

History 225

*Berlin POW for the next*

Re: Notes w/ EP/and w/ Berlin piece in WP

The role of the slaves themselves as prime movers in securing their own freedom. A challenge to the more passive idea that slaves waited around for Massa Likium to free them with the EP.

Whatever the opportunitiers for flight in the opening stages of the war the slaves took a great risk--punishment even death was a possibility. Slaves could not be sure that their masters' stories about the dreaded Yankees were true--that they were cannibals and would eat the slaves. . . .etc.

Afterall, the Yankees were white folk--white folk were capable of anything. Add here that in early stages of war(one aim war)Most Union generals would return slaves to their masters. Note: Lincoln's limited war policy and the Union's limited war aims.

For example, General Patterson who moved against Harper's Ferry and McClellan in western Virginia announced that they would use Union force to suppress any slave uprisings against their masters.

Most Union soldiers at the start of the war regarded this as a white man's fight and had no place for blacks. Only a very small minority of Union soldiers were abolitionists or committed to seeing the war turned into a crusade to end slavery. Most Union soldiers had little or no experience with blacks at all. This would be especially true of Billy Yanks from the Midwestern states.

See some notes from Mitchell,etc. . . . .

These initial attitudes were challanged when fugitive slaves began to filter into Union lines. In they came--breathless, clothed in tatters, bearing the marks of abuse. . . Some soldiers gavbe them succor despite the orders against this. Fugitives proved useful in terms of doing camp chores and served as sources of information,etc.

*Despite fugitive have now*

There was friction between soldiers and those officers who insisted that the slaves be returned. Then there was even greateat friction when the masters turned up and demanded that their "property" be returned. Some of these masters from the border states would bring certificates on their loyalty to the Union and were regarded as arrogant in their demands.

Note: the dilemma that Union officers found themselves in in the border states: Had to find a middle way between being slave catchers and slave stealers. The general manner to resolve was to try and exempt all fugitives from slipping into the Union camps.

History 217

Page two

Re: Notes w/ Emancipation Proclamation

The reality was that as soon as Union troops began their invasion of the South they became entangled with the institution of slavery.

Blacks began to vote against slavery with their feet. They moved in great numbers into the ranks of the invading Union armies.

Quote: A NY Times correspondent at the Union-held Port Royal in So. Carolina wrote in February 1862: "Everywhere I find the same state of things existing; everywhere the blacks hurry in droves to out lines; they crowd in small boats around our ships; they swarm upon our decks; they hurry to our officers from the cotton houses of their masters. In an hour or two after the first guns are fired. . . . I mean such statement I make to be taken literally ; it is not garnished for rhetorical effect."

As slaves moved in great numbers into Union camps this produced great pressure at the bottom of the chain of command. Blacks realized this. [Curious to hear Barbara Fields when she speaks on "Who Freed the Slaves"]. Company commanders on the scene had to pass this problem up the chain of command to brigade. Brigade passed it up to the Corps commander for the area. Corp commanders passed it along to the ranking General in the theatre who, in turn, looked for instructions from his superior--the General in Chief of the Union armies. The C-in-C had to speak immediately to the Secretary of War who was then compelled to talk to his boss, the man in the White House. And so it went.

Another factor here was the reaction of Billy Yank, the Union foot-slogger in the ranks. As Union soldiers moved deeper into the South and as casualties mounted, etc. they became less respectful of the property of the enemy. They were asked by the government to risk their lives while at the same time they were supposed to protect the property of the very people who were in rebellion against the government and were killing them in great numbers. Moreover, Union soldiers as they brushed up against the institution of slavery came to realize that slavery was the stomach of the Confederacy. Slaves, who made up 40% of the southern population, was a critical military asset for the South. It didn't take superior intelligence for Union combat troops to recognize this. In addition, most of these young men had never seen slavery up close; perhaps they had never even seen a slave or even a black person. But now they came in daily contact with the trappings of the institution--the whipping posts, the slave pens, they saw slaves who were scarred by the lash and with cropped ears, and they heard stories from slaves about the cruelties of the system.



History 217  
Page three

Re: Notes w/ Emancipation Proclamation

They also saw first-hand the devastating inequalities that the slave system created in the South--the great gap between the luxury and opulence of the planter class and the dirt-poor conditions of the poor nonslave-holding whites.

All this by way of shock of recognition. In a smaller way it must have been similar to the kind of visual impact that hit US forces in WW II when they stumbled across the Nazi killing camps in southern Germany--Dachaus and Buchenwalds; scenes of ghastly dimensions that they were not prepared for. . . .  
hev

The point here is: The perspective from the field was a very critical and many times overlooked factor in explaining the reason for the transformation of the Union war strategy from a limited war to a revolutionary struggle.

#### B. Union Commanders Divided on "contrabands"

1. Many Union commanders returned runaways. See McClellan. McClellan also threatened to put down without mercy any slave insurrection in his theatre of command.

2. Other generals like Butler in New Orleans and David Hunter in Missouri declared the runaways as "contraband" of war and recruited them into Union forces.

#### C B. Military Pressures

Clear that by 1862 the war had bogged down into a bloody stalemate. The South was running wild in the East but Union forces in the West under Grant were banging successfully at Confederate positions all along the Mississippi. But the large fact that emerged was that neither side was able to gain absolute victory--to destroy the other sides armies so they were unable to return to the combat. It was going to be a long war of attrition not a war of one or two great battles to bring resolution.

Shiloh was a dramatic and unbelievable indicator of how expensive in human life this war was becoming. One of the immediate effects of all this was a dropping off in volunteers into the Union Army in 1862. The initial romance and adventure of the war was gone.