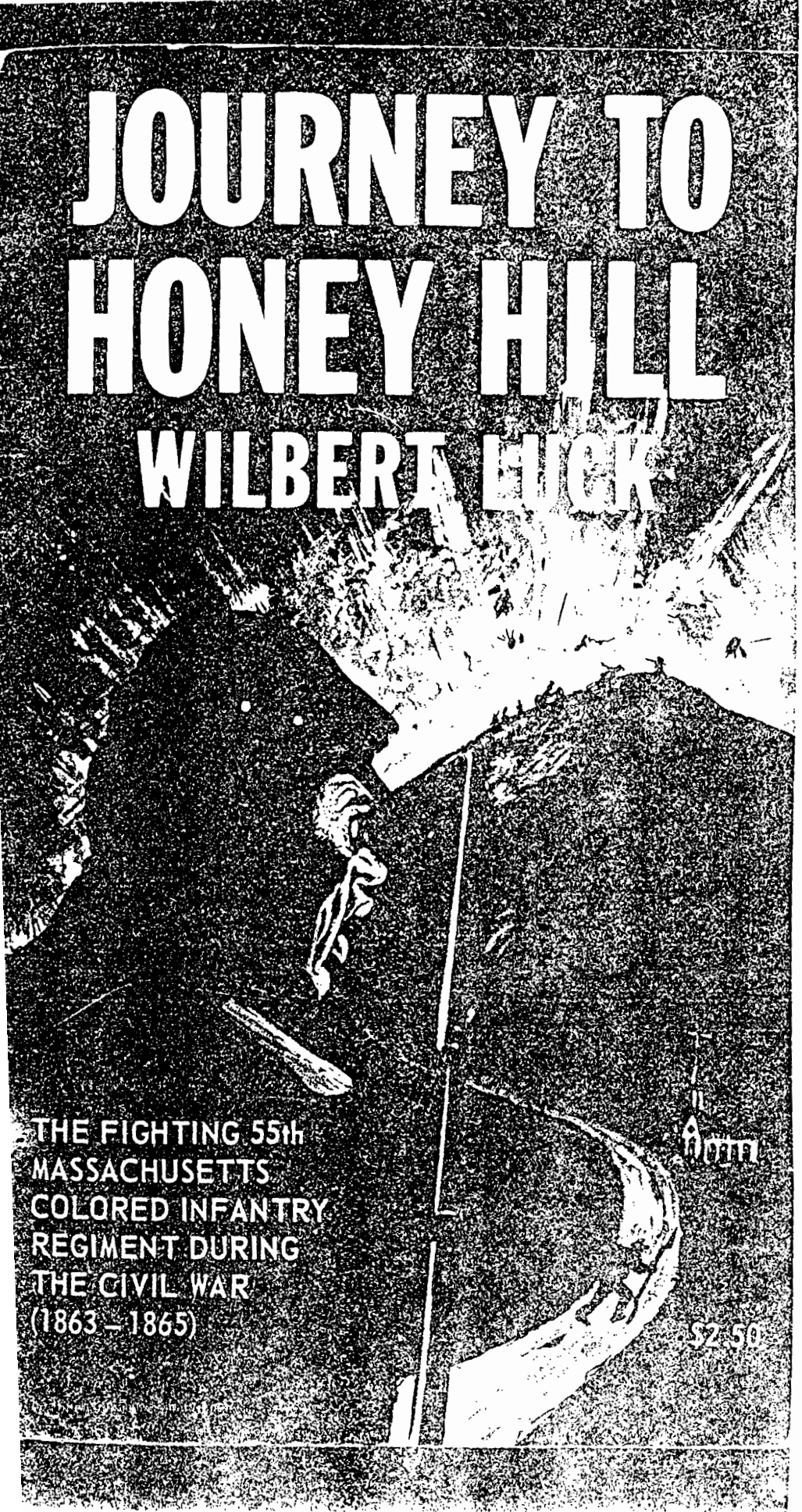


# JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL WILBERT LUCK



THE FIGHTING 55th  
MASSACHUSETTS  
COLORED INFANTRY  
REGIMENT DURING  
THE CIVIL WAR  
(1863 - 1865)

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JOURNEY

TO

HONEY HILL

*The 55th Massachusetts Regiment's (Colored)  
Journey South to fight the Civil War that  
toppled the institution of slavery.*

*by Wilbert H. Luck*

*The best to you*  
*Wilbert H. Luck*

*Published by the Wiluk Press  
Washington, D.C.*

*1976*

BEAUFORT COUNTY LIBRARY

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Would you like to go on a journey with me as we travel from the North, to the South, and back to the homes of the colored men who decided to volunteer and fight in a war over the slave issue, yet rejected as being equals as they did their fighting? One might argue that the journey taken by the colored soldiers, formally slaves or free men, was necessary to help regain the freedom they lost the day their forefathers left the continent of Africa.

How do you view one who goes from a slave to a soldier fighting for dignity, wielding his own destiny? Pardon me, for I do not propose to deal with the physiological framework of such a mind going through this transition. I only hope to present the spirit and life of the freed men, the thoughts of different people that surrounded them as they took their journey for human dignity.

This book, its title, structure and motives would perhaps be made clear if I explained why I brought myself to research and write it. No matter what I say, one who pursues this course as I did can't help from being unmoved by such a challenge. About a year or two ago, I started out with a casual interest in viewing Civil War battle monuments, relics and other collectibles. In the process, I came upon a picture that displayed an impressive view of former slaves, called the 54th Mass (colored) dressed in Union Blue uniforms of the North, who for all practical purposes were killing some of their former masters who were dressed in Confederate Grey uniforms of the South at a place named Fort

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Wagner. Knowing my love for history and wanting to see first-hand how life was for those persons during the early part of the Civil War, I too, started on a journey that led me into an intensive search through national libraries, archives, private collections, historical societies and etc. I soon found in my search that there was an equally capable sister organization to the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, namely the 55th Massachusetts (colored). Except for a published diary kept by a Colonel Fox, little or nothing has been done to elevate the 55th to their rightful place in history; namely, the front lines. I had to move swiftly to get behind the 55th Mass and follow them on a journey that had an end, but not even I knew where.

Exactly why the book was written I shall try to answer without exposing myself to criticism. As I moved further and further into the research I asked myself, "why go on?" After little debate, my conclusion was that there were a considerable number of books written about the Civil War yet the majority of these books, until lately, had devoted little more than a line, a page or two to the efforts on a particular colored regiment or for that matter mentioned any participation in the Civil War by colored troops — in general. I also found that a considerable amount of the history was either buried in basements' archives or scattered in ten or more rare collections which served no utility unless brought to the attention of the general public. Those books, rare in number, that did devote more than a page on the colored man's regimental activities during the Civil War invariably concentrated

totally on the military life which could prove unpalatable to the general reader. My course soon became clear, that is, I was compelled to lift some of these treasures buried in basements, rare book rooms and the like, so that our readers would know the colored soldiers of the 55th, and how they were treated and thought of from the time they were recruited until they were mustered out. Also, you will want to know how the State of Massachusetts, the anti-slavery Governor and surrounding States, the white and colored people, the Congress, the War Department, the white officers and the southerners influenced the shaping of the 55th Mass Regiment (colored) and their final outcome. As expected, I know the different readers will draw their own conclusions but I suspect you will go forward with "Letters of Appreciation" to present to the 55th Mass (colored soldiers) who made great contributions to the defense of the Union during the Civil War and indeed as years passed to the long term architecture of the American posture.

*For  
Casilda & Wilbert Jr.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*Appreciation goes to the persons who assisted me at the State Library of Massachusetts, Library of the Boston Athenaeum, Massachusetts Historical Society, Kansas State Historical Society, Hyde Park Historical Society, Duke University, Howard University Spingarn Staff, Carlisle, Pennsylvania Historical Research Collection (Army), National Archives, Mother Bethel AME Church, Pennsylvania, the able Ralph Bellamy at the Library of Congress, Dr. R. Logan and his assistants at Howard University History Department; to Dr. Wolfram, Strong, Bayet and a host of others that gave me advise and assistance. To the family, I say "thanks" because they let me out of the house night-after-night without my having to give an excuse.*

## List of Illustrations

Governor John A. Andrew\*  
Lincoln and The Broken Shackle Army\*  
N.P. Hallowell\*  
Frederick Douglass\*  
Camp Meigs\*  
Colored Officers\*  
Honey Hill†  
Return of the 55th Mass to South Carolina\*

\*Library of Congress Collections

†National Archives Collection

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## CHAPTER I

### THE COLORED PEOPLE'S DEBATE TO TAKE UP ARMS

The thunder and lightning that struck in the 1860's marked the beginning of the Civil War, called by some the "War of the Colored Slaves." Secession from the Federal Union broke the chains of the masters' hold on their slaves, unleashing a new animosity between the economy of Southern slavery and Northern industrial aims. Focus shifted on land interest from east to west and left scared, for all times, the colored men faced with the question of whether to join forces against the enemies of slavery and win an honorable and rightful place in freedom's hall or sit on the sideline and let the white men fight for the black man's freedom. The war was not underway long before the slaves and Northern freed men began to voice their opinions on this role. As early as September 1861, in the letter to an editor of the Anglo-African newspaper, a colored man, who signed RHV, wrote:

"The duty of the black man at this critical epoch is a question of much importance—to both white and black. The most imposing feature of this duty I am told is in relation to Military organization. The question is forced upon us by our imminent educated far sighted leaders who would have us write our names side by side with our white brothers upon the immortal book of fame and upon the battle fields. Claiming that any omission on our part to exhibit that patriotism so noticeable in the

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whites will, when history shall record the doings of this memorable country, leave our name without one deed of patriotism... Have not two centuries of cruel and unrequited servitude in this country, alone entitled the children of this generation to the rights of men and citizens. I do not suppose any people have been taxed heavier or more than the poor colored people for the cause of liberty, with such small results to themselves... Now I claim that the raising of black regiment for the war would be highly impolitic and uncalled for under the present state of affairs, knowing as we do the policy of the Government in relation to colored men... Yes, a Government that would sooner consign five millions of human beings to never-ending slavery than wrong one slave master. I maintain that the principle of neutrality is the only safe one to govern us at this time."<sup>1</sup>

While this position on the role of colored men in the war was the feeling of many, in October of the same year, a number of blacks began to change their position on the war, especially since they saw a chance for change. One leading citizen of the colored people said:

"I have no desire for contention with those who wrote the article on September 28th, signed RHV, but I think the inactivity that is advocated is the principle that has ever had us left behind and will leave us again, unless we arouse from the lethargy and arm ourselves as men and patriots against the common enemy of God and men... No nation ever has or ever will be emancipated from slavery and the result of such a prejudice as we are undergoing

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in this country, but by the sword wielded too by their own strong arms. We admit that has been said about the meanness of this government towards us—we are fully aware that there is no more soul in the present administration on the great moral issue involved in the slavery question... God will help no one that refuses to help himself; so God will not even help a sinner that will not first help himself... God is saying to us today, as plainly as events can be pointed out, stretch forth thy hand, but we sit idly under such circumstances. If ever colored men plead for rights or fight for liberty, now of all others is the time. The prejudiced white men North or South, never will respect us until they are forced to do it by deeds of our own."<sup>2</sup>

Reports were circulated among the colored which did move them from non-involvement to a total commitment to fight the war for man's freedom. The various colored leaders of that day, finally persuaded by each other to bear arms, touched off a call to arms not only by the colored, but also by the military men, who were interested in leading an army of men, for any reason. Major Burr Porter, from the Ottoman Army 3rd Campaign, wrote the Adjutant General's Office the following:

"Sir:

I have the honor to make the following suggestion to the Department of War, that the Government raise as soon as possible, two regular regiments from the free colored people."<sup>3</sup>

On April 23, 1861, Jacob Dodson, a colored employee of the Senate Chamber, wrote the

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Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, on this subject:  
"Honorable Secretary:

I desire to inform you that I know of some 300 reliable colored free citizens of this city who desire to enter the services for the defense of the city.

I have been three times across the rocky mountains. . . I can be found about the Senate (U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C.) chambers as I have been employed about the premises for some years."<sup>4</sup>

Dodson's letter was soon answered. But it was quite evident that the War Department was going to be one of the last groups within the government to agree to arm the slaves. Secretary Cameron, wrote to Dodson:

"In reply to your letter of the 23rd instance, I have to say that the Department has no intention at present to call into Service of the Government any colored soldiers."<sup>5</sup>

Cameron was definitely reflecting the governments' position in his letter to Dodson, not necessarily his own, because the framework of the government was prepared to accept slaves even though the debate continued. However, public pressure from all quarters began to influence the private opinions of both Congressmen, and militarymen in the War Department.

In November of 1861, John Cochrane who was then a Colonel in charge of the first United States Chasseurs Regiment (cavalry), made one of the strongest arguments by a military man in the War Department for arming the slaves. Coincidentally, Colonel Cochrane's proposal came exactly one year before Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

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Cochrane, in a speech to a group giving honor to his regiment, said:

"This war is devoted not merely to victory and its mighty honors, not merely to the triumph. It is a war which moves toward the protection of our homes, the safety of our families. In such a war we are justified, are bound to resort to our every force. Do you say that we suppose the munitions of war are within our reach, would we not be guilty of shameful neglect if we availed not ourselves of the opportunity to use them? Suppose the enemy's slaves were arrayed against you, would you, from any squeamishness; refrain from pointing against them the hostile gun, or prostrating them to death? No! That is your very object; and if you would seize their Property, open their ports, and even destroy their lives, I ask you whether you would not use their slaves? Whether you would not arm their slaves (great applause) and carry them in battalions against their masters? (Renewed and tremendous applause.) If necessary to save this Government, I would plunge their whole country, black and white, into one scene of indiscriminate warfare, so that we should in the end have a Government—a Government the vicegerent of God. . . . For the purpose of exterminating the enemy. . . . take property whenever you may find it. Take the slave and bestow him upon the non-slaveholder if you please. (Great applause.) Do to them as they would do to us. Raise up a party of interest against the absent slaveholder. Distract their counsels, and if this should not be sufficient, take the slave by the hand, place a musket in it and in

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God's name bid him strike for the liberty of the human race. (Immense applause.)

Now is this emancipation? Is this abolitionism? I do not regard it as either. . . . Abolitionism is simply but to free the slaves. . . . It is to assert merely the great abstract principles of equality among men. But to take the slave and make him an implement of war in overcoming your enemy, that is a military scheme. It is a military necessity, and the commander who does not do this, or something equivalent to it, is unworthy of your confidence. Emancipation! Are we engaged in a war of emancipation? Who commenced the war? Not we. And, if we did not commence the war, we cannot be charged with its consequences. Where had its origin? It has its origin in the South. It is a war of the South against the free institutions of the North."<sup>6</sup>

This speech by John Cochrane won the personal approval of the Secretary of War, Cameron, who was also in attendance. He responded:

"I wholeheartedly approve every sentiment uttered by your noble commander. The doctrine he has laid down, I approve as if they were my own words. They are my sentiments which will not only lead to victory, but which will in the end reconstruct this our glorious Federal Constitution."<sup>7</sup>

Cameron's views on arming the slaves were solidified because of his knowledge that the southern whites of military age were few in number as compared with the slaves on southern soil, a fact which could be a military advantage to the South. To tip the scales in favor of a northern victory, it became necessary to encourage slaves to overbear

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their masters and secure for themselves a free institution.

Edwin Croswell and Daniel Dickerson from the Albany, N.Y. Newspaper Editors Staff, praised Colonel Cochrane's position on arming the slaves, when they wrote:

"You recognize. . . . and seize the slave as any other. . . . rebel munitions or implements of war and turn it against the enemy or hand it over to loyal Union citizens. . . . You capture them as you would a ship, a fort or an 80 pounder or as a musket, deprive the enemy of the materials of war and apply it to the uses of the captors."<sup>8</sup>

Little did Edwin Croswell and Dickerson know that implicit in Colonel Cochrane's position was the notion that to arm the slaves was, for all practical purposes, to free them.

Secretary Cameron, who has always agreed with Colonel Cochrane's doctrine to arm the slaves, decided to take the same position in his annual report to President Lincoln. Some of Cameron's close friends who disagreed with him, however, came to his Washington, D.C. home to air their views with Cameron. All night, Lincoln's Cabinet members continued to oppose Cameron. Finally Cameron took one drink and toasted: "Gentlemen, the position I have taken stands." This was Cameron's last great act of courage before he was replaced by Edwin Stanton as Secretary of War. There were, of course, those who thought that Cameron's last act was a relief to the whole nation. He left the War Department on January 11th, and took a mission to Russia, a post which was con-

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sidered by some an effective banishment. The decision to arm slaves enabled President Lincoln to issue his Emancipation Proclamation in the fall of 1862, to become effective the 1st day of January 1863. The Proclamation read in part that:

"Persons held as slaves, within any State or designate part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion and forever 'free'; . . . and be received into the armed services of the United States, to garrison forts, positions, station and other places of all sorts."<sup>9</sup>

The Proclamation opened the way for more debate on the subject of the military use of slaves. At the start of the war, April 15, 1861, only white soldiers were used as per the regulation "any free white person above the age of eighteen." The great debate began in the House of Representatives in January, 1863, on whether it was necessary to employ 150,000 or more colored men to perform military service. The debate, put forth in a Bill, was agreed to by Congress in July 17, 1862.

The U.S. Senate Committee on Military Affairs worked on Senate Bill 386, which was to provide for the recruitment of the U.S. persons of African descent into the service. This recruitment was for constructing entrenchments, camp duty, labor that was not in violation of the Constitution and any other task as the President may prescribe. The theme of that Senate Bill was Equality For Colored Workers who joined the ranks and their white counterparts. Many Congressmen expressed their personal views and the views of their Constituents. Congressman William H. Wadsworth, from the State

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of Kentucky, said:

"We in the South, could not live under this policy of arming the slaves. Let an army of one hundred and fifty thousand men, once slaves, be uniformed and armed, and commanded by the appointees of abolition and it cannot be otherwise than that it would be the destruction of our homes, our families, our lives, our property and our liberty. We could not live under it. The first Negro regiment that it was attempted to march through the State of Kentucky would produce a collision. The first attempt made to recruit slaves in that State would produce scenes of violence, unless you permitted to peaceable execution of the laws of that State violated by this recruiting.

Mr. Speaker, is our support of the Government worth nothing? Is it worth less than that of the Negro? We have not withheld that support; we have not stinted it. A thousand of our citizens poured out their blood on the battlefield of Stone River."<sup>10</sup>

Congressman Sedgwich, from the State of New York, said he was in favor of the bill which is before the House for consideration.

Congressman Alexander S. Diven, a representative from New York, had always been in favor of arming the colored. As early as June, 1862, he wanted to amend a previous bill to read:

"Be it by the Senate and House of Representatives of the U.S. of America that the President be authorized by proclamation or otherwise to invite the enrollment of Negroes from the... [various States] to be employed as teamsters, nurses, waiters

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or otherwise noncombatants or to be mustered into companies. . . But then. . . if it be true that by the employment of black men in the Army we should lose more by the withdrawal of white soldiers that we add to the Army by the employment. . . For God knows that through my life I will stand up for the white race and for the nation of men to which I belong. . .

The amendment that I propose to offer to this bill makes provision for the employment of these men, and contemplates that they shall first be organized. Who, in heaven's name, but a mad fanatic, reckless of human life and of all the endearments of society would employ the black man without organizing and controlling him and subjecting him to discipline? Who would place arms into the hands of the undisciplined African, to murder his master and mistress and their children? . . . Sir, in my honest judgment, the black man may be employed without endangering civil society. . .

Now, as to the extent of their employment. The amendment that I propose to offer provides that they may be employed in intrenchments and as nurses, and teamsters, after providing for their employment in the trenches and ditches, and as nurses, servants, and teamsters, add the words "and in such other service as they may be found useful in. . . I believe our soldiers would have no objections, officers or privates, to the employment of these men in the manner which I have indicated. . . I think it might be a mistake to give them rank as commissioned officers. There are no objections to making them sergeants, and corporals but they

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should be prohibited from holding higher rank or else nothing will satisfy their ambition short of holding a commission."<sup>11</sup>

The Congress knew that in order to conclude the war in two years, it was becoming increasingly necessary to rely on the acquisition of men from the ranks of not only the freshly emancipated slaves but also those declared free blacks in the North. Had the government taken this position at the outset of the war and not faltered, and frightened itself of its own shadow, there would have been no need for a doubtful proclamation. Since the outset of the war Congress thought that prejudice against the colored was rampant. The fact of the matter was that it was much less than they thought. Now that the government had adopted a policy of arming the slaves, it wanted to push forward with the war against the South, rather than have the fear of going under.

There were thousands of colored men from the North standing ready to be good soldiers without much drilling. They had the same intelligence as the whites and wanted to be led by men of their own race. One Northern newspaper stated its position when it posed the question:

"Why not let the Negroes fight if they will. Can the hunkerest of hunkers give a reason that will bear examination. . . Negroes fought well in our first revolution and the war of 1812; certainly in this war they not only have a common interest with white Americans in crushing the rebellion, but still a stronger motive, in the prospect of freedom for their race. . . "<sup>12</sup>



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The debate took various turns from the day Cameron first introduced the subject until the President's Proclamation. There were those who instantly interpreted arming slaves to mean emancipation. The question raised was ignored, however, and the response was that the act of arming the slaves was to inflict injury on the South. The Northern proponents of the war would have people to believe that the war was fought to restore the union, not to emancipate the slaves. But those who agreed with the former position felt that restoration of the Union justified doing it by any means. Yet some of the proponents of the war argued that to arm the slaves would violate the constitutional rights of the Southerner. The answer came back from the proponents fast and firm—the South in this war had no rights. Both sides of the debate were quartered with statesmen from the press, church, philosophers, and politicians from other nations.

It was known that at the start of the war on April 15, 1861, only white soldiers served in the Army. The laws were written to include "any free white person above the age of eighteen." Prior to March, 1862, Negro's who escaped slavery were hunted and delivered to their owners—Masters. However, after 1862, Congress enacted a law prohibiting any military units or others from using their commands to return fugitive slaves and any person doing so would be court-martialed. This was one of the first signs that the Government was willing to provide some grounds for the slaves freedom. The 1862 act that provided many benefits to the colored men, especially, the right of their mothers,

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wives and children's freedom, if they enlisted in the military service.

Later the Government enacted a law to expand the recruitment Acts which provided that a bounty of \$100 be paid to the master who had lost the services of the slave that enlisted in the Army but no bounty was to be paid at this time to the colored soldier. It was not until February 1864, that bounties were promised to colored soldiers by the Federal Government.

Notwithstanding the debate, it became evident that the colored slaves were ready to fight and some of them saw this as a chance to abandon their master. The following song illustrates how some of the slaves must have felt about leaving a life to which they had so long been accustomed.

Say, darkeys, hab you seen do massa,  
Wid de muffstash on he face,  
Go long de road some time dis mornin,  
Like he gwine leabe de place?  
He see de smoke way up de ribber  
Whar de Lincum gunboats lay;  
He took he heat an leff berry sudden,  
And I spose he's runned away.  
De massa run, ha, ho!  
It mus' be now de kingdom comin',  
An' de yar ob jubilo.<sup>13</sup>

The enthusiasm over the Emancipation Proclamation laid some of the ground work for the enlistment of colored men in Massachusetts, but we should not overlook the many public pleadings made by the State's Governor Andrew.



John A. Andrew



## CHAPTER II

### GOVERNOR ANDREW TO STRIKE DOWN THE REBELLION

In January, 1863, the new Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, sent a letter to Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts, authorizing the Governor to raise volunteer companies for duty at forts of Massachusetts and other places that he might find convenient. The volunteers were to serve for three years and were to include persons of African descent.

When Andrews returned to Boston he put the question to one Lewis Hayden, a Boston negro of ability and good standing. Hayden, a former slave, worked in the State House, later became a Grand Master of Freemasons in Massachusetts, claimed the credit for asking Governor Andrew to organize a regiment of colored Massachusetts volunteers. The Governor also realized that free Negroes around Boston were gainfully employed, and they received higher wages, than they would in the Army. In addition, they had no desire to go to war and be captured by the confederates. Governor Andrew went among the prominent colored citizens of Boston and asked, "Will your people enlist in my regiment?" Lewis Hayden, one outspoken colored citizen, answered, "Yes!" He further said that he "had no objection to white officers but felt that colored were equally able to be officers." With some assurance from the colored to join his regiments, Governor Andrew began to lay out his plans.

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He left for Washington, D.C., to confer with Secretary Stanton about his plans. Secretary Stanton approved all of the Governor's plans, but the Secretary did not have the authority of Congress to allow Governor Andrew to use colored officers. Andrew left Washington, convinced that he had approval for his ideas to organize a group of Massachusetts colored volunteers. The men would be first obtained from the Negro population of the New England states, and, if needed, from other states sympathetic with the Union. Recognizing that the War Department was strained by the war and had not the manpower nor the will to raise the colored volunteers, the Governor took complete charge of his own machinery to do the job. To take charge of the recruitment, Governor Andrew looked to his long standing friend George Stearns.

James Mercer Langston, who came from an aristocratic colored family in Virginia, was one of Stearns's aides who helped recruit. Langston described Stearns as a man who was:

"full of genuine devotion to that freedom and impartiality which knows no color in a human being; wholly alive to the deadly effects of slavery upon every interest of his country; with full knowledge of the soldierly qualities of the negro troops of the revolutionary Army and the war of 1812... George Stearns an old friend of John Brown, a loyal merchant of Boston, wealthy himself and able to secure all the means necessary for such work... New England could not produce a man of higher social quality, anti-slavery fame and general influence. [Stearns] was armed too for this special

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task by reason of his great knowledge of leading colored men and their chief white friends, all of whom he might employ as instruments of the largest importance in promoting the recruitment of Colored troops."<sup>14</sup>

The understanding reached was that Stearns would go any place to recruit a regiment among the colored, even in Canada among the runaways. Furthermore, it was understood that money from the State legislature for transportation would be made available and that support funds would be raised among people in Massachusetts. With some recruiting funds already raised, Stearns left for Buffalo, where within a few days, he called a meeting of colored residents.

Stearns tried to enlist the Negroes by stressing the future improvement in their life style when they had guns in their hands. Stearns said, "your freedom will be secure."

Lewis Hayden, the colored man that Governor Andrew relied upon earlier, was also a recruiter of colored troops. He traveled extensively in his drive to recruit. His appeal was mostly to liberty and how other races had fought for their progress.

At the outset there were those who were convinced that they would offer all kinds of inducement for freedom to volunteers before resorting to drafting or other measures. One of these measures was to use those slaves who were in exodus from the South. In fact, the transformation of the Southern Slave Society into a free society was made a reality for national political purposes.

Governor Andrew did all he could to champion

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the cause of his colored troops. He first had to overcome much of the opposition to arming the blacks. This opposition continued among Northerners even after Emancipation.

George Stearns sometimes faced opposition from colored men in the face of his recruiting. The colored men wanted to know who would volunteer and leave their families with no one to care for them and why only white officers were being commissioned for colored regiments? To the first question Stearns assured them that he would look after their families, that is, he would see to it that they received some allowances during their son's absence. He also promised that colored officers would be commissioned within six or seven months. Stearns enrolled about ten to twenty in Buffalo and provided for their maintenance until transported to the camp at Readville, Massachusetts. In Philadelphia, Stearns encountered considerable danger in his efforts to recruit. As a result, the meeting places were kept secret. The squads of volunteers marched only after darkness to their points of debarkation. Similarly, in Ohio, the darkness was used to slip the volunteers out of town. In fact, it was considered a joke among the whites who thought it a good idea to send the "darkies on to Boston." The Governor of Ohio later resented the joke because he wanted those taken from his state credited to his state quota.

Stearns went back to Buffalo and set up a recruiting bureau with agencies in northern and western states. Among those agents were the Langston brothers of Virginia, and Hayden. All

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agents wrote daily letters to Stearn's relating their accomplishment and needs.

In Boston, offices were opened to enlist volunteers. Lieutenant Appleton open a recruiting office for colored men in Cambridge Street, while Lieutenant Grace opened an office in New Bedford. The appeal was as follows:

### TO COLORED MEN

"Wanted Good Men for the . . . Mass Volunteer of African descent . . . \$100 bounty at the expiration of the terms of Service.

Pay \$13.00 a month and State Aid to families. All necessary information can be obtained at an office by the corner of Cambridge and North Russell Streets."15

The State of Massachusetts decided to sound the call for men to enlist:

TO A R M S !

TO ARMS!

### MEN OF MASSACHUSETTS!

"Your COUNTRY is in danger! She calls on you for her defense. She puts her trust in you. You will fight in a righteous cause. Will you hear her in silence? Will you permit her to raise her voice in vain? Has she erred in placing her confidence in you?

### FILL UP THE REGIMENT

"then, and let not MASSACHUSETTS be behind in sending her quota of troops! Let it not be said that the freemen of MASSACHUSETTS have lost their

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valor and patriotism! Let not the system of drafting be resorted to, but show the South and the whole world that the OLD BAY STATE will send forth her sons without stint for the defense of their country!

FILL UP THE REGIMENTS then. Enlist and let the name and praise of MASSACHUSETTS be in the mouth of all."<sup>16</sup>

At the time of this appeal some white opposition had diminished but yet there were those who considered it a joke on the part of the colored to fight.

Well, Ned, you are ready to shoulder your gun for Massa Lincoln, I suppose, he has made a call for you to put down the rebels. Ned—Oh! me Massa Wilson, no catch dis chile at dat kind-o-fun."<sup>17</sup>

In Massachusetts, both colored and white men were coming to the aid of Governor Andrew. A meeting was held Monday night, February 16, 1863, among colored citizens of Boston in the Joy Street Church to aid the proposed colored regiment. The meeting was organized by Robert Johnson, Jr., with Judge Russell, E.L. Pierce and Robert Morris as the principal speakers.

February 18, 1863, Governor Andrew appointed a committee to support Stearn's recruiting efforts by raising funds among the citizens. The committee sought more recruitment funds in March because there were very few gainfully employed colored men in Massachusetts who wanted to fill the ranks of volunteers. Consequently, it was necessary to not only seek men at far away places but also have funds to defray the costs of subsistence and transportation from home to the camp. Although the



Lincoln and the Broken Shackle Army

## *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

her son, she wanted him...to enter the service . . . . with manly purpose and to discharge his duty as an American soldier with courage and vigor. She hoped . . . not only all might go well with her child but that the cause of the government and the welfare of her people might be promoted, if need be, even in his death, "for" she said, "liberty is better than life."<sup>18</sup>



Fredrick Douglass

### *Governor Andrew to Strike Down the Rebellion*

Massachusetts Legislature provided funds for transportation of the troops, this did not meet all emergencies and Stearns often had to use his own funds to cover the extraordinary expenses.

Despite the monetary problems and some resistance on all sides, the recruiting went on. The chief agent in the western part of the country, John Langston, was kept very busy. He not only consulted with Stearns on matters of the Service but also addressed large groups in the cities and rural areas on the legal and other regulatory aspects of colored men sent out of their state. John Langston's efforts in the states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois provided over three hundred men from which selections could be made. The men for the 55th regiment came mostly from Ohio, although Ohio provided no bounty nor received credit against their quota for colored men sent to Massachusetts.

One incident associated with recruiting colored men in Ohio deserves mention because it reflects some of the support given by colored families to "Lincoln's Call to Arms."

An elderly colored woman, who had lived far from the town, sent her only son, in fact, only child, to join the colored regiment. After bidding farewell, the mother called upon Mr. Langston: "her heart" was evidently moved by the deepest feeling as she thought of him (her son), the dangers which awaited him and realized that she might not see him again. . . . . As she opened her mouth, he discovered in the midst of her sadness a temper of remarkable. . . good nature. She had not come to make complaint. She said she regretted the loss of

### CHAPTER III

#### THE "WILL" OR "WANT" TO FIGHT FOR BLACK RIGHTS

Frederick Douglass often lent his body and spirit to the recruitment of colored. In Rochester, New York, on March 2, 1863, Douglass on the advice of Mr. Stearns gave his call to men of colored to arm, he said:

"when the first Rebel cannon shattered the walls of Sumter,. . . I predicted that the war. . . would not be fought out entirely by white men. . . one could see that the arm of the slaves was the best defense against the arm of the slave holders. . . Action! action! not criticism, is the plain duty of this hour. Words are now useful only as they stimulate to blows. The office of speech now is only to point out! When, where and how to strike to the best advantage. There is no time for delay. The tide is at flood that leads on to fortune. From east to west, from north to south the sky is written all over with "now or never." Liberty won by white men would lack half its lustre. Who would be free themselves must strike the blow. Better even to die free than to live slaves. This is the sentiment of every brave colored man among us.

In good earnest, then, and after the best deliberation, I, now for the first time during the war, feel at liberty to call and counsel you to arms. . . I wish I could tell you that the State of New York calls you to this high honor. For the moment her constituted authorities are silent on the subject.

## *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

They will speak by and by, and doubtless on the right side. . . We can get at the throat of treason and Slavery though the State of Massachusetts. She was first in the war of Independence; first to break the chains of her slaves; first to make the colored man equal before the law; first to admit colored children to her common schools, and she was the first to answer with her blood the alarm cry of the nation, when its capital was menaced by rebels. You know her Governor, and you know Charles Sumner - I need add no more.

Massachusetts now welcomes you to arms as her soldiers. She has but a small colored population from which to recruit. She has full leave of the war, and she has undertaken to do it. Go quickly and help fill up this first colored regiment from the North. I am authorized to assure you that you will receive the same wages, the same rations, the same equipments, the same protection, the same treatment and the same bounty secured to white soldiers. You will be led by able and skillful officer - men who will take special pride in your efficiency and success. They will be quick to accord to you all the honor you shall merit by your valor - and see that your right and feelings are respected by other soldiers I have assured myself on these points - and can speak with authority. More than twenty years unswerving devotion to our common cause, may give me some humble claim to be trusted at this momentous crisis.

I will not argue. To do implies hesitation and doubt, and you do not doubt. The day dawns - the morning star is bright upon the horizon! The iron

## *The "Will" or "Want" to Fight for Black Rights*

gate of our prison stands half open. One gallant rush from the North willing it wide open, while four million of our brothers and sisters shall march out into Liberty! Remember Denmark Vesey of Charleston. Remember Nathaniel Turner of South Hampton; Remember Shields, Green, and Copeland, who followed noble John Brown, and fell as glorious martyrs for the cause of the slaves. . . The nucleus of this first regiment is now in camp at Readville, a short distance from Boston. I will undertake to forward to Boston all persons adjudged fit to be mustered into this regiment, who shall apply to me at any time within the next two weeks."<sup>19</sup>

To continue the effort to recruit, on March 20, 1863, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Promulgated General Order Number 7, which was an act to promote enlistment and regulate recruiting. In part, the order provided that no town hereafter would raise or expend money for bounties for volunteering. The Governor was authorized to offer and pay bounties up to \$50 to each volunteer and an additional \$20 for those who reenlisted. Only agents appointed by the Governor were authorized to recruit or enlist men into service. Agents were paid for office rent, fuel, and stationery not exceeding \$2 for each recruit received; \$50 was paid for the recruit's subsistence and two cents per mile for recruit's transportation. The general order provided that the agent's authority could be revoked at the discretion of the Governor.

In the early part of April 1863 most of the barriers, which prevented colored men from



## JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL

becoming full-fledged soldiers had been lowered. The lowered barriers increased the desire of the black population to fight because they were often heard shouting all forms of jubilation, such as, "Give us a flag all free, without a slave." While such notions to fight were bitterly opposed by most conservative whites, some liberal minded whites were very much in favor and were definitely against those whites who opposed the blacks desire to fight. One of the best examples of the controversy can be understood by this song written by Colonel Charles G. Halpine, nicknamed Miles O'Reilly:

Some say it is a burning shame to make the  
Naygurs fight,

An' that the trade o'being kilt belongs but to  
the white:

But as for me, upon me sowl, so liberal are  
we here,

I'll let Sambo be murthered, in place of meself,  
on every day in the year,

On every day of the year, boys, and every hour in  
the day,

The right to be kilt I'll divide wid him,  
and divil a word I'll say.

In battles wild commotion I shouldn't at all object  
If Sambo's body should stop a ball that was  
coming for me direct.

An' the prod of a southern bayonet, so liberal are  
we here,

I'll resign and let Sambo take it, on every day in  
the year,

On every day in the year, boys, an'wid nonce of  
your nasty pride,

## *The "Will" or "Want" to Fight for Black Rights*

All right in a southern bagnet prod, wid Sambo  
I'll divide.

The men who object to Sambo, should take his  
place and fight,

An' it is better to have a Naygur's hue, than a liver  
that's weak an' white,

Though Sambo's black as the aces of spades, his finger  
a thryger can pull

An' his eye runs straight on the barrel sight from  
under its thatch of wool,

So hear me all, boys, darlin, don't think I'm  
tipping you chaff,

The right to be kilt, I'll divide with him, an' give  
him the largest half.<sup>20</sup>

Since, the colored soldier at the beginning had been promised fair treatment, Governor Andrew felt compelled to confirm his position in a letter to George T. Dowing, a local citizen in Massachusetts, who had questioned how the colored soldiers would be treated.

"Dear Sir,

In reply to your inquiries as to the position of colored men who may be enlisted and mustered into the volunteer service of the United States, I would say that their position in respect to pay, equipment, bounty and protection when so mustered will be precisely the same in every particular as that of any and all other soldiers. . . The Secretary of War has stated in the most emphatic manner that he would never consent that free colored men would be accepted into the service to serve as soldiers in the South until he should be assured that the Government of the United States was prepared

## JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL

to guarantee and defend to the last dollar and the last man, to these men all the rights, privileges and immunities that are given by the laws of civilized warfare to other soldiers."21

The State of Massachusetts needed more men in the service but it was evident that mostly those of the North had been inducted. The question now raised concerned Southern colored men, mostly slaves of the South. Congress was presented with the plan to allow State governments to compete as to who could raise the largest number of colored men from the South. Since the North had the money and the South the men, it became evident as to who would be the grand champion. In July 1864 it was legal for loyal states to recruit in the South. Governor Andrew immediately set into motion the machinery for recruiting. He then sent his agents throughout the South to arm the colored slaves.

The story behind the assignment of the number 55 to the black regiment is not totally clear other than the fact that it was the next logical group of Massachusetts volunteers to come after the 54th Massachusetts regiment. Nevertheless, as early as September, 1862, and long before the U.S. Government and the State of Massachusetts decided to recruit blacks for military service, there was a 55th Irish Regiment.

On September, 1862, special order Number 968 was issued. The order stated that the 55th would comprise companies from Boston and the vicinity by Captain John B. Farrell and James C. Rogers. The Assistant Adjutant General of Massachusetts, in October and November 1862, gave the mustering

*The "Will" or "Want" to Fight for Black Rights*  
and disbursing Officer, Captain Collins, authority to go to Lakerville and gather companies of men belonging to the 55th Regiment.

All this effort fell to naught because in January 8, 1863, the former Irish officers wrote a letter to U.S. Senator Henry Wilson from Massachusetts, complaining that their objective for establishing the Irish Regiment were not being met.

The 14 officers of the late 55th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers felt a need to compose their complaints as follows:

"The officers were induced to commence recruiting with the understanding that they and the men they recruited would be and become our Irish American Regiment and that it... was designated the 55th Regiment Massachusetts, (NM) by the State and was known as the Irish Regiment..."

The men, in the number of more than six hundred, six companies were organized and forty-seven men were in camp for the seventh company when on or about the 4th of December last the Governor issued an order consolidating the 55th Regiment with the 48 Regiment... The Governor refused to accept (the officers) resignation and on the officers deciding not to withdraw them, he dishonorably discharged those most prominent in protesting against the consolidation and honorable discharge the others."22

The Governor ended the Irish American Regiment which made it possible to freely assign the number 55 to the regiment of colored who were being recruited for regimental duty.

During January, 1863, Governor Andrews first received the call to organize colored regiments in another state. These men arrived about February 20th and were assigned barracks at Camp Meigs, previously occupied by the 44th regiment. These men came in great numbers and swelled the ranks from 27 in February to over 300 in March. Then the Governor decided to organize the 55th. Consequently, the number previously given the Irish Regiment was finally assigned the colored regiment.

Stearns discontinued all recruitment for the 55th Regiment after the Governor of Ohio advised Governor Andrew that no more colored men could be taken from his state unless credit was given to the State of Ohio. To this Governor Andrew replied that the Governor of Ohio had the authority to raise his own colored regiments and there was no other reason to rely on the State of Massachusetts.

## CHAPTER IV

## MUSTER IN AT READVILLE

Back in early January 1863, while visiting Washington, Governor Andrew agreed with Secretary Stanton that all commissioned officers of the 55th would be white men. Nevertheless, Andrew did plead that perhaps a few lower commissions should be given to the colored men. But Secretary Stanton refused and Governor Andrew returned home to renew his plea for some colored officers.

Governor Andrew had long given thought as to what kind of individual he wanted to command the 55th Mass (colored). The lesser ranking officers were also a part of his overall plan. Governor Andrew felt that those officers selected should be men of ambition, long standing principles of anti-slavery, and with no contempt for people of color. Furthermore, the men were to be young, with some years of military experience, men, of high honor, and gentlemen. The Governor sought his officers in the circles of educated men who participated in anti-slavery societies and who had an interest in seeing that the experiment that the Governor was attempting would, in fact, be successful. Governor Andrew explained that the colored regiment were to be the "most important corps to be organized during the whole war. . . I am anxious to organize it judiciously in order that it may be a model for all future colored regiments."<sup>23</sup>

Governor Andrew was always convinced of the significance of his efforts because it would be a



Norman P. Hollowell

regiment composed of colored men from free states. He thought his efforts would raise colored esteem not only in the United States but also in the world, especially if the regiment were successful. He not only wanted the firm support of the officers for their undertaking but he also wanted the families of these men to give their consent and sympathy.

Captain Robert Shaw, was selected by Governor Andrew for the 54th Mass and Captain N.P. Hallowell for the 55th. Andrew said of both men: "the more ardent faithful, true Republican's and friends of Liberty would recognize in them a Scion of a tree whose fruits and leaves alike contributed to the strength and healing of our generation."<sup>24</sup> Captain Hallowell, a Quaker, had two other brothers serving as officers in Massachusetts regiments located in Boston. The Hallowell family used their home in Philadelphia as a hospital for Massachusetts officers. Captain Hallowell was a gallant, young officer who was true to all of the causes he undertook.

Before Captain Hallowell went to see Governor Andrew to discuss his future in the Black Regiment, he might have recalled his days as a young boy. It was then that he knew two girls in their hometown of Philadelphia who had caucasian features and long wavy hair but their finger tips were darker because of the Negro blood, a characteristic which consigned them to a life as slaves. Also, as a young boy, Hallowell saw one Daniel Dangerfield who was as black as coal, a muscular fugitive slave who was permitted to hide in the family's country barn. Young Hallowell saw the Philadelphia police go

about their search for the fugitive. Sometime later, as the family was taking Daniel to the next station of the underground railroad, the detective searched the carriage in which the Hallowell children and mother were riding. But the slave was safely tucked away in a box under the seat of the young boys. These scenes recalled are of major significance in that they make us appreciate the background of the men Governor Andrew wanted to select to lead his prize regiment of colored soldiers.

Captain Hallowell and the Governor drove about as they talked about their aspirations, their views about the regiment, and how they would start out in Readville. They both had a mutual admiration for each other. Captain Hallowell grew fonder of the Governor as each day passed. He considered the Governor not only a likeable, liberal minded, and philanthropic person, but also as kind-hearted as one could be.

Captain N.P. Hallowell accepted immediately the commandership of the 55th Regiment and reported for duty. Captain Shaw at first declined, thinking himself not worthy of the task, but later accepted the commandership of the sister regiment, the 54th. When Captain Shaw's mother, Sarah first heard of her sons initial denial she wrote to Governor Andrew:

"that his decision has caused me the bitterest disappointment I have ever experienced..... you said you should wish him to have the assent support and sympathy of his family, he had it entirely and their earnest prayers... It would have been the proudest moment of my life and I could have died satisfied that I had not lived in vain. This being the

## JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL

truth, you will believe that I have shed bitter tears over his refusal.”<sup>25</sup>

The House of Representative Bill, 675, which was discussed late in January 1863; provoked a long debate over the amendment to arm persons of African descent. The most controversial aspect of the amendment was the proposal to allow the men to be officered by colored or white persons appointed and commissioned by the President or Governors. Such opposition centered on the possible reaction of white soldiers when brought in contact, for reasons of combat, with colored officers who by rank would command both white men and white officers. It did not take the opposition in Congress long to realize that they surely didn't want a slave to rise to such power. Nevertheless, HR Bill 675 passed the House 83 to 54, but only after it was amended to provide that no language therein could or should be construed to permit colored officers to exercise any authority over white officers or men in the service of the U.S. The Bill failed in the Senate. However, as soon as the Bill passed the House, Governor Andrew again saw a chance to obtain some colored officers for his colored regiment. Governor Andrew wrote to Secretary of War, Stanton on February 3, 1863.

“Congressional Bill passed House of Representatives not prohibiting colored officers in colored regiments. Will you withdraw prohibition so far as it concerns line officers, assistant surgeons and chaplains of my proposed colored regiments. I will avoid difficulty. Powers would not be used except possibly for few cases of plainly competent persons

## Muster in at Readville

recommended by the field officers who shall be gentlemen and soldiers of the highest merit and influence.”<sup>26</sup>

Not wanting to await the answer of Secretary of War Stanton nor leave any avenues unexplored, Governor Andrew wrote the Boston Congressman, Charles Summer, on February 7, 1863. “Get me leave to Commission colored chaplains, assistant surgeons and a few lieutenant's by discretion... The mere power will be useful.”<sup>27</sup>

No matter how much Governor Andrew tried or what his personal thought might have been, he succeeded only in getting an appointment for a chaplain as a colored officer of the 55th at first. Even during the entire life of the regiment there was only 10 colored out of 68 officers chosen. The officers originally chosen by Governor Andrew to command the 55th Mass used his criteria for gentlemen qualities in selecting the first line commanders.

Although there were many applications submitted by whites, it was not easy to acquire gentlemen. Some whites submitted their applications inquiring of the possibility for a commission in that regiment of “niggers” as opposed to colored men or a person of “african descent.” Preliminary examinations were given to applicants and one question was asked to determine how the men would react to the “negro.” The persons considered worthy of retaining were those who thought of darky or colored when they heard the word Negro. But those rejected outright were those who used the term “nigger.”

Oddly enough, it was a strange set of circum-



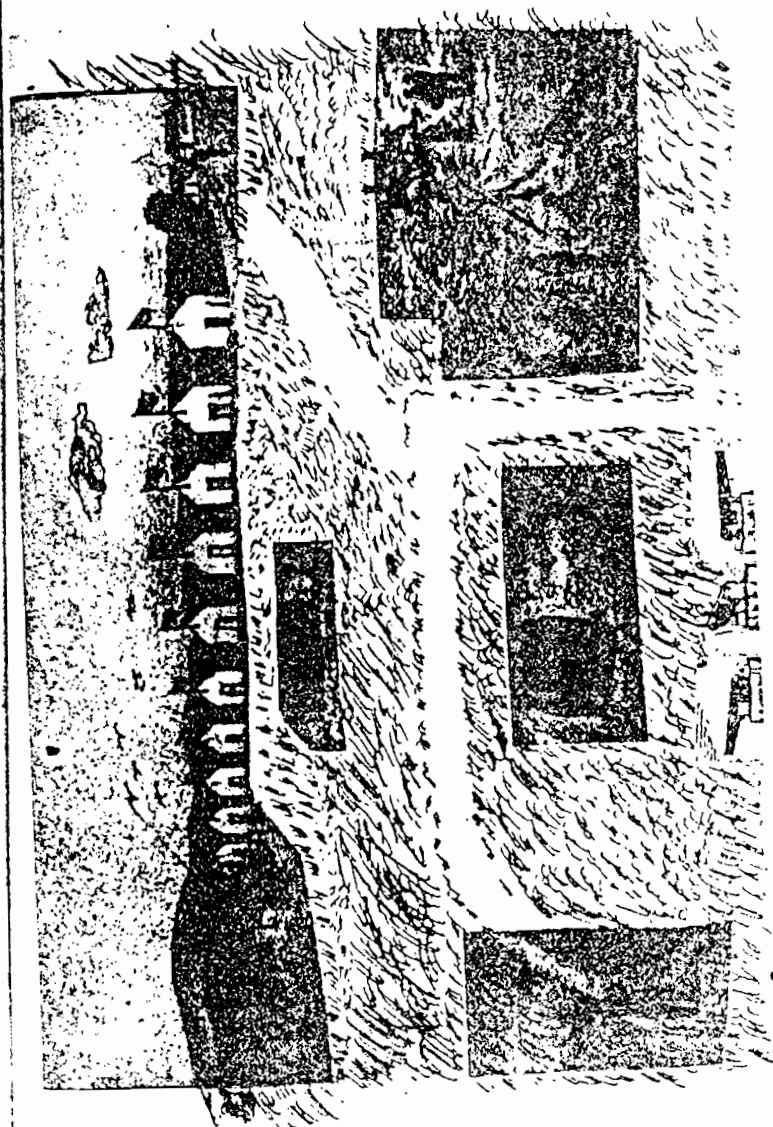
## JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL

stances because, more often than not, people were appointed to public offices because of their courage, capacity to perform, good character, and untiring devotion to the country. However, these selections to public office were strictly on the basis of color and prejudice.

It was not until 1864 that the Government established a policy to train potential colored officers in tactics, army regulations, and general knowledge that would permit them to pass the officer's examination. Prior to December 1863, at least 50 percent of the applications submitted by potential colored officers were rejected because of a lack of knowledge.

None of the formal training or free schools for military tactics helped colored men in the 55th Massachusetts. Those colored officers selected were given field commissions, except for the one colored chaplain selected by Governor Andrew. (See appendix of colored officers).

The recruiters told the men that they would be going to Boston but when they arrived they were told that they would be sent out to Camp Meigs, which was some 10 miles from the center of Boston. Within the town of Readville was Camp Meigs, set aside by the State as a place for those regiments looking forward to departing for the heat of the battle in the South. For about three and a half years, these hills and valleys were destined to be used by newly raised regiments such as the 55th. The site was first picked as a camp in September 1862, when Governor Andrew, by Special Order 790 established Camp Meigs, Readville, as a rendez-



55th Regiment at Camp Meigs, Readville

### *Muster in at Readville*

vous for military regiments.

The different squads of colored men started arriving at Readville on or about the 12th of May 1863. To some it was their first time seeing a military post and they were thunderstruck by what they saw. They could see that:

"ten new barracks, each arranged for some 100 men, occupied this immediate neighborhood. They stood on a line facing the sunrise. A space called the company street ran between the buildings, where the different companies formed for drill, parade or guard mounting. Just back of each was a small building occupied as a cook house, and the quarters of the different line officers were just in the rear of the latter.

The entrance to the camp was between two sturdy trees, and near the entrance was the guard tent."... All around the camp were sentries, some twenty or more beats being maintained,..." It was a comical sight as a regiment landed there. The building for each company being designated, a rush was made to secure lodging, each man as he arrived at the building, grabbing a huge bundle of straw, which lay adjacent, to serve as his bed."<sup>28</sup>

The men were in great need of baths after the ride over dusty road leading to the camp. Immediately after going through the barracks, they were marched to the river nearby where they were ordered to wash and later issued new uniforms. At first glance, one could say that these men hardly reflected a select group of fighting men. But once in their uniforms, with shining buttons and shoes, these men looked to all present that the Governor



## *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

and Mr. Stearns had done a fine job of selecting the men for the 55th.

The recruits for the 55th were received by their new commanders, Lieutenant Colonel N.P. Hallowell and his assistant, Captain A.L. Hartwell, who was designated as colonel of the new 55th Regiment. The men already stationed at Readville in the early days of May were mostly from 13 to 16 years of age coming from 20 different states. The largest number, 222, came from Ohio, with one each from Maine, Vermont, Louisiana, Arkansas, Nova Scotia and Africa. They had worked at varied occupations, such as teamsters, farmers, brick masons, teachers, firemen, porters, waiters, and cooks. Over 200 had been slaves and were pure black. Over 400 were of mixed blood and could read and write. Few were church members and over 200 were married, having left their families behind on the promise that the government would provide for them. Nonetheless, they were here at Readville and very pleased with their uniforms.

## CHAPTER V

### RECRUITS IN PREPARATION FOR WAR

After the initial greeting ended, Commander Hallowell issued General orders designed to maintain the orderly conduct of regiment business.

General Order 1: These "daily calls to be observed"

Reveille	5:00 a.m.
Squad Drill	5:45
1st Sergeants Report to ABJ.	5:30
Police Call	6:30
Breakfast	7:00
Surgeons Call	7:30
Guard mounting	8:00
Squad drill-roll call	9:00
Recall from drill	11:00
Dinner	12:00
1st Sergeants Report	1:00 p.m.
Drill	2:00
Recall from drill	4:00
Company parade	4:30
Supper	6:00
Retreat	Sunset
Tattoo	8:00
Taps	8:30

"General Order "2" immediately after reveille, and roll call, company officers will report in person at their headquarters to the Commanding officer. Each company will then under charge of a Commanding

## *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

Officer be marched to the dam where every man will be required to wash his face and hands."<sup>29</sup>

The first few weeks were not only devoted to the personal hygiene of the soldiers but also to order, neatness of dress, barracks and the entire grounds of Camp Meigs. The men underwent frequent inspections of their barracks and kitchen by the commander in charge. The men arrived in such great numbers that the officers had little time to get them in shape; however, this was soon overcome and it became apparent that the men marched much better in their new uniforms. They started straightening up, and no longer shuffling their feet. The men tried hard to look and feel like veteran soldiers. Part of the recruits' determination was attributed to the officers, that is "gentlemen who understood the correct orthography and pronunciation of the word "negro."<sup>30</sup> For the first time in their lives, (half free or slaves) they found themselves respected and entrusted with duties for the proper performance of which they would be held to a strict accountability.

After the departure of the other regiments (2nd Mass and the 54th Mass.) from Camp Meigs for southern battlefields, guard duty for the entire camp was finally entrusted to the 55th Mass, the only group then stationed there. Commander Hallowell recalled that "there was nothing quite so magnificent and let me add quite so reliable as the colored volunteers."<sup>31</sup>

General Order No. 6 called for the men to turn in pistols, their personal dirks, and other weapons not of authorized issue. A few days later N.P.

## *Recruits in Preparation for War*

Hallowell issued General Order No. 10, which provided that only those who have been issued muskets would form and parade for inspection on the parade ground. Late in June of 1863, friends of the regiment decided to add some cheerful atmosphere to the group by purchasing band instruments. About 16 instruments were purchased and given to a select group of men who were then placed under a tutor. Within weeks the band had improved to the point that the members of the community attended the regiment's dress parades.

As the men became familiar with the camp and perfected their duties, they found themselves with idle time. Since most of the men were never exposed to formal education, a school was started in which basic reading, writing, and arithmetic were taught. Doctor Bowditch devoted his spare time to the soldiers who expressed a serious desire to learn. Many soldiers and some officers attended classes and some officers attended for the purpose of tutoring other soldiers. The training continued as long as the men stayed in Readville.

Although most of the men wanted to serve and improve their lot while at Readville, only two or three deserted. Many felt that it was useless to try to bring those back since they were not of good character. The remainder felt that justice to their cause was advanced when those who couldn't adjust to army life deserted and or returned home. The one incident that did make the colored soldiers rise up in arms against their officers was the "one shooting by an officer of one Private Benjamin Hayes. Soldier Hayes refused to obey the officer of

## *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

the guard, Lieutenant Kingston. . . The officer shot Private Hayes but he escaped death by a narrow margin. Hayes later did get better but died from typhoid at Readville."<sup>32</sup>

Lieutenant Kingston was never court martialed as he should have been. This failure to avenge the mistreatment of a colored soldier produced a lack of confidence in the officers and Governor Andrew. Nevertheless, the officer was forced to resign, thereby escaping the revelation of the true motive for his action and the full punishment for his crime.

The 55th had many capable and intelligent men in the ranks. An outstanding example was Nicholas Said, who was a native of Soudan Central Africa. His face bore etched-tribal marks peculiar to persons of the ruling class. He was described as an intelligent looking Negro who contributed much from his culture and experience. He spoke several languages including Parisian French. He was a man of high intelligence and respectability and one who, if it were not for his color and position, would have been accepted anywhere. He had come from a self-reliant and property class of people.

"On the 4th of July 1863, a festival was prepared for the regiment by the laides in the vicinity. Music and dancing with games and prizes were the order of the day and in the evening a display of fireworks from the high embankment of the railroad overlooking the camp."<sup>33</sup>

Many of the visitors who came that day and other days came as curiosity seekers and/or with a sincere interest in the welfare and improvement of the colored soldiers. The strangers and frequent

## *Recruits in Preparation for War*

visitors showed much kindness towards the colored soldiers. They responded by providing their guests with a band performance. Both spectators and soldiers soon realized that the 55th colored soldiers had learned their commands, steps, turns, and manual of arms. Some soon concluded that these soldiers were more able to learn quickly and to adapt to the discipline of the war "in much less time than the average white soldier."<sup>34</sup>

The Governor had his colored regiments but he had trouble filling old regiments of white soldiers. This was due, in part, to the fact that federal government has taken away the States' duty of recruitment for old regiments. In order to fill the regiments, the Congress provided for the Enrollment Act to draft soldiers. Governor Andrew accepted great responsibilities for explaining the law so that the man would adhere to it.

In July, draft riots broke out in Boston. The Governor ordered the fort at Readville to dispatch troops to the city. The groups at the fort were small. At Camp Meigs, the only regiment with full ranks was the governor's black regiment and there were those who questioned employing these colored soldiers to control a riot. Nevertheless, before the day had passed, hundreds of soldiers were placed in the hands of the Boston mayor to contain the crowd. At night fall, those who decided to change the armory were shot, and their bodies were dragged away. Months later the state met all of it's quota.

As days past, the parades took on all of the splendor of a veteran regiment without the regi-

## JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL

mental colors. The 55th Mass (colored) was without the colors from the date they were brought into Readville. On the drill field, the men used a flag donated by some young women of Dorchester, Massachusetts.

James Langston, who had helped George Stearns in the recruitment of the 55th, wanted also to help bear the cost of making a full set of regimental colors. Therefore, he had them made by an Ohio Company named Scheilotto & Company. Stearns and Governor Andrew gave their consent to the plan to make the colors of the finest of material. Initially, Langston was to deliver the colors in person to the 55th Mass. He went to Ohio to secure the colors and at that time Governor Todd of Ohio learned of Langston's visit. The Governor sent a porter to the Hotel in which Langston stayed to obtain the colors. Once he examined them, he suggested exhibiting them for a short time near the east Capitol steps during which time a group would be called together for Langston to deliver a "war speech."

However, Langston convinced Governor Todd that if the Colors weren't sent immediately to Massachusetts, it would cause considerable embarrassment. After some reflection on the matter, the Governor quickly called a group together to listen to the "war speech" and praise the Colors made for the 55th. Langston agreed to send the Colors. In a telegram to Governor Andrew on the 8th of July 1863. Mr. Langston said:

"you will present the colors to the 55th Regiment in the name of Colored Ladies of Ohio for me. Find

## Recruits in Preparation for War

them at the store of Mr. Hallowell, Boston. Will explain by letter today."35

On July 9, 1863, it was reported that: "two splendid sets of colors are to be presented to the (55th) Regiment on Saturday afternoon at 3 o'clock by Governor Andrew and J.M. Langston, Esq., a colored lawyer from Ohio. Wendell Phillips is also expected to speak."36

Langston stayed on in Ohio to assist the Governor of Ohio in recruiting the first Ohio Regiment of colored volunteers. This left Governor Andrew of Massachusetts to deliver the speech and present the colors.

On July 18, 1863 at 3:00 p.m. many of the towns-people came to Camp Meigs as well as distinguished men like Wendell Phillips and Reverend Grimes to see the colors presented to the 55th Mass. Regiment (colored). Governor Andrew brought along his staff, and they were greeted by the band of the 55th with "Hail to the Governor" (Chief). The Governor said:

"Colonel Hallowell at the request of the Governor of Ohio and of Colored Women of the State of Ohio whose gifts they are, I am here first to present to the Fifty-fifth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers emblematic banners which are presented by the mothers, wives and daughters of the State of Ohio, whose hearts are moved by interests both of patriotism and of personal affection toward the regiment I now have the honor to address. "The Women of Ohio who have prepared these emblematic tokens of their affection to interest and fervent aspirations and regard, had expected to be

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represented by one of their own immediate friends and fellow citizens upon the occasion of this presentation. Circumstances which prevented the gentlemen, John Langston who was the bearer of their mission from appearing today, have in like manner rendered it both a duty and pleasure to myself to appear not only for the purpose of delivering the regulation color of Massachusetts and the flags of the Union to the Massachusetts 55th, but also for the purpose of passing into your hands, Mr. Commander, these emblems and tokens of the affectionate patriotism of the women of Ohio.

I present you, Mr. Commander, in behalf of the committee of colored women of Ohio, this splendid emblematic banner bearing upon a blue field with appropriate insignia the eagle of the Republic. Take it, Mr. Commander, and wherever our eagle soars, let the eagle of the 55th with equal fight bear its honored unquestioned and victorious way. In behalf also of the women of Ohio, I present to the 55th Regiment this splendid regulation flag of the American Union—in spite of traitors secessionists, rebels, slaveholders and insurrectionists everywhere, to be forever one and inseparable.”<sup>37</sup>

In addition, the Governor presented the states white flag of the old Massachusetts Commonwealth and the regulation flag of the U.S. After these presentations, the Governor continued his praise of the 55th:

“I have the honor and grand satisfaction to declare that no longer is the employment of Americans of African descent an experiment in the Company, on the march, in the siege or on the field of battle . . .

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I have the pleasure to declare now that you will soon be received in the Department of North Carolina by a Massachusetts soldier and General. . . The commanding general of the Department of North Carolina (is) aware of your organization and the quality of the men who have been selected. . . I commend you now to the high and heroic future which shall become the colonel, the officers and men of the 55th Massachusetts Volunteers.”<sup>38</sup>

Colonel Hallowell followed the Governor's speech with a statement of regret that John Mercer Langston who was to present the flag and who had done much to recruit the men from Ohio, could not be there. However, Hallowell committed himself to cherish the colors with a soldiers love and protect them with all the devotion to the duty a soldier could muster.

One of the colors was made of heavy silk and regulation infantry color of embroidered blue silk. This made the color heavy to carry but also, some questioned whether the 55th was entitled to a State color. At first it was decided to leave this color in Boston, but later the Governor had it sent to the Regiment while they were stationed near Georgia.

The Colors were carried by the Regiment through the fields and streams. They finally were worn and later exchanged. Unfortunately, these worn flags were destroyed by fire in Beaufort, South Carolina. When the regiment was mustered out, the colors were turned over by Colonel Hartwell, the last Commander of the Regiment, to Governor Andrew. They were placed among the relics of the war of the Rebellion.

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When the 55th started their training, the Governor was convinced that the soldiers ought not to serve in the South until the Government was prepared to "guarantee and defend to the last dollar, and last man to these men all of the rights and privileges and immunities... given to other soldiers."<sup>39</sup>

It was only months before they completed their training that Governor Andrew wanted to pursue and promote the subject of where his soldiers should be placed and under what conditions they could best serve. He said to Secretary of War, Stanton, concerning his conversation about:

"North Carolina (we understood)" the difficulty of attracting negroes to join white troops, while it would be ... easy to gain large numbers to join an army already composed of black troops ... And if you are prepared to have it done, I believe the work is already ripe. When our regiment gets there it will be the best egg of a (black) brigade ... And if the U.S. Government is not prepared to organize a brigade in North Carolina. I would gladly take those black men ... who may choose to come ... and be mustered in."<sup>40</sup>

The Governor not only had great ideas for a colored brigade but he also wanted to make sure that his regiments were being raised and officered by good men who would be taken into the South for military activity. The Governor felt that unless the regiment was promised some brilliant battle participation, the regiment would be underutilized and not have their chance for a rightful and honorable place in the war.

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On May 4, 1863, General Hunter wrote to Governor Andrew asking the Governor's permission to write directly to the Secretary of War so that the Massachusetts Regiments would serve under him in South Carolina. General Hunter understood the ambitions of Governor Andrew; therefore, he said in his letter to the Governor:

"I am happy to be able to announce to your army complete and eminent satisfaction with the results of the organization of Negro regiments in this department. In the field as far as tried they have proved brave, active, enduring and energetic, frequently outrunning by their zeal and familiarity with the southern country the restrictions deemed prudent by certain of their officers."<sup>41</sup>

The Governor took advantage of General Butler's gracious offer to send the 55th to South Carolina. So with every one prepared, orders were given by Secretary Stanton to honor Governor Andrew's request. It had been a tradition to transport the soldiers to New York ports for embarkation to the South. However, John A. Kennedy, Superintendent of New York, sent a telegram to Stanton on July 8, 1863, protesting the bringing of the 55th Mass (colored) through New York. In a direct communication to the Secretary of War, Mr. Kennedy said:

"Notice has been given me that it is designed to march the Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Regiment colored troop through our streets on Monday next. The recent victories have more than ever excited, a portion of our City population, against the Negroes. Every day my men are engaged in protecting Negroes



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from unjustifiable attacks, and the bad feeling is on the increase, mainly on the part of the returned two year soldiers, whose antipathies are stronger than before they went to the Potomac. Save us from riot and possible bloodshed by letting these Massachusetts troops be transported from a Seaport nearer their encampment than this is. In the absence of all the Militia force now on active duty at the seat of war there is nothing but the police here to secure peace and good order.”<sup>42</sup>

The same day July 8, 1863, Secretary Stanton telegraphed Governor Andrew with the thought that: “Events on the Mississippi may render a change of destination for your colored regiment very desirable. You will therefore retain them in Boston until further orders. Two or three days will probably determine the question as to where they can be useful. Please acknowledge the receipt of these and inform me when they can be ready to embark for New Orleans.”<sup>43</sup>

Apparently, the Secretary Stanton did not want to reveal to Governor Andrew the John A. Kennedy report which was the true cause for the delay, as it was reported by New York. Only two days later, the anticipated riots in New York took place. Secretary Stanton’s final explanation for sending the 55th to New Orleans was to relieve the troops already there and to substitute colored troops. Secretary Stanton admitted that he did not have much faith in the alternative destination for the 55th.

The next day, the acknowledgement was sent to Secretary Stanton by the Assistant Military Secretary in Boston, H. Ware:

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“your telegram of July 8, received. Governor absent today, 55th Regiment under marching orders for Monday next for Newbern and will be retained according to your order. We have no other colored regiment.”<sup>44</sup>

This was followed the next day by Governor Andrew’s telegram which said that: “The 55th Mass. detained, but I beg if possible it may not be diverted from North Carolina, where it is strongly urged.”<sup>45</sup>

All the confusion appeared to be fading away when, on July 11, 1863, a local newspaper, reported:

“the Mass 55th Regiment (colored) is under order to leave camp at Readville next week for active service. The regiment will go direct to New York where it will embark for Newbern, North Carolina, with orders to report to Major General Foster.”<sup>46</sup>

As ordered, the 55th left camp Readville on July 21, 1863. Seven-hundred and sixty-seven privates, 18 Musicians, 64 Corporals, 45 Sergeants, 9 Lieutenants, 5 Captains, 4 Staff and 2 Field Officers traveled to Boston by train. Once again, the men formed ranks and marched through major streets with fixed bayonets and loaded muskets. The guns were loaded because there was still fear of danger and because of rumors that the soldiers might be attacked by some local citizens opposed to colored enlistments. The men came near the wharf, where they boarded the steamboat “Chaawba” for Newbern, North Carolina. The rain poured as they approached the wharf, causing the regiment to miss Governor Andrew’s departure speech. Although the 55th never had the opportunity to march through

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the streets of New York and receive that jubilant ovation as others had received, they were accorded better respect than the 54th Regiment received as they were hissed from windows by Boston extremists.

Immediately before the boat departed, the men shot their loaded guns into the water and removed their fixed bayonets. There was little excitement and little to see as they sailed toward the South except for the fish, whales, and sharks. The men were often seasick. The boat was much too small for a crew of over 1,000. There were insufficient beds for the men, so many had to be content to sleep on the deck or in the hold. In a boat designed for 500 to 600 persons, the men were forced to lie side by side; as their ancestors had done when transported as slaves to America from Africa.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FIRST CALL TO FACE REBEL TROOPS

The destination of the 55th Massachusetts was Newborn, but they stopped at Moorhead City, North Carolina for a few days after departing from Boston. By rail they traveled to Newbern, where they were entertained by the first North Carolina colored Volunteers. After dinner and coffee, the men were escorted to the area where they pitched their tents. They devoted the next three days, until the 29th of July, to drilling and clearing the stumps and rubbish from the camp area. On the 30th of July, orders were received from General Wild to move the 55th on to Charleston, South Carolina. The 1,000 men arose early in the morning, drew three days of rations, cooked them, and moved to the port during a heavy rain.

Since the men were ordered to leave in a great haste, they only took their canteens, knapsacks, and blankets; their tents and almost all bags were left behind. This led many to believe that they were only going for a short distance. It was decided to split up the regiment, since there were large numbers of soldiers and the boats were very small. Consequently, 600 men were placed aboard the steamship *Maple Leafs* and the other 400 on the ship *Recruit*, under the command of Major Fox.

Many of the proud fighters of the 55th saw Charleston as a real opportunity to show their fighting ability, since the city was the center of succession. From their boats they could see into the



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town with its towering buildings giving shape to a great metropolis under the setting sun. One of the officers thought it was a good chance to show off the proud black soldiers to the southern hospitality. He wrote:

"How the southern female population in that city, Charleston, would hate to pay proper respect to the colored soldiers anyhow would be pretty bitter there, but when you combine the unpleasant properties of being colored and coming from Massachusetts it would be unbearable."<sup>47</sup>

Much to the surprise of many people, the ships passed Charleston and arrived at Folley Island, South Carolina, on August 3, 1863. It was there that a permanent camp was established. The day after arrival, some 500 men in the regiment were given a 6:00 a.m. fatigue duty on Morris Island. Since the 400 men that left Newbern on the boat Recruit had not arrived, General Wild and Colonel Hallowell went in search of them on the Steamship "Mary Benton". Once found, they attended their needs and sicknesses. With few exceptions, the camp life of a soldier was delightful and the men behaved splendidly despite large amounts of "fatigue duty."

Day and night, from the months August through October, the men were going on fatigue duties, which consisted of digging trenches and building defenses. They often experienced shelling from the rebel army which was designed to prevent the work from being completed. However, no damage of any consequences was done. Even as the men tried to sleep in their tents at night, they were constantly aroused by gun shots that sometimes were as close

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as the sound of muskets. The excessive fatigue duty covered not only Morris Island, but also Fort Wagner, Fort Gregg; Fort Sumter, and Charleston. Some said that the engineers wanted the help of the black troops more than white troops because the black troops were better disciplined, good at following orders, and never resisted or disobeyed their officers. Others thought that the excessive fatigue was really in keeping with the government's original plan to enlist colored soldiers to dig trenches, haul cannons, logs, and ammunition, thus freeing the white soldier to fight the glorious battles of war. Some of the officers feared that the 55th was strictly a fatigue unit that would be left to guard the island and other areas obtained through victorious battles. Such was not the true situation but the men had no assurance to the contrary; therefore, they continued to believe that fatigue duty was their sole fate. Shortly thereafter, however, General Gilmore issued an order forbidding the 55th to do any more fatigue duty for white troops. The men considered this to be an order of justice for the colored soldiers. Despite the reprimand from fatigue duty, the 55th still had picket duty to perform in order to guard against a surprise attack.

In September, 1864, Colonel Hallowell left the war department because of a chronic wound he had received in a battle before joining the 55th. His absence created low morale among some of the men because they considered him their leader no matter where he was. Several other officers also departed from the South due to infections or chronic illnesses.

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In October, a group that included officers Charles Soule, Frank Goodwin, and James Thurber was ordered to investigate the cause for the loss of guns, ammunition, food and other company property during the trip by boat from Newbern to Folley Island. Before Colonel Hallowell left for the North, he requested General Wild's permission to send someone back to Newbern to collect the soldier's items left behind. He argued that the men had been months without adequate conveyance and supplies. But rather than be swayed by the reasons to return the unit to the North, the General gave his permission and Colonel Hartwell was allowed to go to Newbern and get the men's supplies.

The Sutler or traveling salesman who arrived in early August brought all kinds of goods for the men to purchase. D.W. Johnson immediately set up his tent and business was brisk because the men were nearly out of supplies. After the first days General Order 30 was issued limiting the use of the Sutler's tent without permission from the commanding officer.

A few black soldiers recruited into the 55th and other units from the South made no objections to cleaning the quarters of the white officers. Many who were recruited from the North, however, refused to obey the detail to work for the officers. Some were placed under arrest for their refusal, but when the post commander learned of the incident, an order was issued forbidding the black soldiers to work as servants of the white officers. This included cooking, cleaning and other duties. Many of the Negro barbers also refused to cut the hair of the

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Negro soldiers at the same time as the white soldiers. However, after some of the men almost destroyed the wooden shed used as the barber shop, the commander issued an order forbidding discrimination because of color.

Another Order that affected the men's freedom in camp followed: General Order 39 read, in part, that:

"No enlisted men shall be allowed to pass the ground between the officers tents on business. Those who wish to go to the hospital must go around the flanks of the camp... Each day the sick call will be at 11:15 a.m."<sup>48</sup>

Various detachment from the regiment were ordered to various points on Folley Island and neighboring islands during November and December. Also it was during that time that many persons, from Boston, especially women, came to visit and attend the needs of the sick. They saw that the general health of the regiment was good. Even the hospital showed marked improvement.

Jean Margaret Davenport, the widow of General Frederick Lander, met some of the soldiers near the tent door one afternoon. She gave the men her assurance that the new hospital for colored soldiers at Beaufort would be constructed according to plans. Nevertheless, she was skeptical about the surgeons because she was sure that the surgeons would not perform as adequately for the colored as they would for whites. If anyone was in need of gentle hands and kind words it surely was the colored soldiers who for many years had known suffering and misery.

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Practically all engineer's work terminated and new efforts were made to sabotage trains by denting the rails. Many were convinced that this was a means to stop rebel troops from reestablishing a foothold in Charleston and Bragg. Many of the troops once stationed there were moved on to another place very quietly. The 55th, left temporarily behind, began to get restless for action. They knew that after eight months of duty, the regiment had not encountered nor had they been sent on any duty requiring military action.

The men resented the constant inspection, especially since they were seldom permitted to wash and patch their clothes. Being short of money, the inspecting officer did not consider a clothing allowance.

Christmas was a time for merry-making and the soldiers attempted to display some joy and high spirits for the occasion by singing songs and celebrating. But the joy shown on their faces was frozen with gloom when they were reminded that they had not been paid since entering the service.

The next month a school committee was established which was composed of Surgeon Brown, his assistant Wilder, and Captains Gorden, Bowditch and Crane. The purpose of the committee was to organize and teach good English for those who wished to learn. The committee was charged with not only raising, accounting and disposing of the funds but also the daily instructions which were called at 11:45.

With the smaller number of troops at the camp, duty was more difficult because the men and offi-

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cers that remained had to do the work of those absent. The soldiers on James Island encountered more sickness during this period than in previous times.

During February and March, the Regiment was happy to be on the move again:

"Headquarters and companies of the regiment were stationed at Folley Island, February 1. Company E was stationed on Long Island from February 1 to 12 when it joined the regiment at Folley Island and arrived at Jacksonville, Florida on February 15. On February 16 they marched to Camp Shaw, a distance of 8 miles and returned to Jacksonville, February 17th. On February 19th Company D, E, F, G, H, I and K were ordered to Barbours Ford. They reached there February 20th with 5 companies. Company D being left to guard Barbours Station. On the night of February 20 the wounded of the battle of Olustee, Florida arrived at Barbours Ford and the retreating forces halted there to reform. The detachment was ordered to cover the retreat of the forces and arrived at Jacksonville. . . Company A, B, C and F remained at Jacksonville during the expedition."<sup>49</sup>

The 55th did not take part in the battle of Olustee, Florida, because they were kept as garrisons at Jacksonville. Most of the duty performed at Jacksonville was of a provost type.

News began to spread about the camp that a rape had been committed by four soldiers who were alleged to have been from the 55th. As in all cases of military justice, a hasty court martial was arranged in which the charge of rape was declared.

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The accused pleaded not guilty; however, the commission trying the case declared the accused guilty of the charge and the specifications. The accused was sentenced to die by hanging.

John Smith, aged 21, light skin, dark eyes and hair, who was born in an old town main, became a shoemaker before he joined the 55th in Readville. Smith deserted from Readville but was recaptured on October 1863. Nevertheless, General Order Number 6, put out by General Seymour of the district of Florida, the soldier was executed by hanging.

John W. Cork, aged 23, was born in Wilmington, Delaware. He was a laborer before he enlisted. He was executed on February 18, 1864 for the crime of rape.

Spencer Floyd, aged 21. black, also from Wilmington, Delaware, was a porter before he enlisted at Readville, also was executed the same day.

On March 16th, Brigadier General Hatch (Department of the South), under Special Order 14, ordered the 55th from Bilatka on the "Sentinel" to proceed to Hilton Head, South Carolina. The men packed all of their equipment and prepared a four-day supply of food.

## CHAPTER VII

### UNEQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL OR MORE WORK

On April 28, 1864, Colonel A. S. Hartwell, the new Commander of the 55th, wrote General Order Number 21. The first part of the order concerned careful inspection of men going on guard, picket or parade. It also included the position of men in the ranks, the frequent cleaning of clothes, and the quietness of camp after taps. He further dealt with the necessity of seeing that issued orders were executed. He was trying to impress upon the men that they were always on duty for the Country. In the second part of the Order the Colonel took the time to offer his regret to the men because they had not been paid.

In part he said:

"The commanding officer feels deeply the suffering and injustice cause by the delay to pay the men of his regiment... that had been passed by... It cannot be many weeks before his men will receive what is due them and what they labored hard and patiently for so long - their pay from date of enlistment (May 1863). The Colonel told them not to "be discouraged now if anyone should meet a soldier's death before receiving this pay his family or heirs should have every last penny as well as the government pension."50

The Commander also prayed that the great name of the regiment would not suffer because of the hard time the men had undergone without pay. The pay problem didn't end on April 28th. The

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problem then started in Congress. Approximately one year before, the present Congress debated whether colored men would be ushered into service of the country as laborers and soldiers, and if as soldiers-whether they would equal to whites in all respects and ranks.

The only law that grew out of the congressional debates relating to colored men in the military service was the Act of July 17, 1862. The Act only granted ten dollars a month to colored soldiers, of which three were for clothes. The white soldiers were getting thirteen dollars per month in addition to three dollars and fifty cents, for clothing. The problem of equal pay really started when the war department's action to employ blacks for fighting did not parallel Congress' laws to accommodate the services of the black. Secretary Stanton, who had encouraged Governor Andrews to recruit the 55th, found himself seeking legal advise from William Whiting on the pay question.

Solicitor Whiting's opinion read as follows: "By the IIth section of the Act of July 17, 1862, entitled 'An act to define the pay and employments, the President was authorized to employ as many persons of African descent as he should deem necessary and proper for the suppression of the rebellion, and to organize and use them in such manner as he judged for public welfare' No provision was specially made for their compensation in the act. By the 15th section of act of July 17, entitled 'an act to amend the act calling forth ... (100,000) volunteers for nine months) ... be entitled to receive his first month's pay and twenty-

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five dollars (\$25) bounty upon the mustering ... That persons of African descent, who should be employed under the law should receive Ten dollars (\$10) per month and one ration each per day, of which three dollars (\$3) might be paid in clothing. It seems therefore that in accordance with the foregoing that persons of African descent ... receive at pay ten dollars (\$10) per month and one ration daily of which monthly per three dollars (\$3) per month may be paid in clothing."<sup>51</sup>

Solicitor Whiting's opinion was followed immediately by the war department's General Order 163. Assistant Attorney General E.D. Thowsend's order read as follows:

"persons of African descent who enlist under the Act approved July 17, 1862, (General Order 91 AGO 1862 page 25) are entitled to "ten dollars" per month and one ration, "three dollars" of which monthly pay may be in clothing."<sup>52</sup>

This edict was set forth to convince all who questioned the unequal pay for colored soldiers. It did not intend to cast blame on the War Department or Secretary Stanton, who had pushed to get colored soldiers to enlist, but to blame the Congress.

The legal advisors of the War Department disappointed the Secretary, Governor Andrew, and all black soldiers with the verdict that only ten dollars could be paid to the Negro soldiers. The cry of discrimination against the colored soldiers was sounded by men like Frederick Douglass and it was heard throughout the North and South.

When word reached the men in the 55th, who

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just one month before they had left Boston for South Carolina, the soldiers were very much disgusted. They felt that the Government, the State of Massachusetts, and especially Governor Andrews had been fraudulent. The men of the 55th refused to take the ten dollars and decided that they would have the same pay as the white soldiers or nothing at all.

Governor Andrews was dealt his first major setback by the decision of the War Department on unequal pay for the colored soldiers and the decision of the men to accept the ten dollars. The Governor was also aware of the fact that he promised equal pay to all the colored men recruited for the 55th. The recruiting officers and Mr. Stearns had been successful in filling the ranks in Readville because they offered equal pay. Despite these promises, made in early 1863, many heard about the unequal pay even though they preferred to listen to Governor Andrew's promise of equal pay. Now faced with the dilemma, Governor Andrew called his legislators into special session in November, 1863. Out of that session came a law whereby the state would pay their colored men the difference between the ten dollars the Federal Government would pay them and the white soldier's pay. Immediately, Governor Andrew sent Major James Sturges with Mr. Edward Kinsley, giving him the authority to pay the colored soldiers of the 55th the difference in pay.

Major Sturges called the men together upon his arrival to explain the Governor's desire to pay the 55th Mass the additional three dollars. He explained

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that to accept the money was truly an act of courage and honor. Sergeant Major Trotter expressed the position of the men when he said:

"a great deal has been said of the ungratefulness of the 55th... We did not come to fight for money, for if we did, we might as well have accepted the money that was offered us; we come not only to make men of ourselves, but of our other colored brothers at home, and we do highly honor, the generous and hearted people of the State of Massachusetts."53

Refusing the ten dollars offered by the U.S. Government and the additional three dollars offered by the State of Massachusetts, the men in the 55th served without pay. Since the men had not been paid, there was nothing for their families at home. Often the families would write and plead their men to send money for food, medicine, and clothes for the children. Given this situation, their patriotism was lessened considerably.

A few weeks later someone secretly sent Colonel Hartwell an anonymous letter stating that:

"if we were not paid by the 1st of March, the men would stack arms and do no more duty." Captain Bowditch said that: "a good many have the idea that if they were not paid at the end of nine months, they would go back to Massachusetts and be mustered out of the service."

"I should not be surprised if we had some trouble with them within the next month... the men are rather given to talking about their non-receipt of pay... I can judge of their feelings by mine."54

To contain such talk of departure, Colonel Fox,



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the second in command of the 55th, expressed his views to the Commander, Colonel Hartwell:

"It having come to my knowledge that erroneous opinions are held by a portion of the regiment... The state of Massachusetts, having offered to make good as far as possible the promises made by her agents, and that offer having been declined... no possible claim to be discharged the service on the ground of non-payment can be made, until the present Congress has refused to provide for the pay of the regiment agreeably to the terms of their enlistment, or has adjourned taking no action. Should Congress refuse by vote or adjournment... the claim to be mustered out of the service can then be made only to the Secretary of War... on the ground of enlistment under false pretenses.

Nothing can be more certain than that mutinous conduct or refusal to do duty would result in the extreme, penalty of the law to the ringleaders, and the probable disarming of the entire regiment."<sup>55</sup>

The circular that Colonel Fox prepared was distributed the same day to every ranking officer in the regiment with the orders to be read to all the men. The purpose of this order was to hold the regiment together, rescuing the dreams and aspirations of both Governor Andrew and the colored population that supported the 55th. However, Colonel Hartwell had already set forth to the Secretary of War a request that the regiment be disbanded because of the Government's failure to live up to the terms of the agreement for enlisting colored soldiers. It was now up to Congress to act and the War Department to decide the fate of the

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55th Massachusetts.

In the interim, during the month of July 1864, some of the men felt a desire to refuse duty partially because of lack of pay. Those leaders of the action were immediately arrested and tried with the purpose of checking and preventing the action from spreading. Nevertheless, Private Sampson Golda, John Lewis, Young, Gouch, and Nelson Browning, all of Company A were tried for mutiny convicted and sentenced to hard labor.

Governor Andrew not only had reason to have the State Legislature offer equal pay to his 55th, but also a need to continue his long and uphill fight with the U.S. Congress and President Lincoln on that very subject.

His arguments were that:

Many of those who marched in their regiments from the Commonwealth have been worn out in service, or have fallen in battle... Many also yet linger; bearing honorable wounds, but dependent upon private charity while unpaid by the Government of the Nation the humble wages of a soldier and sick at heart as they contemplate their own humiliation... These regiments... are trembling on the verge of military demoralization. Already one man... suffered the penalty of death for the military offense of mutiny by refusing further obedience of his officers... The Government which found no law to pay him... nevertheless found law enough to shoot him as a soldier."<sup>56</sup>

Congress passed the equal pay bill in mid June of 1864 and the War Department followed with its normal General Order which read:

"That all persons of color who have been or may be mustered into the military service of the United States shall receive the same uniform, clothing, arms, equipment, camp equipage, rations, medical and hospital attendance, pay and emoluments, other than bounty, as other soldiers of the regular volunteer forces of the United States. . . . That all persons of color who were free on the nineteenth day of April, eighteen hundred and sixty-one and who have been enlisted and mustered into the military service of the United States, shall, from the time of their enlistment, be entitled to receive pay, bounty, and clothing allowed to such persons by the laws existing at the time of their enlistment."58

Still awaiting their pay, the Commander decided to issue General Order Number 48 for the protection of the men who would have a lump sum of money with a limited supply of goods available on which to spend it on. He wrote:

view of the approaching payment of the regiment, the C/O takes occasion to caution this command and with reference to the two crimes of gambling. The professional gambler is at once the meanest and most cowardly of men, a robber in all but the name. All money used for this purpose will be liable for seizure for the benefit of the Hospital Fund and any man convicted of being a habitual gambler will receive the severest punishment and all non-commissioned officers engaged in or continuing this practice will be liable to reduction to the ranks."59

Since the 55th has some persons whose freedom before April 19, 1861, had been questioned, the men in question were asked to make sworn statements attesting to their freedom. The long wait, inequality among the whites and colored soldiers, family disappointments and hardships came to an end in September 1864, when the men were finally paid. There were four events that place at camp worth mentioning:

On June 29th, 1864, the Commander of the 55th Mass. Vols. was finally paid. There were four events that place at camp worth mentioning: Firstly, the pay date was celebrated not with noise, and disorder (like some football victories of the "educated" whites), but by addresses and music. Secondly, there were promptly and fully paid all claims from the officers, and all indebtedness to the sutler who had sold on credit for months. Thirdly, in addition to amounts remitted by mail or otherwise, there was sent home, by Adams Express alone, from the Fifty-fifth Regiment of Colored Infantry, over sixty thousand dollars!! Then, surely was the

The sworn statement, which became known as the "Quaker Oath," satisfied all concerned, and cleared the air for the day they would be paid. On June 29th, 1864, the Commander of the 55th Mass. Vols. was finally paid. There were four events that place at camp worth mentioning: Firstly, the pay date was celebrated not with noise, and disorder (like some football victories of the "educated" whites), but by addresses and music. Secondly, there were promptly and fully paid all claims from the officers, and all indebtedness to the sutler who had sold on credit for months. Thirdly, in addition to amounts remitted by mail or otherwise, there was sent home, by Adams Express alone, from the Fifty-fifth Regiment of Colored Infantry, over sixty thousand dollars!! Then, surely was the



## *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

"Moral Crusader" justified; then was his crusade proved to have been worthwhile."60

Another soldier in the 55th wrote his sister-in-law after the men were paid. He said:

"We had a glorious celebration, there was a procession... speeches of various gentlemen were made... readings of resolutions to be published in the papers and we had a Grand Supper. All passed off very creditable."61

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SECOND ENGAGEMENT WITH REBEL TROOPS

The propeller-driven "sentinel" arrived at Yellow Bluff, but/was later forced to dock at Folley Island because of problems with the boat.

From March through July, 1864, the men did battle as a regimental unit, although smaller groups were assigned duties of various sorts, such as picket duty.

Some men were sent by a boat which passed an expedition to James Island in the latter part of May. The group immediately and successfully drove away the rebel parties. The success of the expedition gave the men a feeling of honor as they fought along the side of fighting white soldiers. After the action with the rebels, the group on the expedition reached Folley Island by way of Coles Island. This was the first action although small but there was contest with the rebels. Many of the officers were happy to take their respective companies.

Camp life during the marches from island to island was entirely different from the life at a fort. During a bivouac, the men would build a campfire at night. Long past the sunset some groups could still be heard leaving the road for the wooded encampment. There were many stories of the encounters with the enemy. While one or two men exchanged stories of interest to all, the other men were holding their guns in their arms as though they were ready to jump to their feet and battle with the

### *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

rebels. Not all the men were involved in the stories of war around the campfires; others dreamed of their families, loved ones and hometowns that they had left to come to South Carolina. A few hours before the bugle blew taps, men could be heard singing songs of victory, slave songs, and war songs. It was not until the day gray of the early morning showed through that the men realized the reality of the times of war.

Two other important events happened when all of the groups returned to the camp. The first was the arrival of Chaplain Bowles, an Ohio Clergyman who was the second colored chaplain to join the regiment from a state other than Massachusetts. The second event was the promotion of a Sergeant, John F. Shorter, formerly an orderly to a Commission, to the rank of 2nd Lieutenant by Governor Andrew. This was the first of the colored soldiers in the 55th to be so commissioned. However, shortly after his commission, Lieutenant Shorter applied for a discharge and muster in since it was the tradition of all officers. His mustering in was refused by the General of the South, however, simply because colored officers were not to be commissioned.

Colonel Hartwell appealed to Governor Andrews, hoping the Governor would in turn appeal to the War Department. In his appeal Colonel Hartwell said:

"I herewith transmit to your Excellency the discharge papers of First Sergeant John F. Shorter, Commissioned by your Excellency as a Second Lieutenant in this Regiment... It is with... vexation to myself and officers that this man is refused



James Monroe Trotter  
**LIEUTENANT**



William H. Dupree  
**LIEUTENANT**

55th Mass. Colored Officers

### *The Second Engagement with Rebel Troops*

his discharge [and muster in as an officer] I leave the matter for your Excellency to lay before the authorities."62

The application went through the War Department for a redress of the wrong done by the General from the Department of the South, but to no avail. The application was turned down and only months later Shorter received his promotion in accordance with General Army Regulations.

James Monroe Trotter was also well qualified to be an officer in the 55th Massachusetts Regiment. He was born in Grand Gulf, Mississippi, but at an early age was taken to live in Cincinnati, Ohio. Later he moved to Hamilton, Ohio, and attended school where he studied music and art. He taught school for a short time and moved to Massachusetts; he joined the 55th as a private, but quickly moved up to the rank of First Sergeant and then Sergeant Major at 23 years of age.

Trotter, also denied a muster out, became very bitter when he learned of the event. It became more apparent to Trotter that the white officers were giving him the cold shoulder and appeared to be very satisfied at the outcome. Trotter found it difficult to understand why a poor oppressed people were being denied the means of elevating themselves. One white officer told Trotter that he thought the time was not now because white officers needed time to get rid of their prejudice. Trotter wondered why the white officers never thought that an educated decent colored officer would object to sleeping with the whites. Moreover, Trotter thought that the white officers among them

## *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

were turning up their noses at the failure of the coloreds to obtain a commission.

During the latter part of May, the regiment moved on to a tiny Island called "Stono", where they remained until June except for some very small picket duty around the island.

During June 1864, the confederate troops who were stationed on James Island had been reduced significantly. This came at a time when the Union Army decided on a three point attack on that Island. A Company was ordered to lead the attack on the Island, selected from the 55th, on the 2nd of July, 1864. Captain William Nutt and his men left Tiger Island by boat at night with the express purpose of making contact with the Union forces approaching from Coles Island. They arrived about sunrise intent on taking Battery Lamar by surprise. When the other two groups that were a part of the three point attack came in sight of the River Causeway, they were bombarded with shelling from two twelve-pound Napoleon guns left on the island. This shelling slowed the advance of the two groups.

The colored soldiers from the 55th, realizing their predicament, did not wait for orders from their officers who were in doubt as to what steps to take. Instead, the soldiers leaped forward and moved into a fast step. They saw the danger that was ahead but were not concerned for their own safety. They then moved swiftly to destroy the enemy and, in the process, took the two large Napoleon guns from the rebels who fled without some shells. Ironically, these shells were used by the 55th (Company F.) to shoot the fleeing rebels.

## *The Second Engagement with Rebel Troops*

The steps taken by the colored soldiers of the 55th Mass at James Island refuted for all times the old concept "that the Negro... shrinks from peril and that at best he may follow blindly where others lead." The concept was indeed refuted as a result of the action of the Negro soldiers of the 55th at James Island. It is said that the colored soldiers showed great physical courage. There never has been and there never will be a lack of fighting spirit among those soldiers.

When asked if "the colored soldiers fight as well as the white"? The 55th Commander replied that it was obvious as to who was a better fighter since the two guns taken at James River were defended by white troops.

Captain Nutt who was in charge of the 55th soldiers who attacked Battery Lamar on James Island, reported that the men were well behaved during the battle. They captured the prisoners but showed no barbarism and they were very "much worthy of special mention for their gallantry."

Now that the worse part of the rebel defense had ended at Battery Lamar, the 55th Mass. reformed, and the wounded, of which there were two commissioned officers and 17 enlisted men were moved to the rear. Having cleared the field of battle, the 55th then advanced to Battery Lamar. The group received orders to immediately move to the Coles Island, thus leaving their dead to the enemy to bury or mistreat. Thus, the 55th returned to Folley Island camps where they had known life so well previously.

The conditions at Folley Island were such now

## JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL

that Colonel Hartwell had moved up to the position of Post Commander.

The latter part of July, Captain Soule led a group over to John's Island. He suffered no loss of men, nor did he encounter rebel resistance. However, the rebels slipped into the camp and set some of the houses previously used by the 55th on fire.

From August to early November, 1864, the regiment was enjoying camp life such as was never before known by the 55th. They were assigned simple duties, such as details and expeditions in small groups. This provided time for recruiting and drilling and constant parade and review by the District Commander.

The regiment underwent vigorous inspections. George L. Poddock reported on the inspection he made:

"The losses by disease since May 1863 were 124 and losses by desertion was 169. Discipline, excellent, instruction thorough, arms serviceable and clean in almost every instance. . . The quarters are tents (worn out). . . They are not sufficient for cold on wet weather. Camp is pretty well policed. The regimental books are in good form. Descriptive Books are not yet completed but in progress. Company Book is better than every one of those of colored regiment. . . I recommend Captain A. C. Crosby be ordered before a commission for examination touching this qualification for command and general efficiency as an officer in the colored service."63

The men in the 55th, who seemed to have been held back from all their dreams of getting into the

## The Second Engagement with Rebel Troops

thick of the fighting, hardly knew that during the month of November, 1864, they would write their

names in history. The early part of the month started slowly, without many demands being made on the soldier's time. One unfortunate incident took place when two men left camp in search for food.

Since they wandered far out of the camp site without arms, they were captured mistakingly for rebel soldiers. At first, they escaped, but were later placed in rebel jails until exchanged. After that incident the men stayed closed to camp until they received word from General Hatch to move at a moment's notice. Clothes and rations were issued and camp was made ready for departure. Before

departure very little excitement was going on except for the dress parade and the celebration of the date set aside by President Lincoln as Thanksgiving Day.

Lieutenant Hall and Private Humbey of the 55th, previously assigned to Fort Delafield returned to their regiment still unaware of their destiny. On Sunday, November 27th, the 55th received their long awaited marching orders. Their destination was Boyd's Neck Hilton Head, which was kept under sealed orders just prior to arrival. The Department of the South was very busy during this period. All available troops had been sent up the Broad River in order to secure lodging. A base of operation was set up along the Charleston and Savannah Railroad should General Sherman attempt to land his forces somewhere near Port Royal between Savannah, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina, the largest prison depot on the Atlantic. The men took with them an advance of five days of cooked food and sufficient ammunition for each man.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE BATTLE OF HONEY HILL

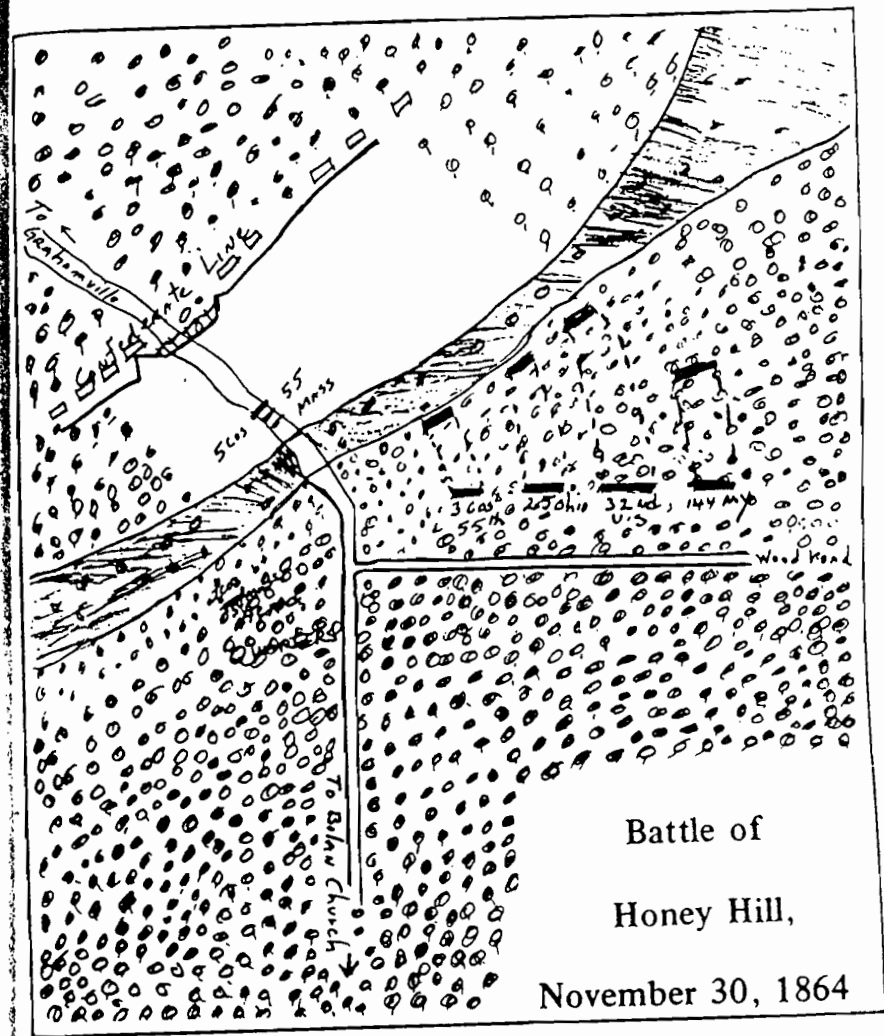
On November 27th, the 55th Mass., boarded the steamers "Mary Boardman" and "Frazer" which took them up the Broad River to their destination. Early afternoon the next day the regiment landed at Hilton Head. Thereafter, Major Nutt and Captains Soule and Crane were to give close command to the 55th since Colonel Hartwell was appointed Brigadier Leader. As night fell, the men settled in for rest, preparing for the advance they expected to make the next day toward Grahamville.

The drive of the rebels was changed from Augusta to Savannah, since the line of the Southern Railroad was in the hands of the Union Troops. The Confederate Troops moved by rail to Albany, at which point they marched about 60 miles to Thomasville, arriving the 28th of November. Lacking sufficient trains in Thomasville, only part of the Georgia Militia reached Savannah on Wednesday. As soon as they reached Savannah, they were ordered to go immediately to Grahamville, South Carolina, to stop the advance of the union army up the Broad River. They hoped to separate the Charleston and Savannah Railroad.

The separation of the railroad was in the pathway of General Sherman's greatest military plan, a plan that astonished the military strategist of great world powers. The plan called for a "march to the sea," hailed also as a great emancipation march because it brought immediate freedom to thousands







## *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

of slaves who followed Sherman. Part of the orders issued by Sherman covered the service of able-bodied Negroes who would be taken along but their first priority was to bear arms.

The Civil War could have ended in July, 1863, because the Battle of Vicksburg and Gettysburg broke the back of the rebellious Southerner. Instead of accepting defeat, the southern leaders were stubborn and wanted to hold out until the last man was lying dead in a hole. Naturally, Sherman's determination was to give the South more war if so desired by the rebels. The great march to the sea, which was more than three hundred miles took 27 days. The march brought about many encounters that made the rank of respectable battles, such as the battle at Honey Hill. This battle was one of the most significant battles in which colored soldiers fought during the entire Civil War. Honey Hill was situated in the Beaufort area of South Carolina, three miles east of Grahamville.

As one looked up and down the road and up the hill one could not help but see a poorly constructed semi-circle of earthworks. These were considered to be the center of the rebel force. To the right or left they were protected by the swamp or pine trees. The main road up the hill passed closely to the swamps at the bottom of the hill, while the creek ran some miles through the swamp.

The Confederates knew that the security and preservation of Savannah depended largely upon the possession of the communication line. It was expected that the small force of rebels would hold and repulse the Union Army, pending the arrival of

## *The Battle of Honey Hill*

those troops delayed by the trains in Thomasville and the thousands enroute from the Carolinas. Another rebel force was expected from Georgia but the Governor wanted to withdraw the Georgia forces from confederate service if anyone tried to order the force beyond the State borders. Furthermore, the troops, suffering from battle fatigue, were in no condition to fight any place to preserve the South. Nevertheless, upon orders, the Georgia State Brigade moved across the border toward Grahamville, South Carolina. Before the arrival of the additional troops at Grahamville, the 55th Mass did not know that the only rebel troops on duty were a part of the South Carolina Cavalry. The balance of the troops had been moved farther inland to stop the advance of General Sherman.

When the 55th first arrived at Boyd's Neck on the 29th, they devoted much of that day to their entrenchment. Had they advanced with the small rebel force on duty, the 55th could have taken the railroad without much resistance. But by waiting that one day, the South gained the advantage because then the Georgia brigade arrived on the 30th as well as the rebel troops from Thomasville.

During the early morning of November 30th, the 55th Mass., was aroused in readiness to advance toward Grahamville. They first stopped at a cross-road, then the Bolan Church where a group was left to guard. The men then went single file through an open cornfield stopping to put out a fire that was started by the rebels to block the route. Consequently, there was only one safe route, which was a swamp sided by woods and very thick under

## *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

brush. Naturally, this route slowed the advance. Other regiments, such as, the 32 Regiment, United States Colored troops, the 25th Ohio, and the 44th New York were brought in at the same time to take and secure the Charleston and Savannah Railroad. To do so, required passing over Honey Hill. These Union forces were deployed either to the right or left of the main road heading towards the base of Honey Hill beyond the church. Around noon on the 30th, the Union troops met with an attack of one rebel gun, which brought to a halt the advance of the 55th and other union troops.

On the same day the Southern troops received notices that:

"the Federal Column marching up the Honey Hill road from Hilton Head had passed Bolan's Church and was then only five miles from Grahamville. A line of breastworks was previously constructed for the use of infantry, and field artillery [therefore] . . . it became all important that the advance of the enemy should be retarded in order that the confederates might occupy these works. With this view [the rebels] pushed rapidly a 12 pounder Napoleon gun. . . The first shell from the Napoleon gun is said to have killed and wounded 9 men of the enemy. (Union soldiers). In the face of this opposing fire the Federal Column halted and after some delay, abandoned the highway."<sup>64</sup>

In the meantime, the southern troops held on to the constructed infantry and field artillery works.

Colonel Hartwell was about to give the order; he ordered the color guard to come forward, then he shouted to the men to follow your colors.

## *The Battle of Honey Hill*

"When the firing commenced the 55th. . . [was] ordered forward over the ground where the first dead were lying, and formed in line in a field at the left of the road. . . and moving forward the brigade was formed in columns in the next open field at the right and advanced a half a mile, while the artillery followed the road. . . Regiment after regiment was advanced to support this section. . . but all were driven back to places of partial shelter."<sup>65</sup>

About two o'clock, the firing between the rebel and union forces grew fiercer as the 55th moved closer to the rebel-held position. They ran past Branch Road as they were under fire. They realized their situation and almost without orders the colored 55th formed a double column and, stormed the enemy works in front of Honey Hill. Companies K, I, and E advanced with Lieutenant Colonel Fox and Major Nutt to the right of the road leading up to Honey Hill, while the other five companies moved straight up the road to the base of Honey Hill. Again, the 55th colored rallied and thundered and in great desperation they charged Honey Hill, the strong-hold of the Confederate soldiers. The rebels looked down the hill and saw that the woods were full of bluecoats. The 55th turned their heavy guns upon the rebels. At short range, the cannoneers kept their calm and fired with extreme accuracy. The rebels on the upper half of the Honey Hill began to stagger under the thick fire. The spectacle was grand beyond description. Scores of rebels were running around somewhat stunned by the advance of the 55th. Shells were exploding all around and bodies of both men and horses were

## *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

falling. Loud shrieks of anger were shouted as they fell under the rain of fire.

Commander Hartwell reported that:

"On turning the last angle in the road in front of the fort, the grape and canister became insupportable. Captain Crane acting aide was killed with his horse; Lieutenant Hill, second acting aide was knocked off his horse by a concussion; and my own horse was killed and fell on me. . . I was pulled from under my horse and back by an officer and. . . was hit in the boot heel by a shot that burned my ankle and in the side by a spent grape shot."66

'Lieutenant Boynton, while urging his man is killed. Lieutenant Hill is wounded, but still keeps his place. Captains Soule, and Woodward are both wounded, and yet keep their command. The blood is running freely from the mouth of Lieutenant Jewett; but he does not leave his company. Sergeant Major Trotter is wounded but still fights. Sergeant Shorter is wounded in the knee yet will not go to the rear. A shell tears off the foot of Sergeant Major Charles L. Mitchell; and as he is carried to the rear he shouts, "Cheer up, boys" "We'll never surrender."67

Color Sergeant Robert King, a brave, handsome lad of eighteen, was blown to pieces by an explosion of a shell; but the colors were snatched from his hand and sustained by Corporal Andy Smith."68

After the worst part of the battle for Honey Hill, which began early Wednesday morning, November 30, 1864, and lasted nearly till dark, the 55th started the construction of a defensive position in breastworks all the way back to Boyd's landing.

## *The Battle of Honey Hill*

They were also covered by protection because groups of Federal Gun Boats were awaiting some of the other regiments. However, the 55th remained behind to further defend the positions.

Days after the major battle of Honey Hill, the rebels and union troops fought light battles along the various stretches of the Charleston and Savannah Railroad. Late in December, news of the battle came to camp, bringing wild expressions of joy. The news confirmed the valor of the colored soldiers to the white officers.

"At Honey Hill after several other regiment had been repulsed, a battalion of the 55th charged the Confederates works, losing kild [sic] and wounded about half the officers and one-third of the enlisted engaged."69

The commander expressed his views of the brave black men of the 55th when he said:

"The company commander desires to express his pleasure to the officers and men of the 55th for their good conduct in the recent operations and especially Honey Hill. Your comrades suffering from their wounds suffer proudly and patiently for they know that they helped to keep the fair fame of this Regiment unblemished. For the brave souls of those who have fallen in battle, let each remember that in following the example such as "advance guard" he cannot fail of the best success."70

It was well known that the colored troops of the 55th fought an honorable fight all during the day despite the great odds. During one part of the battle, one round exploded along side of the color guard and struck him. Private Fitzgerald of Com-

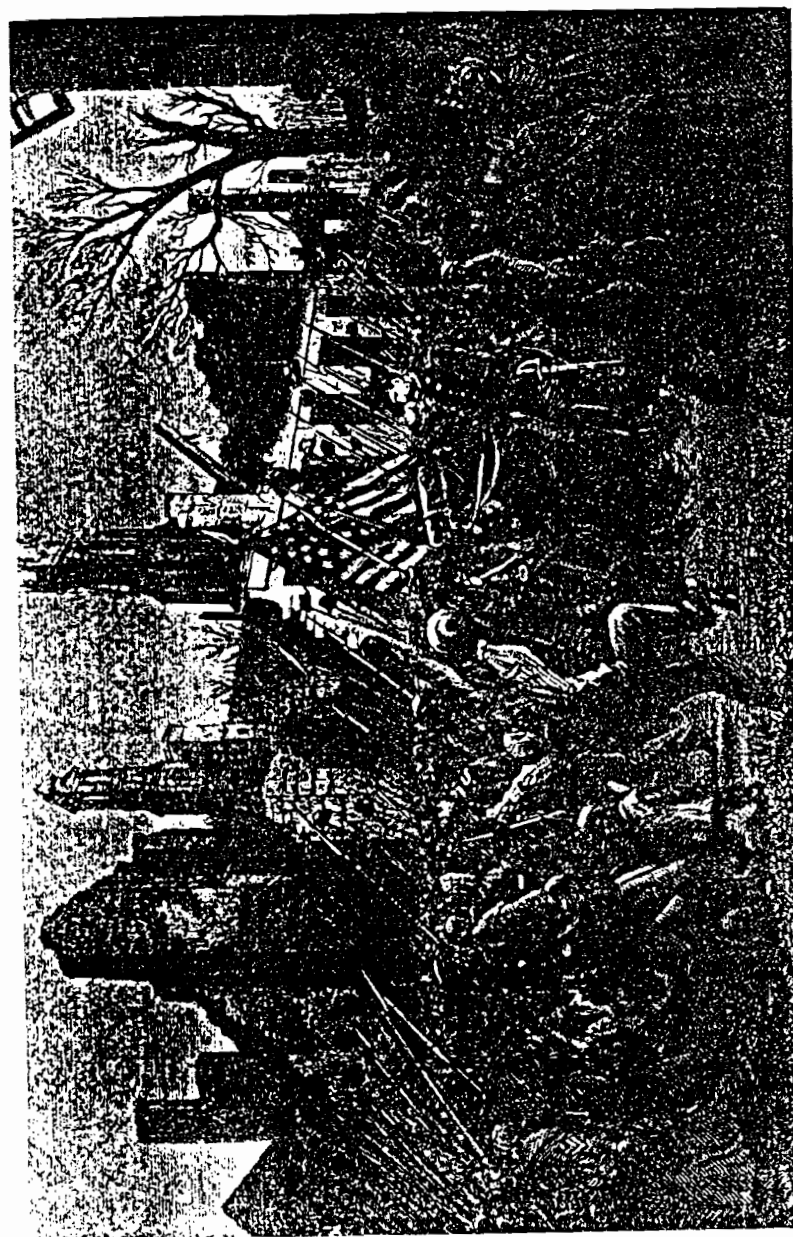
## *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

pany D was severely wounded, but after three requests to return to the rear for bandages to his wounds, he was later seen looking and firing.

The 55th was to cover the retreat of the other regiments.

It was apparent to the white officers and colored soldiers that the Honey Hill battle was very significant in the Civil War. Honey Hill stands alongside of such battles as Manassas and Bull Run in terms of historic significance. One needs only examine closely the fact that the brave men of the 55th went up the hill several times and were driven back by the thundering rain of bullets. One hundred or more men were lost in the first thirty or forty minutes of the battle. Yet, these heroic colored soldiers held their ground when heavily outnumbered. The sacrifice and willingness to embrace death by the colored soldiers was all on behalf of freedom, initially their principal reason for fighting.

From January 17 to February 1st, 1865, the regiment stayed at Forts Barton and Jackson to defend the Savannah River under General Foster's command. They left for Hilton Head by steamboat-Louisburg in February, where they were placed in a temporary brigade with Colonel Hartwell, who commanded a drive toward the rebels lines on James Island. The loss by the brigade was a little more than normal. The group thereafter left for Mt. Pleasant after coming through the Owandaw Creek, and on the 21st of February the 55th went into Charleston in pursuit of the retreating rebels in the city.



Return of the 55th

### *The Battle of Honey Hill*

Now a Lieutenant, Trotter and some of the other colored soldiers found Charleston to their satisfaction because it was considered to be the strong-hold of slavery. Consequently, some of the soldiers felt jubilant about their presence in Charleston and decided to write upon the walls the lines of those brave colored people who had fought for freedom here. The soldiers saw the slave auction ahead from which hundreds of blacks had been sold and bought. It was ironic that the last chapter of war was closing with the objective of the war accomplished, namely, freedom from slavery.

Not every day in Charleston was without activity because the soldiers were found to be in skirmishes with the rebels and those who moved around the Saratie River bridge, which was left in smoke as the rebels made good their escape.

From March through May, 1865, the regiment moved from Charleston Neck to James Island, then to St. Andrews Station which was lost not far from the city of Charleston. A raid was made through the interior on areas still occupied by the rebels. The 55th suffered no losses but returned with thousands of colored refugees.

In the early part of May, the regiment marched to Sommerville, South Carolina crossing the Ashley River. They later moved 90 miles by train to Orangeburg, South Carolina. The men served as guards and worked on the construction of the South Carolina Railroad. A number of the men were also sent out to work out agreements between the landowners who had once owned the slaves.



## *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

The regiment continued to perform various duties in and around South Carolina. The camp life was the same for about 10 months, until the 55th received their mustering out orders from the War Department. That took place in September, 1865. Before their departure from the South, the Regiment was accorded a thundering applause as they passed in dress parade through the town. The eyes of each of the citizens sparkled with thanks to the colored soldiers who had left their former condition to defend their homes against the rebels.

The Regiment left for Boston shortly afterwards by way of two boats. Upon arriving, on Monday, September 22nd, the 55th marched in dress parade through Boston, being well received by not only the colored citizens but also the white citizens and the original committee that had a hand in the recruitment of the 55th during May 1863.

"Thirty-two commissioned officers and 822 enlisted men were (to be) mustered out, and 31 commissioned officers, and 767 enlisted men received transportation from Charleston. The following statistics are nearly accurate:

Terms of service - 2 years and 3 months

Deaths from Disease - 1 commissioned officer and 112 enlisted men, accident - 1 commissioned officer and 5 enlisted men; 4 by sentence of GCM; in action of wounds. Received: - 3 commissioned officers and 54 enlisted men.

Discharged from Sickness: 82; Wounds, 37

Recruits received: 153

Desertions: 30/21 of them in July 1865...."71

## *The Battle of Honey Hill*

All agreed that the 55th Regiment served the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Union Army, fulfilling all that was expected of them. They withstood the advance of the rebels and advanced the cause of the colored people.

Whenever one gives honor and testament to those of the 55th, they will have to start with the loss to the Country and their families of those brave forthright and devoted men who lost their lives at Honey Hill. We should recall how the pride, patriotism and inspiration to duty arose in the men after they had finished their training at Readville. The acts of bravery need not to be mentioned, for we already have had illustrated those untainted acts of courage.

The deeds of these men were written in deep granite and deeper in the hearts of loved ones.

The men were paid on Saturday, September 22nd, and discharged. They were then faced with what should they do next. Most of them took trains and other means of transportation toward their respective homes. Some of the men who had been slaves before the war returned to their former houses, looking taller in their fading blue uniforms. They were tired of war, but carried still that fighting spirit. Moreover, they did not find conditions of slavery as they once did. Instead, they had a place without a master. Now, as freedmen, they sought to restore or seek better places of dignity and self-respect.

History bears witness to the fact that the men who returned home kept up the fight for what they thought was right and resisted wrongs and



## *JOURNEY TO HONEY HILL*

inequitable treatment. For they knew that the way to great places, attained by some, was but by a winding and difficult ladder, and great men have and must suffer all kinds of abuses, as must all men of courage.

## Appendix I

### List of Colored Officers and Background

**WILLIAM JACKSON.** — Chaplain. Clergyman. Married. Born in Norfolk, Virginia., August 16, 1818. His father was a pilot of that port, and was employed, during the war of 1812, in evading the British blockading fleet, and moved to Philadelphia after the Nat Turner insurrection, in 1831, made Virginia a disagreeable place of residence for the free Negros. Served in the navy on board sloop "Vandalia," 1834-5. Joined the Baptist Church 1837, and September 16, 1842, was ordained as pastor of the Oak Street Baptist Church in Philadelphia. He afterward was settled in Newbury, N.Y., Wilmington, Delaware, again in Philadelphia, and finally at New Bedford, Massachusetts. Was appointed Post Chaplain at Readville, Mass., March 10, 1863. Chaplain Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry, July 14, 1863. Resigned, January 14, 1864. He was later the pastor of the Salem Baptist Church in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

**JOHN R. BOWLES.** — Chaplain. Clergyman. Married. Born in Lynchburg, Virginia, June 13, 1826. Residence, when commissioned, Chillicothe, Ohio. Chaplain Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry, March 27, 1864. Resigned, June, 1865. Last residence, Albany, Athens County, Ohio.

**JAMES MONROE TROTTER.** — Second Lieutenant. Teacher. Single, born in Grand Gulf, Mississippi, February 7, 1842. Residence, when commissioned,

Cincinnati, Ohio. Enlisted as a Private in Company K, Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry, at its formation. First Sergeant, June 11, 1863. Commissioned Second Lieutenant, April 10, 1864, but not mustered until July 1, 1865. Slightly wounded at Honey Hill, South Carolina, November 30, 1864. Mustered out with regiment, August 29, 1865. Was later a clerk in the Boston post office.

**WILLIAM H. DUPREE.** — Second Lieutenant Plasterer. Single. Born in Petersburg, Virginia, March 13, 1838. Residence, when commissioned Chillicothe, Ohio. Enlisted as a Private in Company H, Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry, June 5, 1865. First Sergeant, June 25, 1865. Commissioned Second Lieutenant, May 30, 1864, but not mustered until July 1, 1865. Mustered out with regiment, August 29, 1865. Was a letter-carrier for the Boston post office.

**CHARLES L. MITCHELL.** — Commissioned Second Lieutenant, September 20, 1865, but never mustered, on account of disability from wounds. Printer. Single. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, November, 1829. Residence when commissioned Boston, Massachusetts. Enlisted in Company F, Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry, during the formation of the regiment. Corporal, August 23, 1863. Sergeant, June 20, 1864. Severely wounded, losing his right foot, at Honey Hill, South Carolina, November 30, 1864, and was discharged October 20, 1865. He represented Ward Six of Boston in the Legislature of 1866-7.

**ABRAM W. SHADD.** — Commissioned as Second Lieutenant but never mustered on account of the

muster-out of regiment. Teacher. Married. Born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, February 25, 1844. Residence, when commissioned, Chatham, C.W. Enlisted as a Private in Company B, Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry, May 16, 1863. Appointed Quartermaster Sergeant, June 24, 1863. Returned to company in charge of Quartermaster's Department, November 19, 1863. Sergeant, August 4, 1864. Sergeant-Major, July 1, 1865. Mustered out with regiment, August 29, 1865. He later kept a photographic gallery and studied law at South Saginaw, Michigan.

**RICHARD M. WHITE.** — Commissioned Second Lieutenant, but never mustered, on account of discharge of regiment. Farmer. Married. Born in Sumter, South Carolina. Residence when commissioned Ohio. Served in Kansas Cavalry Regiment. Enlisted as Private in Company D, Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry. Sergeant, May 31, 1863. Regimental Commissary Sergeant, December 12, 1863. Mustered out with the regiment, August 29, 1865. Moved to Savannah, Georgia.

**MARTIN F. BECKER.** — Commissioned Second Lieutenant, but never mustered on account of discharge of regiment. Was born in Africa and educated in Germany. Enlisted as a Private in Company F, Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry. Commissary Sergeant, June 24, 1863. Returned to company, December 12, 1863. Quartermaster Sergeant, March 1864. Mustered out with regiment, August 29, 1865. Moved to Charleston, South Carolina. Was a member of the Constitutional Convention of South Carolina.

**ARMSTEAD M. JONES.** — Commissioned as Second Lieutenant, but never mustered on account of the discharge of the regiment. Brickmaker. Married. Born in Charlottte County, Virginia. Enlisted at the formation of the regiment, in Company D, Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry. Sergeant, May 25, 1863, and Color-Sergeant of the regiment until June, 1864. First Sergeant, July 1, 1865. Later moved to Sidney, Ohio.

**JOHN F. SHORTER.** — Second Lieutenant. Carpenter. Born Delaware County, Ohio. Enlisted as a private in Company D. Commissioned 2nd Lieutenant March 24, 1864 but not mustered until July 1, 1865. Wounded at Honey Hill, South Carolina, November 30, 1864. Died soon after the regiment was mustered out in August 1865.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Anglo-African - September 28, 1861
2. Anglo-African - October 19, 1861
3. The Negro in the Military Service of the U.S. 1639-1886-Adjutant General's office - Record Group 94  
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