to land mines, of which the Confederates placed a reported nine thousand.[67] The weapon apparently unnerved the attackers at Blakely: one soldier wrote a two-page description of a "land torpedo," complete with illustration.[68] These devices infuriated Union troops, especially because they often inflicted injury among those tending the wounded after the battle. One man called them "barbarous" and declared that their use relieved him of any obligation to deal honorably with prisoners. He added that the whole army agreed with him.[69] Another account expressed anger that some Confederate officers refused to reveal the location of the mines after the battle.[70] Instead, Confederate prisoners were forced to help locate and explode these weapons, often under the supervision of African American troops. Union troops frequently commented on the appropriateness of this

[66] On this topic see Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861–1865* (New York, 1995).

[67] "Ned" to "Sallie," April 16, 1865, Edward E. Davis Letters, Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City.

[68] "Description of a Land Torpedo at Blakely," [April 1865], Eldridge B. Platt Letters (hereafter cited as Platt Letters), Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[69] T. Evans to Parents, April 10, 1865, Thomas L. Evans Papers (hereafter cited as Evans Papers), Archives and Special Collections, Eastern Washington University.

[70] J. T. Woods, *Services of the Ninety-Sixth Ohio Volunteers* (Toledo, Ohio, 1874), 123–24.

arrangement, and if it humiliated their former foes, so much the better. The subsequent news of Lincoln's assassination intensified this inclination toward severity. One man heard his officers vow never to take another prisoner.[71] Upon hearing the rumor, one veteran simply noted that "we ought to kill every Reb in our hands."[72]

Given this context, white Union troops were unmoved by the talk of abuse toward surrendering prisoners at Blakely. Instead, they generally dismissed these atrocity reports as a by-product of commendable zeal. As one Iowa soldier observed, "The Negro brigade fought like tigers . . . and after the rebs had surrendered, the darky officers . . . had all they could do to keep from shooting them down." Rather than condemn the USCI troops, he asked, "Who can blame them?"[73] Another soldier recounted a similar report then immediately followed it with an enthusiastic account of black valor.[74] Walter Chapman, who alleged gross atrocities, concluded nonetheless that his troops were the best of soldiers.[75] Some of these accounts reflect nineteenth-century stereotypes of African American savagery, but under the circumstances white Union soldiers were in no mood to find fault. Moreover, some reports suggested that white units were also responsible for maltreating or shooting captives in the confusion of surrender.[76]

Experienced Union troops valued bravery in battle above all else, and by this standard the appraisal of African American performance was favorable. Of course, most survivors' accounts focused on their own roles in the battle, but the

[71] S. H. Glascow to Emma Glascow, April 22, 1865, Samuel Glascow Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines (SHSI).
[72] Cornelius Corwin Diary, April 25, 1865, Cornelius Corwin Papers, IHS.
[73] F. J. Patterson Diary, April 10, 1865, SHSI.
[74] E. B. Platt to "Father and Mother," April 10, 1865, Platt Letters.
[75] W. Chapman to Parents, April 11, 1865, W. Chapman to Brother, April 16, 1865, Chapman Papers.
[76] Charles S. Hills to C. C. Andrews, June 21, 1866, Andrews Papers.

comments made about the USCI were all but unanimously positive. Gen. C. C. Andrews observed that the black troops to his right "fought nobly."[77] "The darkies faltered not," one unit history commented, while another noted the marked gallantry of the black troops.[78] Decades later, a veteran of an Illinois regiment observed in his memoir that "were it even remotely" related to his story, "it would be a pleasure to tell of the magnificent courage of the colored troops in this engagement."[79] Similar observations echoed throughout the rank and file in widespread post-battle talk that the black soldiers behaved well.[80]

For example, after the victory some Iowa soldiers walked over the battlefield and viewed the redoubt the USCI had stormed. It was the best-defended portion of the Confederate line, with three rows of sharpened log stakes pointing outward, as well as head-high branches and other impediments designed to slow the attackers. The redoubt was among the most impregnable positions they had ever seen, and they marveled that anyone would dare to make the charge. The midwesterners came upon a USCI soldier, quite dark-skinned and showing "all the African fire and fervor." They asked him how he and his comrades could have overcome the obstructions. A ready reply came: "'Golly, mass'r. Nebber know dat ar brush-pile was dar.'" The soldiers perhaps exaggerated the "uncouth" English, but they wholly approved the soldierly zeal that the statement revealed.[81]

[77] C. C. Andrews to President Abraham Lincoln, April 13, 1865, *O.R.*, ser. 1, vol. 49, pt. 2, p. 349.
[78] Chester Barney, *Recollections of Field Service with the Twentieth Iowa Infantry Volunteers* (Davenport, Iowa, 1865), 309; Scott, *Story of the Thirty-Second Iowa*, 340. The former statement is by a non-eyewitness but based on veterans' testimony.
[79] B. C. Bryner, *Bugle Echoes: The Story of the Illinois 47th* (Springfield, Ill., 1905), 154.
[80] Thomas N. Stevens to "Carrie," April 10, 1865, in Thomas N. Stevens, *"Dear Carrie—": The Civil War Letters of Thomas N. Stevens*, ed. George M. Blackburn (Mount Pleasant, Mich., 1984), 309–10; Daniel Buchwalter, *Grandpa's Gone . . . : The Adventures of Daniel Buchwalter in the Western Army, 1862–1865*, ed. Jerry Frey (Shippensburg, Penn., 1998), 160.
[81] Sperry, *33d Iowa Infantry*, 151.

After years of war, it was difficult for veteran Union troops to devalue conspicuous courage, even in African American units. Some soldiers' accounts suggest that they were personally moved by the performance. The day after the Blakely assault, E. B. Platt wrote his family: "I don't want to hear any body run down the negrows for they cant any body doo any beter than they have here."[82] They charged first, he observed, from the worst position, and they had the strongest opposition to face. They nonetheless did their duty "right up to the handle," Platt thought. At least for the moment, racist expressions became less prevalent, and there were only scattered critical voices. Charles Musser, a forthrightly racist Iowan, thought he discerned some flaws. The "Niggars" fought well, he conceded, but only with white soldiers to "*lead and back them.*" On their own, Musser maintained, they were much too wild and reckless. In the excitement of battle they exposed themselves heedlessly to danger, "while we [whites] look out for our own Scalp and that of the enemy, too."[83] Although Musser's criticism had some point, it was more applicable to the USCI officers, who had responsibility for maintaining order among their troops. Nevertheless, his commentary implicitly conceded the valor of the African American units in a milieu that placed tremendous emphasis on physical bravery and equated it with manhood.

Encouraged by the favorable reports, some reflective observers also drew out the wider egalitarian implications of the campaign. A chaplain's victory sermon after Blakely described a struggle between "glorious heavenly liberty" and "hell born, hell bound slavery."[84] A soldier, after commenting on the black participation in Blakely, saw signs advertis-

[82] E. B. Platt to "Father and Mother," April 10, 1865, Platt Letters.
[83] Charles Musser to "Sister," May 25, 1865, in Charles Musser, *Soldier Boy: The Civil War Letters of Charles O. Musser, 29th Iowa*, ed. Barry Popchock (Iowa City, 1995), 208–10.
[84] George Wells, "Sermon on Victory at Blakely, April 1865," File 1865 April, SHSW.

ing slave sales as he marched into Mobile. Was it any wonder, he wrote to his parents, that divine retribution should visit such people?[85] Union soldiers frequently invoked an antislavery moral, often in ironic terms. A USCI officer recalled that he saw one of his men sharing a canteen with his former master, whom the black soldier had earlier threatened to kill on capture. The officer commented on the soldier's humanity that transcended the bitterness of their previous relationship.[86] One German American commented on the valor of the black troops, adding that some "who had formerly been slaves, recognized their former masters among the prisoners." This he considered the nicest part of their triumph.[87] Such antislavery sentiment was not as prevalent as the favorable comments on the USCI in battle, but it was by no means rare.

Ironically, the inept aggressiveness of the USCI officers helped African American troops solidify a reputation for heroism at Blakely and created a scenario in which black military service might have a transformative role in changing American attitudes toward race. Tens of thousands of their fellow Union soldiers were on hand to witness the USCI feats at Blakely, and everyone on the field could hear that the USCI took the lead in the first charge. In the glow of victory USCI bravery was widely acknowledged, and any blemishes in their performance were minimized. African American soldiers might have reasonably concluded that the performance bolstered their claims for citizenship, at least in the eyes of their comrades in arms. Instead, the achievement proved strikingly transient: if wartime circumstances forced white Union soldiers to question their racial prejudices, the situation changed quickly after the triumph at

[85] T. Evans to Parents, April 10, 15, 1865, Evans Papers.

[86] Scofield to Andrews, April 1, 1866.

[87] Kurz, "Reminiscences," 23.

Blakely. Even among the soldiers who participated in the campaign, its egalitarian implications were quickly overshadowed as peace brought new priorities to the victors.

After the collapse of Confederate resistance, Canby's forces entered Mobile and moved to the interior of Alabama to occupy former strongholds at Montgomery and Selma. As the last enemy forces surrendered in May, Union troops quickly settled into routine chores of keeping order. The military scene looked very different once southern whites began to resume nominal allegiance to the United States. Local white resistance to military authority was less pronounced in the cities than in the surrounding countryside, and the army turned its attention to the more pressing problem of implementing emancipation, which had resulted in a flood of former slaves to the sanctuary of the cities and army camps. Union troops confronted unwelcome legions of refugees. As one soldier wrote in May, the abolitionists had "caught the elephant" but lacked the "hay and oats to feed him."[88]

Just as emancipation was imposing additional responsibilities on the occupying forces, most white Union soldiers felt a growing disinclination to fulfill them. After the excitement of battle gave way to peacetime routine, most troops increasingly just wanted to collect their pay and go home. They had been away for years, and morale plummeted as spring wore into summer. The men's desire to rejoin their families overrode other considerations of duty. Drunkenness and fighting proliferated among the white troops stationed in various cities, often directed at African American soldiers or civilians. These problems were especially severe among those expecting to depart imminently. One soldier reported that he had never been so homesick and observed that it was "hard work

[88] Raymond Buker, comp., "Two Unwilling Soldiers: My Two Grandfathers and the Part They Played in the Civil War" (1980), unpublished typescript, p. 13, William Ault Civil War Papers, SC 2750, SHSW.

to be waiting to be muster[ed] out knowing it is coming soon and not knowing the exact time."[89] A regiment in Mobile, bumped from a transport ship at the last minute, attempted to force its way on and nearly faced court-martial. Moreover, the news that many of Canby's veterans would be sent to confront holdout Confederates in Texas outraged many. One soldier wrote that his unit would go in irons if it went at all.[90]

As tensions mounted, Union soldiers vented their frustrations on the black population that they were supposed to be supervising and protecting. Pacification duties included encouraging the restive former slaves to stay put if possible and work under contract as plantation laborers. In cities such as Mobile and Montgomery, the effort to deter migration of freedmen included harsh treatment. The experience of one Minnesota soldier demonstrates how postwar duties could bring out racial prejudice. Wyman Folsom had emerged from the Mobile campaign expressing antislavery views and breathing hostility toward traitors; Lincoln's death moved him to ponder mass slaughter. After a few months in the garrison at Selma, however, his attitude changed.[91] As the weather grew warm, he found himself in an "ugly mood." He accused officers of murdering loyal soldiers by keeping them in such an unhealthy climate, all in an effort to facilitate cotton speculation.[92] His acerbity also turned on black people, who were pouring into Selma "by the hundred."[93] Folsom's brother served as assistant provost marshal, charged with overseeing control of the refugee camp, and his stories moved Folsom to open dislike. "I will jump ten feet high and crack my heels . . . when I get out of this land of negroes. I am heartily sick of them," he wrote. He proclaimed them very

[89] Wyman Folsom to Parents, June 3, 1865, W. H. C. Folsom and Family Papers (hereafter cited as Folsom Papers), MHS.

[90] I. H. Rowland to Wife, August 1, 1865, Rowland-Shilliday Papers, IHS.

[91] Wyman Folsom to Parents, April 9, 26, May 8, 1865, Folsom Papers.

[92] Wyman Folsom to Parents, June 30, July 11, 1865, Folsom Papers.

[93] Wyman Folsom to Parents, May 13, 1865, Folsom Papers.

much degraded, concluding that they would not amount to anything without a master.[94]

Such problems proved especially severe at Mobile, where Union soldiers confronted an unwelcome flood of freedpeople into Alabama's major port. Oppressive practices toward the would-be migrants took shape quickly, and the policies intensified even after the Confederates surrendered. Before the end of April, Union officers conscripted hundreds of unemployed laborers for work on defensive fortifications. On May 17 one officer suggested that the army "arrest all vagrant colored men" and work them for a dollar a day. "Many of them," he complained, "have already been employed and have left and are now strolling about town."[95] A white resident commented appreciatively that "the negroes are kept in order[;] not a loiterer is to be seen, they keep them all employed & are going to establish work houses for the women." The sternness of the soldiers alarmed all the freedpeople, she concluded.[96] And the ex-slaves had good reason for alarm: over the next several months sentries killed several African Americans, including some women. The army soon established a pass system for ex-slaves that required them to demonstrate employment in order to move freely.[97] Thus Union soldiers increasingly found themselves confronting the freedpeople of Mobile in an adversarial rather than friendly context.

If circumstances encouraged northern soldiers to forget the exploits of their African American comrades in nearby

[94] Wyman Folsom to Parents, May 26, 1865, Folsom Papers.

[95] John C. Cobb to R. G. Custis, May 17, 1865, Letters Received, 13th Army Corps, Records of Army Corps (Civil War), Records of United States Army Continental Commands, Record Group 393, NA.

[96] Martha V. Schroeder to G. Schroeder, April 1865, Henry A. Schroeder Papers, Museum of Mobile.

[97] *Mobile Advertiser and Register,* October 20, 1865; Endorsement on "The Black Population of Mobile" to Secretary of War, October 24, 1865, Letters Relative to Military Discipline and Control, Series 22, Records of the Headquarters of the Army, Record Group 108, NA.

Fort Blakely, they did nothing to lessen the resentment expressed by the former Confederate defenders. Indeed, postwar developments reinforced them. Immediately after the surrender, black regiments assumed the duty of guarding Confederate captives on Ship Island. By all accounts the atmosphere was filled with open hostility between the two groups. One prisoner recalled that guards took great pleasure in shouting at them for infractions. Comments such as "Look out dar, white man, de bottom rail on top now" were reportedly commonplace.[98] Another Confederate recalled that he and his fellow prisoners spent much time plotting revenge in case they ever encountered their captors again.[99] The prisoners doubtless were inclined to exaggerate, but one white Union soldier noticed that there was "some old grudge to settle" between Confederates and their black captors. Stationed next to some Alabama prisoners, who were apparently mostly from planter families, the Union soldier saw tightly disciplined black troops acting with icy correctness. Crowing or taunting the prisoners was neither allowed nor even attempted. Still, one "could often hear statements of the deepest hate and vindictiveness from dusky lips when away from the line of guards." A person of evident antislavery sympathies, the Union soldier wondered what personal tragedies underlay this unsettling desire for "their captive masters' blood."[100]

White Mobilians responded in outrage and horror to tales of what had transpired at Blakely and stories of abuse against prisoners by the USCI. On returning to Mobile, one woman heard that "after the surrender, the negro troops acted like demons, and slaughtered our troops on all sides." Only after

[98] James Bradley, *The Confederate Mail Carrier. . . .* (Mexico, Mo., 1894), 225.
[99] Dennis Murphee Memoir, Blakely Vertical File, Local History and Genealogy Division, Mobile Public Library.
[100] Sperry, *33d Iowa Infantry*, 149.

white troops fired on them, she reported, did the black troops desist.[101] Such statements won wide credence among former Confederates. Beyond the memory of the "Yankee Fort Pillow," as one Confederate veteran termed it, other points of tension also arose.[102] Mobile's whites could hardly overlook the warm welcome that emancipated slaves gave the Union forces. The entry of African American soldiers into the city traumatized local whites, as did the subsequent recruitment of thousands of newly emancipated African Americans. One white woman wrote that it was "so humiliating to see them march by with such a *free air*" that it made her blood boil.[103] Another found the progress of USCI troops down Government Street "a sight calculated to strike horror" into her southern heart.[104] Still another white Mobile woman disparaged the black troops who serenaded freedwomen in a nearby home, reportedly in bawdy terms. This practice troubled her less, however, than their apparent musical threat to "Hang Jeff Davis from a Sour Apple Tree," which drove her to distraction.[105] The woman's bitter antagonism typified white Mobile's persistent attitude toward black soldiers.

For black soldiers military service had always been about racial equality as well as fighting slavery. With victory USCI participants wrapped themselves in the flag and emphasized their martial claim to full American citizenship. In the transformed peacetime landscape, however, these veterans found it difficult to parlay their wartime valor into political gains,

[101] Cumming, *Kate*, 306.

[102] Philip Daingerfield Stephenson, *The Civil War Memoir of Philip Daingerfield Stephenson, D.D.*, ed. Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes (Conway, Ark., 1995), 368.

[103] Kate Oliver to Starke H. Oliver, [April 25, 1865], Rice Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Special Collections Department, Mississippi State University Libraries.

[104] Russell E. Belous, ed., "The Diary of Ann Quigley," *Gulf States Historical Review* 4 (Spring 1989): 98.

[105] Kate Cumming, *Gleanings from Southland: Sketches of Life and Manners of the People of the South before, during, and after the War of Secession* (Birmingham, 1895), 258–59; Cumming, *Kate*, 307.

even safely symbolic ones near the scene of their greatest triumph. One grim episode illustrates a wider trend. The 1865 Fourth of July celebration degenerated into a second battle of Mobile over the rights of African Americans to claim public space in the city.

After Appomattox, Mobile's African American leaders sought to celebrate the emancipation of their community and assert a public presence. Independence Day seemed an appropriate occasion, and thousands of freedpeople turned out for a parade and rally in downtown Mobile. Symbolizing the African American community's pride in its soldiers, two USCI regiments led the procession down Royal Street. Following them were workingmen, "assorted as to their trades and callings" and bearing aloft the implements of their work, and a mass of children brought up the rear. Speakers gave several patriotic addresses in the downtown square, where a self-described white southern conservative "sympathized with their great joy" and later conceded the moderation of its expression.[106] They were, he opined, well behaved that day, and they certainly were not expecting trouble in the midst of their lovingly orchestrated ceremonials. Unfortunately, as the crowd proceeded to the edge of town for a picnic, trouble erupted among the white spectators.

Accounts of the episode conflict, but it seems that several of the white Union soldiers present resented the appropriation of the national flag by the multitude and began harassing the celebrants. The local conservative press gleefully claimed that there were "some heads broken" by the white troops, and a black newspaper agreed that Union soldiers were responsible for most of the insults and injuries.[107] To a striking extent, the Union participants in the recent campaign blamed their black comrades for the trouble. One Iowan observed that "the 'niggers' had a big time in town."

[106] *New Orleans Picayune,* July 9, 1865.

[107] *Mobile Tribune,* July 11, 1865; *New Orleans Tribune,* July 11, 1865.

They tried to "run the thing their own way," with black regiments acting as guards, but they came into conflict with white troops. The parade escort "scratched one or two [white] soldiers with their bayonets, and two or three of the 'nigs' were killed and thus ended the celebration." The account of fatalities was apparently exaggerated, but the soldier was correct that the freedpeople canceled their evening festivities "to prevent a serious disturbance."[108]

Other white Union troops saw things much the same way, blaming the black community for the troubles. One thought they were holding sway downtown.[109] A similar observation came from E. B. Platt, the soldier who had earlier lavished ungrammatical praise on his black comrades' heroism. Mobile's African Americans were "a litle biger than anybody else" on the Fourth, he wrote, adding that they had "several fights with the soldyers on account of being somewhat saucy threw the day."[110] Any gratitude Platt may have felt toward his comrades at Blakely apparently did not persist. Platt was not present at the rally, so his observations were derived from the word of mouth in camp, an indication that his fellow soldiers were also changing their attitudes toward African Americans.

This negative depiction was not universal, and some soldiers blamed white southerners for most of the trouble. The disturbance was just one episode, and many Union soldiers continued to express sympathy for the freedpeople. Still, a rapid shift in white soldiers' opinions seems evident as they settled into the task of policing Mobile and its race relations. The larger point is that postwar duties pushed Union soldiers toward prejudicial attitudes and conflict with the freed-

[108] William Henry Harrison Clayton to "Brothers," July 9, 1865, in *A Damned Iowa Greyhound: The Civil War Letters of William Henry Harrison Clayton*, ed. Donald C. Elder III (Iowa City, 1998), 173.

[109] John W. Schlagle Diary, July 4, 1865, IHS.

[110] E. B. Platt to "Father and Mother," July 11, 1865, Platt Letters.

people. Less than three months after Blakely, white Union veterans joined with ex-Confederates to harass a procession led by their former comrades in arms. It seems that heroic service for the Union could accomplish only so much in challenging racial assumptions of white troops, and once peace returned the memories of the USCI's exploits faded. In a startlingly short time, blacks in Mobile felt the wrath of their infuriated adversaries in an episode of violence that launched a series of racial affrays lasting for years to come.

Bearing this in mind, evaluation of the broader significance of African American service in the Civil War produces a more somber picture. Black soldiers served heroically in the cause of freedom, and no other course could have better vindicated their humanity or their claim to the nation's protection. And it may well be that the positive influence on northern public opinion outweighed everything else, crucial as northern sentiment was in the subsequent Reconstruction struggles over civil rights and suffrage. Even so, African American military service unleashed demons among both black troops and ex-Confederates. Exemplary battlefield performance only infuriated local whites; it exacerbated the racist hatred and violence that bedeviled black lives in the postwar period. Numerous race riots plagued Mobile over the course of Reconstruction, several resulting in deaths of former slaves. This grim reality, combined with the abandonment of black soldiers by their former comrades in arms, suggests a more nuanced verdict of the long-term implications of African American military participation. The outcome of heroic service was perhaps not so glorious after all.