History # 217

Re: The Sable Arm -- The Negroes' Civil War

Opening statement: Blacks have fought in all the American wars beginning with the Revolutionary war. They have generally been called upon only when the manpower levels dip dangerously low, or the war was not going too well. . Then the authorities turned and tapped the black sources of manpower. This was the case in the Civil War. . . . .

## Northern Resistance:

 $\label{eq:After Sumter northern blacks tried to enlist in the $U_n$ ion Army.} \\$ 

If blacks proved their patriotism and courage on the battle field the nation would be morally obligated to grant them first-class citizenship.

Frederick Douglass: "Once let the black man wear the brass letters "US" on his coat, or an eagle on his buttons, and a musket on his shoulder and a bullet in his pocket and there was no power on earth that could deny him his earned right to citizenship in the US."

 $\label{eq:black-enlistment} Black\ enlistment\ efforts\ were\ met\ with\ the\ iniform\ cry\ that\ ''This is\ a\ White\ Man's\ War!''$ 

The spirit i of John Brown was not present in the North or in the Lincoln government in the early stages of the war.

The general sentiments about black troopers was that blacks, and especially former slaves were too servile and cowardly to make good soldiers.

Lincoln had many reservations about entertaining the idea of incorporating blacks into the military.

Moreover a federal law banned blacks from serving in the state militias in the North. There were no blacks in the regular Army prior to the war. However, Jim Crow was absent from the US Navy prior to the Civil war. During the war some 29,000 Negroes served in the navy--this was about 25% of the Union's naval strength.

Robert Smalls was a free black from Charleston, South Carolina. He was an assistant pilot on a side-wheeled steamer called the <u>Planter</u>. In May 1862 the Planter was provisioned with arms and gun powder--military stores that were formerally Union provisions seized by the State of So. Carolina when they took over the arsenals in the Palmetto state upon seceeding from the Union. These provisions were detailed to Fort Sumter.

On the evening of May 12, Smalls was left in charge of the Planter, then docked at the Charleston warf. At 4 0'clock in the moring Smalls and his familiy and other blacks that made up the skeleton crew of the steamer "cast off." Their destination was Beaufort--where Smalls learned that General Hunterof the Union Army was recruting blacks to serve in the war.

The <u>Planter</u> sailed out of Charleston Harbor under the gums of Ft. Sumter and Ft. Moultrie. He delivered the <u>Planter</u> to the Hunter Headquaters at Beufort. The US Congress rewarded Smalls and his crew with half of the prize money for the Planter.

## The Negroes Contribution:

By the last year of the War some 180,000 blacks were in the Union Army. They sevéd in all branches of the Army--infantry, heavy and light artillery, and cavalry. They participated in all the major battles of the war, except for Sherman's March through Georgia. They made up about 12% of the total number of Union soldiers.

Of these 180,000--some 68,000 were lost in the war. Some as battle casualties, others died of diswases and their wounds.

They served under less than ideal sircumstances. Some were impressed into the service. Some served under racisits white officers who never learned how to get the most out of them. They were dicriminiated in the most blatant manner. Especially true in the scandal of unequal pay. Black soldiers received \$3 less per month than white troopers. This inequity was not corrected by Congress until midway through 1864.

 $\label{eq:the_confidence} They \ \text{faced the most extrem form of prejudice} \\ \text{from the Confederate enemy.}$