

Jimerson, Private CW
Addendum

Re: White Union Soldier sentiments re: Black soldiers

Charles Wills of Illinois mirrored the northern assessment of black character. The conduct of black soldiers and the war's inexorable logic converted Wills from a virulent racist to a grudging admirer of poor "Sambo." Wills was a Lt. in the Cavalry The 7th Illinois Cavalry.

Letters to his sister back home:

April '62: "I don't give a damn for the darkies.

August 1862--"You have no idea what a miserable, horrible-looking, degraded set of brutes these plantation hands are. The most savage, copper savage, cannot be below these field hands in any brute quality." "Let them(Rebs)keep their negroes for we surely don't want our northern states degraded by them"

August 1862--"We are all rejoicing that 'Abe' refuses to accept the negroes as soldiers"[after Lincoln rejected Hunter's policies]. Blacks could not be counted upon as soldiers "for a million of them aren't worth 100 whites."

By 1863 Wills began to change his tune

March 1863--Although convinced that most blacks could not handle freedom he admitted there were some exceptions. The Union should "arm all the latter and make them fight Rebels. They will probably be fit for freedom after a few years as soldiers."

May 1863--"I am by no means an enthusiast over the negro soldiers yet. I would rather fight the war out than arming them." Yet he would not set up against Lincoln's policies. "I think poor Sambo should be allowed a fair chance and that he will certainly never get under worthless officers."

June 1863--By now Wills conversion was complete. "I never thought I would, but I am getting strongly in favor of arming them, and becoming so blind that I can't see why they will not make good soldiers. A year ago last January I didn't like to hear anything of emancipation. Last fall accepted confiscation of Rebel's negroes quietly. In January took to emancipation readily, and now believe in arming the negroes. "I almost think of applying for a position in a regiment myself."