

Butler, the General with the White Face and Black Heart

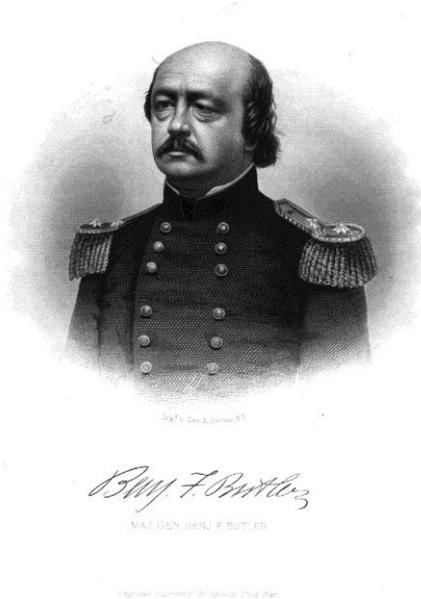
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ABSTRACT

General Benjamin Butler was hated and criticized for becoming a fanatical supporter of Negro equality. At the beginning of the Civil War, General Butler was indifferent to the plight of Negroes. General Butler's initial views were common among Union officers; most felt that blacks would not fight for their own freedom. Perhaps, he was changed when he had to rule on a case of slave brutality in New Orleans. Butler met with free New Orleans black men to determine, if given the opportunity, "Will they fight?" Butler mustered the first black regiment, the Louisiana Native Guard, into service in 1862. A year later the Louisiana Native Guard answered Butler's question. "Yes, they will fight." Following the Emancipation Proclamation, Butler met with President Lincoln to discuss African colonization of the Negroes. Butler replied that it would not work and he preferred John Brown's plan of arming the Negroes. This meeting initiated the recruitment of black soldiers which resulted in 130,000 USCT's in the field. Following gallantry at Port Hudson, Milliken's Bend, Fort Wagner and Petersburg, black troops were still not trusted by white troops. Lincoln was also not expected to win reelection in November 1864. Butler declined Lincoln's invitation to be Vice President and planned to win a major battle with black troops at Richmond. Black troops successively captured New Market Heights and destroyed Richmond's outer defenses. Lincoln won reelection. Black troops were awarded 14 Congressional Medals of Honor which remains as African-American's greatest military honor.

INTRODUCTION



Abraham Lincoln is considered by many as America's greatest president. He is credited with freeing the slaves, saving the Union and placing America on high moral ground. It is a little known fact however that many of his decisions were greatly influenced by General Benjamin F. Butler. Butler influenced Lincoln to the point that Lincoln wanted Butler to be his Vice President during his second term. Butler was a product of his upper class environment and initially was not interested in freeing slaves. Like most people, his opinion was influenced by the people around him and the media. Newspapers, magazines and books, however, cater to their audience, echoing and reinforcing their beliefs. Butler's views shifted dramatically when he was exposed to the brutality and dehumanization of slavery. Although Butler was a Democrat, his views were becoming more like those

of the abolitionists that supported John Brown. Like John Brown he felt that he was commanded by God to end slavery by arming the slaves. There was one difference between Butler and the abolitionist, however - Butler was an advisor to President Lincoln. He used his influence with President Lincoln to build an army of black men "*that would be a terror to the whole South.*" Like the black men that he and John Brown supported, he became one of the most hated men of the Civil War. He was hated by conservatives of his time and by historians that followed. Modern historians have criticized his military judgment by referring to him as "inept" and "more of a politician than a general." (Gorman, *The Union Perspective*). On the other hand, Butler played a major role with the development and deployment of a new Union weapon, freed slaves, and dramatically altered the course of the Civil War.

BUTLER'S INITIAL VIEWS

At the beginning of the Civil War General Butler was indifferent to the plight of Negroes. In fact he supported Jeff Davis in the Charleston Convention in 1860 who became the President of the Confederacy. Although Butler did not want to use black troops, he saw the value of their labor. On May 24, 1861, Butler declared slaves "contraband of war". Runaway slaves would not be returned to the South and all slaves acquired by war were under the control of the United States.

Like most Union Generals, Butler was a Democrat which was the conservative party of that time period. Butler Wrote:

"A large majority of the officers of the army were of Democratic inclination, or, to speak more accurately, were in favor of the Union as it was; that is to say, believed in states rights, including the restoration of the negroes to slavery. Certain it was that the almost universal feeling of ' the army was against the employing of negroes as soldiers, and that volunteering had so far stopped unless we were able to conquer the Rebellion with what troops we had it would be very difficult to get many more. I doubted whether the people would be willing to sustain the emancipation proclamation unless the negroes could be so far employed as to show that they were willing to fight for their freedom, a thing which no considerable portion had yet been permitted to do."

(Butler, Benjamin F, *Butler's Book*, page 581)

General William Tecumseh Sherman felt that blacks would not make good soldiers and resisted using black troops. He argued:

"I have had the question put to me often, " 'Is not a negro as good as a white man to stop a bullet?' Yes: and a sand-bag is better; but can a negro do our skirmishing and picket duty? Can they improvise bridges, sorties, flank movements, etc., like the white man? I say no."

(G. C. Ward, *The Civil War*, page 246)

General Butler also resisted the enlistment of Black troops into the Union Army. In early August of 1862, Brigadier General John W. Phelps requested permission from Butler to start a black regiment. Butler refused, stating that only Lincoln had the authority to start black regiments under the 2nd Confiscation Act of July 17, 1862. Phelps was ordered to use the Negroes as laborers. Phelps was angered by the order and resigned.

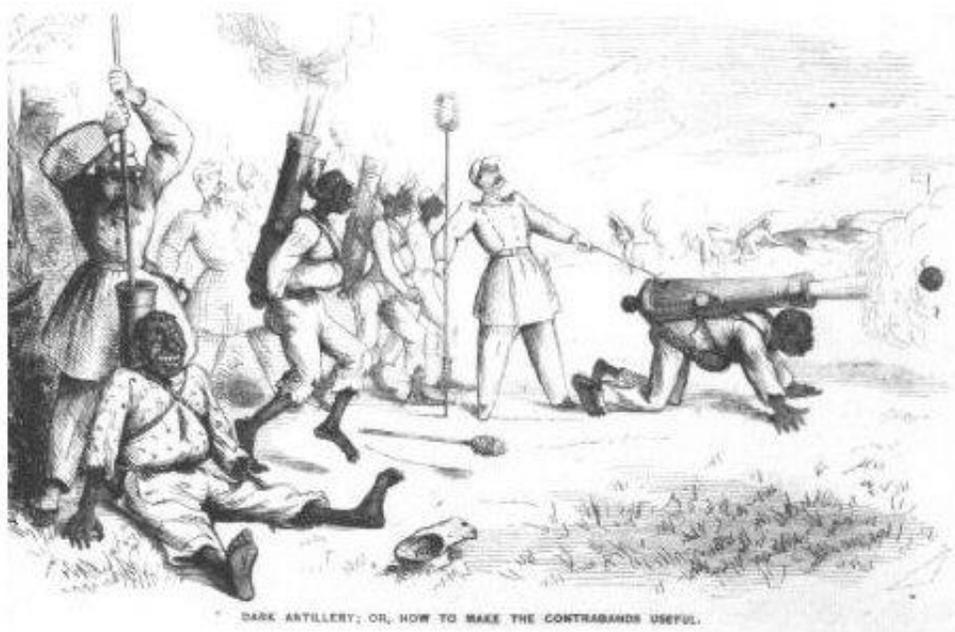
At the heart of distrust of black soldiers by Union generals was a universal belief that they would not fight. The source of this belief was an argument that slave owners made to support

slavery. They argued that slavery was the black man's natural state and they could not handle the responsibilities of freedom. This argument was debated toward the latter part of the war. The Confederacy was short of men and they debated using black troops. There was a great deal of resistance to the idea, however, since they believed in racism and the inferiority of blacks. Confederate General Howell Cobb of Georgia expressed the views of many Southerners. He reminded the Confederacy of what they were fighting for when he said:

"You cannot make soldiers of slaves, or slaves of soldiers. The day you make a soldier of them is the beginning of the end of the revolution. And if slaves seem good soldiers, then our whole theory of slavery is wrong. And was not that the theory the South fought for? It would be the most extraordinary instance of self-stultification the world ever saw arm and emancipate slaves, declared the Rhett. "It is abolition doctrine . . . the very doctrine which the war was commenced to put down.""

(J. M. McPherson, *Battle Cry For Freedom*, page 836)

The opinion of Union Generals toward the use of black troops was shared by the Northern public and was reflected in the media. Many Northerners were racist, most people saw blacks as labors and unable to be good soldiers. Below is an illustration that appeared in Frank Leslie's Weekly, a news magazine, on October 5, 1861.



Dark Artillery – Frank Leslie's Weekly, October 5, 1861

Supporters of slavery used newspapers and magazines to promote the idea that blacks were happy as slaves and not interested in freedom. They portrayed black men as cowards with no principles and unwilling to fight for their freedom. A proslavery newspaper published such an article following the Fort-Donelson Battle on February 16, 1862. William Wells Brown collected many articles during the war and published them in the first African-American Civil War history book, *"The Negro in the American Rebellion."* Brown wrote:

“Proslavery newspaper correspondents from the North, in the Western and Southern departments, still continued to report to their journals that the slaves would not fight if an opportunity was offered to them. Many of these were ridiculously amusing. The following is a sample:

“I noticed upon the hurricane-deck, to-day, an elderly negro, with a very philosophical and retrospective cast of countenance, squatted upon his bundle, toasting his shins against the chimney, and apparently plunged into a state of profound meditation. Finding by inquiry that he belonged to the North Illinois, one of the most gallantly behaved and heavily-losing regiments at the Fort-Donelson battle, and part of which was aboard, I began to interrogate him upon the subject. His philosophy was so much in the Falstaffian vein that I will give his views in his own words, as near as my memory serves me: -

*“ ‘ Were you in the fight ? ’
“ ‘ Had a little taste of it, sa.’
“ ‘ Stood your ground, did you ? ’
“ ‘ No, sa ; I runs.’
“ ‘ Run at the first fire, did you ? ’
“ ‘ Yes, sa. ; and would ha’ run soona had I know’d it war comin’!’
“ ‘ Why, that wasn’t very creditable to your courage.’
“ ‘ Dat isn’t in my line, sa ; cookin’s my perfeshun.’
“ ‘ Well, but have you no regard for your reputation ? ’
“ ‘ Refutation’s nuffin by the side ob life.’
“ ‘ Do you consider your life worth more than other people’s ? ’
“ ‘ It’s worth more to me, sa.’
“ ‘ Then you must value it very highly.’
“ ‘ Yes, sa , ‘ I does ; more dan all dis wuld ; more dan a million of dollars, sa : for what would dat be Wuf to a man wid de bref out of him. Self-perserbashum am de fust l’bm wid me.’
“ ‘ But why should you act upon a different rule from other men ? ’
“ ‘ Because different men set different values upon dar lives : mine is not in de market.’
“ ‘ But if’ you lost it, you would have the satisfaction of knowing that you died for your country.’
“ ‘ What satisfaction would dat be to me when de power ob feelin’ was gone ? ’
“ ‘ Then patriotism and honor are nothing to you ? ’
“ ‘ Nuffin whatever, sa: I regard dem as among de vanities ; and den de government don’t know me ; I hab no rights ; may be sold like old hoss any day, and dat’s all.’
“ ‘ If our old soldiers were like you, traitors might have broken up the Government without resistance.’
“ ‘ Yes, sa; dar would hab been no help for it. I wouldn’t put my life in de scale ‘ginst any government dat ever existed; for no government could replace de loss to me.’
“ ‘ Do you think any of your company would have missed you if’ you had been killed ? ’
“ ‘ May be not, sa; a dead white man ain’t much to dese sogors, let lone a dead nigga; but I’d n missed myself, and dat was de pint wid me.’
“ ‘ It is safe to say that the dusky corpse of that African*

will never darken the field of carnage."

(Brown, William Wells *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, page 127)

The black soldier portrayed in this article has a well developed philosophy. He values his life more than he values such things as honor, duty or self respect. He runs from a battle, not because he is scared like most soldiers, but he runs because it is the most logical thing to do considering the circumstances. He has "no dog in this fight." The author claimed that the black soldier was part of a Northern Illinois regiment. Black troops however were not mustered into Illinois regiments until 1864, two years after this article was published. These types of characterizations were so commonly used that it is easily believed by blacks today that this character was a typical black soldier. Most blacks lived in the south where black stereotyping was common in published literature and black heroism was censored.

SLAVERY WAS 'THINGS PAST TELLIN'

Beatings were a common part of American slavery but remained hidden from the American public. It was not until the slave narratives were published that the horrors of slavery were revealed. Bible scripture may apply to slavery, **1 Corinthians 4:5** says: "*wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness*". **The exposure of the truth about slavery's inhumanity condemned it.**

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was established during the Great Depression to give the unemployed some work. Between 1936 and 1938, the WPA Federal Writers' Project (FWP) sent out-of-work writers in seventeen states to interview ordinary people in order to document their lives as slaves. Over 2,000 interviews of former slaves were made and compiled into seventeen volumes of *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews With Former Slaves*.

From slave narratives we learn that slavery in the Delta was particularly harsh. Former slave Rachel Cruze from Strawberry Plains, Knox County, Tennessee said that she knew of Tennessee slaves that chose to drown rather than live in the cotton fields of the Delta. She said the following in her interview:

"As they walked together, they talked about their future, and they all agreed that death would be preferable to the living death of the cotton fields. And they decided that the first time they had to ferry across a river with the nigger trader, they would walk onto the Ferryboat and keep right on walking till they had walked off the other end. At the end of Dr. Sneed's farm was a ferry to carry people over to the Macabee farm on the other side, and when the nigger trader drove those slaves onto the ferry, that is exactly what they did: they all walked 'off into the deep of the river at the other end. If there was any among them who was lukewarm he was shoved in by the ones behind him."

(Mellon, James, *Bull Whip Days*, pg213)

When former slave Mary Reynolds was interviewed for her narrative she was living in Texas and was 100 years old. She had spent many years in the Delta as a slave where slavery was "*things past tellin.*" Mary described the inhumanity of slavery in her narrative:

"Slavery was the worst days was ever seed in the world. They was things past tellin', but I got the scars on my old body to show to this day. I seed worse than what happened to me. I seed them put the men and women in the stock with they hands screwed down through holes in the board and they feets tied together and they naked behinds to the world. Solomon the [sic] overseer beat them with a big whip and massa look on. The niggers

better not stop in the fields when they hear them yellin'. They cut the flesh most to the bones and some they was when they taken them out of stock and put them on the beds, they never got up again."

(Mellon, James, *Bull Whip Days*, pg18)

"Seems like after I got bigger, I member' more'n more niggers run away. They's most al us cotched. Massa used to hire out his niggers for wage hands. One time he hired me and a nigger boy, Turner, to work for some ornery white trash name of Kidd. One day Turner goes off and don't come back. Old man Kidd say I knowed bout it, and he tied my wrists together and stripped me. He hanged me by the wrists from a limb on a tree and spraddled my legs around the trunk and tied my feet together. Then he beat me. He beat me worser than I ever been beat before and I faints dead away. When I come to I'm in bed. I didn't care so much iffen I died.

(Mellon, James, *Bull Whip Days*, pg22) and (*The American Slave*, vol. 5: 236-246).

Former slave Alex Wood of Raleigh, North Carolina, (Mellon, James, *Bull Whip Days*, pg244) said: "Dey wouldn't allow 'em to call on de Lord when dey were whippin' 'em, but dey let 'em say, "Oh, pray! Oh, pray, Marster!" William Moore was from Texas and his interview supported Alex Wood's claim. He described how his mother was stripped to the waist, hung by a tree and whipped.

"One day, I am down in the hog pen riling the hogs and teasing them like any yearling boy will do, when I hear a loud agony screaming up to the house. I can't make out who 'tis. I'm curious and I start up to the house and I hear, "Pray Marse Tom. Pray, Marse Tom. " But still I can't tell who 'tis. When I get up close I see Marse Tom got my mammy tied to a tree with hir clothes pulled down and he is laying it on her with a bullwhip and de blood is running down her eyes and off her back. I goes crazy. I say, "Stop, Marse Tom," and he swings the whip and it don't reach me good, but it cuts just the same. I sees Miss Mary standing in the cook house door. I run aryund crazy like, and I see a big rock and I take it and I throw it and it ketches Marse Tom in the skull and he goes down like a poled ox"

(Mellon, James, *Bull Whip Days*, pg332)

Floggings in Foreign Publications



Flogging Of An 18 Year Old Samboe Girl

The Northern public was not exposed to the brutality of slavery. Very little material was published in the United States that described slave floggings. This may be a case of early censorship. Sketches of floggings, however, were published in foreign publications. The following is a description of a slave beating in South America that was published in England. The girl refused to have sex with her owner. He stripped her clothing off, tied her to a tree and beat her. The following is John Stedman's description of the girls' flogging:

Upon investigating the cause of this matchless barbarity, I was credibly informed, that her only crime consisted in firmly refusing to submit to the loathsome embraces of her detestable executioner. Prompted by his jealousy and revenge, he called this the punishment of disobedience, and she was thus flayed alive."

(Stedman, John Gabriel, *Narrative Of A Five Year Expedition Against The Revolted Negroes Of Surinam In Guiana On The Wild Coast Of South America From The Years 1772 To 1777*, (London, 1796), vol. 1, facing p. 326.)

COURT DOCUMENTED FLOGGINGS

Similar to the public, the justice system was also unexposed to the brutality of slavery. Since slaves were personal property, they had no rights and cases of slave brutality were not taken to court. Once blacks were free, however, they were allowed to exercise their rights in the justice system. Kentucky was a border state. Slave owners were allowed to keep their slaves, and black men from Kentucky were mustered into the Union Army. Patsy Leach remained in bondage while her husband died fighting for their freedom at Saltville, Va. Under threat of death at the hands of her owner, Patsy escaped and left her kids with her owner. She appealed to the Union Army justice system in Kentucky to have her children returned to her. The Union Army became aware of her abuse by her court testimony. Her testimony is as follows:

I am a widow and belonged to Warren Wiley of Woodford County Ky. My husband Julius Leach was a member of Co. D. 5th U.S. C[olored]. Cavalry and was killed at the Salt Works Va. about six months ago. When he enlisted sometime in the fall of 1864 he belonged to Sarah Martin Scott County Ky. He had only been about a month in the service when he was killed. I was living with aforesaid Wiley when he died.

About three weeks after my husband enlisted a Company of Colored soldiers passed our house and I was there in the garden and looked at them as they passed. My master had been watching me and when the soldiers had gone I went into the kitchen. My master followed me and Knocked me to the floor senseless saying as he did so, "You have been looking at them darned Nigger Soldiers"

When I recovered my senses he beat me with a cowhide. When my husband was Killed my master whipped me severely saying my husband had gone into the army to fight against white folks and he my master would let me know that I was foolish to let my husband go he would "take it out of my back," he would "Kill me by piecemeal" and he hoped "that the last one of the nigger soldiers would be Killed" He whipped me twice after that using similar expressions

The last whipping he gave me he took me into the Kitchen tied my hands tore all my clothes off until I was entirely naked, bent me down, placed my head between his Knees, then whipped me most unmercifully until my back was lacerated all over, the blood oozing out in several places so that I could not wear my underclothes without their becoming saturated with blood.

The marks are still visible on my back. On this and other occasions my master whipped me for no other cause than my husband having enlisted. When he had whipped me he said "never mind God dam you when I am done with you tomorrow you never will live no more." I knew he would carry out his threats so that night about 10 o'clock I took my babe and traveled to Arnolds Depot where I took the Cars to Lexington

I have five children, I left them all with my master except the youngest and I want to get them but I dare not go near my master knowing he would whip me again. My master is a Rebel Sympathizer and often sends Boxes of Goods to Rebel prisoners. And further Deponent saith not. 15.

Her

*Signed Patsey Leach
mark*

(Berlin, Ira, *Free At Last*, p400)

NEWSPAPER REPORTS OF FLOGGINGS

Floggings or whippings were rarely reported in the media. An article appeared in the New York Herald revealing a law being considered in Virginia that would make flogging the punishment for Negroes caught having prayer meetings. Slaves prayed for freedom, an action which was strictly prohibited in the South.

The following bill, we understand, is now before the Legislature of the state of Virginia.

An act to amend an act, to reduce into one, the several acts concerning Slaves, Free Negroes and Mulattoes.

Whereas it is represented to the General Assembly, that it is a common practice in many places within this Commonwealth, for Slaves, Free Negroes and Mulattoes, to assemble in considerable numbers at Meeting Houses, and places of Religious Worship, in the night, which may have a tendency to promote conspiracy and insurrection.

Be it therefore enacted, That all meetings or assemblies of Slaves, Free Negroes or Mulattoes, at any meeting House or Houses, or any other place or places in the night under any pretence whatever, shall be deemed and considered, as an unlawful assembly. And that it shall be the duty of any Magistrate of the County or Corporation, where such assembly shall be, either from his own knowledge or from the information of others, of such unlaw-

New York Herald Saturday, January 28, 1804

Slaves caught praying for freedom were commonly flogged. Former slave July Halfen witnessed her mother's flogging for participating in prayer meetings. She said:

"Marse Carter had a house gal by de name uf Frances, an' she had wait on de white folks all day long, an' when night wud come, he made her slip out 'mongst de slaves an' see what dey wuz doin' an' talkin' 'bout.

My mammy wus livin' wid 'nudder man, named Joe, an' one night Joe an' my Mammy an' some more slaves wuz down on deir knees prayin' fur de good Lord to sot dem free, an' Frances wus slippin' round de corner uf de house an' heard what dey wus sayin'. An' she goes back to de house an' tells de old marse, an' he sent de oberseer down dar an' brung ebery one uf dem to de stake, an' tied dem, an' whipped dem so hard dat blood come from some uf dems backs."

(Mellon, James, *Bull Whip Days*, pg196)

Note that the house servant revealed the prayer meeting to her owner. Her loyalty was to her owner, not field slaves. This type of behavior led to divisions between house servants and field slaves.

BUTLER CHANGES IN NEW ORLEANS

On May 1, 1862, General Benjamin Butler commanded the Union force that captured New Orleans from the Confederacy, and was given the responsibility of maintaining order in New Orleans. Since the city was under Union control, cases of slave brutality were brought to his attention. It was one such case that changed Butler's opinion of slavery. A young lady was brought before him at his headquarters. The girl was beautiful and probably reminded him of one of his own children. Her back was scarred and disfigured by the repeated tears of the bullwhip. The perpetrator was her father and her master. Reports of the incident suggested that Butler was deeply shaken, stunned and never the same again. The incident was published in the *Atlanta Monthly* in July, 1863. William Wells Brown apparently saw the article and published it in this book "*The Negro in the American Rebellion.*"

"RESPECTABLE MERCHANT" AND HIS SLAVE DAUGHTER.

One Sunday morning, while General Butler was seated at the breakfast table, Major Strong, a gentleman who was not given to undue emotion, rushed into the room, pale with rage and horror.

"General," he exclaimed, "there is the most list damnable thing out here!"... The woman who was the object of so much attention, was nearly white, aged about twenty-seven... "Look here, General," said Major Strong, as he opened the dress of this poor creature.

Her back was cut to pieces with the infernal cowhide. It was all black and red-red where and the infernal instrument of torture had broken the skin, black where it had not. To convey an idea of its appearance, General Strong used to yon say that it resembled a very rare beefsteak, with Ire the black marks of the gridiron across it.

No one ever saw General Butler so profoundly for moved as he was while gazing upon this pitiable ten spectacle. Who did this?" he asked the girl.

"Master," she replied.

"Who is your master?"

"Mr. Landry"

Landry was a respectable merchant living in near by quarters, not unknown to the members of the staff.

"What did he do it for?" asked the general.

"I went out after the clothes from the wash," said she, "and I stayed out late. When I then came home, master licked me and said he would teach me to run away."...At this moment Major Strong whispered in the general's ear a piece of information which I caused him to compare the faces of the master and the slave. The resemblance between them was striking.

"Is this woman your daughter?" asked the met general.

"There are reports to that effect," said Landry. ... The general, for once, seemed deprived of his power to judge with promptness. He remained for some time," says an eye-witness, "apparently lost in abstraction. I shall never forget the singular expression on his face.

"I had been accustomed to see him in a storm of passion at any instance of oppression or flagrant injustice; but on this occasion he was too deeply affected to obtain relief in the usual way.

"His whole air was one of dejection, almost listlessness; his indignation too intense, and his anger too stern, to find expression even in his countenance.

...Those who lived on intimate relations with the general, remarked his growing abhorrence of It slavery. During the first weeks of the occupation of the city, he was occasionally capable, in the hurry of indorsing a peck of letters, of spelling negro with two g's. Not so in the later months. Not so when he had seen the torn and bleeding and blackened backs of fair and delicate in women. Not so when he had learned how the oppression of the negroes had extinguished in the white race almost every trait of character se which redeems and sanctifies human nature.

"God Almighty himself is doing it," he would say, when talking on this subject. "No man's hand can stay it.

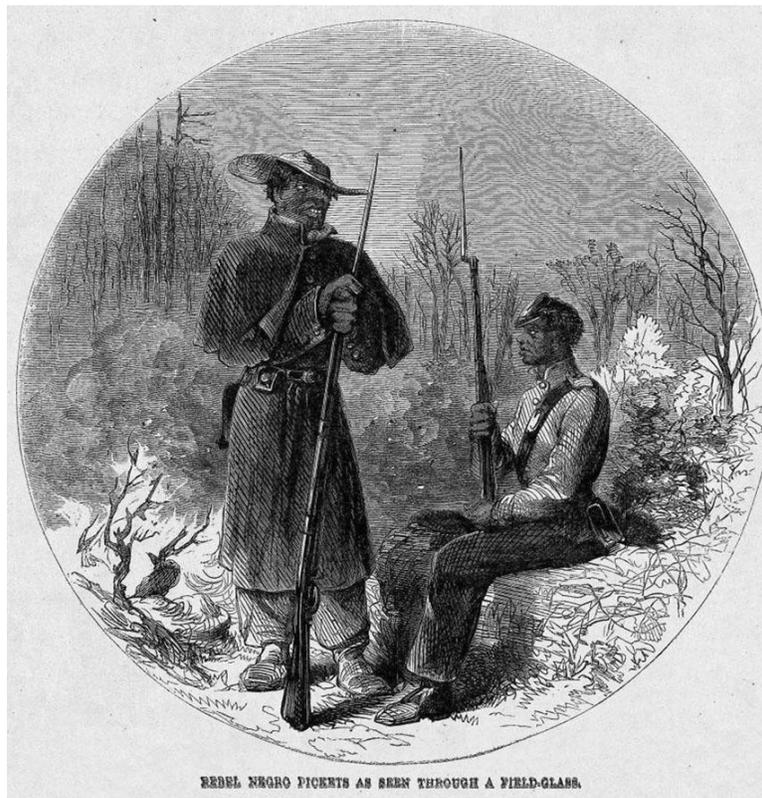
It is no other than the omnipotent God who has taken this mode of destroying slavery. We are but the instruments in his hands. We could not prevent it if we would. And let us strive as we might, the judicial blindness of the rebels would do the work of God without our aid, and in spite of all our endeavors against it."
AMEN!

(*Atlanta Monthly*, July, 1863. P143-145)

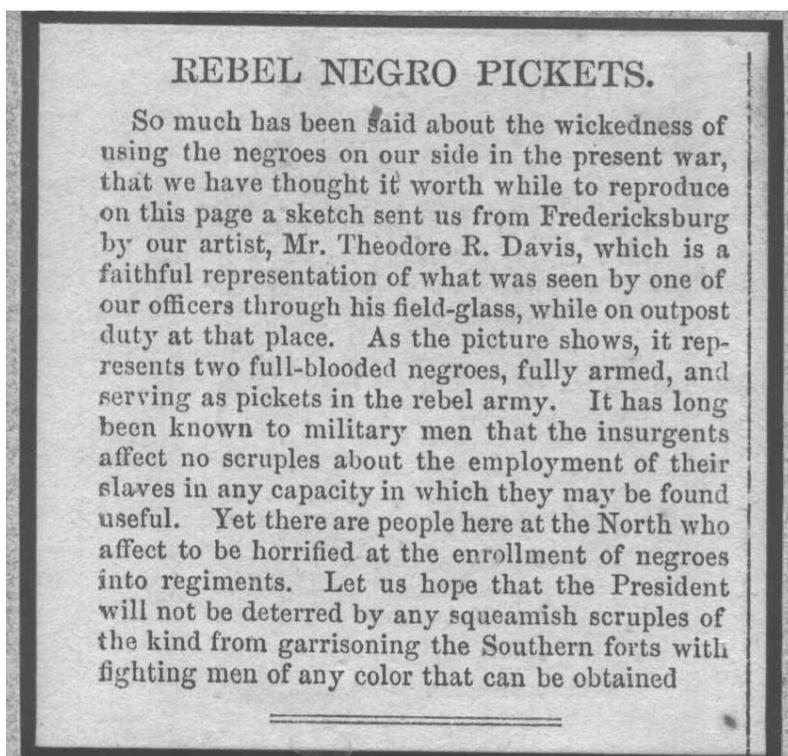
(Parton, James, *General Butler In New Orleans Being a History of the Administration of the Department of the Gulf in the Year 1862*, Mason Brothers, No. 7 Mercer Street 1864)
Also, *General Butler in New Orleans*: (Brown, William Wells, *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, p145)

In order to have control over slaves yet provide them with the freedom to be productive, slaves were treated inhumanly. The lower status of slaves and racism were used to justify ill-treatment and place the guilt for ill-treatment on slaves themselves. Beatings and floggings of slaves also eroded the humanity of the slave owners. To execute their punishment on slaves, floggers suppressed all feeling of empathy and sympathy. Butler saw that the system of slavery lowered the humanity of the slave and destroyed the humanity of the slave owners as well. Butler felt that God “*has taken this mode of destroying slavery*” and he would be serving good by fighting to end it.

BUTLER AND THE LOUISIANA NATIVE GUARD



Louisiana Native Guard, Authors Collection



Louisiana Native Guard, Authors Collection

The Confederacy organized a regiment of free black soldiers in New Orleans called "Native Guard, Colored," on May 2, 1861. New Orleans had a population of 150,000, of which 18,000 were slaves and 10,000 were free blacks (James Parton, General Butler In New Orleans, P130). Free blacks had previously been enrolled by Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812 to protect New Orleans. (James Parton, General Butler In New Orleans, P134). Although the Louisiana Native Guard was initially black Confederates, they were the first black Civil War regiment to be formed and they have the distinction of being the only black regiment to be commanded by black officers. Some were slave owners and some were mulattos but they were primarily free blacks.

Following the defeat of the Confederacy at New Orleans in May of 1861 the Louisiana Native Guard remained in the city. By May of 1862 General Hunter had formed the 1st South Carolina Colored volunteers and Governor Lane started the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers, but these regiments were not authorized by President Lincoln. Butler, however, had a great deal of power in New Orleans but he was short of men. Butler wondered if the Native Guard would switch sides and fight for the freedom of all blacks. Butler had the following conversation with a group of them:

"But," I said, "I want you to answer me one question. My officers, most of them, believe that negroes won't fight."

"Oh, but we will, "came from the whole of them.

"You seem to be an intelligent man, "said I, to their spokesman;

" answer me this question: I have found out that you know just as well what this war is about as I do, and if the United States succeed in it, it will put an end to slavery." They all looked assent.

"Then tell me why some negroes have not in this war struck a good blow somewhere for their freedom?"

"General, will you permit a question?"

"Yes."

"If we colored men had risen to make war on our masters, would not it have been our duty to ourselves, they being our enemies, to kill the enemy wherever we could find them? and all the white men would have been our enemies to be killed?"

"I don't know but what you are right," said I. "I think that would be a logical necessity of insurrection."

"If the colored men had begun such a war as that, General, which general of the United States army should we have called on to help us fight our battles?"

That was unanswerable.

"Well," I said, "why do you think that your men will fight?"

"General we come from a fighting race. Our fathers were brought here slaves because they were captured in war, and in hand to hand fights, too. We are willing to fight. Pardon me, General, but the only cowardly blood we have got in our veins is the white blood."

(Butler, Benjamin F, *Butler's Book*, page 492)

The First Regiment of Louisiana Native Guard was mustered into the US Army on August 22, 1862. By December of 1862 there were three Native Guard regiments, which were the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Louisiana Native Guard.

When Butler first came to New Orleans he occasionally used the word "nigger" to describe blacks. Parton said, *"Not so in the later months. Not so when he had seen the torn and bleeding and blackened backs of fair and delicate in women. Not so when he had reviewed his noble colored regiments"*. While in New Orleans Butler became a strong supporter for the use of black soldiers and felt they could be the key to a Union victory. Butler wrote:

"Better soldiers never shouldered a musket. They were intelligent, obedient, highly appreciative of their position, and fully maintained its dignity. They easily learned the school of soldier. I observed a, very remarkable trait about them. They learned to handle arms and to march more readily than the most intelligent white men. My drillmaster could teach a regiment of negroes that much of the art of war sooner than he could have taught the same number of students from Harvard or Yale...

Again, their ear for time as well as tune was exceedingly apt; and it was wonderful with what accuracy and steadiness a company of negroes would march after a few days' instruction...

Again, white men, in case of sudden danger, seek safety by going apart each for himself. The negroes always cling together for mutual protection."

(Butler, Benjamin F, *Butler's Book*, page 491)

ARMING THE NEGROES

Apparently Butler had opened the door to raising black troops in the Union Army. On August 25, 1862, three days after the Louisiana Native Guard was mustered into service, Secretary of War Stanton authorized General Saxton to muster black troops into Union service. General Saxton reformed General Hunter's 1st South Carolina's Colored Volunteers.

By the spring of 1863, the States had organized five black regiments and Massachusetts was in the process of forming a regiment. There were three black regiments in Louisiana, one in Kansas and one in South Carolina. By the spring of 1863 both the 1st South Carolina Volunteers and the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers had proven themselves in battle.

The Emancipation Proclamation freed all American slaves and took effect in January, 1863. Slaves held in Confederate states would be freed after defeat of the Confederacy. Many officers

in the Union Army were outraged by the Emancipation Proclamation. One Wisconsin Union officer warned Lincoln, *"A decided majority of our Officers of all grades have no sympathy with your policy; nor with any human. They hate the Negro more than they love the Union."* (J. T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, p10)

Once slaves were in Union control would they become American citizens or be sent back to Africa? President Lincoln supported the latter idea. President Lincoln supported African Colonization as an answer to the Negro problem. This would require deporting all American blacks by ship to Africa. Butler felt that the country did not have the resources to implement Lincoln's plan, and blacks did not want to go back to Africa anyway. Most American blacks were generations removed from Africa.

On the other hand, Butler supported John Brown's plan. John Brown had developed a plan of ending slavery by freeing the slaves then arming them. John Brown's plan of arming the slaves was secretly supported by abolitionists. Brown's plan was to acquire arms at the arsenal at Harpers Ferry and arm local slaves. This small force would arm and collect slaves as they traveled south through Virginia. Brown was only able to acquire a small force of 21 men, which was easily defeated by Robert E. Lee at Harpers Ferry.

Butler felt the plan was basically sound; Brown just lacked the resources to make his plan successful. Butler had mustered the Louisiana Native Guard into the Union on August 22, 1862 and was therefore experienced with arming Negroes. Although General Butler was a Democrat and did not belong to Lincoln's political party, he had shown both good military and political judgment, and he appeared to be against slavery as well. In March of 1863 General Butler met with President Lincoln to discuss the Negro problem. Butler recalls the meeting as follows:

"We then talked of a favorite project he had of getting rid of the negroes by colonization, and he asked me what I thought of it. I told him that it was simply impossible; that the negroes would not go anyway, for they loved their homes as much as the rest of us, and all efforts at colonization would not make a substantial impression upon the number of negroes in the country."

"Reverting to the subject of arming the negroes, I said to him that I thought it might be possible to start with a sufficient army of white troops, and, avoiding a march which might deplete their ranks by death and sickness, to take them in ships and land them somewhere on the Southern coast. These troops could then come up through the Confederacy, gathering up negroes, who could be armed at first with arms that they could handle, so as to defend themselves and aid the rest of the army in case of rebel charges upon it. In this way we could establish ourselves down there with an army that would be a terror to the whole South."

"He asked me what I would arm them with. I told him John Brown had intended, if he got loose in the mountains of Virginia, to arm his negroes with spears and revolvers; and there was a great deal in that. "

"That is a new idea, General," said he.

"No, Mr. President," I answered, "it is a very old one. Fathers of these negroes, and some of the negroes themselves, fought their battles in Africa with no other weapon, save a club. Although we have substituted the bayonet for the spear, yet as long as the soldier can shoot he is not inclined to use the bayonet. " 2.

(Butler, Benjamin F, *Butler's Book*, page 578)

On May 22, 1863, the War Department established the Bureau of Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.) and launched an aggressive campaign to recruit black soldiers. By the end of the war there were over 130,000 black soldiers in the field. There were over 130 regiments representing 7 Cavalry (7,000 men), 120 Infantry (100,000 men), 12 Heavy Artillery (12,000 men) and 10 companies of Light Artillery (1,300 men). (*The Eclipse*, February, 1994, p14)

Due to the enormous prejudice against black men, a great deal of effort was made in selecting Officers who had faith in both the ability and potential of black troops. They wanted Officers like Butler. The white Officers in the USCT had high morals and were the most intelligent men in the army. To serve in the USCT, Union Officers were required to pass an intelligence test as well as be committed to lifting the black race. This was not a requirement in other branches of the military. *"Officers in black units were "a better class of men, more moral, more religious, better educated and understand their business better than those in white reg'ts."* (FORGED IN BATTLE PG 39)

After joining the USCT, the white men endured heavy fatigue duty from the army and humiliation from the public as well as their families. They were also criticized for joining the USCT by their colleagues. Strong relationships grew between Officers and men that were "forged in battle." *"White officers were subjected to the same prejudices as their men. For example, while marching through Philadelphia to catch a train, the 2nd USCT were pursued by an angry mob. One black soldier knocked a civilian down for calling an officer a "white nigger"."*(Forged in Battle, J. T. Glatthaar, page 244)

There was frequently a bond between white Officers and their black soldiers. Sacrifices made by white Officers were appreciated. This letter of condolence was pinned to the wife of his deceased commander by a black private. The note also refers to the Children of Israel escaping bondage in Egypt. Many blacks felt that they were the children of Israel.

"Allow me to say, that although a Colored man, a private in the 29th, I found in Colonel Bross a friend, one in whom every member of the regiment placed the utmost confidence, for, and with whom, each one would help defend the country to the end...He was loved by every one, because he was a friend to everyone.

Weep not for him who was one of God's chosen ones, who tried to deliver his people out of Egypt. "

(Glatthaar, Joseph T., Forged in Battle, PG97)

THE BATTLE OF PORT HUDSON



Battle of Port Hudson, Library of Congress

On May 27, 1863, the first large battle that included a black regiment occurred at Port Hudson, Louisiana. Butler had mustered the regiment into Union service making them the first black regiment to service the Union and the only black regiment to have all black officers. Butler's First Regiment of Louisiana Native Guard lived up to their promise to Butler that they would fight with courage and honor. They attacked a heavily defended Confederate fort over five times until their force of 900 men was cut down to less than 300. William Wells Brown published several newspaper articles that described the battle. The battle drew national attention. The following articles appeared in the New York Herald and New York Tribune.

"The New-York Herald," June 6—

"The First Regiment Louisiana Native Guard, Col. Nelson, were in this charge. They went on the advance, and, when they came out, six hundred out of nine hundred men could not be accounted for. It is said on every side that they fought with the desperation of tigers. One negro was observed with a rebel soldiers in his face with his teeth?? (John are there some words missing here? This line doesn't make sense), other weapons having failed him. There are other incidents connected with the conduct of this regiment that have raised them very much in my opinion as soldiers. After firing one volley, they did not deign to load again, but went in with bayonets; and, wherever they hail a chance, it was all up with the rebels."

(Brown, William Wells, *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, p175)

" From" The New-York Tribune," June 8, 1863: -"Nobly done, First Regiment of Louisiana Native Guard! Though you failed to carry the rebel works against overwhelming numbers, you did not charge and fight and fall in vain. That heap of six hundred corpses, lying there dark and grim and silent before and within the rebel works, is a better proclamation of freedom than even President Lincoln's. A race ready to die thus was never yet retained in bondage, and never can be. Even the Wood copperheads, who will not fight themselves, and try to keep others out of the Union ranks, will not dare to mob negro regiments if this is their style of fighting. "

(Brown, William Wells, *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, p175)

Milliken's bend



Battle of Millikens Bend, Library of Congress

White Union troops initially did not welcome black troops on to the battle field. The belief that black troops would not fight was deeply rooted. On June 7, 1863, at Milliken's Bend, some Illinois cavalrymen sneered, "A man ud be a dam fool to try to make soldiers out ah niggers. . . . Any one ough to Know a nigger wont fight: they'r running now. before they seen a reb. . . . We will show them how it is done if we find any of them." Several minutes later the Illinois horsemen raced past in retreat, pursued closely by the Confederates. The black company then rose up and delivered a volley that drove the Rebels back and saved the day. " (Glatthaar, Joseph T., *Forged in Battle*, PG131-135)

FORT PILLOW MASSACRE



Fort Pillow Massacre - Kurz & Allison, Chicago, Ill.

On April 12, 1864, General Forest and 1500 men captured Fort Pillow manned by 550 Federal's, half of which were black. It was alleged that Forest murdered most of the prisoners including black women and children. Black men were burned and buried alive. Forest founded the Ku Klux Klan following the war.

"All the negroes found' in blue uniform or with any outward marks of a Union soldier upon him was killed- I saw some taken into the woods and hung-Others I saw stripped of all their clothing, and they stood upon the bank of the river with their faces riverwards and then they were shot-Still others were killed by having their brains beaten out by the butt end of the muskets in the hands of the Rebels. All were not killed the day of the capture-Those that were not, were placed in a room with their officers, they (the Officers) having previously been dragged through the town with ropes around their necks, where they were kept confined until the following morning when the remainder of the black soldiers were killed."

(McPherson, James M., *Battle Cry For Freedom*, pg793)

THE ARMY OF THE JAMES

In March, 1864, General Grant was put in charge of the Union Army. General Grant organized a coordinated invasion of the South. General Sherman's Army invaded Georgia and marched towards Atlanta. General Sigel invaded the Shenandoah Valley. General Crook and General Averill's mission was to destroy railroad supply lines in West Virginia, and General Banks was sent to capture Mobile, Alabama. General Grant and General Meade attacked General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Butler's mission was to invade the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia with his Army of the James.

General Butler was given command of the Army of the James in April, 1864. The Army of



the James was composed of 33,000 troops, 13,000 or 40% of which were black. On May 5, 1864, Butler traveled down the James by means of the Navy and established his headquarters at a small village called Bermuda Hundred. This was the same day that General Grant engaged Confederate General Robert E. Lee at the Battle of the Wilderness. Before attacking Richmond, Butler first had to attack Petersburg to destroy an important railway supply to Richmond. Butler, however, had to contend with the Confederate Army led by Confederate General Beauregard. His subordinate was General Pickett who led Pickett's Charge at the Battle of Gettysburg and guarded Petersburg.

USCT at Dutch Gap Va., Library of Congress

Butler told President Lincoln that a black army would be "*an army that would be a terror to the whole South.*" His prediction came true. "When Pickett heard of a movement of the Army of the James, the Southern Gettysburg hero expressed his concerns to Adjutant General Cooper:

"Butler's plan, evidently, is to let loose his swarm of blacks upon our ladies and defenseless families, plunder and devastate the country. Against such a warfare there is but one resource to hang at once every one captured belonging to the expedition, and afterwards every one caught who belongs to Butler's department. Let us come to a definite understanding with these heathen at once. Butler cannot be allowed to rule here as he did in New Orleans. His course must be stopped."

(Holzman, R. S., *Stormy Ben Butler*, p137)

Black men were not interested in molesting white ladies but were interested in protecting black women. Chaplain Henry M. Turner said. *"The fact is, when colored Soldiers are about they [whites] are afraid to kick colored women and abuse colored people on the Streets, as they usually do, "* (Glatthaar, Joseph T., *Forged in Battle*, PG213)

Butler had fully implemented John Brown's plan of arming the Negro. Although Brown was dead, it was believed that his soul was marching on, in the army of the Lord. Butler's goal was go to Richmond, find the president of the Confederacy, Jeff Davis and hang him "on an sour apple-tree." A favorite marching song of the Army of the James Colored Troops was "John Brown's Body." A verse was added that refers to hanging Jeff Davis. (Williams, George W., *Negro Troops in the Rebellion 1861-1865*, p300)

*Johns brown's body lies a moulding in the grave,
Johns brown's body lies a moulding in the grave,
Johns brown's body lies a moulding in the grave,
His soul is marching on.*

*Chorus:
Glory Hally, Hallelujah! Glory Hally, Hallelujah!
Glory Hally, Hallelujah!
His soul's marching on.*

*We'll hang Jeff Davis on an sour apple-tree
We'll hang Jeff Davis on an sour apple-tree
We'll hang Jeff Davis on an sour apple-tree
His soul is marching on.*

*Chorus:
Glory Hally, Hallelujah! Glory Hally, Hallelujah!
Glory Hally, Hallelujah!
His soul's marching on.*

Hon Simon Cameron was an aide and friend to President Lincoln. He met with Butler to inform him of Lincoln's desire to have Butler as his running mate in the 1864 presidential election. Butler, however, was pleased with his assignment of capturing Richmond with the Army of the James so he chose to stay on the battlefield. Butler described his conversation with Cameron:

"The President as you know," intends to be a candidate for re-election, and as his friends indicate that Mr. Hamptin should no longer be a candidate for Vice-President, and he is from New England, the President thinks his place should be filled by someone from that section. Besides reasons of personal friendship which would make it pleasant to have you with him, he believes that as you were the first prominent Democrat who volunteered for the war, your candidature would add strength to the ticket, especially with the War Democrats, and he hopes that you in that you will allow your friends to co-operate with his to place you in that position."

"Please say to Mr. Lincoln," I replied, "that while I appreciate with the fullest sensibilities his act of friendship and the high compliment he pays me, yet I must decline. Tell him that I said laughingly that with the prospects of a campaign before me I would not quit the field to be Vice-President even with himself as ~~Vice~~ President, unless he would give me bound in sureties in the full sum of his four years' salary that within three months after his inauguration he will die unresigned.

(Butler, B. F., *Butler's Book*, Page 634)

THE BATTLE OF PETERSBURG



Petersburg, Virginia. Field and staff officers of 39th US Colored Infantry, Library of Congress

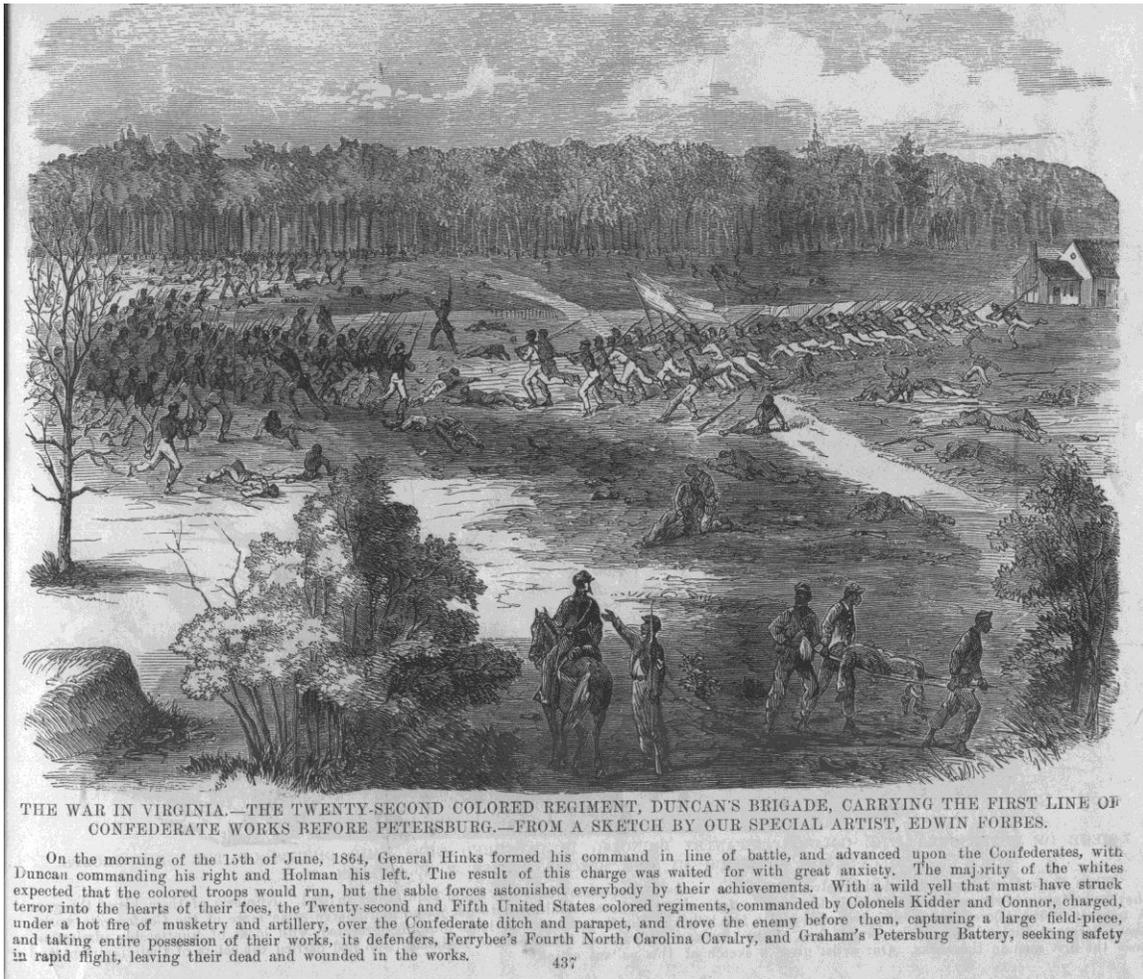
On May 4, 1864, Ulysses S. Grant attacked Robert E. Lee's Army of North Virginia. Grant moved south towards Richmond engaging in a number of major battles. Gen Butler with The Army of the James attacked from the south. Black troops attacked Petersburg with success but were ordered to stop before taking the city. A ten-month siege of Petersburg followed in which nearly one in every eight Union soldiers was black.

Black troops performed well at charging Petersburg's Confederate defenses. They would mount their bayonets and rush the confederate works with a scream. Black soldiers wrote letters to black and abolitionary newspapers describing their Civil War battle experiences. Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Milton Holland wrote a letter that described his charge of a Confederate works at Petersburg. Holland wrote:

One thing that I must mention which attracted the attention of the whole division. It was that brave and daring but strange personage that rides the white charger. We could see him plainly riding up and down the rebel lines, could hear him shouting from the top of his voice to stand, that they had only niggers to contend with. This peculiar personage seems possessed with supernatural talent. He would sometimes ride his horse at lightning speed, up and down his lines amid the most terrific fire of shot and shell. But when the command was given to us, "Charge bayonets! Forward double quick!" the black column rushed forward raising the battle yell, and in a few moments more we mounted the rebel parapets. And to our great surprise, we found that the boasted Southern chivalry had fled. They could not see the nigger part as the man on the white horse presented it. We captured here one gun and caisson.

Milton M. Holland
Orderly Sergeant
Co. C, 5th USCI
Petersburg Virginia, July 24, 1864

(Redkey, Edwin S., *A Grand Army of Black Men*, pg 106)



Frank Leslie's Illustrated, July 9, 1864

Leslies published an illustration of black troops capturing a cannon at the Battle of Petersburg. Butler later published this illustration in his book as well, when he described the battle of New Market Heights.



THE COLORED INFANTRY BRINGING IN THE CAPTURED GUNS, AMID THE CHEERS OF THE OHIO TROOPS.—FROM A SKETCH BY OUR SPECIAL ARTIST, E. F. MULLEN.—SEE PAGE 247.

The Colored Infantry Bringing In The Captured Guns, And The Cheers Of The Ohio Troops, Franks Leslie's Illustrated, July 09, 1864.

By the summer of 1864 the media was looking favorably at black troops. A correspondent of The New York Times wrote as follows:

"As everybody seems to have negro on the brain in the army, I may be pardoned for again alluding to the colored troops in this letter. A single day's work has wiped out a mountain of prejudice, and fairly turned the popular current of feeling in this army in favor of the down-trodden race; and every one who has been with them on the field has some story to relate of their gallant conduct in action, or their humanity and social qualities. The capture of the fort before referred to is related, among other things, in evidence of their manhood and gallantry; taking prisoners in the exciting moment of actual hand-to-hand fighting, in face of the Fort Pillow and other similar rebel atrocities perpetrated elsewhere, upon their colored companions-in-arms as evidence of their humanity,—that they are really something more than the stolid brutes, such as some people profess to believe.."

(Brown, William Wells, *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, p269)

THE AFFAIR OF THE MINE AT PETERSBURG

The Battle of the Crater took place at Petersburg on July 30, 1864. General Burnside developed an elaborate plan to tunnel under the Confederate defenses at Petersburg, blow up the defenses, then rush in with black troops to seize the town. Black troops had gained a reputation of fighting with significant determination and tenacity when charging Confederate works at Petersburg. General Grant, however, was not satisfied with Burnside's reason for using black troops and substituted them with a more experienced but untrained white division. The switch resulted in a disaster. The black troops were trained to go around the crater following the mine explosion. The white troops went into the crater instead of going around it and suffered heavy casualties. General Grant sent the black troops into the crater to save the white troops but the element of surprise was lost. Black troops pushed the rebel line back but suffered heavy losses when the rebels were reinforced. General Grant was called by Congress to come to Washington and explain his actions. In Grant's testimony before Congress he admitted that he made a mistake and he revealed that: "*General Burnside wanted to put his colored division in front, and I believe, if he had done so, it would have been a success.*" (Pleasants, Henry, *Inferno at Petersburg*, p163)

LINCOLN'S RE-ELECTION

Lincoln's re-election in November, 1864, was in jeopardy. Lincoln asked Butler to be his running mate in the election but Butler refused, saying that he would rather remain on the battlefield. Lincoln was behind his anti-war opponent George McClellan, who did not support the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln's defeat in November would have meant a compromise over the slavery issue.

On August 23, 1864 Lincoln wrote " It seems probable that this administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President elect, as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards."

(Martin Graham and George Skoch, *Great Battles of the Civil War*)

The war was dragging on with some success but at great cost to the nation. Most northerners knew little of the horrors of slavery and the stigma of slavery still prevailed. A big Union victory was needed to switch the election momentum towards Lincoln's re-election. A victory with black troops would support the war even more. Butler said "*And the further cry was that the negroes never struck a good blow for their own freedom.*"(Butler, B. F., *Butlers Book*, pg742). Deep rooted American values are based on individual responsibility, self reliance, self determination and self respect. For Negroes to be respected by white Americans they must possess these values as well. John Brown's plan was not to free the slaves but to help the slaves' free themselves. Butler needed to transform the war from a war fought to free slaves to a war helping Negroes free themselves.

BATTLE OF NEW MARKET HEIGHTS

In September, 1864, the Union Army was south of Richmond and unable to control the territory north of the James River. Butler's headquarters was located at Deep Bottom which was on the south shore of the James River. Butler developed a plan in which black troops would attack New Market Heights which was a heavily fortified redoubt on the left flank of the

Confederate line protecting Richmond. At the same time the plan called for white troops to attack the middle of the Confederate line at Fort Harris.

Richmond was protected by 3000 entrenched Confederate troops and most of these were positioned close to New Market Heights and in front of Butler at Deep Bottom. The target for the black troops had failed to be taken by white troops twice. Cadets from a nearby military school had in fact successfully defeated a Union attack there earlier that year. Success by black troops would prove the value of black troops once and for all. Butler's tactical skills were criticized by Union generals. Brig. Gen. W. F. Smith was quoted in a magazine article as saying that Butler was "a child, and incapable of making an order in the field." (Butler, B. F., Butler's Book, pg722). Success at New Market Heights would vindicate black troops as well as himself. General Butler discussed his attack on Richmond with General Grant and he also described his dual objective.

" I further told him that I had another thing in view. The affair of the mine at Petersburg, which had been discussed between us, had convinced me that in the Army of the Potomac negro troops were thought of no value, and with the exception of an attack under Smith on the 15th of June, where they were prevented from entering Petersburg by the sloth, inaction, or I believe worse, of Smith, the negro troops had had no chance to show their valor or staying qualities in action. I told him that I meant to take a large part of my negro force, and under my personal command make an attack upon Newmarket Heights, the redoubt to the extreme left of the enemy's line. If I could take that and turn it, then I was certain that I could gain the first line of the enemy's entrenchment's around Richmond. I said: " I want to convince myself whether, when under my own eye, the negro troops will fight; and if I can take with the negroes, a redoubt that turned Hancock's corps on a former occasion, that will settle the question." I proposed to try this in a manner that I had not before seen attempted, either in the Army of the Potomac or else where, - that is, by a regular "dash" such as I had read of in the history of the wars of Europe."

(Butler, B. F., Butler's Book, Page 721)

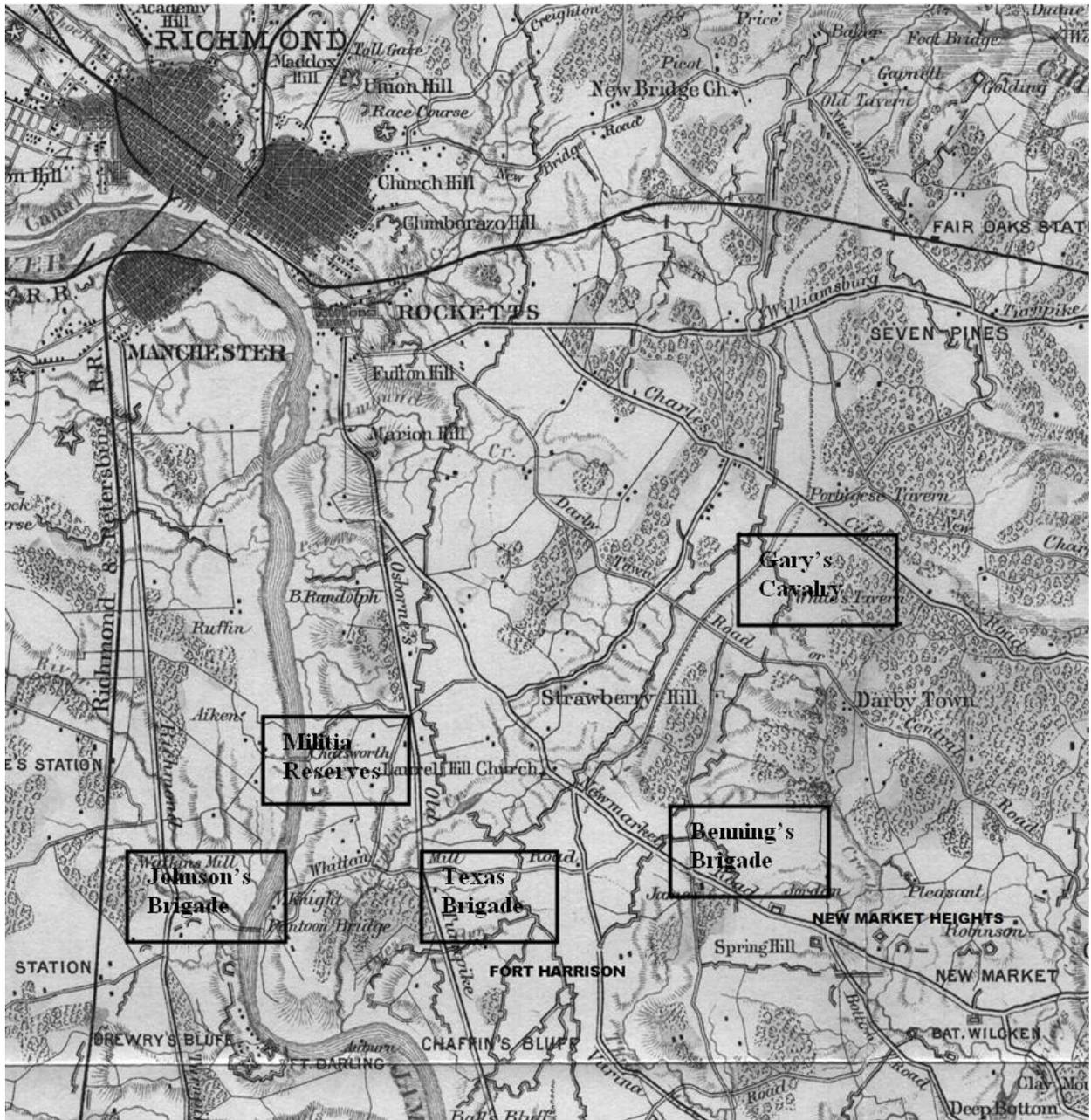
Butler estimated that enemy defenses of 2,875 men held the 8-mile long New Market Line Defense. All but Johnson's Brigade, Chaffin Farm Heavy Artillery and Militia reserve were positioned near New Market Heights.

CONFEDERATE UNIT	COMMANDER	SIZE
Bushrod Johnson's (Tennessee) Brigade	Hughs	450
Twenty- Fifth Virginia (City Brigade)	Elliot	200
Grigg's Texas brigade	Bass	400
Seventh South Carolina Cavalry	Gary	400
Twenty-Fourth Virginia Cavalry	Gary	400
Benning's (Georgia) Brigade	DuBose	400
Militia reserves (2 nd Virginia Reserve Battalion)	Guy	175
Chaffin Farm Heavy Artillery		100
Wade Hamptons Legion		400

General Ben Butler, Butlers Book, p723

Official Confederate New Market Heights Battle reports are not available. The only available Confederate records are included in the book "Hood's Texas Brigade " by J. B. Polley. Polley was a member of the Texas Brigade and was present at the Battle of New Market Heights. Polley wrote his account of the battle many years following the Civil War.

Polley claimed that Benning's Brigade was stationed at New Market Heights and the Texas Brigade was a mile and one half from them.



Polley's description of Confederate positions guarding Richmond Virginia at New Market Heights, September 29, 1864, Burk & McFetridge, Invirons of Richmond

Polley's troop strength at New Market Heights prior to the battle agrees with Butler's pre-battle intelligence, it therefore assumed that his described distribution of Confederate troops at New Market Heights is reliable. Polley wrote:

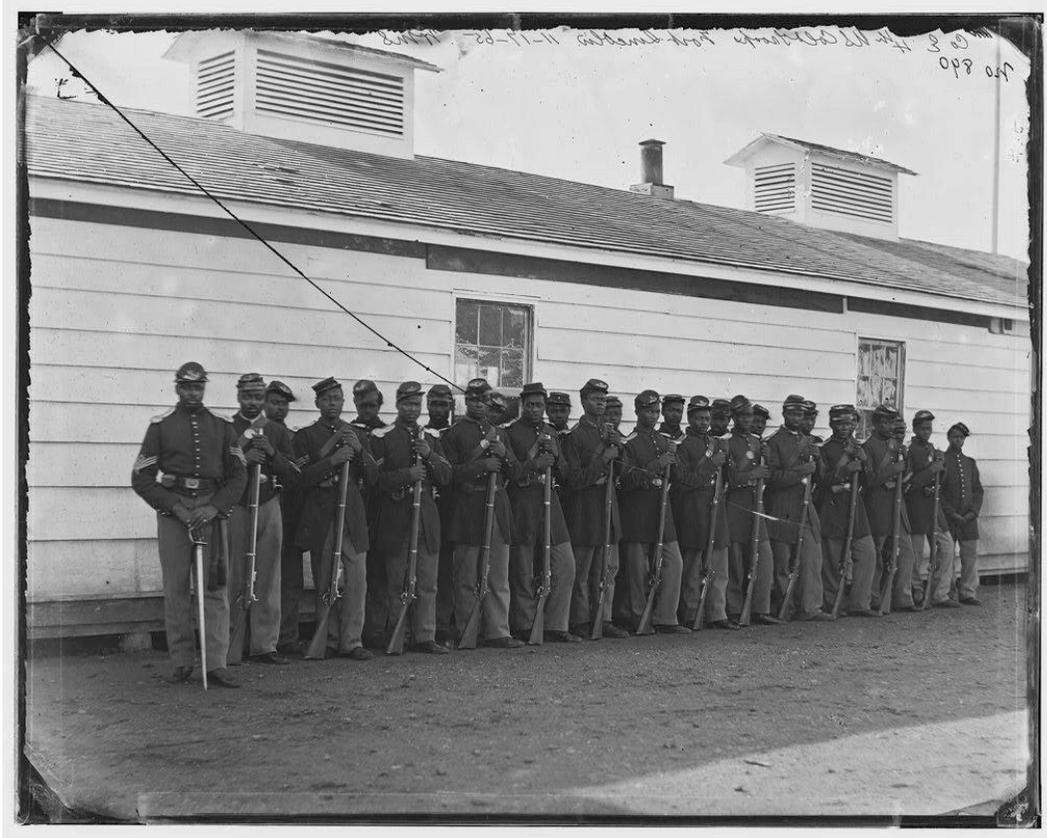
“Along toward the last days of September General Grant believed the time ripe for renewed activity on the north side; wherefore, he started 40,000 men in that direction, under General Ord, with instructions to proceed without delay into Richmond.”

“On the 27th these crossed the James River at Deep Bottom, got well into position on the 28th, and at daylight of the 29th, with negro troops in the van and covering their entire front, moved forward against the 3000 Confederates, all told, then between them and their goal. Of this 3000, Johnson's brigade was on the river above Drury's Bluff, Benning's, at New Market Heights, Gary's, guarding the Charles City Road-and the Texas, at the Phillips house, between Benning's and Johnson's, two miles to the right of the one and three to the left of the other. Half way between the Texas and Johnson's commands, was Fort Harrison, then occupied by a small force of Confederate artillery. On the inner line of intrenchments around the city, a mile and a half in rear of the Texas Brigade, and a like distance in rear of Fort Harrison, was Fort Gilmer, which was defended by a few heavy siege guns, under the management of a few trained artillerists and the City Battalion, composed of old men and boys, and such clerks in governmental departments as were able to bear arms. The line to be defended against the 40,000 Federal soldiers extended from Drury's Bluff down the river about eight miles.”

(Polley, J. B., *Hood's Texas Brigade*, p252)



White Officers of the 4th USCT



Co. E, 4th U.S. Colored Infantry, Ft. Lincoln, defenses of Washington, Library of Congress

Most Civil War generals used Napoleonic tactics. First skirmishers would be sent out to draw enemy fire and assess battlefield terrain obstacles such as ravines, underbrush and swamps. Generals could watch the skirmishers and determine the best attacking route. Assaults were made with columns of troops standing shoulder to shoulder. A column would fire at the enemy while another column reloaded. The advantage of this tactic was that the columns could direct a large amount of fire power at the enemy. At any instance a column was fully loaded, if the enemy charged the column would fire. The disadvantage however is that the column was an easy target for a concealed enemy in breast works.

The regular “dash” as Butler called it put emphasis on the charge. Skirmishers would not be used and the charging column would not stop to discharge their weapons. Butler made certain of this by removing firing caps from their rifles. He told his black men to take New Market Heights at any cost and let “Remember Fort Pillow” be the battle cry”.

“At half past four o'clock I found the colored division, rising three thousand men, occupying a plain which shelved towards the river, so that they were not observed by the enemy at Newmarket Heights. They were formed in close column of division right in front. I rode through the division, addressed a few words of encouragement and confidence to the troops. I told them that this was an attack where I expected them to go over and take a work which would be before them after they got over the hill, and that they must take it at all hazards, and that when they went over the parapet into it their war cry should be, " remember Fort Pillow.”

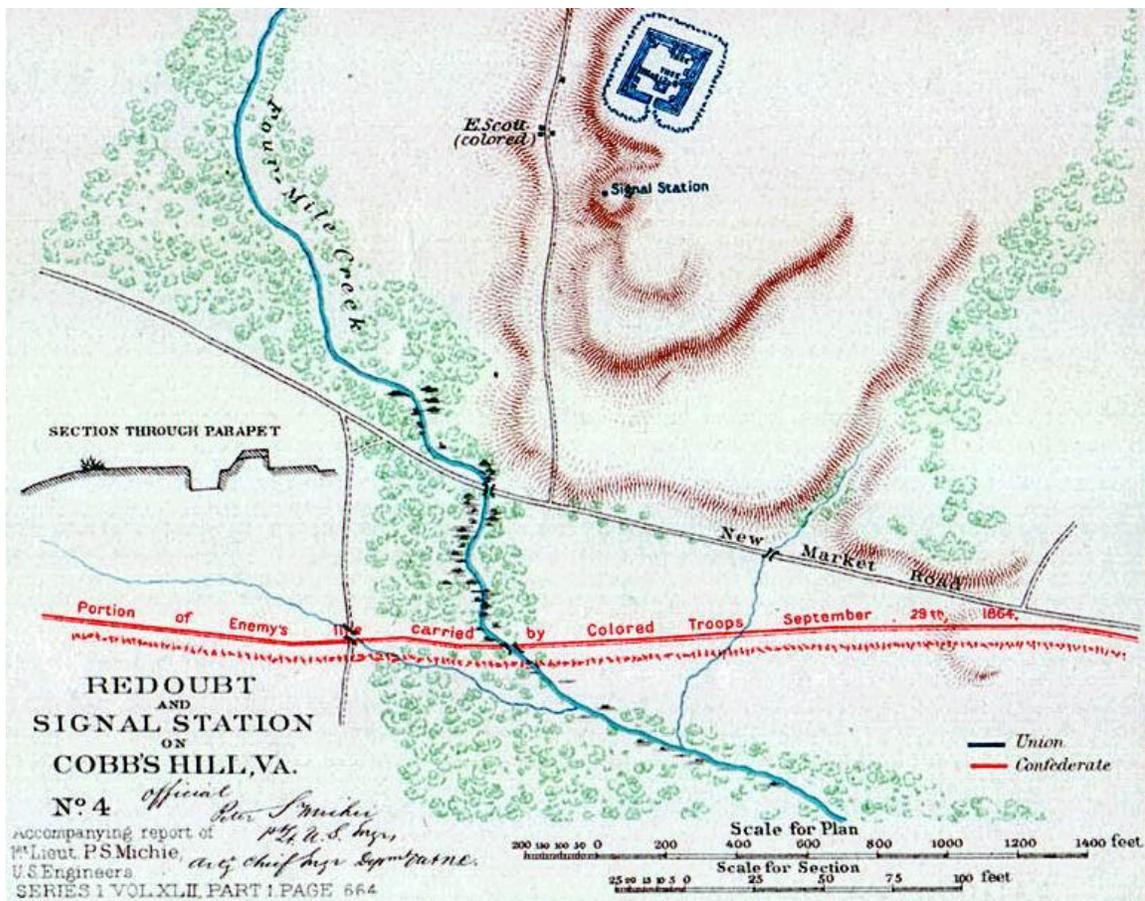
"The caps were taken from the nipples of their guns so that no shot should be fired by them, for when ever a charging column stops to fire, that charge may as well be considered ended. As their was to be no halt after they turned the brow of the hill, no skirmishers were to be deployed.

We waited a few minutes, and the day fairly shining, the order was given to go forward, and the troops marched up to the top of the hill as regularly and quietly as if on parade."

(Butler, B. F., *Butler's Book*, Page 731)

Brevet Major General Alfred H. Terry lined a division of white troops on the New Market battle line, which included Abbott's Second Brigade, Pond's First Brigade and Plaisted's Third Brigade. Brig. General Charles Paine's Third Division of Colored Troops would attack New Market Heights on the left flank of Terry's Second Brigade under Col. Abbott. First he sent in The Third Brigade under Colonel Samuel A. Duncan, which consisted of 4th USCT, 6th USCT and the 2nd USCT Cavalry.

Apparently, Terry did not understand Butler's "dash." Terry deployed these regiments as skirmishers to reveal the strength of the confederate line and they were told to capture the heights if possible. Skirmishers typically fire at will. On the other hand, Butler ordered the black men to remove their firing caps from their rifles and not break the charge to fire them.



Portion of Confederate Works Carried by Colored Troops September 29, 1864

The Confederates deployed a picket line in advance of the Confederate works. The pickets fired at the oncoming Union forces making Confederate defenses aware of the Union attack. Polley describes Duncan's dash as follows:

"With daylight came a dense, obscuring fog, and through it was heard a roar that sounded like the bellowing of ten thousand wild bulls; it was the shout of the negroes as they valorously charged the picket line in their front. A minute later it was learned that the first attack would be up a narrow creek valley across which ran the Confederate line, and thither the Texas Brigade hastened. In this little valley the fog was so thick as to render large objects, a hundred feet distant, indistinguishable. Forming in single line, six feet apart, the Texans and Arkansans awaited the onset of the enemy. They could distinctly hear the Federal officers, as in loud tones they gave such commands as were needed to keep their men moving in line, but until the line approached within a hundred feet, could see nothing; even then, only a wavering dark line was visible. As it became so, and as was usual in those days, without waiting for orders, the Confederates sprang to the top of the low breastworks, and commenced firing" shooting at shadows," one of them said.

(Polley, J. B., *Hood's Texas Brigade*, p252)

Casualties were heavy, between 400 to 500 men. Colonel Duncan was badly wounded. In forty minutes of fighting Company D of the 6th USCT lost 87% of its men, which was the highest reported loss of a Union company during a single charge in the Civil War. Company D of the 6th regiment lost 27 of 30 enlisted men.

Out of 12 flag bearers all were killed or wounded but one. One of the flag bearers was Alfred Hilton, who carried two flags, one belonging to a dead flag bearer and the other belonging to himself. As men were being shot he struggled to keep the flags from touching the ground until he was shot in the leg. He said "Boys, save the colors". Private Charles Veal grabbed the regimental flag and Sergeant Fleetwood grabbed the American flag and they continued their charge. Outnumbered with many dead and wounded they retreated back to their skirmish line, which was still entangled in the abatis.

Colonel Duncan was wounded in the battle and did not report on his failed charge of the rebel works. However, black Civil War Correspondent Thomas Chester covered Duncan's charge and reported the following from the field:

"In the onward to Richmond move of the 29th ult. the 4th United States Colored troops, raised in Maryland, and the sixth United States colored Troops, from Pennsylvania, gained for themselves undying laurels for their steady and unflinching courage displayed in attacking the Rebels at great disadvantage. These two regiments were deployed as skirmishers... The sharpshooters were soon dislodged and our troops entered another woods, pushed beyond it and crossed the Three Mile Creek. On account of the marshy state of the ground, slush, timber, undergrowth and brush, this line became somewhat confused, but some advancing beyond these difficulties, they reached the enemy's abatis in front of his breastworks which they charged with cheering. Two lines of abatis had here to be overcome, which was handsomely accomplished. It was here that many of the colored troops fell while attempting to force a passage over the abatis. There was no flinching of these two regiments in this terrible position, but they manfully received and returned the fire until they were three times ordered to fall back which they did in good order. In the attempt of the fourth and the sixth regiments to pass over the abatis, the fourth lost its entire color guard. Alfred B. Hilton, of the fourth carried the American flag, which was presented to it by the colored ladies of Baltimore, to the very edge of the breastworks, and, lying down, held aloft the national colors. When they were ordered to fall back, this brave man was shot down, but is not dangerously wounded and his exclamation was, " Save the Flag !" Sergeant Major Fleetwood successfully brought the colors back riddled with thirty rents, with no other loss to himself than a shot to his bootleg."

(Chester, Thomas Morris, *Black Civil War Correspondent*, Page 139-141)

Fleetwood rallied the survivors around his flag for another attack. Some men made it to the top and as Butler requested, they said, “remember Fort Pillow”, however, completely outnumbered, they were killed or captured then murdered. Polley wrote:

About the same instant a Federal officer shouted in stentorian voice, "Charge, men-Charge!" But only by the negroes immediately in front of the First Texas was the order obeyed by a rush forward that carried a regiment of the poor wretches up to, and in one or more places, across the breast-works, and right in among the First Texans. The latter, since Spottsylvania Court House well-provided with bayonets, were experts in the use of them, defensively and offensively, and in less than three minutes one-half of the assailants were shot down or bayoneted, and the other half, prisoners.

(Polley, J. B., *Hood's Texas Brigade*, p254)

Their courage in saving the flag was recognized by Congress. Fleetwood, Veal and Hilton of the 4th regiment as well as Sergeant Alexander Kelly and Sergeant Thomas R. Hawkins of the 6th regiment received Congressional Medals of Honor. Hilton died of his wounds a month later.

Butler's *dash* tactic may have worked better on good terrain. New Market Heights, however, contained ravines and swampy ground, which broke portions of the column's charge. Butler's account describes Duncan's failed dash over the abatis. Butler wrote:

Crossing the brook their lines broke in little disorder, the left of the divisions having plunged into the morass, but the men struggling, held their guns above their heads to keep them dry. The enemy directed its fire upon them; but, as in all cases of firing downward from a fort the fire was too high. The leading battalion broke, but its Colonel maintained his position at its head. Words of command was useless as in the melee they could not be heard; but calling his bugler to him the rally rang out, and at its call his men formed around him. The division was at once reformed, and then at double quick they dashed up to the first line of abatis. The axe men laid to, vigorously chopping out the obstructions. Many of them went down. Others seized the axes. The enemy concentrated on the head of the column. It looked at one moment as if it might melt away. The colors of the first battalion went down but instantly they were up again but with new color bearers."

(Butler, B. F., *Butler's Book*, Page 732)

At the same time General Terry deployed Duncan's Brigade, he also deployed Abbott's Second Brigade of white troops on Duncan's right flank. They were composed of Third New Hampshire Regiment, which were 300 men, and the Seventh Connecticut Volunteers as skirmishers. Abbott wrote:

Having thrown out the Seventh Connecticut, Capt. S.S. Atwell commanding, as skirmishers I advanced, following the skirmishers at about 250 yards toward the enemy's works on the New Market road. Between my first position and those works there was a difficult ravine and swamp, and my line was enfiladed by a sharp artillery fire from the enemy's battery-on my right. Captain Atwell having reported that the enemy's works were well manned, and the skirmishing being sharp, I strengthened the skirmish line by sending forward the Third New Hampshire, Maj. J. F. Randlett commanding, with orders to press forward strongly, while I followed with the main line as before.

(Abbot, O.R. 86:702-703)

Major Randlett advanced the Third New Hampshire to 500 yards of the works and halted. He wrote:

Colonel Abbott instructed me to advance my line as rapidly as possible, reporting success to him, exercising my own discretion. When in full view of enemy and his works, 500 yards across the opening, I advanced a light line and drew from the enemy the disposition of his forces.

(Randlett, O.R. 86:702-703)

It appears that the Confederates followed Duncan's retreat and pushed the line of battle back to the area of Four Mile Creek. Confederates were massing at the point of Duncan's attack, after Duncan's dash stalled, Major Randlett, having a small force of 300 men, asked Abbott for reinforcements. He wrote:

Finding my line flanked on the left by works similar to those in my front, and discovering that he was reenforcing the flank, I ordered my men to lie down, the advantage of the rolling ground being such as to entirely protect them from his infantry while his artillery played over us into the ravine. I then dispatched a messenger to Colonel Abbott, informing him of disposition of my command, respectfully suggesting that a force be sent to relieve my left flank. Was informed that General Terry had sent a detachment of colored troops to that duty.

Apparently, Draper was sent in to support the retreating Duncan's Brigade and protect Abbott's left flank. Paine deployed his Second Brigade of colored troops consisting of the 36th, the 38th and the 5th USCT under Col. Draper, a total of 1300 men. The First Brigade, the 22nd U.S.C.T. under Col. Holman, was acting as skirmishers in front of Draper. Draper moved to the right so the 22nd were in front and to the left of Draper. The 22nd followed Duncan's trail but they did not continue to the works. Like Duncan, the 22nd got hung up in the underbrush. Albert James said: "*The line moved forward through a dense tangle of underbrush and felled trees*" which slowed the charge down. On the other hand, Draper had moved to the right of Duncan's trail, missing the tangled underbrush. He only encountered 300 yards of young pines so he continued to Four Mile Creek ahead of the 22nd. Draper charged across the open plain until they reached Four Mile Creek where the charge was halted.

Like Duncan, Draper's men took heavy losses at Four Mile Creek as well. Their dash was broken to a crawl as they crossed Four Mile Creek about 30 yards in front of the Confederate abatis. Some of the men started to discharge their weapons which added to the confusion and halt the progress of the dash. Draper said: "*After half an hour of terrible suspense, by starting the yell among a few, we succeeded in getting them in motion. The entire brigade took up the shout and went over the rebel works.*"

From Butler's viewpoint he watched the men charging over the abatis. He wrote:

Wonderfully they managed to brush aside the abatis, and then at double quick the reformed column charged the second line of abatis. Fortunately they were able to remove that in a few minutes, but it seemed a long time to the lookers on. Then, with a cheer and a yell that I can almost hear now, they dashed upon the fort. But before they reached even the ditch, which was not a formidable thing, the enemy ran away and did not stop until they had run four miles, I believe. They were only fired at as they ran away and did not lose a man."

(Butler, B. F., *Butler's Book*, Page 733)

Butler refers to two lines of abatises; however, the Cobbs Hill Engineering Map and battle reports reveal that the works at New Market Heights was composed of an abatis and a palisade. The palisades at New Market Heights were of the "front (exterior) ditch" construction. A ditch was dug in front of a fill wall which could have contained dirt and

logs. This may have appeared to be an abatis from a distance. The abatis was made of fallen trees with its branches pointing toward the charging Union Army.

Draper's skirmish line was pinned down between Four Mile Creek and the first abatis. His skirmish line was re-enforced and picked up new momentum from the support of the 22nd USCT. Once out of the "*dense tangle of underbrush and felled trees*" the 22nd charged across the open plain while Draper's charge had stalled. Part of the 22nd approached Draper's skirmish line on the right and entered the works with them. Captain Albert Janes of the 22nd wrote: "*As the charging column came up to the support of the skirmish line a part of the regiment assembled on the right and moved forward into the works, driving the enemy in confusion from them.*" Draper wrote: *When we reached the palisades the rebels fell back to the woods on the side of Signal Hill. We again assaulted and drove them out.*" (Draper, O.R. 87:819-820)

Once the Confederates evacuated the works in front of Draper, the whole Confederate line evacuated. The small brigade of white troops charged the works with little resistance. Abbott wrote:

Major Randlett having reported that the enemy were advancing on my left and massing in front, I went forward to the skirmish line to make an examination. I ordered him again to press forward and at once advanced the main line. Just at that time Paine's division commenced a vigorous attack upon the enemy upon my left, which was successful, and as my line advanced into the open ground, the enemy evacuated their works in my front, having a few minutes previous taken off their artillery from the height on my extreme right. I advanced into the works, the Third New Hampshire occupying the deserted battery on the right.

(Abbot, O.R. 86:702-703)

General Ord (numbering 4,000 men) attacked Fort Harrison where they found little resistance. The Confederates had been concentrating their strength on the Negroes at New Market Heights, leaving only 200 men to guard Fort Harris.

During the first wave most of the white officers were killed or wounded and black sergeants took command. Sergeants given Congressional Medals of Honor for rallying their troops were First Sergeant Powhatan, First Sergeant James Bronson and Sergeant Robert Pinn of the Ohio 5th regiment. Medals of Honor were also given to First Sergeant Edward Ratcliff, Sergeant James H. Harris and Private William H. Barnes of the 38th regiment. Cpl. James Miles and Pvt. James Gardiner of the 36th regiment who were among the first men to enter the Rebel works. Casualties among black troops exceeded 1000 while those for white troops were minimal.

"As I rode across the brook and up towards the fort along this line of charge, some eighty feet wide and three or four hundred yards long, there lay in my path five hundred and forty-three dead and wounded of my colored comrades. And, as I guided my horse this way and that way that his hoof might not profane their dead bodies, I swore to myself an oath, which I hope and believe I have kept sacredly, that they and their race should be cared for and protected by me to the extent of my power so long as I lived.

When I reached the scene of their exploit their ranks broke, but it was to gather around their general. They almost dragged my horse up alongside the cannon they had 'captured, and I felt in my inmost heart that the capacity of the negro race for soldiers had then and there been fully settled forever... After that in the Army of the James a negro regiment was looked upon as the safest flanking regiment that could be put in line."

(Butler, B. F., *Butler's Book*, Page 733)

Draper and Duncan were both promoted to General upon recommendation to President Lincoln by General Butler. Apparently, the Texas Brigade had not been defeated until the Battle of New Market Heights. Thomas Morris Chester wrote:

For marching or fighting Draper's 1st Brigade, 1st Division, 25th Corps, is not to be surpassed in the service, and the General honors it with a pride and a consciousness which inspire him to undertake cheerfully whatever may be committed to his execution. It was his brigade that nipped the flower of the Southern army, the Texas Brigade, under Gary, which never before last September knew defeat.

Fort Harris was actually the prize of the day. It was the strongest point on the Confederate line protecting the capitol of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia. As a result, the outer defenses around Richmond collapsed. By 7:00 am Butler's men occupied Fort Harrison. The next day General Robert E. Lee ordered that the fort be taken back. However, the 22nd USCT had arrived at Fort Harris and helped to defend the fort.

On the morning of the 30th the regiment moved to the right of the fort refaced and repaired to earth-works adjacent to the fort. At 1 o'clock the enemy was seen making preparation for an attack. At 2 o'clock our pickets were driven in and five distinct lines of the enemy charged our line. The attack was general. The charging column was repulsed. A second time charged and second time repulsed. A counter-charge was then made by the Twenty-second, which added impetus to the already flying rebels. In this counter-charge the regiment encountered a strong [force] which was stationed under the lee of an isolated fort, and from which we received a volley of musketry which killed several men and wounded two officers (Maj. J. B. Cook and Capt. Jacob F. Force), but they, too, were put [to] flight, and, as no other advantage could be gained, the regiment again took its position in line behind the breast-works, in all the maneuvering the most unflinching bravery was displayed by both officers and men.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

□ ALBERT JANES,

The defeat of the Confederates at New Market Heights caused the Confederates to evacuate the outer defenses around Richmond and retreat to works close to the city. Polley assessed the damage done by the colored troops.

"Their capture on the 29th of September, of Fort Harrison, was a distinct gain to the Federals. Holding it, General Lee had been able to confine the enemy on the north side to the valley of the James, below Drury's Bluff; losing it, he was compelled to withdraw his forces from the heights north of the James, and place them within a line of entrenchments encircling Richmond, and, at various points, not over three mile from the city. This gave the Federals outlet into the country north of Richmond."

(Polley, J. B., *Hood's Texas Brigade*, p254)

After fighting black troops at Petersburg and Chaffins Farm (New Market Heights and Fort Harris) General Robert E. Lee became a supporter of using black troops in battle. Black troops had been used in the Confederacy but only as personal servants and laborers. Lee wrote:

"we should employ the them without delay [even] at the risk which may be produced upon our social institutions...The negroes, under proper circumstances, will make efficient soldiers. I think we could at least do as well with them as the enemy. Those who are employed should be freed. It would be neither just nor wise . . . to require them to serve as slaves."

(McPherson, James M., *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p836)



Butler Medal presented to Black Troops

At his expense, Butler had a large silver medal struck by Tiffany & Co. for his black troops that fought at New Market Heights. These medals remain as the only medal made for black troops. Butler personally gave 200 of the medals to black soldiers. Butler wrote:

I had a medal struck of like size, weight, quality, fabrication and intrinsic value with those which Queen Victoria gave with her own hand to her distinguished private soldiers of the Crimea...The obverse of the medal shows a bastion fort charged by Negro soldiers, and bears the inscription "Ferro iis libertas perveniet." (Freedom was won by them with the sword) The reverse bears the words, "Campaign before Richmond," encircling the words, "Distinguished for Courage."

(Butler, B. F., *Butler's Book*, Page 743)

SOUTHERN BIAS HISTORIAN "SPIN" AND EXAGGERATION

The lack of official Confederate battle records was used by southern leaning historians to bolster the idea that the Confederates were simply redeployed instead of defeated at New Market Heights. Polley's book is the only available Confederate resource for the battle. Many of Polley's claims are exaggerated, however, and are not equivalent to official battlefield records. For example, Polley said that a captured black soldier told them that blacks were forced to charge the Confederate defenses by their white officers. Polley claimed the black soldier said "*Dar wahnt no way outer jinin', but fo' God, Marster, dis chile wouldn't nebbah un chawged you white folkses breas' wuks lack we did, eff der Yankkees hadn't er tole us day'd shoot us eff we didn't.*" (Polley, J. B., *Hood's Texas Brigade*, p251)

It was a widely held view by Confederates that slaves would not make good soldiers. White officers were often shot first by Confederates. Their white skin made them good high contrast targets against the black skin of their men. Confederates hoped that the black troops would not fight without their officers. In reality however, many black sergeants at New Market Heights

rallied their men after their white officers were either wounded or killed, earning Congressional Medals of Honor.

Polley's overall description of the battle does not vary significantly from Union battle reports. The only exception is the so called redeployment of the Texas Brigade during the charge of the colored troops. Polley's claim that the Texas Brigade was redeployed before the black troops entered their works is an example of his exaggerations. He claimed that Benning's Brigade and Gary's Cavalry was driven from their trenches while his Texas Brigade was redeployed. Polley wrote:

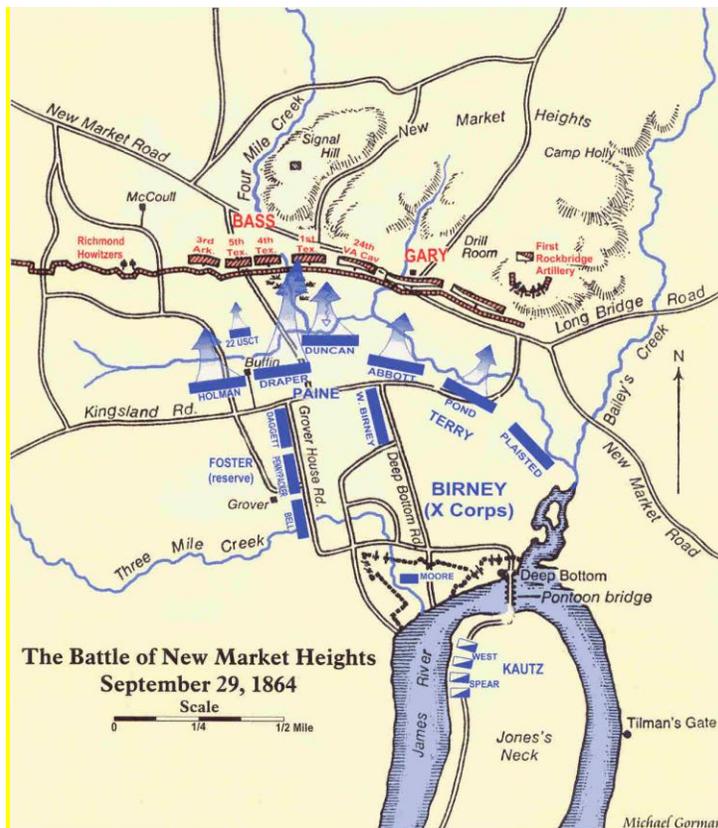
"The firing had hardly ceased when word came that Gary's cavalry and Benning's brigade had been driven from their positions, and were in rapid retreat to the inner line of intrenchments on which stood Fort Gilmer, and that if the Texas Brigade did not "get a move on," and a fast one at that, it would be cut off from Richmond and its comrade commands on the north side.

(Polley, J. B., *Hood's Texas Brigade*, p254)

Polley's claim seems unlikely since he also says Benning's Brigade was on the left flank of the Texas Brigade. If they had been driven off then the Texas Brigade would have to leave their position as well. Polley may have been trying to preserve the undefeated record of the Texas Brigade. Thomas Morris Chester wrote that it was Drapers brigade *"that nipped the flower of the Southern army, the Texas Brigade, under Gary, which never before last September knew defeat."*

Modern historians biased the history of New Market Heights in favor of all the Confederates at New Market Heights, while Polley was interested in bolstering the record of the Texas Brigade only. Polley said the Texas Brigade, Arkansas Brigade, Benning's and Gary's Cavalry were all at New Market Heights. Benning's Brigade plus the Texas Brigade alone is 800 men. Gary's cavalry is composed of an additional 800 men, bringing the total Confederate force at New Market Heights to at least 1600 men, not counting Arkansas. Modern historians simply removed the Benning's Brigade from the battle to reduce Confederate troop strength and used Polley's "re-deployment" idea to reduce the size of Gary's Cavalry as well. The Historian M. Gorman wrote: *"Draper's brigade found the Rebel works almost deserted. The few remaining Confederates either surrendered or fled."* (Gorman, *The Union Perspective*) The black troops therefore rallied against empty trenches and that was the only way they were able to capture New Market Heights. Modern historians minimized the size of Confederate forces and then redeployed them before the charge of the black troops.

Similarly, the size of the white Union forces is also exaggerated. The Park Service map of the battle implies that Abbott's Second Brigade, Pond's First Brigade and Plaisted's Third Brigade were deployed at New Market Heights. In fact only the Third New Hampshire Volunteers and Seventh Connecticut Volunteers were deployed by Abbott at New Market Heights.



Park Service Map. Note that Benning's Brigade is not included. Wade Hamptons Legion and the City Brigade were also not included but were deployed near New Market Heights

DASHING INTO BATTLE

By late 1864 black units were being used effectively at charging Confederate battle lines. For example, at a bridge over the Big Black River in Mississippi, a black regiment charged a regiment twice their size and defeated them in hand to hand combat. Historian J. T. Glatthaar wrote:

“In late 1864 a railroad bridge carried needed Confederate supplies over the Big Black River in Mississippi. The bridge was guarded by over 300 Rebels (one regiment). Large union forces had failed to take the bridge in several occasions when Maj. J. B. Cook and his 3rd U.S. Colored Cavalry “tried their hands”. With only 2 companies of black men (150 men), Cook routed the Confederates fighting parts of the battle “hand to hand”. It was declared “one of the most daring and heroic acts of the war”.

(Glatthaar, J. T., *Forged in Battle*, p152)



Battle of Nashville by Louis Kurz & Alexander Allison 1893

In the late stages of the war, the Union Army was becoming effective at using black troops in large battles as well. When they charged the flank of Confederate defense battle lines, the Confederates tended to reinforce their defenses at the point of attack of the black units. At the Battle of Nashville Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas placed two black brigades on the right flank of the Union line. Historian J. T. Glatthaar wrote:

“On the first day of fighting, the two black brigades attacked the Confederate right to draw resources away from the main Federal thrust on the Rebel left flank, which was successful... During the second day, black and white troops swarmed up the slick slopes of the Confederate position on Overton Hill... Although they did not break the Confederate line, these troops again forced the Confederates high command to transfer men to its right, which weakened the left and facilitated its fall to Federal attackers.”

(Glatthaar, J. T., *Forged in Battle*, p167)

The Confederate Army of Tennessee was crushed at Nashville and Lt. Gen. John Bell Hood's Tennessee invasion was halted. Slave owners had made the argument that blacks did not want the responsibilities of being free. Following the Battle of Nashville, one black soldier had an opportunity to discuss his desire for freedom with his former owner. His story was recorded in the 1930's as follows: *"When I went to the War, I was turning seventeen. I was in the Battle of Nashville, when we whipped old General Hood. I went to see my mistress on my furlough, and she was glad to see me. She said, 'You remember when you were sick and had to bring you to the*

house and nurse you?" And I told her, "Yes m, I remember." And she said, "And now, you are fighting me?" I said, "No'm, I ain't fighting you. I'm fighting to get free. "

(Mellon, Bull Whip Days, p339)

It was difficult for black soldiers to overcome the stigma of slavery. Even towards the end of the war white soldiers had low regard for black troops. By the end of 1864, even though there were 130,000 black soldiers on the field, many white soldiers were still unexposed to blacks and harbored old prejudices. Union officers, however, were becoming aware of the effectiveness of using black troops on the flank of their battle lines.



The 1st Mississippi Cavalry Bringing Into Vicksburg Rebel Prisoners Captured At Haines Bluff, Frank Leslie's Illustrated, December 19, 1863

Between December 10-29, 1864, black Cavalry soldiers from Kentucky fought at Saltville, Virginia. At Saltville, black troops were placed on the left flank of the Union line. Col. James S. Brisbiny of the 5th United States Colored Cavalry described to Brig. General Lorenzo Thomas how his black troops were treated by white troops on the way to the Battle of Saltville:

On the march the Colored Soldiers as well as their white Officers were made the subject of much ridicule and many insulting remarks by the white Troops and in some instances petty outrages such as the pulling off the Caps of Colored Soldiers, stealing their horses etc. was practiced by the white Soldiers. These insults as well as the jeers and taunts that they would not fight were borne by the Colored Soldiers patiently or punished with dignity by their Officers but in no instance did I hear Colored soldiers make any reply to insulting language used toward [them] by the white Troops... On the 2nd of October the forces reached the vicinity of the Salt Works and finding the enemy in force preparations were made for the battle. Col. Ratliff's Brigade was assigned to the left of the line and the Bridge dismounted was disposed as follows. 5th U.S.C. Cav. on the left. 12th O[hio]. V.C. in the center and 11th Mich. Cav. on the right. The point to be attacked was the side of a high mountain, the Rebels being posted about halfway up behind rifle pits made of logs and stones to the heights of three feet. All being in readiness the Brigade moved to the attack. The Rebels opened upon them a terrific fire but the line pressed steadily forward up the steep side of the mountain until they found themselves within fifty yards of the Enemy. Here Col. Wade ordered his force to charge and the Negroes rushed upon the works with a yell and after a desperate struggle carried the entire line killing and wounding a large number of the enemy and capturing some prisoners. Of this fight I can only say that men could not have behaved more

bravely. I have seen white troops fight in twenty-seven battles and I never saw any fight better. At dusk the Colored Troops were withdrawn from the enemies works, which they had held for over two hours, with scarcely a round of ammunition in their Cartridge boxes.

On the return of the forces those who had scoffed at the Colored Troops on the march out were silent...Such of the Colored Soldiers as fell into the hands of the Enemy during the battle were brutally murdered. The Negroes did not retaliate but treated the Rebel wounded with great kindness, carrying them water in their canteens and doing all they could to alleviate the sufferings of those whom the fortunes of war had placed in their hands. Col. Wade handled his command with skill bravery and good judgment, evincing his capacity to command a much larger force. I am General Very Respectfully Your Obedient. Servant

James S Brisbiny

**I.e., disabled or diseased horses that had been only partly rehabilitated.*

(Berlin, Ira, *Free At Last*, p489)

Julius Leach joined Co. D. 5th U.S. Colored Cavalry in Woodford County, Kentucky, and was killed at the Battle of Saltville. His wife Patsy Leach remained in bondage with their owner Warren Wiley. Patsy Leach was knocked to the ground by Wiley after watching her husbands' company leave for Saltville. He brutally beat her owner when he learned that Julius died fighting at Saltville. The story of her ordeal is included earlier in this document as an example of abuse towards slave women.

25TH CORPS

On December 3, 1864, 13,650 black troops were assigned to the 25th Corps making it the largest black army in the history of the United States. The remaining 19,000 white troops were assigned to the 24th Corps.

FORT FISHER

Fort Fisher protected North Carolina's port of Wilmington, which by December of 1865 was the last remaining supply route for the Confederate Army. Northern merchants were expressing concerns to President Lincoln that European trade was still being conducted by the Confederate states through Wilmington. General Grant ordered General Weitzel of the Army of the James to capture the fort. Since General Weitzel reported to General Butler, Fort Fisher became Butler's responsibility. Butler took a similar approach as General Burnside when he tried to blow up the confederate defenses at Petersburg. Butler worked with the Navy to load a ship with explosives that was to approach the wall of the fort and detonate. It was planned that the explosion would destroy the wall of the fort, but the plan failed. The explosives detonated prematurely and the fort walls were not harmed. Butler's plan had depended on the floating bomb destroying the fort and he had not massed enough troops for a successful frontal attack. When President Lincoln inquired about the progress of capturing the fort, Grant described it as a failure and recommended Butler's removal. Recall that General Grant admitted that his interference with the affair at the mine at Petersburg caused that plan to fail. Nevertheless, Butler was removed as commander of the Army of the James. Fort Fisher fell a month later.

FIRST TO ENTER CHARLESTON AND RICHMOND

The following article was published in a rebel newspaper following the Battle of Honey Hill. The article suggests that black troops were observed fighting in the front or advance of the attacking army on a regular basis.

"The negroes, as usual, formed the advance, and had nearly reached the creek, when our batteries opened upon them down the road with a terrible volley of spherical case."

"The Savannah Republic"

(Brown, W. W., *The Negro in the American Rebellion*, p261)

On February 18, 1865, Black troops fighting in the advance of the Union Army were among the first to enter Charleston. On April 2, 1865, black troops were among the first to enter Petersburg. They marched to the tune of "John Brown's Body" including the phrase "We'll hang Jeff Davis on an sour apple-tree." Richmond fell a day later on April 3, 1865. Draper, now a General, saw that his 36th Colored Regiment was the first to enter the Confederate capital at the front of the Union Army. Chaplain Garland H. White marched at the front of his regiment and described the day that Richmond fell to a newspaper. White wrote:

I have just returned from the city of Richmond; my regiment was among the first that entered that city. I marched at the head of the column, and soon I found myself called upon by the officers and men of my regiment to make a speech, with which, of course, I readily complied. A vast multitude assembled on Broad Street, and I was aroused amid the shouts of ten thousand voices, and proclaimed for the first time in that city freedom to all mankind. After which the doors of all the slave pens were thrown open, and thousands came out shouting and praising God, and Father, of Master Abe, as they termed him. In this mighty consternation I became so overcome with tears that I could not stand up under the pressure of such fullness of joy in my own heart. I retired to gain strength, so I lost many important topics worthy of note.

Among the densely crowded concourse there were parents looking for children who had been sold south of this state in tribes, and husbands came for the same purpose; here and there one was singled out in the ranks, and an effort was made to approach the gallant and marching soldiers, who were too obedient to orders to break ranks.

We continued our march as far as Camp Lee, at the extreme end of Broad Street, running westwards. In camp the multitude followed, and everybody could participate in shaking the friendly but hard hands of the poor slaves. Among the many broken-hearted mothers looking for their children who had been sold to Georgia and elsewhere, was an aged woman, passing through the vast crowd of colored, inquiring for [one] by the name of Garland H. White, who had been sold from her when a small boy, and was bought by a lawyer named Robert Toombs, who lived in Georgia. Since the war has been going on she has seen Mr. Toombs in Richmond with troops from his state, and upon her asking him where his body-servant Garland was, he replied: "He ran off from me at Washington, and went to 'Canada. I have since learned that he is living somewhere in the State of Ohio." Some of the boys knowing that I lived in Ohio, soon found me and said, "Chaplain, here is a lady that wishes to see you." I quickly turned, following the soldier until coming to a group of colored ladies. I was questioned as follows:

"What is your name, sir?"

"My name is Garland H. White."

"What was your mother's name?"

"Nancy."

"Where was you born?"

"In Hanover County, in this State." "Where was you sold from?"

"From this city."

"What was the name of the man who bought you?"

"Robert Toombs."

"Where did he live?"

"In the State of Georgia."

"Where did you leave him?"

"At Washington."

"Where did you go then?"

"To Canada."

"Where do you live now?"

"In Ohio."

"This is your mother, Garland, whom you are now talking to, who has spent twenty years of grief about her son."

I cannot express the joy I felt at this happy meeting of my mother and other friends. But suffice it to say that God is on the side of the righteous, and will in due time reward them. I have witnessed several such scenes among the other colored regiments.

Late in the afternoon, we were honored with his Excellency, the President of the United States, Lieutenant-General Grant, and other gentlemen of distinction. We made a grand parade through most of the principal streets of the city, beginning at Jeff Davis's mansion, and it appeared to me that all the colored people in the world had collected in that city for that purpose. I never saw so many colored people in all my life, women and children of all sizes running after Father, or Master Abraham, as they called him. To see the colored people, one would think they had all gone crazy...Some people do not seem to believe that the colored troops were the first that entered Richmond. Why, you need not feel at all timid in giving the truthfulness of my assertion to the four winds of the heavens, and let the angels re-echo it back to the earth, that the colored soldiers of the Army of the James were the first to enter the city of Richmond. I was with them, and am still with them, and am willing to stay with them until freedom is proclaimed throughout the world. Yes, we will follow this race of men in search of liberty through the whole Island of Cuba. All the boys are well, and send their love to all the kind ones at home.

*Garland H. White, Chaplain,
28th USCI,
Richmond, Virginia,
April 12, 1865;*

(Redkey, E. S., *A Grand Army of Black Men*, p175)



Black Troops Entering Charleston, Harper's Weekly, March 18, 1865

Thomas Morris Chester also described the fall of Richmond to newspapers back in Philadelphia. Chester wrote:

"When General Draper's brigade entered the outskirts of the city it was halted, and a brigade of Devin's division, 24th Corps, passed in to constitute the provost guard. A scene was here witnessed which was not only grand, but sublime. Officers rushed into each other's arms, congratulating them upon the peaceful occupation of this citadel... The pious old negroes, male and female, indulged in such expressions: "You've come at last"; "We've been looking for you these many days"; "Jesus has opened the way"; "God bless you"; "I've not seen that old flag for four years"; "It does my eyes good"; "Have you come to stay?"; "Thank God", and similar expressions of exultation.

There General Draper's brigade, with the gallant 36th U.S.C.T.'s drum corps, played "Yankee Doodle" and "Shouting the Battle Cry of Freedom," amid the cheers of the boys and the white soldiers who filed by them... For marching or fighting Draper's 1st Brigade, 1st Division, 25th Corps, is not to be surpassed in the service, and the General honors it with a pride and a consciousness which inspire him to undertake cheerfully whatever may be committed to his execution. It was his brigade that nipped the flower of the Southern army, the Texas Brigade, under Gary, which never before last September knew defeat. There may be others who may claim the distinction of being the first to enter the city, but as I was ahead of every part of the force but the cavalry, which of necessity must lead the advance, I know whereof I affirm when I announce that General Draper's brigade was the first organization to enter the city limits. According to custom, it should constitute the provost guard of Richmond.

(Chester, Thomas Morris, *Black Civil War Correspondent*, Page 290-291)



THE FEDERAL ARMY ENTERING RICHMOND, VA., APRIL 3d. 1865.—RECEPTION OF THE TROOPS IN MAIN STREET.—FROM A SKETCH BY JOSEPH BECKER.

THE SOLDIER IN OUR CIVIL WAR

The Federal Army Entering Richmon VA. April 03rd 1865, Frank LESLIES 1895 BOOK HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR

The 25th Corps pursued Robert E. Lee's Army and participated in the closing battle at Clover Hill, April 9th, the day of Lee's surrender. Black troops continue to follow General Lee to Appomattox where he surrendered.

Butler's plan of arming the Negroes became an important tactic for winning the Civil War. It won the support of Northerners' as well as the self respect of Negroes. Even the word "nigger" had a new meaning. In a letter to his mother a Union officer wrote:

"I have talked with numbers of Paroled Prisoners in Vicksburg, and they all admit it was the hardest stroke that there cause has received-the arming of the negrow. Not a few of them told me that they would rather fight two Regiments of white Soldiers than one of Niggers. Rebel Citizens fear them more than they would fear Indians. "

(Glatthaar, J. T., *Forged in Battle*, p155)

BUTLER'S POLITICAL CAREER

Butler never forgot the promise that he made to black folks at New Market Heights. He switched from the conservative Democratic Party to the liberal Republican Party. He served in the United States House of Representatives from 1867 to 1875. He drafted the initial version of the Civil Rights Act of 1871, called "The Ku Klux Klan Act." Butler tried to outlaw racial discrimination in public places, although it would not be until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed that Butler's provisions would become law. Historian R. S. Holzman wrote:

"When the first Negro Congressmen were met with cold courtesies on every hand, Butler was quick to be on familiar terms with them. His solicitude for Negroes was so great that at a colored banquet in New Orleans, the master of ceremonies offered this well intended toast: "Here's to General Butler. He has a white face, but he has a black heart."

(Holzman, R. S., *Stormy Ben Butler*, p205)

Butler was the Governor of Massachusetts from 1883 to 1884, after which he ran for the presidency of the United States. In that short period as governor he made several historic appointments. He was the first to appoint an African-American (George Louis Ruffin) and an Irish-American as judges. He was also was the first to appoint a woman to executive office. He appointed Clara Barton to head the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women (Wikipedia.)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Butler has been referred to by modern historians as "inept," and "more of a politician than a general." Butler's accomplishments, however, reveal that more than either a general or politician, Butler was a visionary. Butler envisioned an America whose creed "*all men are created equal*" is believed to be a proven fact, even at a time when racism prevailed.

Americans respect the characteristics of a good soldier: courage, self-sacrifice, self-reliance and personal responsibility. Although it was a common belief that blacks did not possess these values, Butler discovered that many of them did. In bondage, slaves frequently took personal responsibility for change; they secretly sought the power of God. In the face of danger, they "stole away" and had illegal prayer meetings, where they prayed for freedom. It became a great enough threat to slave owners that Negro prayer meetings (free or slave) were banned in Virginia, punishable by flogging.

Freedom for slaves won by white men, however, would do nothing to counter racism or the stigma of slavery. Equality of men had to be proven on the battlefield. Butler felt that slaves had

to “*strike a good blow for their own freedom*” or pass along a inheritance of shame to future generations.

Butler initiated the recruitment of black troops and discovered how to use them effectively. Like John Brown and other abolitionists, he felt that slavery was wrong and God had instructed him to destroy it. Unlike most abolitionists, however, Butler was a skilled lawyer, an accomplished military general and an advisor to President Lincoln. Butler successfully implemented John Brown’s plan, of “arming the Negro.”

Historians frequently cater to their audience. Most Civil War battlefields are located in the south and most southern Civil War history buffs support the Confederacy. African-Americans have roots in the south where people like Butler and John Brown are thought of as villains. Since Civil War historians cater to their audience it is essential for African Americans to be part of that audience in order to be fairly represented in American history. History teaches us the importance of values that help us to be successful. If we don’t understand how hard slaves fought to win their freedom we may not recognize our obligation to do something to preserve our history and our culture. One thing we can do is make sure African-American history is told completely and accurately, without omissions and exaggerations.

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APPENDIX

As of October 9, 2011 the Battle of New Market Heights is marked with a road side sign on New Market Road. There is currently no access to the sign, visitors must find available parking and walk along the shoulder of the road to the signs location. There are no available sidewalks or parking. This is not a reflection of the significance of the battle but more of a reflection of how well the battle is being preserved. If we don't understand the fundamentals of freedom, its responsibilities, its cost and how it was obtained, it will be difficult preserve.



New Market Height, Virginia