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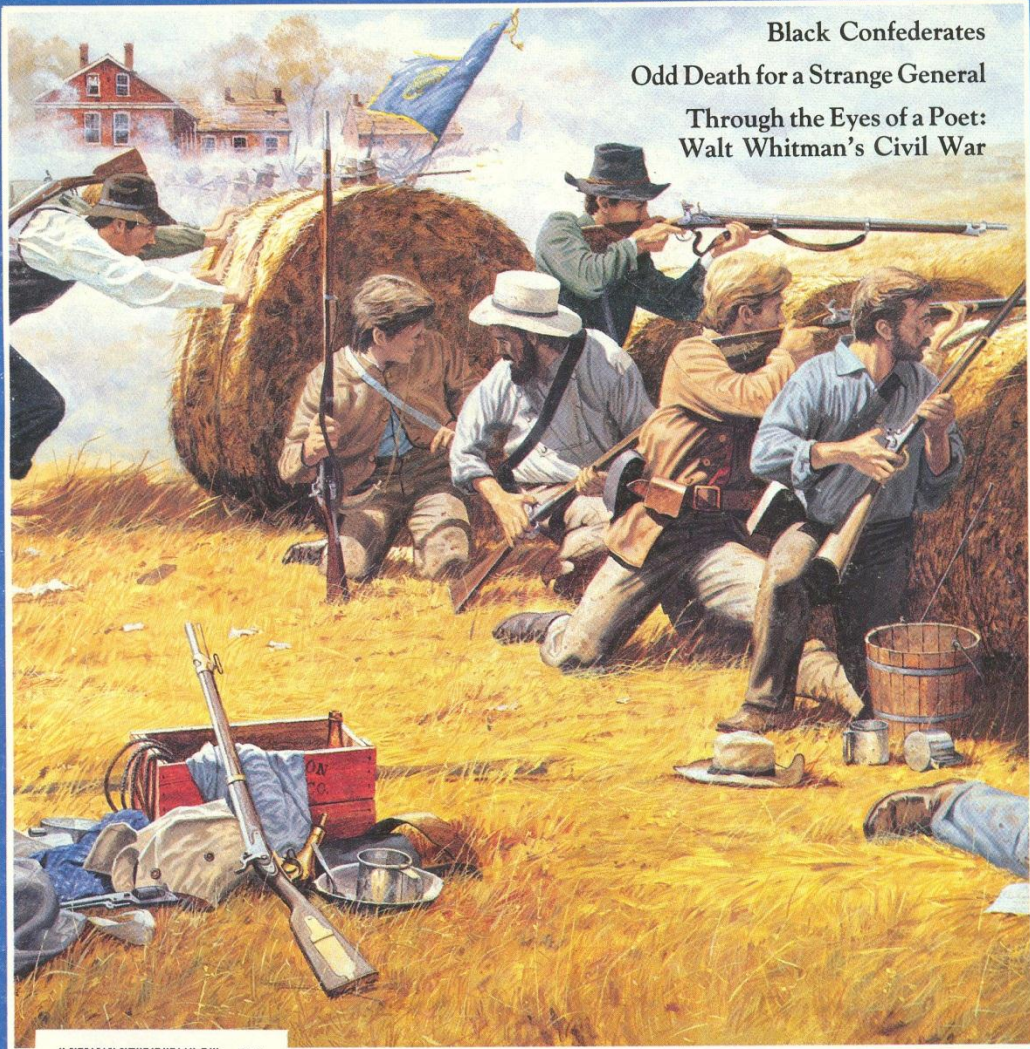
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Black Confederates

Odd Death for a Strange General

Through the Eyes of a Poet:
Walt Whitman's Civil War



QUARTERLY

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

To me, no battlefield park is more beautiful and impressive than Antietam. Civil War enthusiasts seem to agree that the Antietam National Military Park is a favorite site. Maybe this is so because the battle itself was so incredibly fierce and ghastly. The ground is indeed hallowed. I have loved that battlefield because of those things, and, because the area is so untouched, relatively speaking. As a lad, the Antietam battlefield was my first introduction to the Civil War. Visits with my relatives in nearby Martinsburg, West Virginia (twelve miles distant), enabled me frequently to roam that once sanguine field. The visions of the West Woods, the ruins of the Dunker Church, the Sunken Road and the Lower Bridge from those early days in my life will remain indelibly etched in my memory.

In recent times those seeking to "cash in" on the visitor traffic to and from sleepy Sharpsburg, Maryland have made their presence known. There have been rumblings about proposed housing projects near the battlefield and suggested shopping centers.

I am happy to report that on October 27, 1986 Judge John P. Corderman, Washington (County) Circuit Court, Hagerstown, Maryland, ruled that the County Commissioners of Washington County improperly rezoned a 12-acre tract of land which was to be the site of a shopping center near the Grove farm, the site of the famous meeting between General George B. McClellan and President Lincoln.

A permanent injunction was issued.

Civil War enthusiasts from all over the nation became interested in the proposed commercial invasion into the Sharpsburg area. It was reported by the *Washington Post* that petitions opposing the construction of the shopping center (which was to contain a pizza shop, drugstore and supermarket) contained over 5,000 signatures.

It has been estimated that 27,500 Americans fell in the Battle of Antietam. The field is beautifully marked, and offers wonderful vistas not unlike what the two contending armies would have seen. Why not leave it alone!

Good news also comes from Gettysburg. Rumor has it that the Commonwealth of Virginia (or, more accurately, those in political authority in the Old Dominion) apparently has deemed it not "politically expedient" to expend the necessary public funds to repair the Virginia Memorial on Seminary Ridge. If the rumor is accurate, such insensitivity is an absolute disgrace. Votes may be more important, you know. Maybe they think that if all the monuments crumble to dust, that chapter in Virginia's history will somehow evaporate, and then they can get on with "progress."

Well, disinterest in the history of the Old Dominion is hardly displayed by all Virginians. *Virginia Country* has been informed by John Earnst, Superintendent of the Gettysburg National Military Park, that Mrs. Leslie Cheek, daughter of Douglas Southall Freeman, has arranged the necessary financing for the restoration project.

Rededication of the impressive memorial is planned for April 25, 1987. I urge all Virginians to attend. It's a matter of principle!

Thank you Mrs. Cheek.

In the wake of these developments the Virginia Country Civil War Society will announce early in the new year the formation of the Civil War Soldiers Memorial Foundation, a trust fund established to finance the repair, refurbishing and maintenance of Civil War memorials and gravesites. A formal announcement will be forthcoming. Let's all rededicate ourselves to preserve what is a heritage more glorious than any on earth.

KENT MASTERSON BROWN
Editor

Virginia's Black Confederates

By WAYNE R. AUSTERMAN

The dead and wounded still littered the fields around the Virginia hamlet of Manassas Junction late in July 1861, as a defeated Union army stumbled back within the ring of fortifications that shielded Washington, D.C., little more than a day's march to the northeast. Brigadier General Thomas Johnathan Jackson paused briefly during his duties to write a brief letter to an old friend, Pastor William S. White of the First Presbyterian Church of Lexington, Virginia. Although nagging pain from a bullet-shattered finger of his left hand momentarily distracted him, Jackson quickly collected his thoughts and composed the message. Passing briefly over the South's victory in this first major battle of the war, which had seen him win the immortal sobriquet of "Stonewall" Jackson, the young general dwelt mainly on a concern close to his pious heart. "In my tent last night, after a fatiguing day's service," he wrote, "I remembered that I had failed to send you my contribution for our Colored Sunday school. Enclosed you will find my check. . . ."

Jackson's preoccupation with providing religious education for the children of slaves may seem curious behavior for a Confederate general to the modern observer, but there was nothing odd about it at the time. Bonds of friendship and solicitude had long existed between many white Virginians and their black neighbors, both slave and free. The challenges and hardships of the war years ironically intensified many of those relationships in the midst of the conflict that would eventually emancipate the bondsmen. By 1865 there were tens of thousands of black Virginians who had served the Confederacy ably in roles ranging from raising crops to casting cannons, crewing locomotives and even standing fire in battle with their white comrades. The story of Virginia's black



Stonewall Jackson's Cook

Confederates deserves to be told, for the courage and skills they displayed in defending their state would help to carry them through the long decades of struggle that followed until they finally won a sadly belated place of equality among all the Old Dominion's citizens. Like all their fellow Virginians of the Civil War generation, the black Confederates learned that to survive was to endure, and to endure was a triumph in itself.

When secession and war came to Virginia in the spring of 1861 many blacks were as eager to join the colors as their masters. A newspaper in Lynchburg printed an article on the enlistment of

seventy free Negroes in a company pledged to defend the state, and concluded with the comment, "three cheers for the patriotic Negroes of Lynchburg." In April, 1861, the black citizens of Petersburg, Virginia volunteered to help construct fortifications at Norfolk, and held a mass rally to demonstrate their enthusiasm for the cause in the courthouse square. Former mayor John Dodson presented them with a Confederate flag, promising the volunteers "a rich reward of praise, and merit, from a thankful people." The company's spokesman, bricklayer Charles Tinsley, accepted the banner and replied, "We are willing to aid Virginia's cause to the utmost of our ability. . . and we promise unhesitating obedience to all orders that may be given us." That October a Northern journal, *Harper's Weekly*, published a drawing that depicted a black drummer marching with a military band in a recruiting parade held at Woodstock, Virginia.

Black enthusiasm for service survived the early months of the war and remained a valuable resource for the Confederates. Early in February 1862, the *Baltimore Traveler* reported that black men in the neighborhood of Williamsport, Virginia "are being taken to Richmond, formed into regiments, and armed for the defense of that city." That month the state legislature considered formal legal sanction for the enrollment of all free Virginia blacks in the Confederate forces. Although neither the state nor national authorities were yet willing to approve the organization of black combat units, many slaves and freedmen were already serving unofficially with the army.

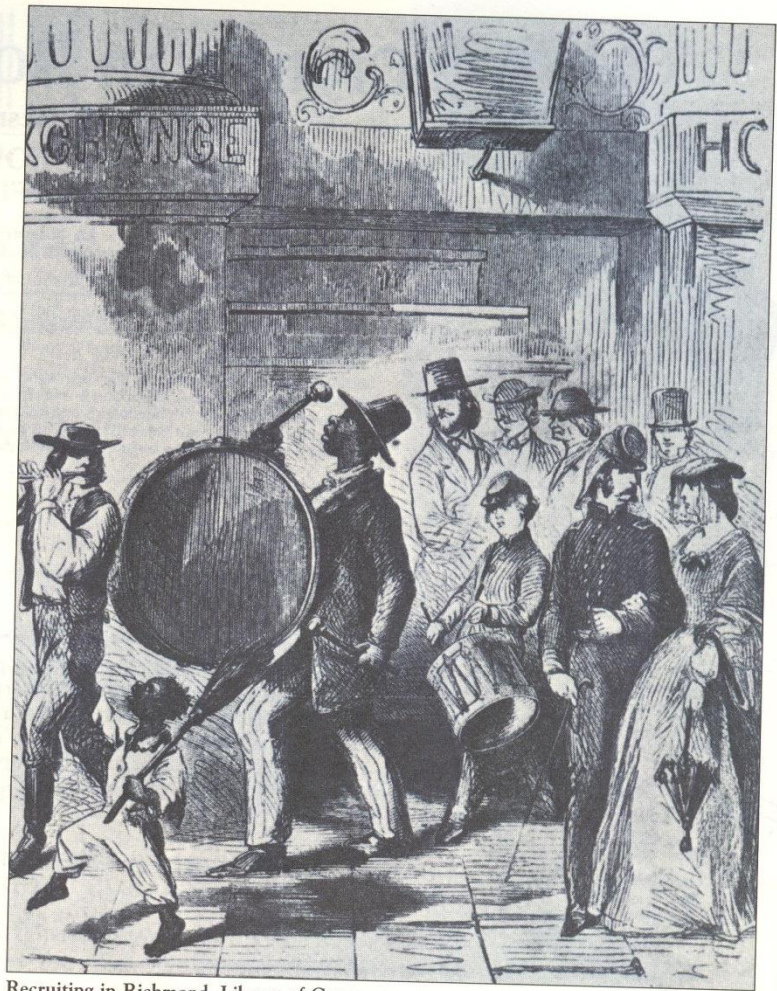
Thousands of Confederate officers and enlisted men had marched off to war with their personal servants in tow, and many regiments mustered as many black camp helpers and teamsters on

their rolls as they did white soldiers. Military bands were often composed wholly or in part by black musicians. So common were the sable tunesmiths that the Confederate States Congress passed legislation requiring equal pay for all military bandsmen. The country ballads and martial airs played by these men cheered the troops in camp and put steel in their backbones as they marched into battle.

Not all Virginia blacks were content to be servants or drummers, however. By 1862 some were shouldering arms and burning powder in combat. During the Army of the Potomac's siege of Yorktown in the spring of that year, the troops in the Union trenches were plagued by a Rebel sniper who fired with deadly accuracy. He became such a nuisance that a squad from the elite 1st Regiment of U.S. Sharpshooters was detailed to eliminate him for good. After laying a careful pre-dawn ambush, the green-coated marksmen spotted the sniper as he took his post and killed him with a single volley. They were shocked upon discovering that their quarry had been a black man.

The following August the *Linden Jeffersonian* related the story of a soldier's slave who had been involuntarily emancipated following his capture by the Yankees. Claimed as a servant by a Union officer, the ungrateful bondsman retained his loyalty to the South. "The Negro was sent to a spring to procure some water for his new master," reported the *Jeffersonian*, "but instead of performing that task he kept on his way to the Confederate lines where on his arrival he presented himself to (the commanding general) together with two horses which he captured from the Yankees on his 'masterly retreat!'"

It was understandable that many camp slaves would come to see their masters' fight as their own. Captain George Baylor of the 12th Virginia Cavalry recalled that one of his servants "rendered himself obnoxious to the Yankees" by luring an unsuspecting detachment of bluecoats into a Confederate ambush. During the massive cavalry battle at Brandy Station, Virginia in June, 1863, Baylor's servants, Tom and Overton, caught the fever of combat and seized discarded enemy weapons to join the 12th Virginia in a charge. Capturing the black servant of a Union officer, they



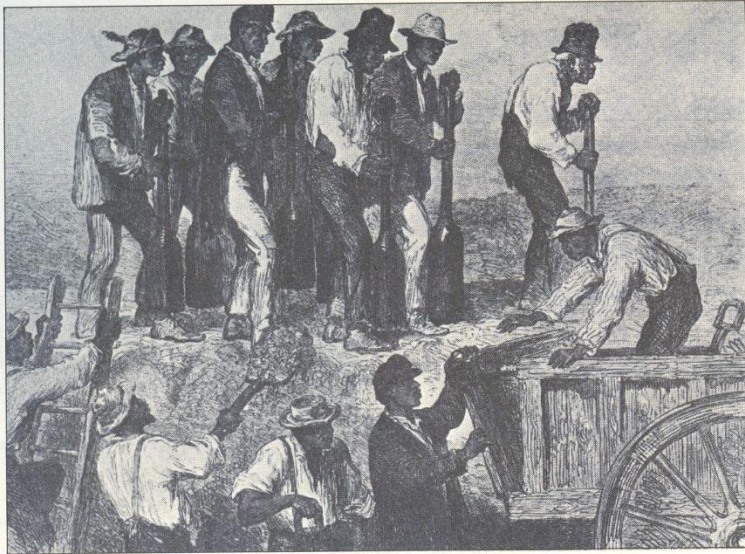
Recruiting in Richmond. Library of Congress.

marched him back to camp at gunpoint and held him prisoner for several months. The two warriors happily faced their burden of camp chores.

Individual armed blacks became a more common sight as the war continued. In 1863 a visiting British officer, Captain Arthur L. Fremantle of the Coldstream Guards, joined Lee's Army of Northern Virginia during the Gettysburg Campaign. He told the story of seeing "a most laughable spectacle" during the march back to Virginia. "A Negro dressed in full Yankee uniform, with rifle at full cock, leading along a barefooted white man, with whom he had evidently changed clothes. General Longstreet stopped the pair, and asked the black man what it meant." The proud guard

replied that the two soldiers who had originally taken custody of the prisoner had drunk too much brandy and, fearing the Yank's escape, had turned him over to their servant's charge. Fremantle was impressed by the slave's "consequential manner" and the "supreme contempt with which he spoke to his prisoner."

The Briton felt that reality disproved much Northern propaganda. "This little episode of a Southern slave leading a white Yankee soldier through a Northern village, *alone and of his own accord*, would not have been gratifying to an abolitionist," he wrote. "Nor would the sympathizers both in England and in the North feel encouraged if they could hear the language of detestation and contempt with which the numerous Negroes



Blacks Building Trenches Near Richmond
Library of Congress.

with the Southern armies speak of their liberators.”

Not all black combatants relished battle or hoped for a Southern victory, however. John Parker, who claimed to have been born in “King and Queen’s County, Virginia,” joined his fellow slaves in building fieldworks at Winchester and Fredericksburg, as well as fortifications on the James River below Richmond in the spring of 1861. In July his work gang was sent to Manassas Junction, where a major battle was in the making. Parker and four other blacks were assigned to an artillery battery and given hasty training in how to serve the guns. He was badly frightened by the enemy artillery fire, but, “We wish to our hearts that the Yankees would whip, and we would have run over to their side, but our officers would have shot us if we had made the attempt.” Parker eventually fled to the Union lines in Maryland.

Parker was not the only Virginia black to serve a gun in battle. In August 1861, a senior Union officer complained that the “Richmond Howitzer Battery” that had opposed his unit’s advance near Newport News was “manned in part by negroes.” Parker was also fortunate that he did not return to the Southern lines following his desertion. An English officer who served with the Confederates relayed the story of a body servant who defected to the Yankees just before the

First Battle of Manassas and gave the bluecoats full details of the location and equipment of several artillery batteries in the gray defenses. Recaptured a short time later, he was an object of scorn among the loyal servants in his master’s brigade, who called for him to be executed as a traitor. The fugitive was turned over to them “and met a death at their hands more violent than any white person’s anger could have suggested.”

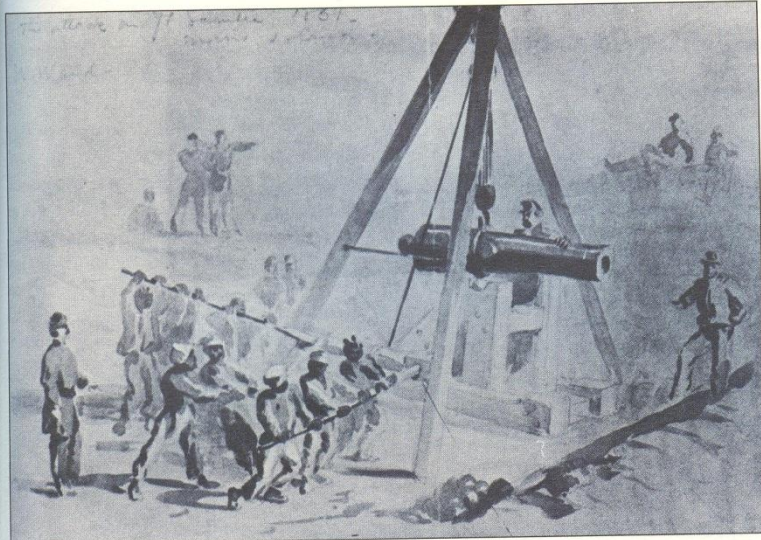
Enthusiasm for the cause could even surmount white reluctance to let the bondsmen join in the fighting. In April, 1861, a company of 60 free blacks marched into Richmond with a Confederate flag gracing the head of their column. They petitioned to join the army to help in repulsing the Northern invasion, but were instead complimented for their patriotism and then sent home by the authorities. Such zealots had better luck as individuals. An officer told the story of how he had cautioned his servant to keep under cover when the fighting erupted at Manassas, but, he said, “I was surprised to find him behind me. . . rifle in hand, shouting out, ‘Go in Massa! Give it to ‘em, boys! . . . Give ‘em h’ll!’”

Other blacks put different skills to use in support of the soldiers. Many units boasted cooks who could make even the roughest fare nourishing and palatable.

They were objects of affection among the troops and invaluable assets to the organizations they served. The Confederate soldier was by necessity a resourceful individual, but even his ingenuity paled before that of the regimental cooks. One such individual was dubbed “General Boeyguard” in honor of his prandial expertise. During the Army of Northern Virginia’s invasion of Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863, the cook often left the line of march at daybreak and did not reappear until the column had halted for the night. He always returned laden with hams, chickens, fruit and other produce from the local farms. No one ever bothered to inquire too closely about how he had obtained such choice viands in enemy country.

Another cook, Bill Doins, acquired his nickname from his habit of referring to his cooking utensils as “my doins.” A freedman, he had spent the antebellum years aboard a Chesapeake Bay oyster boat, but when Virginia seceded from the Union he immediately joined the colors. In September 1862, Lee’s battered army was retiring southward after fighting McClellan’s forces to a bloody standstill at Antietam. In the confusion of the movement Bill was separated from his “doins”. The men had to be fed, and there was flour at hand in the supply wagons, so he fashioned a field bakery on the banks of the Potomac River. Mixing flour with water right in the barrels, he used rails from a nearby fence to fuel the cooking fires. As each company in his regiment marched past, they found hot loaves of bread ready to be thrust upon their ramrods by the tireless cook.

Before the war the Bollingbroke Hotel in Petersburg had boasted the talents of an expert chef named Dick Poplar, who could work gourmet wonders with little more than cornmeal. Joining the army at the conflict’s start, he was with Lee’s men at Gettysburg, where he was taken prisoner. Poplar was a man of strong convictions and loyalty. He spent the next 20 months in a Northern prison camp with his white comrades. Taunted and threatened by his guards, Poplar staunchly refused to desert the Confederacy by taking an oath of allegiance to the Union government. Declaring himself a “Jeff Davis man,” he scorned his liberators’ promises of a quick release and elevated his fellow captives’ morale by making their scant and shabby rations



Blacks Setting Shore Batteries
Library of Congress

more palatable. At the end of the war he returned to Petersburg and prospered once more in his profession. Those who had worn the gray with him were among his most frequent patrons.

Senior officers frequently retained servants as part of their headquarters staff. Such men often had access to the most critical information about the army's capabilities and intentions. They could have done serious damage to the Confederacy had they chosen to desert to the enemy with their knowledge, but, it seems, all remained true to their trust.

Stonewall Jackson employed Jim Lewis as his body servant and headquarters cook, and the domestic often knew even before the general's staff did when a march or attack was planned. "Jim announced he could always tell the condition of the military atmosphere by the General's devotions," recalled one of Jackson's aides, "that he didn't mind his daily prayers, but when he got up in the night to pray, 'then I begin to cook rations and pack up for there will be hell to pay in the morning.'"

When Jackson was wounded at Chancellorsville in May 1863, and died of pneumonia following the amputation of his left arm, Lewis was inconsolable. He was accorded the honor of leading Jackson's horse, "Little Sorrel," in the funeral procession that carried the general's body up Broad Street in a grief-stricken Richmond. Lewis remained in

the service with Colonel Alexander "Sandie" Pendleton, but when that officer died in battle at Fisher's Hill in September 1864, Jim carried the tragic news home to his family then in Staunton before falling fatally ill. Lewis died in Lexington and was buried not far from where Jackson was laid to his final rest.

***Bonds of friendship and
solicitude had long existed
between many white Virginians
and their black neighbors, both
slave and free.***

Colonel Henry Kyd Douglas, who also served with Jackson's staff, was touched by the solicitude shown to him by two servants. Enoch, his family's coachman, had been given his freedom just before the war and went north to settle in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Douglas was wounded and captured at Gettysburg. Imprisoned on Johnston's Island in Lake Erie, Douglas was astonished to receive a letter from Enoch, who offered him the loan of money and other aid to help ease the hardships of his captivity. "His letter was in his own untutored language," wrote Douglas, "but its words were verily apples of gold."

Douglas was subsequently freed in an exchange of prisoners and returned to duty in time to witness the Confederacy's death throes. During the retreat from Petersburg to Appomattox in April 1865, Douglas became separated from his personal baggage and servant, Buck. Nearly a week after the Army of Northern Virginia stacked its arms near the McLean house in Appomattox, the young colonel was riding through Lexington when Buck hailed him joyously. Despite being cut off from the army by the advancing Yankees, Buck had eluded capture by swimming the James River at night with horse and baggage in tow, and reached Lexington safely. "There he intended to wait awhile for me. If he could hear nothing from me and the war went on," recorded Douglas, "he intended, as he said, to 'cut his way through to General Johnston'—which it was supposed General Lee was trying to do."

Although the loyal officers' body servants formed a distinctive and highly visible class of black Confederates, the greatest contribution to Virginia's war effort came from the thousands of largely anonymous slaves and freedmen who tilled the fields, mined the earth, drove wagons and helped to crew locomotives. Their skills and labor were particularly important in Virginia, "whose industries were more diversified and more highly developed than those of any other Southern state," wrote James H. Brewer in *The Confederate Negro*. "Richmond—the capital, the industrial center, and the nerve center of the Confederacy—was destined to become a major military target. Virginia's strong commitment to the war effort, therefore, found the state making extensive use of the physical and mental capacities of its large Negro population.

In 1861 there were 491,000 slaves in Virginia, while 58,000 free blacks also resided in the state. In all, the black population totalled roughly 51 percent of the white, thus forming a major portion of the Commonwealth's labor force, as well as a reservoir of skilled artisans and mechanics. The state and national governments acted to mobilize this valuable resource to support the war effort. Between February 1862, and February 1864, five laws were passed to regulate the procurement of black labor for non-combatant tasks. The three state acts

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subjected freedmen to conscription for work projects, fixed a ceiling on the number of slaves who could be similarly impressed, and exempted from forced service slaves in those counties where their absence would materially hamper agricultural production. The Confederate States Congress passed legislation in March 1863 that empowered President Davis to act as the chief enforcement agent in the procurement of black workers, with authority superior to that exercised by the individual state governors in the matter. The law also specifically authorized slave impressment by Confederate authorities "according to the rules and regulations provided in the laws of the state wherein they are impressed."

On February 17, 1864, the Congress passed an amendment to the act which authorized a levy of 20,000 slaves throughout the country between the ages of 18 and 50 whenever conditions should require it. By that September the War Department had issued a call for 14,500 slaves, of which Virginia was to furnish 2,500. Within two months President Davis was asking for authority to impress 40,000 bondsmen for national service.

Many of the slaves drafted for service were assigned to construct extensive field fortifications to defend important towns and harbors. This physically punishing work was understandably unpopular among the conscripts who comprised the huge labor gangs necessary for the earth-works' erection, but the mounting demands placed upon the state's industries also provided increased opportunities for skilled slaves and freedmen alike.

Comprehensive figures are lacking for the black labor force employed in all aspects of Virginia's military effort, but in the government shops of the community of Lynchburg alone, 201 blacks worked alongside 55 whites as blacksmiths, ropemakers, cobblers, carpenters, and wheelwrights. The Staunton quartermaster depot employed 121 blacks at similar tasks. In 1864 the Ordnance Department counted 1,830 slaves and freedmen on its employment rolls or those of associated private contractors. By year's end the figure was over 2,200. The C.S. Armory and Central Laboratory in Richmond produced nearly 100,000 rounds of small arms am-

munition and 900 artillery shells a day with the help of 54 blacks. The average such worker in either a government or private manufacturing establishment drew good wages that far exceeded what a soldier in Lee's army was paid. One slave employed as a blacksmith in a Clarksville harness shop collected \$182 a month, although most of it went to his owner. More typical was the Richmond freedman who made \$85 a month by cleaning and repairing captured muskets.

. . . Senior officers such as Major General Patrick R. Cleburne were making official requests to field black troops for combat duty.

The war's demands drove the wages of skilled workers up rapidly as the demand for them quickly exceeded the supply. In August 1861, the Tredegar-Iron Works of Richmond paid skilled slave workers \$1.25 a day. By December the rate was \$2.25 a day. In 1864 it reached \$4.00 for some jobs. One slave blacksmith could boast that his pay exceeded "that of any white man in the shop with him." The slaves were also motivated by the realization that they could keep all the money they made by working in their spare time. In January 1864, for exam-

ple, one worker made \$7.50 a day in basic wages, plus another \$6.00 for each breech band he fabricated for a cannon. That month he pocketed \$127.50 in overtime wages. Slave or free, these artisans benefited from the skills they perfected and the prestige they earned as well as the money gained in supporting the struggle for Southern independence.

With the blacks making so marked a contribution to the struggle and white manpower being drained by battlefield losses at a tragic rate, it was only a matter of time before the issue of arming the Negro became openly discussed. Despite Virginia's foresighted consideration of the proposal in 1862, President Davis and many other members of his administration remained hostile to the concept of arming the slaves to defend the Confederacy. As late as November 1864, Davis quashed such proposals, but senior officers such as Major General Patrick R. Cleburne were making official requests to field black troops for combat duty. Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin lent his influence to the idea, urging that the bondsmen be promised emancipation in exchange for their military service.

As the cheerless new year of 1865 opened, there were new calls for black enlistment in the faltering struggle. That month General Robert E. Lee wrote to a congressman, saying, "I think. . . we must decide whether slavery shall be extinguished by our enemies and the slaves be used against us, or use them ourselves at the risk of the effects which may be



Recruiting in Woodstock Virginia
Library of Congress.



Contrabands. Library of Congress

produced upon our social institutions." "My own opinion," he stressed, "is that we should employ them without delay. I believe that with proper regulations they may be made efficient soldiers. . . Our chief aim should be to secure their fidelity. . . Such an interest we can give our Negroes by giving immediate freedom to all who enlist, and freedom at the end of the war to the families of those who discharge their duties faithfully (whether they survive or not), together with the privilege of residing at the South. To this might be added a bounty for faithful service."

Lee subsequently told another legislator that the employment of Negro troops was not only expedient but necessary. Governor William Smith of Virginia joined Lee in urging Davis to support the creation of black regiments to bolster the shrinking gray armies. By February Davis had reluctantly concluded that "all arguments as to the positive advantage or disadvantage of employing them are beside the question, which is simply one of relative advantage between having their fighting element in our ranks or in those of the enemy."

At Davis' urging, the Confederate Congress finally passed a law authorizing the enrollment of black combatant troops on March 13, 1865. Virginia was to furnish a quota of 300,000 men for

service under the legislation. On April 1, Lieutenant John L. Cowardin, adjutant of the 19th Battalion, Virginia Artillery, received orders to recruit black gunners for his unit. A handful of black units were actually recruited for the regular army, and at least one uniformed

Black Virginians must have realized that they could benefit from either a Union or Confederate victory in the war

company was seen drilling in the streets of Richmond. None of these units ever saw combat before Lee surrendered on April 9, but by then at least one company of black troopers drawn from a highly improbable source had already stood enemy fire in defense of the Cause.

Since August 1861, the Confederate Medical Corps had been authorized to utilize male and female Negroes as nurses, cooks and hospital attendants. Chimbarazo, Howard's Grove, Jackson, and Winder hospitals employed hundreds of Richmond blacks to keep their services in operation as the casualties rolled in by the thousands from each battle. In March, 1865 as Grant's armies

threatened to pierce the city's defenses, a composite unit drawn from the staff of both Jackson and Winder hospitals was sent to the front to help hold the line against the enemy. An officer serving at Jackson Hospital reported:

I ordered my battalion from the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th divisions of Jackson Hospital to the front on Saturday night. . . My men acted with the utmost promptness and good will. I had the pleasure in turning over to Dr. Major Chambliss a portion of my Negro Company to be attached to his command. Allow me to state, sir, that they behave in an extraordinary suitable manner. I would respectfully ask that Major Chambliss be particularly noticed for the manner which he handled that very important element about to be inaugurated in our service.

The precise details of the hospital-stewards-turned-riflemen's field service are not recorded, but they obviously met the challenge satisfactorily and won the trust of their officers during the Confederacy's darkest hours. Had the national government capitalized on the willingness of Southern blacks to fight for their freedom as allies rather than opponents of their native land it might well have been able to win independence from Northern domination while forging bonds of trust and need between the two most important elements of its population.

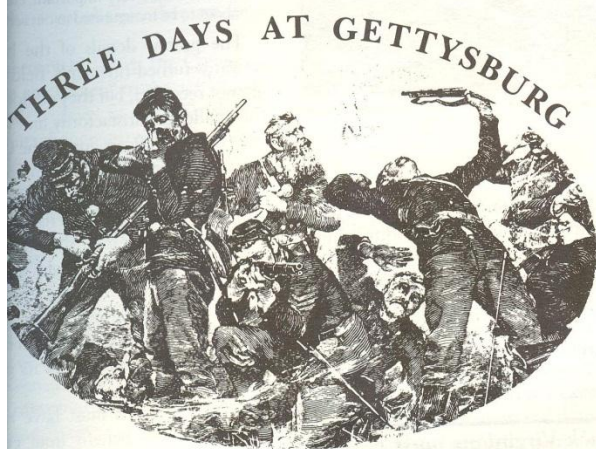
Black Virginians must have realized that they could benefit from either a Union or Confederate victory in the war. If the Yankees won, Lincoln's call for their emancipation would be forcibly honored throughout the defeated South. If the Confederates won, their loyalty and willing support for the Cause could well result in a gratitude that could engender freedom for those who had stood by their masters and white neighbors through the long struggle. The willingness of leaders like Lee, Davis, Smith and Benjamin to urge emancipation and national service for the slaves was telling evidence that the institution of slavery was judged to be expendable when weighed against the goal of national survival. There was also the grim perception that a freedom raked from the ashes of a devastated homeland would be a bitter experience no matter how much emancipation was desired.

The war's loss and the indignities of Reconstruction left virtually all Virginians impoverished and bewildered at

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the destruction of their familiar world. The resultant political rivalries pitted blacks against whites, creating a breach between the races that steadily widened the gap in mutual sympathy and understanding. Although racial tensions in Virginia never erupted into some of the tragedies that marred life in other Southern states during the postwar decades, the emancipation and enfranchisement of former slaves, coupled with the ill-advised attempts by some radical reformers to overthrow long-standing social mores created the potential for conflict. Men of good will among both races were badly needed to forestall violence between them.

Only a few weeks after the surrender at Appomattox, General Lee was attending Sunday services at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond. When the minister was ready to administer the holy communion, a black man arose in the rear of the church and strode forward amid the shocked silence to kneel at the communion table.

For long seconds there was no sound in the church as the whites saw an established tradition crumble before their eyes. A section of the western gallery had always been reserved for blacks. If they wished to receive communion, they could wait until the last whites had returned to their pews, and then go forward to their proper place. Such effrontery by a black would have brought a jail term or even a flogging in earlier years. Even now, amid a Union-occupied community, some of the men in the congregation must have thought of knotting a rope after services.

"General Robert E. Lee was present," wrote a witness, "and, ignoring the action and presence of the Negro, arose in his usual dignified and self-possessed manner, walked up the aisle to the chancel rail, and reverently knelt down to partake of the communion, and not far from the Negro." After brief hesitation, the rest of the congregation came forward in turn and the service ended quietly.

In kneeling by the freedman Lee may have been trying to set an example for tolerance and good will among his fellow whites during those tense and confusing times. He may well also have recognized a familiar black face from among the tattered ranks that had followed him to Appomattox. □

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