

**Color No Longer A Sign of Bondage: Race, Identity and the First
Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment (1862-1865)**

By

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Abstract

“Color No Longer A Sign of Bondage” is an account of the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment from its earliest days in 1862 to the regiment’s triumphant return to Kansas in November 1865. This work encompasses the racial attitudes of the black and white communities of Kansas, Indian Territory, and Arkansas, and the military service of the regiment through campaigns in the service of the Union’s Army of the Frontier. The evolution of white support for black enlistment in Kansas, the regiment’s acceptance by white Union regiments, and the concurrent conflicts with Confederate sympathizers and military organizations are central themes of this work.

Although black military service in the Union was not officially countenanced in Kansas prior to 1863 and the Emancipation Proclamation, the First Kansas Colored fought for recognition and shed blood despite the opposition of Kansas civil and military authorities alike. The irregular enlistment and employment of the regiment jeopardized its existence through the fall of 1862, and despite official disapproval the regiment survived to become a vital part of the Army of the Frontier. White and black Kansans alike took note of the regiment’s military service and through the sterling service of the regiment in an unforgiving theater of war, the regiment won the admiration of white regiments and a skeptical black civil populace.

The deeds of the First Kansas Colored in battle and in garrison ultimately undergirded the black drive for civil rights and proved that black men could serve as soldiers in an army that often relegated its black soldiers to fatigue duty. The First Kansas Colored was

a fighting regiment that won honors in Kansas, Indian Territory, and Arkansas and by its actions demanded respect. The manhood denied to blacks prior to the Civil War was not won through legal battles, but through courageous conduct in war and the blood shed by its soldiers in combat. The First Kansas Colored never faltered in its service to the Union; nor did it fail its supporters and the families of those who served in its ranks. The First Kansas Colored proved that color was no longer a sign of bondage and, although recognition for its deeds often proved ephemeral, its legacy endures.

Acknowledgements

I did not suspect that my interest in African History would kindle an interest in the American Civil War when I began my studies at the University of Kansas. A chance visit to the Richard Allen Cultural Center in Leavenworth, Kansas and a conversation with Ms. Phillis Bass made an indelible impression upon me, one that took me back to my childhood in Arizona. My father painted a Buffalo Soldier after several years of interest in the Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, and although I appreciated his art, I didn't understand the significance. My first duty as a Lieutenant at Fort Riley, Kansas in 2000 involved assisting with the dedication of a Buffalo Soldier monument, another event that proved in hindsight to provide impetus to my studies. These three events combined with an interest in East African *askaris*, or colonial-era soldiers compelled me to read a seminal work on the topic of African-Americans in the Civil War, Dr. Dudley Cornish's *The Sable Arm*. The revelations proved eye opening, and prompted me to recall Ms. Bass's words "We hope you will do something with what we've shown you about African-Americans in the military." I offer my thanks to Ms. Bass and humbly applaud her work at the Richard Allen Cultural Center.

I would like to personally thank others who helped me find my way through the research process, including Arnold Schofield who introduced me to the Island Mound battlefield, Alan Chilton and Galen Ewing of the National Park Service at Fort Scott, Kansas who provided me with my first glimpses into the First Kansas Colored, Katie

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Special notice goes to Dr. Jackie Whitt and Dr. Matthew Flynn for reading my work and their suggestions during terms already packed with student writing projects. Dr. Christopher Rein proved a staunch supporter and encouraged me to continue analyzing medical records to uncover the effects of disease and climate on the First Kansas Colored's ranks. Dale Vaughn, whose book, *The Chance* provided me with inspiration was a valuable early supporter.

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*To my family,
whose support sustained me*

&

*To the men of the First Kansas Colored,
whose service inspired me*

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Part I
Crucible

Introduction

The victory of Free Soil advocates over Pro-slavery factions in Kansas Territory, and the admission of Kansas as a free state into the Union, set the stage for change in Kansas. The genesis of the first black regiment in the west, and arguably the first northern black regiment, occurred in Kansas during the summer of 1862, the outcome of a unique conjunction of people, politics, legislation and ideology.¹⁰⁵ The result of this ferment, the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment, derived from abolitionist efforts as well as Senator James H. Lane's ambition to dominate Kansas politics and thereby establish a national presence. Subtle as a Kansas thunderstorm, and as incandescent as a prairie fire, Senator Lane determined in 1862 to create several regiments of blacks to terrorize secessionists in Missouri, Arkansas, and Indian Territory, a specter to haunt their imaginations.

His creation, the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment came to signify the ability of black men in the Civil War west, a visible symbol of black pride and strength for Kansans and Arkansans. The First Kansas Colored Infantry's experience reflected that of other black troops in that its soldiers redeemed their people from slavery through blood, and in the process seized freedom and earned the respect of white veterans of the Union's Army of the Frontier. Unlike many other black regiments, their history was one of continual combat, patrols, and skirmishes, and the regiment's fortune ebbed

¹⁰⁵ The racial term black is used to describe people now referred to as African-Americans, the period terms for those persons of African ancestry now regarded as socially repugnant ("Nigger or darkie,") terms or archaic (Negro, or colored). The term black is the least offensive and most historically accurate term, therefore I shall use the term black throughout this work unless sources indicate otherwise. The sense of this term is the same as Frederick Douglass when he referred to Massachusetts being the "first to make the black man equal before the law," as in Frederick Douglass "Men of Color to Arms !" speech found in the March 21, 1863 edition of *Douglass's Monthly*. No disrespect is intended, nor does this term seek to diminish the African or American component of identity.

and flowed with the fortune of the Union forces in Civil War Arkansas. It is best therefore to start from the beginning to appreciate the First Kansas Colored's origins, and the motivations of its founder, Senator James Lane of Kansas.

Lane was never an advocate for racial equality; he hated slavery and opposed it vociferously in a number of forums, but also advocated separation of the races. The presence of large numbers of escaped slaves and confiscated slaves in Kansas in 1861 and 1862 provided Lane with the raw material for a slave army that could be wielded to achieve his political aims while punishing Southern slave holders. In the process, the state would be rid of the numerous newly arrived contrabands that were upsetting Kansas's social order. Although acquainted with, but not an acolyte of John Brown, Lane commissioned abolitionist officers in the regiment to facilitate his goal of destroying slavery. The men Lane selected constituted a highly politicized group, for many served as Underground Railroad conductors in the 1850s, and some were retainers of the late John Brown. Given these backgrounds, it is important to examine the fervor of these officers, and determine if their idealism and abolitionism stood true after months spent with black soldiers.

Portraying abolitionist officers of Colored Regiments as pure souls incapable of acting except from the highest goals paints a dishonest picture. The true measure of abolitionist commitment was the welfare of their regiment's soldiers, and how officers related to their men in garrison and in combat. The character of the First Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment's officers tells some about who they were, but so do mortality and morbidity statistics, and the longevity of the officer corps. Despite Lane's careful selection of recruiting officers and regimental cadres, Governor Charles Robinson and his successors

attempted to appoint officers to the regiment as part of the political patronage system. Political favors and individual desire for the rights and privileges of an officer also compelled some men to join the regiment; altruism was but one compelling factor for seeking a commission to command black troops.

As time passed and casualties mounted, the character of the First Kansas Colored transformed as well, the losses of campaigning contributing to a steady loss of the original officers and soldiers of the regiment. The officers who recruited the First Kansas Colored in 1862, and trained it in early 1863, had been replaced by spring of 1865, by men who obtained their commissions through examination boards. The enlisted ranks also lost their original character, black Indians and contrabands giving way to former Arkansan slaves and substitutes. It is fair to say that the regiment that marched south into Indian Territory in 1863 was not the same that mustered out of service in October 1865.

The regiment experienced trials comparable to other Colored Troops Regiments, but the experience of the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment remains unique amongst its contemporaries, its illegal recruitment and early commitment an indicator of Lane's political power and influence in 1862 and 1863. Ignoring criticism, Lane refused to disband the regiment and shepherded it until its official muster in January 1863. The First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment's recruitment, and employment represented a change in national and regional attitudes toward blacks. The regiment's service disproved notions of race and tested the ideologies of slave owner and abolitionist, both sides forced to reappraise their pre-war racial attitudes in the wake of black military service against enemies as varied as guerrillas, conventional armies, and a hostile white Arkansan population. Recruited primarily from the numbers of former

slaves who fled to Kansas and later volunteers from Arkansas, the First Kansas Colored offered black men an opportunity to assert their manhood and prove their worth to the Union cause and in doing so, seize their freedom.

The “people” who comprised the effort to raise the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment included the black communities of Kansas-urban and rural, contraband and free. Also involved were white Free Staters whose struggles against slavery in the 1850s created a state intolerant of slavery, wary of freedmen, and unwilling to support black enfranchisement, but whose attitudes changed slowly to admit the possibility of black military service. Abolitionists led white sponsorship through example, and a small but dedicated core of Kansans made clear their willingness to risk their lives and reputations on a chance to command black soldiers.

Legal precedents established a climate in which enrollment stood a chance of success. Initially sanctioned under the First Confiscation Act and General John Fremont’s stillborn Freedom Proclamation of 1861, the seizure of “contrabands” created Lane’s manpower base, while the Second Confiscation Act, convinced Lane to compel President Lincoln to approve black military service. President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and subsequent revisions to the Militia Act, legalized black military service in capacities other than as military labor. Whereas in antebellum Kansas there were not enough black men to form a company, by 1862 there were enough for two regiments, but no support for the measure until Senator Lane took up the challenge and created enough support through his frenetic and hypnotic oratory to make raising a regiment socially and politically acceptable to Kansans. Still, Lane would not achieve success until he ran roughshod over the Wyandotte Constitution and its prohibitions against black military

service, breaking the Kansas Militia Law, and the despised Fugitive Slave Law for good measure.¹⁰⁶

Senator Lane issued no apologies for his actions; he utilized the First Confiscation Act to justify slave seizures, and rejected the return of slaves to their masters contrary to military orders. Lane reveled in his stubborn, insubordinate, and flagrantly illegal actions; he flouted military authority as he fostered political intrigue, and overtly supported General John C. Fremont's Freedom Proclamation in Missouri. Lane also positioned his one-time subordinate James Blunt as the Commanding General of Kansas troops. An ardent abolitionist and former friend of John Brown, Blunt executed Lane's agenda, the General eager to gain prominence in Kansas politics through his wartime deeds. Although both men favored the abolitionist cause, Lane sought and achieved the enlistment of blacks, a step that many initially opposed, including President Lincoln.

Notably, Lane created an army in a state where before 1860 few blacks resided. Although contested, the 1860 census records reflect that less than one percent of Kansas' population was black, even the abolitionist citadel of Lawrence was less than two percent black. That enumeration obviously did not reflect the transient populations of fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad. The numbers do however indicate that a small, but significant population of freedmen existed, mainly in eastern Kansas.

The recent Kansas constitution barred slavery, and by extension any potential growth of the black population except by freedmen immigration. Kansas appeared as unlikely as any of the Northern states to support black military service, but although it lacked the

¹⁰⁶ D.W. Wilder. *The Annals of Kansas: 1541-1885* (Topeka: T. Dwight Thatcher, 1886), 264-271. Especially Article VIII, which mirrored the Federal Militia Act by forbidding black militia participation.

blacks necessary for large units, it did contain a small abolitionist army that catalyzed social change.

Kansas Population Statistics (1860)		
1860		
County	Total	Black
Leavenworth	12,606	
Douglas	8,637	
Wyandotte	2,609	
Linn	6,336	
Bourbon	7,729	
Shawnee	3,513.	
% State Population		
Total state population: 107,204	667	.6
Lawrence Census Results		
1860		
White	Colored	% Population Black
1,645	25	1.5

Table 1: Kansas Population Statistics, 1860.¹⁰⁷

Granted Presidential authority to raise three regiments for service and a Brigadier general’s commission by President Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton in July, 1861, Lane returned to Kansas. Recruitment proceeded rapidly, the ranks of Lane’s commanders filled with controversial Kansans that included the ardent abolitionists James Montgomery, Charles Jennison, Daniel R. Anthony, and James Blunt. Lane’s political speeches conveyed his unmistakably radical attitude toward emancipation; Lane supported arming slaves to work and fight for the country.¹⁰⁸ General Fremont, the department commander and abolitionist of the first caliber shared this philosophy, and despite the need to retain the loyalty of the Border States, Fremont wasted no time

¹⁰⁷ Wilder, *Annals of Kansas*, 302, 419.

¹⁰⁸ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Series 3, Volume 1 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Company, 1880-1901), 280-281 (hereafter cited as *OR*:); Thomas F. Robley. *History of Bourbon County Kansas* (Fort Scott, Kansas: Monitor Book and Publishing Company, 1894), 172; Wiley Britton. *The Civil War on the Border, Volume I 1861-1862..* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1889), I, 129; *Leavenworth Daily Times*, July 18, 1861.

implementing his abolitionist agenda. Fremont's "Proclamation of August 31, 1861" exceeded his authority as a department commander, and unilaterally freed any slaves owned by secessionists who took up arms against the United States.

Alarmed by the consequences of Fremont's Proclamation, Lincoln modified it, but not before large numbers of Missouri slaves flooded the Union lines, and crossed into Kansas. Lane, who was campaigning in Missouri as part of Fremont's forces, eagerly distributed copies of Fremont's proclamation while his brigade marched through Missouri. Lane's Kansas Brigade, more commonly known as the Jayhawker Brigade, became the scourge of western Missouri slave owners. Kansans settled old scores, consciously and deliberately, and in short order emptied the Missouri border counties of their slaves in a form of warfare that struck to the heart of slave owners' wealth.¹⁰⁹ Marked by slave seizures, or "confiscations," and characterized by slave amnesty and challenges to slave owners seeking to recover their slaves from Lane's camps, the Kansas Brigade's progress through Missouri contributed greatly to the migration of slaves westward into Kansas. Lane's contemptuous communications to his superior, General Sturgis, reiterated his abhorrence of the institution of slavery. Lane reiterated that his Brigade would be neither "Negro thieves" nor "Negro catchers." Instead, employing Fremont's proclamation and The First Confiscation Act of 1861 as his justification, he accepted the role of slave "liberator."¹¹⁰ The abolitionist armies of Kansas made no secret

¹⁰⁹Springfield *Daily Conservative*, November 17, 1861; Ethan Earle. *Journal of Captain Ethan Earle, Company F, First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment* [Manuscript: Boston: January 1873]. (Boston, Massachusetts: New England Historical & Genealogical Society, transcription by Fort Scott National Historic Site) - hereafter referred to as *Earle Journal*, 13; Alberta Pantle, "The Story of a Kansas Freedman," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, volume XI, 1942, Number 4 (November, 1942): 344.; OR: *Series 1, Volume 3*, 477-78, 485-486.

¹¹⁰ *U.S., Statutes at Large, Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America*, vol. 12 (Boston, 1863), 319; *Lawrence Republican*, October 17, 1861, 3; *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, October 29, 1861, 8; OR: *Series 1, Volume 3*, 516, 748; *The Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, Part 4,

of their goal to liberate slaves, and by early 1862, the brigade periodically suspended campaigning to divest itself of contraband slaves in Kansas.

An economic weapon frequently used against Border State secessionists, confiscation authorized the seizure of property owned by Southern sympathizers including slaves. Confiscated slaves were referred to as “contrabands,” a term derived from General Benjamin Butler’s confiscation of a large number of slaves that he declared “contraband of war,” rather than return them to their former owners. Many contrabands remained in the rarefied environs of the Lane Brigade’s camps, contrabands employed to drive teams, cook, groom horses, and perform camp duties, while officers employed one as a servant.¹¹¹ Colonel Jennison readily espoused arming slaves and proposed organizing a company of contrabands for use as ‘Home Guards,’ and admitted to drilling contrabands for that role. One Missouri observer noted that among Jennison’s soldiers “an entire company of Negroes, armed, mounted, and uniformed as soldiers of the Union. They were led by a slave who had been enticed away from a master who was widely known for unwavering loyalty to the Union.”¹¹² Enticement or emancipation, the terms betray the observer’s opinions of the “Jayhawker Brigade,” as a collection of thieves and liars as liable to prey upon loyal Unionist slave owners as they would secessionists. The

3235. Lane’s Brigade confiscated slaves in such large numbers (Lane admitting to 1,200 at one time) that the Confederate General Ben McCulloch felt compelled to write to Judah Benjamin, the Confederate Secretary of War, to report one especially large seizure of over 600 slaves from Missouri, an aggregate \$600,000 in slaves alone.

¹¹¹ Richard Cordley. *Pioneer Days in Kansas* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1903), 150; Donald Gilmore. *Civil War on the Missouri-Kansas Border* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing, 2006), 142-144; *The Commonwealth*, “First Colored Troops,” Colonel Richard J. Hinton’s letter to the editor of the *Boston Herald*, August 20, 1887; *New York World* “His Black Brigade” as printed in *Douglass’ Monthly*, January, 1862; *The Lawrence Republican*”, November 21, 1861; Britton, *The Civil War on the Border*, vol I, 304; *Leavenworth Daily Times*, November 16, 1861.

¹¹² *Chicago Tribune*, November 12, 1861; Britton, *The Civil War On The Border*, 179; *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, 24 September, 1861. *Official Records, Series I, Volume VIII*, 641-42; *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* October 29, 1861; Richard S. Brownlee. *Gray Ghosts of the Confederacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), 46.

regiment employed the law to emancipate slaves regardless of their owner's political loyalties; rarely did political proclivities interfere with liberation.

The actual process by which Union regiments obtained contrabands differed in degrees from outright violent seizure (labeled "nigger stealing" by many enraged slave owners) to providing amnesty for fugitive slaves and protection from recapture, with many variations between the extremes. A former agricultural slave from Missouri recalled that when Union soldiers from Kansas liberated him and his fellow slaves, they offered them a choice to stay with their masters or to go to Kansas. However, there appeared to be a limit to the Jayhawker Brigade's coercive methods and in their wake the Kansas soldiers left many other slave families that did not want to "emigrate" to Kansas to ponder the consequences of staying in familiar surroundings.¹¹³ As units confiscated slaves and shepherded fugitive slaves to freedom, the numbers of blacks in Kansas impressed witnesses who rarely observed blacks in Kansas outside of the larger cities and towns before the war. Initially warmly welcomed by the labor-starved Kansas agricultural communities, some towns experienced a shockingly rapid expansion of their black communities as the initial contraband trickle swelled from tens to hundreds.

One Kansas resident who kept records estimated the "movable property of Missouri" passing through his town north of Leavenworth at over 150; whereas Charles Monroe Chase, a journalist from Illinois estimated the daily influx of contrabands into Kansas

¹¹³ Maralyn Etzler. *The Seizure, Confiscation and Destruction of Property in the Confederacy, 1861-1865* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas, 1948); Jeffrey Patrick. "This Regiment Will Leave a Mark: A Letter from a Member of Jennison's Jayhawkers, 1861-1862." Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, *Kansas History*, 20, (1997-98); 53-55; Andrew Williams. *Narrative of Former Slave*, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, RH Manuscript, 42.5.

from Missouri between 50 and 100.¹¹⁴ Although these estimates capture the raw number of arrivals, they fail to convey the change in Kansan communities during the winter of 1861. The largest demographic shifts occurred following the arrival of contraband trains from Union armies. Contraband trains differed in size and organization, ranging from a modest train of 150 to the generally large and well-organized trains from the Kansas Brigade that could contain hundreds of contrabands. Large numbers of former slaves entered Kansas in the vicinity of Fort Scott; one of Lane's chaplains, Howard Fisher, settled some of the contrabands at Fort Scott and the balance in communities in and around Mound City.¹¹⁵

The citizens of Lawrence, their abolitionist town well known before the war to escaping slaves, experienced a heavy influx of contrabands. A letter from John B. Wood of Lawrence to the Massachusetts abolitionist and philanthropist, George L. Stearns, described the situation in Lawrence, contrabands arriving from Missouri large numbers with hundreds employed in harvesting crops. incoming contrabands, and by January 1862, all remaining vacant houses and rooms contained inhabitants. The less fortunate crowded the streets of the town or sought shelter Although the contrabands tested the residents' ability to provide for both their own and contraband needs, Lawrence and the

¹¹⁴ "Affairs in Kansas," *New York Times*, October 29, 1861; C.M. Chase Letters, Manuscript 43207, Misc. Chase, Kansas State Historical Society, Chase to Editor Lawrence *Republican*, 19 August 1863: "Since May 1861 over 200 entered Leavenworth; Lawrence's numbers swelled by 400, and an additional 400 joined fellow contrabands at Mound City and Fort Scott. In total, over a thousand blacks were believed to be in Kansas by late-1861, nearly double the 1860 census numbers, with more arriving daily."

¹¹⁵ Walter Meeks. *The Role of Fort Scott, Kansas, in the Civil War* (Pittsburg, Kansas: Kansas State Teacher's College, 1952), 15; Ralph Richards. *The Forts of Fort Scott and the Fateful Borderland* (Kansas City, Missouri: The Lowell Press, 1976), 268-269; Chase to Editor Lawrence *Republican*, Aug 19, 1863, C.M. Chase Letters, Manuscript 43207, misc Chase, Kansas State Historical Society; T.F. Robley. *History of Bourbon County, Kansas*. (Fort Scott, Kansas: Monitor Book and Printing Company, 1894), 169. Contraband trains often halted north of Mound City at Fort Lincoln before fanning out into Kansas. High demand for farm hands and domestic servants earned them wages between \$8 and \$12 per month harvesting corn or chopping wood for the winter.

surrounding community enjoyed a brief respite from the incoming numbers unlike Leavenworth, which experienced almost immediate inundation.

Many slaves escaped Missouri by crossing over the Missouri River into Leavenworth during the extremely cold winter of 1861, the icy river forming a highway for escaping slaves from Missouri; others took the ferry across the Missouri River when it was ice-free, taking refuge in Wyandotte, (now Kansas City, Kansas).¹¹⁶ The small pre-war black population of Leavenworth which originally consisted of freedmen primarily from Arkansas, Kentucky, and a few young men from the east, disappeared under contrabands in early 1862, when estimated numbers exceed 1,500. One Wisconsin soldier observed, “the city is full of ‘contrabands,’ alias runaway Negroes from Missouri...they are of all ages and characters, pious Uncle Toms and half-ape Topseys.”¹¹⁷ While an imperfect expression of Leavenworth’s changing population demographics, many Leavenworth residents may have agreed with him as they watched Union troops continuously deposit contrabands in Leavenworth after operations in Missouri.

In parallel with the arrival of contrabands, freedmen drawn by the plight of the contrabands and opportunities in wartime Kansas also immigrated to Kansas during this time. Some such as Charles Henry Langston worked with the contraband slaves and became pivotal leaders in the black community.¹¹⁸ Leavenworth’s fortunes ebbed and flowed with the seasons, contraband numbers fluctuating with the weather and job availability on the outskirts of town.

¹¹⁶ *Leavenworth Daily Times*, December 30, 1861; Pearl W. Morgan. *History of Wyandotte County Kansas Volume 1* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1911), 232.

¹¹⁷ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, February 7, 1862.

¹¹⁸ *The Daily Conservative-Leavenworth*, “Our Colored Population”, July 8, 1862; Richard Sheridan, “Charles Henry Langston and the African American Struggle in Kansas,” *Kansas History, Volume 22*, Number 4 (Winter 1999-2000): 271; W.M. Paxton. *Annals of Platte County, Missouri* (Kansas City: Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Company, 1897), 338. Charles Langston, a highly educated Oberlin College alumnus and member of the Ohio State Anti-Slavery Society, arrived in Leavenworth in April, 1862.

Southern Kansas, in stark contrast to the urban black communities of Kansas, contained the miserable camps of newly arrived Union Indian refugees, many rendered destitute following defeat by Confederate Indian forces in Indian Territory. Gradually the numbers of Union Indians in Kansas increased, and by April of 1862, nearly eight thousand were receiving aid. Amongst the survivors were a number of freedmen and formerly enslaved blacks, a considerable portion of the tribes of mixed blood parentage.¹¹⁹ Senator Lane seized upon the presence of large numbers of tribal refugees in Kansas, the ever-pressing threat of Confederate raids from Indian Territory, and the need humanitarian relief, to argue for the recruitment of Indians into Kansas regiments for use against similar forces in the Confederate armies.

Union manpower demands in the west and the threat of invasion from Southern armies encouraged Lane's protégé, General James Blunt, in May of 1862, to issue General Order Number Two, authorizing the recruitment of two Indian regiments consisting of Union Cherokees, Seminoles and Creeks to be enrolled as Home Guards. Not by accident however, the mustering officer enlisted many Creek and Cherokee "wooly headed Indians" who were in actuality black. After Kansas troops under General Blunt invaded the Indian Territory in June, 1862, Union forces confiscated slaves from the Creek and Cherokee nations, and transported them north to Kansas where the men enlisted into the Union army, while the women worked in the fields. Many contrabands also changed their names to prevent possible pursuit by their former masters. Joining the blacks from Indian Territory were large numbers of freedmen from Arkansas under the

¹¹⁹ William L. Katz. *Black Indians* (New York: Simon Pulse, 1986), 135.

protection of Union soldiers.¹²⁰ The resultant numbers when combined with contrabands from Missouri swelled the black manpower pool, and the refugees' miserable conditions added impetus for members of the displaced communities to seek employment as quickly as possible to alleviate the suffering of their families. Initially the outlet for this social pressure was the Indian Home Guards, and when blacks were accepted for military service, many previously ineligible enlisted.

The significance of recruiting Indians into Kansan units posed great implications for future black enlistment. Lane's and Blunt's political maneuverings carefully built support for eventual black military service by breaking down white resistance to non-white soldiers. Instead of taking an abolitionist stance in Kansas papers, Lane's appeals to white Kansans preyed on invasion fears, exploited concerns about future manpower drafts (that could be met by potential use of available non-white manpower in lieu of Kansan whites), and most significantly, drew attention to the military performance of the Indian Home Guard units. The dearth of Kansan manpower for regiments bore dividends for the racially disenfranchised: for Indians it ensured financial support for their community and the opportunity for revenge, while for contrabands it offered the ultimate prizes of emancipation and social standing in their community. However, dominant racial attitudes required modification before black recruitment became reality. Kansan attitudes toward African-Americans ranged from the virulent rejection of anything

¹²⁰ George Rawick. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, Supplement Series I, Volume 12, Oklahoma Narratives* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), 138-40, 177, 210-211, 225; Wiley Britton. *The Union Indian Brigade In the Civil War* (Kansas City: Franklin Hudson Publishing Company, 1922), 178-79; *The Commonwealth*, "First Colored Troops", Richard J. Hinton, letter to the editor of the *Boston Herald*, August 20, 1887, 1; *OR: Series I, Volume 13*, 370; Richard J. Hinton, "War Department of Kansas," *New York Times*, August 4, 1862; Lizzie E. Goodnight. *The Negroes of Lawrence* MA Thesis (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas, 1908), 7.

resembling racial equality and absolute abhorrence of amalgamation, to joy at the prospect of arming former slaves for war.

The Kansas white community reacted in various ways to the influx of contrabands, some attacking the Kansas Emancipation League as “Nigger stealers,” others firmly supporting the right of black men to live free, condemning the kidnapping of contrabands and the agitation of Kansan whites that sought to create racial strife. Although Kansas didn’t impose Black Law restrictions in its constitution, and Kansans vociferously supported the destruction of slavery, Free Staters did not abandon their preference for racially separate communities. Most Free State Kansans desired black labor, not black neighbors. One column from the Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* spoke volumes to this issue, and identified that while Kansans opposed slavery, they also “pledged to driving out blacks from their midst,” white efforts toward improving black welfare “originat[ing] from a desire of whites to rid themselves of the contraband nuisance.”¹²¹ Perhaps prevailing attitudes demonstrated attitudes not so long ago the norm in a Territorial Kansas dominated by Missourians and their heavy-handed sectional interference.

Notwithstanding these sentiments, the contraband presence in Leavenworth exacerbated tensions between Missouri and Kansas. Missourians complained bitterly to the Secretary of War of ravaging bands of blacks originating from Kansas invading Missouri in search of plunder and revenge, a position confirmed by a member of the rabidly anti-slavery Seventh Kansas Cavalry, who noted without hint of sarcasm that the contrabands his regiment brought Leavenworth later returned to Missouri where they burned and plundered. The cross-border lawlessness worked both ways, Missouri

¹²¹ Randolph, “Kansas” *The New York Times*, March 2, 1860; Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, December 22, 1861; March 19, 28, 1862; *New York World* as reported in the Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* December 22, 1861.

kidnappers infiltrating into Kansas to steal blacks for sale in Missouri and points further south.¹²² Contrabands lacked security or community, and their uncertain status as “contrabands of war,” trapped them in a state between freedmen and slaves. The question of what to do with the contrabands grew in urgency as their numbers increased in Kansas. Arming them for use as soldiers appeared the least viable option, in 1861 and early 1862, opinions against black martial ability greatly outweighing support.

Most quarters in Kansas received proposals to arm contrabands poorly, reasons varying from black inability to learn the drill evolutions required of soldiers, to racist arguments of black timidity and cowardice in the face of white soldiers, as well as the racist demon of black savagery and danger of bloody slave uprisings. John Brown’s ghost haunted Americans on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line, and the possibility of slave uprisings abetted by white abolitionists a real and frightening prospect so great that the Union Army maintained the stance that slave uprisings would be crushed. A bastion of conservatism, many in the Army opposed black enlistment, and maintained that black soldiers would disgrace the nation. Abolitionist Ethan Earle caught a glimpse into this mentality after he recommended that rather than enforcing General Halleck’s General Order Number Three barring slaves from entering Union lines, they be retained, enlisted, and trained as soldiers.

Soldiers, having been conditioned to think that the war was a “white man’s war” expressed utter contempt for Earle; some officers threatened to resign rather than countenance the degradation of the Army, and country’s disgrace by allowing the “Nigger” to wear its uniform and use its arms. One example of this sentiment surfaced

¹²² *OR: Vol 17, Part II*, 93; Sim.Fox “The Early History of the Seventh Kansas Cavalry.” Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, RH MS 555: Anthony and Havens Family Papers; Leavenworth *Daily Times*, May 9, 10, 1862, 1.16.

among the soldiers of the First Kansas Volunteers, they voted to remove the single black soldier of their company, complaining that his presence was unbearable. Senator Lane played to similar sentiments when in a speech to the Third Wisconsin Cavalry, he offered to supply a black servant for every white soldier, the government policy being that “the white man shall fight and the colored man labor.”¹²³ While Lane and others traded rhetoric about the value of black soldiers and their potential role in the military, some Kansas units in the field also debated the issues, especially those units that witnessed the enrollment and employment of the Indian Home Guard soldiers.

Although Wiley Britton’s memoirs confirmed that many whites refused to fight alongside black soldiers, he believed that Kansans’ revulsion for returning slaves to their masters and a pronounced aversion to be thought of as slave hunters indicated a change in attitudes. White military prejudices remained strong throughout 1862, but as a counterpart to white attitudes, when recruiting opened up for the First Kansas Colored, the Indian regiments sent black refugees north with every wagon train from Indian Territory to Fort Scott. The irony of manpower-strapped units refusing to utilize blacks as soldiers was not lost on the Indian Regiments, their existence due to that very need, and when the First Kansas Colored commenced with recruiting, the Indian Regiments released some of their mixed race and black members to the regiment.¹²⁴

In contrast to Kansans in other locales, a number of civilians in Lawrence supported arming blacks and enlisting them as soldiers. Their sentiments took form as early as

¹²³ Earle *Journal*, 13-14; Benjamin Quarles. *Negro in the Civil War* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), 32.

¹²⁴ Dudley Cornish, “Kansas Negro Regiments in the Civil War,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, vol. XX, (1952-1953): 422, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka Kansas; Britton, *Union Indian Brigade*, 178-80. Britton wrote that soldiers openly debated black enlistment in conversation between individual soldiers, and in letters and other communication of Kansans at home.

October of 1861, when black men formed into companies and drilled under white supervision. Some Kansans like Wiley Britton migrated to Kansas specifically for the purpose of supporting the anti-slavery movement in the Free State party, and welcomed the idea of black soldiers fighting in the war.¹²⁵ Whatever their method of demonstrating support for black soldiers, private citizens stood little chance of changing the minds of their fellow Kansans. Senator Lane took up that challenge, his recent attempt to command a military expedition into Indian Territory defeated by his political rivals, Governor Robinson and General David Hunter. Lane resumed his speeches in support of organizing black soldiers for combat duties, and advocated employment of blacks in the military as a casualty reduction measure for whites, citing their perceived natural resistance to heat and disease ideal qualifications for their use as soldiers in hot and pestilential areas of the South.¹²⁶ In his crude and caustic manner, he also attacked those whites that, although supporting emancipation shied away from recruiting blacks to serve in the military.

Lane violently rejected what he referred to as “nigger worshipping” expressing dismay for Northern sentimentality and resistance to arming slaves while white men died. Skillfully setting the context for his recruiting appeal amongst the historic precedents of black service during the Revolution and the War of 1812, Lane reminded his listeners of the past American and present-day European success in employing black soldiers. Allaying fears of uncontrollable black guerrillas, Lane proposed that soldiers be recruited

¹²⁵George Collamore Letter to George L. Stearns, October 23, 1861. Papers of George Luther Stearns and Mary Elizabeth Stearns, Manuscript, roll 171, MS 35507, Kansas State Historical Society; Wiley Britton. *The Civil War on the Border Volume I*, 181.

¹²⁶Lane’s “Speech at the Cooper Institute in New York,” *Lawrence Republican*, June 26, 1862.

for black regiments and officered by white men, with Sergeants of their own race.¹²⁷ The overt message Lane conveyed was that blacks would fight, and whites, command. There would be no black uprising or weakening of the army by black soldiers. There was no insinuation of racial equality in Lane's speeches, rather, he spoke of duty and obligation.

Lane's passionate speeches appealed to many, especially his entreaties against protecting blacks from war, while white soldiers died in combat to free the slaves. Lane's combination of propaganda and history appealed to the interests of many whites, rather than the desires of blacks, and eroded white resistance to black recruitment with such blunt statements as "I believe the [N]egro may just as well become food for powder as my son," and "they take to drill as a child takes to its mother's milk...and soon learn the manual of arms."¹²⁸ His goals were clear, his ambitions unambiguous, and as the war wore on, more Kansans supported his views.

Convincing Kansans that the time had come to arm the slaves required Lane to identify an issue that appealed to all Kansan whites; he found it in the Confederate threat to Kansas' borders. Lane linked black enlistment to the survival of Kansas, rather than to notions of racial equality.¹²⁹ Lane recognized that Kansans feared the threat posed by Confederate General Sterling Price (a Missourian!) to Kansas, and Price's threats of punishing Kansas for its "marauding and murdering Abolitionists." Lane exploited their anxiety over Kansans' ability to defend the state with white soldiers alone. Fear and uncertainty constituted key parts of Lane's campaign to change white attitudes toward

¹²⁷OR: *Series 1, Volume 3*, Lane to Sturgis, 516; Lane's "Speech at the Cooper Institute in New York," *Lawrence Republican*, June 26, 1862.

¹²⁸ Lane's "Speech to the Leavenworth Mercantile Library Association," *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, January 29, 1862; *Leavenworth Daily Times*, August 4-6, 1862, September 18, 1862.

¹²⁹ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, January 29, 1862; June 12, 1862.

blacks enlistment; he later admitted in Congress took over four months to accomplish.¹³⁰

The recent influx of contraband men in large numbers reminded Kansans daily of the large numbers of black men available for military service if Kansans supported Lane's efforts. Notwithstanding his campaign, events in Washington overtook Lane's propaganda efforts as legislation supported by increasing numbers of Northern politicians granted the President the power to accept blacks for military service.

The Second Confiscation Act (July 1862) provided impetus for the recruitment of blacks despite federal and Kansas Militia Laws that barred the recruitment of blacks as soldiers. The most important section of the Act, Section 11, granted the President authority to employ "persons of African descent," and the power to "organize and use them in such manner as he may judge best for the public welfare."¹³¹ Senator Lane knew this and perhaps sensing the need to reassert his power in Kansas after his recent defeat, he traveled to Washington D.C. where he convinced Secretary of War Stanton and President Lincoln to appoint him as a federal Commissioner of Recruiting for the newly established Department of Kansas. Although Lane perhaps never mentioned black

¹³⁰ G.M. Cary. "Department of Kansas." *New York Times*, January 11, 1862; *Congressional Globe, Senate, 38th Congress, 1st Session, Part 1*, 163. In all fairness to Lane's opponents, the Union had not achieved any militarily significant victory at this point in the war and the recruitment of blacks may have appeared to many to represent Federal desperation to achieve victory by any means. It also implied that Northern manhood was unequal to the task of defeating men in battle, and that victory could only be won by violating the entrenched racial hierarchy to find enough men to fill the Union ranks.

¹³¹ *U.S., Statutes at Large, Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America, vol. 12* (Boston, 1863), 589–92. Sections 2, 9 and 11 constituted the greatest threat to slaveholders, sec. 2 forfeiture, sec 9 freedom for escaped slaves in Union lines, sec 11 Presidential authority to employ slaves. Doubtless Kansas units already practiced confiscation and manumission, but the Second Confiscation Act legalized their actions. Kansas was not exclusive in recruiting former slaves, Louisiana and South Carolina possessed significant numbers that had been organized for military service. Across the Union from 1861 onward free black populations of the North offered men to the Union cause, many regiments tendered but declined by the Secretary of War.

enlistment he pursued that policy with a vengeance upon his return to Kansas.¹³² The Second Confiscation Act created an opening that Lane exploited almost immediately, his return to Kansas followed the Act's passage by less than two weeks. Lane has been referred to as a man of the frontier and a man of action. Both appeared accurate titles given his subsequent actions in Kansas in the summer of 1862. Lane returned to Kansas seeking to recreate the balance of power in his favor in the most spectacular fashion. Lane could have pursued a field command with little political drama, but instead he demanded attention at a time when Union fortunes appeared to be fading against Southern armies. Lane may have, with his flair for the dramatic, have helped to compel a measure that ultimately may have saved the Union and emancipate the slaves.

¹³² Ian M. Spurgeon. *Man of Douglas, Man of Lincoln* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 189; Lane, James. "Proclamation to the People of Kansas." *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, August 4, 1862.

Chapter One: “War for the Union and Freedom for All Men”

Senator James Lane’s impending arrival in Kansas must have seemed the return of a man of vision to some, and the harbinger of chaos to others. Lane did very little as a half-measure and his agenda for Kansas was written on a grand scale. Lane took inspiration from the changing laws of the United States and Kansas’s swelling black refugee population. Lane in addition to being a politician, was a military man and although his most recent service may have resembled that of a warrior-king of past ages, his next project would resound across America when it came to fruition. His timing was perfect for his purposes, the ground carefully prepared by his partisans while he nursed his wounds from the bruising defeat of his schemes for an Indian Territory Expedition. The political climate was hot and the factions arrayed into their respective camps. His return could catalyze the disparate factors into a revolutionary state of affairs.

Kansas abolitionists eagerly awaited Lane’s arrival, the recent increase of support for enlisting blacks filling them with confidence that the Government would recognize the recruitment of black soldiers. Parties circulated the names of potential commanders for a black Brigade, amongst them Colonel Jennison and Kansas Red Leg commander Captain George H. Hoyt, Captain James Williams of the Fifth Kansas, Captain Stewart of the Ninth Kansas and Captain Moonlight of the Tenth as regimental commanders. The excitement amongst the black community in Lawrence compelled black men to openly

drill in anticipation of a black regiment's formation.¹³³ Some that formerly rejected the concept of blacks serving alongside white soldiers as an insult, expressed a willingness to support recruiting blacks as military labor, and believed that black laborers would free white soldiers for combat.¹³⁴ As Kansas sweltered in the heat of July, the debate and conjectures suddenly culminated not with a one of Lane's great pronouncements, but as a modest advertisement appeared in the Leavenworth *Daily Times*. Ethan Earle, an abolitionist shoe merchant, declared that while in contact with Senator Lane, the senator voiced his intent to raise a regiment regardless of race.¹³⁵ Although a nobody to most Kansans, Earle boldly announced that black men should stand ready to enlist, with he taking the names of those persons wishing to raise companies. Audacious and hot headed, Earle stole Senator Lane's surprise and preempted Lane by a week with his announcement, immediately notifying Kansans that blacks were welcome to join the First Regiment Kansas Zouaves D'Afrique.

The Leavenworth papers soon verified Earle's statements, the *Daily Times* publishing Senator Lane's General Orders Number 1, which established his authority as Commissioner of Recruiting for the newly established Department of Kansas, his appointment approved by the Secretary of War a week prior. Subsequent issues announced Lane's intention to recruit "persons of African descent," and on 6 August General Orders Number 2, which offered as inducement for enlistment, freedom for the

¹³³ George W. Collamore Letter to George L. Stearns, July 21, 1862. Papers of George Luther Stearns and Mary Elizabeth Stearns, Manuscript, Roll 171, MS 35507, Kansas State Historical Society.

¹³⁴ Wiley Britton. *Memoirs of the Rebellion on the Border, 1863*. (Chicago: Cushing, Thomas and Company, 1882), 17; October 19, 1938, *Topeka Capital*; Charles Robinson. *The Kansas Conflict*. Manuscript, Spencer research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, RH MS E67 V.3, 33-35; *Fort Scott (Kansas) Bulletin*, July 26, 1862.

¹³⁵ Leavenworth *Daily Times*, July 28, 1862; Earle, *Journal*, 15.

enlisting soldier, mother, wife and children.¹³⁶ A series of advertisements by Earle and James M. Williams, Lane's authorized Commissioner of Recruiting in Leavenworth, also appeared in the Leavenworth *Daily Times* and *Daily Conservative*. Lane commissioned Captain James Williams and Captain Henry Seaman Recruiting Commissioners with duties encompassing the areas north and south of the Kansas River respectively, but despite Earle's efforts, denied him the same consideration. The advertisements conspicuously promised freedom and liberation, Williams' advertisement guaranteeing a certificate of freedom for those who may have been escaped slaves threatened with reclamation by their former masters.

Lane's latest challenge to his opponents in Kansas carried across the United States to New York where the *New York Times* posted Earle's recruiting announcement as evidence to show the absurdity of the wild, crazy-headed fanatical abolitionists in Kansas.¹³⁷ Representing nothing less than statements of abolitionist intent, the recruiting advertisements in Kansan newspapers were in contravention to all applicable laws of the state and nation. They also challenged Lane's opponents to dare and defy his power over Kansas politics.

Earle's and Williams' advertisements differed in subtle ways, but the language deserves analysis because of how the two men expressed the terms of enlistment: Mister Earle offered membership in a liberating army; Captain Williams, former Fifth Kansas Cavalry officer, and Senator Lane's appointed Commissioner of Recruiting, offered freedom for the enlisting soldier and family. Captain Williams also promised enlistment as soldiers with the implication that volunteers would not be laborers, but rather fighters,

¹³⁶ Leavenworth *Daily Times*, August 4, 6, 1862; Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* August 4,6, 1862.

¹³⁷ Leavenworth *Daily Times*, August 4, 6-12, 1862; *51st Congress, 1st Session, Report 1214, Report to Accompany Bill S. 2471*; *New York Times*, August 17, 1862.

whereas Earle made no such offer. It was an important distinction that the militarized city of Leavenworth recognized. Although Union and Confederate armies both employed black labor, Williams' advertisement stipulated black enrollment as soldiers in violation of the laws of Kansas and the United States.

Lane met with prominent Leavenworth leaders the evening of August 3, the group including William D. Matthews, the most prominent black businessman in Leavenworth. Also present were Charles Langston, who with Richard Hinton had recently organized the city's contraband relief society, Phillip H. Minor, an Oberlin College graduate, and Colonel Jennison and Captain Hoyt. Only Minor announced his intent to join, while others opposed it. Interestingly enough, handbills appeared in the east at this time, and reports of recruiting officers for Lane's regiment in the city of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania confirmed how divisive recruiting would be if pursued. Captain Richard Dodge in a series of telegrams to Brigadier General Lorenzo Thomas reported outrage amongst white recruits and refusal to serve alongside black soldiers.¹³⁸ No significant information was reported regarding local black reactions. It is tempting to hypothesize if rather than enemies of the government, the authors of the handbills and purported recruiters were abolitionists linked to Lane. The timing of the reports is especially interesting given that Lane was still negotiating with Kansas black community leaders for their support.

The local freedman community's leaders initially rejected the terms of enlistment as offering little for freedmen, Lane's past offensive offer of black servants to white Wisconsin soldiers served as additional disincentive for recruiting, the assumption being that black recruits would be utilized as menial labor and not as soldiers. Although many

¹³⁸ *Negro in the Military Service of the United States 1639-1886* (The National Archives and Records Service General Services Administration, Washington: 1963). Roll 2, Vol. 3, documents 930-932, Hereafter referred to as *Negro in the Military Service*.

white Kansans appeared receptive to Lane's efforts, some wags in Leavenworth took to calling the regiment the "Southern Rebellion Grave Diggers," and "Shovel Brigade" due to the impression that the regiment was being recruited to provide laborers for fortifications. Whites incredulously regarded black recruits as fit for digging but not fighting.¹³⁹ Although black leaders agreed to support Lane's recruiting efforts several days later, in the meantime, hundreds of black men answered the recruiting advertisements. The strong response drew forth two of Lane's fellow Kansans, Colonels Jennison and Montgomery, who commenced a ferocious competition for command of the Regiment.

Lane granted the initial advantage to Jennison and appointed him as a Recruiting Officer, with assistance from George Hoyt. Montgomery however preempted Jennison's effort, and when the prospect of a command of a colored regiment seemed likely, appealed to Governor Robinson, Lane's rival for control in Kansas, for appointment to command the regiment. Montgomery savaged any potential Jennison command as a "calamity," and the man "a black cap, and a liar" whilst calling attention to the desire of both the regiment's soldiers (men assembled for enlistment, but were not enlisted until 5 August) and community leaders at Mound City to see Montgomery appointed regimental commander.¹⁴⁰ Jennison and Montgomery appeared logical choices, with solid abolitionist reputations from their pre-war Underground Railroad experiences, and commands in the Kansas Brigade of 1861. However both men's past actions in Missouri

¹³⁹ Richard Hinton, "Department of Kansas," *New York Times*, August 18, 1862; Earle, *Journal*, 3-4.

¹⁴⁰ Hinton, Richard, "The Department of Kansas," *New York Times*, August 4, 1862; Stephen Starr. *Jennison's Jayhawkers* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1973), 216-217. Montgomery to Robinson, August 3, 1862, Robinson papers. Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, MS 640. Montgomery believed his command would see "the Negro elevated instead of being reduced to thief and pest."

made them less attractive as candidates for command of the Regiment, and repelled moderate Kansans by their association with the lawlessness of Lane's "Black Brigade." Lane also viewed the pair as rivals for political power. If they gained prestige and broke from his control, Lane stood to lose valuable leverage against Governor Robinson.

Lane manipulated Hoyt and Jennison in support his recruiting goals, their credibility strong amongst elements of both black and white communities. In turn, the pair attempted separately to betray him to Robinson in consideration for future command positions. Hoyt expressed his desires in a letter to Lane's rival, Governor Robinson in which Hoyt described the inner workings of the Regiment. Hoyt anticipated that Williams and Jennison would command two regiments of black soldiers, the first of their kind and identically equipped to white regiments, and led by loyal "old fifty-six" and "radical" such as Williams and John Bowles. Hoyt naturally expected to be Jennison's Lieutenant Colonel, or second-in command.¹⁴¹ Perhaps Hoyt wrote Governor Robinson anticipating support for the Regiment and believed that establishing the abolitionist reputations of Williams and Bowles as well of the company officers would convince Robinson of the sincerity of the effort. Hoyt overreached however, and although Jennison was popular amongst some groups in Kansas, he failed to command the Regiment, much less a brigade of black soldiers in Kansas.

In the end, Lane disqualified Hoyt and Jennison after their usefulness ended, the pair proving poor candidates due to their disloyalty to Lane, their efforts to solicit Governor Robinson's patronage noted by Lane supporters. Lane also frustrated Montgomery's efforts, compelling Montgomery to accept a commission to command black troops in

¹⁴¹ George H. Hoyt, to Governor Robinson, August 12, 1862, Private Papers of Charles and Sara T.D. Robinson, MS 36490, manuscript 640, roll 1, Kansas State Historical Society.

South Carolina from General David Hunter, another Lane rival.¹⁴² The problem with Jennison and Montgomery was their popularity amongst Kansans, and their potential as future political rivals. Lane wanted to terrorize secessionists and reestablish his reputation, not raise future rivals for political dominance in Kansas. Lane appointed Captain James Williams and Captain Henry Seaman to co-command the regiment in anticipation of eventually forming two regiments with each man commanding his own. The exact reasons for Lane's choice are unknown, but the pair offered Lane the ease of expediency, non-threatening reputations, little previous evidence of political involvement, and a reasonable degree of loyalty.

Lane's recruiting proclamations electrified contraband communities across Kansas, and as a result hundreds enlisted within days of the announcements. Judicious recruiting officer appointments of men with high social standing in local communities aided recruiting. Williams appointed Richard Hinton, well-known friend of the black community his first recruiting officer on 4 August. The first soldier enlisted at Leavenworth was Charles Harris, who was sworn in at 10 A.M. on 6 August by Lieutenant Hinton, although some muster records record soldiers from Lawrence and Mound City enlisting as early as 5 August.¹⁴³ Officers accepted commissions with the understanding that they would command companies consisting of the men that they recruited, a policy that ensured most men in each company had some passing familiarity, and a method of building unit cohesion. Lane's insistence on white officers nearly cost

¹⁴² George Hoyt letter to Governor Charles Robinson, August 12, 1862; Charles Jennison letter to Governor Charles Robinson, August 22, 1862, Robinson Collection, Kansas State Historical Society; Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, October 8, 1861; *OR: Series 3, Volume 3*, 14.

¹⁴³ *Hinton Appointment Letter*, August, 4 1862, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Hinton Collection; Richard Hinton, "The First Colored Troops." *The Commonwealth*, August 20, 1887.

him the support of the Leavenworth black community when Lane initially refused to commission William D. Matthews as a company commander.

Lane's maneuvering for support in Leavenworth prior to announcing black enrollment committed him to honoring an understanding with former Underground railroad conductors Earle and Matthews, in which Lane reputedly offered Matthews a commission. When confronted, Lane offered Earle a commission to raise a company, but said that he could not commission black officers. Perhaps not appreciating Matthews' influence over the black community in Leavenworth, when Earle pressed Lane for a commission for Matthews, Lane demurred, offering a "situation" in the quartermaster or commissary departments, but finally relented when that offer too was declined.¹⁴⁴

Although Lane offered Matthews a commission, he may have done so knowing that the War Department would not honor it when the regiment mustered. Regardless of Lane's intent, Matthews commenced recruiting immediately, and within weeks parlayed his reputation in the black community into a company that he staffed with black Lieutenants.

Seeking to gain white support for the regiment, Lane and Blunt engaged in a speaking tour during which they explained the government's recruiting policy across Kansas. General Blunt argued in favor of the recruitment of blacks, emphasizing that there were men enough in Kansas to form two regiments, and appealing to whites to consider the choice between being overrun with black contrabands or arming them for use as soldiers. He also emphasized the pay issue, reiterating that blacks would make less than whites, with any increase contingent on performance in battle. Disturbingly, he also declared if black men did not voluntarily enlist, they would be forced to serve, sentiments Lane also expressed in his speeches. Lane was no humanitarian, and forcefully reiterated that the

¹⁴⁴ Earle, *Journal*, 18-19.

time for the black man had come to fight, “the Negroes are mistaken if they think white men can fight for them while they stay at home. We don’t threaten, but we have been saying you would fight, and if you won’t fight, we will make you.” Lane also stated that, “If a white man can stop a bullet, you ought to stop two. You shall try it...if not voluntarily, we will compel you to fight.”¹⁴⁵ Lane’s rhetoric no longer sought to convince whites to permit blacks to enlist, instead it embodied strident threats if blacks sought to avoid military service. Enlistment no longer a concept, but now a reality, Lane changed his emphasis to include identifying blacks as part of the shared resources of Kansas in its military struggle.

Black enlistment rose to national attention as Senator Lane and Governor Robinson fought over who would control the process and its legality. Lane underestimated Governor Robinson’s resistance to his recruiting efforts, and Robinson challenged Lane over the right to appoint recruiting officers for the regiment, the Governor refusing to recognize Lane’s authority, commissions, and irregular recruiting practices. Telegraphing Secretary of War Stanton for clarification, Robinson tersely informed him that Lane was raising Negro regiments, and asked if he should commission the officers. Lane also appealed directly to Stanton, who informed both Lane and Robinson that he favored issuing commissions if the governor did not. Lane also reacted to Robinson’s efforts to disband the regiment by directing General Blunt to issue General Orders Number 20 commanding the arrest of any “encouraging desertion and preventing enlistment of soldiers.”¹⁴⁶ Accustomed to winning political contests, Secretary of War Stanton’s support

¹⁴⁵ Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, January 29, August 6, 1862; Leavenworth *Daily Times*, August 6, 1862.

¹⁴⁶ *51st Congress, 1st Session, Report Number 1214 to accompany S. 2471*; Frank Blackmar. *Life of Charles Robinson* (Topeka: Crane and Company, 1902), 282-283; Leverette Spring. *The Prelude to the War for*

for Lane appeared to have settled the issue. This was not the case; Lane's biggest fight loomed on the horizon.

Accustomed to communicating directly with Secretary of War Stanton, Lane telegraphed his anticipation two regiments of blacks when he commenced recruiting, and asked if there was any objection to his recruiting blacks under the latest acts of Congress. In the interval between Lane's telegram and Stanton's reply, General Henry Halleck, the Commander of the Department of the Missouri, learned of Lane's recruiting efforts and labeled them "without authority of law" due to lack of Presidential approval. Halleck was not the last word however; recruiting continuing while Lane awaited Stanton's reply. Confusing the issue, on 19 August, the Assistant Adjutant General's office wired the Disbursing Officer at Fort Leavenworth informing him that recruits for Negro regiments were ineligible for enlistment bounties and premiums. Given this telegram Stanton's subsequent refusal to formally accept the regiment was unexpected, and with the encouragement of Lane's enemies, printed in the September 4, 1862 *Daily Times*.¹⁴⁷ Senator Lane's rash decision to enlist black men for military service ran directly counter to the wishes of President Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton.

Although the reason for rejection most likely originated from attempts to keep the Border States within the Union, the President reportedly declared that emancipation and arming slaves would turn 50,000 Border State soldiers away from the Union. It is possible that President Lincoln's rejection of Lane stemmed from concerns over Lane's reputation and the Missourian complaints that Lane would turn the armed contrabands

the Union (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1885), 283; *OR: Series 3, Volume 2*, 417, 431; "Affairs in The West," *New York Times*, August 17, 1862.

¹⁴⁷ Leavenworth *Daily Times*, September 4, 1862; *OR: Series 3, Volume 2.*, 294-95, 311-312, 314, 411, 445; *New York Times*, August 21, 1862.

against them, compounding theft with murder. Lane's proposal was not the only one the Government received regarding black enlistment. President Lincoln declined a similar proposal from the Edward Salomon, Governor of Wisconsin, to raise a Negro or Indian regiment only a short period before he declined Lane's. The President was unwilling to grant Lane any political favors, and it is reasonable to hypothesize that having overlooked Lane's Jayhawking and Indian enlistments, that President Lincoln did not believe the time was politically right for black enlistments.¹⁴⁸ President Lincoln may have also harbored doubts about the fighting ability of black men. Stanton understood the politically explosive impact that black enlistment could have on the Northern war effort. Historian Eric Foner pointed out Stanton's reluctance to advertise authorizing General Rufus Saxton to recruit black soldiers, in a letter expressing that "This must never see daylight, because it is so much in advance of public opinion."¹⁴⁹ Lane however cared little for these concerns and continued with operations in Kansas, if with a reduced public presence; Kansas was a long way from Washington D.C. and Lane controlled Kansas.

Political opposition was one thing that Lane fought regularly, however, opposition from the black community in Leavenworth proved less malleable to his political skills and oratory. Complicated by economics as well as concerns about rights as soldiers, black resistance to recruiting required the expertise of local black leaders to resolve. Some of the black opposition to enlistment originated with laborers that were benefiting from the wartime economy of Kansas. Recognizing that the Kansas economy valued their skills and labor, and paid better wages than the Army offered black soldiers, many declined the opportunity to enlist. There was no incentive to accept lower pay for what

¹⁴⁸ *OR: Series 3, Volume 2.*, 314.

¹⁴⁹ Eric Foner. *The Fiery Trial* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 230.

appeared for all intents and purposes to be the same job, that of laborer and menial servant. Opposition to enlistment could be overcome with time and assurance of support. Charles H. Langston encouraged black enlistment and understood that much of the black reluctance to enlist originated with concerns over the welfare of families. Therefore to allay concerns, he urged the community to support the families of soldiers in their absence. Many contraband blacks also feared abuse in military service and the possibility of capture and re-enslavement.¹⁵⁰ Other individuals perceived opportunity for their race and willingly accepted the enlistment offer.

The debate in the black community over whether blacks would enlist as laborers or soldiers appeared a moot point for some black volunteers. Hinton cited one as ambivalent to his status as soldier or laborer; the opportunity to serve was a start toward equality. Pay disparity, lack of advantage and utilization as laborers seemed to matter less to contrabands who were slaves less than a year prior, than to freedmen who expected more than a certificate of freedom and less pay (and no bounties!) than their white counterparts to serve in the Union army. The pay was not all as it appeared: despite advertisements offering \$10 per month as soldiers, it was in actuality \$7 per month, after uniform deduction, and barely on par with an unskilled laborer's wages. White soldiers earned at least \$13 per month and a bounty.¹⁵¹ Some enlistees however were never afforded the opportunity to consider the effect on their families or whether or not they would be soldiers or laborers.

The Regiment Begins to Form

¹⁵⁰ Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, September 4, 1862.

¹⁵¹ *OR: Series I, Vol.13*, 791-2.; Lorenzo Greene. *Missouri's Black Heritage* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1980), 78. White soldiers were offered between \$100 and \$300 bounty for enlistment, the equivalent of one to years' pay, whereas no black soldiers received a bounty until late in the war.

Captain James M. Williams established the first significant camp in northern Kansas, Camp Jim Lane, outside Leavenworth. Soon tents and wagons full of supplies entered the camp followed by black enlistees. Several days later a large number of confiscated plantation slaves from Missouri marched to the regimental camp outside Leavenworth, as Colonel Burris returned from a raid along the Missouri border. The next large group to arrive, Captain Matthews' Leavenworth recruits arrived at Camp Lane on 16 August, closely followed by a contingent under Lieutenant George Martin from Atchison that marched into camp on 23 August to be enlisted into service. Not to be outdone, Ethan Earle offered \$100 bounty for fifty contrabands to join a company he was personally raising. Some other "recruiting" efforts failed miserably. The Missouri State Militia intercepted a detachment of Kansans after they seized twenty-five slaves from Missouri slave owners. The captured men claimed that they operated under orders from Colonel Jennison to "recruit Negroes for Lane's brigade."¹⁵² Recruiting it seemed could be conducted both legally and illegally, but perhaps the most dangerous methods were those employed by the former Underground Railroad conductors who defied law and social convention to obtain recruits.

Utilizing his experience as a conductor, Earle conducted forays into Missouri to garner new recruits. One expedition in late August brazenly "liberated" sixteen slaves, and Earle enlisted the men just prior to boarding a steamer. The pursuing owner was powerless to stop him because Earle was on the river and carried proof of fresh enlistments. Upon landing Earle marched the group straight into camp, a feat reported in the *Daily Times*. On other occasions, Earle landed in Missouri where he met with

¹⁵² Leavenworth *Daily Times*, August 7, 9, 15, 21, 1862; Atchison *Freedom's Champion*, August 23, 1862; Donald L. Gilmore. *Civil War on the Missouri-Kansas Border* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing, 2006), 160; *OR: Series 1, Volume 13*, 619.

Clement Johnson, a Methodist slave preacher with whom Earle worked to liberate a large number of slaves to fill his company. Earle entreated Johnson to hand out small slips of paper with the letter F on them to slaves seeking freedom in Kansas. Those slaves were instructed to seek out and enlist in Earle's company, Company F.¹⁵³ The northern regiment's commanders experienced success recruiting in Leavenworth and other areas north of the river, and within weeks the detachments grew large enough to be designated a regiment. The recruiting efforts enraged Missourians, and concerned Kansans sympathetic to the plight of former slaves, but wary of retaliation by the aggrieved Missourian's. The Missourians, both suspected secessionist and Unionist slaveholder suffered losses from extralegal recruiting and sought relief from recruiting expeditions.

Lane's hyperbole and Earle's expeditions aside, opposition to the recruitment of black soldiers swiftly organized in Missouri where a group of prominent Missouri citizens representing Clay and Jackson Counties appealed to the President for protection from Lane's illegal army of armed slaves. Lane's goal of striking terror into the hearts of secessionists appeared to have succeeded, and affected those counties where Missourians endured numerous Union raids in the past including those by Lane's Brigade. The citizens appealed for an immediate disarming of the regiment, and an injunction against future attempts to recruit blacks. Accompanied by a thinly veiled threat of "troubles" along the border if the regiment was not disbanded, the citizen's letter concludes by darkly alluding that they understood that the President had decided against mustering armed slaves into the Union army.¹⁵⁴ The complaint failed, perhaps because the

¹⁵³ Earle, *Journal*, 17, 20-21; Leavenworth *Daily Times*, August 28, 1862.

¹⁵⁴ *OR: Series 1, Volume 18*, 618-619.

committee represented a region of Missouri known to be the favorite haunt of bushwhackers and guerrillas.

Many Kansans sympathized with the Missourians' objection to a black regiment in Kansas, others agreed with Lane and maintained faith that the President would change his mind and accept the regiment into service. E.B. Whitman in Lawrence evidenced little evidence of despair when he wrote that "the experiment of using the escaped slaves at least, not only at the spade but also the musket, will I am confident be tried *here in Kansas* under some form or other," Kansans having organized, "nearly ten companies of 'contrabands' and it is expected that two entire regiments will soon be in the field."¹⁵⁵ The Lawrence-based *Kansas State Journal* responded to Lane's truculence differently, urging black men to refrain from supporting Lane's illegal and disgraceful efforts, and labeling Lane's recruiting practices "grave deceptions," that impoverished honest and hard-working blacks with lies about honorable service as soldiers. The *Journal* also expressed fear that "hot-headed indiscreet men would invade Missouri with the [R]egiment...damaging the black cause and weakening the influence of their friends..."¹⁵⁶ Confronted by a Senator who would not obey the Governor, President, or military, Kansans faced a tough decision: do they support their charismatic Senator or the Government? The abolitionists of Lawrence, the stronghold of abolitionism in Kansas, regarded Lane's efforts with trepidation. Lane threatened their attempts to free blacks from slavery by advocating measures that had the potential to backfire disastrously on the abolitionist cause. If Lane's efforts did result in indiscriminate attacks against Missourians without Federal approval, the potential for a mass defection to the

¹⁵⁵ Whitman letter to Stearns, September 7, 1862, Papers of George Luther Stearns and Mary Elizabeth Stearns, Manuscript, roll 171, MS 35507, Kansas State Historical Society.

¹⁵⁶ Lawrence *Kansas State Journal*, September 11, 18, 1862.

Confederacy could become a reality. Regiment continued to fill its ranks with contrabands and freedmen as Kansans argued their positions; meanwhile the regiment remained viable as long as Lane supported it and channeled supplies to sustain it.

Referred to variously as the Twelfth (colored) regiment, the First Zouaves, or simply Zouaves by the Kansas press, the regiment contained six full or partial companies within weeks of its organization. As the companies at Leavenworth filled, the new recruits exchanged their civilian garments for blue jackets, gray pants and forage caps, and adjusted to strange social rules and expectations. Political and social concerns were never far from the regiment, and political partisans intruded into the Regiment's affairs daily. Some in the Regiment, disturbed by Senator Lane's remarks about blacks being servants and laborers, demanded to be armed as well as clothed. Williams as a result of these demands secured a lot of short, heavy Austrian rifles. Test firing revealed that only twenty percent of the weapons functioned. Williams responded to the general dissatisfaction with the rifles, and assured the recruits that when the Regiment was completed and went south, it would be issued "new U.S. muskets," presumably the same as other units armed with more modern Springfield rifles¹⁵⁷ While Williams coped with inadequate weaponry and dissatisfaction amongst the ranks, the southern branch of the regiment also filled its ranks a hundred miles south of his location under the direction, albeit briefly, of Colonel Montgomery, Captain Seaman's former Kansas Brigade commander.

¹⁵⁷ Leavenworth *Daily Times*, August 15, 1862; Benjamin Quarles. *The Negro in the Civil War* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), 114; *Kansas City Journal*, 7 February 1902; Richards, 271; Earle, *Journal*, 22. The rifles were described as having a kick like a mule, and were equipped with lethal-looking, but cumbersome sword bayonets that increased the weapon's overall weight and length. This was not a unique combination of weapons; several white regiments were issued similar armaments and expressed dissatisfaction as well.

Based at Mound City, the southern recruiting effort reported over a hundred recruits in the first two weeks, and by the end of August over three hundred recruits were encamped at Wyandotte, with another three hundred at Lawrence. Several companies already filled, the soldiers in the camps commenced training in drill, utilizing what Richard Hinton referred to as the “Orpheus C. Kerr manual of colored arms.”¹⁵⁸ Amongst the first recruits to arrive at Mound City was Company E, under the command of former First Sergeant Luther Thrasher, consisting of recruits from the middle of the state, near Topeka and Lawrence. These recruits left Lawrence on 23 August and arrived in Mound City three days later after a seventy-five mile march. A month later Company E departed Mound City for Fort Lincoln, Kansas, where Seaman’s command performed post and prisoner guard duty. While Williams fought against desertion, low morale and constant interference from all sides, Seaman and the southern recruits experienced their own tribulations.

White units opposed to the black recruits traveled the military road from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Scott regularly and when the two groups met, insults flew freely. Some of the white officers of those units openly declared the black soldiers a stain on the Union’s honor, believing that “it would be a disgrace to wear the uniform of an American soldier if the government was going to put it on the backs of a lot of niggers.” Despite this acrimonious relationship with Kansas white troops, Mound City’s civilian populace welcomed them, and Seaman’s troops numbering several hundred marched through Mound City singing “Old John Brown” at the tops of their voices, the mixture of

¹⁵⁸ *Emporia News*, August 9, 1862; *New York Times*, August 18, 28, 1862, Orpheus C. Kerr being the pseudonym of humorist Robert H. Newell, author of the Orpheus C. Kerr papers that included the story of a fictional black “Mackerel Brigade.” In brief the experience was comical, but effective and soon achieved good results as soldiers became more skilled at the “school of the soldier.”

“contrabands, Cherokees, Missourians, and darkies from Arkansas” reported as strong and determined to go to war against secessionists.¹⁵⁹ Singing John Brown’s Body while on the march was nothing particular to the black recruits, white Union soldiers also enjoyed singing the popular song. The meaning of the song was decidedly different for the black men and their white officers, men who may have been aided by Brown to escape or compatriots on the Underground Railroad.

Recruiting men and retaining public support for recruiting black men became more difficult as opposition to Lane’s efforts intensified in late August, 1862. Senator Lane, in recognition that opposition to the regiment, and its close proximity to Leavenworth made it too high profile to simply ignore, issued General Order Number Seven designating new assembly areas for the recruits away from Leavenworth. Political agitation from failed commission seekers generated acrimony to towards the Regiment, and hastened its removal from the political hothouse of Leavenworth. Ordered to train near Wyandotte bridge, units from Camp Jim Lane marched south, while Captain Seaman’s troops remained near Mound City. Lane later admitted to Congress that he moved the regiment because prejudice against black troops was so intense that they had to be “drilled in seclusion.”¹⁶⁰ Lane words sound inadequate in light of what Captain Williams reported in the Official Regimental History as formidable challenges to the integrity of his regiment.

Williams and his officers encountered significant opposition from civilian authorities while they attempted the simultaneous duties of deserter apprehension and recruiting.

¹⁵⁹ Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, September 4, 1862. Albert Castel. *Civil War Kansas: Reaping the Whirlwind*. (Lawrence, Kansas: Kansas Heritage Press, 1997), 91; J.H. Stearns, *Linn County Republic*, Jan 31, 1902; Leavenworth *Daily Times*, August 23, 1862.; Earle, *Journal*, 22; Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, November 9, 1862; Lawrence *State Journal* September 4, 1862; Ira Berlin, Joseph Reidy, and Rowland, Leslie. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1865, series II: The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 39.

¹⁶⁰ Earle, *Journal*, 24; *Congressional Globe*, 38th Congress, 1st Session, Part 1, 163; Leavenworth *Daily Times*, September 3, 1862..

Williams believed that the civilians that opposed him and the Regiment were of four types:

those [in] active sympathy with the rebellion; [those harboring] an intolerant prejudice against the colored race which would deny them the honorable place in society, to which every soldier is entitled; a few...who believed that this attempt to enlist colored men would not be approved by the War Department and that the real interests of the colored men should not be vainly spent in this effort; a large class who believed that the Negro race did not possess necessary qualifications to make efficient soldiers, and consequently the experiment would result in defeat or disaster.¹⁶¹

So perhaps it was difficult to drill, but more likely, the regiment was moved to an area far wherein the men could train, but also maintain a low profile. It is of note that no attempt was made to prevent the regiment from leaving Leavenworth, or to disband it when the armed soldiers marched south. The Army, although charged with maintaining order and fully capable of disbanding the regiment did nothing that indicates orders from Secretary of War Stanton to forcibly disband the regiment. It appears that while the regiment enjoyed the military's support, the regiment's greatest threats originated with civilian authorities and desertion than from a military commission.

The first companies of the northern arm of the regiment to reach Wyandotte were Companies A through D, which arrived September 3; an incomplete Company F marched out of Leavenworth under a nine-striped U.S. flag sewn by the wives and friends of the company's soldiers. Company G arrived on September 12. Located approximately thirty miles south of Leavenworth, the camp was situated in Wyandotte's picnic area, a pasture in which the estimated six hundred soldiers lived in tents, the camp cited as a model of cleanliness and efficiency. The regiment's progress was unsteady however, and training was continually interrupted by the dual cycles of desertions and acquisitions of recruits.

¹⁶¹ J.B. McAfee. *Official History of the Kansas Regiments During the War for the Suppression of the Great Rebellion* (Leavenworth, Kansas: W.S. Burke, 1870), 246-247.

Recruiting continued as irregularly as in Leavenworth, some recruits arriving with the letter F in hand, others escaping from across the river in Missouri, and still others reportedly obtained through an arrangement between Williams and an unnamed man who operated a boat to bring escaped slaves across the river to the regimental camp, where Earle asserts men were purchased for \$2.00 apiece. Recruit buying was not restricted to Wyandotte; in late August an unnamed recruiter at Hiawatha, Kansas reportedly offered \$2.00 per male slave brought from Missouri to his camp.¹⁶²

The move to Wyandotte did not stop desertions or interference with the regimental affairs, Jennison and Hoyt were accused of indirectly attempting to destroy the Regiment with their interference. Leavenworth Provost Marshal Stout attempted to break up the regiment with a detachment of twenty men, and failing the direct approach, issued regimental deserters Provost passes to their homes. The passes extended over an unlimited period, and advised recruits them that they were not soldiers. It is unknown how many illiterate former slaves believed Provost Marshal Stout, but the desertion rates were heavy as could be inferred by Williams' constant efforts to capture and return deserters to the camp.

Lack of pay constituted the greatest challenge to the regiment, unpaid soldiers growing restless in the absence of remuneration for their efforts. Williams was charged with attempting to forestall desertions at one point by offering to collect gold from slave owners in Missouri to pay the money due the soldiers.¹⁶³ Obviously this offer, if it had occurred, was one of desperation; Williams had no authorization for such raids and the retaliation from Missourians would have been severe. No such raids ever occurred, but

¹⁶² Earle *Journal*, 9-11,22-23; *White Cloud Kansas Chief*, August 21, 1862.

¹⁶³ Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, November 9, 1862; Earle *Journal*, 23.

the hint of pay doubtless forestalled many who would have deserted. The regiment existed in large part due to discipline, but also owed its existence to soldiers who remained in the hope of being mustered into service. Failure to muster threatened to invalidate their freedom certificates and render all their effort to free family for naught.

While at Wyandotte, the Regiment adhered to a rigorous training schedule in which the soldiers exhibited a natural aptitude for the manual of arms, and despite some initial setbacks in sentinel training, the regiment's men were intent on mastering the intricacies of drill, each one vying with the other for perfection. Drill was conducted in two daily sessions from 8:30 A.M. to 11 A.M. and 3 P.M. to 5:30 P.M., over five hours per day, the new soldiers standing parade daily. It may be that the Regiment's drill proficiency impressed some white officers at Fort Leavenworth, but more likely was the fact that the regiment was available and as a result, soon received orders to provide companies for duty at Fort Leavenworth. This however did not come to pass. The Regiment with one major exception in September, did not participate in any military duties except for training. Across the border in Missouri nervous white citizens watched anxiously for the impending black army, as their slaves fled for the safety of Kansas, and some to the regiment's camp.¹⁶⁴

The regiment's deployment to Wyandotte elicited fresh complaints from Missouri and delegations solicited arms from Missouri Governor Gamble to fight what they regarded to be a terrifying invading slave army they were defenseless to resist. A mixture of guile and legitimate grievance, perhaps, especially given that regimental troops marched into Missouri in mid September. A small contingent of the regiment under the command of Lieutenant Edgerton and Sergeant Major Phillip Minor, served as scouts for Colonel

¹⁶⁴ Richard Hinton, "Camp Jim Lane" *New York Times*, September 22, 1862.

Burriss' Tenth Kansas regiment during a hunt for the notorious guerrilla William Quantrill in late September, consequently returning to Kansas with a train of 70 contrabands confiscated during the raid.¹⁶⁵ The black troops of the Regiment faced formidable opposition from the inhabitants of western Missouri, many of which were slave owners and who suffered the confiscations of the Kansas Brigade in 1861. Future expeditions into Missouri would contend with angry Missourians as well as any bushwhackers, Confederate soldiers and partisan rangers in the vicinity. No unilateral operations appeared likely however, despite the use of regimental soldiers and officers in conjunction with white Kansas units.

Less than a month after their arrival in Wyandotte, Senator Lane reassigned the regiment to Fort Scott after he received orders that deployed all recruits regardless of race, and capable of bearing arms, to the border to defend against a potential Confederate invasion. The regiment departed Wyandotte on October 7, and marched south after giving three cheers for the loyal citizens of Wyandotte. After a short period in Paola to be equipped with better muskets (type unknown), ammunition, greatcoats, and other materiel, the regiment proceeded to Fort Lincoln, where Lane ordered the approximately 550 remaining soldiers from Wyandotte and a like number from Mound City, to consolidate into one regiment at Fort Lincoln.¹⁶⁶ The numbers are telling: despite several months of recruiting, eleven hundred men remained in ranks for service.

The fall of 1862 proved an especially trying time for the regiment, a tempering period during which many volunteers departed, leaving few remaining recruits from the heady

¹⁶⁵ Richard Hinton, "Interesting from Kansas," *New York Times*, October 12, 1862.

¹⁶⁶"The Department of Kansas – A Demonstration Against Fort Scott," *New York Times*, October 3, 1862; Richard J. Hinton, "The Department of Kansas," *New York Times*, October 18, 1862.; Lawrence *Republican*, October 16, 1862; Earle, *Journal*, 23-24; Lane letter to Williams, October 9, 1862; Ira Berlin, et al. *Freedom*, 39.

days of August. Despite a promising beginning and excitement over the recruiting process, the political and social realities in Kansas were such that various parties treated the regiment with suspicion, hostility and outright condemnation. Kansas, the arch abolitionist state, appeared to have little appetite for black enlistment. The preliminary Emancipation Proclamation failed to bring any succor to the regiment. Pay did not arrive, nor did recognition or muster occur. Despite the landmark events of the summer, and the recruitment of the first Northern blacks for military service, the regiment remained in limbo, its men victims of Lane's political gamesmanship and President Lincoln's unwillingness to accept black troops for fear of losing the Border States. The demoralizing effect of the regiment's lack of Government recognition, combined with no pay and growing Kansan animosity, wore down the resolve of many of the black soldiers. The presence of white collaborators willing to suborn black desertion posed a constant threat to the black regiment that few white regiments experienced. Black deserters often received community support, whereas encouraging and abetting the desertion of a white soldier bore steep penalties.

The remaining soldiers of the regiment stoically endured these challenges, the officers and men resisting a growing sense of despair that the regiment's destiny was to serve as a labor pool and not a fighting formation. October began inauspiciously; desertions increased as many soldiers disenchanted with the military after months of no pay and no combat, deserted to tend to their families. Soldiers fought daily against the temptation to desert: the choice between either remaining in a military formation unrecognized by the Secretary of War and the President, or the chance for a decent paying job in the Kansas

wartime economy posed little difficulty for many. Nothing short of combat or muster into service with pay would arrest the departure of the men.

The remaining recruits of the regiment garrisoned a miserable series of small camps in the vicinity of Fort Lincoln, dividing their time between drilling, guarding Confederate prisoners at the fort, repairing the earthworks at Fort Lincoln, and constructing new ones at Fish Creek. Fort Lincoln, a crudely constructed post situated on a floodplain near the Osage River, served as the regimental base of operations during fall of 1862. Fort Lincoln consisted of several small wooden building surrounded by a packed earth embankment. One wag described Fort Lincoln as “nothing more than the work of an insane or idiotic brain...barely fit for the sheltering of livestock, let alone soldiers...the hole is calculated to be more of an enginery of destruction to human life than the battlefield itself.”¹⁶⁷ Lack of pay, in conjunction with poor living conditions, isolation, and distance from family, created an environment in which desertion appeared not a matter of if, but when.

Captain Williams reported to Major Charles Henning at Fort Scott, who utilized the black recruits almost immediately. Williams was ordered to detail two companies to occupy Barnesville, and a third to Fish Creek as pickets on the Kansas-Missouri border, with all soldiers instructed to carefully respect the rights of Missourians. Cautioned to keep his troops “well in hand” so that guerrillas could not cut them off from other companies, Williams assigned them to camps close enough to concentrate quickly and

¹⁶⁷ Lawrence *Kansas State Journal*, November 27, 1862. Although the authorship of the article of the column was attributed to S, I believe that it was Lieutenant William Smallwood given his practice of writing to Lawrence newspapers regarding the regiment’s affairs. The vagueness of authorship is understandable given the possible penalties for the column’s tone, especially since the location was chosen and developed by Senator Lane.

efficiently.¹⁶⁸ The remaining companies at Fort Lincoln endured service in a pestilential location chosen as much to hide the regiment's men from ready observation, as to test them against the demoralizing dreariness of Fort Lincoln.

The uncertainty of muster, and repeated demands for pay and recognition continued unabated, taxing the spirit of the soldiers and officers alike. Short stints in Leavenworth or Lawrence searching for deserters or enrolling volunteers relieved boredom to a limited degree, but drill dominated the regiment's daily schedule. Unlike the majority of the soldiers however, the many regimental officers shared experiences and acquaintances from pre-war times, some united by service in the Free State militia, while clandestine work as Underground Railroad conductors, social organizations such as the Masons, or religious affiliation linked many more together.

Regimental backgrounds and motivations

A number of factors distinguished the regiment's white officers from their contemporaries in white Kansas regiments. Selected by Senator Lane for a variety of reasons, but primarily for their loyalty as "Lane Men," the company commanders commissioned lieutenants of similar outlook for their companies. Some exceptions existed however; Captains Ethan Earle and William D. Matthews accepted commissions despite initial acrimony over their anticipated positions in the regiment. Matthews' company reflected his local influence in Leavenworth, his Lieutenants known men of community prominence and learning. In addition to their loyalty to Lane, the inner core of the regiment's leadership also shared ties with John Brown of Harper's Ferry renown, their pre-Civil War associations ranging from providing Brown monetary support, or accompanying him on slave raids, to the formation of a rescue squad to free Brown from

¹⁶⁸ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, October 19, 1862.

jail. The regimental leaderships' strong abolitionist character and faith in their cause provided another layer of shared identity, a potential bulwark against the mounting disapproval of the Kansa populace and military. Abolitionist sentiment may have explained why the vast majority of the officers remained with the regiment despite being unpaid. If the regiment disbanded, the potential for the soldiers to be conscripted as military labor seemed likely, and the effect upon the future of black military service dire. Many of the officers shared a deeper bond, their fealty to the memory of John Brown and his demand that slavery be destroyed to save America. The regiment marched with Brown's ghost, "John Brown's Body," as its regimental song. Unlike later regiments raised other parts of the Union, the First Kansas Colored contained a large number of John Brown's men for whom slavery constituted an abomination before God and country.

	Underground Railroad	John Brown Associate	Kansas Territorial Militia	Politician	Soldier in Lane's brigade	Abolitionist
James Williams		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Henry Seaman	Possible	Yes			Yes	Yes
John Bowles	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Richard Hinton	Yes	Yes		Yes	Journalist	Yes
Eliab Macy				Yes		
Ezekiel Coleman	Yes	Yes				Yes
William Matthews	Yes			Yes		Yes
Henry Copeland	Yes	Yes				Yes
Ethan Earle	Yes		Yes			Yes
Joseph Gardner	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes
Charles Coleman	Yes	Yes				Yes
Ransom Harris	Yes					Yes
Luther Thrasher					Yes	

Table 2: Sources of Regimental Officer Affiliation.

An examination of a selection of regimental officers and their personal backgrounds is important for understanding their character and motivations. The ages of the vast majority of the officers were in the early to mid 20s, but some were as old as 40. Most were educated men, some like Lieutenants Minor and Copeland shared the same alma mater, in their case, Oberlin College in Ohio. The First Kansas Colored's officers

differed from white units because the soldiers did not elect them, as was the custom in many white units; Senator Lane dictated the command structure and officer selection.⁶⁴

The two co-commanders of the regiment, Captain Williams and Captain Seaman hailed from two of Kansas' largest towns, Leavenworth and Lawrence respectively. Their appointments brought all of Kansas into Lane's patronage system, the two men appointing additional officers as recruiting commissioners from their respective areas.

Captain James M. Williams arrived in Kansas from Wisconsin in 1856, and although trained as a lawyer, speculated in real estate and operated a stationary store in Leavenworth. Williams took an active role in the border warfare of Territorial Kansas, wherein he actively supported abolitionist activity. Williams later served as commander of Company K of the Fifth Kansas Cavalry until his resignation in July of 1862 to recruit "Men of African Descent" for Senator Lane.¹⁶⁹ A fellow officer of similar outlook, Captain Henry Seaman also from the Fifth Kansas Cavalry, joined Williams and Lieutenant John Bowles in recruiting for the regiment. The three men rose to the attention of Kansans in 1862, when they refused to return fugitive slaves to their former masters, a moral stand that resulted in their arrest. Richard Hinton also claimed links between Williams, Bowles and Seaman with John Brown. In addition, Seaman's pre-war abolitionist activity linked him to James Montgomery. Originally from Kentucky,

⁶⁴ Letter War Department, Assistant Adjutant General C.W. Foster to Major General James G. Blunt, December 8, 1863, *Negro in the Military Service*, Roll IV, document 1800. The practice of appointing white officers in Kansas regiments continued. This document authorized Blunt to appoint officers for the new 11th Regiment USCT the same as officers were appointed for the 2nd Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment. Blunt would appoint them himself rather than the War Department examining them in Saint Louis.

¹⁶⁹ *Lull Family Genealogical Sketch of James Monroe Williams*, MS. Coll. 545, Williams, J.M. Kansas State Historical Society; *Sutherland's Leavenworth City Directory, 1860-1861* (La Crosse, Wisconsin: Northern Micrographics, 1861), 155; Samuel J. Crawford. *Kansas in the Sixties* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1911), 165. During the late 1850s Williams' anti-slavery sentiments surfaced when he and William T. Sherman (who was practicing law in Leavenworth at that time), rescued a fugitive slave from Missouri border ruffians.

Lieutenant John Bowles, served with Free State forces under John Brown in Lawrence, and served as one of the leading Underground Railroad conductors in Lawrence.¹⁷⁰

Seaman in retrospect was an unusual choice given some of his actions while serving with Fifth Kansas Cavalry. Seaman's service records reveal a troubled man, one given to retaining and appropriating for his own use at least eighteen horses or colts, four mules, a wagon, two carriages, and a large quantity of dry goods. He was also charged with threatening and shooting at one of the regiment's men without provocation.¹⁷¹ Seaman's deeds hardly appear the actions of an honorable man despite his abolitionist credentials.

Seaman's service record is disturbing, but perhaps a reflection of the actions of the Third Kansas Volunteer Regiment as Lane's Brigade ravaged western Missouri. Missing from his records is any description of punishment for his thefts. However, the records do contain a resignation letter from May of 1862 in which Seaman resigned his commission. His resignation letter's passionate words denounced slavery as "a behavior that had to be crushed," and because of that he enlisted under the command of Montgomery and Lane. He claimed remaining under the command of Colonel Clayton, the new regimental commander would "cause violence to his manhood." His resignation certified by Special Orders 176 of the Department of the Missouri, Seaman appeared to have severed his connection with the military. There was a catch however, on May 21, 1862, both his and James M. Williams resignations were rescinded by Washington and both ordered to duty

¹⁷⁰ Richard Hinton. *John Brown and His Men* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1894), 107. Richard Hinton believed that their actions served as the inspiration for the United States Senate Military Committee's bill forbidding the use of the army to capture or return fugitive slaves; Hinton, *John Brown*, 48. Bowles claimed to personally know of over three hundred fugitives that passed through Lawrence between 1855 and 1859.

¹⁷¹ Criminal Charges, 1861, Combined Military Service Records, 5th Kansas Cavalry, Henry Seaman, Captain Company D, Third Kansas Volunteers. National Archives, Washington D.C. These charges covered the period August to November 1861, the first charge in a two count case against Seaman. The second charge

with their regiments. A cryptic note at the bottom of the order requested that only the parties concerned be notified.¹⁷² Why did Washington see fit to get involved in their resignations, they were two amongst many that resigned, but received attention and revocation? The possibility that Senator Lane was responsible is one answer, but no record of any official reassignment is in either Seaman's or Williams' service files.

Perhaps Senator Lane was the cause, for soon afterwards Senator Lane commissioned the pair as recruiters for the new black regiment. Did Lane see their resignation letters and decide to retain them for his purposes? Williams makes mention of being detached for special duty beginning in June 1862, and was reported as a member of the Fifth Kansas Cavalry until September, 1862, but Seaman remains an enigma.¹⁷³ The implication is that Lane knew both men from their service in his brigade and that they had made a favorable impression on the Senator. Another man of Bleeding Kansas renown also received Lane's attention, the newspaperman and abolitionist Richard Hinton.

Adjutant (Lieutenant) Richard Hinton arrived in New York from London in 1851, and then trained in surveying and topographic engineering. Hinton developed journalistic and political affinity with abolitionists, and emigrated to Kansas Territory in 1855, where he joined cause with the Territory's abolitionists. A close associate of John Brown and the Underground Railroad in the vicinity of Leavenworth, Hinton participated in an aborted attempt to free Brown from prison; among his companions the well-known abolitionists James Montgomery and Joseph Gardner. Especially active as a reporter for

¹⁷² Resignation letter, and ratifications May 8, 1862, May 15, 1862. Combined Military Service Records, 5th Kansas Cavalry, Henry Seaman, Captain Company D, Third Kansas Volunteers. National Archives, Washington D.C.

¹⁷³ RG 94: 79th USCT, Combined Military Service Records, James M. Williams.; James M. Williams, *Retirement List Bill, 51st Congress, House of Representatives, Report Number 2971.*

numerous newspapers including the Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, the New York *Times*, and *Tribune*, Chicago *Tribune*, Boston *Commonwealth*, Hinton's Kansas social circle included noted radical abolitionist Daniel R. Anthony, Charles Henry Langston, and William D. Matthews. Identified early as a supporter of contraband relief and black causes, Hinton accepted a commission in the First Kansas on August 4, 1862, one of the first officers of the regiment.¹⁷⁴ Hinton later proved a controversial officer, his private views and public reporting at times suggesting Hinton sought personal advancement as much as the destruction of slavery.

Other abolitionists swelled the First Kansas' officer corps, many of them former conductors for the Underground Railroad. Captain Ethan Earle arrived in Kansas from Boston in 1857. Earle claimed personal connections to both Senator Lane and General Blunt, as well as a close friendship with William D. Matthews. When not dabbling in politics, Earle owned a shoe store on Delaware Street in Leavenworth from which he raided into Missouri, regularly conducting slaves to freedom in Kansas.¹⁷⁵ A Lawrencian and acolyte of John Brown, Lieutenant Joseph Gardner gained notoriety for his role in the armed rescue of fellow conductor Reverend John Doy from Missouri in 1859 and his involvement in the aborted rescue of John Brown. Gardner carried a grudge against slavery advocates, a fugitive slave in his care died at their hands when unknown assailants attacked Gardner's house with a hail of gunfire.⁷³

¹⁷⁴ *Hinton Biography*, 13 June 1893, MS 127 Thomas Wentworth Higginson Collection, Richard J. Hinton papers, 1850-1905; Hinton, *John Brown and His Men*.

¹⁷⁵ Earle, *Journal*, 2 – 4; *Sutherland's City Directory*, 61. Earle immigrated to Kansas "impelled by a very strong desire to take a hand in the 'Border Ruffian War' in the defense of Kansas."

⁷³Hinton, *John Brown*, 522; Richard Sheridan (ed.). *Freedom's Crucible: The Underground Railroad in Lawrence and Douglas County, Kansas 1854-1865, A Reader* (Lawrence, Kansas: Division of Continuing Education 1998), 52; George W. Martin (ed.), Morse, O.E. "An Attempted Rescue of John Brown from Charleston, Va. Jail," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1903-1904*, Volume 8 (Topeka: George A. Clark, State Printer, 1904), 164; *Pratt to Stearns*, May 30, 1860; *Gardner to Stearns*, June 9,

Several other Underground Railroad conductors with similar experiences to Gardner were the Colman family, who also suffered attacks from pro-slavery partisans, and Ransom Harris, who operated a small station just inside the Kansas state line. Ezekiel Colman arrived from Boston, and settled in Lawrence where the outspoken abolitionist operated a station out of his farm, and received frequent visits from John Brown.¹⁷⁶ A kindred New Englander, Ransom Harris arrived in Kansas from Vermont in 1860, and operated an Underground Railroad station at Pardee, Kansas, out of a small log cabin close to the border. When the Civil War began, Harris enlisted in the Tenth Kansas, a regiment in which fellow Lieutenant Luther Thrasher served as a company First Sergeant, before accepting a commission in the First Kansas Colored.¹⁷⁷

The First Kansas Colored's trio of black officers constituted a unique experiment in black leadership, especially with black men commissioned as infantry officers in 1862. Few black men commanded combat units during the Civil War; most black officers were chaplains or served in non-combat arms positions. William D. Matthews, born in Maryland, moved to Leavenworth in 1856, and opened the Waverly House with money earned as a seaman. Williams operated the Waverly House as a boarding house, he and fellow abolitionist Daniel R. Anthony also employing it as a station on the Underground Railway. Captain Williams secured a commission from Senator Lane after convincing

1860, George L. Stearns Collection, no 507, items 90087 and 90596, Kansas State Historical Society; Richard. Cordley. *A History of Lawrence, Kansas*. (Lawrence, Kansas: E.F. Caldwell, 1895). Gardner participated in the attempt to free John Brown along with Hinton and Montgomery.

¹⁷⁶ Martha Parker. *Soil of Our Souls* (Overbrook, Kansas: Parker Laird Enterprises, 1980), 81-82. One of the slaves entrusted to the Colman family, Neely, while farming in the Colman fields, drew the attention of pro-slavery men, and Missouri slave catchers seized and transported him to Missouri. In one of the chance meetings of war, in 1864 Ezekiel's son Charles was reunited with Neely in Arkansas.

¹⁷⁷ Sheridan, *Freedom's Crucible*, 90-95.

him of his ability and community standing, Williams aided by his prior experience as Leavenworth's Commissioner of Contrabands. The most prominent black businessman in Leavenworth, Matthews' opinions mattered greatly in the freedman and contraband communities. Matthews easily filled Company D with Leavenworth men; his efforts appealed to black men, and held out the promise of legitimacy and respect earned from military service. Lane needed Matthews for recruiting to succeed in Leavenworth; Matthews' commission and those of his Lieutenants Henry Copeland and Philip Minor constituted the price Lane paid for black support.¹⁷⁸

Lieutenant Henry Copeland attended preparatory school in Oberlin, Ohio, and both Copeland and his brother, John A. Copeland, knew John Brown well. Perhaps seeking a more active role in the fight against slavery, Copeland immigrated to Kansas, and settled in Lawrence in 1861. His brother's widow also moved to Kansas, and married Charles H. Langston, establishing a possible connection that brought Copeland to Matthews' interest.¹⁷⁹ Lieutenant Philip Minor, a Louisiana native, attended Oberlin College, and immigrated to Kansas in 1862. A literate and highly educated man, Minor initially served as the Sergeant Major for the First Kansas Colored before being commissioned.¹⁸⁰ Although little more is known about the regiment's black officers, their achievements resounded through the Kansan black community and proved that black men could serve well as officers despite white claims to the contrary. The regiment's abolitionist pedigree appeared unquestionable. How that abolitionist character changed with time and circumstance is a matter for consideration, in part because the regiment formed earlier

¹⁷⁸ Roger Cunningham, "Douglas's Battery at Fort Leavenworth." *Kansas History*, (Winter 2000): 204; Earle, *Journal*, 7.

¹⁷⁹ Hinton, *John Brown*, 108. John Copeland traveled to Harper's Ferry with John Brown where he was executed following the failure of their raid.

¹⁸⁰ Roger Cunningham, "Douglas's Battery," 206.

than other Colored Regiments, and because of its long period of training and indoctrination before marching into battle in Indian Territory.

The backgrounds and experiences of the regiment's soldiers varied widely, and while the majority were experienced laborers, while others practiced trades as carpenters, blacksmiths, and teamsters. The stories of two regimental soldiers provide a brief overview of why black men decided to join and what motivated them to stay with the regiment. George Washington escaped across the frozen Missouri River from a tobacco plantation in Parkville, Missouri, and found aid in Quindaro, Kansas. In the summer of 1862 Washington traveled to Leavenworth where he enlisted in Company B, in August 1862.¹⁸¹ Youth, boredom, patriotism, and the need for a source of income may have motivated Washington and other black men, much as it motivated white recruits. However, coming so soon on the heels of his escape from Missouri, Washington may have been motivated most of all by the promised "freedom certificate" prominently featured in the recruiting broadsides.

Clement Johnson of Company F also enlisted in August of 1862. Clement Johnson's motivations originated from a desire to reunite his family, and find his wife and daughter in Tennessee. Impressed by the Methodist preacher's bearing and manners, Captain Earle, promised Johnson the highest-ranking enlisted position in the company, First Sergeant. Johnson's held the position until his discharge in May of 1865 for disability. Although illiterate at the time of his enlistment, Johnson learned to read and write by

¹⁸¹ Katie Armitage, "Seeking a Home Where He Himself Is Free: African Americans Build a Community in Douglas County, Kansas," *Kansas History*, Volume 31, Number 3 (Autumn 2008): 159; James S. Johnson, "The Life and Times of George Washington: Slave, Soldier, Farmer," *Platte County, Missouri Historical and Genealogical Society Bulletin*, Volume 47, Number 3 (1994): 4-6; *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861 – 1865, Vol. 1*. (Topeka: The Kansas State Printing Company, 1896). The absence of memoirs by enlisted soldiers makes the story of Johnson and Washington especially valuable.

spring of 1863.¹⁸² As Earle surmised, Clement Johnson's motivation centered on redeeming his family from slavery, and although different from George Washington's, both men shared a desire to serve as soldiers despite the risks of such service. As Charles H. Langston expressed it, they were "willing to exchange one form of slavery for another," and enlisted despite the uncertainty of the regiment's prospects for success.¹⁸³ Many others that joined the regiment understood the risk enlistment entailed, the potential for capture or re-enslavement high, especially as Southern rhetoric against black enlistment increased following the issuance of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation.

Many soldiers resisted the impulse to desert despite hardships, possibly because they believed that the privations were worth the price of freedom for themselves and their families. Those soldiers not freedmen before the war grappled with the cruel legalities of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Ostensibly free due to their military service, many soldiers' families in border-states remained slaves because the Emancipation promised freedom to slaves in secessionist states, not loyal Border States such as Missouri. Those fortunate enough to have family in a free state endured the mixed lot of a soldier, the potential for separation and death an emotional as well as financial loss to their families.¹⁸⁴ Some soldiers enlisted to facilitate revenge for past mistreatment, retribution through killing justified "in the service of their cause," their efforts part of the fight for "righteousness, equality and citizenship."¹⁸⁵ Enlistment didn't expunge the experience of slavery; the opportunity to exact armed vengeance on

¹⁸² Earle, *Journal*, 20-21.

¹⁸³ Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, September 4, 1862.

¹⁸⁴ Berlin, *Freedom*, 656 - 657.

¹⁸⁵ Drew G. Faust. *This Republic of Suffering: Death and The American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 47-53.

secessionists served soldiers as another motivator for their continued service in otherwise unbearable conditions.

Freedmen may have served for similar reasons, those recently arrived from Arkansas resentful of their expulsion from the state after draconian laws adopted in 1860 threatened freedmen with enslavement if they remained within the states borders. In Indian Territory, pre-Civil War pressure from slave owners to expel or enslave freedmen, as well as increased incidents of kidnapping and enslavement by white Southerners compelled some freedmen to immigrate to Kansas. Enlistment offered Union black Indians the opportunity to emancipate family members and revenge for their lost lands, herds, and family that died during the trek north into Kansas early in 1862. The drive for respect rivaled revenge as a motivation for enlistment, freedmen seeking greater social status and rights, while newly liberated contrabands sought the respect that many whites accorded freedmen, the newly freed regarded by many, including freedmen as “backward” or “damaged” by the experience of slavery. Northern white society frequently treated freedmen differently from former slaves. Freedmen by merit of their pre-war free existence and mingling with the “civilizing” influence of whites were regarded as more enlightened, and therefore better equipped for the exercise of rights, due to their autonomy.

Northern freedmen believed that education and employment would improve white perceptions, but the presence of large numbers of contrabands in such towns as Leavenworth and Lawrence pressured freedmen to seek outlets for their numbers, and aid for their upkeep. Service in the army offered one such outlet, especially after the series of new laws regarding black military labor and service passed prior to the Emancipation

Proclamation. Substantial pressure to enlist may also have originated in the home as black women increasingly supported the recruitment of black men in the army, the war perceived as an opportunity to “prove black manhood and gain citizenship.” However, the government’s failure to pay soldiers for their service compelled soldiers to desert and find other means to support their families.¹⁸⁶ The key to reversing public disapproval, as contemporary newspaper accounts implied, hinged upon the soldiers mustering, and receiving pay (backdated!) for their service.

The brief span between August and September 1862 tested the people of Kansas and their state government, and in the process forced citizens to take sides on the debate over the legitimacy of the regiment. Nowhere in Kansas was the opposition to black recruiting more pronounced than Leavenworth. The adversarial relationship between Leavenworth police and their combative mayor, and the regimental officers that sought deserters in the city, erupted into open contention. In other areas, officers attempted to recruit the black Indians residing on the Sac and Fox Reserve in southern Kansas. Lane’s shell game preserved the Regiment long enough for President Lincoln to issue the first part of the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862. Although it did not end slavery, the proclamation announced that on January 1, 1863, the emancipation of all slaves in Confederate states that failed to seek reentry into the United States. Although excluded from the proclamation’s specifications by its status as a Border State, the proclamation impacted Missouri indirectly. Many slaves responded to Lincoln’s Proclamation much as

¹⁸⁶ Orville W. Taylor. *Negro Slavery in Arkansas* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1958), 256; Daniel F. Littlefield, and Mary Ann. Littlefield. “The Beams Family: Free Blacks in Indian Territory and *The Journal of Negro History*, Volume. 61, Number. 1, (Jan., 1976): 16-35; Ella Forbes. *African American Women During the Civil War* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 5, 43.

they did to Fremont's in 1861, and migrated west. The Emancipation Proclamation gave hope to the First Kansas Colored soldiers that they would soon be paid and legally acknowledged.

The regiment's relocation to Fort Lincoln failed to resolve the significant issues confronting its personnel and officers. No pay, low morale, high desertion rates, and the resentment of white Kansans plagued the regiment and eroded the men's confidence in its viability. Officers detailed to apprehend deserters encountered increasing levels of civilian resistance as the new Governor, Thomas Carney, succeeded the politically debilitated Charles Robinson. Governor Carney brought a new perspective to the issue, his efforts against the Regiment grounded less in personal animosity towards its founder than by a sincere desire to impose order and stability in Kansas. In the towns and cities however, a clash between civil and military law would play out, and threaten the existence of the regiment before it could be mustered into the Union Army. However, before that happened, the regiment faced its first trial by fire on a small farmstead in western Missouri.

Chapter 2: “The Bayonets Came In Bloody”

The most stalwart support for the First Kansas Colored during its early months did not come from the Kansas abolitionists that believed that black military service could cause backlash amongst the white citizens of the North. Incredibly, or perhaps not given the personal sentiments of the Department of the Missouri’s highest ranking officer, the greatest source of support was the Union army. Unlike many who opposed any form of black rights equal to those of whites, the army possessed motives that depended on manpower regardless of color, in a department where white manpower was fully utilized, and black men untapped as a military resource.

Although public support for the regiment fluctuated with the Union’s fortunes in battle, unofficial military support was more robust, especially from General Samuel Curtis. Curtis communicated with Lane through the Chief of Staff of the Department of the Missouri, Colonel N. P. Chipman, and both men recognized the Regiment’s value as a fighting force in case of emergency. Chipman in response to Lane’s request that he do something about the regiment, recommended the organization’s move from Wyandotte to Fort Lincoln as one method by which to shield them from Missourians’ wrath. Chipman also recommended that the regiment retain its arms and be retained for emergencies while digging trenches at Fort Lincoln. Although publicly the Government opposed the muster of the regiment from Washington D.C.; privately the government fed, equipped and

sustained the regiment in small camps such as Fort Lincoln, where training continued despite the War Department's disapproval.¹⁸⁷

Curtis' behavior was not without precedent; Historian Carl Moneyhon asserted that Curtis initially employed freedmen in Arkansas as laborers, and then took the unusual measure of detailing an officer to recruit a black regiment at Helena, Arkansas. Curtis' efforts withered in Arkansas when he returned to St. Louis in September, 1862, but his experiences may have brought him into congruence with Lane's. Given Curtis' position in the military hierarchy, his involvement may have been more crucial for the regiment's survival than Lane's. Curtis was the regiment's quartermaster and protector while it trained and performed various duties in Kansas.⁸⁰

The regiment, despite all signs to the contrary regarding mustering into service, existed not simply because of Senator Lane's patronage and periodic pronouncements, but also because of the regiment's value to the Army. The preliminary Emancipation Proclamation issued in September gave hope that the regiment would be mustered on January 1, 1863 (when the final Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on New Year's Day). Accordingly, the army kept the regiment confined to the duties that chafed the men so badly; guard detail and fortification construction.

¹⁸⁷ *Negro in the Military Service*, Roll 2, Vol. 3, document 973, Chipman to Curtis, October 4, 1862. Regimental soldiers' employment in military capacities such as prison guards and fortification improvement as well as newspaper articles referencing weapons, tents and equipment, and the absence of any reports reporting the confiscation of such equipment implies approval by military authorities even if the regiment was posted to a "mudhole" to remove it from the public eye. Doubtless had the regiment remained at Wyandotte the pressure for disbandment would have been greater than at Fort Lincoln. Chipman was responding to Lane who told him that the President and Secretary of War had approved black enlistment stating, 'go ahead only not involve them.' A tenuous justification, but enough to interest Curtis and Chipman in supporting Lane.

⁸⁰ Carl H. Moneyhon. *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1994), 138.

Perhaps curious about the progress of the regiment, and seeking some idea of its performance and capabilities, Colonel Chipman at General Curtis' behest visited Fort Lincoln on October 16, 1862. Chipman's report to General Curtis provided a sober assessment of Lane's political maneuvering, and the resulting impact on the morale of the regiment. Although favorably impressed by the regiment's proficiency (he singled out Company D and its all-black officers for special praise), Chipman reported Lane's attempts to retain control of the regiment by denying it for labor at Fort Scott, despite the requests of General Blunt and Major Henning, Fort Scott's commander.¹⁸⁸ Lane's interference and obfuscations were the origin of the Regiment's uncertain fate, the senator shifting the regiment around according to whim and not the needs of the Department.

A significant portion of Chipman's report also addressed the order for Captain Williams to consolidate his and Seaman's regiments into a single one, General Blunt's attempt to commandeer the regiment to build a military telegraph line from Fort Scott to Fort Leavenworth, and Lane's intent to deploy the regiment to Baxter Springs. The latter order reflects desperation by Lane to keep the regiment together, many of the regiment's free black soldiers deserting to return to failing businesses or destitute families. Chipman also ventured a hope that mustering would reinforce their desire to serve, especially if military labor could be replaced by combat service.¹⁸⁹ Recognizing that muster authority lay with General Curtis, Chipman cynically noted that Lane's "hobby" would not be mustered unless he convinced the President to authorize it. In the meantime, the regiment's families suffered, and it appeared that only by regimental muster would the

¹⁸⁸ *Negro in the Military Service*, Roll 2, Vol. 3, document 977-979, Colonel N.P. Chipman to General Samuel R. Curtis, October 18, 1862.

¹⁸⁹ *Negro in the Military Service*, Roll 2, Vol. 3, 978.

men be paid so that they could support their families. The majority of the freedmen echoed this request, the load on their families and businesses increasing with each day that passed without receipt of pay. Confronted with the failure of businesses and impoverishment of family, morale failed.¹⁹⁰ The regiment possessed men of commitment and determination, but because the men were unpaid and unrecognized, the regiment faced imminent dissolution from desertions.

Island Mound

Ten days after the review, events on the Kansas-Missouri border changed the situation; orders arrived from Major Henning on Sunday October 26, to break the regiment's monotonous existence. Acting on recently obtained intelligence, Major Henning ordered Captain Ward and Captain Seaman to enter into Bates County, Missouri, to break up a suspected group of guerrillas based on Hog Island. Captain Richard G. Ward, in Williams' absence, led one hundred and sixty men and six officers from Camp Phillips to meet with Captain Seaman and another sixty-four from Fort Lincoln. Accompanying the regiment was a contingent of a half-dozen mounted scouts from the Fifth Kansas Cavalry. United under the command of Captain Seaman, the mixed regimental column marched behind the handmade, nine-striped national ensign of Company F, the men proud to be marching off to war in columns of four, instead of trudging to dig trenches. The regiment traveled along the old military road to Mound City, crossing Mine Creek before making camp that night at intermittently manned Fort

¹⁹⁰ *Colonel N.P. Chipman to General Samuel R. Curtis, 18 October 1862.* RG 393, Part 1, C-104, C-46 1862, Letters Received, ser. 2593, Department of the Missouri. Chipman expressed dissatisfaction with several regimental shortcomings related to its logistical support, namely the Prussian and Austrian muskets, and the large number of soldiers clad in gray uniforms. Baxter Springs and its immediate area endured raids by both Confederate regular and irregular forces on Union supply trains, because of a dearth of Union soldiers for security. Given that General Blunt's forces required more of all the foregoing supplies, it may be that Lane issued the second order to raise morale, as well as forestall additional desertions.

Defiance, an outpost just inside the Kansas state line. The next day, October 27, the regiment proceeded by way of the Butler Road to the ferry crossing located on the Osage River at Dickey's Crossing.¹⁹¹ The question remains: did Curtis believe the men ready for action and thus engineer their orders, or was the regiment merely the largest body of men in the vicinity? Although Federal manpower was thin in the region, the regiment would not have been the first choice for any who doubted their ability as soldiers, or moral fiber as former slaves. Curtis was an ally.

The border region harbored many bushwhackers; some of the prisoners at Fort Lincoln under guard by First Kansas Colored soldiers were local men suspected of secessionist activity. The few civilians encountered along the route reported a large guerrilla force at Hog, or Osage Island, as it was also known, numbers varying between seven and eight hundred. The Union scouts that accompanied the regiment also reported horsemen shadowing the regiment, and when they attempted to question them, the riders rode in the direction of Hog Island. As the men marched, the guerrillas continuously reported the regiment's impending arrival to their commanders, the guerrilla chieftains Campbell, Hancock and Turman.¹⁹² Infantry often fought against cavalry in the border region, but given the slow rate of fire of their muskets, a cavalry dominated force would attempt to maximize their numbers and armament by maintaining contact with the infantry as it advanced into Missouri.

The appearance of guerrilla scouts, and reports of large numbers of enemy guerrillas

¹⁹¹ *OR: Series I, Volume 53*, 455-456; Chris Tabor. *The Skirmish at Island Mound* (Independence, Missouri: The Blue and the Grey Book Shoppe, 2001), 10.; J.H. Stearns, "First Kansas Colored Inf't," *Linn County Republic*, January 31, 1902.

¹⁹² Stearns, *Linn County Republic*, January 31, 1902.

sent a *frisson* of excitement through the ranks, the prospect of a battle looming large in the imaginations of the mostly inexperienced soldiers. Although a very small portion of the regiment's troops may have served in the Kansas Indian Home Guard regiments before this time and a number of the officers in Kansas regiments, the majority's experience consisted of drill, guard mount, and excavation.¹⁹³ Any clash with the guerrillas offered the chance to prove their mettle and perhaps, settle some old scores. The guerrilla scouts' reports elicited a range of reactions from the veteran secessionist bands on Osage Island, many of whom recently participated in the recent battle of Lone Jack, Missouri in August.

Although many of the guerrillas undoubtedly knew of the hated black regiment from friends or relatives, the Union column of hundreds of musket-armed black infantry approaching Hog Island signaled a change in the conduct of the war. No small Union cavalry or infantry force, the regiments' hundreds of armed black soldiers led by white Union officers presented "the terrifying actuality of a force of armed black men," which to some "seemed equivalent to a slave uprising launched by the federal government against the South."¹⁹⁴ The arrival of the black troops created an opportunity to erase the lingering residue of past Union Kansans' jayhawking raids and humiliations with the annihilation of "The Grim Lieutenant's" project. Leavening local guerrillas' hate with professional military reason, Colonel Vard Cockrell of Johnson County agreed to join his mixed force of regulars and green recruits with local guerrilla chieftains Bill Truman and

¹⁹³ Joseph T. Wilson. *The Black Phalanx* (Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing Company, 1890), 111; Wilson asserts there were over 400 blacks in the Kansas Indian Regiments, according to Wiley Britton, the Indian regiments contained many black Cherokee and Creeks.

¹⁹⁴ Michael Carter. *First Kansas Colored Volunteers: Contributions of Black Union Soldiers in the Trans-Mississippi West*. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Command and General Staff College Thesis, (2004), 47; Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 44.

John Hancock.¹⁹⁵ Perhaps assessing a battle with the black Kansans as a way to blood his new soldiers and build their morale with an easy victory, Cockrell also agreed to command the guerrilla force.

Undoubtedly aware of the increasing guerrilla presence by this point, and alert for any signs of the guerrillas massing for an attack, two miles after crossing the river the lead elements of the column reached the Toothman farm. As Union scouts interrogated the only remaining farm inhabitants (Christiana and her daughters), about the whereabouts of the rest of the Toothman family, guerrilla scouts atop the nearby mounds in the area monitored the regiment's approach. The farm offered a good base for the regiment's operations, the farmhouse a solid structure of double log construction that stood about fifteen feet high, its thick walls consisting of hewn logs arranged atop one another. The prairie grass stood high in the fields around the farmhouse, and encroached upon the fences that girded the farmyard and animal pens.

Soldiers quickly tore down the fences and hauled timber and brush to stack with the rails to create barricades around the farmyard, the national colors flying over a creation quickly dubbed "Fort Africa" by the soldiers. Fortunately, according to Captain Earle, the regiment's men exchanged their despised Prussian or Austrian rifles for better models shortly before the expedition to Island Mound. Pickets assumed their positions between the camp and the outer darkness as nightfall descended, and the regiment settled in for a tense standoff with large numbers of guerrilla cavalry gathering in the valley.¹⁹⁶ The

¹⁹⁵ Bruce Nichols. *Guerrilla Warfare in Civil War Missouri, 1862*. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc, 2004), 178. After the failure of the 29 October attack, Colonel Cockrell withdrew his recruits southward, away from the battlefield, before Union cavalry was drawn to the fighting.

¹⁹⁶ James M. Denny, "Early Southern Domestic Architecture in Missouri, 1810-184: The "Georgianization" of the trans-Mississippi West," *PAST (Pioneer America Society Transactions, Annual Meeting for 1984)* (1985); OR: Series I, Volume 53, Captain Ward's After Action Report, 456; Tabor, *Island Mound*, 11 ; Earle, *Journal*, 23. These muskets may have been the ones Lane ordered Williams to

atmosphere in the camp is not recorded, but one could imagine that the overwhelmingly green recruits of the First Kansas Colored slept little that night.

The next day, Tuesday October 28, pickets traded desultory shots with guerrillas. Despite the cartridges expended, no casualties resulted from the exchanges; the high winds and the distances between the opponents foiled any chance of casualties. Skirmishing fulfilled a number of needs for Civil War armies that included providing early warning of impending attack, the potential to inflict casualties without exposing large numbers of soldiers to fire, and the denial of accurate intelligence regarding force composition and dispositions.¹⁹⁷ Captain Seaman, prompted by concern over increasing enemy numbers and aware of the critical state of his regiment's logistics, sent out runners to seek reinforcements from a number of locations including Fort Lincoln, where Captain Williams and over two hundred and fifty of the regiment's soldiers remained. Captain Seaman also requested cavalry to cut off the guerrillas at Burnett's Ferry south of Osage Island, the regiment intending to skirmish with the guerrillas until reinforcements arrived.¹⁹⁸ Although eager for a chance to prove themselves, no general engagement was sought.

The First Kansas Colored's officer ranks may have felt a mixture of pride and apprehension at this time, the unspoken question of black resolve against Southern whites in open battle hung over the regiment. Across the prairie on Hog Island, the guerrilla

requisition at Paola on October 9; Stearns, "First Kansas..."; Joseph Lyon, Leavenworth *Daily Times*, November 4, 1862. Pickets served the role of skirmisher, advance guard and lookout for military units.¹⁹⁷ Earl J. Hess. *The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat: Reality and Myth* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 170-174. Although rifled muskets could theoretically hit targets 500 yards distant, most engagements featured exchanges of fire at much shorter ranges. At Island Mound the ranges appeared to have varied from several hundred yards to point blank, 50 - 100 yards being the average.

¹⁹⁸ OR: Series I, Volume 53, 456; Hinton, "Affairs of the West - A Negro Regiment in Action," *The New York Times*, November 19, 1862; William S. Smallwood, "Kansas Black Soldiers Battle!" *Lawrence Republican*, November 6, 1862.

chieftains resolved to draw out and annihilate a portion of the command as punishment for daring to enlist and fight against white men.¹⁹⁹ Such a propaganda victory would have race's emboldened the Confederate cause, and provided fodder to demonstrate the black inability to fight against white men.

Despite the dispatch of riders, Wednesday, October 29, 1862, dawned with no sign of Union reinforcements. Unbeknownst to the soldiers at Fort Africa, the remaining soldiers of the regiment executed a force march through Tuesday night and into Wednesday in order to reach their fellow soldiers; the soldiers' eagerness for battle drove them to set forth from camp with nearly empty cartridge cases that contained only three cartridges. The soldiers of the regiment were determined to win or die. While Williams' men marched, conditions in Fort Africa deteriorated, and rations dwindled to beef and parched corn. Captain Seaman ordered fifty-man a foraging expedition under Lieutenants Thrasher and Huddleston to search the area farms for corn and salt, and then covered its departure with a detachment of sixty men under Captain Armstrong. Ordered to engage the attention of the enemy, Armstrong's soldiers located a large force of guerrillas about two miles from the camp. Armstrong deployed skirmishers under Orderly Sergeant Smithers of Company B, and immediately attacked the guerrilla scouts until Armstrong's men were over four miles from camp.²⁰⁰ Recalled to camp after the return of the foraging party, Armstrong's men avoided guerrilla attempts to disperse and destroy his detachment.

¹⁹⁹ L.D. Reddick, "The Negro Policy of the United States Army, 1775-1945," *The Journal of Negro History*, Volume 34, Number 1, (Jan., 1949): 16; Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, November 9, 1862, Major Henning sent the Colonel of the 2d Ohio Cavalry, with one hundred and twenty mounted, and one hundred dismounted men, two guns and ammunition; Tabor, *Island Mound*, 11; *Old Settlers' History of Bates County, Missouri* (Amsterdam, Missouri: Tathwell and Maxey, 1897), 187-188.

²⁰⁰ *OR: Series I, Volume 53*, 456; Hinton, *The New York Times*, November 19, 1862.

Several characteristics of the morning skirmish revealed that the guerrillas intended to attack Armstrong's detachment in force. Although during the chase the fire was predominately at long range, the guerrillas shouted at the men and taunted the officers as "Nigger stealers" in order to induce the dismounted infantry to follow. The white officers attracted much attention from guerrillas armed with long-range rifles, an indication that the guerrillas deliberately tried to disorganize the black soldiers by killing their leaders. The infantry at one point during the chase delivered a brisk volley that killed seven guerrillas. Shortly thereafter the guerrillas near Fort Africa renewed their pressure on the camp, and advanced their pickets under the cover of the smoke from a raging a prairie fire. Blinded by the smoke, the regiment created a firebreak around the camp in order to save their camp equipment.²⁰¹ Flames did not pose the greatest danger to the camp; advancing guerrillas under cover of smoke attacked the regimental pickets and created morale-sapping confusion.

Suspecting that the guerrillas set the fire to cover preparations for an attack, and lacking mounted scouts sufficient to ascertain the guerrillas' intentions, Captain Seaman sent out eight black Cherokee soldiers under their former master, Sergeant John Six Killer, to scout the area. Ordered to stay within visual range of the camp, the Cherokee disobeyed orders and disappeared behind the mounds to the south. Minutes later the Cherokee blacks exchanged fire with guerrilla skirmishers, and drove them back to the prairie by the river. Anxious about the fate of the Cherokee detachment after hearing shots exchanged, Seaman ordered Lieutenant Gardner to take twenty men, find the

²⁰¹ R.J. Hinton, "The Negro Regiment has a Successful Engagement with Guerrillas," *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, November 4, 1862; *White Cloud Kansas Chief*, November 6, 1862.

skirmishers, and return to camp.²⁰² This action sent twenty men to join the other eight, the small group a tempting target for the bushwhackers' cavalry.

Captain Pierson, the Cherokee commander, accompanied Gardner a short distance. Captain Crew and Lieutenant Huddleston, carrying rifles in addition to their officer's armament, disobeyed orders to seize the opportunity for some skirmishing. Gardner's force caught up to the Cherokees, but Gardner, impulsive and aggressive by nature, chose to continue skirmishing with the guerrillas. Distracted by the excitement of combat, the detachment followed the retreating guerrillas away from the camp and onward toward the river, where the group stopped to investigate a cabin in the lowlands about a half-mile from the southern edge of the mounds. Obscured from the camp by the terrain, isolated by distance and vulnerable to cavalry due to their small number, the detachment teetered--blithely unaware--on the edge of disaster.

Uneasy with Gardner's prolonged absence, Captain Ward placed Armstrong's force of soldiers from Companies A, B, E, H and G under arms, in doing so he discovered Crew and Huddleston's absence. During the organization of Armstrong's forces, sporadic firing from the south compelled Ward to order Armstrong immediately toward the noise. The discovery of a detachment of the enemy to the south of his position heightened Ward's anxiety and devoid of information from the two missing groups, Ward sent Adjutant Hinton galloping to the southern mound to observe the location of Gardner's party.²⁰³ Hinton returned as Armstrong's company formed up, and reported Gardner's detachment returning from searching a log cabin eight hundred yards south of the last

²⁰² Hinton, *The New York Times*, November 19, 1862, *OR: Series I, Vol. 53*, 456. Hinton reports 16 men went with Gardner, Ward, 20.

²⁰³ *OR: Series I, Volume 53*, 456; "Battle of Island Mound" *Ezekiel Huddleston letter to F.B. Adams, Secretary [Kansas] State Historical Society, 3 December 1882*, Hist.Military.1861, file 7202, Kansas State Historical Society.

mound. Sensing that the enemy would attempt to cut off the detachment, Ward sent Armstrong's force through the draw to the southwest of camp to form the right flank of the regiment's forces on the reverse slope of the mound. At the same time, Ward sent a messenger to request Captain Seaman to prepare his men for battle.

Gardner's detachment, in the prairie below the mounds, offered easy targets to the guerrilla force massing in the trees along the riverbank. Unlike Armstrong's detachment in the morning, Gardner's proved an ideal target, its dismounted numbers half those of Armstrong's detachment, and its members isolated by terrain and distance from the camp. Perhaps the first to comprehend their danger, Lieutenant Huddleston noted with alarm that a group of one hundred guerrilla cavalry broke from the trees in a flanking movement designed place the cavalry between the detachment and the camp. Finally aware of the imminent danger of attack by overwhelming numbers, Lieutenant Gardner decided the detachment would try to make camp, or find a terrain feature that would protect against a cavalry charge. Lieutenant Huddleston turned the guerrillas' fire tactics against the cavalry racing to cut off the detachment, and in an attempt to blind the enemy and screen the running soldiers, set fire to the prairie grass at two different points.

Huddleston knew the infantry would not beat the cavalry to the safety of the mounds. Monitoring the advance of the cavalry, the infantry continued to retreat to the base of the southern mound (the gray arrow on Map 1), but time ran out. The guerrillas, confident of success, formed for a cavalry charge four hundred yards from the contingent and then emboldened by their numerical advantage and knowledge of the time required to reload their weapons under fire, charged the small cluster of infantry.

The detachment stood no chance of opposing a cavalry charge. Although their retreat brought them closer to the camp and Union troops, it was impossible to withstand the shock of over one hundred cavalry smashing into twenty-five infantrymen. The detachment possessed neither the time nor the men to execute the standard infantry square defense against cavalry. Armed with short-range weapons such as pistols, shotguns and sabers, the guerrillas intended to employ shock to break the infantry, inflict casualties and demoralize the soldiers. Once individuals or small groups were isolated, the guerrillas stood a high likelihood of killing the entire group before Union troops arrived. Lieutenant Smallwood later reported that Lieutenant Gardner's detachment faced imminent annihilation unless they fought their way through the enemy. Instead, the men fired one volley at the cavalry, dropping several, then fixed their long sword bayonets and prepared to receive the cavalry charge.²⁰⁴ The desperate measure worked long enough for the officers to attempt a degree of control while discharging their revolvers against the tightly packed cavalry. A prairie fire added to the chaotic melee, and smoke from fires and musketry reduced combat ranges to a few feet.²⁰⁵

Casualties fell immediately, the white officers being lightning rods for the cavalry's attacks. Despite the choking clouds of smoke that filled the air, Lieutenant Gardner sustained buckshot wounds to his hip and a pistol wound to the knee that immobilized him. A cavalryman dismounted and administered an execution-style shot to Gardner's head with the fallen officer's gun. The blow glanced off, however, and Gardner survived

²⁰⁴ William H. Smallwood, "Another Account of the Engagement Between the Blacks and the Guerrillas," *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, November 7, 1862; "Battle of Island Mound" *Ezekiel Huddleston letter to F.B. Adams, Secretary [Kansas] State Historical Society, 3 December 1882*, Hist.Military.1861, file 7202, Kansas State Historical Society, 1-3; Hinton, Richard. "Affairs in the West – A Negro Regiment in Action." *The New York Times*, November 19, 1862; Lawrence *Kansas State Journal* November 13, 1862.

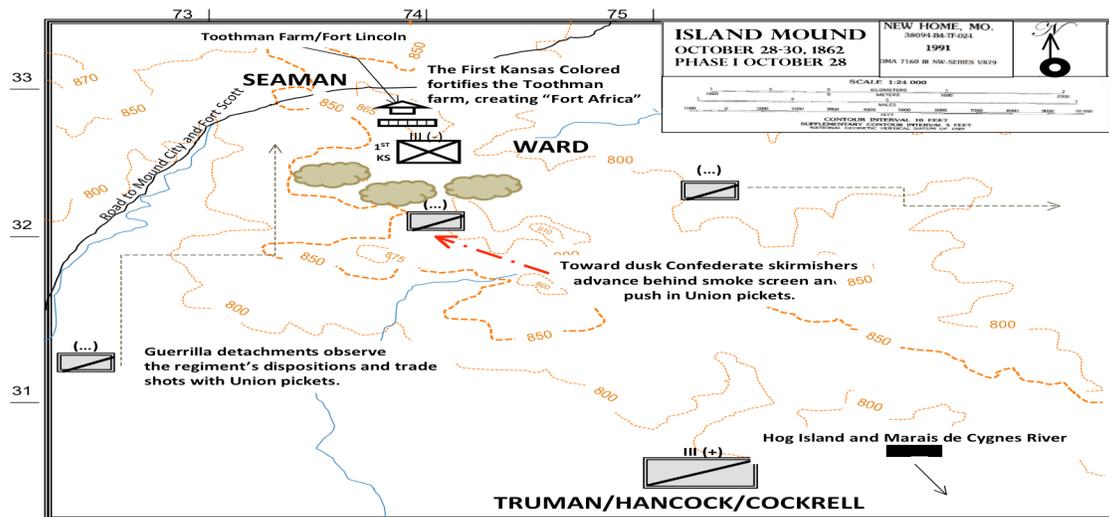
²⁰⁵ William H. Smallwood, "Another Account of the Engagement Between the Blacks and the Guerrillas," *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, November 7, 1862.

because a nearby soldier shot the guerrilla. Flames swept the area wherein he lay prostrate, but the bloody Gardner weathered the remainder of the attack in a burnt patch. Captain Crew kept one small group of soldiers moving toward Union lines until, surrounded and ordered to surrender, he was shot through the heart while exhorting his men not to surrender. Other men fought their own equally desperate battles against multiple attackers.

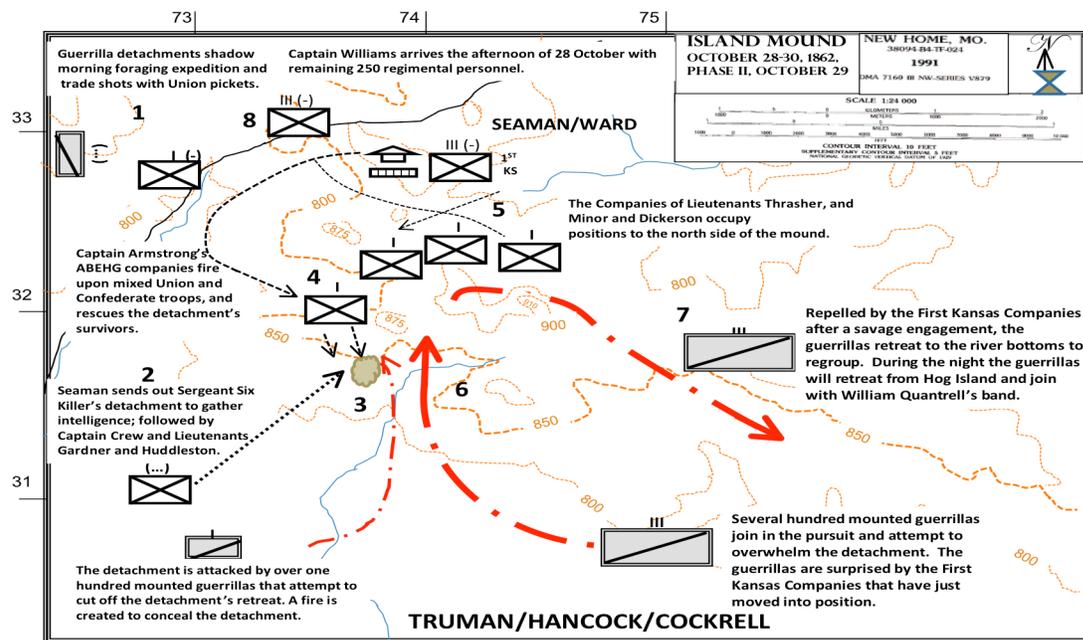
Expecting no quarter and asking none, the black soldiers of the detachment fought for their lives. Sergeant Ed Lowry, wounded by a shotgun blast, faced three guerrillas who demanded his surrender. Lowry's knocked one rider from his horse with the butt of his musket, and then employed his bayonet as a sword until the bushwhackers disengaged and Lowry made it back to camp with three wounds sustained from the hand to hand combat.²⁰⁶ The close quarters combat was equally dire for the Cherokee soldiers, and leader of the black Cherokee, Sergeant Six Killer, fell after he sustained six wounds. Credited with shooting two men, bayoneting a third and bludgeoning a fourth with the butt of his rifle, Six Killer died a "good death" his face turned to the enemy. Although the odds appeared to weight against the isolated detachment, differences in weaponry gave the combatants both advantages and disadvantages. The close combat between the guerrillas and the black soldiers pitted bayonets against sabers, revolvers, and shotguns, some bushwhackers fighting with several pistols at close range as a firepower advantage against Union infantry. The soldiers' sword bayonets inflicted terrible slashing and stabbing wounds, and although few of Captain Gardner's detachment somehow managed to reload their muskets during the melee, they wielded their bayonets to great effect. In

²⁰⁶ William H. Smallwood, "Another Account of the Engagement Between the Blacks and the Guerrillas," *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* November 7, 1862; R.J. Hinton, *The New York Times*, November 19, 1862.

the close confines of the battle space the cavalry's numbers offered one bleak consolidation to the beleaguered soldiers, the cavalry unable to apply their full force of numbers or weapons against the soldiers due to danger of fratricide.¹⁰⁴



Maps 1 and 2: Island Mound 28-29 October 1862.²⁰⁷



¹⁰⁴ R.J. Hinton, *The New York Times*, November 19, 186; Map

²⁰⁷ Chris Tabor. *The Skirmish at Island Mound* (Independence, Missouri: The Blue and the Grey Book Shoppe, 2001). Although Tabor did make maps with similar graphics, these maps are made from the observations of participants in the battle and 1:24,000 scale maps. His maps did serve as one inspiration for the stylistic manner I chose to use for all my dissertation maps.

Alerted by the fires started by Huddleston, and informed by Captain Pierson of the cavalry charge, Lieutenant Thrasher, an experienced infantry veteran, led his men at the double quick, the infantry running through the draw utilized by Armstrong's men, and assumed a position on the left of Captain Armstrong's soldiers. Lieutenants Minor and Dickerson led their soldiers into position between the two other companies and created a line prepared to repulse the bushwhackers' attack. While Minor and Dickerson brought up their soldiers, Captain Armstrong commanded his men to fix bayonets, then led his company up and over the mound, through the smoke and fire, into the swirling melee below. Attempting to envelop Armstrong's company, those guerrillas not engaged in combat with Gardner's men split into two branches. Unaware of the waiting soldiers on the north slope of the hill, the northern branch swept over the hillcrest and into the combined enfilade volleys of Thrasher, Minor and Dickerson's men.

The southern branch soon withered under several volleys from Armstrong's company, and retreated to the east. Armstrong then decided the skirmish between Gardner's men and the guerrillas by firing into the combined mass; a desperate action that drove the last of the guerrillas from the southern mound face. Observing large numbers of guerrillas approaching from the east, Captain Seaman ordered Armstrong, Minor, Dickerson, and Thrasher to withdraw to the camp. Thrasher swept the area where the guerrillas attacked Gardner and recovered all the wounded and most of the dead, then under pressure from returning guerrillas that fired the prairie grass in three places, fell back to the camp.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ R.J. Hinton, *The New York Times*, November 19, 1862; three soldiers lay on the battlefield until the next day. Hinton claims that the guerrillas scalped the bodies.

Smoke played a significant role during the critical moments of the battle, at one point shielding guerrilla and soldier from harm, at other times obscuring combatants from aid. Fire also separated the two foes at different parts of the battle, alternately serving as a screen for advancing guerrillas, and delaying the recovery of the Federal wounded and dead. Fire may also have contributed to higher casualties, incapacitated soldiers helplessly immobile before the advancing flames. When recovery of the fallen resumed on October 30, the regiment's men discovered the dead had been stripped of their Union uniforms and equipment, and then scalped. The appropriation of uniforms and equipment entailed no disrespect to the dead and constituted a vital strategy for the guerrillas that enabled them to move in close to Union patrols or sympathizers before striking. However, tactics such as scalping and other forms of corpse mutilation reflected disdain for the dead, and their cause.

The reinforcements from Fort Lincoln arrived at Fort Africa in the afternoon, Captain Williams leading the remainder of the regiment onto a battlefield that stank of powder and smoke, black ash swirling in the wind as the last of the prairie fires fitfully gnawed the grass down slope from the camp. The arrival of Williams' troops signaled the end of the battle, the guerrillas retiring from the battlefield after collecting their dead and wounded. The guerrillas departed Hog Island that night and retreated east to Red Dirk and Pleasant Gap where they met up with William Quantrill's men.¹⁰⁶ The guerrillas did not renew their attacks despite Quantrill's presence; the risk of a general engagement

¹⁰⁶ Smallwood, William H. "Another Account of the Engagement Between the Blacks and the Guerrillas," Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* November 7, 1862; Hinton, "Affairs in the West," *The New York Times*, November 19, 1862; Stearns, Linn County *Republic*, January 31, 1902. The arrival of reinforcements scattered the Hog Island bushwhackers, disrupted their preparations for the winter, and possibly prevented an attack upon Mound City, Kansas. J.H. Stearns, claimed that the regiment's arrival at the Toothman farm disrupted a planned attack by the combined forces of Cockrell's recruits and the bushwhacking bands of Bates and Vernon counties on Mound City.

reinforced Union infantry in a fortified position may have convinced the Confederates to withdraw.

Despite the mauling sustained by Gardner's detachment, the regiment sustained few other casualties, and the regiment's casualty toll amounted to nineteen out of the twenty-five men of Gardner's detachment, roughly ten percent of the regimental strength, and eighty percent of the detachment. The guerrillas sustained approximately forty killed and wounded, also approximately ten percent of the total guerrilla manpower if low guerrilla number estimates are used. The loss of ten percent manpower in an engagement with infantry proved high, and continuing the attack against the entrenching black infantry, offered the potential for higher casualties that the guerrillas could not afford. The battle's toll would climb as wounded men succumbed to wounds.

The soldiers sustained horrific wounds during the short, brutal battle. Captain Ethan Earle's memoirs reveal that for at least one survivor, recovery would prove lengthy. Fourteen year-old Manuel Dobson of Co. F sustained three gunshot wounds and a shattered elbow in the exchange. His morale didn't appear to suffer though, and the young soldier left the battle with his musket in hand, proudly proclaiming "well Capt. they didn't get my gun." Another man sustained a head wound, a bayonet thrust to the chest, and part of his hand carried away by a bushwhacker's bullet.¹⁰⁷ The uncertain status of the regiment's black soldiers condemned them to additional pain and suffering in the aftermath of the battle, the regiment's lack of recognition forced the regimental surgeon transport the wounded by wagon to Lawrence. Dr. Tenny, lacked ambulances and pain killing drugs to aid his men; medical aid at Fort Scott was out of the question.

¹⁰⁷ Earle, *Journal*, 16. Dobson enlisted illegally, an indicator that the First Kansas Colored's recruiters were not very particular about their enlistees, only their desire to serve.

Lawrence’s Doctor Hiatt proved able and willing to treat the wounded, and attended them in a hospital created specifically for their needs of the regiment in the town’s courthouse. Lieutenant Gardner also moved to Lawrence to convalesce at home, and he recovered enough to rejoin the regiment in January, 1863. There are no reports of additional soldiers dying of wounds after the battle, a testimony to the doctors’ medical skill and soldiers will to live. However, a burial detail under the supervision of Lieutenant Thrasher buried the seven dead soldiers north of the Toothman farm. Capt. Crews’ remains traveled to Leavenworth in the company of Lieutenant Lyons, and his watch went to his sister while his remains went to friends in Leavenworth for burial.¹⁰⁸

Island Mounds Casualty Recapitulation		
Killed	Company	
Captain Andrew J. Crew	A	
Sergeant John Sixkiller		
Corporal Joseph Talbot	F	
Private Marion Barber	F	
Private Samuel Davis	F	
Private Henry Gash	F	
Private Thomas Lane	F	
Private Allen Rhodes	F	
Wounded		
Lieutenant Joseph Gardner	F	wounded head, knee and hip
Sergeant Ed Lowry*		wounded neck, arm and side
Corporal Anderson Riley*		
Corporal Jacob Edwards	E	wounded head and side
Private Edward Curtis		wounded back and mouth
Private Laz. Johnson	F	wounded in arm
Private General Dudley	F	wounded in both legs
Private Andy Hytower*		
Private Shelby Banning*		
Private Manuel Dobson	F	wounded in both arms
Private Thomas Knight	F	wounded in leg
* Seaman's command personnel		
Killed: 8	Wounded: 11	
Commissioned Officers: 1	Commissioned Officers: 1	
Non-Commissioned Officers: 2	Non-Commissioned Officers: 3	
Privates: 5	Privates: 7	

Table 3: Island Mound Casualties.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ William H. Smallwood, “Another Account of the Engagement Between the Blacks and the Guerrillas,” Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* November 7, 1862; Lawrence *Kansas State Journal* November 6, 1862, the letter from Southern Kansas was dated November 1; “Battle of Island Mound” Ezekiel Huddleston letter to F.B. Adams, Secretary [Kansas] State Historical Society, 3 December 1882, Hist.Military.1861, file 7202, Kansas State Historical Society, 1-3; Leavenworth *Daily Times*, November 4, 1862.

Lyons and Pierson later declined commissions and muster into service with the First Kansas Colored.
¹⁰⁹ Captain R.G. Ward to Williams, “List of Killed and Wounded at the Battle of Toothman’s Mound”, October 28, 1862; J.M. Williams to Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, November 13, 1862.

The following morning the combined command moved out toward the island, and confiscated a large number of government horses and mules, and cattle. Additional searches of local dwellings discovered the burial places of the dead guerrillas, and gained intelligence that the confirmed number killed as eighteen, with some twenty wounded. A gristly war trophy in form of a scalp reputed to be from a Union soldier hung on a nail one house. Smoke smudged the Missouri sky after the regiment's soldiers burned farms following the discovery of arms taken from dead soldiers. After scouting around the vicinity for several more days, the command returned to Fort Lincoln. Ever ready to promote the regiment in the press, Richard Hinton reported unexpected praise for the regiment from Colonel Bill Turman, one of the guerrilla leaders at Island Mound. Speaking to the residents Butler a few days after the battle Turman commented that "the black devils fought like tigers, and that the white officers had got them so trained that not one would surrender."¹¹⁰

The Aftermath of the Skirmish at Island Mound

A spate of reports in Kansas papers the first week of November presented Kansans with proof that black enlistment worked, that Lane's "pets" fought fearlessly in the face of the enemy. Utilizing sanguine imagery to describe the moral resolve and courage of the soldiers during their first battle, Hinton wrote "there was no flinching, no hesitation, no paling hearts or trembling hands among the men...Bayonets came in bloody, as did stocks of guns, and the last charge was found gone from cartridge boxes."¹¹¹ Despite the report of victory against the guerrillas, no plaudits awaited them. Unlike the praise heaped on white units for their battle successes, Kansas papers remained largely devoid

¹¹⁰ J.H. Stearns, Linn County *Republic*, January 31, 1862; Hinton, *New York Times*, November 19, 1862.

¹¹¹ Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* Nov 9, 1862.

of praise for the black soldiers and their officers. Perhaps to demonstrate that his pride in his soldiers' accomplishment, two weeks after the battle, Captain Williams gave notice to Kansans of the regiment's achievements by publishing General Orders Number 10. Williams spared no praise for the black soldiers, and pointedly recognized that Island Mound was a success for the regiment's cause, "show[ing] to the country that the heart of our colored troops is fired with the same patriotic impulses, honorable ambition, and martial courage...of the classes who have in war filled the ranks of armies with courageous, loyal soldiers."¹¹² The casualty lists also legitimized the sacrifice of the regiment, and demonstrated that their victory at Island Mound did not constitute a fluke or bloodless exchange, but rather cemented the commitment of the officers to their men and the men to the cause of the Union.

Williams faced a tough challenge changing Kansans' mindset, for although Kansans largely opposed slavery, Kansas was not an abolitionist state despite the presence of many abolitionists in its cities. One minor battle would not shift public opinion significantly. Evidence of this appeared in the weeks following the battle as Kansas papers returned to coverage of political contests, and the Lawrence *Kansas State Journal* excoriated Senator Lane for employing the regiment in such a manner as to attract an enemy, while ignoring their pleas for pay. The pages of the Leavenworth *Weekly Inquirer* continued to print anti-abolitionist stories, and several political candidates voiced sentiment against blacks; in one case, a wagon featured the motto, "Shall Niggers

¹¹² Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* November 13, 1862. Conspicuously absent from the order is any mention of Seaman's soldiers or their performance, although this omission may not indicate disdain for Seaman. Regimental consolidation would not be complete until the end of November.

Arrest White Men?” as well as three black soldiers holding a white man under arrest.¹¹⁶ In the aftermath of Island Mound this bit of political drama indicated the battle did little to change white attitudes. It is unclear if this bandwagon protested black enlistment or the regiment’s soldiers guarding secessionist prisoners at Fort Lincoln, but it reveals that tolerance for black labor did not entail similar support for black rights or any usurpation of exclusively white authority such as law enforcement.

Hinton he appealed to Kansans to support black enlistment because the soldiers performed manfully and without complaint, and he chose to emphasize the concept of duty and the value of blacks to the Union war effort. Hinton believed “we held it to be our duty to exhaust not only the *probabilities* but the *possibilities* of the enterprise. We all believe that the Union needs the services of the negro...,” and further stated “We had our duty to perform; we have done it...*We are eager to march South*. Will not Gen. Curtis give us a chance?” Hinton delivered a challenge to the military: “If the Union does not want brave and efficient soldiers, pay them and let them go home. If it does, then muster and pay them, and let them *go on*.”¹¹⁷ Hinton’s words cut straight through to the regiment’s greatest problem. Mustering and paying the regiment would force the Union to acknowledge blacks as men, a step the Union proved unwilling to take despite the regiment’s performance. The regiment’s actions did have wider impact as newspapers in the east reported the skirmish to their readers and intensified the debate over black enlistment.

¹¹⁶ “The Negro Regiment,” Lawrence *Kansas State Journal*, November 13, 1862; Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, November 1, 5, 1862; Leavenworth papers of the period among them the *Daily Conservative* and *Daily Times* contain frequent mention of slave kidnappings or suspected kidnappings. The Leavenworth *Weekly Inquirer* repeatedly and enthusiastically attacked abolitionism in its columns.

¹¹⁷ Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, November 9, 1862.

The results of the skirmish at Island Mound eventually reached audiences in Chicago and New York due to Hinton's reports, and he influenced the *Chicago Tribune* to report the "[uselessness] of talking any more of [N]egro courage," especially after black soldiers emerged from a battle in which they fought against odds five to one against them.¹¹⁸ Although little record exists of the black reaction to Island Mound in Kansas, there was adequate time for the wounded men of the regiment to tell their tale to the citizens of Lawrence and to share their sacrifice with fellow blacks as a living testimony of black courage and ability. The sacrifice of the regiment's black and white soldiers did not go unnoticed by those touched by their service. The black communities of Kansas had living proof that their race could stand in battle against experienced, well-armed foes in a contest of will and skill.

Deserter Trouble in Leavenworth

Despite defeating secessionist guerrillas at Island Mound, the regiment continued to hemorrhage deserters to a thriving civilian wartime economy. Deserter recovery constituted one of the fundamental duties of the regimental officers, and when Hinton attempted to perform this duty in Leavenworth, Provost Marshall Stout, attacked him. Hinton denied Stout's authority to arrest him, and launched a counterattack in the Leavenworth papers in which he exposed Stout's removal as Provost Marshal and implied a linkage between Stout and the marauding Kansas "Red Legs" that General Blunt confirmed several days later.¹¹⁹ Although Stout's influence was banished by

¹¹⁸ "The Negro Regiment has a Successful Engagement with Guerrillas, Bravery of the Black Soldiers." *Chicago Tribune*, November 10, 1862; *New York Times* November 19, 1862.

¹¹⁹ Leavenworth *Daily Times*, November 11, 12, 1862; Wyandotte *Commercial Gazette*, November 8, 1862. Stout cursed Hinton as a thief, subjected him to a tirade against Lane and the regiment, then arrested him for "jayhawking." Several days prior the Wyandotte *Commercial Gazette* had also reported the arrest of Provost Marshal Captain Stout; Lawrence *Kansas State Journal* November 20, 1862. Despite this the

Blunt's General Order One and Hinton's reporting, the regiment's officers encountered a more formidable opponent in the person of the Mayor of Leavenworth, H.B. Denman.

Despite the presence of regimental officers in the city, and their deserter apprehension efforts of the preceding two months, two events occurred to polarized the community against the regiment. Captain Matthews and a detail, on October 14, arrested several deserters at a church, an action characterized as "high handed" by local newspapers. The Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* in response to Matthews' arrests posed an open-ended question to the people of Leavenworth: "the Negroes are industrious and disposed to work. The question is whether they shall do that or starve?"¹²⁰ Resentment against deserter searches and arrests led to another clash between civilians and regimental officers when Captain Williams searched the store of a Leavenworth merchant without permission. The man filed charges, and the police arrested Captains Williams and Matthews. Exacerbating the situation, Leavenworth police arrested a soldier belonging to the regiment for carrying side arms while Williams and Matthews appeared before the city magistrate to post bond.¹²¹ Williams' passion and fiery character flared into full fury as events developed in Leavenworth.

The next day, Williams appeared at the Mayor's office accompanied by a Sergeant of the 3rd Wisconsin Cavalry and a squad of armed soldiers, and announced his intention to arrest the policemen who had arrested his soldier. Mayor Denman and District Attorney Fenlon, protested Williams' behavior to Colonel Burris at Fort Leavenworth, but Burris

Red Legs maintained facilities for the storage and sale of loot garnered in Missouri in Lawrence where the facilities were destroyed in Quantrill's Raid in 1863.

¹²⁰ Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, November 15, 1862.

¹²¹ Shall the Law be Obeyed," Leavenworth *Daily Times*, November 19, 1862; "Military vs. Civil Law" *Letter from Mayor H.B. Denman to Leavenworth Daily Times, 19 November 1862*. Mr. Brant's complaint alleged that "Capt. Williams with four or five armed Negroes, entered Brant's store and "searched the store of Mr. Brant, against his continued and earnest remonstrance."

referred the mayor to Major H.J. Weed, the Adjutant General of the District, and General Blunt's representative.¹²² Burris was an ally of the regiment from its inception, the cavalry officer who had marched an entire group of contrabands into the regimental camp in August. He could not openly defy Mayor Denman, but he could stymie his attempts by referring the matter to the military authorities.

Conversely, while Mayor Denman sought to arrest Williams, Williams and Matthews filed affidavits against Mayor Denman and the Leavenworth police that alleged a conspiracy to break up the regiment. The pair alleged that Mayor Denman, while holding the men in custody, admitted a fear that if the regiment stayed together until the next meeting of Congress, that Lane would get it recognized and paid. Faced with counter accusations and the potential for a political confrontation of major proportions, Major Weed queried General Blunt for guidance, and asked “[Should] Williams be given up to civil authorities for discharging his duties in arresting deserters from his camp?”¹²³ Deferring the question to Blunt demonstrated no hurry on Major Weed's part, the letter took weeks to reach Blunt in Arkansas. While Weed sought legal and policy guidance, Captain Williams tested the limits of his military authority by engineering a jailbreak.

Williams and a squad of soldiers compelled the city jailer at gunpoint to release the soldier from jail. Mayor Denman, in response requested assistance from Major General Stone for militia and issued a warrant for Williams' arrest. The next day, November 16, Mayor Denman demanded the Fort surrender Williams, but the City Marshal determined

¹²² “Military vs. Civil Law”; Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* November 18, 1862; *Letter from Captain Williams to Brigadier General Blunt*, November 24, 1862, Fort Scott, Kansas archives, Williams folder. This is the same Colonel Burris that deposited confiscated slaves in Williams' camp in August.

¹²³ *Williams Letter to Major Weed*, Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, November 16, 17, 1862; *Captain Matthews Arrest affidavit*, November 15, 1862, RG 94, Combined Military Service Records, James Monroe Williams; Special Correspondence *Chicago Tribune*, “Important Order of Gen. Sherman Summary of News from Southern Papers,” November 11, 1862; *Major Weed Letter to General Blunt*, November 17, 1862, Fort Scott, Kansas State Archives, Williams file.

that he did not consider it “practicable” to arrest him. Put bluntly, the civil authority declined to challenge the military. Williams remained under military protection until his departure the following day partially defused the situation. Humiliated by the experience, Mayor Denman requested arms from Governor Robinson. The *Daily Conservative* normally a supporter of the regiment, expressed the hope that the regiment would be disbanded because the clash grew out of conflict over blacks, and therefore endangered the regiment and the public. Captain Williams disagreed, and a product of his training as a lawyer, countered that the mayor’s actions and those of his policemen were “in contempt of military laws and interrupted the proper discharge of his duty.”¹²⁴ Violence narrowly averted, the incident confirmed the difficulty of apprehending deserters, and created a police and municipal government opposed to the presence of the regiment’s officers in the city.

Mutiny

While Williams and Matthews fought the civil authorities, a seemingly unrelated event loomed over the state and the nation as the deadline for the Emancipation Proclamation approached. The regiment appeared to some as an expensive and illegal “pet” of Senator Lane, and some complained that although organized as “laborers” and “superintendents” were not engaged in construction projects. However, a major portion of the regiment assigned to Fort Henning performed construction duty. Captain Seaman commanded two additional companies at Fort Lincoln charged with guarding rebel prisoners. One black recruit in a twist of fortune guarded his former master, “laughing

¹²⁴ Shall the Law be Obeyed,” Leavenworth *Daily Times*, November 19, 1862; “Military vs. Civil Law” Letter from Mayor H.B. Denman to Leavenworth *Daily Times*, 19 November 1862; Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, November 20, 1862; “Capt. J.M. Williams,” Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, November 30, 1862. Williams denied that any guns were used, but Mayor Denman insisted that Williams and his men threatened the jailer with pistols.

over his new position, driving his former master and making him work.” Deserter recovery work also carefully continued, and included newspaper advertisements that offered pardons for deserters.¹²⁶

The soldiers and officers in addition to official duties also pursued other vital tasks. Captain Earle reported that under his direction soldiers from Company F built a school. Earle procured books and noted with satisfaction that the soldiers of the company, and many from other companies attended school after duty in camp. Earle observed that the soldiers’ voracious thirst for learning accelerated the process of teaching soldiers to read and write, as one soldier learned his letters, he taught others. By winter’s end “nearly all could read and some could write a letter,” resulting in “Company F suppl[ing] the regiment with men for the commissary and quartermaster departments because the soldiers could read and write, and men for Non-Commissioned officers in the company.”¹²⁷ A notable achievement under any conditions, but all the more impressive given the recent trauma the regiment experienced when tempers, frayed threadbare by the marginal conditions of the camp, snapped in spectacular fashion.

Adjutant Hinton, Earle alleged, delighted in humiliating soldiers for minor violations of the regulations. The Adjutant punishing soldiers by tying a board on which he wrote some degrading words about the soldiers or by placing a log of wood in their shoulders and forcing them to walk for hours back and forth and in front of his tent. Earle’s disapproval may have originated from resentment of Hinton’s power as Adjutant in the Regimental Commander’s absence, but it is more likely that Earle resented Hinton’s

¹²⁶ Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* December 11, 1862; “Fort Lincoln,” Lawrence *Kansas State Journal*, November 27, 1862, Atchison *Freedom’s Champion*, December 13, 20, 1862.

¹²⁷ Earle, *Journal*, 28

violation of the relationship between officers and the soldiers with whom they developed relationships over time.

Officers in other black regiments formed after the First Kansas Colored mentioned the special need to treat black soldiers the same as their white counterparts. The array of acceptable punishments included those that subjected offenders to ridicule and discomfort such as standing on barrels, bucking, and gagging; more serious offenses jail terms and fines. However, as Thomas Wentworth Higginson observed, petty torments revived memories of slavery.²⁰⁸ Hinton's alleged actions focused attention on the plight of individual soldiers, and in the highly charged climate of the regiment's camp, gave cause for soldiers to attempt to reclaim their dignity and manhood by forcibly resisting his arbitrary punishment after attacking a member of the regiment.

The fateful incident that started the mutiny occurred when Hinton traded words, then blows with a soldier, and Hinton struck the soldier with his sword. When Hinton ordered the soldier confined in the guardhouse, twenty soldiers of the man's company marched to the guardhouse and took him back to the company, and then drove the company's officers from the area. Prepared to defend their fellow soldier against re-imprisonment, the mutinous company's soldiers loaded their muskets, fixed bayonets, and announced their determination to keep the soldier and "fight their way out of the Regiment as long as they had a live man left."²⁰⁹ Other companies, despite appeals to suppress the mutinous company, failed to challenge them for custody of the soldier; and many of the men of

²⁰⁸ John David Smith (ed.). *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 29.

²⁰⁹ Earle, Journal, 29.

those companies expressed sympathy with the accused.²¹⁰ Earle reported at this juncture that Major Ward, the acting commander in Williams' absence, requested Company F to suppress the mutineers.

Earle responded to Ward's request knowing that if the mutiny spread that the regiment would be disbanded in disgrace, a massive setback to black enlistment and a vindication of the racist claims of the regiment's opponents. Earle reported that after he addressed this company, they responded to his appeal with the deadly earnestness of professional soldiers. The company dutifully loaded their muskets and fixed bayonets, and although outnumbered almost two to one by the mutineers, formed opposite the mutineers ready to execute orders to fire on their comrades. Major Ward, as hammers clicked back on muskets, called on Earle to stay his men and the mutineers surrendered twenty of their number and the soldier they had rescued from the guardhouse. The situation defused, the men returned to their tents.²¹¹ Major Ward, to forestall any possibility of another incident, ordered Lieutenant Hinton not to return to the camp until ordered.

When Williams returned he assembled a drumhead court martial to try and sentence the offending soldiers, and the board meted out sentences for such crimes as riotous behavior, seditious behavior, and mutinous conduct.²¹² Although the regiment broke up

²¹⁰ Earle, *Journal*, 29.

²¹¹ Earle, *Journal*, 30. Joseph Glatthaar's *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), addresses the close bond between white officers and their black soldiers, and his comments about loyalty in return for kindness seem borne out by this incident. Earle's men willing to fire upon fellow soldiers to avoid the disgrace of mutiny, but also because he ordered them to do so. Earle's willingness to place himself before his men validated their trust in his commitment as *their* officer.

²¹² *Note concerning court martial punishment*, RG 94, CMSR, Box 1, 79th USCT (New) M1921, Private James Williams service file. The offending soldier, Henry Egleston, received for mutinous conduct and contemptuous language to a superior officer, and insubordinate and unsoldierlike conduct in camp, twenty days hard labor, eight hours per day; RG 94, CMSR, Box 1, 79th USCT (New) M1921, Private Benjamin

the mutiny quickly and firmly, regimental officers and Major Henning, the Commander of Fort Scott covered up news of the mutiny and no Kansas papers carried stories of the dramatic confrontation. The ramifications of the mutiny, if made public would have destroyed the First Kansas Colored. The soldiers' grievances remained, if only under control for the time being.

Several days after the suppression of the mutiny, news arrived that the War Department, approved General Rufus Saxton in South Carolina to arm and equip black men as a security force for plantations and settlements under United States protection in South Carolina. An account in the New York *Independent* described the event “[Saxton] pronounced them all free: they, their wives, children, fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters...they were free, the Government had acknowledged their manhood.” The Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* added “It strikes us that the precedent is now established, and that there should be no more delay in mustering the Kansas Colored regiment.”²¹³

The greatest threats to the regiment remained unresolved as the New Year approached. The mustering of Saxton's soldiers in South Carolina gave hope that following the final Emancipation Proclamation on January that the regiment stood a good chance of mustering into service, its men proven in battle and desperately needed in Indian Territory and Arkansas by the chronically manpower impoverished General Blunt. Acceptance for black soldiers would not come from a single event, despite the abolitionists' rapture over the impending Emancipation Proclamation. The exhilarating

Riggs was charged with seditious and riotous behavior and sentenced to ninety days hard labor, eight hours a day on half rations.

²¹³ Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, December 18, 1862; Noah A. Trudeau. *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War, 1862 – 1865* (New York: Castle Books, 2002), 17-18; “Festival by Colored Citizens,” Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, December 23, 1862.

combat at Island Mound failed to transform white public opinion in favor of enlistment in Kansas, instead the externality of General Saxton compelled Kansan competitiveness, not humanitarian concern. The regiment survived battle, mutiny and desertions, whether or not it would survive continued neglect remained a grave concern. High hopes abounded for 1863, soldiers and officers alike waiting with bated breath for any sign of Government recognition.

Detractors in Kansas continued their attack upon the regiment and its officers, and sought to destroy it before it could fully organize and muster into Federal service. Battle lines were drawn across Kansas between supporters of black enlistment and those adamantly opposed to any change in the social order. One of the first of those battlefields was the press, the written word demanding explanations and examining the First Kansas much in the way their eastern counterpart, the First South Carolina Colored Infantry was placed under intense scrutiny. Former Kansan and abolitionist Colonel Samuel Wentworth Higginson of the First South Carolina described the experience of white societal evaluation with great accuracy, observing that, “[this] regiment was watched with microscopic scrutiny by friends and foes. I felt sometimes as if we were a plant trying to take root, but constantly pulled up to see if we were growing...It was no pleasant thing to live under such constant surveillance; but it guaranteed the honesty of any success, while fearfully multiplying the penalties had there been failure.”²¹⁴

The First Kansas Colored’s performance was essential to the nascent black racial identity developing across the Kansas public consciousness, their performance a new yardstick by which to measure other black men by extension. Safely ensconced in a

²¹⁴ Thomas W. Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co, 1870), 5.

military camp and under the watchful eye of white officers who could control the men's behaviors, the military camp of the First Kansas Colored Regiment was as much prison as camp, a place where the curious could come to watch the former slaves transformed into soldiers.

White reaction to the impending Emancipation Proclamation varied widely across the Midwest and Kansas. Historian Steven Ash asserted that political ideology and sectional attitudes influenced men's reactions "Officers and men [running] the gamut from radical Republican to conservative Democrat; almost all were racist to some extent, but the Democrats were vehemently Negro-phobic and opposed to abolishing slavery..."²¹⁵ Kansans were part of this white reaction, despite their reputation as abolitionists and friends to contraband slaves. Some Kansans like Samuel Reader regarded black military service as a positive and uplifting development, while other white Kansans resigned in disgust following the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, or decried its potential adverse effect on a verdant Kansas threatened by a "sickly ebony hue" from freed contraband slaves in Kansas. Others believed that if the North didn't recruit blacks, the South soon would.²¹⁶ Heirs to Free Soil philosophies, Kansans did not want competing slave, or unwelcome free black labor to prevent white men from dominating political and social discourse in Kansas.

Midwestern men, especially Democrats and those men hailing from Border States such as Missouri, resented the Emancipation Proclamation because it changed the nature

²¹⁵ Steven V Ash. *Firebrand of Liberty: The Story of Two Black Regiments that Changed the Course of the Civil War* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), 22.

²¹⁶ "Letters of Samuel James Reader, 1861-1863, Pioneer of Soldier Township, Shawnee County (Concluded)," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (May, 1940), 52; Britton, *The Civil War on the Border, Volume II*, 18; Aaron Sheehan-Dean (Ed.). *The View from The Ground: Experiences of Civil War Soldiers* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), as quoted from *First Kansas*, January 18, 1862, 2, Lexington, MO, Kansas State Historical Society, 34; Berlin, *Freedom A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867*, 74-75.

of the war from a war to preserve the Union, to a war to free the slaves. Slaves were property, and abolition presented a terrifying dual prospect of impoverishment and labor competition in such states; any change in the existing racial hierarchy was an anathema. Many resigned in protest, or as one Southern soldier in Arkansas reported “they willingly surrendered in order to be paroled rather than fight a war to end slavery.” Several extreme examples of Union soldiers favored shooting the blacks; others viewed them as scapegoats for the war. Supporters looked upon the new black soldiers as a war-winning measure and black regiments as a potential source of commissions. Aside from the polar opposites of abolitionists and status quo Democrats, the vast body politic was indifferent, regarding the enlistment of blacks as “no disgrace,” with one soldier frankly welcoming them stating “if they can kill rebels I say arm them and set them to shooting. I would use mules for the same purpose if possible.”²¹⁷

Kansans in the field also hotly debated the utility of black soldiers, and many considered emancipation as a foreboding portent for the Union. Kansan Wiley Britton highlighted the divided nature of Kansans on the issue of black enlistment, revealing that some Kansans thought that the Emancipation Proclamation would create problems for the Union, while others voiced objections against fighting to abolish slavery. Others thought emancipation an opportunity to erase a national disgrace and to confirm their belief that all men should have the chance for “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”²¹⁸ Gone

²¹⁷ Bell Irvin Wiley “Billy Yank and the Black Folk,” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 36, No. 1, (Jan., 1951): 38, 49. Richard Lowe. *Walker’s Texas Division C.S.A. : Greyhounds of the Trans-Mississippi* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 67-68; James M. McPherson. *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 121-127.

²¹⁸ Britton, *Memoirs of the Rebellion on the Border*, 151-153.

was the simple protest that black enlistment was illegal, that legal syllogism obviated by the Emancipation Proclamation.

Ironically concepts of black martial ability, and biological suitability to serve and survive in diseased southern climates, may have swayed white support in favor of black soldiers. The black body was an alien one, with assumed physical and mental characteristics very different from white bodies. Howard Westwood pointed out this dichotomy of military service, with white men willing to let black men serve contingent upon employment in disease harboring swamps, while white men served in healthier locales. Union Private Milton Bassett, favored employing black troops in Louisiana because it meant white men would escape “fever and ague,” because mosquitoes couldn’t pierce black men’s skin.²¹⁹ The United States Navy also believed blacks superior to whites during the South’s “sickly season,” and encouraged black enlistment from amongst the ranks of escaped contraband slaves.²²⁰ President Lincoln sought to learn if employing black soldiers was justified by examining the French experience of utilizing black Sudanese troops from Nubia, in Mexico. The United States State Department on January 9, 1863 reported that the French employed black troops in Vera Cruz due to their supposed immunity to yellow fever.²²¹ Resistance to heat and disease, indefatigable endurance, and expendability appear to have been primary motivators for black enlistment, and black enlistment an acceptable casualty mitigating measure that sacrificed

²¹⁹ Howard C. Westwood *Black Troops White Commanders and Freedmen During the Civil War*. (Southern Illinois University Press, Edwardsville, IL. 1992), 14; Sheehan-Dean, 45.

²²⁰ Navy Department, April 30, 1863 Gideon Wells to Southern Squadron Flag Officers, *Negro in the Military Service*, Roll II, document 838.

²²¹ Secretary of State Seward to President Lincoln, 13 February 13, 1863, *Negro in the Military Service, Vol III*, document 1096.

black lives in lieu of white in a confused mélange of racial suppositions and expediencies.

The First Kansas Colored was a social laboratory for the renegotiation of the capabilities of the black race. The abolitionist officers and their former slaves turned soldiers had proven that they could stand in battle against foes, but their true test would be against the many anonymous observers black and white who watched for signs of indiscipline or incompetence. Enlisting soldiers to work in unhealthy climates was a cynical motive, but in a time when black men could expect little support from their white counterparts, the ability to don the Union blue uniform signaled a shift in attitudes. The grudging support of Kansan whites for the First Kansas Colored depended on results, and was in no way a sign of wholehearted approval. The number of black regiments enlisting in early 1863 would be small, but the First Kansas Colored entered into its Union service with pride. The celebrations of January 1, 1863 would not be dimmed by white ambivalence, and with time the promise of the regiment would become reality.

Chapter 3: Emancipation and Exasperation

Despite white approbation, desertions and an uncertain future, the regiment continued to train new enlistees, building companies as increasing numbers of contraband blacks entered Kansas. The regiment stood alone in the west, no other Colored Regiments were in existence in Kansas, and its only contemporaries were the First South Carolina and General Butler's regiments in Louisiana. Despite shedding blood at Island Mound, the regiment's men were still denied the last measure of manhood, the ability to provide for their kin by the sweat of their brow as mustered Union soldiers. The New Year would bring formal recognition and the Union Army of the Frontier's need for manpower would propel the black men of the regiment into battle against pitiless opponents sworn to upholding the southern cause.

Emancipation, despite the promise of freedom and muster into the Federal army resolved few of the regiment's problems. Respect would be earned every step of the way; for the officers and the soldiers of the regiment nothing would be easy, and advances would be hard-won. President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, on January 1, 1863 declared forever free the slaves in the Confederacy, and opened the door for black enlistment.²²² One hundred days had elapsed since the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation's publication and in Kansas the regiment could finally muster as a legitimate military formation in the service of the Union. The First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment, although not the first black regiment mustered for

²²² Richard Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas: The Influx of Black Fugitives and Contrabands Into Kansas, 1854-1865," *Kansas History*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (Spring 1989): 31.

service, was the first of the Colored Regiments mustered in the North.²²³ Lane's "army" of former slaves could finally begin the process of liberation against slave-holding secessionists. The First Kansas Colored greeted the change in national policy with a public celebration that featured speeches by regimental officers and civil dignitaries.

Soldiers and supporters of the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment commemorated the Emancipation Proclamation at Fort Scott in martial fashion, the day's speeches preceded by a mass singing of the "Star Spangled Banner," a fitting opening to the afternoon's speeches. Amongst the speakers were Captain Earle and Lieutenant Sholes of Company F followed by the commander of Fort Leavenworth. Adding to the abolitionist rhetoric of the day, newly promoted Lieutenant Colonel Williams spoke next, emphasizing that the coming black military effort would be a "struggle for their own freedom, and disenthralment." Adjutant Hinton then read the second paragraph of the Emancipation Proclamation, and paused to emphasize with a flourish to the Stars and Stripes that black soldiers were authorized to "hunt, shoot, and destroy" every rebel slaveholder in the land. After the cheering died down, Captain Mathews spoke of black men and how "Our exertions and own muscle must make us men...If we fight we shall be respected." These were particularly poignant words given that Mathews was the single black speaker of the many that spoke that day, he alone of the speakers knew what the day meant for a black soldier and its importance to his race. Concluding the day's events with song, the regiment sang "The John Brown song," a favorite of the Regiment given the familiar bonds many of the Regiment's officers once shared with Brown, and

²²³ Albert Castel, "Civil War Kansas and the Negro," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Apr., 1966): 135. Butler's regiments were enrolled in the fall of 1862.

Brown's symbolic value to blacks as an emancipator.²²⁴ Brown was an important symbol for the regiment, the scourge of pre-war slavery advocates, liberator of slaves and uncompromising enemy of the slavery. The First Kansas was a regiment born as much from abolitionist fervor as political expediency, its existence buoyed during the fall of 1862 by a steadfast belief in the necessity for emancipation, and the role of black men in that effort.

There were powerful compelling personal and group reasons for black enlistment that predated January 1, 1863. The Emancipation Proclamation didn't compel black enlistment in Kansas as much as personal and social pressures from the Kansas black community. The passage of the Emancipation Proclamation meant legal recognition for the right of black men to serve, and charged those same men to represent their race with pride. Army service initially offered escaped slaves protection from pursuing masters and steady pay in an uncertain employment market, but military service also presented an opportunity to prove manhood and gain citizenship, a "bridge to manhood" for men previously denied recognition as full men. The allure of enlistment for black men stemmed from a powerful cocktail of revenge, liberation, and need for a sense of community.²²⁵ Frederick Douglass encapsulated some of the reasons for why black men should serve in his speeches, appealing to his fellow blacks to serve for a myriad of reasons ranging from the requirements of manhood to the opportunity to gain citizenship and renegotiate race identity through military service. Douglass in particular understood that freedom gained without military service would be meaningless, as freedom earned by white men for black men would forever hold them in the debt of their liberators.

²²⁴ *Anglo American* January 31, 1863 as cited in Trudeau, *Like Men of War*, .

²²⁵ Margaret Humphreys. *Intensely Human: The Health of the Black Soldier in the American Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 30; Berlin, Ira (ed.), *Freedom*, 656-657.

According to Douglass, black men must take part in the war.²²⁶ Service however would take place within a greater social context as newly liberated freedmen or contrabands entered states where blacks were initially few in number and generally discouraged by pre-war Black Laws. Kansas offered the potential for black men to serve, but unlike the East where large numbers of freedmen lived before the war, in Kansas most of the potential soldiers were former slaves, and part of a swelling contraband population that by changing racial demographics was engendering white animosity.

A partial answer to black Kansan resistance to recruitment was achieved by recruiting those newly arrived from the liberated portions of Arkansas and the Indian Territory. As the Regiment continued to drill and work on the fortifications around Fort Scott, General Blunt's campaign in Northwest Arkansas around the vicinity of Van Buren, brought many black refugees into the federal lines. Hinton recorded that over one hundred and fifty families arrived at Fort Scott as part of a refugee train in the winter of 1863, some of which soon enlisted in the First Kansas Colored. These black refugees joined a large and growing mixed race refugee community of whites, Indians and blacks numbering about three thousand clustered around Fort Scott, a third of which were blacks. The supply trains sent down to the Union troops in Arkansas and Indian Territory returned as full as they left, materiel cargo exchanged for human cargo aware of the formation of the First Kansas Colored and eager to join its ranks. Hinton reported that the Regiment mustered only six companies, but that in addition to companies forming in Lawrence, Wyandot and Fort Scott, the Regiment hoped to recruit additional soldiers in the field and on the

²²⁶ Donald Yacovone (ed.). *Freedom's Journey* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2004). Frederick Douglass "You Owe It to Yourself and Your Race," April 1863, 103-107. Douglass understood the danger of slavery being reinstated even with a Union victory, "You should enlist because your doing so will be one of the most certain means of preventing the country from drifting back into the whirlpool of Pro-Slavery Compromise at the end of the war, which is now our greatest danger."

march.²²⁷ Hinton's propaganda and rumors may have encouraged refugees to enlist to be part of a liberating army.

Enlistments depended on a ready supply of manpower, and as evidenced by the muster rolls of the regiment's first complete companies, many soldiers enlisted and mustered into service at Fort Scott from amongst the refugee community. The war destroyed the livelihoods of many refugees, and despite the availability of work, this didn't translate into availability of housing. The miserable existence of the majority was notable, perhaps an incentive for many to enlist, especially young men. One prominent Kansan described the housing as shanties that gave way to tents constructed of bed covers with a few wood-burning stoves.²²⁸ Fort Scott's population swelled with each new wagon train from the south, and every wagon train returning north to Fort Scott was inevitably loaded with refugees from the Indian Territory, from which they had been sent by Union troops and under Union escort.²²⁹ Therefore the transitory populace offered a rich recruiting source to the regiment that was continually renewed as wagons brought in refugees.

Another manpower source that proved amenable to enlisting in the First Kansas Colored were the refugee Indians at the Sac and Fox reservation, previous Federal recruiting efforts for the Indian Home Guard regiments furnishing troops for three regiments. Among the first heroes of the Regiment were the Cherokee of Sergeant Six Guns that fell at Island Mound. Captain Van Horn's Company I recruited almost a third of its soldiers at the Sac and Fox Agency in Kansas and later, at Fort Gibson in the Cherokee Nation. Their pride in being soldiers was so great that when their rags were

²²⁷ *The New York Times*, February 15, 1863, "The War on the Frontier"; Wiley Britton. *The Civil War on the Border, Volume II (1863-1865)* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1899), 17-18.

²²⁸ "The Leavenworth Daily Times", December 24, 25 1863.

²²⁹ Britton, *The Civil War on the Border*, vol. II, 17.

replaced by Federal blue uniforms, Van Horn wrote that the soldiers of Company I were “as proud as little boy with a red wagon.”²³⁰

The origins of the soldiers that manned the Regiment’s companies is of interest because of where the soldiers enlisted, versus where soldiers would have been expected to sign up had the process been driven by abolitionists rather than military and political expediency. Antebellum Kansas’ black manpower pool prior was reported by census as 126 free black males.²³¹ It is logical therefore to explore where the bulk of the Regiment’s manpower originated. Despite Kansas’ reputation as an abolitionist stronghold, the majority of the First Kansas’ soldiers enlisted in the three cities of Fort Scott, Wyandotte and Leavenworth. These three cities served as the main points of entry

Enlistment Location/Origin	Number of Enlistees
Fort Scott	182
Wyandotte	177
Unknown	176
Leavenworth	105
Lawrence	57
Mound City	51
Sac and Fox Indian Reserve	29
Topeka	22
Fort Gibson, Cherokee Nation	12
Lexington, Missouri	12
Iola	5

The companies that served prior to 1 January 1863 account for the large number of unknown points of origin. A sample of Regimental Military Service Records reveals Missouri as the overwhelming place of origin.

Table 4: Regimental Manpower Origins, 4 August 1862 – July 1863²³²

for newly liberated “contrabands,” and recruiting. The majority of enlistees, as Table 4 demonstrates, were overwhelmingly from towns situated near the border with Missouri,

²³⁰ Benjamin Van Horn. “*Biographical Sketch, January 4, 1909,*” Benjamin Van Horn Collection, Misc., Kansas State Historical Society, 21.

²³¹ February 11, 1863, Census Office, Department of the Interior *Negro in the Military Service*, document 1090.

²³² *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865, Vol. 1, 574-597.*

or destinations for refugees. Kansas Freedmen felt little incentive to enlist, and refugees and former slaves may have enlisted to guarantee food, shelter, and protection, not because of the efforts of abolitionists. Kansas' situation was not unique; other states in the Midwest were struggling with the issue of black enlistment with mixed results, in part due to white resistance to black recruitment.

The process of training and recruiting the First Kansas Colored after January 1, 1863 occurred under such close scrutiny that any act of savagery or ill-discipline would have been reported as a sign of the race's inferiority, and as Higginson wrote "A single mutiny-a single miniature Bull Run, a stampede of desertions, and it would have been all over for us; the party of distrust would have got the upper hand, and there might not have been, during the whole contest, another effort to arm the Negro."²³³ Accordingly, news of the regiment's muster was carried in several prominent Kansas Papers, among them the *Atchison Freedom's Champion*, and the *Wyandotte Gazette*.²³⁴ This didn't imply support for the Regiment, for while the regiment was recognized as mustered, the editor of the *Atchison Freedom's Champion* demanded quite pointedly answers to a number of discomfiting questions: how was the regiment subsisted, and the officers funded; why wasn't it disbanded despite orders from the Secretary of War, and what became of the large numbers of livestock the regiment confiscated from Missourians?²³⁵ Scandal could still defeat enlistment efforts, and tainting the regiment's achievements with the opprobrium of criminal actions could have proved fatal to the regiment.

Answering these questions could have created political careers and ended many others, General Curtis and Blunt likely targets of this inquiry, as well as Senator Lane and

²³³ *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865, Vol. 1, 574-597.*

²³⁴ *Atchison Freedom's Champion*, January 17, 1863.

²³⁵ "The Negro Regiment," *Atchison Freedom's Champion*, January 20, 1863.

Lieutenant Colonel Williams. These men all knew the regiment was subsisted illegally, kept intact to serve the needs of the overstretched Union forces in eastern Kansas, and protected from prying eyes by a combination of distance and disinterest. As for livestock confiscated from Missourians, many livestock sales occurred and the need for mules in the west was insatiable. Horses changed hands rapidly, remounted cavalry and provided funds for unscrupulous pockets. Problematic questions indeed, especially given the precariousness of the regiment's muster - to be complete, the Regiment required all ten companies to be mustered, or it could be disbanded.

The implication, much less outright evidence of criminal activity by the Regiment and its officers had already besmirched the Regiment with the taint of illegitimacy amongst the white and black communities of Kansas. It is perhaps fortunate that Captain Henry Seaman did not muster in with the regiment, instead preferring to go absent without leave after failing to muster with the regiment. Seaman disappeared from the record until 1864 when he helped organize black militia for Kansas's defense during the Price Raid.²³⁶ Failing to cripple the regiment by legal means, the political foes of black military service changed their tactics. In lieu of legal arguments against recruitment, the fulcrum of anti-black enlistment would be embodied in a series of racial stereotypes, petty annoyances and challenges to black manhood. The Emancipation Proclamation did not smooth the way for the Regiment, and as issues such as lack of pay and irregular operations from pre-muster days continued to dog the Regiment. Emancipation brought out a range of white responses across the north raging from fury to elation.

²³⁶ Special Order 410, September 12, 1863, *RG 94, Combined Military Service Records*, Captain Henry Seaman.

Much would weigh on the accomplishments of black soldiers and their officers, and in Kansas in January 1863, that weight fell squarely on their shoulders to bear for all black Kansans. These attitudes were representative of Union soldiers' ambivalent sentiments toward black soldiers early in the war, perceptions that required black soldiers to prove their fitness in combat. The white soldiers of the various units stationed at Fort Scott reacted in similar fashion toward the black men of the regiment, content to heckle them and insult them, resenting their threat to the place of white men in society. There were consequences for such behaviors, and when threatened the regiment's officers fought back.

Some thoughtless white soldiers chose to make their personal feelings about black soldiers publicly known, not the wisest of decisions considering the aggressive and reactive nature of the First Kansas Colored's officers. Williams complained to Major Blair, the commander of Fort Scott that his soldiers were "frequently forced to receive insults, and after, often stones from other soldiers who seem to have no other employment than lounging around the many low grogeries of [Fort Scott]."²³⁷ This insult rankled especially deeply as the period of abuse coincided with the regiment's work on the Fort Scott defenses. Major Blair's tepid response promised justice, but required Williams to garner names and witnesses to these deeds.²³⁸ Williams understood the value of confronting white soldiers over their resistance to racial change, having done so directly and indirectly since the regiment's inception.

²³⁷ Letter Major Blair to Lieutenant Colonel Williams, April 8, 1863, RG 393, PT II, Vol. 394, District of Missouri, Record 3348, 1 of 3, 3351, 3354 Special Orders June 1863 – July 1863.

²³⁸ *Ibid.* Blair details insults and thrown stones amongst Williams' complaints, and promised protection, but required names and witnesses to the acts. The promise of a General Court Martial for offenders appears stern, but Blair also needed to weigh Williams' behavior against that of white soldiers, and the potential for retributive violence.

Support for black enlistment derived less from a desire for racial equality or egalitarianism than a desire to end the war, the sooner the better. Despite white disapproval, especially from soldiers, outward displays of racism and hostility in Fort Scott toward black soldiers earned immediate punishment. Captain John Graton related that one white soldier's disparaging remark about the black troops was punished with a stint in the guardhouse, and gagging for his loose tongue. Colonel Williams personally responded to the man's indiscretion, confronting him in a group with other white soldiers. Neither the soldiers of the First Kansas Colored, nor their commander tolerated disrespect.²³⁹

The military's approval of black enlistment, pragmatic in nature and compelled by allegiance to the President and the Union, recognized that black manpower would be a welcome addition to the Union army along the Kansas-Missouri border. The Commander of the District of the Missouri, Major General Curtis, formally recognized the utility of black soldiers (which he privately countenanced) on January 4, 1863, when he immediately directed the muster of the First Kansas in response to the War Department's General Order Number One, which formally authorized black enlistment. Mustering the First Kansas Colored into service created a new infantry regiment that could be ordered to garrison Fort Scott, construct fortifications, or relieve white troops for duty elsewhere as the black soldiers assumed border picket and prison garrison duties.

Support for black military service and emancipation was a tacit approval of black military service as a war winning expedient, and less of an expression of support for racial equality. Some viewed black enlistment as a quarantine device, and as one Kansas newspaper expressed it, "The best way to keep blacks out of the north is to enlist them

²³⁹ John H. Graton, 10 Jan 1863, Graton Collection, Kansas State Historical Society.

and have them fight and free blacks in the south where they will voluntarily remain.”²⁴⁰

Supporters of black enlistment, as well as opponents held a variety of beliefs regarding the capacity of blacks as soldiers. Among many white supporters, black soldiers were regarded not as potential future Kansans, but as a sable spear point for the manpower starved Union forces in the Department of Kansas, temporary residents welcome to fight and die, but unwelcome as future neighbors.

However circumspect were their fellow white Kansans, the black communities in Kansas celebrated the First Kansas Colored’s muster. Reverend John Turner, described the events in Leavenworth for readers of *The Christian Recorder*, admitting that one of the leading papers of Leavenworth, the *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* spoke in glowing terms about the First Kansas Colored, praising the patience and perseverance of the regiment under unfavorable conditions. A parallel development to the Regiment’s muster took root in Leavenworth, when black men gathered together to secure voting rights in Kansas. While some black Kansans were fighting for the right to be considered citizens with all the rights accruing to citizens, another group was working actively toward suffrage. Black Kansans fought on several fronts to change white perceptions and to claim the rights of free men.²⁴¹ The performance of the First Kansas Colored figured prominently in this effort as political power, social change and military prowess became linked in a larger struggle for legitimacy not tied to antebellum concepts of race. The behavior of blacks in Kansas also affected enlistment, and some newly emancipated men

²⁴⁰ War Department General Order No. 1, 2 January 1863, Major General Curtis to Major Weed, Telegrams Received, District of Kansas, January 4, 1863 *Negro in the Military Service*, Roll 2, Vol. 3, documents 1062-1063; Castel, *Civil War Kansas*, 138; *White Cloud Kansas Chief* reprint of *Chicago Tribune* January 8, 1863 “Where Will the Negroes Go?”

²⁴¹“Leavenworth City, Kansas, Reverend John Turner”; *The Christian Recorder*, January 24, 1863; Sheridan, Richard B. “Charles Henry Langston and the African American Struggle in Kansas.” *Kansas History* (Winter 1999), 274.

chose to resist the call to service either in defiance of white social expectations, or in reaction to poor treatment by Kansan whites. The regiment's status during the fall of 1862 did little to convince potential black enlistees to sign up for an interminable period of neglect and hardship.

Contemporary newspapers offer insight into black perceptions of Kansas and Kansans, and served to give voice to an otherwise powerless minority. The *Christian Recorder* offered two separate incidents that illustrated how new black Kansans adjusted to their situations in Kansas, some seeking swift revenge, others preferring to silently persevere in their new lives. Perhaps emboldened by their freedom and the perception of powerlessness on the part of Missourians, some black men joined the Jayhawking bands that raided Missouri for valuables. In one case, three black men entered Missouri to steal cattle and horses, and were caught in the act. This was foolish in the extreme as former slaves returning to steal property could be killed by citizens, bushwhackers, or taken into custody, especially of the slaves of a Union man. Race relationships in Leavenworth, Kansas' largest city were strained by spring of 1863, and one black resident angrily lamented the treatment of blacks in that city. The attitude of white Kansans in Leavenworth prompted the observer to write a letter to the *Christian Recorder* in which he decried a growing sentiment of contempt on the part of local businesses and citizens towards black refugees. The prevailing attitude in the city was that contraband blacks should be granted nothing and slaves encouraged to remain with their masters. The absence of white aid compelled many refugees to remain insulated in their communities

and attempt to solve their problems by uniting against a civil society that looked with alarm on black attempts to improve their conditions.²⁴²

Kansas, at least in Leavenworth, as portrayed in this letter was decidedly not a place friendly to black needs despite the earlier tone of newspaper articles in 1862. Blacks were left to fend for themselves as increasing numbers arrived from other states, and as white Kansans increasingly resented their presence. Kansans had not abandoned their free soil principles or their Midwestern mindsets about race, despite disapproving of slavery. Race remained a decisive factor in many whites' beliefs about blacks, especially those of Southern whites. The Confederacy's response to emancipation and the possibility of black soldiers led by white Union officers was both direct and chilling.

The formal Confederate response to the Emancipation Proclamation occurred early in 1863, with President Jefferson Davis's address to the Confederate Congress on January 12, 1863 in Richmond. Renouncing the proclamation as a desperate measure that encourages "assassination of their masters," Davis dictated that Union "officers [in command of such troops] may be dealt with in accordance with the laws of those states providing for the punishment of criminals engaged in exciting servile insurrection."²⁴³ The Confederate declaration of war against colored regiments and their officers created not a fracture, but a bond between these two groups that didn't exist legally before this time. Future Second Kansas Colored and Kansas Governor Samuel Crawford regarded the Confederacy's declaration of "Black Flag," or no quarters war as a godsend, a boon to

²⁴² "Lawrence Correspondence" and "Kansas Correspondence," *The Christian Recorder*, March 28, 1863.

²⁴³ *Negro in the Military Service*, Roll 3, Vol. 4, "Message of Jefferson Davis to the Confederate Congress dated January 12, 1863," documents 1965 - 1968.

regiments as it dissuaded shirkers and office seekers with the very real possibility of execution for serving in a black regiment.²⁴⁴

The Confederacy's willingness to deny white officers special treatment if captured while in command of black soldiers intertwined the fates of white and black soldiers together in the Colored Regiments; to lead black men as a white officer was no immunity from punishment. In addition, Southern officers threatened to execute black soldiers rather than take them prisoners. This attitude was important because as the abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson wrote in his journal, "Black prisoners of war had nowhere to hide, and they were exclusively at the mercy of the rebels," knowing they [white officers] shared the same noose became "a position of pride and esprit de corps."²⁴⁵ Both black and white faced the possibility of execution together on the battlefield. In the ranks of the First Kansas Colored, this was less electrifying than it may have first appeared to white audiences in the East.

The First Kansas Colored braved no-quarter bushwhacker attacks at Island Mound in late 1862, and the veteran soldiers knew that their white officers would stand with them against the enemy. Despite the arrival of many new officers to command companies in the regiment, a strong bond existed. Captain Crews' death set the tone for this relationship between the long-serving black soldiers of the regiment and their white officers who shared the danger of the battlefield. The circumstances of Crews' death and his vehement refusal to abandon his men confounded the Confederate attempt to divide black troops and their officers. The wounds of white officers and shared shed blood at

²⁴⁴ Samuel J. Crawford. *Kansas in the Sixties*. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co, 1911), 108.

²⁴⁵ Britton, *The Civil War on the Border, Volume II*, 78; Michael Barton and Larry M. Logue. *The Civil War Soldier: A Historical Reader*. (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 148, 243.

Island Mound united the officers and men in a way that untested Colored Regiments in other theaters could only achieve during their own baptisms of fire.

Skeletal companies and commissioning

Regardless of the disapproval of many mid-western whites, the hatred of Southerners, and shifting political alliances in Kansas, black enlistment was a political reality. What remained was for the regiments to be recruited and mustered for service, many believing that the black troops would, in the words of the Emancipation Proclamation, garrison forts and perform military construction. Williams was determined that the First Kansas Colored regiment would fight and forge a name as a combat unit, not as stevedores. Therefore it was essential that the Regiment be mustered as rapidly as possible to prevent it from being doled out in company-sized units to serve the construction manpower and garrison needs of the army in Kansas. Such fragmentation threatened Lane's philosophy of punishing slave owners, and his drive for poetic retribution for their slave owners' pre-war actions in Kansas and Southern treachery against the Union.

Williams, recognized the need to muster men to meet minimal manning requirements, and pushed Major Bowles hard to enlist men to form "skeleton companies" numbering a minimum of forty-two men, and an officer, that could then be mustered by Major Weed. Army muster regulations specified that a Regular Army officer conduct the muster process; this required Major Weed to travel from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Scott, therefore adequate manpower had to be available by the time that Major Weed arrived. Williams at one point pressed Weed to travel to Fort Scott to enlist two companies and despite lacking manpower, he remained confident that he could enlist enough before

Weed arrived at the fort.²⁴⁶ Army regulations dictated more than muster requirements, they also determined rank and controlled the addition of specialists to the regiment. A regiment that met the minimal manning requirements and contained its complement of specialists could muster, and as with the First Kansas Colored, be ordered to join other regiments in the field.

Williams' urgency was well founded considering the state of political affairs in Kansas in early 1863. Senator Lane was locked in competition with Governor Carney to determine the officers of the First Kansas Colored, and until the regiment mustered, its commander could be determined by state appointment. Regulations determined that the recruiter of a regiment could be promoted to Lieutenant Colonel after four companies of at least seventy-five men were enlisted with a complement of non-commissioned officers. Thus, when Captain Seaman no longer commanded a separate regiment upon consolidation of the two commands of Seaman and Williams under Williams, the initial manpower requirement was met before muster 13 January 1863.

Regimental completion required the recruitment and staffing of additional companies until the full ten companies were mustered. Knowing that the regulations required at least forty-two men and a First Lieutenant, Williams dictated the formation of skeletal companies that could be filled by company cadre upon company muster. When the company reached its required complement of eighty-four soldiers, a Captain and Second Lieutenant could be commissioned. Surplus enlisted men organized in already mustered companies frustrated Williams' goal, and compelled him to emphasize to recruiters that recruits be sent forward to Fort Scott as soon as possible. When six companies

²⁴⁶Williams to Bowles, January 29, February 1, 1863; Williams to Major Blair, February 18, 1863. RG 94 Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, *Regimental Order Book*, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.

completed organization and muster, a Regimental Major could be mustered, a great help to the Regimental Commander, especially with the endless Army paperwork required of regimental staff. Final muster of the regiment once ten companies formed (approximately nine hundred men and forty officers), brought a promotion for commander to Colonel, and a staff that included a chaplain, surgeon, assistant surgeons, quartermaster, and adjutant.²⁴⁷ This last requirement ensured that the regiment could operate in the field, especially if engaged on detached operations such as were very common in the Indian Territory. While John Bowles attempted to enlist men as soldiers and served as interim regimental Major, Williams sought qualified and acceptable men to commission as officers.

Although Major Weed, the Adjutant General at Fort Leavenworth mustered in companies A through E of the regiment on January 13, 1863, the regiment itself lacked adequate commissioned officers to staff the ten companies required for a regimental muster. The solution, it appeared, was close to home; Williams commissioned a number of veteran Kansan soldiers as officers for the newly formed or forming companies. Therefore, on January 13, 1863 as the enlisted soldiers of companies A through E were being mustered, a number of new officers were sworn in and commissioned, Privates and Corporals becoming officers in a single day. Unlike many white volunteer units wherein officers were voted their regimental ranks, the First Kansas and subsequent Colored Regiments would be staffed by white officers commissioned by either their state Governors or the War Department. The list is extensive, but grants a better understanding

²⁴⁷ Edward Miller. *The Black Civil War Soldiers of Illinois*. (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 13.

of how the First Kansas officer structure formed.²⁴⁸ The early formation of the First Kansas predated Federal guidelines on how officers for Colored regiments would be selected. Instead, Senator Lane commissioned officers in his capacity as Recruiting Commissioner, for Kansas, and then commissions issued by the War Department which supported Lane and overruled opposition by Governor Carney. The Governor's political patronage in this effort was muted by a combination of War Department manpower shortages and Senatorial influence.

The new officers were for large part members of the Ninth Kansas Volunteers, and hailed predominately from the small towns of southeastern Kansas. These men could be relied upon to be staunch allies against the hostile governor in Leavenworth - men of the same ideological bent as Williams, men chosen specifically for their lack of perceived political threat and yet, experienced militarily enough to be useful as trainers and leaders for the green companies that were forming. None of these officers took boards or exams for command fitness as many officers for Colored Regiments were later required to do, but were commissioned by Williams and approved by Senator Lane, then mustered by Major Weed so that he could accelerate the process of recruiting and building a regiment as quickly as possible.²⁴⁹ Company command devolved to experienced commanders who proved their worth through the fall of 1862, and were allocated commands accordingly.

²⁴⁸ RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4, *Regimental Letter and Order Book, 79th (New) United States Colored Troops*, War Records Office, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Special Order No. 1, January 13, 1863 ; General Order No. 1, 13

²⁴⁹ 1263, *Negro in the US Army*, War Department, General Orders No. 144, May 22, 1863. The rules for examining applicants for commission in colored regiments also determined the level of the commission, an order of merit listing that sometimes produced surprising results, Privates becoming Lieutenants and Majors dropping to the rank of Captain. Kansas was an exception, perhaps owing to its early and "irregular" organization.

<u>Former Enlisted Rank</u>	<u>Commissioned Rank</u>
Corporal Benjamin Jones of Company F Eighth Kansas Volunteers	Second Lieutenant
Sergeant Benjamin Welch, Company F Eighth Kansas Volunteers	Second Lieutenant
Private Andrew J. Armstrong, Company C, Ninth Kansas Volunteers	Captain and Commander, Company D
Private Granville Lewis	Second Lieutenant
Private Luther Thrasher	Captain and Commander, Company E
Sergeant John Overdur	First Lieutenant
Private W.C. Gibbons	Second Lieutenant
Charles Coleman, Company C, Ninth Kansas Volunteers	Recruiting Officer
Bethuel Hitchcock, Company C Ninth Kansas Volunteers	Recruiting Officer

Table 5: First Kansas Officers²⁵⁰

Williams upon the occasion of the regiment's muster, designated the battalion's company command structure: Company A, Captain Ransom M. Ward; Company B, Captain George J. Martin; Company C, Captain John R. Graton; Company D, Captain A. J. Armstrong; Company E, First Lieutenant Ethan Earle, Company F. Samuel Herrington provided essential medical support as the Regimental Surgeon. Conspicuously absent from the Regimental muster rolls were three men who greatly influenced black enlistment from the beginning efforts of the Regiment, the trio of Matthews, Minor and Copeland, the black officers of Company D. Instead of the company mustering with experienced black men of proven mettle, as well as a common racial background and often-cited competence, the company command defaulted to white veterans Captain Armstrong, with Lieutenants McFarland and Lewis. The bond between the black soldiers and their black officers was strong, but so was the bond between the black officers and their fellow officers. Unusually for the period, the white officers of the regiment rallied around their

²⁵⁰ *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865, Vol. I.* (Topeka: The Kansas State Printing Company, 1896), 574-597. Jones and Thrasher hailed from Iola; Welch from Fort Scott, Gibbons from Mound City and Overdur from Trading Post; Armstrong from Emporia, Lewis from Elwood, Coleman and Hitchcock from Lawrence.

black counterparts and furiously lobbied for their retention and commission. The black officers refused to passively accept the muster rebuff; Captain William D. Matthews argued persuasively and passionately for his commission despite a refusal by the War Department to muster him.

Captain William D. Matthews, denied the opportunity to muster into service as an officer, wrote Senator Lane demanding that the Senator honor the recruiting commission issued him in August 18, 1862. Matthews carefully pointed out that the Emancipation Proclamation did not prevent him from receiving a commission, and that Williams, Lane and Matthews agreed to officer E Company with black officers when recruiting began. The refusal to commission the black officers of Company D cut deeply, and when offered a recruiting commission in lieu of a military commission, Matthews rejected it, staunchly demanding to retain his commission as a captain and company commander. The refusal to commission Matthews and the other black officers presented other problems aside from issues of fairness. Perceiving white indifference and the possibility of resurrecting the specter of potential white abuse, some of the men felt that Matthews was “selling them out, [which could] cause some men to be shot and the Regiment disgraced.” In short, the refusal to commission the regiment’s black officers had the potential to spark a mutiny like the one in December, 1862. Deeply committed to serving as an officer in the First Kansas, in a final appeal to Lane’s honor Matthews called for justice, and invoked Masonic bonds as reason for support.²⁵¹ Unfortunately for Copeland, Minor and Matthews, commissions were not offered, and the three men declined offers to muster as

²⁵¹ Williams D. Matthews to Hon. James H. Lane, 12 Jan. 1863, filed with K-138 1864, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94 [B-91], from Berlin, *Freedom*, 70.

Sergeants in the Regiment, instead moving back to Leavenworth as the rest of the Regiment continued to muster into service.

The white officers of the Regiment including Williams, in solidarity with their fellow black officers, petitioned both Senator Lane and the War Department to commission Matthews, Copeland and Minor, protesting War Department policy in a letter countersigned by twenty-one officers of the Regiment. Matthews' role in organizing and sustaining the regiment was prominently cited, the officers asserting "Mathews, among the most prominent, is due a large share of our [success] in maintaining this organization intact through the trials and difficulties of the last five months." Matthews "an excellent officer" and "among the most thorough and efficient officers in our organization; a soldier in every sense of the term, drilled, disciplines, and capable," presented a formidable case for black commissioning, but it would take political influence to secure this explosively provocative measure.²⁵² It would take all of Lane's influence to gain approval for a commission; the possibility of a commissioned black officer having the authority to command white officers and men of junior rank presented a disruption to the accepted social order that few whites would countenance without a formal change of War Department policy.

Adjutant Hinton, a close associate of Matthews, aggressively pressed Lane to use his influence to secure a commission for Matthews, citing precedent in Louisiana where General Butler successfully commissioned black officers in the Louisiana Colored Regiments. Perhaps recognizing the potential political ramifications for Lane if he supported a commission for the Regiment's black officers, Hinton reminded Lane that

²⁵² Capt. J.M. Williams et al. to Gen. James H. Lane, 9 Jan 1863, filed with K-138 1864, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94 [B-91] in Berlin, *Freedom*, 309.

Matthews was the primary influence that held together the regiment, and that a commission and the implied social prominence of Matthews would not adversely affect Lane's popularity.

Hinton's tone changed markedly with the conclusion of the letter to Lane, angrily pointing out that Major Weed's refusal to muster Matthews, even as a recruiting commissioner, would affect the Regiment's chances to recruit additional blacks in Kansas, dismissing the whole refusal as "the whole thing amounts simply to the idea, that 'niggers' should not be mustered as officers and not to any question of competency." As Colonel Chipman observed in his report to Major General Curtis in December 1862, the best-led company of the regiment was Company D, a company exclusively staffed with black officers.²⁵³ Kansas and Kansans, while tolerant of abolitionists and amenable to abolition of slavery for economic and ethical reasons, were not prepared to embrace the idea of a black officer. However, as a sign of Matthews' character, he remained a supporter of the regiment, and assisted for months afterward with recruiting until the entire Regiment was mustered and marched south. His commission came in 1864, when he became a Lieutenant in the Independent Light Artillery Battery in Leavenworth, Kansas. Despite his long service to the regiment and influence amongst the Kansas black community, in January 1863, he was fit only for enlisted service in the ranks.

Enlisted duties and capacity for leadership

There were some positions of authority in the ranks of the enlisted, one of which Lieutenant Minor had performed while the Regiment was garnering recruits in

²⁵³Richard J Hinton to General {James H. Lane}, 12 Jan 1863, filed with K-138 1864, Letters received, ser 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94 [B-91] see also service record of William D. Matthews, Independent Battery, U.S. Colored artillery, carded records, volunteer organizations, Civil War, ser 519, RG 94 [N-9] in Berlin, *Freedom A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867*, 336-337.

Wyandotte, Regimental Sergeant Major. When the regiment mustered, key enlisted duties were allocated, Private Steven B. Smith promoted to Regimental Sergeant Major, Private Henry Clay as Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant, and Private R.W. Gibbons as Hospital Steward. These three enlisted positions were significant both for their breadth of duties, but also the interaction with white military personnel required of soldiers in these positions. The Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant worked directly for the Regimental Quartermaster on all Regimental logistical concerns: equipment for man and beast, rations and fodder requisitions, and acquisition of numerous categories of supplies ranging from gunpowder to protected goods such as sutler stores. Although the Regimental Quartermaster Officer performed all regimental logistical functions, the Quartermaster Sergeant coordinated manpower at the level of teamsters, wagon drivers, and the successful loading and storage of supplies. The Regimental Hospital Steward was the enlisted aide to the Regimental Surgeons, dispensing medicines in garrison, overseeing nursing details for sick soldiers, and in combat, coordinating the regimental ambulances and musicians who doubled as litter bearers for wounded personnel.²⁵⁴ Significant challenges remained for the leadership of the regiment, especially those relating to black enlistees education.

Howard Westwood deftly explored the qualifications of black soldiers in Colored Regiments, especially their lack of literacy. Black soldiers may have experienced trepidation about the abilities of their black non-commissioned officers, some reluctant to work with black sergeants because of lack of ability or experience. Some white officers

²⁵⁴ General Order No. 1, 13 January 1863; Letters from J.M. Williams to Thomas Moonlight, January 29, 1863, Special Orders No. 4, Headquarters District of Kansas, February 4, 1863. *Regimental Letter and Order Book, 79th (New) United States Colored Troops*, War Records Office, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

in other regiments reported their duties increased due to their Sergeants' inability to perform their duties due to lack of experience or education. The Army responded to these perceptions by issuing a special drill manual *United States Tactics for Colored Troops*, which modified drill for black soldiers.²⁵⁵ Based on Captain Earle's journal this was indeed initially the case for the First Kansas Colored, but extensive instruction on basic writing and reading appears to have eliminated this shortcoming as a major concern for the regiment. Experience in the trades provided some soldiers alternative duties, and soldiers provided skilled labor as blacksmiths, masons, carpenters and clerks for the regiment and the garrison at Fort Scott. However, other skilled blacks and literate freedmen remained in the Kansas communities and hired out their services for rates that exceeded the meager pay of a soldier.

The low pay specified for black soldiers as compared to their white counterparts served as a prime disincentive for black military service. Ten dollars (three of which were clothing) a month and one ration paled in comparison to the starting pay for white soldiers.²⁵⁶ Compounding the pay inequity was the fixed pay scale of black soldiers that dictated that all ranks receive the same pay. Black soldiers received the ten dollars a month pay regardless of rank be they Private or Sergeant Major. In addition, black soldiers were ineligible for bounties. Confronted by a lack of pay, recruiting among the more highly educated freedmen remained sluggish. Some states offered bounties, or family relief funds as incentives, amongst them Ohio. Governor Tod of Ohio, in an attempt to increase recruitment and offer blacks with families a degree of security, solicited voluntary contributions for the support of the families of black soldiers.

²⁵⁵ Howard C. Westwood, *Black Troops White Commanders and Freedmen During the Civil War*. (Southern Illinois University Press, Edwardsville, IL. 1992), 35-36.

²⁵⁶ General Orders No. 163, June 4, 1863, *Negro in the Military Service*, document 1292.

Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, despite sympathies with black soldiers, provided little assurance for potential black soldiers. Stanton offered up the potential of state contributions, while appealing to Congress' sense of justice toward blacks, a stance that remained unfulfilled in 1863.²⁵⁷ The fact that black men enlisted in the First Kansas when incentives were not a positive factor serves as a sign of their commitment to their cause despite the cost of failure, low pay, disrespect, overwork, and separation from their community.

The potential of black troops to replace white soldiers was noted by many, and amongst those observers were men who recognized a potential escape from combat service by hiring newly freed men to serve as "substitutes" for them during state manpower drafts. A legal arrangement by which one man could willingly serve out another's military obligation in exchange for a cash payment, substitution was one way to serve while avoiding personal injury. If a white man could not find another white man willing to take his place, why not a black one? This loophole was closed quickly however, the Provost Marshal General's Office quickly recognizing that difference between whites and "men of African Descent," primarily financial in nature, necessitated black-black substitutions only.²⁵⁸ The attempt to exploit vulnerable black men did not end with substitution scams; states also competed for manpower because of the desire to meet manpower quotas with black instead of white men. The Civil War rapidly became a war in which blacks would not only fight for their freedom, but one in which they would fight to keep from becoming a cynical tool in the hands of those who believed their death - and not that of a white man- the price for their freedom.

²⁵⁷ "Telegram Secretary of War Stanton to Governor Tod, June 27, 1863," *Negro in the Military Service*, Roll III, Vol 4., document 1351.

²⁵⁸ War Department Circular No. 54, July 20, 1863, *Negro in Military Service*, document1420.

Other political questions came to influence black recruiting as manpower grew short for combat units. The Governor of Iowa applied to raise a black regiment for Federal service, seeking to utilize the soldiers to decrease his state's draft quota. Among the questions of the governor however were some telling indications of eagerness to recruit: "Will I appoint the officers? Will the troops be credited against future drafts? Will less than a full regiment be accepted?"²⁵⁹ The first question may have been influenced by the battle waging between Governors Robinson and Carney with Senator Lane; the third from increasing competition from Kansas and the mustering of the First and Second Kansas Colored. Other inquiries regarding commissions for black officers met with immediate and unequivocal rejection.²⁶⁰ In shades of the rejection experienced by Captain Matthews and Lieutenants Minor and Copeland, many potential black officers were rejected due to an unwillingness of the War Department to commission black men to positions of command; second place was good enough. Among the white officers of the regiment a secret schism developed while the majority openly supported black commissions.

Schisms, mutinous actions, and desertions

Internal division within the regimental officer cadres impacted the regiment's ability to function. A cabal of regimental officers corresponded with Governor Carney throughout the month of March 1863, and secretly supported his appointee to command the First Kansas Colored, R.C. Anderson. Asa Reynard, a Lieutenant from Company F, wrote R.C. Anderson March 10, 1863, warning him of the dangers he faced if he

²⁵⁹ "Governor Samuel Kirkwood to Secretary of War Stanton," July 24, 1863. *Negro in the Military Service*, documents1426-1427.

²⁶⁰ "C.W. Foster, Assistant Adjutant General to Colonel H. VanRensselaar, July 30, 1863, *Negro in the Military Service*, document1455.

attempted to take command of the regiment. Reynard reported that “the majority of the officers are...in favor of Williams and sware [sic] that no man shal [sic]command them but Williams, and that the [sic] will shoot him,” and that when the officers heard of Anderson’s impending arrival, “the[sic] loaded their revolvers and...said that no damned Carney man could come into camp.” Not content with arming themselves, the officers also commanded the guard to shoot the first man to attempt to pass in.²⁶¹ Reynard also accused General Blunt and Senator Lane of sending Colonel Williams orders to refuse muster any man commissioned by Governor Carney.²⁶² Although Reynard wrote with the tone of a man alarmed by the actions of fellow officers more loyal to Senator Lane, Lieutenant Colonel Williams and General Blunt, than their state governor, his motives appear less lofty when considered in association with another disgruntled officer of the First Kansas: Lieutenant John Topping.

Governor Carney received a second letter from a First Kansas officer less than a week after Lieutenant Reynard’s, when Lieutenant John Topping wrote the governor from his tent at Fort Scott, Kansas. Lieutenant Topping reported that Colonel Williams ordered him from the camp because he held a commission from Governor Carney. Williams later explained that orders from the War Department prevented him from mustering any without appointment letters from Senator Lane. Topping complained that he was denied the First Lieutenant’s commission he felt he deserved, rather than the Second Lieutenant’s commission he accepted in order to muster into the regiment. More significantly, others were named as opposing Williams to command the regiment and his

²⁶¹ Asa Reynard to R.C. Anderson, Camp Henning, Fort Scott, March 10, 1863, Kansas State Historical Society, Reynard, Asa. file, document 807 973.7.

²⁶² Asa Reynard to R.C. Anderson, Camp Henning, Fort Scott, March 10, 1863, Kansas State Historical Society, Reynard, Asa. file, document 807 973.7.

authority to commission officers: George Martin, Commander Company B; Lieutenant Luther Dickerson, Company B; Captain Ethan Earle of Company F; Lieutenant Asa Reynard, Company F; Regimental Quartermaster Lieutenant Elijah Hughes. Topping denounced the rest of the regiment's officers as little better than outlaws, willing to kill any who entered the regiment through the order of the Governor.²⁶³

Having presented his case against Williams and the other officers of the regiment, Topping then disingenuously appealed for greater rank and authority for Captains Martin and Earle. He threatened to resign if the Governor did not direct an immediate reorganization of the regiment. Lieutenant Topping's efforts proved the quality of his character, for he neither gained higher rank nor resigned when the regiment mustered in with Colonel Williams as its commander in May, 1863. Such were some of his officers, men willing to seek advancement through political maneuvering while requesting that the Governor not mention their communications for fear "it would endanger their life."²⁶⁴ Despite their machinations, both Topping and Reynard's appeals fell flat, the combined influence of Blunt and Lane being sufficient to counteract any attempts by Governor Carney to claim the regiment as his own political patronage organ.

While Carney and Lane wrestled for political dominance and control of the Kansas military, officers of the First Kansas were pursuing their political and military futures through a risky gamble. Carney, as governor could appoint officers, but Lane could sway Federal commissioning and sought to commission his favorites. Therefore, Carney's choice, Adjutant General R.C. Anderson was pitted against Colonel Williams as a

²⁶³ John Topping to Governor Carney, Fort Scott, Kansas, March 16, 1863, Kansas State Historical Society, file, document 973.374.

²⁶⁴ John Topping to Governor Carney, Fort Scott, Kansas, March 16, 1863, Kansas State Historical Society, file, document 973.374, 4.

candidate to command the regiment. Lane chose an audacious policy of filling the Regiment's ranks by sending Williams blank commissions with instructions to fill them out and to muster no one who had been commissioned by the governor without Williams' approval. The War Department sided with Lane, and when Carney insisted on Anderson, Stanton issued the commission to Williams. In fact, most of the regiment's officers received their orders from the War Department.²⁶⁵ Internal divisions continued unabated despite Lane's policy, and ambitious men sought to improve their standing by undercutting the men Williams recruited to command his regiment.

The regiment's problems culminated in early April, when Williams made the dramatic decision to withdraw his men from the fortification work at Fort Scott, citing the lack of pay and "outside influence," as precipitating "growing restlessness and insubordination, the men feeling sorely troubled and grieved by their pay [and a lack of enlistment bounty]."²⁶⁶ Williams' letter openly addressed the potential for mutiny and military indiscipline if he didn't relocate his regiment, and that desertions would continue due to "sources." Williams may have feared a coup against his leadership or mutiny from the enlisted soldiers.

The potential for a mutiny remained high despite the regiment's muster, and the actions of several soldiers in early January pointed to a general sense of discontentment and anger over their treatment by regimental officers. Although Privates Benjamin Riggs, James Williams, Henry Bowles and Henry Egleston all received sentences for

²⁶⁵ *Kansas State Journal* March 20, 1863; Asa Reynard to R.C. Anderson, March 10, 1863, Governor's Correspondence (Thomas Carney), 1863-1865, Military Affairs, Kansas State Archives; Castel Albert. *Civil War Kansas: Reaping the Whirlwind*. (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 89.

²⁶⁶ Colonel Williams to Captain H.S. Loring, 21 April 1863, RG 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, *Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Colonel Williams to Colonel Blair, 21 April 1863, *Regimental Order Book, Vol 2 of 4*, 6.

mutinous behavior in December 1862, their punishment did not deter other soldiers from acting against the chain of command. Private Harrison Miller and Isaac Harrison were charged with mutinous conduct within days of one another in January 1863. The catalyst appears to be the actions of Adjutant Hinton in yet another set of confrontations with soldiers. Private Miller's charges involved a series of exchanges in which he responded to an order to return to camp with abusive language against the "damned nigger driver and a secessionist son of a bitch." When Hinton attempted to bring Miller back by force, the soldier struck Hinton and threatened to kill him. When confronted by Captain Ward, Miller struck Ward several times in the head.²⁶⁷ Harrison did not threaten violence, but refused to obey an order, an action that resulted in his charge of mutinous conduct. Miller served sixty days at Fort Lincoln and received his release on the request of Colonel Williams.

These two soldiers' actions demonstrate several of the stresses on the command, namely the inability to receive passes and the provocative presence of Adjutant Hinton. The still relatively new nature of the command, ongoing discontent arising from lack of pay and little respect combined to create an environment that made discipline difficult. Although Williams did not specifically enumerate any additional charges against soldiers after late January, and the regimental record book lacks mention of mutiny, Williams may have witnessed signs from his men that the combination of heavy fatigue labor, perceptions of mistreatment, and low morale were creating conditions of dangerous instability in the ranks. Another expression of the low unit morale endured by the regiment is its desertion rate for early months of 1863.

²⁶⁷ RG 94: 79th USCT, Combined Military Service Records, January 23, 1863, January 25, 1863, Private Harrison Miller, Private Isaac Harrison.

The high regimental desertion rates at Fort Scott threatened the full regimental muster that Williams pushed his commanders to achieve. Some soldiers may have soured on the experience of soldiering, and while many left their encampments in search of better paying jobs – or simply pay, as the soldiers of the First Kansas had yet to be paid - on the Kansas labor market, some perhaps unclear on the concept of a military enlistment contract, departed after a brief period of time. However the reason, deserters were pursued with vigor, the muster of the regiment dependent upon manpower numbers.

Desertion was, aside from disease, the single most critical impediment that prevented the regiment from filling its companies and completing its organization. Recognizing that the Regiment had legally mustered and was a legitimate military formation, Brigadier General Blunt specifically authorized Williams to recover deserters from Leavenworth where the populace actively aided deserters.²⁶⁸ There would be no threats of police or militia to oppose Williams as they had in previous months. Now he could and did dispatch officers and men to bring back deserters.

The persistent question of the legality of enlistments predating the regiment's muster continued to counter Williams' efforts to recover deserters. Resistance against continued efforts to muster deserters occurred across Kansas from civilian quarters. J.M. Wilkerson of Lawrence in February 1863, incensed by the presence of the Regiment's deserter details, protested the regiment's right to claim men who had joined the regiment before it was mustered. The regiments' harsh deserter recovery efforts angered both white and black Lawrencians, but as Wilkerson explained, the reaction was not based on cowardice. One black veteran wounded at Island Mound was reported as "anxious for another fight." There did not appear to be a racial component to the protest, and the efforts of Lieutenant

²⁶⁸ January 13, 1863; January 17, 1863 Circular, Headquarters, District of Kansas, *Regimental Book*.

Reynard to attend to the needs of his wounded and feverish men still convalescing in Lawrence from Island Mound were applauded.²⁶⁹ Care and consideration for soldiers strengthened their bond with the regiment's officers, but indifference to their plight and commitment engendered resentment, and frustration. The black soldiers and black community demanded respect and when denied respect, challenged the practices of the regiment. Black men wanted to be involved in the war, but they also wanted to be free of the hounding searches of deserter hunting squads determined to return men to harsh conditions and no pay.

The return of deserters was deemed so vital to the Regiment that, despite civilian opposition, details continued to search for deserters throughout the winter months and into the spring, Williams regularly issued orders for detachments to search towns across Kansas. Officers went with specific instructions from Williams to "give least possible offense to loyal citizens," and to consider that many military men expressed extreme prejudice against the Regiment.²⁷⁰ Williams recognized white Kansan opposition, but understood that he needed the assistance of white Kansas units to subsist his recruiting and deserter return parties; until completed organization and departed Kansas's nettlesome mix of civil discontent and political intrigue, Williams was forced to work against a multitude of irritants.

Tact amongst white citizens while in pursuit of deserters must have been difficult to maintain, given the knowledge that many of these whites were harboring deserters for labor on their farms. Captain John Gratton expressed frustration over the desertion rates

²⁶⁹ January 24, 1863, Reverend John Turner, Leavenworth City, Kansas; February 28, 1863 J.M. Wilkerson, Lawrence, Kansas. *The Christian Recorder*.

²⁷⁰ Williams to Thrasher, Special Orders No. 7, January 29, 1863; Special Order No. 13, March 17, 21, 1863, *Regimental Book*, Williams also wrote Major Foreman at Neosho and Colonel Phillips to clarify that Thrasher was seeking new recruits as well as deserters.

in his company and the regiment, and claimed that the desertion losses were so high as to prevent companies from mustering, “I have had enough to more than make my Company full, some 15 or so I think. The Reg[imen]t. Has lost by desertion some three hundred men or more. Almost enough to make us a full Regiment.”²⁷¹ These numbers translate into nearly thirty percent manpower losses, a great impetus to order out company officers as deserter catchers, as well as press for immediate pay for the regiment.

Williams pursued extraordinary measures to muster men into the regiment. One sign of the severity of regimental manpower shortages was Williams’ willingness release men from prison in order to muster into service. Four Privates responsible for mutiny in December were temporarily released from the Fort Scott brig for muster.²⁷² The second major impact on regimental manpower was a more insidious enemy, one that could not be arrested or bullied into submission. Disease killed a company worth of soldiers In the period between 1 January 1863 and 1 July 1863.

The “Seasoning period”

Camp Emancipation, the regiment’s cantonment area at Fort Scott, was a constantly changing epidemiological environment, where new soldiers mixed with old veterans. Although the health of soldiers was the responsibility of surgeons and commanders, command indifference was not the cause of the regiment’s disease casualties. Factors inherent to army life such as fatigue duty exertions, cramped living conditions in tents, constant exposure to the elements, and dietary changes all influenced mortality rates, as they did in white regiments. However, unlike many Colored Regiments raised later in the war, the First Kansas Colored began its military service with a competent medical staff,

²⁷¹ Graton, J.H., 10 Jan 1863, Graton Collection, Kansas State Historical Society.

²⁷² RG 94 Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, *Regimental Order Book*, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4, January 15, 1863.

listed a surgeon and an assistant surgeon on the muster rolls, two thirds of the medical complement allocated to a regiment.²⁷³ Racial suppositions about disease may have also played a significant role in death rates, black regarded to be more disease resistant than whites.

It was believed by many whites that those of the black race were immune both to the ravages of disease, in particular Yellow Fever, and that their physical capacity for work was inexhaustible. Whites, perhaps unfamiliar with the black body, assumed that the experience of slavery made blacks insensitive to pain.²⁷⁴ The unfortunate reality of camp life and disease deaths for many black recruits derived in part from their lives prior to their muster into the military. Margaret Humphreys discovered that malnutrition and lack of exposure to disease early in life rendered black recruits susceptible to diseases such as smallpox, pneumonia, dysentery, measles, and typhoid. Andrew Black echoed these sentiments, and postulated that exposure to the elements and previous pneumonia episodes may have made black soldiers vulnerable to infection in the cramped camps. The closest comparison to the health of black soldiers was that of white recruits from slums.²⁷⁵ Although soldiers were physically inspected before enlistment, cursory exams could not gauge resistance to disease or hidden pre-existing conditions. In the era before lab tests and other screening procedures, knowledge of an individual soldier's medical

²⁷³ Berlin, *Freedom*, 634.

²⁷⁴ "Report on The French Employment of Sudanese Soldiers," *Negro in the Military Service*, document 1093. The French experience with Sudanese troops in Vera Cruz may have influenced the decision to allow blacks to enlist as a casualty mitigating measure; George M. Fredrickson. *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. (New York:Harper Torchbooks, 1971).

²⁷⁵ Margaret Humphreys. *Intensely Human: The Health of the Black Soldier in the American Civil War*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), xii; xv; 9; Andrew K. Black, "In the Service of the United States: Comparative Mortality Among African-American and White Troops in the Union Army," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 79, No. 4, (Autumn, 1994), 322.

history may have been sparse, and potentially compromised by fears of rejection for military service if recruits revealed a past history of illness.

<u>Cause of Death</u>	
Died	16
Disease	27
Consumption	3
Typhoid pneumonia	1
Inflamed lungs	1
Pneumonia	6
Congestive fever	1
Inflamed stomach	1
Congestive chills	2
Malarial fever	1

Between 1 January 1863 and 1 July 1863 fifty-eight soldiers died, a loss of nearly 10% of the Regiment's total manpower.

Table 6: Death Rates for Recruits, 1 January 1863 to 1 July 1863²⁷⁶

The causes of death enumerated in Table 6 offer intriguing medical data, especially relative to pulmonary ailments such as pneumonia and consumption, more commonly known as tuberculosis. The number of soldiers that continued service while infected with lung diseases is unknown, but it is highly likely that many cases of less severe nature went unreported.

The regimental record books do not indicate any significant change in operations or mass quarantines despite the loss of forty-three men from unspecified ailments or the enigmatic “death,” in addition to specific ailments noted in the rolls. Many communicable diseases could be prevented provided soldiers were inoculated against the disease or had prior exposure before entering military service. For those soldiers with no previous exposure however, smallpox was deadly.²⁷⁷ The predominate killer of First

²⁷⁶ *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865, Vol. 1., 574-597.*

²⁷⁷ J.H. Graton, 29 March 1863, Graton Collection, Kansas State Historical Society.

Kansas Colored recruits in the early spring of 1863 was a combination of ailments, the foremost of which was pneumonia, followed by typhoid and consumption (tuberculosis).

The regiment's medical department's response to disease was typical of the period. When soldiers fell ill, soldiers detailed as hospital stewards and orderlies provided nursing care. Companies also possessed another method by which to succor sick soldiers, an informal fund created by the sale of extra coffee rations. In a letter to his wife, Captain Graton explained how coffee sales enabled him to get "extras for the sick." Wiley Britton, mentioned a similar system in effect for his fellow white Kansans, civilians trading such items as butter, eggs, chickens, and dried fruits for coffee, tea, sugar and salt, the trade of such items authorized in order to obtain items for the company's needs.²⁷⁸ These small gestures went quite far considering that soldiers' families were not able to nurse them through their illness, and the restorative effect of nutrient rich foods such as eggs and fruits could bolster the health of sick soldiers.

Inadequate provision for clothing and equipment does not appear a factor in mortality rates. The soldiers of the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment were equipped much as their white contemporaries, and received an issue of clothing and equipment upon enlistment that the soldier was expected to maintain throughout the term of their enlistment. Under Army regulations, infantry soldiers received "two caps and one hat, one overcoat, two dress coats, three pairs of trousers, three flannel shirts, three pairs of drawers, four pairs of stockings, four pairs of bootees, and one blanket. This constituted a year's issue of clothing." Sergeant Major Fleetwood of the Fourth United States Colored Troops received a similar uniform and equipment issue, and in addition

²⁷⁸J.H., Graton, 10 Jan 1863, Graton Collection, Kansas State Historical Society; Britton, *Civil War Along the Border*, 32.

received “one knapsack; one canteen; one haversack; a case for carrying rations; one cartridge box; one cap pouch; and two blankets, one of wool, the other rubber.”²⁷⁹

Soldiers were fined for lost equipment or weaponry, their pay impacted significantly by the initial issue of clothing, and although part of their meager ten dollars was three dollars in clothing each month, it barely seemed adequate when the nature of black soldier’s duties were taken into consideration, especially those related to manual labor.

While the regiment filled its ranks, it was bound to the vicinity of Fort Scott. The fort’s needs took precedence over training, and worries of guerrilla raids on transport near the fort combined with too little Union cavalry. The need to protect the supplies at Fort Scott resulted in the soldiers of the First Kansas Colored under direction of Engineer Captain William Hoelke, erecting four lunettes (small self-contained forts capable of area defense in case of attack) around of Fort Scott.²⁸⁰ Such labor was increasingly necessary as guerrillas preyed upon Federal supply columns as close as the marshalling area of Drywood, a mere twelve miles from Fort Scott. Guerrilla and partisan ranger bands numbering in the hundreds also clashed on a near-daily basis with patrols from Fort Scott. The regiment’s soldiers accomplished impressive feats of fortification during this short period, and created formidable defenses that defended the fort until the end of the Civil War.

Lunettes Blair and Henning dominated Fort Scott’s defenses. Lunettes Blair and Henning protected the southern approaches to Fort Scott, and Lunette Insley defended the northeast part of town. The log and earth lunettes required more than six hundred men to

²⁷⁹ Erna Risch. *Quartermaster Support of the Army 1775-1939*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 445; Edward G. Longacre. *A Regiment of Slaves: The 4th United States Colored Infantry 1863-1866*. (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), 20.

²⁸⁰ MAJ Henning, Special Order No. 2, January 24, 1863, *Regimental Book*, 112.

labor continuously for a period of over six months duration.²⁸¹ In aggregate the lunettes constituted a major field fortification project, that involved shifting great amounts of earth and logs at each site, the work doubtless convincing some soldiers of the regiment that they were indeed laborers and not fighting soldiers as the days passed in digging and drill.

Fortress construction was not an easy detail, each day of labor brought the physical humiliation of laboring at a job that many never enlisted to perform, while subject to the jeers of indolent white soldiers. Soldiers did have one consolation while they waited impatiently for their pay when whiskey rations were ordered issued to fortification workers by the officer in charge of the fatigue detail.²⁸² However welcome the ration, men still suffered from fatigue at the end of their day, sharing the physical aches and pains of latter day construction workers without the sick leave or amenities of modern life available to today's workers.

When not employed at construction tasks, the daily regimental schedule was structured around drill and details. All soldiers drilled regularly to maintain proficiency in drill at company and regimental level, as well as to relieve boredom in the camps. Drill was essential in combat, the men requiring the skill to maneuver in a mass of men, knowledge of commands and their significance, and confidence in their ability to perform such basic tasks as loading and firing rifles, fixing bayonets, and maneuvering on a battlefield. The officers were also learning during this period, the former Privates and

²⁸¹ Charles Goodlander. *Memoirs and Recollections of C.W. Goodlander of the Early Days of Fort Scott.* (Fort Scott, Kansas: Monitor Press, 1900),76; Leo Oliva. *Fort Scott: Courage and Conflict on the Border.* (Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, 1984), 71-72; Letters from J.M. Williams to William Hoelike, February 9, 1863, J.M. Williams to Thomas Moonlight, February 19, 1863, J.M. Williams to C.W. Blair, April 21, 1863, J.M. Williams to Capt. H.G. Loring, April 21, 1863, *Regimental Book.*

²⁸² Special Orders No.11, March 1, 1863, *Regimental Book.*

Sergeants learning their roles, and practicing various tactical evolutions until the Regiment moved as a single fluid formation through its tactical formations.

Drill evolutions were absolutely necessary for infantry regiments to function during the stress and danger of battle. Well-trained companies could react in minimal time to battlefield threats and if officers were killed, the Sergeants could perform their duties and expect the same from their men. Training however boring or repetitious was the guarantee of battlefield success.

Daily routine also reinforced discipline standards for soldiers, especially those pertaining to hygiene and maintenance. The daily schedule in Table 7 required soldiers to maintain and clean equipment preparatory for inspections, and attention to camp police created a relatively hygienic camp environment. Washing uniforms and bodies also ensured that soldiers could be assessed for physical readiness for combat as well as material readiness of uniforms and camp equipment. Keeping the regiment prepared for combat entailed more than arms drill, but training consistency relied on a stable body of men that could build upon basic drill. Isolating the regiment's men from the temptations of Fort Scott by limiting pass access ensured a degree of insulation from the "groggeries" of the Fort Scott community. Restricting men from carrying arms out of camp also preserved the peace in a community brimming with armed discontented whites. The possibility of armed confrontations could prove too difficult for both sides to ignore given their acrimonious relationship.

The daily schedule had another benefit for the regiment's soldiers. Many of the recruits came from agricultural backgrounds in which the rhythms of the seasons and the

Daily Schedule:

The regiment's daily schedule was dictated as follows:

Reveille	Sunrise
Retreat	Sunset
Tattoo	fifty past eight PM
Taps at	quarter to nine PM

Roll call required all not excused to be present, with a minimum of one Company officer at each roll call.

Battalion Drill	Every afternoon after dress parade except Saturdays and Sundays
Dress Parade	1PM every day
Guard Mount	9 AM daily
Police and fatigue parties recruit drill	Forenoon daily
Company Drill	Forenoon three times per week for an hour and a half
General washing and cleaning day	Saturday
Company Inspection	Sunday 10 AM

Passes for only one man at a time and countersigned by the Company Commander. No soldier will leave camp with a gun except to hunt, and only after legitimate business is complete on Saturday. Up to three men per day authorized.

Table 7: Regimental Schedule - Fort Scott and Vicinity²⁸³

hourly periods rather than the demands of a particular job. Training men with little formal background in time management gave them an appreciation for the military's concept of structure and discipline.

Williams, impatient to march the Regiment south and into battle, was constrained by factors other than personnel. The environment constituted an obstacle to the Regiment's deploying south, the lack of forage affecting the number of wagon teams that could move south into Indian Territory. The importance of forage for wagon trains was highlighted by Captain Graton who in addition to describing the interminable fortification work in a letter to his wife, also cited a lack of forage for delaying the regiment's progress: "I do not think we will leave here before May...there is no forage in the country below and we

²⁸³ Camp Henning at Fort Scott, General Order No. 2, January 19, 1863, *Regimental Book*.

will have to want for grass.”²⁸⁴ Grass limited seasonal travel and as a result the wagon trains that supplied Federal troops at Fort Gibson traveled a schedule that emphasized logistics during periods of high grass. Wagon trains were the lifeblood of the Federal forces in Indian Territory and as a result, suffered from numerous raids by Confederate forces.

The support requirements for wagon trains dictated much of the Union war effort between Fort Scott and Fort Gibson. The number of wagons supporting military operations Fort Scott to the south was tremendous, the estimated three hundred and fifty wagons requiring over four hundred and fifty men: fourteen wagon masters to oversee the train operation, three hundred and fifty teamsters to drive the wagons, forty herders to tend to the mules, and forty laborers to load the wagons. The raw power to pull the wagons was provided by 2,200 mules organized into six mule teams for each wagon. The fodder required to feed this quantity of mule flesh was affected by seasonal availability, but strictly dictated by regulations and set at fourteen pounds of hay and twelve pounds per day for horses and fourteen pounds of hay and nine pounds of corn per day per mule. In aggregate this amounted to a daily requirement of 36,400 pounds of hay and 24,600 pounds of corn for horses and mules.²⁸⁵

Any wagon train moving south from Fort Scott or returning north from Fort Gibson required an immense supply of fodder and access to water. In addition, the heavily loaded, slow moving wagon trains deployed with an escort of soldiers, between a company and a regiment depending on the number of wagons and available intelligence regarding bushwhackers and Confederate regular forces. Wagon trains figured

²⁸⁴ Letter to his spouse, J.H.Graton, March 29, 1863, Graton Collection, Kansas State Historical Society.

²⁸⁵ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* (quoting the Fort Scott Bulletin), Jan 11, 1863.

prominently in the Union's strategy in the Indian Territory. The dependency on wagon trains in the early months of 1863, and the supplies they brought to Union soldiers in the Indian Territory was as the Achilles heel of General Blunt's strategy for the Indian Territory in 1863. Union victories in Arkansas and Indian Territory in 1862 established a Union garrison at Fort Gibson (later renamed Fort Blunt) under Colonel William A. Phillips and manned by four regiments of Indian Home Guard soldiers. Union control of the area was precarious however, and the Union Indians too recently returned to Indian Territory to be able to support the garrison, much less themselves with foodstuffs.

Although troubles with pay, enlistments and political interference may have influenced General Blunt's decision to order the Regiment to Baxter Springs, perhaps the most compelling reason was Colonel Phillips' steadily unraveling logistical and military situation in Indian Territory. Overly reliant on the tenuous Fort Scott to Fort Gibson wagon trains for sustenance and materiel, Phillips wrote Blunt throughout the winter of 1862 and spring of 1863 requesting additional wagons and supplies. His forces were hindered by a lack of forage that limited the range and number of cavalry patrols, as well as by increasingly bold Confederate raids upon his supply lines. Phillips appealed to Blunt for additional soldiers. Phillips' supply lines stretched one hundred sixty miles from Fort Scott to Fort Gibson, and the distance wore down his cavalry and their mounts as they guarded against raids by Confederate forces such as those of Partisan Ranger Thomas Livingston, who operated in the vicinity of Baxter Springs.²⁸⁶ Additional threats arose from the need to protect civilian Indian refugees against retaliatory raids by guerrillas and Confederate Indian forces. Phillips' logistical situation was the key to holding his regiments together, and retaining hold of Fort Blunt.

²⁸⁶ Britton, *Civil War on the Border*, 39-40, 65.

Phillips faced a threefold challenge with his logistics: he was expected to supply his soldiers with food; refugees required food to make it through the winter until they could successfully raise a crop; and former Confederate Indians defecting to the Union expected rations. As a result Phillips requested a combination of supplies from Fort Scott including ammunition, seeds, rations for refugees, soldiers and the Choctaw and Creek Indians formerly under McIntosh's Confederate forces. In February Phillips reported raids upon the wagon trains he used to supply the estimated one thousand destitute women and children around his camp.²⁸⁷ Phillips' desperation grew as the demands of the refugees and the Confederate raids combined to stretch his logistics to the breaking point.

As a consequence of his logistical difficulties, Phillips requested in May 1863 that the First Kansas Colored be ordered to support his command. Blunt agreed with Phillips and informed Major General Curtis that he ordered the First Kansas Colored south to support Colonel Phillips, the only white troops available being the Ninth Kansas cavalry, the remaining troops available in the District of the Frontier consisting of "Negroes and Indians." Concurrently, Colonel Williams received orders to march south to Baxter Springs.²⁸⁸ The First Kansas Colored represented the largest and best-trained force available to Blunt and he ordered them to support Phillips without reservation. The regiment's first destination was Baxter Springs, an area that included strong pro-Confederate Missourians as well as hard-pressed Union stalwarts.

The First Kansas assembled at Fort Scott, and drew together its companies for the sixty-mile march south. Companies I and K completed their muster on May 3, and the

²⁸⁷ Col William Phillips to Major General Curtis, January 19, 1863, 61; Phillips to Curtis, February 4, 1863, 96-97; February 11, 1863 Phillips to Curtis, *OR: Series I, Vol 22, Part II Correspondence*, 108-109.

²⁸⁸ *OR: Series I, Vol 22, Part II*, 200, Blunt to Curtis, April 6, 1863, 200; Blunt to Curtis, 29 April, 1863, 260; Blunt to Phillips, April 30, 1863, 262; Phillips to Blunt, 15 May, 1863, 282.

regiment was joined by Company D after it was relieved of its duties as the Fort Lincoln prison garrison, the duty passing to a detachment of the Second Kansas. Pay and muster rolls were also forwarded to Washington D.C., for Companies B, E, and F Companies of the First Kansas Colored.²⁸⁹ Williams ordered a detachment to remain at Fort Scott under Lieutenant Colonel Bowles to attend to the needs of sick soldiers left behind, and specified the creation of a detachment to apprehend deserters to be sent forward to the regiment. Completing the regimental staff was the return of the Assistant Regimental Surgeon to the Regiment.²⁹⁰ However, the regimental staff required a new adjutant when Lieutenant Hinton, received orders to report to Senator Lane to assist in the recruiting effort for the Second Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment.²⁹¹ The regiment's orders to Baxter Springs required Williams to protect the line of supplies and mail as a halfway station between Fort Gibson and Fort Scott.

The Regiment didn't go alone; a section of Captain E.A. Smith's Second Kansas Battery accompanied the infantry to provide firepower. There was a telling lack of cavalry, a glaring omission given the wide spaces the Regiment was expected to defend against guerrillas and Confederate forces from the south, while keeping open a line of communication with Fayetteville, Arkansas. The regiment finally had the chance to justify their existence and their right to serve as soldiers against those that discounted their previous combat at Island Mound. Credible service under fire would disprove the

²⁸⁹ Entry 3354 Special Orders June 1862 – July 1863, RG 393, Pt. 2, Vol. 394.

²⁹⁰ RG 94 Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4, Special order no. 23, May 3, 1863, Camp Emancipation; RG 393, Pt. 2, Vol. 394, Entry 3354 Special Orders June 1862 – July 1863, National Archives, Henning to Blunt, May 2, 1863.

²⁹¹ *Regimental Book*, Special Orders No. 78, April 21, 1863; Special Order No. 83, Headquarters, District of Kansas, April 25, 1863.

belief that black men could not fight.²⁹² Williams had sought a chance to fight, and the regiment would shed blood while stationed at Baxter Springs.

²⁹² Wiley Britton. *The Civil War on the Border, Volume II (1863-1865)*, 77.

Chapter Four **“True Soldierly Spirit”**

Regimental muster and fortification work accomplished little to raise the value of black soldiers in the eyes of white observers. To a large degree, the reasons were not grounded in race. Largely untried soldiers elicited little respect from the veteran white soldiers of Fort Scott, many of whom regarded themselves superior not only because of race but also because they stood the test of battle and proved their manhood. Soldiers in the ranks weathered disease and desertions, and their leadership continually changed because of frequent inter-regimental transfers of officers and sergeants as the regiment's company commanders transferred veteran Lieutenants and Sergeants to the less experienced companies. During the early months of 1863 the soldiers of the First Kansas Colored Regiments chafed at their roles as diggers and laborers, but drilled for war and, according to their officers, reached a high level of competence and professionalism. The regiment's men would need such leadership in a region where combat action against bushwhackers was certain. Now the First had been provided a chance to win recognition of their manhood from an ambivalent white Kansas citizenry.

The black troops and their white officers felt pressure to justify their existence, for their right to serve as soldiers had been questioned by those who discounted their previous combat performance at Island Mound as a fluke. Credible behavior under fire offered the chance to disprove the belief that black men could not fight, and, one observer claimed, would “do much to disarm many people of the prejudice they entertained against

enlisting colored men for soldiers in the war.”²⁹³ Kansans wrestled with the ramifications of the Emancipation Proclamation, especially the changing social status of slaves; black enlistment inspired some officers to resign commissions in protest. However, attitudes toward slavery changed in parallel with laws of the land, and many whites were happy that a black soldier could serve in lieu of a white recruit.²⁹⁴ The First Kansas Colored carried the hopes of many fellow blacks and abolitionists on their shoulders, and much was expected of them. Kansas’s whites also watched them, looking for a demonstration of martial prowess that could conclusively resolve the debate over black suitability for soldiering.

The First Kansas Colored received orders to depart Fort Scott at the end of April. Companies K and I completed their muster on May 3, and Company D rejoined the regiment after it relinquished its duties at Fort Lincoln to a detachment of the Second Kansas.²⁹⁵ Events in Indian Territory significantly impacted General Blunt’s decision to mobilize the First Kansas. Recognizing his manpower limitations, he assessed the regiment as ready, and, on April 30, 1863 ordered the regiment to support Colonel Phillips at Fort Gibson. The regiment, ordered to bivouac at Baxter Springs to safeguard the trains and Colonel Phillips’s lines of communication, were to challenge Confederate guerrillas’ raiding of the military road between Drywood and Baxter Springs. Blunt lacked significant reserves to send any other unit to Phillips’s aid with the bulk of his command posted to Missouri or in the process of mustering into service. Claiming that

²⁹³ Wiley Britton. *The Civil War on the Border, Volume II*, 77.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 18.

²⁹⁵ Special Orders June 1862 – July 1863, *RG 393, Pt. 2, Vol. 394*, 3354.

the regiment contained 1,000 effectives, Blunt left their disposition to Phillips's discretion.²⁹⁶

Manpower shortages regularly beset Blunt, and his efforts to raise a second Kansas black infantry regiment required that he detail officers from the First Kansas Colored to assist in recruiting the new regiment. Hence Lieutenant Hinton's order to report to Senator Lane to assist in the recruiting effort for the Second Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment.²⁹⁷ A second black infantry regiment could take on garrison and fortification duties and offered increased combat power against the predominantly cavalry-based Confederate forces in Indian Territory. Deploying both regiments south would also ease social pressures in Kansas: the sight of black men marching south to fight for the Union, rather than competing with white men for work in the Kansas war time boom economy would be a relief to many Kansan whites.

Guerrilla warfare and retribution

The Regiment's departure from Fort Scott broke the demoralizing monotony of garrison life and finally distanced it from the "sources" that encouraged desertions and insubordination. Charged with establishing a direct line of communications with Colonel Phillips' forces at Fort Blunt, the regiment departed Fort Scott on May 4, 1863 accompanied by a section of Captain E.A. Smith's Second Kansas Battery. While at Baxter Springs, thirty-five soldiers detailed from across the Regiment and commanded by Captain Armstrong of Company D, would man two twelve-pound howitzers from the

²⁹⁶ Major General Blunt to Colonel Phillips, April 30, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part II: Correspondence*, 262.

²⁹⁷ Special Orders No. 78, April 21, 1863, Special Order No. 83, Headquarters, District of Kansas, April 25, 1863, *RG 94 Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*. Fort Gibson is also referred to as Fort Blunt, Colonel Phillips renaming Fort Gibson in General Blunt's honor.

battery.²⁹⁸ Additional soldiers joined the regiment during May and June, some as recovered convalescents from Lieutenant Colonel Bowles detachment at Fort Scott, others deserters that details recovered and forwarded to the regiment.²⁹⁹

This strong composite artillery and infantry force provided the manpower and firepower to quell Livingston's constant depredations and to protect the vulnerable supply trains as they passed south from Fort Scott through Baxter Springs. A lack of cavalry would limit the regiment's mobility against guerrillas and Confederate forces operating from the south. Their anticipated foe, Major Livingston, commanded an experienced and well-mounted guerrilla force.

Livingston posed a dangerous threat to Union forces and Indian refugees in southwest Missouri and Indian Territory. Colonel Phillips and his Indian Home Guard Regiments skirmished constantly with bushwhackers, especially along their line of communication, the old military road from Fort Scott to Fort Blunt in Indian Territory. Phillips's thinly spread forces provided for the defense of the military road, as well as the protection of Indian refugee families. His success in securing regular supplies influenced Indian loyalty, and by subsisting refugees around Fort Blunt, also encouraged desertions from Confederate Indian forces.³⁰⁰ As a result, guerrillas - amongst them men from Livingston's band - continually attacked Phillips's foraging trains, thus necessitating

²⁹⁸ Special Order No. 28, Camp Ben Butler, June 24, 1863, *RG 94 Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

²⁹⁹ Special Order No. 23, May 3, 1863, Camp Emancipation, *RG 94 Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

³⁰⁰ Colonel Phillips to Major General Curtis, January 19, 1863, February 4, 1863, *OR: Series I, Vol 22, Part II Correspondence*, 61, 96-97, Phillips required a secure wagon route to protect refugees from Neosho as they returned to Indian territory. As early as February, Phillips requested wagons loaded with seeds, rations and ammunition. His soldiers were reduced to foraging to make up shortcomings in rations as Phillips subsisted over a thousand refugees in addition to his soldiers.

Phillips to detach companies to protect the road and refugees.³⁰¹ The incessant demand for cavalry escorts wore down man and beast to the point that Phillips despaired of defending the trains while also contesting control of the territory around Fort Blunt. The First Kansas Colored deployed to protect these routes, and by interdicting Livingston assisted Phillips to conserve his manpower while decreasing his command's exposure to the small unit actions favored by guerrilla bands.

Although Confederate forces knew of the existence of the First Kansas Colored, they had yet to take the measure of the regiment. Colonel Williams wasted little time pitting his men against the bushwhackers. Two days into the regiment's march, Lieutenant M.M. Ehle of the Third Wisconsin Cavalry discovered a guerrilla camp on an island in the Spring River, but he realized that guerrillas outnumbered his command by a factor of four to one. Ehle appealed to Colonel Williams for additional troops, and Williams detailed a force of one hundred men and an artillery piece under Captains Armstrong and Welch to aid Ehle's cavalry in the assault on the camp. Scout Hugh Thompson reported the guerrillas routed and a large number of horses, mules and guns captured.³⁰² Flushed with success, the regiment prepared to conduct operations against secessionists and bushwhackers in the vicinity of Baxter Springs. Success against Livingston created confidence in the men's abilities, and gave newer recruits valuable experience. Livingston would not underestimate the regiment after this raid.

³⁰¹ Colonel Phillips to Major General Curtis, February 4, 1863, February 11, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part II, Correspondence*, 96-97; 108-109.

³⁰² Lieutenant Ehle, 3rd Wisconsin to Colonel Williams, May 6, 1863, *RG 94 Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Hugh Thompson, *Baxter Springs as a Military Post*. (Kansas City: Press of Jerry Ward, 1895), 7-10. Ehle asked Williams to take command of the raid. Thompson knew Williams from the Fifth Kansas Cavalry, and served under Williams's command while the First Kansas Colored operated against bushwhackers in the vicinity of Baxter Springs. His accounts of the action around Baxter Springs form some of the most detailed reports of the regiment's operations and their effect on the region.

Although his regiment's involvement in the attack on Livingston's encampment was not in question, Williams sent a letter to Major Livingston, taunting him to take action. Williams' letter invited Livingston to assemble all bushwhackers of the region at a point of their choosing for battle. Failure to do so, he proclaimed, would result in Livingston's men being considered "thieves and robbers who lurk in secret places, dishonorable murderers unworthy of the fate of chivalrous soldiers engaged in honorable warfare."³⁰³ Williams' language was deliberately provocative and his threat of punishment an invitation to test his men against Livingston's. Ignorant of Livingston's operational reach, Williams failed to perform a thorough reconnaissance of the region. As a result, the regimental encampment at Baxter Springs, Camp Joe Hooker, was established on May 6, in close proximity to Cow Creek.³⁰⁴ Unknown to Williams it was also located within easy striking distance of Livingston's forces. Indeed,, the guerrillas leader's camp literally sat at Livingston's doorstep in Shoal Gulch, less than five miles from the encampment.³⁰⁵

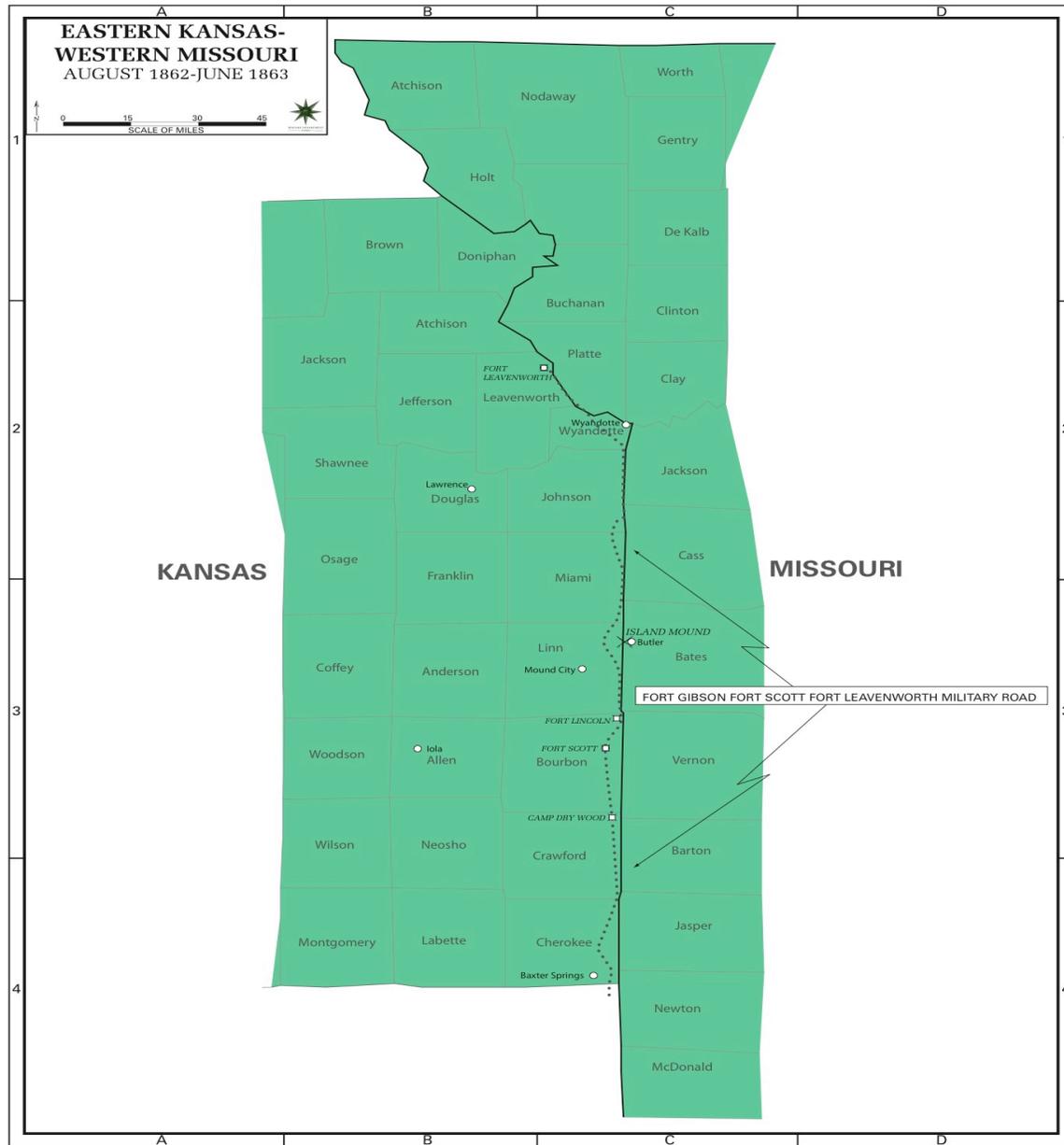
Livingston possessed significant advantages over the First Kansas Colored including mobility, familiarity with the region, and regularly updated intelligence from his Confederate commanders and local sympathizers. Livingston also received regular intelligence about the regiment's movements from the women of the area, and in particular from Mrs. Fountain, who lived within half of a mile of Livingston's camp in

³⁰³ Letter Williams to Livingston, 11 May 1863, Camp Joe Hooker, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Voluntary Organizations, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

³⁰⁴ Hugh Thompson, *Baxter Springs as a Military Post*, 10.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 18-20.

Shoal Gulch. Ostensibly a non-combatant, she was Livingston’s choice of intermediary between his command and the First Kansas Colored.³⁰⁶



Map 3: Baxter Springs, Sherwood and Cabin Creek

³⁰⁶ Hugh Thompson, *Baxter Springs as a Military Post*, 18-20.

Livingston's spies provided early intelligence that confirmed the regiment's lack of cavalry support, and he tailored his attacks accordingly, forcing the regiment to react to his ambushes and raids on his terms. Perhaps in recognition of his regiment's shortcomings, and the potential for attack with little notice, Williams required all soldiers and officers to fall out at general call with full equipment and arms ready for action. Williams also imposed noise restrictions and threatened stiff penalties for any not found in their quarters or talking after tattoo.³⁰⁷ Doubtless these measures increased Williams's command readiness for immediate action, and eased the duty of the camp pickets who listened for activity from the darkness beyond the camp's perimeter. However, Livingston continued to keep the initiative against the regiment, and planned his attacks carefully.

The regiment wasted no time in raiding the surrounding communities and Livingston's secessionist supporters, and by mid-May the regiment guarded a large number of prisoners, both civilian secessionists and guerrillas. Williams held the secessionist civilians as hostages for the safe treatment of his soldiers as a contingency "should any fall into rebel hands."³⁰⁸ The uncertain fate of his soldiers if captured weighed heavily on Williams's correspondence with Livingston, and forced Williams to adopt harsh measures to reduce the effectiveness of Livingston's guerrilla band.

Williams's earliest raids set the tone for his relationship with any suspected of providing aid to Livingston or the south. In one raid, a detachment of a hundred men

³⁰⁷ General Orders No. 4, Camp Hooker, May 13, 1863, *RG 94 Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

³⁰⁸ Richard Hinton, "The War in the Far West," May 27, 1863, *The New York Times*. By May 17, 1863 Hinton claimed the regiment held a dozen bushwhackers and twenty-five or thirty prominent disloyal citizens.

under Major Ward and Captain Graton arrived at Grand Falls on Shoal Creek and confiscated farm machinery, mules and horses from the vicinity. Soon afterwards, after two women rode into their lines, Ward detained them after they brazenly claimed that they were there to count the soldiers for Livingston. Ward confiscated their horses and calmly informed them their horses would be withheld from them, then released the women to return to their homes after giving his troop numbers at three times their actual count. When the detachment prepared to leave, he told the women they could claim saddles and animals at Baxter Springs.³⁰⁹ Colonel Williams also reacted harshly towards secessionist sympathizers, and after an elderly man of pro-slavery sentiments attempted to reclaim his wagon and ox team from the regimental camp at Baxter Springs, Williams threatened to shoot him unless he left his camp.³¹⁰ The regiment's harsh treatment of civilians infuriated Livingston; Ward and Williams raided his flour mill, checked his intelligence gathering efforts, abused women and the elderly, and challenged his authority in the region.

After receiving intelligence on the regiment's latest raid, Livingston assembled his forces for a clash of arms. The report he forwarded to his Confederate superiors confirmed all the Confederates suspected and feared from black soldiers. In response to Williams's raids, Livingston waited for a chance to reassert his control of the region and kill the hated black soldiers. The opportunity occurred when Livingston's spies observed a detail of forty black and white soldiers of the First Kansas Colored under the command of Captains Ward and Armstrong, engaged in foraging at Mrs. Rador's farm on Centre Creek Prairie near Sherwood, Missouri. Livingston ordered sixty-seven of his best raiders

³⁰⁹ Hugh Thompson, *Baxter Springs as a Military Post*, 10-12.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

assembled to destroy the foraging party. The foraging party's inexperience played into Livingston's attack plan, and when the officers separated to post pickets, the conditions were set for an ambush. Ignorant of any danger as Livingston's men gathered for an attack, Lieutenant Edgerton of the First Kansas Colored ordered a wagon driven into the farmyard, and arms stacked. Twenty unarmed and unsuspecting men commenced foraging and threw corn out the windows.³¹¹ Thus distracted and unaware of their surroundings, and more critically, separated from their weapons, the men in the house offered little resistance to Livingston's attack as his riders emerged from the timber line a few hundred yards from the detail.

The survivors of the detachment reported the shameful events to Colonel Williams; Captain Graton, in a letter to his wife dated May 22, 1863 conveyed a sense of the confusion that swept over the foraging party. Graton wrote, "A party of our boys got badly whipped on the afternoon of the 18th," as the attack commenced, "the white officers and mounted artillerymen fled on horses while the dismounted black infantry, separated from their arms and on foot, were killed."³¹² The fate of the dismounted soldiers decided almost from the start of the engagement, Livingston's men slaughtered them as they scattered in the hope of escaping his hard riding guerrillas.

Livingston pressed his attack successfully against the divided soldiers of the detachment, and then pursued the remnants for eight miles to the Spring River crossing. The regiments' losses consisted of twenty-three black and seven white soldiers killed,

³¹¹ Hugh Thompson, *Baxter Springs as a Military Post*, 14.

³¹² John Graton "Sherwood letter," May 22, 1863, from Camp Hooker, Baxter Springs, Kansas, John Graton Collection, MS 913.02, Microfilm Division, Kansas State Historical Society (hereafter referred to as Graton Collection); Hugh Thompson, *Baxter Springs as a Military Post*, 10-14. Graton and Thompson disagree on numbers of bushwhackers, but Thompson was at Sherwood and as a scout was better qualified to estimate numbers of bushwhackers with which he was familiar. Graton's estimate of over two hundred guerrillas is more than three times that of Thompson.

and the complete loss of the detachment's mules and wagons, as well as the seizure of weapons and a large amount of ammunition. It is irrefutable that the detachment, denied the leadership of the fleeing officers and separated from their weapons, offered little resistance. Instead of standing and dying in common cause with their soldiers, the flight of the white officers set off a panic amongst the dismounted majority. Abolitionist sentiments evaporated in the face of imminent annihilation. Perhaps the only factor that saved the detachment from complete destruction was the division of the party into two groups, which allowed some of each to escape while Livingston's men pursued individuals tenaciously, stopping to execute those soldiers they encountered. Livingston's men responded in the manner of southern men against the abomination of armed slaves in uprising against their masters, and stealing the property of a good secessionist woman: no quarter was offered. As the regimental survivors straggled back into camp, the First Kansas Colored responded swiftly, and mobilized immediately for retaliation.

The regiment set out at dusk with five companies of infantry and some cavalry from the train escort to determine the fate of the soldiers at Sherwood. After marching through the night the regiment arrived at Sherwood at daybreak. Although discovering the stripped body of a white artilleryman on the roadside leading to Sherwood, the fate of the black soldiers remained unclear. Unspoken doubts about the treatment of black soldiers and their status as potential prisoners resolved when the regiment spotted the thirteen mutilated bodies of the black soldiers who lay unburied where they fell. The hastily abandoned Radnor home became a holding area for the dead. As a detail placed the bodies inside the Radnor home, the cavalry brought in an old man named John Bishop, a

bushwhacker who was recognized as being a paroled prisoner from Fort Lincoln. Bishop's appearance left little question of involvement for many of the observers from the First Kansas; a bloody shirt and government boots marked his complicity. Colonel Williams directed the prisoner be marched into the Radnor house, and executed for his involvement in the murder of the black troops. The house was then burned.³¹³ Williams' revenge did not halt with Bishop's execution, the town of Sherwood also paid a frightful price for its complicity in past guerrilla raids.

The regiment's soldiers combed the surrounding area for homes and burned a dozen homes after permitting the inhabitants to evacuate. Upon return to Baxter Springs and for several days afterward, black soldiers rejoined their comrades, some having escaped by hiding in the brush overnight. Captain Graton reported expedition's loss as "thirteen men black men killed, three prisoners, five or six horses lost, about twenty-three mules and harness lost, five wagons, about twenty-three guns & equipment, mostly the result of the want of foresight."³¹⁴ He also understood the significance of the event and its location; the savage exchange occurred in a remote area where news of the massacre and its aftermath would not soon be revealed to other border area inhabitants. The skirmish at Sherwood proved Williams burned for revenge, and demanded respect for his men. Any violations merited immediate and overwhelming retaliation. A more circumspect Graton privately refuted the official May monthly report of a heroic stand during which the men fought well before being overwhelmed, and that the fallen soldiers were buried, not

³¹³ John Graton, "Sherwood Letter," Graton Collection, Kansas State Historical Society.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

cremated.³¹⁵ The town of Sherwood would no longer harbor Livingston's band, for it no longer existed.

Livingston reported all contacts with the regiment to his Confederate chain of command, and characterized First Kansas Colored's response as brutal. Livingston's report contained all the elements of the archetypical "savage slave" stereotype: murder, robbery, and cruel, seemingly uncontrolled acts of unspeakable vileness. Livingston's report filtered the events through Southern racial constructs, but confirmed Williams's willingness to engage in battle, and if denied that opportunity, his readiness to punish those that supported the secessionist cause. The black soldiers also violated the accepted conventions of warfare by murdering Bishop, a civilian, and then immolating his body with those of the dead black soldiers in Mrs. Radnor's home.³¹⁶ Burning Bishop with the black soldiers represented a dire insult, as did the regiment's threats against a Southern white woman. To Confederate officers and sympathizers, the black abolitionist regiment constituted a dangerous threat imbued with a powerful thirst for vengeance.

The fate of Williams's men at Sherwood convinced him of the merits of taking white secessionist prisoners. Livingston's attack at Sherwood demonstrated his ability to counter Williams's expeditions, and when informed of the execution of Bishop and his cremation in Mrs. Rador's house, Livingston warned Williams that his barbaric actions invited retribution. However, he also shared his possession of prisoners, white and black, and offered to exchange the white soldiers, but not the black. According to Livingston, "I cannot recognize them as Soljers and as consequence I will hav to hold them as

³¹⁵ John Graton, "Sherwood Letter," Graton Collection, Kansas State Historical Society.

³¹⁶ "Livingston to Major General Sterling Price, May 28, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I: Reports*, 322.

contraband of ware.”³¹⁷ Livingston was acting in accordance with Confederate war policy toward black soldiers and offered no exchange or parole. The First Kansas Colored soldiers would not be treated as soldiers, a declaration that infuriated Williams and invited an escalation in invective that Williams’ expressed in his reply to Livingston “Bishop was executed for shooting a bound and helpless soldier. Conversely, his soldiers had been beaten to death after surrender or capture, ‘club bruised and brain bespattered, and their bodies mutilated,’” and as a result Williams acted as he saw fit.³¹⁸ Williams threatened retribution against the Confederate prisoners in his control if his soldiers were not returned unharmed. If twenty days elapsed between the letter and no return of his men, Williams stated, “I shall assume them murdered or sent to the slave pens of the south, and considered dead.”³¹⁹ Williams declared war on Livingston, and prepared for a contest that recognized no quarter for Livingston’s men if none extended to his. Williams firmly asserted his soldiers rights as lawful combatants and demanded treatment as such. Williams took stock of his unit, their morale, and ordered the regiment to move to a more defensible location.

Recognizing the regiment’s exposed position at Camp Joe Hooker, the regiment chose a camp location in the timber near Baxter Springs. Williams named the camp “Camp Ben Butler,” the encampment described as “slightly fortified from the head of one ravine to the head of another facing to the prairie to the southwest; the timber was felled around

³¹⁷ Letter Livingston to Williams, Camp Jackson, 20 May, 1863, RG 94: AGO, Record Book, 79th USCT, Vol 2 of 4. Livingston acted entirely within the guidance provided by his Confederate superiors, and contrary to claims of no quarter for captured whites in service with black regiments, did not kill white prisoners outright. Black prisoners, as property, returned to the control of the Confederacy. However, the large number of executed black soldiers at Sherwood indicates a pronounced reluctance to take blacks as prisoners.

³¹⁸ Williams to Livingston, May 20, 1863 from Camp Ben Butler, *RG 94: AGO, Record Book, 79th USCT, Vol 2 of 4; Official Military History of Kansas Regiments*, First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry, 410.

³¹⁹ Letter Williams to Livingston, Camp Joe Hooker, 21 May, 1863, *RG 94: AGO, Record Book, 79th USCT, Vol 2 of 4*.

the bluffs,” and Hinton claimed that the regiment’s soldiers constructed a blockhouse to augment the regiment’s tents.³²⁰ Despite this new location, Livingston’s bushwhackers attacked a small detachment of twenty-five men and some wagons under Captains Macy and Welch en route from Fort Scott at Brush Creek. Williams’ timely reaction and a spirited defense saved the train from destruction and a repeat of Sherwood.³²¹

Livingston’s intermediary delivered a mocking letter to Williams that in addition to informing him of his dishonorable actions being reported to Confederate authorities, that the hard pressed train did not fight against Livingston’s men: if his men had attacked the train, it would have been destroyed, “a sure thing.”³²² Livingston demonstrated to Williams he could strike with impunity at the camp’s patrols and supply trains, and further impressed Williams with the need for constant alertness.

Williams continued to demand Livingston accord his men the same treatment as white prisoners, and further clarified his position by issuing a threat to Livingston and his supporters in clear, unambiguous terms. If Livingston would not stand and fight, Williams would turn his attentions to depriving him of support, and drive out Confederate sympathizers regardless of sex. Williams also hanged a prisoner in retaliation for the murder of one of his men.³²³

Williams threatened the supporters of Livingston’s band because the guerrilla leader proved elusive, and refused to meet Williams on his terms. Striking against civilians in lieu of military targets bore the stamp of the abolitionists of “Bleeding Kansas,” and

³²⁰ Hugh Thompson, *Baxter Springs as a Military Post*, 20; Richard Hinton, “The War in the Far West,” May 27, 1863, *The New York Times*.

³²¹ Hugh Thompson, *Baxter Springs as a Military Post*, 20.

³²² Letter Livingston to Williams to, Camp Diamond Grove, Missouri, 27 May, 1863, RG 94: AGO, Record Book, 79th USCT, Vol 2

³²³ Williams to Livingston, Camp Ben Butler, May 26, 1863; Williams to Livingston, June 8, 1863, RG 94: AGO, Record Book, 79th USCT, Vol 2.

offered Williams one method by which to bring the war to the secessionists by evicting them and burning their homes. He also reiterated his intent to arrest and hold prominent rebel sympathizers as hostages to guarantee the safety of his men.³²⁴

Livingston rejected Williams' terms and questioned Williams' personal honor and manhood, as well as that of his officers, labeling them "a lot of low down thieving white men of Such honer and laurels as that I as not wish to be the gainer of," and the proposal to fight the regiment on even terms as beneath contempt, "I would suppose that men of your stripe would call it honorable for white men and jentalmen to eaquillize themselves to com out hand to hand against a lot of eatheuoppieons."³²⁵ Both men were passionate believers in their causes, and the feud between Williams and Livingston foreshadowed future interactions with Confederate forces.

Williams considered Livingston a criminal. The treatment accorded his men at Sherwood ample evidence of Livingston's own lawless and savage nature, and the perverse racial views of Southerners. Williams asserted his men enlisted in the service of the United States, and that the Government would punish those who violated honorable warfare with acts of massacre. His personal response was to threaten to meet Livingston "hand for hand," and that he would "trump" any action of Livingston with harsher measures.³²⁶ While Livingston and Williams fought their private war, knowledge of their skirmishes filtered down to the white Union and Confederate soldiers around Fort Gibson.

³²⁴ The New York Times, May 27, 1863, "The War in the Far West."; Wiley Britton, *Civil War on The Border, Vol. II*, 78.

³²⁵ Livingston to Williams, June 13, 1863, *RG 94: AGO, Record Book, 79th USCT, Vol. 2.*

³²⁶ Ibid.

Colonel Phillips regularly sent couriers to Williams, as early as May 15, Phillips directed Williams to send men to escort the supply train from Fort Scott, the supplies more necessary than ever for Fort Gibson. Phillips claimed that his men despite laboring hard on fortifications around Fort Gibson subsisted on little more than two ounces of flour per day.³²⁷ Despite Phillips's orders for Williams to hasten his regiment's movement south, Williams remained at Baxter Springs, and his escalating confrontations with Livingston threatened to immobilize Williams's command as he negotiated for prisoners and sought retribution. White prisoner exchanges continued despite a lack of similar treatment for black soldiers. Williams's obligations extended to black and white soldiers, and he faced censure, if not worse, if he failed to exchange his white prisoners for those of Livingston. Williams remained in order to reclaim his white artillerymen and Unionist white farmers, while powerless to prevent the execution of his black soldiers, a distinction that rankled with Williams.

Union soldiers at Fort Gibson knew of the guerrilla's attacks on the First Kansas Colored and expected that when Livingston offered no quarter to black prisoners, that he could not expect any different treatment for his own captured men. Soldiers expected that either side would take no prisoners, and that "the enemy may be inventing the means of his own destruction."³²⁸ Confederate forces in Indian Territory also knew about the regiment before it began its march south, in large part due to Livingston's reports. An escaped slave made his way back into Union lines at Fort Gibson, and reported Confederate indignation that the Union employed armed former slaves against them. Wiley Britton observed that many southern officers threatened no quarter should black

³²⁷ Phillips to Blunt, May 15, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part II, Correspondence*, 283.

³²⁸ Wiley Britton, *Civil War on The Border, Vol. II*, 243.

prisoners fall into their hands. Conversely, Britton looked forward to the regiment's arrival in Indian Territory, and he expressed the desire to witness ebony soldiers in blue uniforms with fixed bayonets engage the enemy, and "prick his tender white skin."³²⁹ Their arrival was much anticipated by Union and Confederate forces alike, the novelty of a black regiment and the challenge it presented to white authority almost irresistible.

Despite Phillips's claims to the contrary, Williams attempted to move his command south and fought with Fort Scott to obtain wagon transport for supplies and equipment. Williams repeatedly requested additional wagons from the Quartermaster at Fort Scott, suggesting that a train be made available for his regiment. Williams claimed over 10,000 pounds of ordnance and 15,000 pounds of supplies required transport, but was informed that his regulation five wagons were all that could be spared.³³⁰ The loss of five wagons at Sherwood effectively crippled Williams's logistical situation until they were replaced. Although the Regiment was authorized six wagons, in actuality only five were available to transport cargo, one being reserved by the Regimental Surgeon for the exclusive transport of medical stores and equipment. Colonel Williams' frustration is therefore understandable considering that he estimated that he needed to transport at least 30,000 pounds of stores, but with his allotted wagons possessed capacity to transport only 18,650 pounds; each wagon team could carry 2,800 pounds if using a four-horse team, and 3,730 pounds if equipped with a six-mule team. In addition to cargo, the wagons also carried

³²⁹ Wiley Britton. *Memoirs of the Rebellion on the Border, 1863*, 276-278, 311; Wiley Britton. *The Civil War on the Border, Volume II*, 78, 92-93.

³³⁰ Letter Williams to Captain Loring, Camp Ben Butler, May 31, 1863; Letter to Captain Insley, Fort Scott, June 8, 1863, *RG 94: RG 94 Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*. Major Curtis informed Williams that his men should be prepared to carry subsistence in haversacks, hardly a suitable response to Williams' letter and Phillips' demands.

five to ten day's grain for the teams if forage was unavailable.³³¹ While Williams fought for transportation, Phillips waited, his supply situation growing steadily more desperate with each passing day.

Blunt assuaged Phillips's fears by ordering a train south from Fort Scott. Blunt assured Phillips that a train was en route with an escort of sixteen hundred troops including the First Kansas Colored. Blunt believed that dispatching the First Kansas Colored would also inspire confidence in Phillips and his soldiers while Union forces prepared for a renewal of hostilities in Indian Territory.³³² The delay was not intentional on Williams' part; his lack of transport halted the regiment's departure, and therefore Williams waited until the train arrived at Neosho before moving south. The fifty miles between Baxter Springs and Cabin Creek would be traversed in company of the wagon train.

Livingston continued his attacks, brazenly attacking the camp while the majority of the regiment was in the vicinity of Turkey Creek seeking Livingston's forces. Williams in a letter to Major Blair, the commanding officer at Fort Scott, expressed Williams's quandary: search for Livingston, or react to the anticipated attack of over a thousand Confederates from the south. Williams' lack of cavalry complicated this conflict. Livingston gloated about the ease of the attack and bragged that he would strike again with equal ease.³³³ Livingston's attacks delayed Williams, and created uncertainty about the whereabouts of the Confederate forces Colonel Phillips advised him were heading north to attack the wagon train heading south from Fort Scott.

³³¹Hanna Risch, 420 - 422.

³³² Phillips to Blunt, 20 June, 1863, Blunt to Phillips, June 26, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22*, 331, 337.

³³³ *Letter Livingston to Williams, Camp Lonely*, 8 June, 1863, RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, Record Book, 79th USCT, Vol 2 of 4; *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part II Correspondence*, 314; Blunt to Major-General Schofield, June 26, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part II Correspondence*, 337.

Cabin Creek

Williams increasingly expressed frustration in his letters that Livingston's attacks and the demands to march south placed him in a difficult situation. Abandoning supplies was not an acceptable alternative, but relief soon came from an unforeseen quarter, and after receiving orders to meet a train coming from Fort Scott, Williams prepared to move his command. On 24 June he reported his readiness to march and explained that transportation slowed his command, not personal intransigence.³³⁴ Although Major General Blunt specifically ordered Williams on June 16, 1863 to refrain from uniting the First Kansas Colored with the Second Colorado to escort the wagon train south from Baxter Springs, Williams chose to ignore that order, because it was "intended to prevent the uniting of colored troops with white, and an officer of colored troops to command white troops."³³⁵ Perhaps, but joining the wagon train also increased Union numbers and potentially saved Williams from piecemeal annihilation by the large Confederate forces reported to be in the vicinity. Despite safety in numbers, there was also danger, as a wagon train on the march spread out to find forage for its animals; it in doing so became vulnerable to attack.³³⁶ The size of the command and the large number of wagons took four days to cover the fifty miles from Baxter Springs to Cabin Creek, a rate of a little over twelve miles per day. The train, if ambushed while in transit, offered a vulnerable and highly lucrative target. The shortage of alternative roads clearly designated the

³³⁴ Colonel Williams to Major General Blunt, 24 June 1863, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, Record Book, 79th USCT, Vol 2 of 4*.

³³⁵ "Lieutenant Colonel Moonlight to Colonel J.M. Williams", June 18, 1863, and "Note by General Williams," December 1, 1891, *Negro in the Military Service*, 1130.

³³⁶ Emmett M. Essin. *Shavetails and Bell Sharps: The History of the Army Mule* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 72.

wagon train's route to all combatants, the old military road to Fort Gibson and the ford at Cabin Creek.

The military situation at Fort Gibson depended on re-supply from Fort Scott, and by June Federal forces endured constant Confederate raids on Colonel Phillips's stock and horse herds, which in turn diminished his ability to mount a defense of the vicinity of the fort, despite stout fortifications. Defending the wagon train stretched Phillips's resources to the limits. Colonel Phillips forces subsisted on short rations, and an outbreak of cholera circulated amongst the refugees and soldiers of the fort. The survival of Phillips's command depended on the arrival of the wagon train.³³⁷ The train's arrival meant sustenance and its capture by Confederates, ruin. Therefore, on June 20, desperate to find and safely escort the train to Fort Gibson, Phillips sent out Major Foreman's column.

Contrary to Phillips's belief, the vital wagon train from Fort Scott marched in company with a significant number of escorts; General Blunt increased the Fort Scott escort to six partially mounted companies of the Second Colorado Infantry under Colonel Dodd, and a section of the Second Kansas battery. In addition, Company B, Third Wisconsin Cavalry, Company C, Ninth Kansas Cavalry, and Company B, Fourteenth Kansas Cavalry, under the command of Captain John Stewart, Company C, Ninth Kansas Cavalry completed the escort's cavalry element. Blunt took seriously the reports of a thousand-man guerrilla band under Livingston and Coffee.³³⁸ The train proceeded south, and joined with Major Foreman and his Third Indian Regiment at Neosho. The First Kansas Colored overtook the train on 26 June, and Colonel Williams offered his

³³⁷ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War on the Border, Volume II*, 94.

³³⁸ OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I Reports, 341-342; Richard Hinton, "Cheering News from the Frontier," the *New York Times*, July 20, 1863.

regiment's assistance.³³⁹ He also assumed command of the train escort as the ranking officer in direct defiance of General Blunt's orders not to unite the commands.

The union of the separate elements into a single train escort increased its offensive capability. By adding additional artillery and infantry, there was created a formation that Lieutenant Benjamin Van Horn described the escort as the odds and ends of everything, noting that "there were two companies of the Kansas 2nd, 3 co[mpanies], Col[orado], 2nd, 4 co[mpanies], of the 3rd Indian under command of Major Forman. We put everything in site into the ranks, and the First Nigger, 900 strong...when our men were all counted we had 2300, with four 12-pounders, two of them rifled, and two howitzers"³⁴⁰The combined force possessed infantry, cavalry, and artillery enough to defend the wagon train and fight through the Confederate forces moving north to ambush it in the vicinity of Cabin Creek. Livingston reported the First Kansas Colored's departure to his superiors, therefore the Confederates expected the black regiment, but not the mounted Colorado troops or artillery.

Suffering from a severe shortage of rations and subsisting off foraged foodstuffs, Confederate forces viewed Federal wagon trains as both welcome sources of supply and important military targets, the denial of their loads contributing to weakening the ability of Federal forces to pursue operations against Confederate forces. When General Samuel Cooper received report of the departure of the wagon train from Fort Scott to Fort Gibson in June, he dispatched Colonel Stand Watie and his regiment to command the crossing at Cabin Creek. Joining Watie's forces would be a second column of 1,500 men and three

³³⁹ Report of Colonel James M. Williams, First Kansas Colored Infantry, "Engagement at Cabin Creek, Indian Territory, Report Number 2," *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I: Reports*, 380.

³⁴⁰ Benjamin Van Horn *Autobiographical letter to Mr. George Martin*, Secretary, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka Kansas), 22; Richard Hinton, "Cheering News from the Frontier" *The New York Times*, July 26, 1863.

artillery pieces under General William Cabell.³⁴¹ Brigadier Generals Cabell and Cooper were ordered to meet at the Grand Saline and capture the train before the estimated 2,000 men (including the First Kansas Colored) under General Blunt at Baxter Springs could march south. However, Confederate commanders acted from the belief that the train would not start south before 29 June due to poor roads.³⁴² Thus constituted, the Confederates deployed their forces in the belief that time and a compliant environment would support this plan.

Although delayed at Hudson's Ford on the Neosho River from June 26 to June 29 by high water, the train's progress to Fort Gibson was unopposed until Lieutenant Luke F. Parsons of Major Foreman's Third Indian Regiment encountered rebel scouts under Stand Watie in the vicinity of Timbered Hill, about ten miles from Cabin Creek. In a brief skirmish between twenty Cherokees under Lieutenant Parsons, and approximately thirty of Stand Watie's picket, the Confederates suffered four dead and three prisoners, and the Third Indian Regiment confirmed that the crossing at Cabin Creek was under Confederate control.³⁴³ However, two Confederate forces in the vicinity of Cabin Creek remained separated; General Cabell with 1,500 cavalry waited on the east side of Grand River, restrained by the high water from the recent rains. Colonel Stand Watie's force on the west side of Grand River consisted of the First Cherokee Mounted Rifles, First Creek Mounted Volunteers, a detachment of the Twenty-Ninth Texas Cavalry, and a

³⁴¹Dale, Edward E. and Litton, Gaston. *Cherokee Cavaliers* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 131.

³⁴²Wiley Britton. *The Civil War on the Border, Volume II*. 78, 92-93; Lieutenant Duvall to Brigadier General Cabell, June 29, 1863, and Duvall to Brigadier General Cooper, June 29, 1863; Report of John A. Foreman, Third Indian Home Guards. Fort Blunt, July 5, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part II, Correspondence*, 893-894.

³⁴³George West, Report, July 6, 1863, in (Golden) *Colorado Transcript*, April 4, 1877, as quoted in Edwards, Whit. *The Prairie was on Fire: Eyewitness Accounts of the Civil War in the Indian Territory* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 2001), 57; Wiley Britton, *Civil War on the Border, Vol. 2*, 95; *OR Series 1, Volume 22, Part 1 Reports*, 382.

detachment of Martin's Partisan Rangers. The swollen rivers and recent rains separated Watie's forces from their artillery that sat trapped on the opposite bank of the Grand River. Lieutenant Van Horn believed that the heavy rains that fell after the train crossed the Neosho River prevented Confederate pursuit, and prevented Confederate forces under General Cabell from uniting with Watie's command.³⁴⁴ The odds between the opposing commands changed in favor of the Federals, the Confederate forces prevented from uniting, and the Union wagon train escort unexpectedly increased by the addition of the First Kansas Colored and Major Foreman's cavalry. Both groups expected combat, but the overflowing rivers disrupted timetables, and knowledge of their fall compelled the Federal forces to advance as fast as possible to avoid being caught in a two-part Confederate attack from the front and rear of the train.

The fear of being caught with the command trapped against Cabin Creek, and under attack from two directions shaped Williams's tactical plan. Lieutenant Van Horn observed, "Cabin Creek was the only stream before us that we had any fears of and we knew that it would commence to fall before we got to it. We made all speed possible in the water and mud and reached Cabin Creek late in the afternoon. It had run down considerable, but was still so high that we thought it doubtful about it being safe to attempt to cross."³⁴⁵ The water constituted the Confederate's first line of defense, but the southern bank of the creek also held unseen dangers.

The Confederates prepared well chosen defenses, a series of rifle pits constructed of felled trees of piled stones, and dug into the thickly covered southern bank of Cabin

³⁴⁴ Benjamin Van Horn *Autobiographical letter to Mr. George Martin*, Secretary, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka Kansas), 23-24.

³⁴⁵ Benjamin Van Horn *Autobiographical letter to Mr. George Martin*, Secretary, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka Kansas), 23-24.

Creek, amongst timber that stretched for about a mile on the southern bank.

Camouflaged by the thick brushwood that extended down to the water, and commanding a series of thinned rifle lanes in the brush, the fifteen hundred Indian and Texan troops under General Stand Watie prepared to stop any attempt to cross the sixty yard-wide Cabin Creek. Arrayed in the brush and concealed from observation, Confederate cavalry could wield their short-range shotguns and muskets to good effect if the unsuspecting train escort chose to attack piecemeal. Situated further in the brush abatis and pits completed the defenses.³⁴⁶

The opening action commenced around noon on July 1, 1863 when soldiers under the Third Indian Home Guard skirmished with Confederate pickets, killing three and capturing three, and forcing the rest to retreat across the creek. After an exchange of small arms fire against the well-camouflaged Confederates concealed by the thick brush that extended to the banks of the creek. Williams ordered one of his twelve-pound howitzers and both of Major Foreman's mountain howitzers to shell the opposite banks of the creek to support an advance by the Third Wisconsin Cavalry. Hinton claimed that the commander of Company B, a man he claimed was a "Pro-Southern Democrat," protested that "d-d niggers or Injuns" should conduct the advance, but ultimately followed Williams's orders. After enemy fire repulsed the Wisconsin cavalry, Colonel Williams rashly declared "he could find men to make the attempt," and led five companies of the First Kansas Colored into the creek. The infantry quickly discovered that despite their willingness to swim the distance, the water stymied their attempt, and

³⁴⁶ Ethan Earle, *Journal*, 35; Richard Hinton, "The Cheering News from the Frontier" *The New York Times*, July 26, 1863.

returned to the northern bank.³⁴⁷ Undoubtedly Hinton, who was not present at Cabin Creek, may have embellished his report. However, his reporting did confirm that the river and not any tactical incompetence on the part of the First Kansas Colored prevented the Federal forces from achieving a successful crossing.

Unable to cross while the water remained high, the Federal forces reformed and picketed the north bank with companies of the First Kansas Colored against the return of Confederate scouts. While the Union commanders debated the next course of action, the fighting denigrated into skirmishing across the creek.³⁴⁸ The first day's action ended with the Union forces withdrawing to a point about two miles from the ford, where the Lieutenant Van Horn established a wagon laager about with approximately half of the command as security, while the remainder guarded the ford during the night. Later that evening Williams, Dodd and Foreman conducted a careful reconnaissance of the opposite bank and then held a council to determine how to assault the opposite bank the next day.³⁴⁹

Realizing the vital importance of suppressing the southern bank's defenders, Williams dictated a plan of attack that utilized his artillery advantage. On the morning of the second assault, Williams ordered Lieutenant Wilson of the Third Kansas Battery to deploy his two six pounders to a point to the extreme left and below the ford, Captain Armstrong of the First Kansas Colored sited one twelve pounder howitzer and one

³⁴⁷ Richard Hinton "Cheering News from the Frontier", *The New York Times*, July 26, 1863.

³⁴⁸ Benjamin Van Horn *Autobiographical letter to Mr. George Martin*, Secretary, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka Kansas), 23-24; OR: Report of Colonel James M. Williams, First Kansas Colored Infantry, "Engagement at Cabin Creek, Indian Territory, Report Number 2, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I: Reports*: 380; Report of John A. Foreman, Third Indian Home Guards. Fort Blunt, July 5, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part II, Correspondence*, 893-894; Ethan Earle, *Journal*, 36.

³⁴⁹ Report of Colonel James M. Williams, First Kansas Colored Infantry, "Engagement at Cabin Creek, Indian Territory, Report Number 2," *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I: Reports*, 380; Benjamin Van Horn *Autobiographical letter to Mr. George Martin*, Secretary, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka Kansas), 23-24.

mountain howitzer in the center of the line, not more than 200 yards from the enemy, at extreme range from the defending Confederates mix of shotguns and muskets, and Foreman's additional twelve pounder assumed a firing position on the right. Thus positioned to dominate the ford site, the guns provided supporting fire for the assault by firing a combination of canister and grape shot.³⁵⁰ Another essential element to consider for a successful crossing, the bottomland near the ford lay partially submerged, and the mix of water and scrub posed an additional check to cavalry maneuver. Although the creek depth had dropped about three and a half feet, the water exceeded the axles of the wagons, and threatened to ruin the cargoes if the command attempted a high water crossing. Van Horn captured the complexity of the tactical dilemma, and the impact of the terrain on tactics each side would employ "on the south side it is bottom land densely covered with small timber and brush, and a mile and half further south there is a bayou puts into the Grand River, ...there was only a narrow wagon road cut through the brush on the other side, it was just like a lane."³⁵¹ The Confederates concentrated their forces in the brush at the river's edge and unless they were routed, the attack could falter mid-stream. However, if the Federal forces gained the southern bank, they could force Watie's men into the bottomland, and trap them against the river to their rear.

The following morning, after reorganizing the command's forces, the Federals attempted a second attack on the ford, well aware that failure to seize the crossing could place the train in danger of being captured by a united Confederate army if the waters

³⁵⁰Report of Colonel James M. Williams, First Kansas Colored Infantry, "Engagement at Cabin Creek, Indian Territory, Report Number 2," *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I: Reports*, 380 The effect of the artillery cannot be overestimated. The guns suppressed the defenders, shredded their protective tree cover, and demoralized the defenders through the course of the battle by heavy fire. ³⁵⁰

³⁵¹ Benjamin Van Horn *Autobiographical letter to Mr. George Martin*, Secretary, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka Kansas), 23-24.

continued to fall. Day two of the battle commenced with a larger assault element attempting to seize the ford. Williams, as overall commander of the Union forces at Cabin Creek, configured the Union forces with one company of the Third Indian Home Guards under Major Foreman in the lead, followed by an infantry-heavy element led by Lieutenant Colonel Bowles and five companies of the First Kansas Colored along with the mounted elements of the Third Battalion of the Second Colorado Infantry. Three companies of cavalry, including one company of the Ninth Kansas Cavalry followed the infantry to exploit any breakthrough, and the rest of the Third Indian Home Guards secured the river above and below the ford.³⁵² Artillery fire opened the attack with shell and canister beginning at 8 A.M.; a forty-minute barrage intended to rout the enemy from their defensive rifle pits in the brush along the southern bank. Major Foreman led the first element into the creek, but was met with fierce small arms fire that struck Foreman in the back and neck and repulsed his cavalry. Williams halted the infantry at the waters edge and diverted three companies to the right where they commenced with musketry against the opposite bank, and were soon joined by another twenty minutes of artillery fire against the entrenched Confederates. Company C of the Ninth Kansas followed the First Kansas into the creek. Williams led two companies of infantry at the double quick to the water; the infantry assaulted with fixed bayonets and held their cartridge boxes held high above the chest-high water of the creek. Advancing resolutely under supporting small arms and artillery fire, the infantry successfully crossed under fire and after mounting the southern bank, routed Watie's Confederates from the brush.³⁵³

³⁵² Report of Colonel James M. Williams, First Kansas Colored Infantry, "Engagement at Cabin Creek, Indian Territory, Report Number 2," *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I: Reports*, 380.

³⁵³ Report of Colonel James M. Williams, First Kansas Colored Infantry, "Engagement at Cabin Creek, Indian Territory, Report Number 2," *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I: Reports*, 380-381.

Exploiting the hole made by the infantry, Captain Stewart and two companies of the Ninth Kansas maneuvered to the right of the First Kansas Colored, and encountered heavy fire from the enemy situated in the timber at the edge of the prairie. Stewart ordered a charge against the tree line and concurrently, Lieutenant Philbrick's C Company of the Ninth Kansas and Companies E, G and I of the 2nd Colorado charged the enemy line that was attempting to form four hundred yards from the ford, breaking it and precipitating a rout. All the Union cavalry joined in the pursuit, and the Confederates in their haste to escape became trapped at the mouth of the bayou where many bogged down their horses in the water and mud. Union cavalry pursued the enemy over five miles, killing and dispersing Watie's forces in all directions. In the ensuing panic, some of Watie's command attempted to swim the river and quickly found that the rocks and cliffs on the far side made escape very difficult. So many men and horses died that Van Horn reported "a dead man or horse occasionally floated down past Fort Gibson for several days."³⁵⁴ The Confederate forces defeated, and the Federal escort in possession of the crossing, the command quickly consolidated and crossed the wagons to the southern bank with no further opposition.

Federal losses for the battle amounted to less than twenty killed and fifty wounded. Major Foreman reported a loss is 3 killed and 30 wounded, and Williams estimated Federal losses at 1 killed, about 20 wounded, and Major Foreman severely wounded, and

³⁵⁴ Report of Colonel James M. Williams, First Kansas Colored Infantry, "Engagement at Cabin Creek, Indian Territory, Report Number 2," *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I: Reports*, 381; Benjamin Van Horn *Autobiographical Letter to Mr. George Martin*, Secretary, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, 23-24; Wiley Britton, *Memoirs of the Rebellion on the Border, 1863*, 319-328; George West, Report, July 6, 1863, in *Colorado Transcript*, April 4, 1877, as quoted in Edwards, *The Prairie was on Fire*, 59; "Military History of the Ninth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry" in *Official Military History of Kansas Regiments During the War for the Suppression of the Great Rebellion* (Leavenworth: W.S. Burke, 1870), 278

Captain Earle slightly wounded in the head. Although Williams's attack column consisted of approximately 900 men packed into a very narrow frontage, his command mitigated their losses through artillery cannonades and accurate small arms fire.³⁵⁵

Prisoners reported the Confederate force as between 1,600 and 1,800, consisting of Colonel Watie and McIntosh's Cherokee and Creek regiments, 600 men from the Fifth partisan rangers and Twenty-Ninth Regiment. After the battle Williams estimated Confederate losses at fifty killed, an unknown number of wounded, and nine prisoners. Confederate soldiers reported different losses, Sergeant Major Ross of the First Creek Mounted Volunteers tallied twenty-five killed and between thirty and forty taken prisoner, and Colonel Stand Watie of the First Cherokee Mounted Rifles put his losses at four killed with an aggregate loss of less than fifteen. Private John Howard of the Fifth Texas Partisan Rangers believed that his unit lost a third of its men. Hinton reported forty Confederates buried on the battlefield, and three wagons of wounded men evacuated the night of July 1.³⁵⁶ Confederate forces sustained a large number of casualties, the exact number difficult to estimate despite official reports, due to numbers lost through drowning in the Confederate retreat.

Comparing casualties on the basis of numbers alone belies the importance of this battle. As the first battle fought by a combined force of Union white, black and Indian

³⁵⁵ John A. Foreman, "Engagement at cabin Creek, Report Number 3," July 5, 1863, *OR Series I, Volume 22, Part I*, 382; Report of Colonel James M. Williams, First Kansas Colored Infantry, "Engagement at Cabin Creek, Indian Territory, Report Number 2," *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I: Reports*, 381.

³⁵⁶ Richard J. Ross, Letter, July 21, 1863, Richard J. Ross Letters, Private Collection, Patsy Mann, Checotah, Oklahoma; Stand Watie, Letter, date unknown, Jay L. Hargett Collection, Box H-57, OU/WHC; Mamie Yeary, *Reminiscences of the Boys in Gray*, 1861-1865. Dallas, Texas: not published, 1912, as cited in Grant Foreman, *The Prairie Was On Fire*, 60-61; Richard Hinton, "Cheering News from the Frontier," *The New York Times*, July 26, 1863. The sight of desperate men braving flood waters to escape, and the ensuing gruesome flotilla of bodies created an impression of complete rout despite the overall low casualties sustained during and after the battle. The Confederates suffered a stinging defeat at the hands of a racially mixed Federal force that performed well in battle.

soldiers, it served notice to the Confederates in Indian Territory that the Union was drawing on increasing manpower numbers, and more significantly that these racially disparate soldiers could fight well together against Confederate forces in Indian Territory. The performance of the black troops is especially worthy of comment because of their competency and fearlessness under fire. The First Kansas Colored's conduct shattered preconceptions of questionable worth or servile tendencies. The First Kansas Colored was a fighting regiment that sought to close with and destroy the enemy.

Confederate dispatches failed to recognize the Union's victory as due to fighting ability, and overplayed the impact of the high water in the Grand Saline River. Casualties tell a different tale, despite the assertion that defeat was due to failure of Cabell and Cooper to unite at Cabin Creek. Watie's force, intended to hold the train at Cabin Creek until it could be destroyed by an attack by Cabell from the rear, failed its mission.³⁵⁷ The setback to Confederate morale and the loss of the train constituted a greater loss to the Confederates than their manpower losses. The Confederates expected their black and Indian foes to engage in an orgy of atrocities, but when none materialized, the battle became a Union propaganda victory, as well as a military one.

In the battle's aftermath Captain Earle observed that the Confederates had abandoned their dead and wounded to the victorious Federals, a clear sign of defeat. Despite the "severe" action at Cabin Creek, the First Kansas Colored did not engage in "the hellish passions of their race." The Union soldiers behaved with compassion, contrary to Confederate expectations; Earle reported Union ambulances bringing in the wounded Confederates for treatment. Thomas McDaniel, a captured Confederate soldier reported

³⁵⁷ Brigadier General W.M. Steele to Major W.B. Blair, Assistant Adjutant General District of Arkansas, July 5, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part II, Correspondence*, 905.

that after capture by soldiers of the First Kansas Colored, he received compassionate care from a Lieutenant of the First Kansas Colored who carried him back to camp where medical aid was administered.³⁵⁸

These accounts are interesting as much for the report of humane treatment, as it is for the absence of any mention of inhumane treatment of Confederates by the black Kansas soldiers. Neither Hugh Thompson's memoirs or Colonel Stand Watie's report mention incidents of atrocities or poor treatment of Confederates by the black Kansan troops. Black soldiers did not become "savage" or uncontrollable in battle. Instead, they demonstrated courage, compassion and competency in the face of a determined enemy. The soldiers of the First Kansas Colored also impressed their white and Indian counterparts with their steadiness courage under fire.

Williams received criticism from General Blunt and Colonel Phillips for his failure to destroy Watie's Confederates. The failure to completely destroy or capture the Confederate force derived from Williams's two conflicting imperatives, protection for the desperately needed wagon train or a complete enemy rout by pursuit and capture. Williams claimed that the wagon train escort duty prevented him from capturing the whole enemy force, the priority being the safe conduct of the train to Fort Gibson. Blunt and Phillips criticized Williams's choice, and with the benefit of intelligence that revealed that Colonel Watie barely escaped and a report to General Cabell that his force was broken by the successful attack. Grudgingly he acknowledged the First Kansas Colored's performance, and credited them with fighting well. Phillips and Blunt craved a decisive battle in which the Confederate forces in Indian Territory could be destroyed.

³⁵⁸ Ethan Earle, *Journal*, 36-37; Annie R. Cubage. "Engagement at Cabin Creek, Indian Territory," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March, 1932), 50.

Cabin Creek failed to meet this level of effect, but carnage of the battle proved evident from the numbers of dead men and horses reported floating past Fort Gibson in the following days.³⁵⁹ Williams chose the more prudent course of action. The potential for a Confederate rout was weighed against a number of factors including increased casualties during the pursuit, a scattered escort command that would require time to assemble, and vulnerable wagons that still required multiple water crossings before they could advance to Fort Gibson. Time and the knowledge of additional Confederate forces in the area influenced Williams's decision to hasten the train's arrival at Fort Gibson. Had Williams opted for a complete military victory, he would have imperiled the entire command, and offered Confederate forces on the east bank of the Grand River another opportunity to strike at his command.

A number of factors contributed to the Confederate defeat: underestimating the wagon train escort size, an overly complex plan that involved multiple water crossings and the unexpectedly high waters of all the region's rivers, and a Confederate lack of artillery with which to challenge the Federal attack.³⁶⁰ The effect of the multiple cannonades on the Confederate defenders constituted a major factor in their defeat. Watie's Confederates possessed no counter-battery capability. Historian Whit Edwards in his excellent volume, *The Prairie was on Fire*, captured this inequity and its shocking effect on the defenders: one howitzer reportedly fired eighty rounds during the engagement, while Confederate men under fire related that the artillery fired from less than one

³⁵⁹ Report of Colonel James M. Williams, First Kansas Colored Infantry, "Engagement at Cabin Creek, Indian Territory, Report Number 2," *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I: Reports*, 381.; Col Phillips to Major General Blunt Fort Blunt, July 7, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I, Reports*, 378-379.

³⁶⁰ Annie R Cubage. "Engagement at Cabin Creek, Indian Territory," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March, 1932), 49-50; Edward E Dale and Gaston Litton. *Cherokee Cavaliers* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 131. Although Cubage cited a newspaper that was written as a satirical chronicle of Thomas B. McDaniel, the paper's description of the battle nearly matches those of Federal reports.

hundred yards distant, so close guns hissed while being swabbed. The thick foliage saved many from death by the artillery.³⁶¹ Although the infantry charge broke the lines, and the cavalry ensured victory by preventing the Confederates from reforming their lines, it appears that artillery won the day.

The First Kansas Colored earned their victor's laurels at Cabin Creek, and while the regiment marched south, additional black soldiers trained at Fort Scott. The Second Kansas Colored constituted one of General Blunt's attempts to increase his manpower reserves from the numbers of contraband slaves and freedmen in Kansas. Despite his proved reputation as an abolitionist, Blunt also subscribed to the mores of a realist. Black manpower existed in abundance in Kansas, and despite the tempting high wages for black labor in Kansas, many blacks enlisted with alacrity.³⁶² Although the muster of a second Kansas colored regiment was not guaranteed, by July, the performance of the First Kansas Colored served as proof that black men could fight and contribute to the Union cause in the West. More disturbingly, Hinton reported that the value of Indian Regiments was questionable, the Indian Regiments regarded as poor fighters despite sustaining the Union cause in Indian Territory. General Blunt sought and received early in 1863, authority to raise a second colored regiment in Kansas. Confronted with a dearth of white manpower and seeking additional infantry to escort wagon trains – it took over two hundred to escort a single wagon train to and from Fort Scott - and garrison fortifications,

³⁶¹ Stand Watie, Letter, date unknown, Jay L. Hargett Collection, Box H-57, Oklahoma University/Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma; James McCombs, Report, n.d., Section X, Biographies, Oklahoma Historical Society/Archives Division, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, as cited in Edwards, *The Prairie was on Fire*, 60-61.

³⁶² Richard Hinton, "Cheering News from the Frontier" *The New York Times*, July 26, 1863. Wartime wages for laborers exceeded those of soldiers, the report of \$1.50 per day for laborers far superior to the still unpaid \$7.00 for a black soldier. If money was truly a motive to avoid military service, the numbers of recruits and the speed in which they enlisted into the Second Kansas Colored indicated a counter argument that black men sought an active role in the war. Manhood could not be bought, and Blunt's newest regiment benefited from the societal mores of the period.

Blunt commenced with mustering the Eighth (Colored) Kansas (soon re-designated Second Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment). Hinton later accepted a company command in the Second Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment.³⁶³ Unlike the tenuous early start of the First Kansas Colored, the Second Kansas Colored began with political and military support as part of greater Union recruiting effort across the north.

With the value of black soldiers demonstrated in battle against a tough and tenacious foe, recruiting for the new regiment reached new heights. The demand for black soldiery created competition for recruits between Generals Blunt and General Ewing in Missouri. Ewing sought exclusive recruiting rights in Missouri, the source of the majority of the First Kansas Colored's recruits and the recruiting ground for the Second Kansas. Ewing's motives encompassed pacifying the bruised feelings of Missouri slave owners, as well as the more politically motivated desire for credit for recruits against troop levies, in his words, "It is desirable that the freedmen in Missouri get into the service... It will contribute to the peace of the district to have them recruited in Missouri rather than Kansas."³⁶⁴ Despite his appeals, many former slaves continued to vote with their feet and chose Kansas.

The battle at Cabin Creek transcended the rivalries and bickering of Union commanders. Colonel Williams recognized the performance of the racially mixed command in his report to Colonel Phillips with a ringing endorsement of their efforts. Williams proudly pointed out that the battle was fought by white and black troops and that "[Colonel Dodd's men] allowed no prejudice on account of color to interfere in the

³⁶³ New York Times, June 23, 1863, "The War in the Far West"; Wiley Britton, *Civil War on the Border*, Vol. II, 19.

³⁶⁴ Brigadier General Ewing to Lieutenant Colonel C.W. Marsh, Assistant Adjutant General Department of Missouri, St Louis MO, July 4, 1863, *RG 393 Records of US Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Department of the Missouri, 1861-98, Letters Sent, June 63 – Feb 64. Vol 184(400) 4 of 4 PI-172, A 1-2.*

discharge of their duty in the face of an enemy to both races...the regiment [1st Kansas] evinced a coolness and true soldierly spirit,” which engendered “confidence which subsequent battle scenes satisfactorily proved was not unfounded.”³⁶⁵ The First Kansas Colored proved to white Union witnesses that despite Livingston’s guerrilla warfare, and expectations of poor performance by white compatriots that the First Kansas Colored was a courageous and skilled regiment. Their following battles continued to demonstrate that combat performance created acceptance amongst white Union regiments, and the regiment’s soldiers proved their dedication to the Union through their blood, sweat and unflagging service.

The First Kansas Colored proved its worth in battle. The months of desertions and privation yielded to the stinging tang of gunpowder and the visceral grip of combat. The Emancipation Proclamation freed them from their bonds, but donning the Union blue uniform made them men. Their officers proved their dedication as well, uncertainty giving way to faith in their soldiers, and their common desire to defeat the slaveholding Confederate armies. However, success in one full-fledged battle did not guarantee that blacks would be treated as equals, and as such many potential black recruits continued to decline enlistment. The regiment’s bitter experience in Kansas lingered in black Kansans’ memories, and rather than join the established regiment, most new recruits flocked to the Second Kansas Colored Infantry.

The long road from social experiment to soldier left many blacks wary of military service for the efforts of black soldiers continued to be ignored in contrast to their white contemporaries. The First Kansas Colored experienced the gamut of white hatred

³⁶⁵ Report of Colonel James M. Williams, First Kansas Colored Infantry, “Engagement at Cabin Creek, Indian Territory, Report Number 2,” *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I: Reports*, 381

starting with unconcealed disgust and opposition, even from Kansan abolitionists, and bore the scars of Southern opposition on the regiment's muster rolls. The names of deceased black soldiers who fell in battle or from disease populated the regiment's rolls, and served as silent testimony to their willingness to seize the opportunity to strike off the bonds of slavery despite few guarantees of success. The First Kansas entered Indian Territory as the vanguard of Kansas Colored regiments, and as the regiment marched south to Fort Gibson, its place in the Union order of battle appeared secure. The next several months of campaigning in Indian Territory would test the regiment against new enemies and gain for it additional laurels

Chapter Five **“Bravery and Coolness Unsurpassed”**

The Union victory at Cabin Creek and the successful entry of the wagon train into Fort Gibson heralded a new phase to the Union war effort in Indian Territory. Arrival of the escort significantly increased the manpower, especially infantry, available to the Union command at Fort Gibson. The two-day battle at Cabin Creek had tested the regiment against a variety of opponents: Colonel Stand Watie’s Indian troops, white Union soldiers’ prejudices, and any unspoken doubts First Kansas Colored soldiers and officers harbored about their own ability. Cabin Creek demonstrated that the First Kansas Colored’s time spent in drill and extensive arms practice paid dividends in battle. Perhaps the best compliment paid to the regiment came from the lips of a white cavalryman belonging to a regiment to which Senator Lane once had offered black men as servants for the failed Indian Expedition of 1862. An officer of the veteran Third Wisconsin Cavalry commented in his official report, “I never believed in niggers before, but by Jasus [sp], they are hell for fighting.”³⁶⁶ The regiment proved its worth in such a manner that naysayers could no longer with complete confidence deride the ability of black soldiers in battle. Although critics attributed success to the regiment’s white officers, the regiment could no longer be regarded as a social experiment of dubious value.

The battle of Cabin Creek welded the soldiers and officers of the regiment into a coherent unit. Leadership in battle required officers to demonstrate courage and to

³⁶⁶ Dudley T. Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 147.

inspire their men to greater exertions on the field of battle. Colonel Williams did so twice during the battle, and exhibited bravery bordering on fanaticism when he attempted to ford Cabin Creek after the repulsed Union cavalry failed to reach the southern bank. Williams's concern for his men had been made clear prior to this battle, but combat served as the ultimate test of commitment. Other officers exhibited bravery as well. Captain Earle of Company F, leading from the front, suffered a head wound. Captain Armstrong and his artillery crew performed skillfully, receiving recognition for their bravery during the battle. In sum, the regiment earned a reputation for gallantry and determination from the white units that fought alongside it in battle.

The wagon train brought essential supplies to Fort Gibson, but the most noticeable aspect was the arrival blue uniformed black soldiers of the First Kansas Colored. The regiment's soldiers went into camp inside the fortifications, and immediately created a stir amongst the refugees and white garrison, with each group noting different characteristics of the black infantrymen. White observers marked the soaring morale of the regiment's soldiers and their high level of proficiency in drill. Wiley Britton approached some of the regiment's soldiers and after several conversations reported that the black infantry seemed eager for further combat against their Confederate foes. They held no illusions about combat, however; Britton recalled that the black soldiers with whom he spoke reacted stoically to the Confederate desire to punish the blacks that entered Union service, declaring that as much white as black blood would be shed. The soldiers impressed Britton with their skill at drill and soldierly appearance. Britton postulated that their predominantly Missouri upbringings made them superior to plantation slaves in intelligence, traits that translated well to performance in battle. Their

arms appeared equally formidable, an improved model of musket with which most possessed great proficiency.³⁶⁷ The First Kansas Colored presented the appearance and mannerisms of a veteran regiment prepared for war.

Britton, as did other contemporary white observers, shared many of the prevailing suppositions about black physiognomy. Characterized as “strongly built and equal to whites in size,” Britton concluded black soldiers would bear up better under climactic conditions encountered in the south climates than would white soldiers. He emphasized the value of their physical endurance and greater resistance to disease to the Union cause. What made blacks good slaves, Britton asserted, would make them great soldiers.³⁶⁸ His knowledge of the recent victory at Cabin Creek may have influenced these observations.

The First Kansas Colored also inspired black refugees, and within a week of its arrival, recruits from the refugee population began to fill the regiment’s ranks. Although Company I already listed fourteen soldiers originating from Fort Gibson on the company rolls, between June 27, 1863 and July 12, 1863 the regiment recruited an additional fifteen soldiers from Fort Gibson.³⁶⁹ The regiment eagerly welcomed the new recruits, for they replaced deserters and wounded personnel.

The regiment arrived at Fort Gibson at a time when Union and Confederate fortunes in the theater hinged on securing the loyalty of the local Indian nations and achieving logistical dominance. The situation at Fort Gibson impressed itself deeply on contemporary witnesses, who reported huge numbers of refugees – Indian and black - congregating in the vicinity of the fort. Colonel Phillips fed the refugees from his

³⁶⁷ Wiley Britton, *Memoirs of the Rebellion on the Border*, 1863, 335.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 334-335.

³⁶⁹ <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/statewide/military/civilwar/adjutant/index3.html>. *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. 1. (Reprinted by Authority)* Topeka, Kansas: The Kansas State Printing Company. 1896, 574-599 (accessed July 2, 2010).

military rations, and his cavalry endeavored to protect them against Confederate raids. Earlier in the war the fort had played host to many blacks and Confederate soldiers, so many that Rachel Ward, a contemporary slave observer, noted that slaves were everywhere living in shelters built from cloth scraps or in riverbank burrows. Food was scarce, shelter almost non-existent, and security tenuous at all times. Fort Gibson, a one and a half square mile area, supported an estimated three thousand soldiers and six thousand refugees.³⁷⁰ The failed policies and promises by both the Union and Confederacy subjected many refugees to horrible conditions. The fort's dense population arose from refugees' inability to farm or establish homes without constant attacks from Confederate partisans.

Large numbers of pro-Union Indians occupied the immediate vicinity of Fort Gibson. These unfortunate refugees were suffering because of Federal efforts to repatriate the Indian tribes before Union forces could guarantee their safety. As a result of guerrilla raids, many sought the safety of the fort despite its unhealthy climate. Among refugee black groups, family ties may have ameliorated the situation at Fort Gibson. Historian Clarissa Confer has cited the narratives of former slaves as evidence that former refugees serving in the First Kansas Colored [may have] shared their rations with their families at Fort Gibson. The additional calories provided by ration sharing raised immune systems enough for family members to weather the disease outbreaks that swept through the unhygienic and densely packed camps of the refugees.³⁷¹ Black refugees possessed few alternatives to the meager shelter of Fort Gibson. Many had been brought to the fort by

³⁷⁰ Clarissa W. Confer, *The Cherokee Nation in the Civil War* Norman (Oklahoma: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 123; Celia E. Naylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizens* (University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 125.

³⁷¹ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War on the Border, Volume II* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), 94; Clarissa Confer, *The Cherokee Nation in The Civil War*, 142.

Union forces in the fall of 1862, and then left to fend for themselves through the winter and spring. Their options were few. Returning to former masters after Union liberation appeared a far worse alternative than patiently waiting for conditions to improve as a result of ultimate Union victory.

The First Kansas Colored's arrival with the Union wagon train on July 5, 1863 occurred just a week before the arrival of General Blunt on July 11 with the remainder of his Army of the Frontier. Blunt left Kansas on July 6, 1863 accompanied by companies of the Sixth Kansas Cavalry Regiment, Fourteenth Kansas Cavalry Regiment, Third Wisconsin Cavalry Regiment and the Second Kansas Battery. Recognizing the danger inherent in the gathering Confederate forces south of Fort Gibson, and the need for offensive action to break up the commands of Confederate Generals Cooper, Cabell and Steele, Blunt swung into action.

Blunt pugnaciously sought to attack his enemy's weak points, and developed a strategy to defeat his enemies in detail before they could mass forces against Fort Gibson. Assembly of the Army of the Frontier signaled his intent to crush the Confederates in Indian Territory and, if possible, achieve the occupation of Fort Smith in Arkansas. Therefore Blunt's first priority before attempting the capture of the strategically located Fort Smith would be to defeat the separate commands composing General William Steele's army before they could unite and gain an advantage in numbers and weaponry that could force him into defensive operations. His operations highly constrained by logistics and the availability of fodder, Blunt may have believed that the Confederates would attempt to gather forces from across Indian Territory and western Arkansas and

attack him early in the summer campaign season before grass and water curtailed cavalry movements. His instinct to attack first proved correct.

General William Steele was alarmed by the change in military affairs in Indian Territory, and on July 10, he wrote Major Francis Blair, the Assistant Adjutant General of the Confederate District of Arkansas to convey alarm concerning Blunt's arrival in Indian Territory. Steele feared that the weakened state of his command and their lack of artillery made it vulnerable to Federal attack. Steele also wrote Texan Brigadier General Smith Bankhead for aid and emphasized the high stakes involved if a Federal army should defeat his forces: "The instant Indian country is overrun most of the tribes now friendly will be against us... They are, most of them, little value as soldiers, but they are better as friends than enemies."³⁷² Indian defections and the destruction of the buffer zone between Fort Gibson and Texas constituted the main prizes of the 1863 summer campaigns in Indian Territory.

Before Blunt could force his foes to battle, he needed to reorganize his forces and affect a successful crossing of the heavily defended Arkansas River ford sites. Blunt immediately ordered the construction of three ferries to support a river crossing, and on the basis of intelligence reported by his spies, mobilized his entire command at Fort Blunt to attack Confederate forces south of the Arkansas River. The First Kansas Colored, along with the Indian Home Guard Regiments and Second Colorado Infantry, fell under the command of Colonel William R. Judson of the First Brigade of General Blunt's Army of the Frontier.³⁷³ The First Kansas Colored went into battle as part of a multi-racial, ad

³⁷² Steele to MAJ Blair, July 10, 1863; July 20, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part II, Correspondence*, 917; Steele to Brigadier General Bankhead, July 11, 1863, 921.

³⁷³ *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part II, Correspondence*, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1888, 354, 357; *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I*, 447-451.

hoc brigade that with the exception of the Second Colorado Infantry, comprised a force of groups considered previously by whites as racially inferior.

General Blunt's Army consisted of a cavalry-heavy collection of regiments estimated to total nearly three thousand soldiers. Amongst the regiments of his command Blunt numbered the three Indian Home Guard regiments from Fort Gibson, two Kansas artillery batteries – commanded by Smith and Hopkins--the Third Wisconsin Cavalry, the First Kansas Colored and Second Colorado regiments. Against them Blunt faced Confederate regiments under the command of General Douglas Cooper, a force composed of veteran Cherokee, Creek and Choctaw Indian regiments and Texas cavalry, with one artillery battery in support. While Blunt prepared his command, Cooper concentrated his forces around the supply depot at Honey Springs. Their defensive strategy rested on the anticipated arrival of General Cabell from Arkansas with a force sufficient to defeat Blunt.

General Blunt refused to surrender the initiative to the Confederate forces and in typically aggressive decision marched his units from Fort Blunt with the intent of forcing battle before Cabell's forces from Arkansas could join with Cooper's army. Blunt identified the Confederate depot at Honey Springs as his first objective. Defeating the Confederate forces piecemeal provided Blunt with the ability to use his smaller numbers against a numerically superior but logistically less strong foe before the Confederates could concentrate against his army at Fort Blunt.

The depot at Honey Springs contained armaments, supplies and forage that could sustain a Confederate drive north; therefore, Blunt's strategy encompassed several

objectives.³⁷⁴ Blunt sought to destroy Cooper's army, scatter his Indian troops, and break their resolve to support the Confederacy, and deny General Steele the advantage of numbers. Blunt also sought to force Steele's raiders away from the Union supply line along the Texas Road from Fort Scott. If successful, Blunt would ensure a secure route for supplies and reinforcements to further his conquest of Indian Territory.

Blunt began his expedition with a lightning fast series of movements by scouts followed by a crossing of the Arkansas River. The period between July 11, 1863 and July 15, 1863 gave Blunt time to provision his troops and prepare them for battle. After Blunt's advance scout of two hundred and fifty cavalry and four pieces of artillery drove back Cooper's pickets from their Arkansas River rifle pits, the remainder of the Army of the Frontier crossed the Grand River. By late evening July 16, 1863, the army, composed mostly of his Indian regiments and the First Kansas Colored, was on the south bank of the Grand River. Key to his plans for the campaign against the Confederate forces was bringing along the artillery batteries in the river crossing. The Union army crossed Elk Creek on the night of July 16, and commenced a punishing night march. The river crossings were not without incident, for the Second Indian Home guards lost three men drowned in the crossing and Private Henry Pippins, a teamster of the First Kansas Colored, died while attempting to cross his wagon over Elk Creek.³⁷⁵ Blunt's timetable brooked no pauses, and his command pushed onward toward the Confederate depot at Honey Spring.

³⁷⁴ John Grady and Bradford Felmly, *Suffering to Silence: 29th Texas Cavalry, CSA, a Regimental History* (Quanah, Oklahoma: Nortex Press, 1975), 84; Lary C. Rampp and Donald L. Rampp, *The Civil War in the Indian Territory*, 37.

³⁷⁵ Major General James Blunt, Report Number 1, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I*, 447; Lieutenant Colonel Frederick W. Schaurte, Second Indian Home Guards, July 20, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume. 22, Part. 1*, 451-452; *RG 94, 79th USCT (New), Combined Military Service Records*, Henry Peppin's death certificate.

Blunt's cavalry probed the Confederate lines and drove off Confederate advance pickets on the morning of July 17, forcing them to the timbered south bank of Elk Creek where the main body of Cooper's army awaited the Union forces. In preparation for the coming battle, Blunt conducted a reconnaissance of the Confederate lines that revealed concealed defensive positions of approximately one and a half miles in length on the south bank of Elk River. Unsure of the location of the Confederate artillery, and taking fire from Confederate infantry, Blunt terminated his reconnaissance and ordered his command to halt behind a ridge located about a half mile from the Confederate lines. During the two-hour pause, his weary soldiers took advantage of this halt to rest and eat from their haversacks. Captain Earle, Company F, First Kansas Colored's commander, had recovered from his wound at Cabin Creek and in his memoirs offered useful observations at this point in the Army of the Frontier's timeline. The First Kansas Colored departed Fort Blunt at 4:00 P.M. on July 16, 1863, and the men marched until midnight. After a short four-hour rest, the march continued in severe rain for another four hours. All told the regiment marched for nearly twelve hours, crossed two water barriers, and arrived at the battlefield of Honey Springs at 9:00 A.M on July 17.³⁷⁶ This impressive night march occurred in conjunction with multiple unit movements, and Blunt's insistence on speed ensured his force would not be divided by rivers as had been the Confederate forces at Cabin Creek. Arriving with a united combined arms force at Honey Springs ensured Blunt possessed maximum combat power for the battle ahead.

While Blunt paused briefly to conduct a reconnaissance of the battlefield and to read the terrain upon which his Army would fight, the First Kansas Colored took advantage of the lull to rest and eat, anticipating rations from their regimental trains. Instead, Earle

³⁷⁶ Earle, *Journal*, 39.

discovered the wagons containing rations and much of the ammunition became lost during the river crossing. The soldiers of the First Kansas Colored breakfasted on one hardtack cracker per man; the Regiment would fight hungry. However, the weather favored battle, as the rain stopped and the skies cleared. Assembled in line of battle by 10:00 A.M. the regiment stood ready to engage their Confederate foes in battle.³⁷⁷ The rain, fatigue, hunger, and anticipation of battle did little to dull the Regiment's ardor, and it occupied a place of honor near the center of General Blunt's lines.

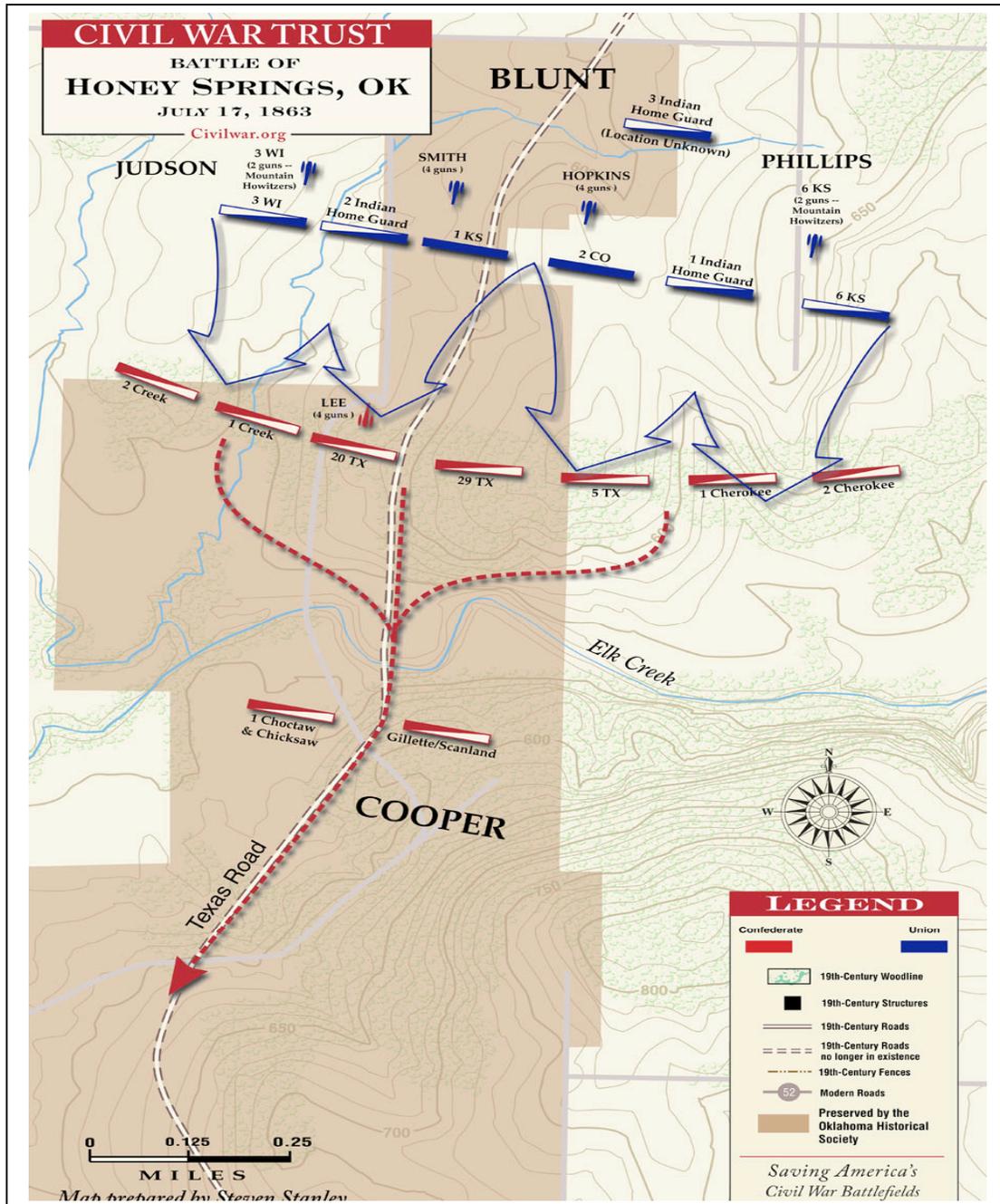
Union dispositions before the battle reflected Blunt's confidence in the First Kansas Colored's ability to withstand the full fury of pitched battle against an experienced and determined foe. Before the battle, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Moonlight, General Blunt's Chief of Staff, climbed atop a farmhouse roof to scan the Confederate lines. His reconnaissance revealed a brush-choked battlefield that favored both sides, for while initially hiding the Confederates; it also prevented them from spotting the advancing columns before they closed the distance between the two armies to one hundred yards.³⁷⁸ The First Kansas Colored maneuvered to the right center of the Union line to provide support for Captain Smith's artillery, directly opposite the Confederate battery. Blunt posted the Second Indian Home Guard in columns to the rear of the regiment. Colonel Williams rose to the challenge and offered the soldiers of the regiment a martial pep talk, enjoining the soldiers to "keep cool and not fire until given the command. In all cases aim deliberately and below the waist."³⁷⁹ These words carried an underlying command

³⁷⁷ Earle, *Journal*, 39.

³⁷⁸ Kip Lindberg and Matt Matthews, "The Eagle of the 11th Kansas': Wartime Reminiscences of Colonel Thomas Moonlight," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Volume 62, Number 1 (Spring 2003): 31.

³⁷⁹ Lieutenant Colonel Bowles to Colonel William Judson, Honey Springs Battle Report. July 20, 1863. *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

to the regiment to remain disciplined in battle, and resist the temptation to break ranks, or in the excitement of battle to fire wildly at the enemy. The individual soldiers' cartridge



Map 4: The Battle of Honey Springs³⁸⁰

³⁸⁰ <http://www.Civilwar.org>. This map is copyrighted, but I have received reproduction permission for inclusion in this work.

boxes regiment's contained the only ammunition available –about forty rounds - and they would be fighting an experienced enemy that outnumbered Union forces almost two to one. Every shot must count.

The battle began with a cannonade from the Union guns; Blunt sought to locate the Confederate batteries and break Confederate morale before ordering his infantry into combat. While the regiment's soldiers watched the enemy, ten minutes elapsed while Union artillery shelled the Confederate lines, guns thundering away as Union troops monitored their opposite number. General Blunt, as prelude to the infantry attack, personally ordered Williams to take the Confederate guns at bayonet point if opportunity presented. Williams in turn grimly ordered his men through clenched teeth to fix bayonets, as "there was work to do." The regiment moved to the right of a two-howitzer section of Captain Smith's guns, three hundred yards from the Confederates. A number of rounds of canister and shell raked the Confederate positions in the brush, and under covering fire, the regiment advanced to within fifty-two yards of the enemy, the point in the battlefield where Colonel Moonlight recalls seeing a rail fence.³⁸¹

While the Second Colorado engaged Confederates on their left, Williams commanded his men to fire upon the Confederates to their front at the same time the enemy delivered their own volley. Williams intended the regiment to take the Confederate battery, but before he could communicate his (and Blunt's) intent to his command, Williams

³⁸¹ Lieutenant Colonel Bowles to Colonel William Judson, Honey Springs Battle Report. July 20, 1863. *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Benjamin Van Horn, Letter, July 17, 1863, *Benjamin Van Horn Collection*, Military History Collection, Manuscript Division, Kansas State Historical Society; Kip Lindberg and Matt Matthews, "'The Eagle of the 11th Kansas,'" 31. Lieutenant Van Horn claimed to have paced off this amazingly precise distance after the battle. The short distance was well within the range of muskets, testifies to the incredibly short range of the encounter, and provides an indication of why the First Kansas Colored sustained so many casualties in the battle.

sustained wounds in the chest, face and hands.³⁸² Unaware of Williams' intent, at this time Bowles lost the opportunity to order, "charge bayonet," and take the Confederate guns. Concurrently, skirmishers from the Second Indian Home Guard entered the timber and in doing so, passed between the First Kansas and the Twentieth and Twenty Ninth Texas, forcing a temporary halt while Bowles ordered the Indians to fall back. Perhaps confused, the Twenty-Ninth Texas advanced upon what they perceived to be a retreating First Kansas Colored, and their ranks shuddered when the regiment loosed a volley of buck and ball from a distance of twenty-five yards. The wounding of the Texans' regimental commander, Colonel DeMorse precipitated a collapse of the Confederate lines, and the First Kansas Colored pressed forward. Seeing the Twentieth Texas rally behind its colors, Bowles ordered a second volley that dropped the colors and routed the Confederates.³⁸³ Their colors abandoned, and their lines routed, the Confederates fled to the safety of a cornfield and the Confederate lines beyond.

Bowles learned of Williams's wounding several minutes after the start of the action, and assumed command of the regiment as Williams left the field. Under his command, the First Kansas Colored pressed forward and at one point of the battle part of the regiment rescued a company of the Second Colorado that the Confederates "gobbled up" or captured. Grateful for the rescue and the regiment's strong support during the battle, after the battle the Second Colorado Infantry's soldiers changed their opinion of the First Kansas Colored, and despite treating the First Kansas with contempt at Fort Scott,

³⁸² James M. Williams, Report, July 30, 1863, *James M. Williams Collection*, Military History Collection, manuscript Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

³⁸³ Bowles, Battle Report. *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Lieut. Col. Frederick W. Schuarte, Second Indian Home Guards, July 20, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume. 22, Part. 1*, 451-452. After Captain Smith displaced his batteries from the right to the left of the brigade, Schuarte's cavalry moved forward to skirmish with the enemy in the timber. No coordination appears to have occurred between the Second Indian and the First Kansas Colored, hence the confusion.

insisted after Honey Spring “If we are going into a fight give us the niggers.”³⁸⁴ The First Kansas continued its attack and pursued the routed enemy to a cornfield. Stymied by the “nature of the ground,” Bowles ordered the First Kansas back to the Union lines.³⁸⁵ The Regiment temporarily occupied in regrouping, the dismounted Second Indian Home Guard regiment swept across the First Kansas Colored’s front.

Impatient to carry the battle to the enemy, and perhaps claim honors for his regiment, the Second Indian Home Guard repeatedly entered the First Kansas Colored’s battle space. Lieutenant Colonel Schuarte of the Second Indian Home Guard sent word to Bowles that he would pass forward with his regiment, and in doing so his soldiers claimed the colors of the Twenty-Ninth Texas. Feeling cheated by this act, officers and men from the First Kansas Colored shouted and criticized the Second Indian, and asked permission to break ranks to retrieve the colors. Permission denied, Bowles demurred and after receiving orders from Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Moonlight, Blunt’s Chief of Staff, resumed the advance for another three miles, skirmishing occasionally with the retreating enemy. The First Kansas Colored terminated combat operations when ordered into bivouac near the ford on Elk Creek at 7:00 P.M.³⁸⁶ The day concluded with the regiment victorious and the Army of the Frontier in possession of the battlefield.

Bowles offered a recapitulation of the Regiment’s manpower at the start and end of the battle: the Regiment entered with five hundred men and lost two killed and thirty wounded. Company C sustained two killed, and the wounded represented almost all companies of the regiment, Company A sustaining three wounded, D and F one wounded

³⁸⁴ Earle, *Journal*, 43.

³⁸⁵ Bowles, Battle Report. *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

apiece, E suffered eleven wounded, Company H two wounded, J eight wounded, K three, and unassigned troops sustained two. Many of the severely wounded soldiers sustained head, thigh, and chest wounds. No back wounds were reported. Lieutenant Colonel Bowles bestowed effusive praise upon his soldiers and officers, characterizing their performance as “noble” and the men “cool as veterans, vying with one another in the performance of their duty.”³⁸⁷ Once again the soldiers of the First Kansas Colored fought like men, fighting and dying with their face to the enemy, and in defiance of Confederate racial beliefs. The First Kansas successfully broke the Twenty-Ninth Texas on the field of battle, and despite the Second Indian Home Guard seizing the Confederate colors, claimed victory in a battle in which the Union forces entered outnumbered by an enemy that fought from prepared ground.

As the sounds of battle faded away, and the victorious Federal forces returned from their pursuit to police the battlefield, Colonel Williams endured treatment under the regimental surgeon, Samuel Harrington. General Blunt visited Williams in the field hospital, and according to Wiley Britton, Williams immediately asked Blunt, “How did my regiment fight?” The General is reported to have responded, “Like veterans, most gallantly.” Williams then reportedly added, “I am ready to die then.”³⁸⁸ Williams did not die, but his wounds required time to heal. Command of the regiment devolved to

³⁸⁷ Bowles, Battle Report. *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Return of Casualties, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I*, 449. The official tally of the regiment's losses lists two killed, one officer wounded, and twenty nine soldiers wounded. The only regiment sustaining near equivalent casualties was the Second Colorado which sustained five killed and fourteen wounded. Fierce fighting for the First Kansas colored resulted in six percent losses. Combined with the losses from Cabin Creek, in which the regiment sustained two officers wounded, and eighteen other soldiers, regimental losses in one month approximately ten percent not counting soldiers too ill to fight.

³⁸⁸ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War on the Border*, 124; Richard Hinton, “News of the West,” July 29, 1863, *The New York Times*. Williams's chest wound resulted in a ball being removed from his back, the projectile having glanced off some bone to miss the lungs.

Lieutenant Colonel John Bowles. In short order Colonel Williams's wounded joined him in the hospital for treatment, and the Colonel received validation that his once-despised, and poorly regarded, soldiers proved themselves again in battle.

Press reports after the battle generously heaped laurels on Blunt's command. The *New York Times* emphasized the Confederate position as "very strong," and the impressive spoils of the battle. Despite Confederate efforts to deny the contents of their storehouses to Blunt's army, the army of the frontier captured four hundred stand of arms, quantities of foodstuffs, and an ambulance. The *Times* article estimated the Union loss at twelve killed and thirty-six wounded, and the Confederate losses at between one hundred twenty-five and two hundred killed, seventy-five wounded and one hundred prisoners. Blunt reported different tolls from the battle. His forces sustained seventeen killed and sixty wounded; the enemy sustained one hundred and fifty killed and buried on the battlefield, four hundred wounded, and seventy-seven prisoners. The Confederate loss in materiel consisted of the Twenty-Ninth Texas cavalry's colors, a piece of artillery, two hundred stand of arms, and fifteen wagons.³⁸⁹ Confederate figures also differed and offered a much higher estimate of Federal losses, perhaps in compensation for Cooper's poor performance.

Following his defeat, Brigadier General Cooper differed from Blunt in his casualty figures and counted his as one hundred thirty-four killed and forty-seven prisoners, while estimating Federal losses at two hundred.³⁹⁰ The Confederate army under Cooper, despite its low casualties, suffered defeat at the hands of a composite Federal force that included

³⁸⁹ "The Battle of Elk Creek," August 5, 1863, *The New York Times*; *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part 1*, 449; Benjamin Van Horn, Letter, July 17, 1863. *Benjamin Van Horn Collection*, Military History Collection, Manuscript Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

³⁹⁰ Brigadier General Douglas Cooper, Battle Report, August 12, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part 1*, 457-461.

black soldiers. Although many escaped injury in battle, many white southern soldiers did not forget their defeat at the hands of former slaves, a much greater victory for the men of the First Kansas Colored.

Casualties from the battle offer one measure of Federal performance at the regimental level. The First Kansas Colored sustained the greatest casualties on the Union side, a testament to the fierce close-range fighting that brought down both side's regimental commanders. The First Kansas Colored fought with bravery and skill, and its performance at Honey Springs earned the undying enmity of the Twenty-Ninth Texas, and the praise of the Army of the Frontier's commander, General Blunt. Blunt shepherded the regiment from its beginning in Kansas and its performance vindicated his faith in their utility to the Union cause. Blunt proved unstinting in his praise, and his report commended the regiment as unsurpassed, their bravery and coolness evident during the "hottest part of the fight," the regiment routing twice its number in Confederate troops. Blunt declared it "invidious to make particular mention of any one where all did their duty so well."³⁹¹ Blunt did not single out individual men, but his pride in the First Kansas Colored's performance rang out clearly.

Colonel Williams also demonstrated pride in his regiment. In a report written shortly after the battle Williams expressed his sentiments in harsh terms. Williams believed that the Confederates "received a lesson, which in my opinion taught them not to despise on the battlefield, a race they had long tyrannized over as having no rights which a white man was bound to respect...this race had a right to kill traitors and this day proved their

³⁹¹ Major General James Blunt, Report Number 1, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I*, 448.

capacity.”³⁹² The regiment took forty prisoners, and a stand of colors, vindication in Williams’s eyes of the regiment’s training and martial spirit. It is a testimony Williams’s character that when wounded the first words he spoke to General Blunt concerned his men and their performance.

Despite the regiment’s outstanding performance in battle, some white Kansans retained their belief that black soldiers could in no way excel white soldiers in battle. The *Fort Scott Union Monitor* carried the opinion that although General Blunt believed black soldiers made the best soldiers under his command, such soldiers could never surpass white Kansans. The *Monitor* held forth that blacks could be better *machines* than whites, easily trained and disciplined.³⁹³ Rather than admit black élan and skill, the paper made them into machines, and thus neutralized their humanity to explain their superior performances. Mindless black automatons defeated their Confederate foes, not black men capable of independent thought and action. This opinion fails to account for the additional challenges facing black soldiers and their officers, namely the threat of annihilation if defeated, and the effect on black Kansan if *their* regiment suffered in battle. The battle constituted as much a victory for black communities across Kansas as a victory for the Army of the Frontier.

The First Kansas Colored fought against an enemy committed to destroying the regiment. Confederate General Kirby Smith and others supported a policy that opposed taking black soldiers prisoners, and the Confederate Congress on January 12, 1863 made it clear that black soldiers and their officers could expect no quarter.³⁹⁴ A slave of a

³⁹² James M. Williams, Report, July 30, 1863, *James M. Williams Collection*, Military History Collection, manuscript Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

³⁹³ 18 August 1863, *Fort Scott Union Monitor*

³⁹⁴ John Grady and Bradford K Felmly. *Suffering to Silence*, 84.

Twenty-Ninth Texas officer claimed that few “Southern officers believed that colored soldiers would fight and could be captured simply by marching up to the men.”³⁹⁵ This supposition proved very wrong, and to the credit of the soldiers of the First Kansas Colored, despite discovering five hundred pairs of shackles intended for the regiment’s black soldiers, after the battle no mistreatment of Confederate prisoners or wounded occurred. Colonel Moonlight claimed that the black soldiers, “grinned ear to ear when sighting their old companions, *the shackles*.”³⁹⁶ Black humanity defied Confederate inhumanity and the empty shackles proved the soldiers of the First Kansas Colored would not surrender against those that denied their place as soldiers and men. Rather than admit a quality difference between the two opponents, Confederate apologists offered up differing reasons for their defeat, among them inadequacies in armaments and the three to one advantage in Union artillery.

One reason for the Confederate line’s collapse may have been the poor quality gunpowder available for their weapons, and the fouling caused by rain. General Cooper believed his Choctaw Indians retreated because of the ineffectiveness of their firearms and worthless ammunition, and demoralized, fled across the Canadian River.

Conversely, according to Captain George West of the Second Colorado, at least some of the Confederates fought the battle armed with 1862 pattern Enfield rifles.³⁹⁷ Abel does not

³⁹⁵ Mark Christ (ed.). *All Cut to Pieces and Gone to Hell: The Civil War, Race Relations, and the Battle of Poison Spring* (Little Rock: August House Publishers, 2003), 81.

³⁹⁶ Kip Lindberg and Matt Matthews, “ ‘The Eagle of the 11th Kansas’ ,” 32.

³⁹⁷ Annie H. Abel. *American Indian as Participant in the Civil War*. Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clarke Company, 1919, 288-289; Brigadier General Douglas Cooper, report Number 10, OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I, 458-460. Captain George West, Report, September 17, 1863, in Colorado Transcript, April 4, 1877, as quoted in Whit Edwards *The Prairie Was on Fire*, 65. Of particular note is the fact that although Abel doesn’t specifically address weapon deficiency, but rather ammunition unreliability speaks volumes. Rather than accept that variously armed Indian troops could not stand against a well-provisioned Union force, the Confederate command blamed ammunition. This completely negates any black military skill in

address the disparity of firearm quality between the two forces, but it played a significant role nonetheless. Federal Springfield rifles and carbines shot farther and more accurately than Confederate shotguns and older models of muskets, despite Enfield rifles being in evidence.³⁹⁸ However the ultimate measure of combat effectiveness can be measured in the soldiers' performance at close quarters.

Armaments aside, the extremely short engagement distance offers another, more conclusive reason for the Confederate collapse. The Twenty-Ninth Texas advanced precipitously, and the First Kansas's resolve in the face of the Confederate attack proved the winning factor. The mixed Confederate cavalry armaments were unsuitable for bayonets, and the bayonet charge of the First Kansas Colored presented the Texans with cold steel, precipitating a rout because the Confederate forces possessed no similar arm, or reserves of either manpower or morale. The First Kansas Colored's soldiers fought with fury knowing their foes sought not merely to defeat them, but also intended to take no prisoners. Additional signs of the regiment's professionalism can be discerned from their adherence to orders despite other Federal regiments crossing their lines, and the regiment's steadfastness in their pursuit of the enemy. After the battle the soldiers of the First Kansas Colored reaped rewards of a humble variety, taking solace in rations and rest.

The Regiment found additional rewards amongst the Confederate stores, quickly sated their hunger on captured meat and bread, then returned to the battlefield where it camped for the night. On the following day, details buried over a hundred Confederates

the defeat and introduces another factor into their defeat, one that skews Confederate logistics rather than manpower quality or quantity.

³⁹⁸ Clarissa Confer, *The Cherokee Nation*, 89; Earle, *Journal*, 41. Earle claims the Confederates used double barrel shotguns, which were ineffective in the brush. The First Kansas's .58 caliber rifles proved superior in these conditions.

before the order to return to Fort Blunt recalled the Union forces. Hampered by short rations and low ammunition, the Army of the Frontier stayed at Honey Springs briefly, the last units to leave the battlefield the field hospitals where wounded rested before transport back to Fort Gibson.³⁹⁹ The threat of General Cabell's newly arrived Arkansas Confederate army, although not cited as a significant factor in the *New York Times* article, may have also compelled Blunt to retire to Fort Blunt. Fighting a second Confederate army with short ammunition doubtless appealed little to Blunt. Although the Federal regiments all fought well, The *Times*' correspondent praised the Second Colorado and First Kansas Colored in particular, and then pressed for a movement toward the Red River where it was hypothesized numbers of colored regiments could be recruited.⁴⁰⁰ The Union victory maintained the Union army's initiative in Indian Territory and opened the door to Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Confederate General William Steele attempted to downplay the defeat at Honey Springs, reporting Cooper's losses in killed, wounded or missing at less than two hundred.⁴⁰¹ Steele comprehended the magnitude of the morale defeat at Honey Springs, and appreciated that two successive defeats of Indian troops by Blunt's forces affected their resolve. However, he still possessed significant non-Indian resources with which to oppose Blunt. The Union victory at Honey Springs did not in itself constitute cause for

³⁹⁹ Earle, *Journal*, 41; Kip Lindberg and Matt Matthews, "The Eagle of the 11th Kansas," 32.

⁴⁰⁰ "The Battle of Elk Creek," August 5, 1863, *The New York Times*. Hinton is the most likely source for this report, and his words betray optimism regarding additional Colored regiments. Cabell and Cooper remained viable despite their defeat, but they sustained a great morale defeat. The victory at Honey Springs, although important for the Union efforts in Indian Territory paled as compared with Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg. The most important lesson from the battle could be drawn from the Union army's performance, an example of how a multi-racial army could achieve victory in defiance of racial theories of white superiority. The Twenty-Ninth Texas lost its colors, the greatest mark against a regiment that could be sustained in battle.

⁴⁰¹ "Major General W.M. Steele to Brigadier General Bankhead Commanding Northern Texas" July 22, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I*, 940.

despair, but when coupled with Confederate defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, the South appeared on the verge of defeat in the west. One Texan wrote of the fears of slave insurrection and worse treatment “A deplorable future is in state for us...woes, arrests, wretchedness...rape, rapine and disgrace...every crime ever perpetrated on earth will soon be the fate of the Lone Star State.”⁴⁰² Union victory in Indian Territory exposed Texas to invasion from the north, and losing control of Indian Territory threatened Texas with a two-pronged Union invasion from the north (Kansas) and south (Louisiana).⁴⁰³ Civilians feared Union victory and expected the worst from their slaves and blue-coated black Union soldiers. Many slave owners moved their slaves to Texas when Union forces occupied Little Rock, Arkansas, and their “property” now appeared on the verge of liberation.

General Blunt’s designs on Indian Territory and northern Texas did encompass the possibility of tapping into Texas’ large numbers of slaves. Blunt believed that manpower for a black army could be readily recruited in Texas, and by July 1863 possessed two Colored Regiments to buttress his beliefs. Besides the First Kansas Colored, the Second Kansas Colored, recruiting in Kansas, grew to five companies by July, 1863, and Richard Hinton postulated before the battle of Honey Springs that manpower to complete the regiment could be provided by a successful raid south of Fort Gibson. Hinton relentlessly reiterated this belief in successive stories throughout July, and after Honey Springs Blunt’s desire for a black army, and the fall of Fort Smith both appeared viable.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰² Edward E Dale and Gaston Litton. *Cherokee Cavaliers* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 134.

⁴⁰³ Anne J. Bailey. *Invisible Southerners: Ethnicity in the Civil War* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2006), 45.

⁴⁰⁴ Richard Hinton, “The War in the West,” July 9, 1863, July 18, 1863; July 29, 1863, the *New York Times*.

Unlike many of the political officers of the District of the Missouri and the District of Kansas, Hinton and Blunt shared a legacy that reached back to John Brown. A decisive victory by Blunt could resurrect Brown's dream of a black army to liberate their brethren in the secessionist states. When General Blunt retired back to Fort Gibson to plan his next move, in part motivated by illness, Hinton exhorted him to take the field again. Hinton believed that if Blunt remained at Fort Gibson that the general would lose the initiative and be forced to fight at a disadvantage or surrender.⁴⁰⁵ Hinton's manic excitement over the victory at Honey Springs failed to take into account many factors that forced Blunt into action, and a month elapsed before the general again pursued his Confederate foes.

The Union victory at Honey Springs constituted a great military and morale victory for the Union, and proved the value of the black infantry of the First Kansas Colored. The regiment, with the exception of some of the wounded that remained at Honey Springs with the field hospital, returned to Fort Gibson on July 19, 1863. Fort Gibson could not support the regiment in conjunction with the rest of the Army of the Frontier, so the First Kansas Colored took up quarters at Fort Davis, a former Confederate fort located south of the Arkansas River near the junction with Grand River.

The army of the frontier granted the First Kansas Colored no time to refit its companies, or assess its fitness. As a battle-proven infantry unit its soldiers soon received orders to detach nearly half of the regiment, Companies B, E, G and I, to positions on the Verdigris River eight miles northwest of Fort Blunt.⁴⁰⁶ The detachment

⁴⁰⁵ Richard Hinton, "The War in the West," August 10, 1863, *The New York Times*.

⁴⁰⁶ Earle, *Journal*, 43; Janet B Hewitt (ed.) *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies: Part II – Record of Events, Volume 78, Serial Number 90* (Wilmington, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1998), 620.

provided Blunt with pickets that could be relied upon to watch for any river crossing attempts by Colonel Stand Watie's guerrillas, or incursions by Missouri-based guerrilla bands such as those officered by Livingston and Coffee. Blunt's employment of the regiment as pickets instead of working as laborers on static defenses reflected growing recognition of the regiment as a fighting regiment that sought battle and scorned manual labor. The infantry permitted Blunt to rest his sorely tested cavalry, and especially the campaign ravaged horses. The requirements for wagon train escorts demanded cavalry, as did scouting operations against Confederate forces, and exhausted horses could not fill those roles without adequate rest.

The First Kansas Colored constituted a valuable resource for Blunt's recruiting efforts and the general wasted little time detailing officers and men as recruiters for the Second Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment. Less than a week after Honey Springs, Second Lieutenant Topping of Company F, and Second Lieutenant Johnson of Company I received orders to raise companies for the Second Kansas Colored. Soldiers also received orders to assist the recruiting process, Private Curtiss and Private Louis Moore of Company F accompanying Lieutenant Topping and Lieutenant Johnson respectively. Lieutenant Overdear followed shortly, ordered to repeat to Fort Scott for the purpose of arresting deserters. As officers departed the regiment, the regimental headquarters received a Regimental Hospital Steward, Robert Gibbons.⁴⁰⁷ The detailing of officers did not significantly interfere with regimental operations, and the troops at Camp Davis experienced a significant increase in regulation for their daily lives.

⁴⁰⁷ General Orders Number 11, July 22, 1863; Special Orders Number 34, July 29, 1863, Special Orders 23, Army of the Frontier, August 10, 1863, Special Orders 208, District of the Missouri, August 1, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

Garrison life soon presented soldiers and their non-commissioned officers with the dual challenges and opportunities of a stable environment. Discipline became Lieutenant Colonel Bowles's focus for the regiment, and by the end of July two Sergeants of the regiment returned to the ranks as Privates after being reduced for disobedience, incompetence, gambling, and conduct unbecoming a soldier. Private Charles Whittaker of Company B endured the shaving of half of his head and a humiliating march before the battalion dress parade, as well as ten days hard labor for stealing.⁴⁰⁸ Garrison life required structure and Bowles ordered drill for every day except Saturday and Sunday, Company drill commenced at 9:00 A.M. and continued to 11:00 A.M., then Battalion drill filled the hours between 2:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M. Colonel William further modified these instructions by requiring companies to fall out under arms and conduct roll call at reveille. Officers also received specific instruction regarding the training of soldiers as sentinels and saluting.⁴⁰⁹ Garrison life and field required different behaviors from soldiers, and much as Colonel Williams spent several weeks attending to the discipline of his soldiers at Fort Scott, so did Lieutenant Colonel Bowles at Camp Davis.

The First Kansas Colored drilled and reestablished discipline for several weeks, then traveled marched south on August 22, 1863 as part of General Blunt's campaign against the Confederate forces of Generals Steele and Cabell at Perryville in the Choctaw Nation, and Fort Smith in Arkansas. The soldiers marched with minimal equipment, their

⁴⁰⁸ Special Orders 32, July 26, 1863 and Special Orders 34, July 29, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*. During this time Colonel Williams was placed under arrest, a direct measure to ensure he recovered fully from his wounds sustained in the battle of Honey Springs. Williams reassumed command on September 15, 1863 in time to march his regiment to Fort Smith.

⁴⁰⁹ General Orders 6, First Kansas Colored, August 11, 1863, General Orders 11, First Kansas Colored, July 22, 1863, Special Orders 32, First Kansas Colored, July 26, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*.

knapsacks loaded with ten day's rations and no more shelter than a blanket and a rubber sheet. Captain Earle described the expedition as a "forced march," of over two hundred and twenty miles, and eight days with little combat exposure bar the brief cannonading of less than a company of the regiment's soldiers. The regiment then marched back to Fort Gibson, arriving on August 31, 1863. Their former regimental camp at Fort Davis occupied by other Union troops, the regiment set up Camp Williams not far from Fort Davis.⁴¹⁰ The regiment's absence from Fort Gibson delayed news of a horrendous deed that deeply affected all Kansans, and injected an element of fear into lives largely insulated from the ravages of guerrilla warfare along the border.

Quantrill's Raid on Lawrence

Tragedy struck Kansas in the wake of the Union victory in Indian Territory, the abolitionist stronghold and home of many of the regiment's soldiers and officers, Lawrence, sacked by the guerrilla leader William C. Quantrill. The Kansas border proved a porous place despite Federal and militia units remaining to garrison the state's border with Missouri. Quantrill's raid on August 21, 1863 brought personal loss to the regiment, and several of the officers lost homes and property, amongst them Captain Graton who lost his gun shop in the ensuing blaze. Manpower losses to the regiment proved minimal, but the morale effect struck deeply. The regiment included in its ranks at least fifty soldiers that enlisted at Lawrence; Company G's ranks constituted at least

⁴¹⁰ Special Orders 32, Army of the Frontier, August 22, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Cornish, Dudley. "Kansas Negro Regiments in the Civil War." *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Volume XX, (1952-1953): 426, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka Kansas.; *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-'65, Volume I: Official Military History of Kansas Regiments During the War for the Suppression of the Great Rebellion* (Topeka, Kansas: The Kansas State Printing Company, 1896), 250-251; Earle, *Journal*, 43.

half this number. One soldier, Private George Pope of Company I detached on recruiting duty, also died in the raid.

Quantrill's raid on Lawrence targeted a number of influential Lawrencians, amongst them Senator Lane and many of his fellow citizens regarded to be the abolitionist agitators and Jayhawkers responsible for their family's misfortunes in Missouri. At the start of the raid, Quantrill's men targeted the Captain Samuel Snyder's Second Kansas Colored's recruiting camp on Massachusetts Street, and savagely attacked its men without mercy. John McCorkle, one of Quantrill's men, reported when the black recruits and their white officers rushed out of the tents, "many of them sought shelter in the direction of the river. The command was given to break ranks, scatter, and follow them. A few of the [N]egroes reached the river, plunging into it, but none succeeded in reaching the opposite shore." Official reports later listed the Second Kansas Colored's losses at twenty men.⁴¹¹ The losses however reflected that the whites and blacks of Lawrence at least shared tragedy, despite any other differences they may have felt.

The hated black soldiers and their abolitionist officers, and the black residents of Lawrence, may have suspected Quantrill would attempt an attack, Hinton implied as much when he described the raid to *New York Times* readers. The black community sustained loss as well as the white, twenty-two of its residents killed by Quantrill's men. However many Lawrencian blacks appear to have escaped the slaughter Quantrill's band inflicted on the town. Quantrill's forces clashed with black troops again in October 1863 at Baxter Springs where Quantrill's band destroyed an escort conveying General Blunt to Fort Smith, and inflicted significant casualties on a company of the Second Kansas

⁴¹¹ O.S. Barton. *Three Years with Quantrill: A True Story Told by His Scout John McCorkle* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 124-125; Thomas Goodrich. *Bloody Dawn: The Story of the Lawrence Massacre* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1991), 50.

Colored. Many of the wounded sustained fatal gunshot wounds to the head after falling from other injuries-- a sign of Quantrill's absolute refusal to grant quarter to black soldiers.⁴¹² Quantrill may have harbored resentment for the black infantrymen's successful defense of the outpost at Baxter Springs, the location where Quantrill's forces sustained their greatest losses in one battle against Union troops.

Untended Consequences of Battle

While the soldiers of the regiment absorbed the news of Quantrill's raid, the regiment came under assault from higher headquarters as the regiment immediately suffered from a loss of command and control, numerous officers again received instructions for detached duty. Collateral duties and detached service affected many of the regiment's companies, and extended to the highest levels of the regiment. The Army of the Frontier ordered Lieutenant Colonel Bowles and Chaplain Hutchinson in mid-August to detached service, the former for Court Martial duty, the latter to apprehend and escort deserters back to the regiment. Officers also tendered resignations, and Lieutenant Dickerson received a disability discharge. Lieutenant Colonel Bowles also tendered his resignation; a step he later argued was undertaken under duress. Although Special Orders Number 30 authorized Bowles a leave of absence, and Bowles received a surgeon's certificate of disability, his service record from mid-August to December 1863 reflects a confusing and contradictory series of absences without leave.⁴¹³ The regiment operated without Bowles for the remainder of his service in the Civil War. Major Ward assumed Bowles's position during his and Williams's absences.

⁴¹² Richard Hinton, "The War in the Indian Territory – Gen. Blunt's Last Victory," September 4, 1863; "Quantrill in Kansas – The Massacre of Gen. Blunt's Escort," October 18, 1863, *The New York Times*.

⁴¹³ John Bowles, Special Order Number 30, Army of the Frontier August 18, 1863, Resignation August 18, 1863; George Hutchinson, Special Order 28, Army of the Frontier, August 16, 1863; Richard Hinton. *RG 94, 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records*.

Other officers proved highly problematic for the regiment, with two company commanders arrested and a third absent without leave. George Martin, the commander of Company B was reported in the regimental rolls as absent without leave from June 25, 1863 to October 9, 1863. Captain Andrew Armstrong of Company D was arrested on charges of murder, charges outstanding since April 1863, and held at Fort Gibson from September 17, 1863 to February 24, 1864, although later acquitted by a court martial. Captain Thrasher of Company E also endured arrest on charges preferred by Colonel Williams, and despite a week of release at Colonel Williams' request, Thrasher returned to confinement at Fort Gibson and remained there until February 1, 1864. Unlike Armstrong, Thrasher was sentenced to six months suspended pay for an unspecified offense.⁴¹⁴ The regimental officers' scheming and maneuvering for power in early 1863 appeared to have resurfaced while the regiment garrisoned Fort Gibson. However, this time the reasons for their disloyalty appeared to be based in allegations of criminal misconduct by Colonel Williams and at least one officer's belief that Williams betrayed his duties as an officer.

The seriousness of the charges against two company commanders may be explained by a journal entry by Captain Earle in December in which he mentions a second attempt by company commanders to bring charges against Williams for "Every crime which could disgrace an officer and render him unfit and unworthy of holding an office in the

⁴¹⁴ Special Order 59, District of the Frontier, September 4, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; *RG 94, 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records*, George Martin; Andrew Armstrong, April 2, 1863 charges preferred and Armstrong's arrest ordered by major Henning, Fort Scott Commander, Special Order 47, paragraph V, Headquarters District of the Frontier, February 19, 1864; Special Order 6, First Kansas Colored, September 9, 1863; Luther Thrasher, Special Order 40, September 16, 1863, General Field Order 2, September 25, 1863 suspension of pay and emoluments, restored to duty per order Number 2, Headquarters First Kansas Colored Volunteers at Roseville, Arkansas, February 1, 1864.

Army.⁴¹⁵ If a first attempt resulted in charges resurfacing against Armstrong, and other unspecified charges against Thrasher, it appears that Earle may have revealed a Byzantine attempt by a cabal of officers to unseat Williams while absent from his command. No charges are in Williams's file and in their absence, several things may be considered: Williams preferred charges against Thrasher as the representative of a group attempting to subvert Williams's leadership; Armstrong finally stood Court Martial for offenses that he may have avoided in Fort Scott and which could have been suppressed; Bowles may have been connected with the attempt to replace Williams, hence his resignation under duress. The possibilities are fascinating to consider, especially given Earle's earlier maneuvers to replace Williams at Fort Scott during the formation of the regiment. Regardless of the facts in the case, Williams retained regimental command.

Despite the upheaval in the regimental officer ranks, the regiment continued to train and access new recruits. But, errors occurred during the haste of the regiment's initial efforts to muster the regiment, and resulted in several discharges at the direction of Major General Blunt, namely those of underage Privates Naro and Elias Hardridge.⁴¹⁶ Company C and Company H along with Assistant Surgeon Eberle Macy, on September 3 reported for garrison duty at Fort Gibson. The remaining companies foraged for food and building materials, but the supply situation at Fort Gibson reached the point where foraging deprived loyal Union families of both corn meal and their scarce fence rails which were used as fuel for soldier's fires. Houses also fell victim to scavenging

⁴¹⁵ Earle, *Journal*, 44; James M. Williams, *RG 94: 79th USCT (New), Combined Military Service Record*.

⁴¹⁶ Special Order 33, District of the Frontier, August 22, 1863. Captain Van Horn was specifically ordered to effect the return to their parents immediately. *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*.

companies seeking materials to build huts.⁴¹⁷ The hard campaigning of the summer showed in the physical condition of the unit's equipment and clothing, its men fighting shoeless in sun-bleached uniforms that had seen better days. Despite these material shortcomings, deployment orders arrived for an "easy march" to Fort Smith on September 14, 1863 and the regiment left Fort Gibson on September 22, 1863.⁴¹⁸ Captain Welch of Company K remained at Camp Williams to command a small number of sick in the hospital at camp Williams, and retained the regiment's camp equipage for later transport to Fort Smith. Assistant Surgeon Macy also received orders to rejoin his regiment after serving detached duty at the general hospital at Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation.⁴¹⁹ Their deployment to Fort Smith appeared to give the regiment a new mission commensurate with their reputation.

Fort Smith and the Army of the Frontier's refugee problem

The First Kansas Colored arrived in Fort Smith as Union forces sought to consolidate their hold on the area. Fort Smith's importance to Blunt's strategy and the necessity for infantry to garrison the towns and plantations of the region made their deployment to Fort Smith imperative. Fort Gibson continued to rely on its cavalry, but Fort Smith would play host to two black infantry regiments. Recruiting for the Second Kansas Colored completed, the new regiment marched directly to Arkansas. The Second Kansas Colored's arrival at Fort Smith provoked anger and recriminations against Colonel

⁴¹⁷ Special Orders 44, First Kansas Colored, September 2, 1863, Special Orders 1 and 6, First Kansas Colored, September 8, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁴¹⁸ Special Order 38, Army of the Frontier, September 14, 1863; Special Order 42, Army of the Frontier, September 18, 1863. *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁴¹⁹ Special Orders 46, First Kansas Colored Regiment, September 16, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

Williams. His officers and men helped to raise a regiment that now served alongside the First Kansas Colored clothed in new uniforms, equipped with good arms and first-rate camp and garrison equipage. Captain Earle's journal entry expresses the disenchantment of the First Kansas Colored's men and officers, and many were angry that the new, un-blooded regiment arrived well equipped while the First Kansas Colored's soldiers wore shabby clothing and many lacked shoes or proper tents. The regiment's officers immediately queried Williams as to the disparity between the two regiments, and requisitions for new clothing and equipment flooded the regimental quartermaster. The regiment quickly made up for their equipment shortcomings.⁴²⁰ Two Colored Regiments established the fact that black men understood the impact of their contribution, a development reflected by events elsewhere in the region.

The long process of recruiting black regiments gathered momentum in 1863, and by late summer, black military service appeared an established and appreciated reality for the Union army. Many changes occurred in the month of August. Black recruiting received increased support in Missouri, western Arkansas and Kansas. Potential recruits in the military District of the Border in Missouri marched under escort from Missouri to Kansas for military duty. General McNeil, who later assumed command of the Army of the Frontier from Blunt, received orders to raise as many black regiments as possible.⁴²¹ Black military service no longer existed as a "pet project" of rogue senators, it now constituted Union policy, and the impact of black soldiers on Union operations proved significant.

⁴²⁰ Earle, *Journal*, 43.

⁴²¹ *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part II, Correspondence*, August 10, 1863, Letter Schofield to Blunt, Letter Schofield to McNeil, 440-441, August 18, 1863, General Order 9, Headquarters District of the Frontier, 460-461.

The summer campaigns of 1863 gave way to a battle of a different sort as the mass of refugees around Fort Gibson proved an enormous draw upon Federal logistics, and a recurring source of disease for the combat units of the Army of the Frontier. Although Conditions varied between Fort Gibson and Fort Smith, “at Fort Smith women and children received half rations from the Federals. The usual attitude was that Union refugees merely got in the way and consequently many were sent to Kansas.”⁴²² Kansas served as the overflow for refugees and despite the growing apprehension about additional refugees flooding Kansas, many continued to accompany Federal wagon trains north from Indian Territory.

Military leaders understood the impact of civilian refugees on their ability to wage war. Repeated attempts to remove refugees from the vicinity of Fort Blunt and Fort Smith arose from the increasing numbers of destitute refugees around the forts, their disease incubating unhygienic conditions, and humanitarian urges to remove them to safer places in other regions. Acting from the need to thin their numbers, in September Lieutenant Colonel Schuarte of the Second Indian Home Guard Regiment issued general orders Number Three, which commanded all non-governmental workers to leave Fort Gibson under threat of forcible expulsion. Although Colonel John Ritchie, the First Brigade Commander, revoked Schuarte’s order as “oppos[ing] the principles of humanity,” he may also have understood that expelling refugees could cause ripple effects amongst the black and Indian regiments stationed at that post.⁴²³ Schuarte’s impulsive command exposed the Federal forces at Fort Blunt to the potential of forcing

⁴²² Michael Dougan, *Confederate Arkansas: The People and Policies of a Frontier State in Wartime*. (University of Alabama Press, 1976),115.

⁴²³ General Orders Number 3, 18 September, 1863, Richard Hinton Collection, document 25583, Kansas State Historical Society.

disaffected refugees to seek succor behind Confederate lines, an action that threatened to undo the Indian defections of the summer and fall. Expelling non-essential refugees also threatened the familial bonds of black soldiers and risked inspiring a mutiny or mass desertions.

Fort Smith possessed a large population of white and black refugees as well as a civilian town and Unionist farms around the fort. Colonel Williams jealously fought to preserve his regiment's reputation by reining excesses before soldiers earned the hatred of the surrounding community. The first disciplinary infractions occurred less than a week after the regiment's arrival and occupation of Camp Judson outside Fort Smith. Colonel Williams reduced a sergeant and two corporals of Company F to the ranks for "marauding and molesting citizens without orders." Their actions compelled Williams to stringently outline the conditions for foraging, and reiterated that foraging authority rested with him, not individuals. Williams instituted two measures to re-impose discipline on his soldiers, stringently limiting passes, and reinstating drill periods for company and battalion drill.⁴²⁴ Despite Williams' regulation of his soldiers' time and freedom of movement, foraging and its attendant potential for criminal abuse remained a pressing issue for the troops around Fort Smith. Temptations and malfeasance aside, the regiment grew during its tenure at Fort Smith, despite losses to desertion and disease. Members of the black community enlisted in nearly all companies of the regiment, a sign that the regiment offered a fitting chance for proving one's manhood as well as a steady paycheck (almost) and meals.

⁴²⁴ General Orders 8, Camp Judson, First Kansas Colored Regiment, September 29, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

Developments in Kansas and Arkansas contributed to the ranks of the regiment at Fort Smith, some due to returning deserters, others due to the steadily worsening guerrilla problem in western Arkansas. While detached to apprehend deserters in Kansas, Chaplain Hutchinson successfully negotiated the release of seven soldiers held in confinement at Fort Scott for desertion. The soldiers then returned to the regiment through a circuitous arrangement that first placed them under the control of the Second Kansas Colored at Fort Gibson, and then transport to Fort Smith.⁴²⁵ The regiment also recruited new members at Fort Smith, and during the period October 2, 1863 through December 5, 1863 thirty recruits enlisted at Fort Smith, and the regiment achieved notable success recruiting eight men on a single day, October 8. Three additional recruits came in from Little Rock and Ozark in October.⁴²⁶

The regiment's dispositions changed in late October and Camp Judson gave way to Fort Smith. First among the regiment's companies to enter Fort Smith, Company D reported for detached service as the garrison prison guard. The remainder of the regiment selected quarters. Life at Fort Smith proved less than ideal for disciplinary purposes and Colonel Williams ordered increased vigilance on the part of officers and non-commissioned officers. The need for constant supervision demanded draconian measures and Williams ordered the arrest of any non-commissioned officer found more than one hundred yards from their company quarters without a pass, the only exception being to bathe or draw water from the river. Loitering also constituted grounds for arrest. The standard pattern of drill continued unabated, company drill in the morning and battalion

⁴²⁵ Special Orders 90, District of the Frontier, October 15, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁴²⁶ *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-'65, Volume I, 572-597.*

drill in the afternoon.⁴²⁷ The new measures beg the question of why movement became so restricted. Several scenarios suggest themselves: ease of desertion, need to continually maintain accountability for deployment purposes, and the threat of conflict between the various units stationed at Fort Smith. The latter two alternatives do not prove out in the regimental or company records, although detachments did receive regular marching orders. Desertion deserves a closer look because of the close proximity to a constantly changing refugee community.

Non-combat threats to the regiment

When considering all manpower losses for the period at Fort Smith, the three main sources of loss of appreciable number are combat losses, desertion losses, and deaths due to disease. Manpower losses from combat-related causes were minimal for the regiment, and only four men appear to have died as the direct result of wounds sustained in battle, despite the number of wounded reported from Cabin Creek and Honey Springs. The greatest single source of manpower losses was disease, followed by desertions.

Desertions correlated closely with the time the regiment spent at Fort Gibson and Fort Smith, and Company B sustained the largest single day rash of desertions on December 5, 1863. Surprisingly, the month of December posted the greatest losses, despite the cold of winter and multiple detachments to towns around Fort Smith.

The existence of a black refugee community at Fort Smith offered deserters potential shelter, but another competitor may have been a reason for soldiers deserting the regiment at this time. Four soldiers of the First Kansas Colored deserted from their regiment to join the Second Kansas Colored, and Colonel Crawford received orders to

⁴²⁷ Special Orders 56, Headquarters Troops in the Field, October 22, 1863, Special Orders 8, First Kansas Colored, October 25, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

return them to Colonel Williams. Despite the soldiers' individual motivations for deserting, on December 11, four different deserters voluntarily reported back to their regiment, one of which had been absent without leave since September. Deserter

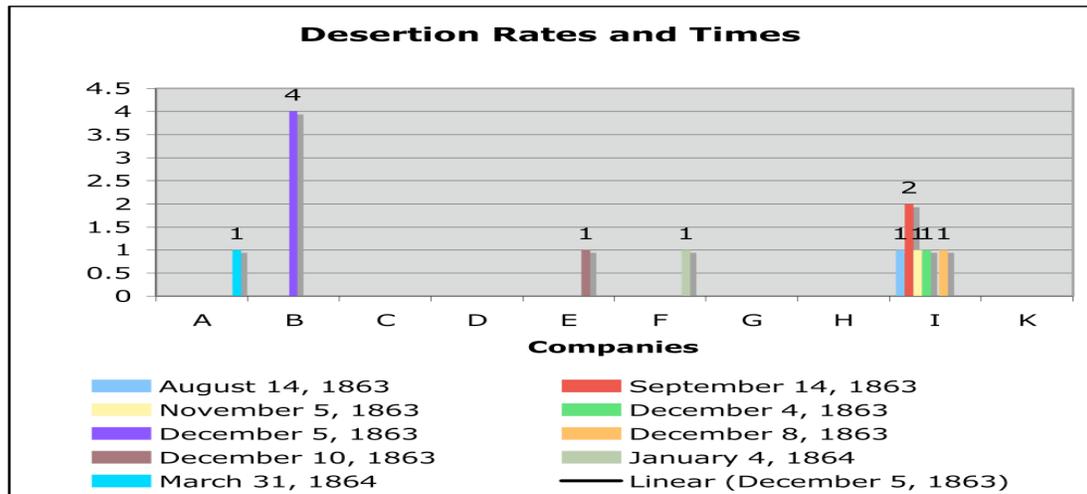


Chart 1: Regimental Desertion rates July 3, 1864 – March 31, 1864.⁴²⁸

catchers sought out fugitive men - the \$30.00 reward incentive for the successful capture of deserters – among them Private Benjamin Taylor who cost the Quartermaster at Fort Leavenworth the usual fee when turned over to military custody.⁴²⁹ No single event appears to have precipitated desertions, but the imminent departure of the regiment for Roseville may have spurred deserters to reconsider their actions.

However problematic the desertion rate suffered by the regiment appears, Historian Dudley Cornish determined the desertion rate of white Kansas regiments was almost twice that of the First and Second Kansas Colored. The white Kansas desertion rate of 117.54 per thousand eclipsed the black rate of 62.20 per thousand.⁴³⁰ The obvious answer is that black troops deserting in Indian Territory or Arkansas immediately entered an

⁴²⁸ Table 8 composed from unit data as reported in the *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-'65, Volume I, 572-597.*

⁴²⁹ Special Order 36, December 11, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Private Benjamin Taylor, *RG 94: 79th USCT, Combined Military Service Records.*

⁴³⁰ Dudley Cornish. "Kansas Negro Regiments in the Civil War," 429.

environment imminently hostile to them, white guerrillas, white refugees and Indian guerrillas all seeking their death. This obviates the influence of black refugee communities into which former soldiers could attempt to vanish unless the regiment occupied a place adjacent their communities. A third option may be that the predominately young recruits suffered from “recruit’s remorse” when the military life didn’t appeal to their thirst for adventure. Camp life varied from the excitement of preparation for marches, to the dull routine of drill or guard duty.

The quality of camp life varied by season and diet. Monotony was broken by an October payday and the occasional raid by guerrillas. Parades and drill established a routine, and combat duties varied it, but when soldiers lacked food, pay, or basic comforts, they voted with their feet and often deserted. Food went beyond sustenance despite the claims of the military quartermasters. The quality of rations also affected health, especially when access to fresh foods became difficult due to areas becoming over-foraged, or no longer in season.

Federal rations offered a variety of foodstuffs to sustain the Union armies in the field, but when in garrison troops expected to subsist on better fare than in the field. When available, rations took the form of regulated measures and types of foodstuffs available to individuals and companies. Individual soldiers could expect dried or salt meat, bread or hardtack, sugar, coffee and when available potatoes and soap. These regulated supplies often depended on the whim of military exigency, and fresh foods competed with military cargoes and even fodder for space in transport.⁴³¹ The Army of the Frontier utilized primarily wagons for transporting supplies, and shortages also resulted when the river

⁴³¹ Alfred J. Bollett. *Civil War Medicine: Challenges and Triumphs*. (Tucson, Arizona: Galen Press, LTD.), 2002, 339, 346, 352.

dropped below navigable levels for riverboats. Ingenious solutions presented themselves, and an attempt was made to alleviate dietary diseases such as scurvy by the creation of the much-despised “Desiccated Mixed Vegetables.” Confederate Colonel Stand Watie’s soldiers captured a supply of these rations and reported a disgusting mixture of dried vegetables along with the hind legs of bullfrogs, snails, and screwworms. The dried cakes proved difficult to prepare in communal messes also, the brick-like cakes swelling to enormous size when cooked.⁴³² Such sumptuous fare doubtless contributed to dietary deficiencies.

The ration situation at Fort Gibson and Fort Smith reached crisis levels in fall of 1863. The official correspondence of the First Kansas Colored’s Regimental Quartermaster offers one story of why troops suffered from a shortage of rations. Rations, according to the Commissary General of Subsistence, would be issued in fulfillment of the Government’s obligations, but when full rations existed in short supply, an equivalent value in some other food would be provided.⁴³³ The provision of rations as part of the black soldiers’ pay depended on local availability, and therefore any supply shortage demanded local substitutes. Considering that refugee relief demanded many of the rations that reached Fort Gibson or Fort Smith, soldiers faced two choices: half rations or rations supplemented by foraging in the vicinity of the forts. Food shortages combined with crowded conditions proved deadly for some regimental soldiers.

The First Kansas Colored’s record for the July 1863 – March 1864 time frame reflects forty-five soldiers lost to disease. Regimental disease losses indicate that the most

⁴³² Edward Dale, *Cherokee Cavaliers*, 134; Alfred J. Bollett. *Civil War Medicine*, 344.

⁴³³ Commissary General of Subsistence, Washington City, to Lt E. Hughes, Quartermaster of the First Kansas Colored Volunteers, September 15, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general’s Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

soldiers died when the regiment was billeted with other regiments, or served on the garrisons of Fort Gibson or Fort Smith. During August, and again in December, the regiment experienced spikes in mortality, but when detailed into detachments the mortality rates dropped. The correlation between garrison duty and mortality rates appears well founded, and when the types of disease are considered, the connection becomes clearer. Despite food shortages and dwindling supplies of food to be foraged, no direct dietary connection can be discerned from the disease deaths amongst the regiment's ranks, no reports of scurvy surfacing at this time.

The disease information in Tables 3 and 4 indicate a seasonal correlation between disease and mortality, and although unit records reflect a number of deaths from unknown causes, the main diseases identified in the summer are of diarrheal or intestinal nature, and in winter, close confines appear correlated to deaths due to smallpox, typhoid fever and various fevers. In August the crowded environs of Fort Gibson may have contributed to intestinal ailments, but December's mortality spike is difficult to explain due to incomplete records. The most likely causative agent for unknown deaths may have been the ubiquitous "camp fever" that killed new recruits during their seasoning period

Although the mortality rates do not overtly reflect a better standard of care for black soldiers, Fort Smith did possess a general hospital with a colored ward, and the soldiers

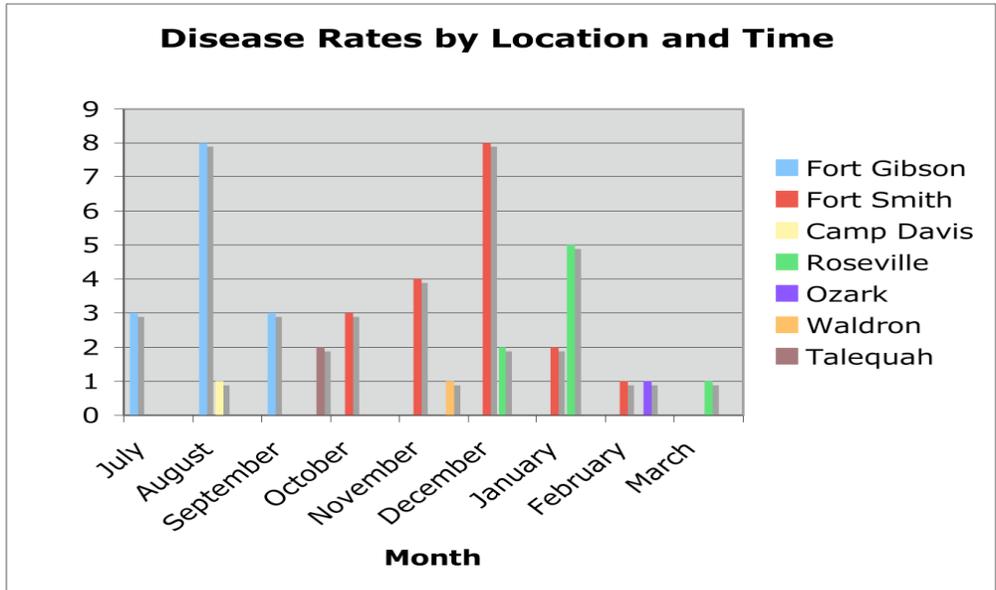


Chart 2: Regimental Disease Losses by Location and Time

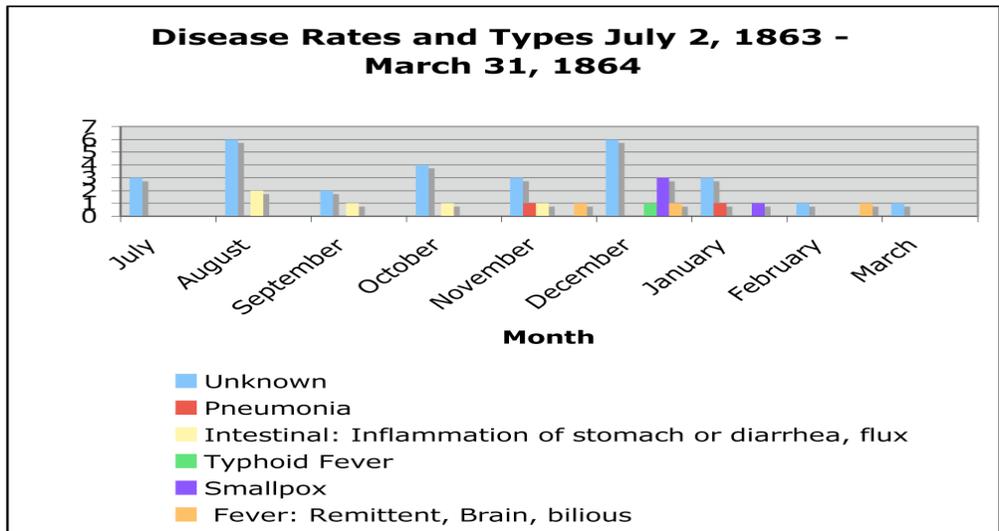


Chart 3: Regimental Disease Losses by Type and Time⁴³⁴

of the First Kansas Colored could expect care from Assistant Regimental Surgeon Abijah Tenny. The hospital's chief complaints during this period appear to cluster around pneumonia and smallpox cases.⁴³⁵ The potential for disease transmission between military and civilian populations remained high at the hospital as it treated military and civilian

⁴³⁴ Tables 9-10 composed from unit data as reported in the *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-'65, Volume I, 572-597*.

⁴³⁵ U.S. General Hospital, Fort Smith, January 30, 1864, *Fort Smith New Era*. Of the 309 cases treated, 64 were pneumonia, and 34 smallpox, approximately twenty and ten percent of cases respectively.

patients alike, and despite suppositions that pneumonia spread amongst soldiers due to “tender lungs” in the cold, the simple fact remains that crowded populations that exchanged diseases spread by contact or discharge. Cold, miserable, inadequate housing also lowered immunity, as did poor diets and reduced rations. Mixed in with this recipe for illness, the civilian refugee population constituted a reservoir of potential diseases that varied with time and season, the winter offering pulmonary and skin diseases, and the summer a variety of mosquito-borne illnesses. In both scenarios disease harbored amongst new recruits accessed from refugee populations quickly spread through the ranks and incapacitated or killed soldiers that remained in a garrison environment for long periods.⁴³⁶

The preventative medicine methods available to commanders could be divided into three classes: isolation in regimental hospitals; careful husbanding of manpower through judicious camp selection; and the administration of medicines such as quinine. Prophylactic methods for controlling disease relied on the prevailing understanding of how disease spread, namely the miasmatic disease theory that postulated that keeping soldiers from swamps and marshes, and noxious night air, would prevent disease such as malaria. Once soldiers contracted malaria, the disease stayed with them throughout their service, quinine holding parasites in check, but not killing them. Victims exhibited classical malaria symptoms: chills, nausea, headaches, and a fever cycle that varied in duration from twenty-four to seventy-two hours. Quotidian malaria occurred every

⁴³⁶ Margaret Humphreys, *Intensely Human*, 48. Humphreys offers an excellent analysis of malaria remaining viable through pools of infected survivors that transmit the disease to others in their immediate vicinity. This hypothesis explains to an extent the high malaria rates in the regiment through the campaigning season.

twenty-four hours, tertian fever every forty-eight, and quartan every seventy-two hours.⁴³⁷

The military implications for such a disease are clear and constituted one of the compelling reasons for supporting black soldiers for the South's "sickly season."

Amongst veteran formations soldiers suffered series of malaria episodes, and when subjected to hard campaigning and fatigue, many of them experienced outbreaks.

Two of the most prevailing diseases that afflicted soldiers of all races took the form of diarrhea and dysentery. These diseases coupled with the predominately agrarian background of many of the regiment's recruits ensured that the regiment continually lost soldiers to diseases to which they may not have been exposed to in their childhood years. These diarrheal diseases were so prevalent that unless soldiers suffered to a debilitating degree, few reported it.⁴³⁸ These diseases may have their origin in communal messes in which small groups of soldiers shared cooking duties and billeting, or in the prevailing use of sinks, or toilets that often concentrated fecal matter into areas which could contaminate ground water. Garrison duties and camp occupation for extended periods exposed soldiers to greater concentrations of the sick, and casualty rates reflect this reality. Relief from garrison life at Fort Smith occurred in part due to the Army of the Frontier's decrepit cavalry force, and on November 14, 1863, the First Kansas Colored marched forth to Waldron, Arkansas.

⁴³⁷ Andrew McIlwaine Bell, "'Gallnippers' & Glory: The Links between Mosquito-borne Disease and U.S. Civil War Operations and Strategy, 1862," *Journal of Military History*, Volume 74, Number 2 (April 2010): 381-382. *Plasmodium vivax* malaria was also known as the ague, dumb ague or chill fever; Stanhope Bayne-Jones, *The Evolution of Preventative Medicine in the United States Army, 1607-1939* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 100-101. Malaria was sometimes coupled with typhoid in one diagnosis as typho-malarial fever. Quotidian malaria occurred every twenty-four hours, tertian fever every forty-eight, and quartan every seventy-two hours.

⁴³⁸ Andrew K. Black "In the Service of the United States: Comparative Mortality among African-American and White Troops in the Union Army." *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 79, No. 4, (Autumn, 1994): 319-320; Bollett, Alfred J. *Civil War Medicine: Challenges and Triumphs*, 284-285.

The Army of the Frontier at Fort Smith fought a continual defensive war against guerrillas and Confederate regulars under Generals Steele and Cooper. General McNeil, despite possessing a number of cavalry regiments, lacked the horseflesh to pursue his Confederate foes. Therefore, he employed infantry to bar the Confederates from key logistical nodes such Waldron, Arkansas (located 40 miles south of Fort Smith), where abundant stocks of wheat and corn existed. The regiment's selection may have occurred as the result of General McNeil's review of the troops at Fort Smith in early November. McNeil singled out the First Kansas Colored as "a triumph of drill and discipline...Few volunteer regiments that I have seen make a better appearance. I regard them as first-rate infantry."⁴³⁹ Apparently so did potential recruits, and seven new recruits joined the regiment when it garrisoned Waldron. Three weeks later on December 11, 1863, the regiment marched again, this time to the town of Roseville on the Arkansas River, over forty miles south of Fort Smith. The regiment's orders directed it to "collect subsistence and forage, seize all contraband cotton and stock, and clean the country of guerrillas."⁴⁴⁰ The regiment formed an integral part of the battle to keep Fort Smith supplied through the winter until supplies could come up from Little Rock became the regiment's primary focus for the next three months.

Many changes occurred in Indian Territory and western Arkansas between July 3, 1863 and December 10, 1863. Additional changes in attitude and employment marked

⁴³⁹ *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part II, Correspondence*, November 2, 1863, McNeil to Schofield, 690-692; Colonel Cloud to Colonel Williams, November 14, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁴⁴⁰ Special Orders No 34, Army of the Frontier, December 9, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

the acceptance of the First Kansas Colored as a full and trusted unit of the Army of the Frontier. Outstanding combat performance at Honey Springs and yeoman's work at Fort Gibson validated the training and effort exerted in enlisting and mustering the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry. The men of the First Kansas Colored no longer stood as an experiment of questionable value, but as trailblazers for the black regiments that would be raised in Kansas and Arkansas. New regiments would form in the footsteps of the First Kansas Colored as the Second Kansas Colored Infantry, Eleventh Colored Infantry and the Fifty-Fourth United States Colored Troops entered the Union army's order of battle in the west in 1864.

The First Kansas Colored weathered its crucial period of testing, having proved that black men could fight as the equals of whites on the field of battle. The next test of the regiment would not be in pitched battle against Confederate field armies, but in garrisoning western Arkansas against guerrillas while imposing a semblance of order on a series of small towns along the Arkansas River and the Army of the Frontier's exposed supply lines. The supply war and preparation for the campaigns of 1864 occupied the regiment's personnel, and the veterans of the regiment welcomed new recruits from Arkansas into ranks formerly dominated by former slaves recruited from Missouri contrabands under trying conditions. The regiment's operations around Fort Smith featured new aspects of the war in the west as cotton confiscation and mill operation replaced lines of battle. However, the regiment would shed blood over the winter and with the spring of 1864 emerge ready for renewed hostilities against Confederate armies.

Part II

Jubilee

Chapter Six Conspiracies

Union dispositions in Western Arkansas in the fall of 1863 defied Confederate efforts to maintain dominance of Indian Territory as a buffer state between Kansas and Texas. The Confederates anticipated that 1864 would witness new Union efforts to take the war into southern Arkansas and Texas, and their thin lines in Indian Territory fought a defensive strategy against the poorly supplied Union forces astride the Texas Road at Fort Gibson and Fort Smith on the Arkansas River. Federal forces controlled Little Rock to the east, and elsewhere Confederate defeats at Vicksburg and Gettysburg signaled a change from offensive to defensive warfare across the Confederacy. In the west Confederate efforts centered around rebuilding disheartened Indian alliances, and filling the depleted ranks of Confederate regiments with which to contest the expected Union invasions. In Indian Territory and Arkansas guerrillas conducted raids to contain Federal forces, reassure secessionist supporters, and deprive Federal forces of the crucial rebuilding period necessary to prepare armies for renewed campaigning. The First Kansas Colored experienced guerrilla war at Baxter Springs, but in western Arkansas around Fort Smith, the war proved to be much marching interspersed with little shooting.

General McNeil's weak supply situation drove many of the First Kansas Colored's deployments beginning in November 1863 and continuing into 1864 until his replacement by General Thayer, and the start of the Red River campaign. McNeil's supply situation remained subject to the whims of nature and the constant raids of Confederate guerrillas and the small, but effective number of Indian troops under Stand

Watie. The distances between Union outposts reveal part of the weaknesses in theater logistics, the distance from Fort Scott (his largest and southernmost Kansas supply base) to Baxter Springs stretched fifty-eight miles, and from Baxter Springs to Fort Gibson another one hundred and five miles. The crossing at Cabin Creek lay fifty miles from Baxter Springs and continually offered a tempting target to guerrillas. McNeil's solution to this extremely long and vulnerable supply line depended on the Arkansas River to bring supplies to Fort Smith, the overland route no longer viable after frost killed off the last of the meager forage available for southbound trains from Fort Scott.⁴⁴¹ When both supply trains and riverboat traffic failed, the local foraging constituted the Army of the Frontier's only recourse.

The regiments of the Army of the Frontier provided essential support to the army's policy of confiscations and foraging, and protected trains while also guarding and exploiting civilian resources to sustain the Federal forces. The orders of the First Kansas Colored contained a variety of instructions ranging from confiscations of crops and economic goods, to securing key towns, road junctions and ferry crossings against Confederate guerrillas in western Arkansas. Most of the short periods that the First Kansas Colored spent in Arkansas towns involved foodstuffs production – milling or grinding - or collection destined to sustain Fort Smith, especially flour.⁴⁴² The Union army's foraging stripped the region's available food supplies, and although guerrillas sought to weaken the Fort Smith garrison by raiding supply lines, the greatest threat to

⁴⁴¹ Major H.Z. Curtis to Lieutenant Colonel C.W. Marsh, August 26, 1863; Blunt to Schofield, September 11, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22*, 478; 525.

⁴⁴² Earle, *Journal*, 46. The regiment milled flour at Baldinsville in October, a distance of approximately fifty miles from Fort Smith.

the Army of the Frontier may have internal disputes between Union Generals for control of the theater's scarce military and logistical resources.

Confederate guerrilla forces continued to harass the Union army at Fort Smith throughout the fall and winter of 1863, and targeted not only military, but also civilian targets to weaken support for the Federal forces. Guerrillas did not concede any territory to the Union, and launched raids that drove up almost to the gates of Fort Gibson and Fort Smith. Future military operations in 1864 would depend on amassing supplies and confirming local loyalties. Guerrilla warfare carried the fight to the Union army and eroded confidence in its ability to protect those who looked for protection to the Army of the Frontier. Skirmishes between regimental companies and bushwhackers resulted in several deaths, and amidst these raids the Confederate rhetoric concerning prisoners suffered its first setback.

The fortunes of war sometimes offered surprises, and the appearance of a black soldier from the First Kansas Colored feared dead, presented observers with an unprecedented tale of the fate of captured black soldiers. Private Jacob Hall, captured near Schullyville in the fall of 1863, shared the story of his confinement by Confederates, first passing through Fort Washita, and then to Bonham, Texas, from which he escaped.⁴⁴³ Captured blacks it seemed would be taken prisoner, and despite the rhetoric of the Confederate Government, instant execution did not appear the automatic consequence of black military service. However, imprisonment and return to bondage did occur, and Private Hall's experience foreshadowed the fate of other black First Kansas Colored soldiers taken prisoner. The war in western Arkansas also followed different rules from the war in

⁴⁴³ January 30, 1864, Fort Smith *The New Era*.

Indian Territory, and small unit actions seemed to occur when guerrillas tested the resolve of Federal troops, rather than concerted attempts at mass capture or annihilation.

The regiment fought a different sort of war while assigned to Roseville, Arkansas. No large Confederate units concentrated in western Arkansas, the Federal Army of the Frontier possessed too many men and guns to openly challenge. Instead, guerrillas struck at vulnerable points in the Union lines, eroding local Arkansans' ability to provide for themselves by destroying mills, food supplies, and capturing stock. Guerrillas provided a constant reminder that although their cause sustained some grievous wounds in 1863, it maintained a presence that could only be ignored at the Federals' peril. General McNeil tried to consolidate his control on western Arkansas while seeking supplies for his logistically isolated army, despite his fight against General Blunt for control of the army of the Frontier at Fort Smith. Requiring foraging expeditions more than garrison troops at Fort Smith, McNeil ordered the First Kansas Colored on December 11 to march for Roseville. The regiment's orders charged Colonel Williams with "collect[ing] and stor[ing] subsistence and forage, seiz[ing] contraband cotton and stock, and clean[ing] the country of guerrillas."⁴⁴⁴ The last stipulation required the regiment to support a number of Federal initiatives including defeating guerrilla recruiting attempts, denying them subsistence and remounts, and ensuring that guerrillas did not establish camps from which their bands could raid with impunity. The civilian government in western Arkansas no longer functioned; therefore the military performed the role of government, including the functions of the judiciary and tax collection in the form of confiscations.

⁴⁴⁴ Brigadier General McNeil, Special Orders No 34 December 9, 1863, RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.

Although winter closed the campaigning season in Indian Territory and western Arkansas, for the First Kansas Colored, it created opportunity for recruitment, and many recruits chose military service as their route to freedom from the large refugee population of Fort Smith. Other benefits accrued to the regiment as it left Fort Smith, among them a change of rations and the increase in the variety and availability of food the further the regiment's soldiers went from the environs of Fort Smith. Rations would not be restricted to those arriving by wagon train, and interference from headquarters would decrease the further the regiment went from the fort. Distance did not necessarily equate to isolation; entrepreneurial souls found opportunity in the regiment's departure, some of them seeking to aid the regiment through unexpected means.

Further surprises awaited Colonel Williams, and Kansas's politics reentered the regiment's affairs in the form of Champion Vaughan, an influential Leavenworth citizen, journalist and part owner of the *Leavenworth Times*. Richard Hinton no longer fed the regional newspapers and the *New York Times* with a first-hand stream of information from the First Kansas Colored. Hinton's time away from the regiment as a recruiter created a news void that Vaughan sought to fill to his advantage. While the regiment prepared to leave Fort Smith, Vaughan promised fellow Leavenworth resident Colonel Williams that if Williams sent reports of his regiment's affairs to his paper, he would ensure that "the whole state and country shall know the truth in regard to you" and that "unless my hand becomes palsied no regiment shall go upon record in the state archives with a prouder name than yours." Vaughan's promises proved a powerful incentive for cooperation, his connections with Kansas's politicians and generals at Leavenworth a gain for the regiment and its reputation. Although a highly political town, Leavenworth

did not evidence a particularly strong sentiment of support for blacks in general. However, if Williams could secure Vaughan's support, his chances to erase animosities from the initial recruiting phase of the regiment could be healed, and Williams' own name recognition and reputation could potentially increase.⁴⁴⁵ Williams appears to have taken the offer, and stories of the regiment's deeds circulated throughout Kansas in 1864. The stories proved useful propaganda for the recruiting effort also, and the regiment experienced a flush of new recruits in early 1864 despite competing with the Second Kansas colored for manpower.

Among the fifty-two new recruits, the largest number went to Company F with fourteen entering its ranks from a variety of locations. Companies C and E reported no new enlistments or musters during this period. The locations or residence reported by recruits from this period reflects an influx of recruits from Arkansas. These locations include some garrisoned or temporarily occupied by companies, but also the degree to which the regiment attracted soldiers from the refugee populations of various locations.

Fort Smith and Fort Gibson combined represent almost three quarters of the new recruits, and the remaining locations reflect the transient communities' input. Specific locations such as Roseville and Ozark did not sustain large refugee populations; therefore it is reasonable to interpret their numbers as coming from resident slave populations. The large selection of individuals from newly occupied regions represented a new manpower base for the regiment. After December 1863 the regiment's manpower replacements derived from Arkansas sources. This new demographic represented a group of men that

⁴⁴⁵ <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/leavenworth/leavenworth-co-p10.html> accessed December 3, 2010; Letter Champion Vaughan to Colonel Williams, December 10, 1863, Williams file, Kansas State Historical Society.

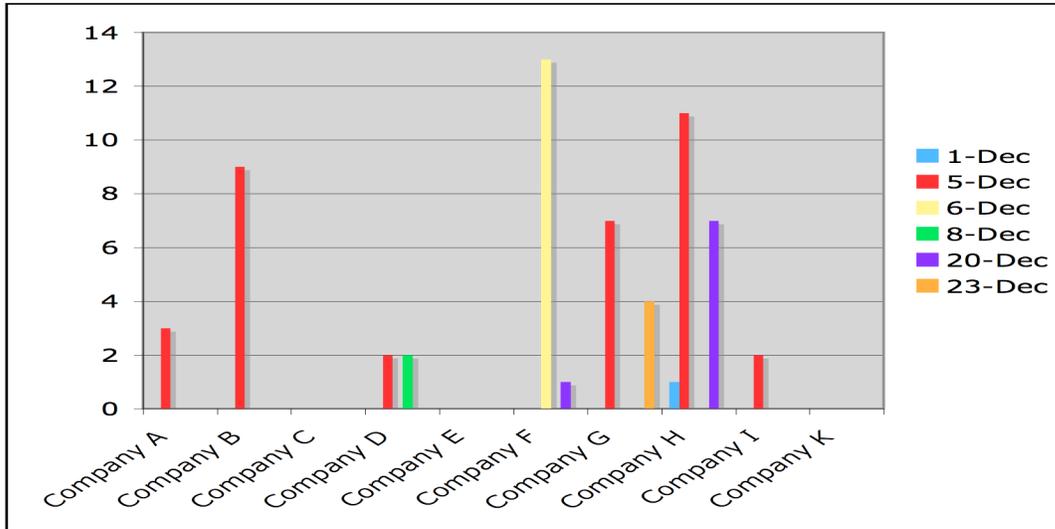


Chart 4: Enlistments and Musters 1 December 1863– 30 March 1864

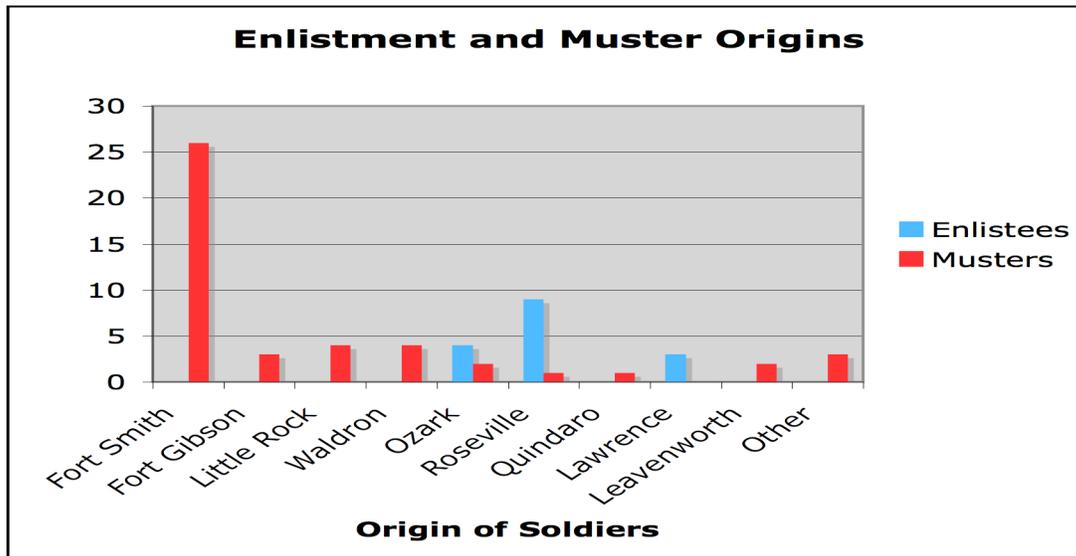


Chart 5: Recruit Numbers by Origin⁴⁴⁶

were not combat veterans of the earlier battles in Indian Territory, or the guerrilla campaigns in Kansas and Missouri. Their membership in the regiment’s ranks is an indication that the First Kansas Colored continued to recruit in the field as well as the garrison and that these volunteers eagerly sought employment as soldiers, bounties and other inducements unavailable to them at this time. In addition, the new recruits added to

⁴⁴⁶ Tables 11-12 composed from unit data as reported in the *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-'65, Volume I, 572-597.*

the ranks at a time when disease, desertions, and disability discharges removed over thirty soldiers from the regimental rolls. Disability discharges derived from a number of sources primarily combat injuries, and illnesses such as tuberculosis and persistent digestive disorders. One special discharge case serves as another example of the undue haste in recruiting the regiment's soldiers. Company H recruiters enlisted Private William Clark for service despite the albino's inability to distinguish targets at a distance of thirty yards.⁴⁴⁷ The new Arkansas recruits ameliorated some of the hasty recruitments of the regiment's initial muster, but the enlistment of physically unfit individuals serves as evidence for the less than fastidious recruiting practices pursued to fill the regiment in order to justify muster.

The town of Roseville did not support a population large enough to provide significant numbers of recruits. Despite ten soldiers enlisting or mustering from Roseville, they most likely composed a group of farm slaves from the large plantation that did not flee when the Union army occupied the town. Roseville was a key point in the army of the Frontier's provisioning and confiscation plan despite being over forty miles from Fort Smith. The town's location near the Arkansas River and proved ideal for all the regiments' missions, especially if riverboats could navigate the river. The regiment's personnel knew Roseville from a brief posting in November, but descriptions of the town convey a picture of its size and capacity to support the Army of the Frontier. Roseville comprised about a dozen houses, only five of which contained occupants. Rich fields of corn and cotton stood ready for harvest around the town, over two hundred acres and cotton to feed the needs of Fort Smith. More importantly, the town contained a working

⁴⁴⁷ William Clark. *RG 94: 79th USCT (New), Combined Military Service Records*, Clark was enlisted January 13, 1863 and by May remained at Camp Hooker due to illness. December and January served as a period for discharging the physically unfit from the regiment.

cotton gin and a corn mill, as well as large stores of farming implements and tools.⁴⁴⁸ Food and confiscated cotton could be processed in one consolidated agrarian location, and then shipped to Fort Smith by either land or water. The existing homes and shacks proved bonuses for the regimental personnel, especially the officers that appropriated a well-furnished house that contained enough rooms for the officers to live comfortably two to a room. Soldiers occupied the slave quarters, a welcome change from tents in the open air.⁴⁴⁹ Roseville offered a pleasant contrast to the crowding and filth of the forts, and may have positively influenced the survival chances for newer regimental members by removing them from the large refugee communities that served as reservoirs for diseases, especially malaria and respiratory disorders. The greatest advantage in the Roseville posting appeared to be more prosaic, access to food stocks without refugee competition.

Roseville offered the First Kansas Colored's soldiers advantages over their fellow soldiers in Fort Smith and Fort Gibson. Roseville's fields and storehouses held large food stores, and diets improved almost immediately as fresh pork and beef, complemented by butter and sweet potatoes, became available to soldiers. Corn meal supplanted regimental hardtack in soldier diets. Captain John Graton of Company C, a prolific letter writer, chronicled his time at Roseville in letters to his wife in Kansas, describing in greater detail what Van Horn later recalled. The cornfields of Roseville provided over 20,000 bushels of corn from what Graton estimated were nearly five continuous miles of cornfields in the vicinity. Fort Smith's quartermasters recognized

⁴⁴⁸ Benjamin Van Horn Memoirs, *Benjamin Van Horn Collection*, Military History Collection, Manuscript Division, Kansas State Historical Society, 25.

⁴⁴⁹ Benjamin Van Horn Memoirs, *Benjamin Van Horn Collection*, Military History Collection, Manuscript Division, Kansas State Historical Society, 25.

this bounty and requisitioned massive quantities of food and fodder for garrison needs throughout the winter.⁴⁵⁰ These two supplies constituted the most pressing needs of the Fort Smith garrison, corn meal sustaining humans, corn and fodder the military animals required for supply trains, and cavalry units.

The federal garrisons at Fort Blunt and Fort Smith voraciously devoured quantities of corn and fodder far in excess of re-supply through military trains or riverboats. The latter transportation offered greater carrying capacity, but in times of low water, riverboats remained downriver at Little Rock.⁴⁵¹ The solution adopted by the Army of the Frontier, and particular by the First Kansas Colored, consisted of vigorous foraging operations in Arkansas and Indian Territory. Foraging supplies from Indian Nations went far further than obtaining food and fodder, foraging also devastated local economies and impoverished Indian communities. Foraging punished the tribes that supported the Confederates, and in a cruel irony forced the same Indians to seek Federal aid to compensate for lost stock and seed.

Foraging proved a godsend for black soldiers, an opportunity to improve diets and obtain familiar foods outside the usual military ration. Military rations provided calories, but rarely the type of nutrients that soldiers required to resist or avoid disease. Dietary deficiencies contributed to mortality and morbidity rates as soldiers suffered through an epidemiological cocktail of environmental threats such as malaria and diarrhea, and dietary ailments typified by scurvy. Specific types of foodstuffs possessed impact

⁴⁵⁰ Graton letter, Roseville Ark, Jan 27, 1864, *John K. Graton Correspondence Collection, MS 9113.02*. Kansas State Historical Society

⁴⁵¹ Graton letter, Roseville Ark, Jan 27, 1864, *John K. Graton Correspondence Collection, MS 9113.02*. Kansas State Historical Society. Graton cited the example of three steamers unable to move upriver from Little Rock. As a result, supply shortages resulted as the riverboats performed a similar role as trains in other theaters. Wagon trains proved equally vulnerable, but their weakness derived from ease of interdiction, not from environmental conditions.

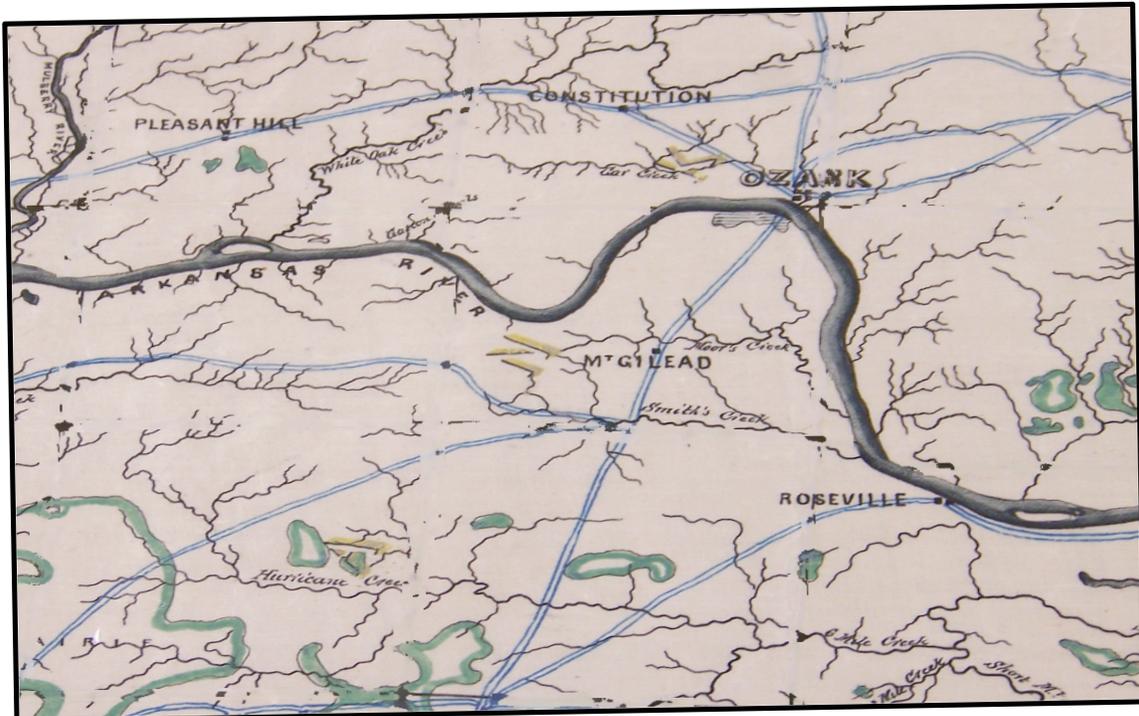
outweighing their gustatory value. Potatoes, as Historian Mary Gillette pointed out, helped to prevent scurvy; the humble tuber provided vitamin C to otherwise limited diets. Around military camps potatoes commended dear prices due to short supply. Military requirements required many commanders to allocate their transportation assets to hauling materiel or ammunition, and not bulky consumables.⁴⁵² Access to vegetables and local rations constituted one of the least of concerns for military quartermasters in the Army of the Frontier, their scarce wagon and riverboat space required to move more enduring dried military rations and war materiel.

Foraging allowed the First Kansas Colored's soldiers to obtain a portion of the larger total of forage foodstuffs for their personal use, and in doing so soldiers consumed calories and nutrients unavailable in garrison. Black soldiers also enjoyed a more traditional diet as a result of their foraging, salt beef and hardtack replaced at least temporarily by more familiar pork and cornbread rations that in historian Ira Berlin's opinion ameliorated dietary and digestive conditions.⁴⁵³ Medical records do not reflect a great incidence of diarrheal disease while the regiment posted Roseville, but that could have been predicated on less crowded conditions, better water, and improved diet. What can be inferred from the mortality rates is that unlike garrison life where foodstuffs commanded premium prices, black soldiers supplemented their diets regularly from the food supplies that existed away from the fort. Soldiers at Fort Smith possessed little purchasing power, their meager \$7.00 per month falling far short for purchasing delicacies that white soldiers with greater salaries could obtain. Food became a weapon

⁴⁵² Mary C. Gillett. *The Army Medical Department 1818-1865*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987, 159.

⁴⁵³ Ira Berlin (ed.). *Freedom A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 634-635.

in the hands of those that possessed it, and a driving goal for those that needed it to sustain military operations. Roseville, despite shelter and food stocks could not sustain the military effort required to evict guerrilla bands from the region. This required that the regiment divide its companies into details to safeguard the few mills and plantations within a twenty-mile radius of Roseville.



Map 5: Roseville and Ozark⁴⁵⁴

One of the regiment's first details concerned the occupation of a series of mills to ensure a constant flow of meal and flour to Fort Smith. Companies A and E under Captain Huddleston secured Boyd's mill, an important site for several reasons. Control of mills and other resources became paramount as guerrillas, both Union and Confederate destroyed mills to deny them to their enemies. Mills constituted a resource that supplied

⁴⁵⁴ District of Trans Mississippi, District of Arkansas Topographical Map, RG: 57, *Civil War and Other Maps*, ARC 654588, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

military requirements beyond food production. Michael Hughes in his studies of economic warfare in western Arkansas asserted, “Mills in addition to grinding corn, wheat and rye, also provided the capacity to card wool, gin cotton and saw timber.”⁴⁵⁵ Such capacity provided food, valuable cotton for Union customs inspectors, and timber for military requirements such as fortification construction and barracks. Detachments that secured mills denied their use to guerrillas and forced guerrillas to forage amongst the civilian populace, thus engendering ill will and resentment. Huddleston’s orders ensured that the production of the mill made its way back to the army, bread and meal serving as a valuable staple for soldiers and civilian refugees alike.⁴⁵⁶ This last matter cannot be stressed enough, for by January the garrison at Fort Smith experienced severe supply shortages. Soldiers subsisted on half rations of bread, and the mills operated by the detachments around Fort Smith provided the only flour and meal for the fort.⁴⁵⁷ The mill operations performed by the First Kansas Colored and other Union regiments sustained Fort Smith while higher command echelons worked out another solution to the fort’s supply woes.

Huddleston’s detail served as a blueprint for detached operations while the regiment garrisoned Roseville. Companies marched forth to surrounding communities with orders to forage, collect stock and clean the country of guerrillas. Huddleston’s company marched first, but two weeks later Captain Ransom Ward led Company H to an encampment south of the town of Ozark, a town that dwarfed Roseville by comparison.

⁴⁵⁵ Michael A. Hughes “Wartime Gristmill Destruction in Northwest Arkansas and Military-Farm Colonies,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Volume 46 Number 2 (Summer, 1987): 168.

⁴⁵⁶ December 12, 1863 Special Orders No 1, RG 94: *Records of the Adjutant general’s Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁴⁵⁷ Edwin C. Bearss “Federal Generals Squabble over Fort Smith, 1863-1864,” 120.

Ozark controlled access to the north bank of the Arkansas River and a road network that could hasten the company's mission. Captain Ward's orders differed little from Huddleston's, but when Major Ward led Companies B, D, G and I to garrison the Titsworth farm about one mile south of Roseville, he completed a web of outposts that continued the Union policy of confiscation, cotton ginning, and security outposts along the roads south of the Arkansas River.⁴⁵⁸

In conjunction with military efforts to quell guerrilla violence in western Arkansas, the army organized elections for pro-Union representatives to reenter the Union. Earle served at the forefront of this effort, and in his role as Franklin County Provost Marshal he required oaths of allegiance from Arkansans that sought protection from the regiment's soldiers. Preparations for Arkansas elections, and the election of state officers presented Earle with a series of interesting encounters with local Arkansans, especially the wives and daughters of secessionists off fighting for the Confederacy, the women drawn to his office by copious supplies of free coffee. His observations about the local population reveal the deep divide between Arkansans. Earle's administration of loyalty oaths to local citizens, both men and women, required him to record the men's' locations during the war. Despite the oaths, Earle believed the only loyal men in the county had fled to Magazine Mountain where they hid until the arrival of the Union army. The war took a heavy toll, and many of the women that took the oath at Earle's officer were widows.⁴⁵⁹ Western Arkansas hosted guerrillas of the Confederate and Union persuasion, and their internecine battles tore apart communities. The Union army presented the best

⁴⁵⁸ Special Orders 3, December 27, 1863; Special Orders 4, January 1, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁴⁵⁹ Earle, *Journal*, 45-47.

chance for stability, and however onerous their presence, Union soldiers enforced martial law on a civilian populace that depended on their presence to defend them from guerrillas.

Loyalty oaths demanded a high price from those Arkansans willing to declare their cause bound to that of the Union. Those Arkansans that renounced the Confederacy faced retribution from their neighbors. Guerrillas brutally murdered men for their involvement with the election registrations, one man hung after having his throat cut, another cut down in Roseville at night by an unknown assailant.⁴⁶⁰ Earle also believed more insidious enemies operated behind Union lines, men of larcenous intent that claimed Federal purview over their questionable business practices.

Captain Earle's duties as Provost Marshal encompassed a number of tasks including accounting for property seizure or confiscation; arrest and confinement of soldiers found outside of post limits without a pass; the creation of a parole and police guard; and the punishment of violators. The strict wording of the orders dictated that Earle countersign all passes and by doing so placed the responsibility for military movement in Earle's hands. He didn't operate without restraints on military personnel though, soldiers found more than 400 yards from their quarters could be arrested, and Earle's parole guard could arrest military and civilian pass violators to be punished at Earle's discretion. Additional orders barred the destruction of property and expressly forbid entering homes except in pursuance of duty requirements.⁴⁶¹ Restraining soldiers from random acts of intimidation

⁴⁶⁰ Earle, *Journal*, 48.

⁴⁶¹ General Order 1, December 14, 1863; General Order 2, December 21, 1863 (later cancelled) *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*. Earle's duties encompassed those expected of a modern military police unit, with the implied additional duty of detaining deserters or attempted deserters. Williams' order expressed the need to keep soldiers from looting while foraging, a difficult task at any rate due to the invasive nature of foraging confiscations and house searches.

or larceny could only increase Federal legitimacy, especially when the seizure of lucrative cotton stocks appeared to many Arkansan observers as theft.

An addition to the regiment's military post duties at Roseville, the regiment entered the cotton business, and while there collected, ginned and guarded cotton until it traveled north with wagon trains departing for Fort Scott. In short order one hundred and fifty bales of cotton valued at thousands of dollars each fell under Union control.⁴⁶² Earle, despite being the Provost Marshal of Roseville, did not act alone; the Regimental Chaplain George Hutchinson became the government cotton collection agent. Little of Hutchinson's prior service indicated skill or knowledge of cotton; the chaplain's prior duties consisted of detached service at Fort Emancipation, a stint as a recruiter, and a detail as a deserter catcher. Unlike Earle, Hutchinson never commanded a company, or possessed special skills germane to cotton management aside from basic literacy.

The position of the Chaplain within a regiment often carried with it collateral duties such as assisting with casualties, regimental post master, and additional staff officer with duties as assigned.⁴⁶³ Chaplain George Hutchinson did not command troops, and much like the regimental adjutant or quartermaster, constituted part of the regimental staff that the regimental commander could assign as needed to meet contingencies. Earle spared no love for Chaplain Hutchinson, and felt him to be a fraud in his duties. The temptation of cotton trading appeared to undermine the Chaplain's commitment to his soldiers, and he confessed to feeling a "fool for spending time with these Negroes when I could make

⁴⁶² Graton Letter to spouse, January 27, 1864. *John K. Graton Collection, MS 9113.02. Kansas State Historical Society.*

⁴⁶³ Richard M. Budd. *Serving Two Masters: The Development of American Military Chaplaincy, 1860-1920* Lincoln Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2002, 49-55.

much more money in something else here.”⁴⁶⁴ Earle’s suspicions deepened after he observed a questionable partnership between the Chaplain and a sutler after the Chaplain obtained custody of the cotton collected by the regiment.

Hutchinson directly oversaw the collection of cotton, unlike Earle who regarded it as an immense fraud perpetrated by high-ranking criminals. Hutchinson therefore controlled the cotton production and storage of the regiment’s confiscated cotton, an operation that employed five cotton gins to bale cotton gathered by the regiment’s soldiers.⁴⁶⁵ Hutchinson received the seed cotton from the soldiers, but employed civilians to run the gins. After the cotton was baled, soldiers remained to guard it against theft.⁴⁶⁶ The chaplain served as the link between Earle and the regiment, and the authorities at Fort Smith who determined where the cotton went after collection.

Earle did not question the cotton confiscation in isolation, other more influential men also acted as witnesses to this activity, among them Lieutenant Colonel Campbell of the Sixth Kansas Cavalry. The Sixth Kansas joined the First Kansas Colored at Roseville in late January, the cavalry sent to assist the thinly stretched infantry in guarding roads and the wagons and riverboats that provided Fort Smith with its supplies.⁴⁶⁷ Collecting and transporting cotton required special equipment, and when cotton bales left Roseville, they attracted attention from military men. Lieutenant Colonel Campbell chose to operate through direct channels to General Schofield, and alerted him of his suspicions in a letter to the general on November 24, 1863, elaborating on the extensive logistical support provided to cotton transport. Campbell, like Earle, believed highly placed military

⁴⁶⁴ Earle, *Journal*, 41-42.

⁴⁶⁵ Graton letter, Roseville Ark, Jan 27, 1864, *John K. Graton Correspondence Collection, MS 9113.02. Kansas States Historical Society.*

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ Edwin Bearss, “Federal generals Squabble over Fort Smith, 1863-1864,” 138.

persons and their agents defrauded the government and farmers alike. The fluid nature of Arkansan economics and the easy access to water facilitated the process, but military escorts guarded the cotton as it traveled north in trains to Fort Scott. Sutler goods entered the military district, and cotton exited the Fort Smith region in specially modified transports pulled by over a hundred two-mule or four horse teams. The November train carried one hundred and fifty bales bound for Fort Scott.⁴⁶⁸ The extravagant allocation of scarce wagons and teams to cotton transport beggars the mind when the same teams could pull corn or other loads in lieu of cotton. The assignment of the Twelfth Kansas Cavalry to escort the train also deprived the district of cavalry to interdict guerrillas.

Cotton speculation and reports of fraud reached the highest levels of command. Informers, including Champion Vaughan, reported to General Schofield that attempts to link Major General Blunt and others to a cotton ring proved tenuous, but local sentiment held that Blunt supported sutlers in cotton speculation.⁴⁶⁹ The historian Lary Rampp believes that Blunt and Senator Lane engaged in speculation in cotton and cattle through the contracting firm of McDonald and Fuller of Fort Smith.⁴⁷⁰ Speculation may have driven orders to the First Kansas Colored's companies collect contraband cattle and cotton as they deployed to various outposts in Indian Territory and western Arkansas. If so, this illegal trade may have undermined local support at a time when guerrilla warfare functioned as a proxy for regular Confederate operations in the region.

⁴⁶⁸ Lieutenant Colonel Campbell to Major General Schofield, November 24, 1863, *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part II, Correspondence*, 714.

⁴⁶⁹ Champion Vaughan to Major General Schofield, December 10, 1863, *OR: OR: ser I, Vol 22, Part II, Correspondence*, 738.

⁴⁷⁰ Lary C. Rampp and Donald Rampp. *The Civil War in the Indian Territory*. Austin, Texas: Presidial Press, 1975, 77-79. The firm of McDonald and Fuller came under additional scrutiny I 1864 by Colonel Phillips of the Indian Brigade and General F.J. Herron.

After Earle left fifty men and the Chaplain with the cotton when the regiment fought the Red River Campaign, he returned to find all of the cotton gone along with the Chaplain.⁴⁷¹ While the provost Marshal at Roseville, Earle claimed to have in his possession over \$50,000 in cotton stored in a cotton shed under private guard.⁴⁷² Earle's suspicions appear sound when taken out of context, but he didn't consider that while the regiment fought on the Red River Valley Campaign, Roseville was attacked and much of the cotton destroyed by Confederate guerrillas during the defense of the town. The leader of the guerrillas that attacked Roseville knew the town well. The cotton gin and storage sheds belonged to Titsworth, and his men destroyed over one hundred and thirty bales of cotton in their raid.⁴⁷³ Guerrilla raids required continual vigilance, and the regiment's absence presented Titsworth with a near perfect target upon which to vent his wrath.

The link between military operations and cotton speculation may appear weak at first glance, but the First Kansas Colored's personnel participated in the collection, ginning, and escorting of confiscated cotton for at least four months between November 1863 and March 1864. The value of cotton to the Union war effort is self-evident as a revenue source, the point of contention that Captain Earle mentions is in the potential involvement of Colonel Williams in the supposed "cotton ring." What Earle may not have understood is that while cotton bales traveled north, they also traveled south in territory controlled by the Confederacy. Cotton secured shipments of weapons and medicine for Confederate traders, and in doing so enabled the South to continue the war. Cotton served as currency and gathering it ensured that either side of the conflict could not use it as a revenue

⁴⁷¹ Earle, *Journal*, 40-41.

⁴⁷² Earle, *Journal*, 45.

⁴⁷³ "The War in the Far West," April 24, 1864, *The New York Times*.

source. Guerrillas could not transport cotton, so they burned it. The Union could transport it and did so by train and water. When cotton resided in collection barns, or arrived at military posts, it represented a form of bank.

Earle believed that a second attempt to bring charges brought against Williams at Roseville received no notice because of his involvement in securing and guarding cotton with his regiment's personnel. In addition, Earle eyed speculators warily, guardedly observing many men that visited Roseville to grade and mark its cotton. When requisitions for cotton arrived from Fort Smith, Earle believed the confiscated cotton traveled to Memphis for disposal by conspirators in the "cotton ring."⁴⁷⁴ It is a fascinating aspect of the war that the black soldiers of the First Kansas Colored engaged in cotton collection, and guarded the ginned bales, while also attempting to protect food stores and mills against guerrillas. This aspect of the war troubled Earle, but he faced other suspicious transactions involving stock while Provost Marshal at Roseville.

Earle's Provost Marshal duties included collecting livestock, and ensuring its proper disposition. Earle's orders regarding stock appeared as clear as those concerning cotton: the military controlled collection and trade in stock, and Earle's orders commanded him to apprehend persons trading in stock without express written permission from Colonel Williams. Therefore Earle could reasonably assume Williams' implication when he claimed to have learned of a stock ring while at Roseville.⁴⁷⁵ Again however, Earle's journal fails to explain that stock confiscation and shipment provided beef for soldiers, and confiscated cattle deprived guerrillas of necessary foodstuffs. Stray animals and

⁴⁷⁴ Earle, *Journal*, 44, 47; Benjamin Van Horn. *RG 94: 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records*.

⁴⁷⁵ General Orders 3, December 21, 1863, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Earle, *Journal*, 47.

confiscated stock often fell prey to foraging soldiers and Williams' order may have helped curb marauding soldiers from obtaining and selling horses and cattle. Regardless of Earle's suspicion, cattle and cotton demanded much of the regiment's time and manpower at Roseville, and orders to confiscate these commodities did not originate with Williams, but the Army of the Frontier. Earle observed the confiscations with the knowledge of a Captain, not that of an army commander.

Colonel Williams did not delegate all his duties to Earle, rather he delegated the most time consuming tasks while he concentrated on his stewardship over the civilian populations in the towns and farms around Roseville. Military regimes employed pass systems to control the mobility of populations, and by doing so ensured quick identification of travelers and bands of soldiers through pass privileges. Pass issue facilitated the identification of guerrillas and their sympathizers, and when passes impinged upon civilian social institutions, Williams arbitrated petitions. When Colonel Williams received a request from the Masonic Fraternity of Ozark Lodge of Free Masons to authorize travel passes in order that Masons could meet and transact business. Williams proved amenable, believing that Masonic meetings could help restore stability to the region, but restricted pass privileges to loyal men that swore allegiance to the Union.⁴⁷⁶ Colonel Williams understood that community organizations helped to reinforce stability, and thus helped him to fulfill his mission. However, he also understood that passes could be used to assist the passage of men of suspect loyalties and potential intelligence collection. Caution guided his policies as much as military expediency.

⁴⁷⁶ Colonel Williams to E. Bowland Ozark, Arkansas, 2 January, 1864, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

Williams proved prescient when he appealed to his supervisors for authorization to organize refugees to cultivate the cornfields and pastures that provided the bounty that graced Fort Smith's logistics trains. Crop yields could not be sustained without organizing the labor necessary to plant and till those resources. Williams offered up five thousand acres for consideration, the lands of Confederate sympathizers and rebels that abandoned them in their haste to escape Federal troops. The farms around Roseville could absorb refugee populations as workers, and Williams felt confident that the offer of permanent future land ownership by purchase or shares could be arranged. Colonel Williams urged settlement before the end of February so that crops could be cultivated under a skilled southern Unionist superintendent.⁴⁷⁷ Guerrilla raids, although episodic and incapable of forcing a military decision, did terrorize many of the black refugees around Fort Smith to the point that they sought passage north in lieu of the opportunity to farm locally due to the bushwhacker threat.⁴⁷⁸ Until stability could be achieved, no refugee farmers could provide for themselves, reduce the Federal logistics requirement, or create a pocket of stability from which civil government could be restored. No further entries reflect the success of this suggestion, but the Freedman's Bureau did establish colonies across Arkansas in Union-controlled areas, amongst them the farm colonies at Pine Bluff and outside Little Rock.

Events in Fort Smith and planning for the summer campaigns changed Williams' plans. Little time remained for Williams in Roseville; on February 12, 1864, Williams received orders from the new commander of the Army of the Frontier, Brigadier General

⁴⁷⁷ Colonel Williams to Brigadier General McNeil, January 4, 1864, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁴⁷⁸ "The War in the Far West," *New York Times*, 10 April 1864.

Thayer to report to Fort Scott to gather and return deserters to his command.⁴⁷⁹ Williams departed Roseville and from Arkansas traveled along the Texas Road back into Indian Territory and Fort Gibson.

Colonel Williams left no correspondence of note concerning his travels north to Kansas, but he could not have failed to note the welfare of the refugee community at Fort Gibson where some of his soldiers' families lived. The supply situation in Fort Gibson differed in degree and kind from that of Fort Smith for several important reasons. The refugee community at Fort Gibson, unlike Fort Smith, consisted of few white and many Indian and black refugees. Captain Graton described a key difference between the black and Indian refugees around Fort Gibson; the Federal government tied to Indian welfare by their employment of Indian Home Guard Regiments and pre-war treaty obligations. The refugees lived in a motley collection of shacks and tents; the latter supplied to Indians as well as government furnished provisions. Indians received more assistance from the government than blacks, and Graton noticed that this inequity compelled many black men to enlist. In addition, all refugees suffered from shortages of clothing.⁴⁸⁰ The meager salary of black soldiers sustained their families at a level of subsistence barely above that of starvation. Threats from Confederate forces and bushwhackers compelled many refugees to gravitate to the Federal forts, but the safety of Union lines proved illusory.

⁴⁷⁹ Special Orders 40, Army of the Frontier, February 12, 1864, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*. General Thayer replaced General McNeil on January 7, 1864 when Fort Smith fell under the control of General Steele's District of the Arkansas.

⁴⁸⁰ John Graton letter to his spouse, December 18, 1863, Fort Blunt; January 5, 1864. *John K. Graton Correspondence Collection, MS 9113.02*. Kansas State Historical Society.

Graton observed that black refugee were primarily women and children, their men having joined the military. Black assistance therefore appeared to be directly linked to military service, black soldiers furnishing rations and money from their allowances.

The presence of the First Kansas Colored, Second Kansas Colored and Eleventh Regiment United States Colored Infantry in Fort Smith did little to change racial perceptions despite their solid service. The same state appeared to apply to Fort Gibson as well; the lives of black refugees did not markedly improve despite proximity to Union garrisons. Although young male black freedmen may have sought the military communities of Fort Gibson and Fort Smith in order to enlist or observe black soldiers in action, black women sought the camps for the safety they represented for their families, and the desire to be close to their men. The camps proved cold comfort for the non-combatants; necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing existed in scarce quantity, and diseases such as pneumonia, typhoid, measles, smallpox and diarrhea ran rampant through the camps.⁴⁸¹ A contemporary Arkansan of southern sentiment wryly wrote that in Van Buren and Fort Smith the black communities lived in crowded penury in “miserable houses,” enjoying their new “freedom.”⁴⁸² Freedom demanded a heavy price from refugees, developed enforced dependency for basic essentials, and made them the object of hatred of many displaced whites and Indians from Indian Territory.

Refugee conditions worsened throughout the winter as Federal rations dwindled in quantity and quality, and as a result, the food aid provided refugees also suffered as their food was drawn from military rations. Foraging trains from Fort Gibson subsisted the military garrisons and outposts at that installation to such an extent that by February 1864, the foraging expeditions caused local resentment and resulted in civilian

⁴⁸¹ Forbes, Ella. *African American Women During the Civil War*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1998, 165.

⁴⁸² Robert E. Waterman and Thomas Rothrock (ed.) “The Earle-Buchanan Letters of 1861-1876,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Volume 33, Number 2 (Summer, 1974), 144. Written by Fontaine R. Earle, a Confederate officer in Company B of the 34th Arkansas Infantry.

casualties.⁴⁸³ The refugee communities possessed little capacity for protest aside from military service. Refugee numbers grew at Fort Smith as the war progressed and Federal fortunes waned during the Red River Campaign, and then waxed again after the defeat of General Sterling Price's 1864 Campaign. Fort Gibson offers a different picture for observers, in consequence of its access to forage and foodstuffs severely limited by heavily depleted stocks of Indian herds and crops.

The refugee communities of Fort Gibson fared little better than those of Fort Smith. In summer of 1863 an attempt to expel the refugees from Fort Gibson failed, but in February 1864, Colonel Phillips, commander of the first Brigade of the Army of the Frontier, appealed to Governor Carney of Kansas for assistance in settling black refugees in Kansas. Phillips sought to resettle refugees in places where they stood a chance of starting life afresh in welcoming communities. Rather than load refugees onto military wagons for a trip north to an unknown destination, Phillips wanted a certainty of fair treatment. The refugees in question cost Phillips' command at Fort Gibson too much in rations and manpower devoted to security details, but they could not be cavalierly discarded. Many of the refugees Phillips sought to send north retained strong connections to soldiers in the Union army: they were the wives and children of First and Second Kansas Colored soldiers.⁴⁸⁴ Poor treatment of these refugees invited desertions from the First and Second Kansas Colored, and therefore could not be chanced. Phillips' appeals fell on deaf ears; the refugee columns from Fort Gibson in early 1864 arrived in Kansas to increasingly strident opposition.

⁴⁸³Robert E. Waterman and Thomas Rothrock (ed.) "Earle-Buchanan Letters", 148.

⁴⁸⁴February 1, 1864, Colonel Phillips to Governor Carney, *Military History Section, William S. Phillips Collection, document 973.974*, Kansas State Historical Society.

Williams's return to Leavenworth after a year's absence permitted him to share his pride in the First Kansas Colored's (his "Iron-clads") achievements. Colonel Crawford of the Second Kansas Colored also figured in the news, Hinton reporting that his new commander as Post Commandant of Fort Smith faced down the objections of officers who objected to an "officer of niggers," giving them orders.⁴⁸⁵ Racial perceptions cannot be blindly ascribed to ignorance of black soldiers and their abilities. Ironically when queried about the effect of mixed blood in black soldiers, Hinton later testified that although superior soldiers, black soldiers varied in quality, the best being the dark-skinned that made the best campaign soldiers, unlike the more intelligent, but less reliable mulattoes.⁴⁸⁶ This condescending assessment by an abolitionist and friend to blacks is not exceptional, but the Hinton's experience with black men is given his background. Hinton served with two separate Colored Regiments, associated with the pre-war Kansas black community, and worked as an Underground Railroad conductor. Hinton's statements reveal a paternalistic attitude toward blacks, one that appears to have been reinforced by his wartime experience. His comments, while rating black soldiers high in effectiveness as soldiers, also reflect contemporary theories of race. Military service did not erase his racial attitudes, but for Hinton service appears to have sharpened the differences within the black race. The Union Army also suffered from an institutional bias against black soldiers, and denied many the opportunity to serve as combat soldiers. The preferred policy was to utilize them as poorly paid labor. Race determined more than civil rights, and for the Union Army race justified pay inequities.

⁴⁸⁵ Richard Hinton, "The War in the West – Gen. Blunt to Take the Field," March 6, 1864, the *New York Times*.

⁴⁸⁶ Testimony of Capt. R.J. Hinton, "American Freedman's Inquiry Commission" dated May 15, 1864, *Negro in the Military Service of the United States 1639-1886*. The National Archives and records service general Services Administration, Washington: 1963. Roll 3 (Vol 4-5 1864), 2582.

The continual pay issues of the Colored Troops finally received official attention in January 1864. Using the First Kansas Colored as an example of the pay inequity, although the regiment mustered for pay in October and November 1863, the pay for the enlisted soldiers remained \$7.00 regardless of rank.⁴⁸⁷ The First Kansas Colored, a veteran regiment that observed established procedure and tight discipline, experienced no mutinies during this time period unlike the earlier period at Fort Scott, and unlike the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts, the First Kansas did not refuse pay. However, much like many other black soldiers, the men of the First Kansas Colored may have harbored resentment over pay inequities and absence of bounties. An officer of the First Alabama Infantry (African Descent) complained to Brigadier General Lorenzo Thomas that his men were growing restless from pay of seven dollars per month, despite heavy labor.⁴⁸⁸

The First Kansas Colored's employment as field soldiers may have impacted their reaction, as black soldiers engaged in fortification labor or other manual labor experienced little direct involvement with fighting against the enemy. Brigadier General Ullmann at Port Hudson believed employment as laborers and poor equipment generated resentment. More pointedly Ullmann stated the pay inequalities were resented, as were the lower quality weapons issued to the black soldiers. The effects on black soldiers' morale were in Ullman's opinion pervasive, and pay issues a constant subject of discussion.⁴⁸⁹ Ullmann understood the inequities, but unlike Colonel Williams, commanded troops that performed labor in lieu of combat. The First Kansas Colored enjoyed continual and meaningful employment as soldiers, and when laboring on onerous

⁴⁸⁷ Letter to spouse, January 27, 1864; March 6, 1864, *John K. Graton Correspondence Collection, MS 9113.02*. Kansas State Historical Society.

⁴⁸⁸ Letter Colonel James M. Alexander to Brigadier General Lorenzo Thomas, October 17, 1863, *Negro in the Military Service*, Roll IV, Document 1680.

⁴⁸⁹ BG Daniel Ullmann to Senator Henry Wilson 12/4/63, *OR, Series III, Volume III*, 1126-1128.

duties Williams rewarded the men with a whiskey ration.⁴⁹⁰ Although not remotely as satisfying as equal pay, the ration indicated that Williams knew his men resented cotton and fortification labor. Williams could pay soldiers whiskey, but he could not increase their pay.

Secretary of War Edwin Stanton's annual summary of military operations echoed Ullmann's pleas, and served in part as validation for the work performed in the Colored Regiments of the Union Army. Congress approved pay scales and bounties, with the occasional state offering its own bounties for recruits. Stanton's compelling rationale originated from the obligation the government owed black refugees and soldiers, the former reliant on relief, the latter resentful of the completely inadequate and arbitrary pay scales. When a Private and a Sergeant earn the same pay, little incentive exists for advancement. Stanton recommended, "authorizing the same pay and bounty as white troops...Soldiers of the Union, fighting under its banner, and exposing their lives in battle to uphold the Government, colored troops are entitled to enjoy its justness and beneficence."⁴⁹¹ Black soldiers in Colored Regiments throughout 1863, proved their utility and bravery in combat, suffering casualties at the battles of Milliken's Bend, Honey Springs, and Fort Wagner, and fought by the Ninth Louisiana, the First Kansas Colored at, and the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts at Fort Wagner.

Discipline and desertion

Desertion rates for the regiment between January and March 1864 did not reflect any significant disciplinary or morale problem amongst the soldiers, but in the officer ranks

⁴⁹⁰ Special Orders 5, Jan 13, 1864, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁴⁹¹ Edwin Stanton, Secretary of War, Annual Message, December 5, 1863, War Department, Washington City, *OR, Series III, Volume III, 1132.*

change occurred almost weekly. A number of key regimental personnel resigned during the January to March 1864 time period, citing a number of reasons, mainly medical or personal. Captain Van Horn of Company I resigned in January after claiming that Colonel Williams refused him a furlough to attend to “deranged financial conditions” and to visit with his four orphaned children in Kansas.⁴⁹² Family matters compelled Captain George Martin to resign so he could look after his “sick family and urgent business matters,” in March 1864. His four-month AWOL period from June to October 1863 may also have factored into his resignation, although a board of his fellow regimental officers cleared him of malfeasance.⁴⁹³ The loss of two experienced company commanders at this time created new openings for other men to command, but did so at a time when the Army of the Frontier prepared for the new campaign season.

The departure of Van Horn and Martin elevated Lieutenants to the command of their companies, but as the records of Van Horn and Martin allege, the officers no longer wished to serve and the service no longer felt their retention desirable. One additional officer left the regiment in February, Second Lieutenant Albert Saviers, who was discharged for disability due to wounds. Saviers served honorably, but his post-military experiences reflect poorly on him; while on sick furlough after his resignation Saviers

⁴⁹² Special Order 18, Jan 19, 1864, First Kansas Colored, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Benjamin Van Horn, *RG 94: 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records*; Benjamin Van Horn Memoirs, *Benjamin Van Horn Collection*, Military History Collection, Manuscript Division, Kansas State Historical Society, 26. Van Horn's arrest since October 14, 1863 cannot be ruled out as a contributing factor despite Van Horn's personal finances and children. Van Horn is a case of an officer receiving a commission out of sheer political expediency given his story of receiving a commission because he raised a company from refugees mustered from the Sac and Fox reservation in Kansas. Captain Benjamin Van Horn was arrested in October on unspecified charges and remained under arrest until his resignation on January 4, 1864. Williams characterized Van Horn as “incompetent and inefficient officer who lacks nearly all the essential qualifications of a good soldier, and in his opinion the service will benefit from his discharge.”

⁴⁹³ George Martin. *RG 94: 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records*.

spent time incarcerated in Missouri charged after being charged with horse theft.⁴⁹⁴ The final officer to depart the regiment by resignation, Regimental Surgeon Samuel Harrington resigned in February citing chronic diarrhea that plagued him since July 1863.⁴⁹⁵ The regimental surgeon was the first to receive a discharge for illness, but more would follow in 1864. Some officers did not seek an honorable route to discharge, and committed the same offenses for which soldiers suffered court martial and imprisonment.

Soldiers and officers of the Civil War frequently responded to disenchantment with their military service by walking away from their obligations or malingering, “Old Soldier’s Sickness” claiming many for whom the glamour of war no longer appealed. Although officers could and did resign for reasons that other inspecting officers verified, some simply took absence without leave. Second Lieutenant Ezekiel Coleman, the oldest of the regimental lieutenants at forty-eight years of age, went AWOL in August 1863 and failed to return to his company. His discharge from the service occurred as part of the Union Army’s renewed efforts to compel the return of many officers absent from their units.⁴⁹⁶ A former Underground Railroad conductor, Coleman’s departure tempts one to question his motives for walking away from his company. Coleman’s age and the concurrent service of his son in Company H are two factors that could be accepted as influencing his decision.

⁴⁹⁴ Albert Saviers, RG 94: 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records; Special Orders 91, Army of the Frontier, RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4; RG 94: 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records. The Mayor of Wyandotte and other influential citizens from the city believed Saviers acted out of his hatred of rebels that compelled him to confiscate rebel property.

⁴⁹⁵ Special Orders 99, Washington, March 1, 1864, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4; RG 94: 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records.*

⁴⁹⁶ Special Orders 99, Washington, March 1, 1864, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4; RG 94: 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records.*

The final missing officer from the regiment, Lieutenant Colonel John Bowles, remained in Kansas. His inability to report his whereabouts, then attempts to exonerate him kept Bowles away from the regiment for months at end. Bowles stayed away from the regiment; in February 1864, he reported for Court Martial duty at Fort Leavenworth.⁴⁹⁷ Bowles' reluctance to return to his regiment refutes the hagiographical concept of the committed Underground Railroad conductor doing his utmost regardless of personal peril to lead slaves to freedom. Instead, Bowles appears, perhaps like Coleman, to have lost his taste for armed conflict.

Two regimental officers under sentence of General Court Martial returned to their companies chastened by their Court martial experience. Captain Armstrong returned to the regiment in February after a five-month arrest and confinement at Fort Smith where soldiers of the regiment testified during his trial, and subsequent acquittal.⁴⁹⁸ Captain Luther Thrasher also returned after receiving a sentence of six months suspended pay. Thrasher suffered the indignity of his muster date reverting to January 24, 1864, another victim of the regiment's "irregular practices," his company having failed to possess adequate numbers to justify muster.⁴⁹⁹ Thrasher's military service with the First Kansas Colored dated back to duty as a recruiting officer and service at Island Mound.

⁴⁹⁷ Special Orders 9, February 3, 1864, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; John Bowles, *RG 94: 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records*. Bowles' service records tell a different story, and connections with Senator Lane may have kept Bowles in Kansas long after he should have returned to his regiment.

⁴⁹⁸ Andrew Armstrong, *RG 94: 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records*; Special Order 47, District of the Frontier, February 19, 1864, *RG 393 Records of US Army Continental Commands 1821-1920, Department of the Missouri, 1861-98, Letters Received, June 1863 – Feb 1864, Vol: 185 (402) 1 of 2, PI-172, Entry A1-2 3107, 161*.

⁴⁹⁹ Luther Thrasher, *RG 94: 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records*; Special Order 2, First Kansas Colored, February 1, 1864, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*.

Resignations, desertions and discharges reduce the cohesion of any unit, and the morale of the First Kansas Colored suffered. Strict orders, the monotony of meal and flour production, cotton ginning and baling, and absence from family and friends heightened the feeling of frustration amongst regimental officers. While Colonel Williams traveled to collect deserters, other officers remained in Arkansas. Although Captain Graton's letters confirm regular mail service, always a morale builder, they reveal a man torn between family and duty. Graton continually complained to his wife of the difficulty obtaining a furlough, even a leave of absence for sickness. His hopes for visiting home hinged on a Confederate defeat, there appearing no other recourse to obtain time with his family. Graton also mentioned two possible courses of action for the regiment in the spring: fortification work at Fort Smith or a new series of military campaigns.⁵⁰⁰ Faced with the possibility of renewed campaigning or another stint as garrison troops, Graton appears to have given up the idea of returning home for furlough, unlike the officers of white units that took furloughs when time and locale permitted.

New company and regimental moves in March denied any chance for a furlough. The Army of the Frontier, now designated as the First, or Frontier Division of the Seventh Army under General Thayer, required all soldiers on detached duty and otherwise not with their regiments to consolidate in early March. Thayer's Army of the Frontier received orders to form the northern column of General Steele's army for a campaign designed to push Union columns into Texas. Steele's army, although designated as the supporting effort for General Banks' Red River campaign, required its own significant efforts to unite the commands of Steele and Thayer. Steele's forces would push south and

⁵⁰⁰Graton Letter to spouse, March 7, 1864. *John K. Graton Correspondence Collection, MS 9113.02.* Kansas State Historical Society.

west into Confederate Arkansas, while Banks' fought the main effort of the campaign with the town of Shreveport the point of rendezvous for the two armies.⁵⁰¹

As Union Generals planned the Red River Campaign, the regiment's companies continued their duties as outposts and foraging parties for the Frontier Army. Throughout February, the regiment's companies remained close to Roseville, Companies B, D, and I posted at the Titsworth farm a mile south of Roseville, Company G at Ivey's Ford six miles south of Roseville, and Company H at Ozark. Colonel Williams, who had returned from Kansas, ordered all companies back to Roseville with the exception of one company remained at Fort Smith to garrison a "contraband camp" to assist with apprehending black deserters and stragglers for return to their respective regiments.⁵⁰² Reuniting the regiment served a number of purposes, among them assessing fitness for campaigning, assessing supplies and equipment, and training new and old soldiers alike on matters of drill and discipline. When assembled for campaign, the under strength First Kansas Colored numbered less than six hundred men of all ranks, down significantly from its full regimental strength approximately eight hundred.

The First Kansas Colored's sister regiment, the Second Kansas Colored, joined the First in Colonel Adams' Second Brigade of the Frontier Division. Colonel Adams appeared a logical choice to lead the brigade, his sentiments regarding slavery established early in the war during a raid into Missouri in November 1862, that ended with Adams preferring arrest and court martial to expelling confiscated slaves from his camp when threatened by superior officers to return them to their masters in Missouri.⁵⁰³ Adams

⁵⁰¹ Edwin C. Bearss "Federal Generals Squabble over Fort Smith, 1863-1864," 140.

⁵⁰² Janet B. Hewitt, *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies: Part II – Record of Events, Volume 78, Serial Number 90*, 614, 619-621.

⁵⁰³ Robert N. Scott *OR: Series I, Volume 22, Part I: Reports*, 846.

Brigade kept the First and Second Kansas Colored Regiments under one command, a way to ensure that the experienced First could inspire and perhaps provide the example in battle for the untried Second Kansas Colored.

The Second Kansas Colored under Colonel Samuel Crawford garrisoned Fort Smith while the First Kansas Colored conducted its duties at Roseville. In contrast to the First Kansas Colored the Second Kansas Colored's ranks swelled to nearly nine hundred. Crawford proved a stern disciplinarian and under his tutelage the Second Kansas Colored developed into a first-rate infantry regiment, a fitting counterpart to the First Kansas Colored. Although untested by battle aside from the occasional guerrilla skirmish, the Second Kansas Colored's soldiers shared the First's sense of mission and destiny, and served under officers commissioned from many of the white regiments around Fort Smith.⁵⁰⁴ Unlike the First Kansas Colored, the Second entered Camden Campaign in good condition, its ranks possessed of high morale and eager to test themselves against Confederate foes and prove themselves the equal of the First Kansas Colored.

While other regiments of the Army of the Frontier prepared for movement, the First Kansas Colored completed its mission at Roseville. Before the regiment could march Lieutenant Hughes, the regimental quartermaster turned over regimental commissary equipment, and stock under Captain Earle's control to the cavalry garrison at Roseville.⁵⁰⁵ The infantry required time to call in their detachments and assemble their stores, and as Earle related, the confiscated cotton at Roseville demanded accounting before departure. As part of the vanguard for his army, Thayer's cavalry moved first to Booneville to

⁵⁰⁴Edwin C. Bearss "Federal Generals Squabble over Fort Smith, 1863-1864," 139; Samuel J. Crawford, *Kansas in the Sixties* (Chicago, 1911), 106-108.

⁵⁰⁵Special Orders 3, March 4, 1864, Special orders 10, March 19, 1864, Special Orders 75, Army of the Frontier, March 21, 1864, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

conduct route security, while the infantry followed several days later accompanied by artillery.⁵⁰⁶ Sending his cavalry forward bought Thayer time to provision and consolidate his widely spread command, but given the short preparation period, accomplished except to delay his junction with Steele's forces.

The Frontier Army, unlike General Steele's much larger and better-supplied forces entered the Red River Campaign with a depleted and arguably weaker force than could have been fielded if given more time to prepare. Although the Frontier Army's units received orders to depart in mid-March, the Colonel Adams' Second Brigade's brigade, like all others in the Frontier Army, did so ill-prepared for the rigors of the campaign ahead, especially considering the crushing impact of logistics on their ranks and mobility. The weather affected a number of preparations for the campaign, especially the amassing of the necessary stockpiles necessary for campaigning, ice blocking riverboats and rain slowing wagon trains in the muddy morass of swamp-like roads. Supply difficulties during the winter prevented adequate food supplies from being stored, and as late as mid-March Thayer's army possessed only five days worth of field rations.

Thayer's logistical headache did not abate despite the expectations of better and more plentiful supplies the closer the army got to Steele's main force. Although observers reported Thayer's army arriving with over three hundred wagons at Arkadelphia, some regiments with an estimated twenty-two per regiment, on the eve of departure scattered foraging teams labored to remedy shortages of rations and fodder. Further problems along the route of march appeared likely, for almost sixty miles south of Fort Smith the country offered little forage, Confederate rebels having cleared the area south of Fort Smith of fodder and foodstuffs. Therefore Thayer's quartermaster requisitioned

⁵⁰⁶ March 26, 1864, *Fort Smith New Era*.

additional wagons, including a foraging train of ninety wagons under General Blunt's command, for hauling forage instead of other cargoes. Consequently, although the soldiers of the Army of the Frontier took little in the way of field gear or tentage, they did so under orders to march in light order with little in the way of rations; orders dictated foraging for food along the route south. General Thayer's provision plan assumed Little Rock would supply his army's needs.⁵⁰⁷ The Frontier Army marched into desolation on roads of questionable quality, and suffering from constraints arising from poor supply and preparation.

The regiment's war resumed its campaigning phase when the First Kansas Colored completed transferring its duties. After consolidation, the regiment commenced movement, First Kansas Colored departing Roseville on March 25, 1864, at the rear of Thayer's army. The majority of General Thayer's command departed Fort Smith on March 21, but moved south slowly, over twenty-eight hundred of its personnel composed of infantry. The fast marching First Kansas Colored met the remainder of the nearly four thousand-man strong division at the Little Missouri River, then after a brief delay while waiting to cross the swollen river, continued its long slog southward. A week later the regiment camped on the south of the Fourche la Pave Mountains, seventy-four miles south of Roseville, en route for General Steele's army at Arkadelphia.⁵⁰⁸ The Camden phase of the Red River campaign ended one part of the regiment's experiences, the long

⁵⁰⁷ Edwin C. Bearss "Federal Generals Squabble over Fort Smith, 1863-1864," 141, 143; OR: *Series I, Volume XXXIV, Part I: Reports*, 618, 679.

⁵⁰⁸ Janet B. Hewitt, *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies: Part II – Record of Events, Volume 78, Serial Number 90*, 614, 619-621; OR: *Series I, Volume XXXIV, Part I: Reports*, 552, 657; Edwin C. Bearss "Federal Generals Squabble over Fort Smith, 1863-1864," 142.

period of muster and combat that began in Kansas reaching its culmination outside Camden in April 1864.

The First Kansas Colored's regimental colors bore the names of Island Mound, Sherwood, Cabin Creek, and Honey Springs. The Camden campaign added others, and tested the regiment to its very core in combat that nearly destroyed the regiment. The campaign pitted the experienced black infantry against its most fervent enemies, Texas cavalry and bitter Confederate Indian regiments that burned for revenge for earlier defeats in Indian Territory. Picket duty and confiscation proved poor training exercises for the regiment, but the lessons of the regiment's earlier battles of 1863 did not fail its soldiers. The First Kansas Colored's officers and men compiled an enviable record at Cabin Creek and Honey Springs and conclusively demonstrated that black men could fight with skill and humanity against foes that denied them recognition.

Race and ability appeared linked in January of 1863, white men of all walks of society unsure of the wisdom of president Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the admission of black men into the Union Army. Few Kansas papers celebrated the First Kansas Colored before it proved its mettle in battle, but in April 1864 the regiment served the Union to its utmost ability and earned recognition for its sacrifices. The historian Joseph Glatthaar wrote that Colored Regiments earned their place in the Union Army, their record "forged in battle," and paid for with blood shed in the service of the Union. The First Kansas Colored left Fort Smith as a cohesive unit; its men united by the threat of Confederate retaliation and shared service in battle. The abolitionist Kansans made good on their dedication to the emancipation of the black race through combat, and their men seized manhood despite the inherent risks of service. Colonel Williams commanded

a regiment confident in its leadership and indeed, forged in battle and quenched in the blood and sweat of its soldiers. The regiment's reputation and existence derived from its unflinching performance in battle. The Camden Campaign offered new potential for glory, but also unforeseen sacrifices from its men.

Chapter 7

Brave and Heroic

The 1864 Camden Campaign created an opportunity for the Union forces in Arkansas. Operating in support of General Banks' army from Louisiana, the Army of the Frontier was poised to break the last vestiges of Confederate military power in Arkansas. The Union armies intended to meet at Shreveport, Louisiana for a push into the Red River Valley of Texas. That region offered tempting spoils for the Union: cotton to be confiscated and slaves to be conscripted into newly-organized Colored Regiments. If the Union armies defeated their foes, the campaign would also deprive Confederate forces in Indian Territory of logistical support from Texas and potentially nullify the weak logistical situation at Fort Smith by providing new water supply routes for the Union forces.

The Camden Campaign presented the Union's Colored Regiments with an opportunity to continue their struggle against Confederate oppressors of their brethren, a test of black manhood for the Second Kansas Colored, and an opportunity for new glories for the First Kansas Colored. The twin Colored Regiments formed a strong infantry force for Thayer's Frontier Division, and their combined numbers made them a formidable adversary for the largely cavalry-based Confederate Arkansans. What appeared to offer such promise ended in failure. The campaign also consumed large amounts of men and materiel with little to demonstrate for the hardships and harrowing experiences of the soldiers.

The First Kansas Colored's departure from Roseville on March 25, 1864 began an intense period of privation and loss that transformed the regiment. The previous six months of picket duty and harsh conditions did little to prepare the command for the rigors of campaigning. Under strength and poorly supplied (as Confederate spies reported to General Cooper), the First Kansas Colored required several days to prepare their force, and as a consequence left Roseville to join the army from Fort Smith while en route. It soon joined with the rear of General Thayer's command.⁵⁰⁹ The army then embarked on a trying march that tested men and animals against the Arkansas wilderness.

The Frontier Division's route took them one hundred and seventy miles from Fort Smith to Arkadelphia, through desolate country and over roads of questionable value. A severe dearth of forage complicated the Frontier Division's passage; Confederate guerrillas had burned all available forage for at least sixty miles south of Fort Smith. A lack of forage near Waldron forced Thayer's army to take a slow, circuitous route through the Caddo Gap and Hot Springs in search of corn for men and beasts.⁵¹⁰ Thayer held little hope for relief, and expected the countryside would not supply his needs, despite orders from General Steele that his command march with the smallest amount of rations possible. These, a mere five days' supply, were not significantly supplemented along the route.⁵¹¹ Although deprived of forage and rations, Thayer's command marched with eighty rounds for each soldier, and his artillery possessed a substantial supply of

⁵⁰⁹ Earle, *Journal*, 51; BG Maxey report, February 7, 1864, *OR: Series I, Vol 53: Supplement, Serial No 111*, 963-966. Maxey's spies reported the black regiments as "not full" and containing between 200 and 500 men fit for duty. The logistical state of Thayer's command was also reported as dire – little forage remained and no new crops had been sown. The Army of the Frontier began its march with starvation at its back and uncertain fortunes to its front.

⁵¹⁰ Thayer to Col F.H. Manter, Chief of Staff Army of Arkansas, March 23, 1864, Lieutenant General Kirby Smith to Major General Price, March 27, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part II: Correspondence*

⁵¹¹ Thayer to F.H. Manter, March 17, 1864, Thayer to Manter, March 18, 1864, *OR: Series I, Vol 34, Part II: Correspondence*, 519, 638, 647.

ammunition. Steele's priorities for the campaign were clear, combat first, then provisioning.

General Steele allotted General Thayer's army fifteen days to accomplish the march and expected Thayer's composite force to reach Arkadelphia on April 1. A fundamental misunderstanding existed between the two commanders: General Steele expected Thayer's poorly supplied force to adhere to a strict timetable; Thayer assumed that Steele would re-supply his troops when they arrived at Arkadelphia. General Steele's haste and Thayer's lack of preparedness in combination signaled disaster, for the Army of the Frontier began the campaign inferior in materiel and the rations necessary to sustain an army marching through hostile territory. This was a curious development, for General Steele was a West Point graduate and doubtless schooled in the history of Napoleon's campaigns. Neglecting supply was out of character for a professionally trained veteran of the Mexican War, and may have been due to a lack of preparedness by General Steele's staff and quartermaster department. Although Thayer's men marched with full cartridge cases, their haversacks were empty and, as Napoleon once said, "An army marches on its stomach." The Army of the Frontier's instructions emphasizing speed proved debilitating for its men and animals, and in an effort to pare down all but the essentials, the Frontier Army's regiments left behind most of their regimental equipment.⁵¹² These shortcomings were to haunt Thayer's command through the Camden campaign. Failure to anticipate logistical challenges proved disastrous for the First Kansas Colored

The tortuous slog along from Fort Smith occurred along roads that regularly necessitated emplacing log corduroy. The backbreaking labor required many men to

⁵¹² Gary D. Joiner *Through the Howling Wilderness: The 1864 Red River Campaign and Union Failure in the West* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 113; *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part 2*, 638, 704-707.

participate in timber cutting and emplacing operations while on the march. Thayer's mules and horses dropped from exhaustion while attempting to pull loads, and soldiers had to step in to muscle the wagons along the miserable track. When men collapsed in turn, the exhausted trace mules reentered service as unwilling mounts. In addition, soldiers suffered from a rude diet of corn meal with little fat or meat to provide energy for their labors.⁵¹³ The exhausted army, as a result of the abysmal roads and the exhaustion of its men and animals, fell behind on the precious timetable.

The Army reached the advance elements of Steele's army on April 7, but paused at the Little Missouri River. Heavy rains raised the river by several feet and delayed a crossing until a pontoon bridge could be emplaced.⁵¹⁴ Along the route the Army of the Frontier traced the passing of Steele's army "Broken fences and horse corpses marking the route and white hospital flags the hospitals of both sides, wrote one participant."⁵¹⁵ The Army of the Frontier's march south from Fort Smith ended with a junction of the two armies on April 10 after a successful river crossing. The delay of ten days proved a sore point for Steele. General Steele in his report to Major General Henry Halleck laid blame at Thayer's feet. Thayer's late arrival combined with Confederate attacks on Steele's column rankled because Steele's troops consuming precious rations while waiting for Thayer. Thayer's late arrival should not have come as a surprise given that Thayer informed Steele via correspondence that his army would not have an easy march, but

⁵¹³ Lonnie J. White (ed.) "A Bluecoat's Account of the Camden Expedition," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Volume 24, Number 1 (Spring, 1965), 83-84. White's descriptions greatly supplement the few accounts from the First Kansas Colored's personnel, the regimental records having been lost at Poison Springs, Arkansas on April 18, 1864, and Captain Earle's loss of his personal records in the preparations for the retreat from Camden. The general sense is that the Frontier Army embarked unprepared for the Camden Campaign, and that Thayer's command performed well in spite of Federal plans.

⁵¹⁴ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War on the Border*, 268.

⁵¹⁵ White, "A Bluecoat's Account," 85.

would try to adhere to the timetable. Steele created part of his campaign woes through his failure to supply Fort Smith through the winter of 1863-1864.⁵¹⁶

The appearance of the Army of the Frontier at Arkadelphia elicited much commentary as to the condition of its equipment and men being noticeably inferior to the better-fed force under General Steele. Curious white soldiers turned out in large numbers to observe Thayer's army, the ranks of which seemed to include "all types of humanity," a bedraggled mob that appeared unfit for war. The true novelty for many white soldiers were the Colored Regiments, the arrival of which white Federal soldiers awaited "eager as children to see their first elephant."⁵¹⁷ Although Steele's Army of Arkansas contained other Colored Regiments, Thayer's division employed the only black combat troops in the Camden Campaign. The remaining black participants in Steele's army were teamsters, a few recruits assigned to the engineers, and refugees collected along the route. The First Kansas Colored's reputation preceded it, and its presence, along with the Second Kansas Colored, represented a notable departure from the stereotypical black garrison troops and contrabands in Steele's district.⁵¹⁸ Thayer employed his Colored regiments as integral parts of his army, and their race mattered little compared to their utility as combat soldiers.

As the united army crawled along from Arkadelphia, foraging parties scoured the countryside for miles to obtain provisions -mainly parched corn -for the army. Soldiers

⁵¹⁶ Steele to Halleck, April 22, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I, Reports*, 662-663. Steele places [you will need to put this back in since "track changes" deleted it when I moved the footnote.]

⁵¹⁷ Brigadier General Maxey to Colonel S.S. Anderson, April 12, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I, Reports*, 671; White, "A Bluecoat's Account," 85.

⁵¹⁸ Report of Captain Junius Wheeler, Chief Engineer Camden Expedition, May 5, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I, Reports*, 672-678. One hundred soldiers of the Fourth Arkansas, African Descent, worked as laborers for the engineer battalion, especially as road repair parties and pontoniers with the Army's pontoon train. This labor was a continuation of the Federal army's policy of employing black soldiers for labor and whites for combat. Steele could have brought along other Colored regiments, but declined to employ them in this campaign.

slowed Steele's advance by frequent departures from the line of march, the orders from their stomachs trumping Steele's orders against unauthorized foraging from Arkansas farms. Confederate cavalry shadowed Steele's advance southward, and they slowed the Federals by destroying the fodder and corn supplies that his men sought. Through a series of small unit cavalry actions, they gnawed away at Steele's force.⁵¹⁹ Steele's army found it hard going along the primitive roads and the constant pinprick attacks by Confederate cavalry forced the army to periodically deploy to chase off the Confederate cavalry. Battle soon appeared in the offing however, for Confederate forces grew stronger and bolder as Steele neared Washington, the Confederacy's Arkansas capital.

Confederate troops made a stand on April 10 on a ridge near Prairie D'Ane, an open swathe of land east of Washington. Confederate artillery drew General Frederick Solomon's Second Brigade into a series of cavalry skirmishes, and the Federal army deployed along the edge of the prairie as darkness fell. Confederate cavalry under General Shelby probed the Union lines during the night, necessitating the Union soldiers to remain in ranks until midnight. When daylight broke across the prairie, the Union army arose after a night of sleeping on their arms to confront a series of Confederate earthworks at the southwest edge of the prairie. General Sterling Price's forces had erected formidable defenses including rifle pits, breastworks and an extensive abatis during the night. While contemplating the Confederate defenses, Steele held his forces in readiness until April 12 while he developed an assault plan. Then, with Thayer's Frontier

⁵¹⁹ *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part 3, 77-79*; Curt Anders *Disaster in Damp Sand* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Guild Press of Indiana, 1997), 49; Joiner, *Through the Howling Wilderness*, 117; Robert L Kerby, *Kirby Smith's Confederacy: The Trans-Mississippi South, 1863-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 300. The Federal army operated on half rations or less the entire Camden Campaign, a sign of the Army of Arkansas' inability to support General Banks' campaign unless Banks could bring the fighting to a swift conclusion and by doing so open supply lines for Steele's army.

Division in reserve, Steele's soldiers drove back Confederate General Price's skirmishers.⁵²⁰ However, Price refused a general engagement and pulled his command back to Washington, leaving the Union troops to enter deserted works.

The desultory affair at Prairie D'Ane, however inconclusive, did result in temporary advantage to Steele. His supply situation could not be ignored. As a result, the Union general chose to march for Camden, while Price's forces remained concentrated near Washington in anticipation of an impending attack. Steele turned his command east toward Camden and with a head start on Price's army, made for the crossing at Terre Rouge Creek, and the approaches to Camden. Alarmed by the change in dispositions, Price sent his cavalry under Generals Maxey and James Fagan to attack Thayer's division at Moscow, Arkansas on the south side of Prairie D'Ane. Thayer's Division held off the Confederates while Steele's main body slowly crossed the Cypress Bayou's treacherous thick morass. Shortly after 5 P.M., the Confederate units broke contact after a four-hour battle and left Thayer in control of the field.⁵²¹ During the battle, The First Kansas Colored's infantry fought almost continually, and successfully repelled several attempts to drive back the Federal rearguard into the Terre Rouge bottomlands.

The Frontier Division's stand bought Steele time while his advance guard struggled to repair bridges and haul guns through Cypress Bayou. The Army of the Frontier conducted a nighttime march toward Camden along a route that traversed muddy troughs, swamps and streams. The atrocious roads demanded log corduroy roads for wagons and artillery, a time-consuming expedient that exhausted men and animals. The Confederate army contributed to Steele's army's misery, leaving animal carcasses to foul water, and

⁵²⁰ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War on the Border*, 270-272.

⁵²¹ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War in the Border*, 274.

destroying food and fodder supplies in the path of Steele's army.⁵²² Steele kept the initiative, but just barely, his hungry army desperately committed to seeking a place where supplies could be obtained.

The Army of Arkansas achieved a notable victory by successfully defeating Confederate General John Marmaduke's cavalry and opening the way to Camden. Confederate cavalry continued to launch attacks against Steele's flanks and rear, but Union forces occupied Camden on April 15. Meanwhile, Thayer's Army of the Frontier struggled through the morass and arrived at Camden the following day.⁵²³ General Steele anticipated additional attacks, but the fortified defenses of Camden offered a respite from endless marching and the need for constant vigilance against cavalry raids. Camden's formidable defenses amounted for little however, if Steele could not rest, refit, and reorganize his army to renew its campaign.

Steele's successful capture of Camden failed to ameliorate his supply situation. The Union army, a thirteen thousand thousand-man fighting column that also possessed nine thousand horses and mules, found little of substance in and around Camden.⁵²⁴ There was cause for hope: the Washita River could support steamboat traffic and while Steele awaited news of Banks' campaign to the south, he requested a quarter of a million rations to reinvigorate his Union army. Steele's army could not sustain operations on their

⁵²² Mark Christ (Ed.) *Rugged and Sublime: The Civil War in Arkansas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 114.

⁵²³ Gregory Urwin, "We Cannot Treat Negroes...as Prisoners of War": Racial Atrocities and reprisals in Civil War Arkansas, " in Annie J. Bailey and Daniel E. Sutherland, *Civil War Arkansas: Beyond Battles and Leaders* (Fayetteville Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 214.

⁵²⁴ Curt Anders *Disaster in Damp Sand* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Guild Press of Indiana, 1997), 111.

remaining field stores, which consisted of low quality corn, animal feed that men ate in lieu of more nutritious fare.⁵²⁵

The army's quartermaster understood the supply quandary and marshaled resources to obtain enough food for the army while the trains from Pine Bluff traveled westward to Camden. The Federal supply woes encompassed the needs of the Camden residents who contrary to expectations could not supply the Union army. Historian Ira Richards cited a report of the Federal army doling out food to starving Camden residents.⁵²⁶ The supply of hardtack was exhausted by April 15, and soldiers resorted to grinding their much-reduced corn rations by hand mills. Thayer's surplus of wagons and mules, initially regarded as a nuisance of little value, in this dire situation was put to good use.⁵²⁷ The quartermaster's scouts discovered a sizeable supply of corn at Poison Spring during the Federal advance. Foraged corn could subsist the command, but time was of the essence as Confederate patrols unquestionably would destroy it if the army did not send out a train immediately.

Thayer's Frontier Division, despite their recent arrival at Camden, received orders to prepare a foraging train to seize the corn at Poison Springs. Captain Luther Thrasher who was detailed from the First Kansas Colored as the an Assistant Adjutant General for Steele's army, issued the order to General Thayer to prepare the train. Thayer in turn assigned the task to the First Kansas Colored. Thayer's decision recognized the high

⁵²⁵ Robert L. Kerby, *Kirby Smith's Confederacy: The Trans-Mississippi South, 1863-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 312.

⁵²⁶ Ira Don Richards, "The Battle of Poison Spring," 340-341.

⁵²⁷ Report No 4, Charles A. Henry Asst QM to HQ Dept of Arkansas, in the field May 12, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part 1, Reports*, 681; Wiley Britton, *The Civil War On The Border*, 279. The immediate objective, corn enough to provide men with quarter rations and animals with half rations, could be met by a forage train capable of reaching Poison Spring and bringing back the corn for immediate distribution. This ambitious plan suffered from one incontrovertible flaw: the Confederate cavalry roamed the countryside destroying corn stocks and mills, while the Federal army's control extended to the city. The enemy cavalry contested Steele's advance, little could convince an observer that it would not target a forage train knowing that Steele's army could not maneuver until fed.

esteem in which Thayer held the regiment and its commander; Steele cautioned Thayer to send a good officer to command the train, and Thayer selected one. The First Kansas Colored, Thayer's best infantry unit, would escort the train together with cavalry and artillery to a point fifteen miles from Camden the following morning at 5 a.m. Additional reinforcements would join the regiment the following day to ensure enough concentrated firepower to repel any anticipated attacks. Williams could place cavalry pickets to alert him of any enemy force, and the distance from Camden could be covered in a short time and in distance of additional aid if required. The train as initially configured would contain 177 wagons assembled from across the Army of Arkansas, sufficient to bring back enough corn for the army.⁵²⁸ Later additions increased the train to 198 wagons, a huge foraging train, on par with the supply trains sent to Fort Gibson from Fort Scott, a target that stretched over a mile over poor roads, and drawn by weak animals.

Poison Springs

Colonel Williams led the regiment out from Union lines on the morning of April 17, despite the fact that Union forces south of Camden captured the Confederate steamboat *Homer* containing 3,000 bushels of corn the night before.⁵²⁹ Perhaps Steele insisted on the train in order to ensure enough rations until the supply trains arrived from Pine Bluff. Possessing a food reserve could give Steele more flexibility and perhaps sustain his cavalry enough to resume active patrols against their Confederate counterparts. The half-starved infantry possessed experience with foraging trains and its ranks contained reliable veteran troops that could be relied upon to accomplish the foraging expedition efficiently.

⁵²⁸ Captain L. A. Thrasher, Second Brigade, Thayer's Division, April 20, 1864; Report of Captain Charles A. Henry, Chief Quartermaster to Department of Arkansas, Office Chief Quartermaster, Arkansas Expedition, May 12, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part 1, Reports*, 237, 678-681.

⁵²⁹ Report Number 24, Colonel Williams Engagement at Poison Spring, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 743; Wiley Britton, *The Civil War On The Border*, 279.

The foraging train was a calculated gamble: a twenty-four hour foraging expedition could expect reasonable success and perhaps dissuade attack Confederate cavalry attacks so close to Camden. General Thayer may have chosen the First Kansas Colored for these reasons, the veteran infantry the best of his command.

The expedition did not proceed blindly onto the western roads, but according to Captain Earle, appealed for additional troops. The officers of the First Kansas Colored understood that they were marching rebel-held territory, and recommended that the train be forestalled until a larger escort could be formed. Captain Earle's persistent requests for a larger escort angered Major Ward, and reportedly threatened to arrest Earle if any more requests for reinforcements came his way.⁵³⁰ Earle and his fellow officers knew that although the Army of Arkansas held Camden, the Confederates controlled the countryside with their excellent and numerous cavalry.

Williams' one hundred and ninety-eight wagon-long train stretched over a mile as it departed Camden, the wagons accompanied by a composite escort of five hundred First Kansas Colored infantry under Major Ward, fifty cavalymen of the Sixth Kansas cavalry, seventy-five of the Second Kansas Cavalry, seventy horse soldiers of the Fourteenth Kansas Cavalry, and a two-gun section of the Second Indiana Battery. The escort, in total, sallied forth with six hundred and ninety-five men and two guns into hostile territory.⁵³¹ The train's departure immediately came under surveillance by

⁵³⁰ Earle, *Journal*, 51.

⁵³¹ Gary D. Joiner *Through the Howling Wilderness: The 1864 Red River Campaign and Union Failure in the West* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 120; Report Number 24, Colonel Williams Engagement at Poison Spring, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 743; Mark, Christ (Ed.) *All Cut to Pieces and Gone to Hell: The Civil War, Race Relations, and the Battle of Poison Spring* (Little Rock: August House, 2003), 89; C.A. Henry to Major General Steele, Camden, April 19, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I, Reports*, 682. Christ disputes Williams' numbers at puts them at four hundred thirty-eight infantry and one hundred ninety-seven cavalry. Steele may have sought to achieve supplies with a small number of troops rather than risk a general engagement outside Camden's works. CA Henry reported

Confederate scouts, and General Marmaduke before nightfall on April 17, received an accurate report of the number of wagons and their escort force.⁵³² The Confederates determined to trap the train in an ambush, and deprive Steele of the precious wagons and their cargo of corn before the train could return to Union lines.

The infantry escorts proved barely equate to defend the train when it traveled along the narrow Washington road, and became less so after Williams established a camp for the night approximately eighteen miles from Camden. Earlier in the day, while Williams' column marched, Confederate cavalry destroyed almost 2,500 bushels of corn, and complicated the foraging plan by forcing Williams to dispatch over a hundred wagons to a point six miles away where corn could be collected in quantity. The time and effort required to forage exhausted Williams' command, and Ward's troops did not return until after midnight with corn-laden wagons. The next day at sunrise, the regiment began its slow return to Camden, its movements delayed by unnecessary halts along the route to collect small quantities of corn.⁵³³

The reinforcements promised by Thayer arrived at Cross Roads four miles into the return march, and brought welcome manpower and firepower to the escort. A force of four hundred sixty-five men and two mountain howitzers joined Williams' command: three hundred seventy-five men from the Eighteenth Iowa Infantry, twenty five cavalry from the Sixth Kansas Cavalry; forty-five men of the Second Kansas Cavalry; twenty men of the Fourteenth Kansas Cavalry; and two mountain howitzers from the Sixth Kansas cavalry. The reinforcements brought Williams' escort up to eight hundred

that Mr. Coles, the wagon master, knew that the local farms stocks of corn were being burned before the regiment departed Camden.

⁵³² Wiley Britton, *The Civil War On The Border*, 281;

⁵³³ Report Number 24, Colonel Williams Engagement at Poison Spring, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 743.

seventy five infantry, and two hundred eighty five cavalry. The numbers meant less than could be expected, for over one hundred exhausted and hungry men, nearly twenty percent of the First Kansas Colored soldiers, were declared unfit for duty. Kansas cavalymen also straggled until Williams possessed fewer than a thousand effective soldiers in his column.⁵³⁴ The return march promised to be arduous regardless of Confederate intentions.

The Confederates knew about the reinforcements and planned accordingly. During the night, Marmaduke assembled a force of twelve guns and almost 4,000 men to ambush the train at Poison Springs. Although several roads met at Poison Springs, there was only one road back to Camden through the swampy bottomlands and thick forests. The choke point appealed to General Marmaduke, and although Brigadier General Maxey would command the majority of the troops, Marmaduke's division formed on the right. General Cabell's Arkansans occupied the center, and Maxey's mixed force of Texans and Choctaws assumed positions on the Confederate left. The former two divisions would face west against the Federal front and Maxey's men would cover the Federal right.⁵³⁵ The ambush would pit roughly three times the number of Confederates against their Federal foe, and three times the number of guns. The Confederates also possessed superior knowledge of the terrain and the assistance of Arkansan farmers eager to avenge their foraging losses against the Union escort.

The battle of Poison Springs began about 10 a.m. on April 18, when Colonel Williams found his road blocked by Confederate skirmishers just a mile after the junction

⁵³⁴ Report Number 24, Colonel Williams Engagement at Poison Spring, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 743-746.

⁵³⁵ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War On The Border*, 282; Christ, Mark, (Ed.) *All Cut to Pieces and Gone to Hell: The Civil War, Race Relations, and the Battle of Poison Spring* (Little Rock: August House, 2003), 89.

at Cross Roads. The battle of Poison Spring entered its first phase at this point, when rebel skirmishers forced Williams to deploy his infantry to develop the situation. Seeking to defend the train and its desperately needed cargo of corn, Williams rushed the First Kansas Colored under the command of Major Ward to the front of the column, where they formed an L-shaped line to protect the head and south side of the supply train. Ward immediately deployed skirmishers to keep back their opposite number from the Confederate lines. The First Kansas Colored troops straddled the road at the top of the hill, while the remainder of the train struggled to consolidate behind their line. The Union position offered advantages, with the regiment's right flank overlooking a field of some thirty or forty acres, and the center able to adjust to threats from the thick pine trees a short distance away from the road.⁵³⁶ Uncertain of the exact numbers facing them, the main Federal line formed in readiness while skirmishers exchanged shots with the enemy.

Williams needed to know if the Confederates possessed artillery support, their approximate numbers. Williams's artillery moved forward to engage the enemy line in order to draw any supporting artillery fire the Confederates could muster. The sound and type of the enemy force could be ascertained by artillery, and if none met his guns' fire Williams could develop a better concept of the enemy's troops while also signaling Camden that the enemy had engaged the train. Williams could not push through the enemy forces at this point until his cavalry scouted the enemy lines and his scattered foraging parties rejoined the main body of the train. Williams ordered the Eighteenth Iowa Infantry to position its pair of howitzers and accompanying cavalry to cover the rear while the Fourteenth Kansas cavalry detachment assumed positions on the extreme left of

⁵³⁶ Mark Christ. *Getting Used to Being Shot At: The Spence family Civil War Letters*. Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2002, 123.

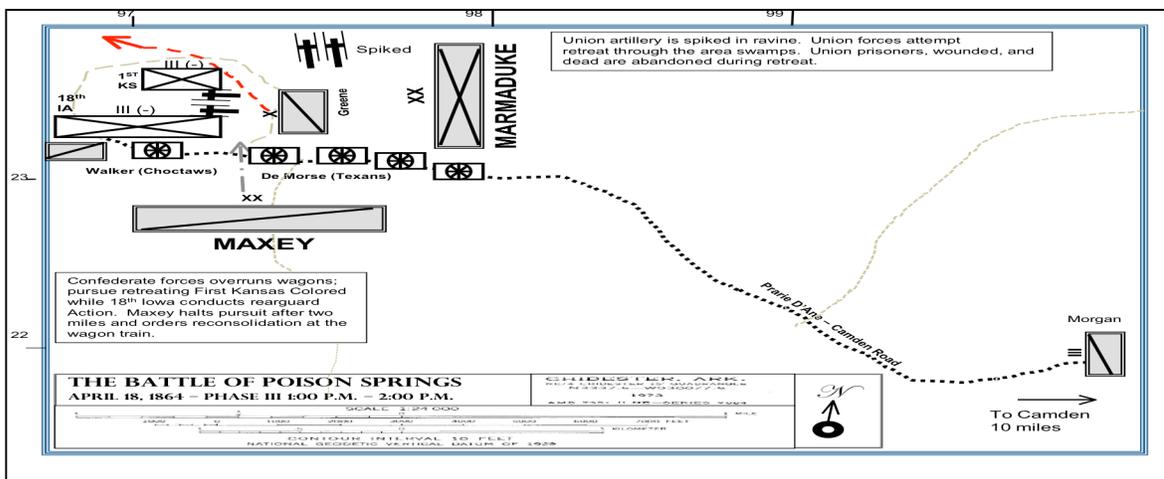
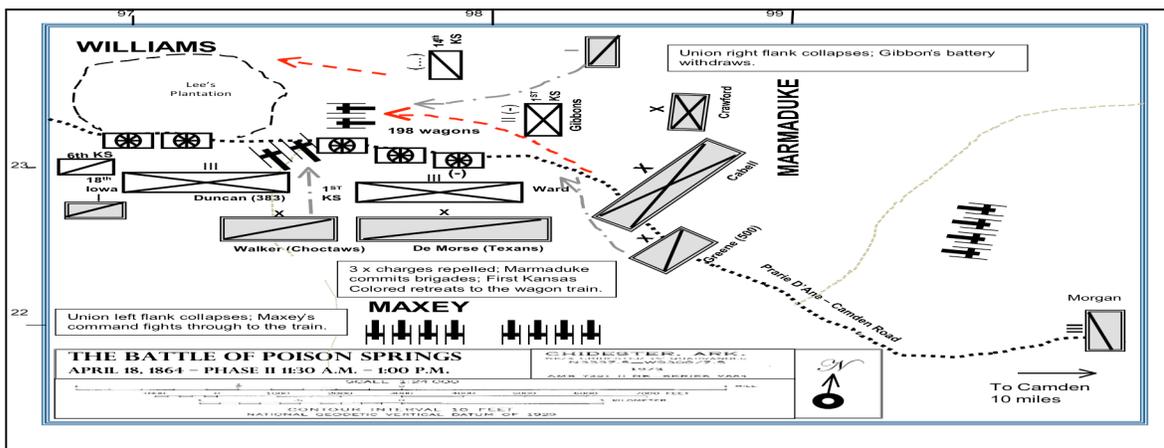
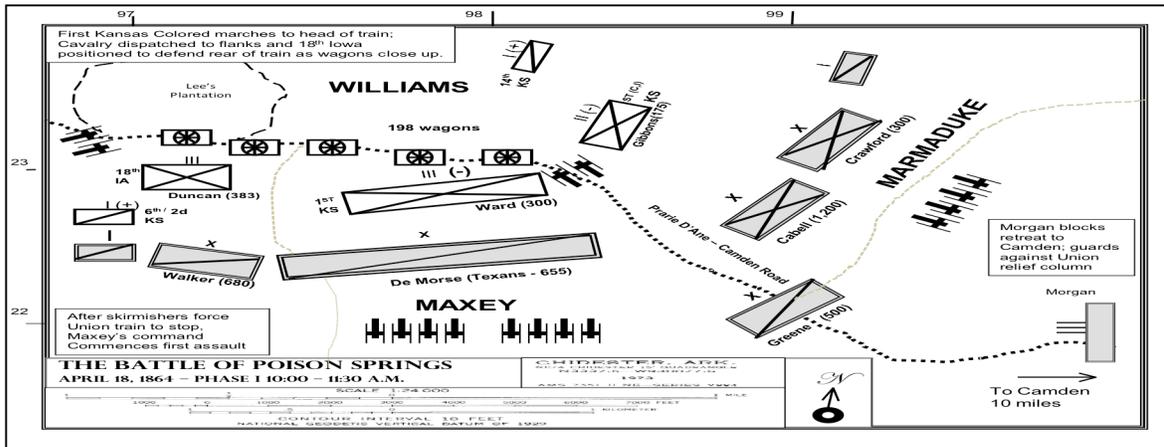
Williams's line. Williams depended on the cavalry to give notice of any enemy attack on the flanks, the whole of the area covered in thick brush. The only open ground near Williams' command lay to his front; the Lee plantation's open fields could become a killing ground if his command entered it unaware of a hidden enemy.⁵³⁷

Williams received valuable intelligence at this uncertain point of the battle when a wayward messenger entered Williams' lines seeking Colonel DeMorse of the Twenty-Ninth Texas Cavalry. The regiment's nemesis from Honey Spring appeared likely to give battle at Poison Springs, and the quick-thinking messenger under duress informed Williams (incorrectly) that General Price and an army of 10,000 men opposed Williams' command. Shortly after the messenger's appearance, the Federal cavalry recoiled from a sudden Confederate assault during which many lost their mounts.⁵³⁸ Warned by the fire and the messenger, Williams ordered the Eighteenth Iowa to send more troops to the fore of the column, only to find that the Iowans could not support him due to an impending Confederate attack on the rear of the train. During the battle, Williams delegated command and control for his regiment to his adjutant, Lieutenant William C. Gibbons, and Major Richard Ward, his second-in-command. While Williams attempted to coordinate the actions of the entire column, Major Ward immediately ordered the regiment's companies to assume their positions in an arc to cover the train north and south of the road.

⁵³⁷ Report Number 24, Colonel Williams Engagement at Poison Spring, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 743-746.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

Maps 6-8: Battle of Poison Spring, Phases I-III⁵³⁹



⁵³⁹ Ira Don Richards, "The Battle of Poison Spring," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Volume 28 (Winter 1959): 338. USGS 1:24,000 as noted in map legend.

Unaware of the enemy's exact locations, Ward positioned Companies A, B, E, G and H, at approximately 11:30 A.M. facing south and flanking his two rifled parrot guns. Companies D and F occupied positions on the extreme left of his line south side of the road facing east. The Sixth Kansas Cavalry screened Ward's right flank along with a detachment from the Second Kansas Cavalry. Gibbons and Companies C and I completed the regiment's dispositions on the north side of the road facing east.⁵⁴⁰

The second phase of the battle of Poison Spring commenced just after 11:30 with heavy Confederate shelling on Williams' lines by several batteries of artillery firing a deadly cross-fire of shot and shell as cover for an infantry assault on the front and right flank of Williams' line. Major Ward ordered the men to lay down behind the hill crest to mask the regiment's soldiers and protect them from shelling. Williams meanwhile spotted Confederate movement and ordered the line to readiness. When the Confederates broke through the timber thirty minutes later and launched their assault, Ward's men rose and delivered a quick succession of volleys at the Confederate line from a distance of one hundred yards. Lashed by buck and ball for fifteen minutes, the Confederate assault fell back.⁵⁴¹ Captain Topping of Company B fell during this first exchange, but his company held their positions. The reprieve proved temporary however, and the Confederates quickly reorganized and launched a second assault against the First Kansas Colored's lines.

⁵⁴⁰ Report 31, Major Richard Ward, First Kansas Colored Engagement at Poison Spring, April 20, 1864, OR: *Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 751-752.

⁵⁴¹ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War On The Border*, 285; Report Number 24, Colonel Williams Engagement at Poison Spring, OR: *Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 743-746; ⁵⁴¹ Report 31, Major Richard Ward, First Kansas Colored Engagement at Poison Spring, April 20, 1864, OR: *Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 752.

The Confederates threw two new regiments into the fray, the butternut soldiers charging with a cry that drowned out the incessant thunder of musketry. Although still suffering from the accurate Confederate artillery crossfire, and unsure of the fight in his column's rear, the Kansans hurled back a second charge after another fifteen minute exchange that threatened to become a hand-to-hand fight.⁵⁴² Lieutenants Coleman and Samuels of Company H fell at this phase of the battle, two companies now threatened by their loss of their officers. Pressed by the Confederate assault, Lieutenant Macy's skirmishers of Company C also fell back on the left and filled the line between Companies G and B. The forces knew each other's identity by this point in the battle, and Wiley Britton asserted that the Colonel DeMorse's Twenty-Ninth Texas called out to the black infantry "You First Nigger, now buck to the Twenty-Ninth Texas."⁵⁴³ The Federal situation on the left appeared equally desperate when Companies C and I were threatened with envelopment by Confederate regiments forming to the north of the road.

The Union troops on the left flank fought at a disadvantage following the first charge. After Rabb's battery, fell back to the left flank's rear to obtain more ammunition, their solid shot of dubious value against infantry at close range. Unable to see Ward's companies when the fighting commenced, but suspecting a Confederate attack on his lines, Gibbons nevertheless understood that the heavy volume of fire signaled a general engagement, and not a skirmish. While gunpowder smoke shrouded the battlefield, heavy artillery fire scourged Gibbons' companies. Lacking adequate shelter from the enemy shot, Gibbons' directed Companies C and I to fall back opposite the lead wagon and prepare for the enemy's assault. The Federal companies temporarily held fire when

⁵⁴² Report Number 24, Colonel Williams Engagement at Poison Spring, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 743-746.

⁵⁴³ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War On The Frontier*, 286.

approximately one hundred blue coated cavalry and infantry crossed Gibbons' front, a ruse to confuse their identity until additional gray uniformed infantry and a large of four to five hundred cavalry crossed the road to their Federal front. Companies C and I opened a sustained fire on the Confederates for several minutes until forced to reposition another sixty yards to the rear to avoid being flanked by cavalry.⁵⁴⁴ The Confederates turned the left and right Federal wings at this point in the battle, the Fourteenth Kansas Cavalry reportedly surrounded by an enemy that outnumbered the cavalrymen by a factor of nine. A brief attempt to form a line faltered when Confederate troops drove in the flanks, and the Fourteenth abandoned the field in retreat.⁵⁴⁵ The center of the line after repelling three charges could no longer effectively contest the enemy, after Confederate small arms and artillery tore holes in the thin Federal line.

The third phase of the battle of Poison Spring commenced with the sobering knowledge that the Federals faced a determined enemy supported with abundant and accurate artillery, and an overwhelming number of troops. Colonel Williams, seeing for the first time the enemy's numbers after the second charge, resolved to defend the train in the hope that Federal reinforcements could reach him from Camden. The Federals paid a steep butcher's bill while repulsing two successive charges: almost half its number were dead or wounded, and three of Williams First Kansas Colored's companies lacked officers, the men killed or wounded in the exchange. Ammunition shortages compelled officers and men to take the cartridges from the bodies of the dead, nearly all ammunition

⁵⁴⁴ Report Number 32, Lieutenant William C. Gibbons, First Kansas Colored Infantry, of engagement at Poison Spring, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 755-756.

⁵⁴⁵ Lieutenant Josephus Utt, Fourteenth Kansas Cavalry to Colonel Williams, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 750.

expended after nearly two hours of continuous combat.⁵⁴⁶ Williams ordered Major Ward to hold the line until he could reposition the Eighteenth Iowa to cover the First Kansas Colored's retreat. Unhorsed at this critical juncture, Williams was unable to order the line's dispositions changed, and lost precious time searching for a remount.⁵⁴⁷ His subordinate officers knew their trade, however, and determinedly held against the Confederates. The white officers and black soldiers faced the same dishonorable fate if forced to surrender. It was better to be killed than face execution.

Sensing victory, General Maxey aggressively ordered additional troops against the First Kansas Colored's lines, and forced the cavalry on the wings of the escort back and the main line against the wagons. The First Kansas Colored endured a third Confederate charge, and although Lieutenant Haines' guns faltered in their support to the Union line, due to greatly reduced gun crews, one gun slashed into Cabell's Arkansans with a discharge of double canister- before retiring to the rear.⁵⁴⁸ Pressed in the north, south, and center, the Federal neared collapse. Major Ward ordered a retreat of the line at approximately 1 p.m.; the Federal center would pull back in stages to the wagons under covering fire from the Eighteenth Iowa Infantry. The well-drilled soldiers, with the exception of a small number that fled in disorder, kept up a continual fire against the Confederate foe, and unleashed two volleys while Colonel Williams formed another line to their rear with several companies of the First Kansas Colored and the Eighteenth Iowa Infantry.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁶Report 31, Major Richard Ward, First Kansas Colored Engagement at Poison Spring, April 20, 1864, OR: *Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 753.

⁵⁴⁷Report Number 24, Colonel Williams Engagement at Poison Spring, OR: *Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 743-746.

⁵⁴⁸Report 31, Major Richard Ward, First Kansas Colored Engagement at Poison Spring, April 20, 1864, OR: *Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 752.

⁵⁴⁹Ibid, 753.

Gibbons' companies on the left flank grimly held on until the right flank retreated. The left flank followed the right's soldiers through the wagons and established a new line along a fence that surrounded Lee's plantation about two hundred yards to their rear. Gibbons, along with Captains Graton and Armstrong, and Lieutenant Harris assembled one hundred men from Companies C and I to contest the Confederate cavalry forming opposite them. The encouragement and steadfastness of First Sergeant Berry of Company I stiffened the resolve of the exhausted soldiers, the veteran appealing to the cause of freedom to inspire to deliver a volley into the attacking Confederate cavalry.⁵⁵⁰

During the First Kansas Colored's combat at the front of the train, the Eighteenth Iowa protected the rear. The Commander of the Eighteenth Iowa, Captain Duncan, deployed his command with his two howitzers on the left, and two companies of skirmishers on the front and right flank of the regiment. When the Sixth Kansas Cavalry was driven back, it augmented Duncan's right flank. Duncan's companies reformed in the orchard to the south of the road after the first two charges on the front of the column, and received increasing volumes of fire as the First Kansas Colored's companies retreated to the northwest. The Eighteenth Iowa covered the First Kansas Colored's retreat by reforming north of the road and shepherded the withdrawing Federal artillery from attack. Holding their line at northern edge of the Lee plantation, the Eighteenth, by Duncan's account formed seven times in the estimated ninety minutes of combat.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁵⁰ Report Number 32, Lieutenant William C. Gibbons, First Kansas Colored Infantry, of engagement at Poison Spring, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports, 755-756*; Wiley Britton, *The Civil War On The Border*, 288.

⁵⁵¹ Report No 30, CPT William M. Duncan, Eighteenth Iowa, Camden, April 20, 1864 *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports, 751*. The Eighteenth did not reach Camden until 8 P.M. that evening.

While the right flank poured past in retreat and the Eighteenth Iowa shielded the retreating Federals, The First Kansas Colored's Companies C and I received orders to scatter with the hope of joining the Eighteenth Iowa, and successfully followed the Eighteenth into a ravine after its defense at the edge of Lee's plantation. Gibbons retained the use of his mount and turning to observe his pursuers, witnessed the pursuing rebels shooting the First Kansas Colored's wounded and fatigued soldiers. Undaunted by this scene, Gibbons remained on the hillside and directed soldiers to safety, then joined the Eighteenth Iowa in retreat to Camden.⁵⁵² The last effective Federal resistance fell to the remaining Union cavalrymen of the Sixth Kansas Cavalry, a thin barrier to the exultant Confederate pursuers who howled and cheered as they chased the retreating soldiers from the field.

Williams ordered Lieutenant Phillips' Sixth Kansas Cavalry to cover the retreat of his infantry, as the only avenue of escape appeared to be the swamp to his command's front. The regiment's surviving troops sought the safety of the trees, but having exhausted their ammunition and cut off from reinforcement, they could not reform to effectively bar their Confederate pursuers. Some of the First Kansas Colored's soldiers fled for the trees and swamps dragging their rifles along with them while Confederate pursuers hunted them.⁵⁵³ The infantry melted back, men when possible, but forced to abandon the badly wounded to the enemy as the remnants of the escort retreated to Camden.

Escaping the battlefield did not guarantee safety. The lost Union command required a quick and concealed route back to Camden and soldiers of the Eighteenth Iowa coerced

⁵⁵² Report Number 32, Lieutenant William C. Gibbons, First Kansas Colored Infantry, of engagement at Poison Spring, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 755-756; Wiley Britton, *The Civil War On The Border*, 288. Haines spiked his guns in the ravine.

⁵⁵³ Mark Christ, *Rugged and Sublime*, 116.

an unwilling guide to take them through the swamp. Other Union soldiers however fared poorly when they struck the upper Washington road. Men of the Confederate Second Arkansas manned a roadblock and after a short engagement “reported at least eighty [bluecoats] killed and thirty-five captured.”⁵⁵⁴ The Confederate pursuit of the broken escort ceased when Confederate General Maxey called off the pursuit perhaps concerned about losing control of his army during the pursuit. The battle of Poison Springs ended for many at this juncture, but for those remaining on the battlefield, the struggle continued.

The battle of Poison Spring ended at around 2 p.m., after a two-mile pursuit by Confederate cavalry. General Maxey’s recall orders effectively concluded the action. During the pursuit the infantry maintained their discipline, and those still possessing ammunition fired several volleys to keep the cavalry at a distance. The failure of the Union army at Camden to relieve his command consigned Williams’ men to a harrowing retreat, and most of them would not see safety until later that evening when they entered Federal lines, Williams entering about 11 P.M. that night.⁵⁵⁵ The remaining soldiers on the field at Poison Springs did not escape notice, for a new phase of the battle, the fourth and most horrific began when the Federals abandoned their wounded and the train to the victorious Confederate army. The Confederate ranks held a score of men that burned for revenge, and they indulged their appetites for slaughter.

When the First Kansas Colored fled the battlefield, they abandoned their wounded to the Confederates. The men remaining on the battlefield suffered great outrages: Williams

⁵⁵⁴ Edwin C. Bearss, *Steele’s Retreat from Camden* Little Rock: Arkansas Civil War Centennial Commission and Pioneer Press, 1967, 35-36.

⁵⁵⁵ Report Number 24, Colonel Williams Engagement at Poison Spring, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 743-746; Wiley Britton, *The Civil War On The Border*, 290.

received witness reports that alleged his wounded suffered instant executions where they fell. The worst abuses may have been committed by Texan troops that sought revenge for their defeat at Honey Springs, and the loss of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment's colors to a band of armed slaves in insurrection under abolitionist officers. However, some survivors played dead and listened to the sounds of the battle and its aftermath. One soldier survived to tell of Texans shooting the wounded, taunting the fallen men with a sing-song rhyme, "Where is the First Nigger now?... 'All Cut to pieces and gone to hell by bad management."⁵⁵⁶ Revenge for Honey Springs and the desperate need of southern men to purge the idea of black military competence appear to be prime motivations for the actions of the victorious Texans. A small number escaped death when they crawled away from the battlefield under cover of darkness. Nightfall was not a panacea. The wounded men fortunate enough to escape pursuit received no painkilling medications or rest, and endured a pain-wracked trek through swamps, wherein many suffered snakebites amongst the swamp grasses when they stopped to rest.⁵⁵⁷

The Significance of Race and Combat

The battle of Poison Springs featured another aspect of Arkansas race relations as former masters fought against their blue-coated slaves. One Confederate combatant witnessed the death of First Kansas Colored soldiers that he knew from personal experience, writing in a letter home that "Among the killed was Dr. Rowland's Clabe and Kyles Berry and old man Edwards' boy was captured..." Historian Mark Christ believes these men were Corporal Jacob Edwards of A Company, Private Silas Newberry of C Co,

⁵⁵⁶ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War On The Border*, 291.

⁵⁵⁷ Mark Christ, *Rugged and Sublime*, 116; Wiley Britton, *The Civil War On The Border*, 291.

and First Sergeant Alfred Berry of Co I.⁵⁵⁸ This shocking degree of familiarity between Confederate Arkansas troops and their opponents may have fueled their rage in battle, the dichotomy of white master versus black slave playing out in a small corner of Arkansas. When Union regiments marched, contraband slaves joined them. Union Colored Regiments doubtless welcomed these opportunities and forcefully liberated a number of slaves along the route according to Confederate witnesses. Gregory Irwin explored the reasons for Confederate Arkansans' virulent hatred and believes racial motives were the most compelling. John Eakin, the Editor of the Confederate newspaper the *Washington Telegraph*, expressed his opinions with a mixture of paternalism and outrage, "It is far better for the deluded victims, as for us, that the fate which may be considered inevitable, should come upon them in hot blood, and the excitement of the battlefield."⁵⁵⁹ Better death and execution befall black soldiers than liberation and loss of white control.

The ferocity of the battle extended to the pursuit of the broken regiment, Confederate infantry pursuing the command for about three miles, then cavalry resuming the chase, in an eerie reversal of fortunes between combatants at Honey Springs. The number killed impressed Confederate participants, one estimating "ten negroes killed to one white Fed." However, the treatment of wounded and captured black soldiers expressed the true nature of the battle. Major Ward's reports address the execution of prisoners directly, "wounded negroes were shot dead as the Confederates passed, and no negro prisoners taken, " while Captain Earle believed "All the Colored men in our Regiment wounded and left on the

⁵⁵⁸ Report 31, Major Richard Ward, First Kansas Colored Engagement at Poison Spring, April 20, 1864, OR: *Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 754.

⁵⁵⁹ *Washington Telegraph*, May 25, 1864 as quoted in Anne J. Bailey and David Sutherland, *Civil War Arkansas*, 221; Earle, *Journal*, 54.

field were killed by the Rebels.”⁵⁶⁰ The number of dead First Kansas Colored soldiers astounded the Confederate victors and figure prominently in their reports. Missouri General Sterling Price was careful to point out the majority of Federal dead as black, and Arkansan General Cabell put the numbers of black soldiers at Poison Spring at 1,500, with so many black soldiers killed that “You could track our troops by the dead bodies lying on the ground. I estimated his loss as 450 [N]egroes killed, 7 Indians, 30 white troops...” During the retreat a number of the regiment’s soldiers appear to have been felled east of the battlefield by Morgan’s Regiment of Arkansans, at least eighty black soldiers killed and four captured. The ferocity of Confederate response could hardly be explained by their losses: sixteen killed and eighty-eight wounded.⁵⁶¹ The annihilation of the First Kansas Colored clearly stood at the forefront of many Confederate leaders and soldiers’ minds, the First Kansas Colored a symbol of Yankee perfidy and the abolitionist threat to the southern way of life.

Another rationale for the harsh treatment meted out to the soldiers of the First Kansas Colored is the charge of theft from defenseless citizens. Foraging constituted part of legitimate military operations, but Colonel Charles DeMorse of the Twenty-Ninth Texas Cavalry offered up a description of the federal train’s contents guaranteed to stir a loyal southerner’s soul. The unscrupulous Federals stole from defenseless Arkansans, seizing more than food and forage in their intense greed. “The enemy’s train of 200 wagons, laden with corn, bacon, stolen bed-quilts, women’s and children’s clothing, hogs, geese,

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⁵⁶¹ Report 48, Major General Sterling Price, Camden, May---, 1864, 781, 786; Report 52 Brigadier General Cabell, HQ Cabell’s Brigade, April 20, 1864, 791-792, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*.

and all the unscrupulous plunder was found standing in the road...⁵⁶² The presence of the First Kansas Colored as part of the train's escort justified severe measures as punishment for the theft of personal possessions of no military value. The image of wanton plunder is clearly transmitted through DeMorse's outraged words.

The objections of Confederates is disingenuous however, especially when instances of similar behavior by Confederates against Union sympathizing Arkansans is considered. The memoirs of a German settler family reveal similar treatment by Confederates. "Hogs, ducks, and chickens were killed...They searched the house from roof to cellar...and took everything they wanted. Some of the things taken were rugs, bedclothes, sleeping gowns, even some clothes for a child."⁵⁶³ The enumeration of foraged items appealed to those seeking proof of depraved behavior, and the theft of items of personal value with little military utility reinforced the behaviors expected of Yankees and their savage black soldiers.

Although official reports fail to detail the execution of prisoners or wounded black soldiers, period newspapers delved deeply into the visual imagery and symbolic nature of the battle's aftermath. Victorious Confederates expunged past defeats and revenged themselves on the broken remnants of the First Kansas Colored's regiment long after the survivors escaped through the swamp to Camden. Confederate Arkansans reputedly vied with Choctaw soldiers for most heinous mutilation and desecration of the dead. One Confederate newspaper, the *Washington Telegraph* reported Choctaws stripping and scalping fallen soldiers, and desecrating them in gruesomely inventive manners: the

⁵⁶² Report 76, Colonel Charles DeMorse, 29th Texas Cavalry, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 846-848.

⁵⁶³ Clarence Evans and Karl Friedrich Hermann, "Memoirs, Letters, and Diary Entries of German Settlers in Northwest Arkansas, 1853-1863," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Autumn, 1947), 243.

Choctaws, after the battle, “buried a Yankee in an ordinary grave. For a headstone they put up a stiff [N]egro buried to the waist. For a footstone another [N]egro reversed out from the waist to the heels,” Arkansas troops “Vied to see if [they] could crush the most ‘nigger heads’ under his wagon wheels.”⁵⁶⁴ The *Washington Telegraph*, a virulently anti-abolitionist opponent of black soldiers, appeared to revel in the barbaric treatment of the defeated black soldiers. Although most newspapers traded in sensational accounts, the casual manner in which the dead were desecrated after the battle reveals a sinister, almost hysterical reaction to the threat posed by black enlistment.

General Kirby Smith seemed untroubled by these reports and visited the battlefield, reporting only two black prisoners to his wife, but estimating the number of dead at six hundred “principally negroes who neither gave nor received quarter.”⁵⁶⁵ Smith forcefully advocated a policy of taking as few black prisoners as possible, and doubtless liked what he witnessed at Poison Springs. His banal declaration that the black soldiers neither gave nor received quarter strains credulity; the First Kansas Colored’s troops did not execute Confederate prisoners in earlier battles, a fact attested to by Confederate survivors through firsthand testimony. As for asking quarter, the Confederate policy for black soldiers and their officers brooked no deviation, especially from Smith, and Colored Regiment troops expected no quarter. The concept of asking for mercy when none could be expected seems pointless. Kirby Smith’s statement served his ends as a rationale to justify the execution of black prisoners and officers from Colored regiments.

The victorious Choctaws revenged plundering of their nation by Fort Smith foraging columns at Poison Springs, and Arkansans killed former slaves that challenged the

⁵⁶⁴ Randy Findley, “In War’s Wake: health Care and Arkansas Freedmen, 1863 -1868,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 51 (1992): 137 as quoted in *The Civil War in Arkansas*, 53.

⁵⁶⁵ Robert Kerby, *Kirby Smith’s Confederacy*, 312.

supremacy of whites. The defeat of the First Kansas Colored's troops erased the shame of the battle of Honey Springs, and encouraged the Choctaws to reassert themselves in support of the Confederacy.⁵⁶⁶ Colonel Tandy Walker, the commander of the Choctaw Brigade, justified his men's actions on grounds that the First Kansas Colored murdered Choctaw families. The Choctaw regarded the First Kansas Colored as "the ravagers of their country, the despoilers of their homes, and the murderers of their women and children..." a "despised enemy" to be destroyed.⁵⁶⁷ General Maxey approved of the Choctaw's actions and elaborated upon Colonel Walker's descriptions by adding: "The Choctaw brigade fought the very army that had destroyed their once happy homes, insulted their women, and driven them with their children destitute upon the world, and many an avenging blow was struck," and in addition "the Texas brigade did its whole duty gloriously, fighting as Texans know how to fight."⁵⁶⁸ No mention of scalping, mutilations, head crushing or executions appeared in the official reports.

Execution squads and vendettas aside, the Confederates took some prisoners. Observers noted between one hundred to one hundred and fifty white prisoners, and four black were taken after the battle. Colonel Williams however assumed that the Confederates would take no prisoners, and assumed his missing men dead.⁵⁶⁹ One exception, Private Montgomery Ridings of Company D, although wounded in the left thigh and shoulder, was not killed, but became a prisoner of war, and was later moved to

⁵⁶⁶ Clara Sue Kidwell. *The Choctaws in Oklahoma: From Tribe to Nation, 1855-1970* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 68.

⁵⁶⁷ Report No. 77, Col Tandy Walker, Second Indian Brigade, April 19, 1864, OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports, 849.

⁵⁶⁸ Report No 75 BG Samuel B. Maxey, Camp on Camden Road, April 23, 1864 OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports, 841-844.

⁵⁶⁹ Mark Christ, "Getting Used to being Shot At," 207; Report Number 24, Colonel Williams Engagement at Poison Spring, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 743-746. Various account mention prisoners, a Confederate observer noted one hundred prisoners.

Princeton, Arkansas in mid-June, 1864.⁵⁷⁰ Although the circumstances of Ridings' capture and imprisonment are unclear, he serves as the rare example of a survivor of Poison Spring. Captain Armstrong of the First Kansas Colored avoided execution through subterfuge, and throughout his captivity at Tyler, Texas claimed to be a Private in the Thirty-Sixth Iowa Infantry.⁵⁷¹ Armstrong knew that white officers of Colored Regiments could expect no mercy. Rather than share the fate of his men following his capture by proudly verifying his regimental affiliation Armstrong denied it. Lieutenant Hitchcock also went to Tyler, Texas, but experienced a period of confinement different from other white officers. Hitchcock, as an officer of in a Colored Regiment merited treatment as a felon, and did not qualify for prisoner exchange.⁵⁷² Officers in Colored Regiments could survive capture, but as the examples of Armstrong and Hitchcock demonstrate, treatment for Colored Regiment officers differed from that of regular white officers in degree and severity. Captured white officers of Colored Regiments became felons, not prisoners of war, a clear distinction that the south defined black service as insurrection and white leadership as encouraging servile insurrection.

The Aftermath of Poison Springs

After the battle of Poison Springs, Williams sought to explain why his column suffered defeat, and conceded that the terrain and the length of the train prevented him from effectively employing more than half of his command for the majority of the battle. The same applied for his artillery, their range advantage muted by the close brush and timber. Williams believed that his command faced the wrath of the entire Confederate

⁵⁷⁰ Montgomery Ridings, *RG 94: 79th USCT, Combined Military Service Records*.

⁵⁷¹ Andrew Armstrong, Robert Scott letter, February 22, 1865 *RG 94: 79th USCT (New), Combined Military Service Records*.

⁵⁷² Andrew Armstrong, Letter Armstrong to Colonel Dwight, Commissioner of Exchange, February 10, 1865, *RG 94: 79th USCT (New), Combined Military Service Records*.

army, 10,000 men and twelve guns arrayed against his thousand effectives. His front and right flank fought against an estimated five regiments of infantry and another of cavalry, while the rear faced equally daunting odds.⁵⁷³

The white Federal units involved sustained nowhere near the number of casualties or endured the same duration of combat as the First Kansas Colored. Despite this inequity of arms, his men withstood three charges, then executed a fighting retreat that enabled his command to escape with a significant portion of their manpower, sans all of its artillery.

Unit	Engaged	Killed and Missing	Wounded
First Kansas Colored	438	117	65
Second Kansas Cavalry	122	15	6
Sixth Kansas Cavalry	77	1	1
Fourteenth Kansas Cavalry	92	9	0
Sixth Kansas Cavalry, 2 howitzers	25	2	0
Eighteenth Iowa Infantry	383	59	21
Second Indiana Battery, 2 guns	33	1	4

Table 8: Poison Springs Union Casualties⁵⁷⁴

The battle lasted four hours, but at no time did reinforcements leave Camden to aid the beleaguered train. The duration of the battle and sound of artillery signaled to listeners that the fighting exceeded that of a skirmish, and more aptly described a battle in which a large force engaged in prolonged combat. General Thayer is reported to have heard the sounds and repeatedly asked permission to send out a relief party from his division, but

⁵⁷³ Report Number 24, Colonel Williams Engagement at Poison Spring, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 743-746.

⁵⁷⁴ Report Number 24, Colonel James M. Williams, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 746-747. In addition Colonel Williams's column lost two ten-pound field guns, two twelve pound mountain howitzers, and 198 wagons and teams.

Steele denied each request. Captain Earle believed that Steele resigned himself to losing a portion of his command rather than risk a general engagement.⁵⁷⁵ The train escort received no aid because it, and not the army, was expendable at this advanced stage of the campaign.

The reports filed by Confederate and Union commanders offer striking testimony to the ferocity of the battle. Colonel Williams overestimated his enemy's numbers, but so did the Confederates. One Confederate soldier thought the Federal escort contained between two and four thousand men, while Confederate leaders offered estimates of varying accuracy.⁵⁷⁶ The distortions in numbers may have stemmed from the determined resistance of the First Kansas Colored, which unlike white Union Regiments, expected little mercy from their Confederate opponents. Surrender simply didn't exist as an option, the previous battle of Honey Springs proved that Confederate regiments did not intend to treat their black opponents with the same treatment accorded to white troops defeated in battle. Those taken alive could expect re-enslavement, or worse. Their officers could expect no fair treatment either, for as officers in a Colored regiment, they fought under threat of execution if captured.

Other equally valid reasons for the column's defeat could be read from Williams' and Wards' assessment of the men. Dozens of fatigued soldiers could not be counted upon to effectively oppose an enemy attack.⁵⁷⁷ The First Kansas Colored's performance at Poison Springs has been ascribed to a number of factors, among them panic amongst the ranks or the skill and aggressiveness of the Confederate regiments opposing the First Kansas

⁵⁷⁵ "The Campaign of the Army of Arkansas," May 21, 1864, *Fort Smith New Era*; Earle, *Journal*, 53.

⁵⁷⁶ Mark Christ, "Getting Used to being Shot At," 207

⁵⁷⁷ Mark Christ (Ed.) *Rugged and Sublime: The Civil War in Arkansas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas press, 1994), 115.

Colored. It may be that these were factors, but more important than these may have been the sheer exhaustion and lack of strength in the First Kansas Colored ranks. Major Ward asserted, “the loss in arms and clothing is quite serious; but from the exhausted state of the men, it is strange that as many of them brought in their arms and accoutrements as did. Out of seventy-eight hours preceding the action, sixty-three hours were spent by the entire command on duty, besides a heavy picket-guard having been furnished for the remaining fifteen hours...rations were of necessity exceedingly short for more than a week previous to the battle.”⁵⁷⁸ The soldiers that fought for the Union at Poison Spring did so as half-starved, exhausted, and isolated troops without recourse to the manpower reserves enjoyed by the Confederates. It is tempting to hypothesize the battle’s outcome if the forces involved fought with equal numbers, rather than the three to one odds faced by the First Kansas Colored and its fellow Federal units.

Regimental losses for the battle of Poison Springs were incredibly high. The regiment went into battle with about four hundred and fifty enlisted men, and thirteen officers. Of the thirteen officers, seven were killed or wounded. In addition, prior to the battle Surgeon Eliab Macy sustained injuries to such an extent when thrown from his horse that he later resigned due to his injuries at Prairie D’Ane. Five of the officers were reported killed in action: Captain Armstrong, Company D, Lieutenant Hitchcock Company G, Lieutenant Coleman, who was commanding Company H fell in the second charge. Lieutenant Samuels from Company H also fell, and Lieutenant Topping of Company B was killed in the first enemy charge. Captain Welch of Company K and Lieutenant Macy of Company C were also wounded. Major Ward amended the official report to include the notification that Captain Armstrong and Lieutenant Hitchcock did not die, but taken

⁵⁷⁸ Mark Christ, “Getting Used to being Shot At,” 232.

prisoner or war.⁵⁷⁹ Losses among the enlisted men proved an inverse relationship between killed and wounded and in a rarity in engagements more men were killed than wounded. One hundred twelve men were killed and sixty-three wounded.⁵⁸⁰ The death of a quarter of the First Kansas Colored escort, and wounding of an additional sixty-three constituted an astounding forty-two percent loss to the regiment.

The casualty totals from Poison Springs fail to truly explain the effect of the casualties upon the command, for the leadership losses represented the loss of critical skills and experience. Officer ranks suffered fifty-four percent losses, with Companies B, D, G, and H losing officers during the battle. Non-commissioned officers Corporal and above sustained almost twenty percent of the total regimental losses; twenty-one Non-Commissioned Officers including the First Sergeants of Company A, I and K fell in battle. The numbers of personnel in leadership positions killed or wounded serves as a reliable indicator of the intensity of the combat at Poison Springs. Confederate General McCulloch paid unintentional tribute to the regiment's mettle when he wrote that "the negro portion of the enemy's force fought with considerable obstinacy, while the white or true Yankee portion ran like whipped curs when charged."⁵⁸¹ The regiment's losses directly impacted the regiment's ability to fight beyond the battle of Poison Spring; the loss of ninety-four privates significantly impacted all companies. In addition the regiment lost large quantities of arms, clothing and equipment.

⁵⁷⁹ Report No 31, Report of Major Ward, First Kansas Colored Infantry of engagement at Poison Springs, April 20, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 751-754; Joseph Samuels; Ethan Earle, Eliab Macy, *RG 94: 79th USCT, Combined Military Service Records*. Samuels is an interesting case. A former enlisted man, Samuels had not yet been mustered and commissioned when he went into battle at Poison Springs.

⁵⁸⁰ Recapitulation of Losses, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 754.

⁵⁸¹ John Q. Anderson *A Texas Surgeon in the CSA* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: SWS Printers, 1957), 55.

The damage sustained by the regiment went much deeper, the loss of so many experienced veterans impacted the regiment's ability to fight, the steadying influence of veterans on newer soldiers no longer reinforcing the orders of the officers and non-commissioned officers in battle. The complex maneuvers required of fighting regiments and the instinctual actions of veteran soldiers no longer appeared possible. When the number of experienced soldiers killed at Poison Springs with enlistments dating back to 1862 is factored in, the regiment's losses are greater than the sum of manpower lost. Forty-eight soldiers with enlistments dating back to 1862 fell at Poison Springs, a ten percent loss of veterans, but another forty-two soldiers with enlistments predating Cabin Creek in 1863 also fell, bringing the total of experienced combat veterans to ninety. The loss of so many veteran soldiers skewed regimental demographics as well, seventy soldiers from Kansas enlistment origins died, and only fourteen from Arkansas. The Kansas-Missouri origins of the regiment gave way to more Arkansas influence as the regiment continued operations into 1865 in Arkansas. The regiment also recruited on the move as it marched from Roseville to Camden and throughout the campaign, Company D enlisted three men at Rome, Arkansas, and Company A recruited another six at Camden on April 16. One of Company D's new enlistees, Private Crayson McMurtry of Rome Ark, enlisted on April 8, 1864, but never mustered before his death at Poison Springs.⁵⁸² This soldier's death hints that the regiment departed on the foraging expedition with all available personnel including its newest recruits despite the potential for combat.

The regiment suffered grievous wounds, but despite this, thirty soldiers rated severely wounded or mortally wounded found its way back to Camden. The severity of soldiers'

⁵⁸²*Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 574- 599.*

injuries demonstrates that the men possessed endurance and willpower despite being overwhelmed by the superior numbers and firepower of the Confederate army. Wounds that would necessitate medical evacuation in contemporary conflicts were borne through the regiment's retreat to Camden, an amazing feat considering that a number of the wounds were sustained to the lower extremities, and in one case a soldier sustained a wound through both legs. The soldiers of the First Kansas Colored saved many of their wounded, and in doing so preserved the equivalent of almost a company to fight again.⁵⁸³

The location of wounds may also be used to analyze how the men fought. A desperate rout would have exposed men to additional wounds to the back, but of the wound type reported, only eleven are to the back and side. Men wounded in the pursuit could be expected to suffer back wounds if they fled in disarray, but it appears that most wounds were sustained during the initial fighting and in the successive defensive lines during retreat. It is also safe to assume a number of the soldiers suffered from shock, heat injuries, and the concussive effect of Confederate shelling.

White Union regiments later offered up praise for the First Kansas Colored's efforts despite the defeat at Poison Springs. The regiment's refusal to surrender did much to prove its worth to white audiences unfamiliar with the fighting qualities of black soldiers. Lieutenant Colonel Adolph Dengler of the Forty-Third Illinois described the First Kansas Colored's efforts as "brave and heroic," and Kansas newspaper accounts seconded this praise in the aftermath of the battle, describing the regiment's stand in glowing terms, the image of grim fighting and a futile stand against great odds a valiant image of soldiers

⁵⁸³ Recapitulation of Regimental losses, *Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*. The array of injuries offers tantalizing clues to refute the Confederate report of a complete rout. Organized retreat offers the only plausible answer for some men's return, especially those that sustained mobility injuries. Those soldiers too wounded, or isolated from aid suffered horribly from their ordeal.

fighting to the last cartridge, and the last man.⁵⁸⁴ Fellow soldiers of the Second Kansas Colored also noted the performance of the First Kansas Colored, but took away very different lessons from the battle.

Colonel Crawford of the Second Kansas Colored closely gauged the treatment afforded the First Kansas Colored by their Confederate foes. Crawford, like Williams, understood that surrender equated massacre and enslavement for Colored Troops regiments. Crawford and his officers believed that the Confederate “Black Flag order was a godsend to the colored regiments. Every officer and every soldier knew that it meant the bayonet, with no quarter, whenever and wherever they met the enemy.” The large number of killed First Kansas Colored soldiers indicated to Crawford that the First’s men died as a result of the Confederate order to take no prisoners. Crawford, in response to the debacle at Poison Springs, called a leadership council in which it was resolved “No prisoners as long as Rebels murder our men; wounded Confederates would be left where they fell...”⁵⁸⁵ The execution threat against black soldiers and their officers no longer rhetoric, the war took on a new character for black Kansan regiments. The news of the massacres of blacks at Poison Springs and Fort Pillow hardened the resolve of black soldiers and their officers against their Confederate foes, and ensured that the war would be conducted with no quarter for either side. However, for the First Kansas Colored, the war continued and the regiment immediately set about inventorying its manpower and materiel status.

⁵⁸⁴ Lieutenant Colonel Dengler, 43rd Illinois to HQ 43rd Illinois Vol Infantry, June ---, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Series I: Reports*, 734; “Noble Conduct,” June 4, 1864, *The Daily Monitor* (Fort Scott); Kansas State Historical Society Microfilm F914, May 16, 1864, August 2, 1865.

⁵⁸⁵ Samuel J. Crawford, *Kansas in the Sixties* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1911), 108, 117.

The next day's events, April 19, 1864 reflect Colonel Williams's hard-nosed pragmatism. As survivors continued to filter back to the regiment through Union lines, a process that would take three days, Williams ordered a board of survey to meet to survey the ordnance and ordnance stores of Company A and B. Both companies lost their commanders at the battle of Poison Springs and their shattered companies required reorganization and accountability so that Williams knew the state of his command. Confederate Arkansans watched the much-reduced First Kansas Colored's soldiers as well, observing them gathering to recount the story of their defeat at Poison Springs. The Federal army appeared destined for defeat and Arkansas liberated from Federal control by a resurgent Confederate army.⁵⁸⁶ Worse news followed closely on the heels of the battle of Poison Springs.

The losses sustained by the First Kansas Colored and his worsening supply situation forced Steele to adopt a defensive posture while he waited for news of his supply wagons. Steele received news of General Banks' defeat from spies shortly after he occupied Camden. However, his plans to remain at Camden hinged on a second supply train that he sent out with a powerful thousand-man escort to obtain additional supplies from Pine Bluff and Little Rock. Steele ordered a train of 211 wagons under a strong escort of over fourteen hundred men under command of Colonel Francis Drake to depart Camden on April 22, en route to Pine Bluff. Two days later a cavalry reinforcement of one hundred fifty men joined the train. The command, accompanied by large numbers of civilians and

⁵⁸⁶ Special Orders 7, Camden, Arkansas, Colonel Williams to regiment, April 19, 1864, RG 94: Adjutant general's office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4; Janet B Hewitt (ed.) Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies: Part II – Record of Events, Volume 78, Serial Number 90. Wilmington, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1998; Gregory J.W. Urwin. "We Cannot Treat Negroes...as Prisoners of War", 215.

three hundred former slaves, immediately attracted Confederate attention.⁵⁸⁷ The train fell prey to a large force of Confederate cavalry under Fagan and Shelby at Marks' Mills on April 25, and nearly the entire escort quickly surrendered. A worse fate than surrender awaited black refugees accompanying the train.

The battle of Marks Mills witnessed terrible atrocities against blacks in the Union army, for Confederate wrath focused upon black refugees and teamsters. The commander of the train Colonel Francis Drake reported that his servant was killed before his eyes and that the dead numbered large numbers of “negroes and Arkansas refugees.”⁵⁸⁸ A Union prisoner captured at Marks' Mills, Lieutenant Benjamin Pearson of the Thirty-Sixth Iowa Infantry, was permitted to survey the battlefield. Confederate soldiers showed him “a point in the woods where they told me they had killed eighty odd negroes man women & children this is their report to me...I fully believe they are hartless enough to do any act that wicked men or devils could conceive.”⁵⁸⁹ Given the level of racial hostility that existed by 1864, slaughter of military-age non-combatant men was justified on both sides, albeit hesitantly, as a military necessity; but killing women and children offers powerful evidence of how fears of black emancipation had intensified the campaign against black soldiers and free blacks seeking to escape Confederate control. The Confederate racial hierarchy could not permit slaves to escape or black men to bear arms, either as soldiers or as teamsters in the employ of the Union. Other Union survivors of the battle recorded in early May that a Confederate surgeon had confirmed

⁵⁸⁷ Mark K. Christ, (ed.). *All Cut to Pieces and Gone to Hell: The Civil War, Race Relations, and the Battle of Poison Spring*. (Little Rock: August House Publishers, 2003), 22.

⁵⁸⁸ Colonel Francis Drake to Headquarters Second Brigade, Third Division, Seventh Army Corps, Marks Mills, April 25, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 714-715; May 13, 1864, Little Rock *Unconditional Union*

⁵⁸⁹ Anne J. Bailey and Daniel E. Sutherland (ed.) *Civil War Arkansas: Beyond Battles and Leaders*, 224-225.

that it was “a settled rule of action of the Confederates to show no quarter to colored men in our military service.”⁵⁹⁰ Taken in isolation, this report could be interpreted as biased, a piece of propaganda, but Confederate witnesses told a similar tale of bloodshed and mayhem.

The execution of black refugees and teamsters occurred without the provocation of black soldiers in Colonel Drake’s command. The Confederate forces tore into the Union ranks, and after the surrender of the white troops, proceeded to slaughter systematically all the blacks they encountered. Confederate Major John N. Edwards of Shelby’s Brigade wrote in 1867 that the scenes following the battle were sickening to behold. “No orders, threats or commands could restrain the men from vengeance on the negroes,” Edwards commented, “and they were piled in great heaps about the wagons, in the tangled brushwood, and upon the muddy and trampled road.”⁵⁹¹ The massacre at Marks’ Mills matched the significance of Poison Springs, and served as a object lesson in terror, designed to intimidate blacks and ensure white supremacy through senseless violence.

The murder of these non-combatants offered a further signal as to how blacks serving in the Union army would be treated if captured. White and black units alike acknowledged the savage turn of events that first had been manifested at Poison Springs and then at Marks’ Mills. One Union soldier, Corporal Charles Musser of the Twenty-Ninth Iowa Infantry swore, “If they raise the black flag, we can fight under it...I say give the rebels no quarter, and the feeling is the same throughout the army in the west. We

⁵⁹⁰ Brigadier General C.C. Andrews to Lieutenant Samuel T. Brush, AAAG, Little Rock, May 3, 1864, OR: *Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 415.

⁵⁹¹ Anne J. Bailey and Daniel E. Sutherland (ed.) *Civil War Arkansas: Beyond Battles and Leaders*, 224-225.

will retaliate.”⁵⁹² Colonel Crawford’s Second Kansas Colored shared these sentiments and made known that no prisoners would be taken.⁵⁹³ What had become a war of annihilation led Union and Confederate forces into increasingly savage battles and cycles of reprisals. White Union soldiers could look askance at the rage of their black counterparts, but few could appreciate the high price of failure should a black unit surrender.

Unlike the aftermath of Poison Spring, few whites fell after the escort surrendered en masse, their numbers muted by a piecemeal defense and poor leadership. Perhaps lacking the same imperative to fight to the last that motivated black units and demoralized by the viciousness of the Confederate attacks, the white regiments saw surrender as an honorable alternative to destruction. Prisoner exchanges or paroles could also be expected from their white Confederate enemies. The blacks accompanying the train suffered immensely. The ferocity of Confederate treatment of black refugees and servants sickened one Confederate at Marks’ Mills, Major John Edwards recounting “No threats, no orders or commands could restrain the men from vengeance on negroes, and they piled up in great heaps around the wagons.”⁵⁹⁴

The slaughter at Marks’ Mills and the loss of a second train destroyed Steele’s final hope to re-supply his starving command. Deprived of over four hundred wagons and eight pieces of artillery, escort troops, and vital logistical capacity, Steele could no longer remain at Camden. If he tarried at Camden, resurgent Confederate forces would mass to destroy his Army of Arkansas, and despite Camden’s strong defenses, he reported to

⁵⁹² Barry Popchock, ed., *Soldier Boy: The Civil War Letters of Charles O. Musser, 29th Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 127 in Mark K. Christ, (ed.). *All Cut to Pieces and Gone to Hell: The Civil War, Race Relations, and the Battle of Poison Spring*, 128.

⁵⁹³ Samuel Crawford. *Kansas in the Sixties*, 117.

⁵⁹⁴ Gregory Irwin “We Cannot Treat Negroes...as Prisoners of War,” in Anne J. Bailey and Daniel Sutherland, *Civil War Arkansas*, 224.

Major General Halleck, “the country is well nigh exhausted of supplies. And the people threatened with starvation.”⁵⁹⁵ His army’s long supply lines offered Steele his only reliable source of sustenance and materiel, and with the twin losses at Poison Spring and Marks’ Mills, the lowering of the waters in the Ouachita River, and Banks’ defeat, Steele possessed no other viable alternative to retreat other than battle. Steele ruled out the last option: the army would march east.⁵⁹⁶ Major General Steele could not hold Camden long if his supplies failed him, his spent army faced starvation and capitulation if he could not sustain it.

The scene in Camden on April 20 could only be interpreted as the preparations of a demoralized army to withdraw from a rapidly closing trap. Confronted by increasing numbers of starving animals and unable to subsist thousands of mules and horses at Camden, General Steele ordered the destruction of surplus wagons. Ethan Earle detailed this chapter of the campaign in his journal with some detail. While the army reduced its subsistence requirements, its soldiers reduced their loads to the bare minimum. Soldiers kept muskets, cartridge boxes and ammunition, and the officers the clothing on their backs. The Army’s regiments retained one wagon each for their needs, and the army consigned wagonloads of ammunition, cannons, and rations to the river’s waters.⁵⁹⁷ The destruction of Union property continued well into the night and the next day.

While Steele’s quartermaster supervised the burning of wagons and regiments prepared for movement, the fate of many of the Federal wounded lay in doubt. Having retained its ambulance train, Steele’s army could transport less severely wounded. The

⁵⁹⁵ Headquarters Department of Arkansas, Major General Frederick Steele to Major General Henry W. Halleck, April 22, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part 1, Reports*, 662-663.

⁵⁹⁶ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War on the Border*, 294.

⁵⁹⁷ General Orders 7, Camden, Arkansas, Major General Steele, April 20, 1864, *RG 94: Adjutant general’s office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Earle, *Journal*, 46, 54.

most severely wounded occupied spaces in a house near Camden that became a field hospital. When the Federal army departed, the wounded became prisoners of war. First Sergeant James Morgan of Company H, as well as other wounded personnel, came under Confederate control April 26. Morgan's treatment directly contradicted reports of Confederates executing all wounded black Federals, and proved a rare example of wounded black soldiers receiving humane care from their Confederate captors.⁵⁹⁸ The difference in treatment appears to be related to what Confederate units captured the Union soldiers. Soldiers captured by Maxey's Choctaws or Texans suffered gruesome indignities. The First Kansas Colored experienced Confederate hospitality at Poison Spring, and the companies determined to prepare themselves to resist future treatment by reorganizing and refitting almost immediately after the battle.

The First Kansas Colored prepared for the Army of Arkansas' departure by consolidating its ranks and transferring weapons between companies to equip those in which soldiers lacked rifles and the necessary accoutrements. Company F turned over twenty-three arms to Company A, and fifteen to Company B, Companies A, C, F and K also received new ordnance supplies.⁵⁹⁹ When the army marched, the First Kansas Colored would do so prepared for additional combat with its reduced compliment. The Army of Arkansas would depart Camden not as victors, but as men driven to escape a victorious Confederate army. The First and Second Kansas also marched under the

⁵⁹⁸ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War on the Border*, 308; James Morgan, *RG 94: 79th USCT, Combined Military Service Records, Memorandum from Prisoner of War Records*. First Sergeant Morgan was reported as Morgan Randolph of Company G, First Kansas Colored. Morgan, received advanced medical care from Confederate surgeons, his left arm amputated after a bullet shattered the elbow during the battle of Poison Spring. He survived his ordeal as a prisoner, and was successfully exchanged at Princeton, Arkansas on June 16, 1864.

⁵⁹⁹ Special Orders 7, Camden, Arkansas, Colonel Williams to regiment, April 26, 1864, *RG 94: Adjutant general's office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*.

shadow of racial retaliation and retribution, cognizant of the massacre of their fellow soldiers at Fort Pillow by Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, and the equally savage treatment of black refugees accorded them by General Fagan at Marks' Mills.⁶⁰⁰ Surrendering black soldiers suffered horrific fates; therefore to avoid being buried alive, summary execution, or re-enslavement, the soldiers of Colored Regiments could not and would not accept defeat until their last ability to resist was completely shattered. The regiments would march accompanied by hundreds of contrabands determined, much those at Marks' Mills, to escape bondage at any price.

The First Kansas Colored followed orders in March 1864 ready to uphold their reputation as combat veterans. Instead of laurels for a successful campaign, the First Kansas Colored added the names of Prairie D'Ane, and Poison Spring to its regimental colors. Glory came not in the form of a victory march through Shreveport, but simply through surviving the campaign. Before the regiment could return to Fort Smith and more familiar surroundings, one additional test awaited the Army of Arkansas. The muddy hell of Jenkins' Ferry would wring the last bit of effort from the Union army, and offer the black soldiers of Thayer's command another opportunity to prove themselves in battle. Their Confederate foes cast down the gauntlet at Poison Spring, and at Jenkins' Ferry the Second Kansas Colored would avenge the First in an orgy of bloodletting and reprisal that set the tone for the remainder of the war. Colored Regiments at Poison Spring and Fort Pillow endured Confederate wrath, and the slaughter of black non-combatants at Marks Mills served as the inspiration for other Colored Regiments to heartily embrace the black flag of "no quarter" war.

⁶⁰⁰ Brigadier General Nathan Kimball to Major General Steele, April 25, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 281; 13 May 1864, *Unconditional Union* (Little Rock).

In the midst of defeat, the First Kansas Colored earned the approval of Union regiments and fought back against Confederate enemies with such passion and skill that although victorious, the rebels estimated the numbers of black troops at numbers three or four times larger than the actual number of men present. The First Kansas Colored would not be beaten in battle, defeated perhaps, but not broken or beaten. The spirit of the First Kansas Colored's soldiers sustained a significant blow, but the soldiers and officers of the regiment held as their prize the total emancipation of the black race. In this regard the First Kansas Colored emerged victorious from Poison Spring, a regiment determined to uphold the honor of their race and cognizant of their role as symbol for other black men to emulate in their support for the Union and for freedom.

Chapter 8

“It has become a War of Extermination”

The First Kansas Colored's departure from Fort Smith at the end of March 1864 occurred in an atmosphere of confidence, despite rushed conditions and crippling logistical difficulties. Barely a month later the regiment and the Army of Arkansas faced an uncertain fate as the Confederates gathered power from their Arkansan sympathizers. The trap appeared to be closing on the Army of Arkansas at Camden. The Camden Campaign and its losses left the regiment much diminished in combat power and leadership. Its casualties and the aftermath of the battle affected many of other regiments in the Army of the Frontier. Their assessment of the regiment's performance in past battles and post duty served as the crucible for racial prejudice and a testing ground for black soldiers in the cauldron of war.

Licking its wounds at Camden, the Army of Arkansas struggled to deal with near starvation conditions for soldiers and animals. Steele's last gambled to subsist his army failed at Marks Mills. When news of the defeat reached Steele, the last act of the Camden Campaign played out. The junction of Confederate Generals Price and Smith left Steele with little in the way of options. Steele, confronted with defeat if he kept his starving army at Camden, ordered a retreat after holding a command council with his subordinate commanders. General Thayer, his command exhausted from their exertions and facing a long return march to Fort Smith, voted in favor of withdrawing to the Federal lines around Little Rock, the sooner the better. His decision appears to have been precipitated by the losses at Poison Springs and Marks' Mills, the supply lines too long

and exposed for adequate protection.⁶⁰¹ The army's leadership decided to march light and divest the command of all unnecessary encumbrances and march at top speed for the safety of Union lines at Little Rock.

Jenkins Ferry

The process of preparing the Army of Arkansas for the retreat occurred with the greatest haste, and in their fervor to prevent any supplies from falling into Confederate hands, Union personnel acted rashly. Tents and heavy cooking utensils joined the wagon pyres, as did rations of hardtack and bacon that the hungry soldiers could have consumed instead of the flames. Soldiers would march on minimal rations, with only corn meal and hardtack to last them until the safety of Union lines.⁶⁰²

Captain Earle recorded the First Kansas Colored's preparations; the men kept their rifles, cartridge boxes and ammunition, while the officers retained nothing but the clothing on their backs. In addition, Earle reported that on April 26, the army dumped forty wagon-loads of ammunition and vast amounts of rations such as sugar, coffee and medicines into the Ouachita River to prevent them from falling into Confederate hands. The route chosen for the Federal columns also varied, "the hospital train of twenty-four ambulances and three or four hundred disabled men mounted on mules was destined for Pine Bluff, and the Army to Little Rock."⁶⁰³ Preparations cut deeply into the Federal army's substance, and the large numbers of wagons without cargo that would otherwise encumber the retreat could not block the roads with their slow-moving bulk.

Steele's Quartermaster acted quickly and destroyed ninety-two wagons and a large supply of harness for the animals no longer able to pull the wagons. Captain Henry

⁶⁰¹ Undated memorandum, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 671.

⁶⁰² Curt Anders. *Disaster in Damp Sand*. (Indianapolis, Indiana: Guild Press of Indiana, 1997), 116.

⁶⁰³ Earle, *Journal*, 54.

endeavored to save the surplus mules, but ultimately lost the majority during the retreat from Camden.⁶⁰⁴ The poor Arkansas roads compelled orders to destroy wagons, the realization that the same poor Arkansas roads that slowed Steele's advance into southwest Arkansas would slow his command during a retreat. Consequently, destroyed clothing and surplus wagons, and record books, munitions wagons and ambulances were the few exceptions to the destruction order. After the crippling losses sustained at Poison Springs and Marks' Mills, only one hundred and fifty wagons remained to serve Steele's command.⁶⁰⁵ Steele's infantry and artillery it appeared, would measure the pace of the retreat.

Preparations among at least one regiment's officers took a decidedly grim tone. Convinced that the disproportionate casualties suffered by the First Kansas Colored indicated deliberate efforts to murder black soldiers in accordance with Confederate President Jefferson Davis' orders, Colonel Samuel Crawford, the commander of the Second Kansas Colored, convened an officer's council. The day after Poison Spring, the officers of the Second Kansas Colored swore that their regiment would treat Confederates as they treated the First Kansas Colored's soldiers and officers. As a group the men swore, "that in the future the regiment would take no prisoners so long as the Rebels continue to murder our men; wounded Confederates would be left where they fell."⁶⁰⁶ The Second Kansas Colored's officers and soldiers knew that the Confederacy considered them to be criminals, but the Confederates transgressed first, and by

⁶⁰⁴Report No 4, Charles A. Henry Asst Quartermaster to Headquarters Department of Arkansas, in the field May 12, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 6798-681.

⁶⁰⁵ Report of First Lieutenant Peetz, Battery E, Second Missouri Artillery May 24, 1864, Little Rock, Arkansas; Report Major General Sherman to Major General Halleck, May 6, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 719, 479.

⁶⁰⁶ Samuel J. Crawford. *Kansas in the Sixties*. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co, 1911), 117. Jennie M. Wayne, Thomas deBlack, George Sabo, Morris S. Arnold. *Arkansas: A Narrative History* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas press, 2002), 199.

mutilating and murdering the men of the First Kansas Colored, no Confederates caught in similar straits could expect mercy.

Uncertainty regarding the next phase of the campaign pervaded the ranks of the Army of Arkansas, and the abandonment of Camden's formidable defenses signaled to many that the army faced utter defeat if retreat failed. Captain Heinemann, a Union officer at Camden described the preparations in blunt terms, "'General S. has but one plan, in which we all join without dissenting voice. It is: save our artillery and baggage, run like whiteheads for the Saline bottom, cut through anything that puts itself in our way," and then "with the river at our back, the bog on our flanks, face about and fight for our lives. Will we make this point? That is the question."⁶⁰⁷ The army's fate depended in outrunning the Confederate army and gaining the relative safety of the Saline River. If the army could put a river between its divisions and the Confederates, salvation seemed possible.

The Union army assembled under cover of night, prepared to march the one hundred and twenty miles from Camden to Little Rock. The subterfuge of doubled pickets and tattoo convinced Confederate spies that the army remained in Camden, while the main body of the Federal army took the road east to the Federal lines.⁶⁰⁸ The deception bought the Federal army an entire day of movement, and when the Confederates realized that the Army of Arkansas no longer occupied the city, the pursuit commenced. The Federals possessed an advantage at this stage: the Army of Arkansas retained its pontoon bridge. Lacking a means to bridge rivers quickly, the Confederate army lost a day in its pursuit as

⁶⁰⁷ Captain F. Heinemann Letter to Captain Milton Elliott "The Federal Occupation of Camden as Set Forth in the Diary of a Union Officer." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Volume 9, Number 3 (Autumn, 1950), 214-219.

⁶⁰⁸ Report No 4, Charles A. Henry Asst Quartermaster to Headquarters Department of Arkansas, in the field May 12, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 676-678.

engineers worked to span the Ouachita River.⁶⁰⁹ This lack of bridging capacity proved a fatal drag on the Confederate pursuit, and at Jenkins Ferry the Federal pontoon bridge once again saved Steele's army.

Federal progress proved slow despite the best efforts to husband the logistical train's animals. The starving animals obtained their last forage the day after leaving Camden; no further forage was obtained for the next six days.⁶¹⁰ Man and beast alike forged forward through the haze of exhaustion, but the effort of the retreat showed in its wake. When their Confederates picked up the retreating army's trail, the total rout of the Union forces appeared likely. Union soldiers discarded weighty items from their haversacks along the route, and the spoor of the Union troops littered the roads where it passed. Men retained arms, ammunition and little else in their haste to outrun their pursuers.⁶¹¹ Trudging along with the Union army, many recently freed slaves chanced their lives in the retreat, willing to share the army's misery in a bid for freedom.

The Federal army arrived at Jenkins Ferry on April 29. The army's engineers swiftly spanned the rain-swollen Saline River with a pontoon bridge. The Saline River bottoms proved a nightmare, for an incessant downpour reduced roads to a morass of mud. The mud devoured wagons. Engineer Captain Wheeler described a scene in which "Wagons sank to the axles and mules floundered about without a resting place for their feet... the rain came down in torrents, putting out [the fires]," exhausted men and animals "sank down into the mud and mire, wherever they were, to seek a few hours' repose."⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁹ Ira D. Richards "The Battle of Jenkins' Ferry," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Volume 20, Number 1 (Spring, 1961), 5.

⁶¹⁰ Report No 4, Charles A. Henry Asst Quartermaster to Headquarters Department of Arkansas, in the field May 12, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 679-681.

⁶¹¹ Curt Anders. *Disaster in Damp Sand*. Indianapolis, Indiana: Guild Press of Indiana, 1997, 118.

⁶¹² Report of Captain Junius B. Wheeler, U.S. Corps of Engineers, Chief Engineer, Little Rock, Ark, May 5, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I Reports*, 672-678.

The soldiers of the Army of Arkansas labored through the night. Colonel James Garrett of the 40th Iowa Volunteers reported that his men consumed nothing for five days during the Camden retreat, their efforts sustained by little more than coffee and a single ration of meat the day of the battle of Jenkins' Ferry.⁶¹³ There is little evidence to suggest any difference for the remainder of the Army of the Frontier, and many soldiers labored despite injuries and privation to ensure that the Federal retreat proceeded without pause.

Those units that fought their way through the sea of mud endured additional tribulations after clearing the bottoms. The roads leading from the river bottoms sucked at the wagons and mules, and called for desperate measures to keep the precious wagons moving eastward. Under more favorable conditions the army corduroyed bad roads, but in this stretch of road the very forces of nature conspired against the Federals, and the inadequate brush and small trees prevented any improvements of the road. Therefore, wagons that suffered damage or carried inconsequential cargo met with destruction, and failing mules gave way to straining men that pushed the wagons through the muddy track.⁶¹⁴ General Thayer's command secured the crossing site. Men strained to free wagons and destroy abandoned military equipment, while General Solomon's division completed the river crossing. The First Kansas Colored, as part of the security of the bridging site, occupied positions to the fore of the army in order to cover its rear against cavalry raids during the crossing.⁶¹⁵ As a consequence of this decision, the First Kansas Colored did not directly engage in battle at Jenkins' Ferry, but played a vital role in

⁶¹³ Colonel Garrett of the 40th Iowa Volunteers to Headquarters 40th Iowa Infantry Little Rock, May 6, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I, Reports*, 741.

⁶¹⁴ Report No 4, Charles A. Henry Asst Quartermaster to Headquarters Department of Arkansas, in the field May 12, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 676-678.

⁶¹⁵ Steele to Major General H.W. Halleck, Little Rock May 4, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 669-671.

protecting the Federal rear during the engagement. When the battle commenced, Thayer's Division, less the Second Kansas Colored, acted as the advance guard for the Army of Arkansas, and secured the road to Little Rock as the remaining divisions of the army engaged Confederate troops in battle.

Although the First Kansas Colored did not directly participate in the combat at Jenkins Ferry, its soldiers shared the misery and privation suffered by all units in Steele's retreating army. The First Kansas Colored, the senior Colored regiment of the Army of Arkansas, lacked the firepower necessary to hold a place with the main Union force, but the Second Kansas Colored's infantry received orders to join the Union line along the Saline as the last Union elements attempted to complete their crossing the morning of April 30. The Second Kansas Colored's skill and determination during the battle won the approval of white Union units.

The battle of Jenkins Ferry pitted the exhausted, but well defended remnant of Steele's army against piecemeal attacks by a number of Confederate regiments of Price's Army, some of which marched north after soundly defeating Banks' column south of Shreveport. The terrain around Jenkins' Ferry offered little cause for either set of combatants to cheer. The river overflowed its banks and created a wet hell for all combatants, but especially for the attacking Confederates that would have to cross the river before closing with the Federal army.

The Second Kansas Colored stood with Federal troops near the river, its near-full ranks providing vital firepower to the Federal army while the regiment straddled the road east. The Second Kansas Colored ached to avenge the slaughter of the First Kansas Colored and the Confederate's abominable treatment of blacks. During the battle the

Second Kansas Colored met Confederate infantry with fast, well-delivered volleys, and when Ruffer's Missouri battery deployed opposite the regiment, the men shredded its crews with close-range musketry. Seeing the guns quieted, the infantry of the Second Kansas Colored charged and captured the guns at bayonet point, shouting "Poison Springs!" The black infantry, eager for revenge on the men that massacred their fellow First Kansas Colored soldiers, purportedly bayoneted their prisoners and cut the throats of wounded Confederate artillerymen when they captured the two-gun battery.⁶¹⁶ The Second Kansas Colored's revenge assumed fevered proportions, shocking white Federals with its intensity.

The white Union regiments that fought alongside the Second Kansas Colored witnessed their black counterparts wreak their retribution upon the wounded Confederates. White Union combatants recorded savage deeds, and one witness observed a black soldier smashing at a wounded Confederate gunner with the butt of his gun. The blacks "want[ed] to kill every wounded reb they come to, and will do it too if we did not watch them."⁶¹⁷ The black soldiers of the Second Kansas Colored and their white officers avenged the horrible deeds perpetrated on the First Kansas Colored with their own equally reprehensible deeds. Terror was met with terror.

Colonel Crawford and his officers understood the nature of black flag warfare as well as Colonel Williams and his men. The desperate fighting in which both Kansas Colored regiments engaged with Confederate forces in their respective battles transcended the immediate combat and stood as a test of wills and renegotiation of racial identity. The Second Kansas Colored at Jenkins Ferry engaged in acts contrary to civilized warfare,

⁶¹⁶ John Q. Anderson, *A Texas Surgeon in the CSA* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: SWS Printers, 1957), 99.

⁶¹⁷ Mark Christ, (ed). *All Cut to Pieces and Gone to Hell*, 129-130.

and Confederate reports conveyed outrage at the Second Kansas Colored's deeds. Confederates may have felt vindicated in their claims of black savagery in battle, the killing of prisoners excusable when practiced against black men, but a sign of unspeakable barbarity when conducted by former slaves against their social and racial betters. The hypocritical southern attitude appeared justified in southern eyes, black men could not be allowed to live after challenging white authority, whereas white Confederate soldiers protected their homes and way of life against a perfidious Yankee invader willing to stoop to servile insurrection to obtain victory.

Various anecdotes illustrate the perceived degeneration of the black race: a severely wounded Confederate officer claimed to have lost his lower jaw to a gunshot wound sustained after the battle. Black soldiers roamed the battle field as the main Union army prepared to withdraw, the vengeful men seeking out wounded Confederates in the muck and slime to reenact the Twenty-Ninth Texas and Choctaw Indians' treatment of the First Kansas Colored by cutting the white throats of wounded Confederates. Wounded Confederates suffered mutilation at the hands of black soldiers, and witnesses confirm reports of wounded soldiers being stabbed, and ears cut off.⁶¹⁸ Confederate massacres and mistreatment of black soldiers and civilians generated the impulse for revenge at Jenkins Ferry, no mention of black flag, or "no quarter war," appears in dispatches, but the fact remains that Jenkins' Ferry put paid to Confederate efforts to crush black soldiers' will to fight.

The Camden Campaign's denouement achieved one goal. However suspect the exacting of revenge appeared to observers, the Second Kansas Colored impressed white

⁶¹⁸ Mark Christ, *All Cut to Pieces and Gone to Hell*, 124-133; John Q. Anderson *A Texas Surgeon in the CSA* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: SWS Printers, 1957), 99.

Union soldiers with their performance in battle. One white Kansan officer, Lieutenant W.B. Clark, in a letter later published in the Fort Scott Daily Monitor praised the Second Kansas: “The colored soldiers fought with desperate valor... History has nothing better. That man is a traitor, who disputes the valor of Kansas soldiers, white or black.”⁶¹⁹ Black soldiers proved their utility to Kansas and the Union through their battlefield service, a duty that separated men from shirkers, and by extension elevated the black race in the eyes of Union soldiers.

The after action reports of the battle speak volumes to the worth of black soldiers in battle, and the laurels accorded the Second Kansas Colored came from the commanders of the white units alongside which the Second Kansas repelled successive Confederate attacks throughout the day. Brigadier Solomon described the Second Kansas Colored as possessing “conspicuous gallantry,” and Brigadier General C.C. Andrews offered “particular praise [for] the Kansas colored troops for their stubborn valor.”⁶²⁰ Perhaps the most powerful testimony from the Federal commanders came from General Steele himself in a report to General Halleck on his army’s conduct during the Camden Campaign. Steele opined “the conduct of the colored troops of my command proves that the African can be made as formidable in battle as a soldier of any other color...”⁶²¹ These men did not have a direct and intimate connection to the two Kansas regiments, and the black men earned glowing praise from men more circumspect about the value of blacks in the Union ranks. Steele’s praise for black soldiers is of special note because

⁶¹⁹ “From Arkansas – Lieut. W.B. Clark to his Brother Capt. Geo. J. Clark, Little Rock, May 8th, 1864,” May 30, 1864, Fort Scott *Daily Monitor*.

⁶²⁰ BG Salomon to HQ 3rd Div, 7th AC, Little Rock May 10, 1864; Brigadier General Christopher C. Andrews to Brigadier General West HQ Dept of Arkansas, Little Rock, Arkansas, May 1, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 667, 691.

⁶²¹ Steele to Halleck, May 4, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 669-671.

Steele, unlike Thayer, did not employ his black soldiers in combat but, instead, utilized them as garrison troops in lieu of white units.

The Army of Arkansas wasted no time at Jenkins' Ferry. The men quickly refilled cartridge boxes and received the few remaining commissary stores, then prepared to resume the march to Little Rock.⁶²² The Confederate cavalry under Brigadier General Fagan haunted the vicinity and further combat appeared likely despite the check administered the Confederate army at Jenkins' Ferry. Until Little Rock's defenses shielded the army from attack, it remained vulnerable to destruction in detail by Fagan's fast, hard-hitting cavalry.

Race continued to play a role in the events immediately following the battle of Jenkins Ferry. Confederate ranks contained numerous soldiers burning for revenge against the black infantry, and vented their rage against black stragglers and wounded personnel. The Union army, as it retreated towards Little Rock, left behind one surgeon and two assistant surgeons to attend the wounded, and supplied hospital stores for their care. Seriously or fatally wounded personnel, including black soldiers of the First and Second Kansas Colored remained in the vicinity of Jenkins Ferry in the belief that wounded soldiers would receive humane treatment in lieu of almost guaranteed death or permanent injury if transported with the Federal army.⁶²³ Helpless, unable to rely upon anything but the hope that the Confederates would honor the neutrality of a hospital, the wounded black soldiers of the Army of Arkansas expected little sympathy. The hope for humanitarian treatment proved a weak reed to rely upon when the Federal army departed.

⁶²² OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part III: Correspondence, 360

⁶²³ General Order No 14, Headquarters Department of Arkansas, April 30, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part III: Correspondence*, 360; Steele to Halleck, May 4, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part III: Correspondence*, 699-671.

Hospitals, under civilized rules of warfare could be taken under military control and the wounded therein made prisoners. Often chaplains and doctors remained to look after the needs of the wounded, and to monitor any wounded prisoner exchanges that might occur as a result of negotiations between combatants. The Union hospital at Princeton, Arkansas initially received protected status, but not all combatants respected it. Surgeon William L. Nicholson of the 29th Iowa reported a Confederate soldier dressed as a Union officer sneaking into a storeroom in a hospital to murder black wounded personnel with a pistol.⁶²⁴ Killing wounded men in a hospital defied the accepted conventions of warfare, and however dispassionately Confederates greeted these reports of revenge, the black soldiers of the Army of Arkansas did not forget or forgive.

Regimental records verify the report of slaughtered personnel, and the Second Kansas Colored records indicate that Privates Andrew Jackson, Thomas Jackson, Joseph Washington, and Albert Warren, were murdered on May 8, 1864 while in the hospital at Jenkins Ferry. Black soldiers also died of their wounds in prison.⁶²⁵ Perhaps proximity dictated response, and Confederates that witnessed the mutilation and killing of wounded whites at Jenkins' Ferry felt justified in killing black patients. The repercussions of the massacres visited upon black soldiers persisted for the rest of the war.

The next two days of the army's progress occurred along wretched roads, and the starving soldiers eagerly watched for relief columns as they marched east. As the column neared Little Rock, General Steele altered their dispositions so that the victorious soldiers from the battle of Jenkins' Ferry would lead the army's entry to Little Rock. The Third

⁶²⁴ Mark Christ (Ed.) *All Cut to Pieces and Gone to Hell: The Civil War, Race Relations, and the Battle of Poison Spring* (Little Rock: August House, 2003), 124-133; *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. 1* (Topeka, Kansas: The Kansas State Printing Company. 1896), 600-622.

⁶²⁵ Montgomery Ridings, RG 94, 79th USCT (New) *Combined Military Service Records*. The First Kansas Colored's Private Montgomery Ridings died of thigh and shoulder wounds in prison at Camden on May 31.

Division and a company of the Second Kansas Colored marched at the head of the column, triumphantly escorting three captured guns. The column finally received relief on May 3, when a supply train from Little Rock arrived amid cheers of joy.⁶²⁶ The long nightmare of the retreat was over.

The results of the Camden Campaign left many long serving officers and soldiers disenchanted with General Steele's leadership, and the poor results of the campaign crushed morale. The Fort Scott *Daily Monitor* picked up on this theme when it reported an anecdotal incident of Colonel Williams challenging General Steele, Williams allegedly telling Steele to his face that he was a traitor. According to the story, Steele "placed him under arrest; but released him in about fifteen minutes – All the leading officers called on him and informed him that it would not be healthy for him to keep Williams under arrest."⁶²⁷ Doubtless Williams's reputation as a courageous and competent soldier with powerful Kansan connections shielded him from retaliation, but his fiery dedication to his men serves as proof of his commitment to their welfare, and his disgust with Steele's failure to relieve his command at Poison Springs.

Hope appeared in the most unlikely places during the campaign. The First Kansas Colored, on the eve of the battle of Jenkins' Ferry, found new strength amid the pain of retreat. Regimental enlistment also continued unabated during the campaign: Company C enlisted three men on April 29; Company D enlisted three men at Rome, Arkansas at the start of the campaign on April 8, and Company I one other; an additional six men joined Company A at Camden. The regiment, although held in reserve during the battle,

⁶²⁶ General Field Orders, Headquarters Army in the Field, Camp 22, May 2 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part III: Correspondence*, 394; *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies: Part II – Record of Events, Volume 78, Serial Number 90* (Wilmington, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1998), 617.

⁶²⁷ "From Fort Smith," May 31, 1864, Fort Scott *Daily Monitor*.

sustained losses. The nighttime river crossing and mud April 29-30 claimed several victims, among them Company A's Private Horace Monan's reported as a prisoner of war, missing in action, and Private Edward Adams of Company B who died of his wounds at Jenkins Ferry on May 4, having suffered from them since April 18 and the battle of Poison Springs.⁶²⁸

The First Kansas Colored sustained the greatest manpower losses of the campaign, and when combined with those of attached units at Poison Spring, suffered two hundred and four killed. In contrast, the Second Kansas Colored lost fourteen men at Jenkins' Ferry.⁶²⁹ The First Kansas Colored, as a result of the Camden Campaign, is recorded as sustaining the greatest number of casualties of any Kansas regiment in the Civil War. The First Kansas Colored's 117 killed in action at Poison Spring constituted nearly fifteen percent of Kansas' estimated 796 casualties killed in battle during the Civil War.⁶³⁰ The First Kansas Colored's men purchased their freedom in blood and sweat, and never bowed to surrender unless after a fierce battle to the last man or cartridge. The First Kansas Colored's courage would sustain Union efforts to prevent the resurgent Confederates from seeking to exploit the Federal weakness after the Camden campaign.

⁶²⁸ Horace Monan, *RG 94, 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records*, Monan returned to duty at Little Rock in July, 1864.

⁶²⁹ Report of Brigadier General Solomon, May 10, 1864; Report Number 24, Colonel James Williams, April 24, 1864; Report 34, Colonel Samuel Crawford, May 20, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 692, 746, 759.

⁶³⁰ Pearl T. Ponce (ed.). *Kansas' War: The Civil War in Documents*. (Athens, Ohio: The Ohio University Press, 2011), 73-74. The First Kansas Colored sustained a total of 171 casualties during the Civil War, in aggregate almost 21% of the Kansas killed in action total. The black soldiers of Kansas truly earned their right to manhood in battle.

Return to Fort Smith

The Camden Campaign proved a greater danger to Federal fortunes in Arkansas than may have first appeared. Stripping Fort Smith and Fort Gibson of their garrisons offered Confederate forces a tempting opportunity to capture the twin forts and eject the Union army from Indian Territory. As early as April 6, Colonel Stand Watie and guerrilla leader William Quantrill received orders to prepare to attack the Union outposts around Fort Smith and Fort Gibson, and the two concentrated their forces near Boggy depot.⁶³¹ The reports of gathering Confederate forces under the command of the First Kansas Colored's old enemies, Watie, Cooper and Maxey, gained increasing urgency as they filtered through to General Thayer. The Frontier Army's absence in April emboldened Confederates, and the guerrilla bands that formed an essential part of the Confederate strategy terrorized freedmen while the Frontier Army fought in the south. The black refugees of Fort Smith found life so intolerable that many sought passage north in lieu of the opportunity to farm locally due to the bushwhacker threat.⁶³² Williams' plan to create farming communities could not succeed in such an environment.

Union outposts came under increasing attack near Fort Smith and endured a number of raids against unfortified targets. Guerrillas boldly attacked Roseville two times, and burned gins and one hundred and thirty three bales of cotton. Colonel Judson, the commander at Fort Smith cared little for trading twenty men's lives for cotton in the attacks and proposed burning the cotton rather than guard it when no boats could remove it to Little Rock. Judson's concerns centered on the welfare of civilians in the vicinity of the fort; many of the black refugees held connections to the men of the Colored

⁶³¹ Report J. N. Hildebrand to Gen D.H. Cooper, April 6, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports, 744-747*.

⁶³² "The War in the Far West," *New York Times*, 10 April 1864.

Regiments and their upkeep required rations and armed details for protection. Pay delays, destitution and predatory Union troops enlisted in Arkansas added to the refugees' woes.⁶³³ Colonel Judson, in mid-April, proposed to send refugees to Springfield in wagons rather than subject them to guerrilla raids and reprisals.⁶³⁴ The military situation demanded the utmost urgency, the increasing strength and frequency of Confederate raids directly threatening Fort Smith. Self-sustainment proved difficult under constant guerrilla threat, Fort Smith and Fort Gibson reverted back to the cycle of confiscations and supply trains to meet their local needs.

The supply situation at Fort Smith competed with military matters in degree of urgency. Confederate raids constrained foraging parties and the Chief of Depot Commissary wrote General Kimball in Little Rock pleading for supplies, stating "We must starve unless something is done immediately... We cannot exist here unless we can control the supplies for our troops... Actual starvation is staring us in the face."⁶³⁵ Relieving the command of the burden of feeding civilians could alleviate the supply situation, but Fort Smith required supplies of all kinds. The Union army at Fort Smith, lacking adequate manpower to garrison outposts, undertook extensive upgrades to the defenses at this time. Relying on the labor of the Eleventh Colored Infantry Regiment, the garrison constructed formidable blockhouses and forts to protect the vital supply depot.⁶³⁶ The Union command at Fort Smith possessed only 800 men to garrison these

⁶³³ Annie Bailey and Daniel Sutherland (ed.) *Civil War Arkansas: Beyond Battles and Leaders*, 39.

⁶³⁴ Colonel W.R. Judson to Brigadier General Kimball, April 11, 1864; Colonel Judson to General Sanborn, Ft Smith, April 16, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part III: Correspondence*, 47, 135, 187

⁶³⁵ Captain M. S. Adams, Chief Depot Commissary to BG Nathan Kimball, April 17, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part III: Correspondence*, 197.

⁶³⁶ Captain Anton Gerster to MG Curtiss, April 9, 1864; Brigadier General Nathan Kimball to Major General W.T. Sherman, April 4, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part III: Correspondence*, 13, 39, 113.

forts and Fort Gibson, in total sixteen hundred soldiers to hold the defenses of the two forts, whereas formerly several thousand Union soldiers manned the forts and outposts.

The lack of manpower to fully man the Fort Smith did not slow the fortification party's pace, and by the first of May, the fortifications included an impressive array of forts and rifle pits, and any attacker would face an entrenched foe. The new defenses included a fort on the Texas Road equipped with two twelve-pound guns and a drop bridge. The largest fort, on the Van Buren Road, required another month to complete but when finished could hold five hundred men.⁶³⁷ When fully manned the forts could garrison several thousand soldiers, and in time of extreme need, some but not all of Fort Smith's civilian populace.

Thayer's Frontier Army rested for a scant four days before marching again. The diminished command broke camp near Little Rock on May 6, and suffered few attacks from guerrillas during a ten-day trek back to Fort Smith.⁶³⁸ Thayer's command deployed to their outposts again, determined to keep open the Arkansas River supply line from Little Rock to Dardanelle, a point eighty miles distant from Fort Smith. Federal troops boarded every riverboat as escorts for the four-day journey north from Little Rock to Fort Smith. Thayer, by transporting refugees of all colors away from his command on returning boats and Fort Scott-bound wagon trains resolved some of the refugee problem.⁶³⁹

The manifest necessity for regimental post details after arriving at Fort Smith demanded an increase in Union patrols to counterbalance Confederate guerrilla raids in western Arkansas. Whereas before the campaign the guerrillas sought escape from

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

⁶³⁸ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War on the Border*, 340.

⁶³⁹ Ibid, 342-344.

pursuing Union patrols, the losses of the failed Camden Expedition breathed new life into guerrilla bands. Guerrilla depredations prevented the local communities from resuming commerce or farming to any great degree. The First Kansas colored received new assignments, and Lieutenant Horace Johnson assumed Provost Marshal duties at Clarksville, Arkansas. The regiment obtained release from cotton confiscation duty and labored on the Fort Smith fortifications.⁶⁴⁰ While the soldiers of the First Kansas Colored worked hard at construction, their officers attempted to assess the damage of the campaign. Many of the First Kansas Colored's men lost guns and equipment as evidenced by the charges for lost ordnance in their individual service records, and restoring the regiment to operational strength took priority for the officers. The regiment utilized the short period of refitting at Fort Smith to account for lost equipment, and obtained new issues of clothing, weapons and field equipment.⁶⁴¹

The presence of approximately eight thousand Confederate soldiers in the vicinity of Fort Smith and Fort Gibson and the threat of imminent attack required combat effective troops. Thayer's arrival at Fort Smith on May 16 with the Frontier Army although fortuitous, did not disperse Confederate forces. When not manning shovels, the First Kansas Colored and other Colored Regiments manned the forts, rifle pits and a protective abatis that girded the Fort's defenses.⁶⁴² Fort Smith finally possessed the fortifications necessary to safeguard the key post against attack, but the army's existence was far from

⁶⁴⁰ Special Orders 47, May 16, 1864, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Earle, *Journal*, 54.

⁶⁴¹ Special Orders 9, First Kansas Colored, May 28, 1864, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*.

⁶⁴² TJ Anderson to Col WA Phillips Fort Smith, May 15, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part III: Correspondence*, 610; Brigadier General Thayer to Major General Rosecrans, May 26, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part IV Correspondence*, 50.

secure. Refugees and their demands weakened Thayer's command, and as a result, their relocation gained importance in the summer of 1864.

Thayer's refugee relocation scheme demanded great deliberation on his part. The army's supply woes did not abate after the Camden Campaign; the refugee communities of Fort Smith swelled to three thousand by the end of May.⁶⁴³ The scale of refugee relocations was staggering, and the numbers of departing refugees rivaled those of armies. A train of over fifteen hundred refugees left Fort Smith on August 6, bound for northern communities exasperated by the steady influx from Arkansas. The ongoing refugee exodus from his command had repercussions for nearby Union states, for although many refugees voluntarily departed Fort Smith and traded one precarious existence for another, the receiving states had to provide for their needs.⁶⁴⁴ The massive shuffling of refugees to other regions added to the escort requirements of Thayer's command, and every departing train or boat required escorts to ensure the safety of the refugees. The lesson of Mark's Mills had taught the army that non-combatant status was no defense against guerrilla raiders bent on punishing escaping slaves for their infidelity to their former masters.

Rehabilitation and Reorganization

Reestablishing Union control in Indian Territory and western Arkansas occurred at a time when Federal armies also fought great campaigns in the east. Union soldiers and

⁶⁴³ Major General Curtis to Brigadier General Thayer, Fort Leavenworth, May 19, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume III: Correspondence*, 675; MG S.R. Curtis to Col C.W. Blair May 27, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part IV Correspondence*, 72, 84; Annie Bailey and Daniel Sutherland (ed.) *Civil War Arkansas: Beyond Battles and Leaders*, 39. The contradictory policy of repatriating Union Indians back to Indian Territory while evacuating black and white refugees from Fort Smith and Fort Gibson created a number of problems for Thayer. The mouths he desired to avoid feeding were replaced by new ones because Union Indians could not sustain themselves after arriving in Indian Territory.

⁶⁴⁴ Leo E. Huff, "Guerrillas, Jayhawkers and Bushwhackers in Northern Arkansas During the Civil War" *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Volume 24, Number 2 (Summer 1965), 146-146.

officers alike devoured news from other parts of the war for a number of reasons, one of which was to place their own experience in the context of the overall Union efforts. Comparing their battles to those in the east brought readers a sense of how their battles compared those in other theaters and contributed to alleviating any sense of regional isolation. Captain Graton eagerly followed the news of the eastern theater and the fighting in Virginia.⁶⁴⁵ What happened in the east affected the west, even if only peripherally, for a Union victory in the east could hasten or end the war in the west. News from Kansas and Arkansas reported matters closer to home, and gave readers an idea of how their performance could be interpreted by civilian readers.

The First Kansas enjoyed a good reputation in Kansas as a fighting regiment, and its deeds received favorable coverage in Kansas and Arkansas newspapers. Newspapers recognized the First Kansas Colored's performance during the Camden Campaign, and approved of the regiment's bravery at Poison Spring. The Little Rock *Unconditional Union* reported that the regiment withstood four charges before giving way to Confederate attacks, while the Fort Smith *New Era* praised the fortitude and fighting spirit of the First Kansas Colored in a heroic tone: "the boys, after spending all their own ammunition, took what was left in the cartridge boxes of the slain and continued the fight to the last."⁶⁴⁶ The shift in perception is striking because the regiment, although defeated in battle, did not receive criticism for its fighting qualities. Instead of emphasizing a defeat that could have been reported in a very negative manner as indicative of black military deficiencies, the First Kansas Colored's performance at Poison Springs was

⁶⁴⁵ Letter May 30, 1864, Fort Gibson, Cherokee Nation, *Graton Collection*, Kansas State Historical Society.

⁶⁴⁶ "Fort Smith *New Era* May 21, as further reported in the June 9 edition of the *Fort Scott The Union Monitor*.

celebrated. The battle was transformed into a triumph of willpower and discipline in the face of hopeless odds. White observers finally acknowledged the First Kansas Colored's spirit, and the fact that the Fort Scott Union Monitor choose to reprint it pays tribute to the growing Kansas pride in the accomplishments of its black soldiers.

Kansan papers appeared to take ownership of the First Kansas Colored. When Lieutenant McFarland of Company D wrote a letter that described the regiment's experience during the Camden Campaign, the Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* published it. McFarland's letter cast the First Kansas Colored's in a heroic role, the embattled regiment "surrounded, and [forced to] cut our way out. We were fighting against ten thousand rebels. The niggers fought like hell."⁶⁴⁷ The speed in which the story ran indicates the immediacy of the battle for Kansan readers, and effectively forestalled any rumors of cowardice or incompetence. Closer to the recent battles in Arkansas, the Little Rock *Unconditional Union*'s editor condemned the deaths of black non-combatants and Union soldiers in battles such as Marks' Mills.⁶⁴⁸ The failed campaign's consequences were not all negative, and change in the officer ranks brought a new opportunity to the black soldiers in the Army of the Frontier.

One of the few positive outcomes of the Camden Campaign, and one important to black Kansans, Colonel Williams received orders promoting him to the command of the Second Brigade of the Frontier Army. Williams' promotion brought the First and Second Kansas Colored Infantry Regiments, the Eleventh United States Colored Troops and the Fifty-Fourth United States Colored Troops under a single commander with long

⁶⁴⁷ "Bad News From Below—Our Boys Beaten—Loss of Property," May 7, 1864, the *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*.

⁶⁴⁸ May 13, 1864, The *Unconditional Union* (Little Rock)

connections to black soldiers and their cause.⁶⁴⁹ The reorganization of the Second Brigade under Williams' command promised better treatment and greater opportunities for black soldiers and their families.

The First Kansas Colored returned to Fort Smith with gaping holes in its muster rolls., Williams, in order to meet the need for more soldiers, authorized the creation of a recruiting detachment to return to Kansas and canvass the black community for additional volunteers. Amongst the men selected for the detachment were officers and soldiers from the communities of eastern Kansas, local men that could appeal to the black community based on their combat experience and fidelity to the black cause. Captain Welch of Company K, from Fort Scott, would muster men with the assistance of First Lieutenant Macy of Company C, and Clinton, Kansas. Enlisted soldiers Sergeant Joe Carras of Company A, and Sergeant Scipio Johnson of Company K, hailed from Leavenworth and Wyandotte respectively, while Privates Sampson Berry of Company G and Private James Jacobs of Company K represented Lawrence and Leavenworth.⁶⁵⁰ This detachment departed for Kansas at the end of May, but proved unsuccessful.

The shortage of new recruits may have been a consequence of the success of the black Kansan recruiting efforts in 1863. The First and Second Kansas Colored's had scoured the state between January and October 1863, and then recruiters for the Eighteenth U.S. Colored Infantry successfully enlisted seventy-seven men primarily from Wyandotte and Leavenworth between February and June 1864. The Second and Eighteenth rejected few

⁶⁴⁹ General Orders 32, Frontier Division, May 7, 1864, Colonel Williams Promotion order, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁶⁵⁰ Special Orders 5, District of the Frontier, May 24, 1864; Special Orders 9, First Kansas Colored, May 28, 1864, *RG 94: Adjutant General's office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

recruits.⁶⁵¹ The First Kansas Colored's reinforcements therefore came from local Arkansas sources. A second class of reinforcements originated from the return of deserters to the regiment's ranks.

Numbers of deserters, perhaps aware but undeterred by the heavy cost paid by their fellow soldiers on the Camden Campaign, returned to service voluntarily. Seven deserters were restored to duty after forfeiting pay and allowances accrued during their unauthorized absence.⁶⁵² Balancing the return of the former deserters against new desertions indicates a net gain of soldiers, and desertion in the enlisted ranks dwindled to three men between May and August 1864⁶⁵³ Disease, the other great source of manpower loss, claimed ten men, and one soldier died from an accidental gunshot wound.⁶⁵⁴ The stable regimental manpower could be interpreted as confirmation of the black soldiers' commitment to the Union cause and commitment to their friends and fellow soldiers.

Replacing the non-commissioned officers killed during the Camden Campaign required promotions beginning from the rank of Corporal through to Company First Sergeant. Tempering promotions were the reductions of Non-Commissioned officers, among them First Sergeant Jeremiah Hall of Company D and Sergeant Charles Jackson of Company K, both men reduced to the ranks for "disobeying orders and unsoldierly

⁶⁵¹ Muster Rolls Second Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry; Eighteenth U.S. Colored Infantry, *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. I*, 600-622, 642-644.

⁶⁵² Special Orders 60, Headquarters District of the Frontier, May 30, 1864, RG 94: *Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁶⁵³ RG 94: *Records of the Adjutant General, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT, Descriptive Book, Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Volume 1 of 4.*

⁶⁵⁴ *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. I*, 574-599. The months of June recorded three disease deaths, August three, July one and May three. All occurred at Fort Smith, but there does not appear to be any pattern to the deaths, or connection to the environmental conditions of the Camden Campaign.

conduct.”⁶⁵⁵ The changes in the enlisted ranks, although disruptive, did not compare with those in the officer ranks. The return from the Camden Campaign began an exodus of experienced officers that deprived the regiment of many of its most experienced officers.

The officer ranks thinned almost upon the regiment’s arrival at Fort Smith. The military life was hard on soldiers, but officers unlike their soldiers could resign for a variety of reasons. Medical ailments were the foremost reason for resignations, many of the men citing diseases or injury contracted during military service. The regiment lost Surgeon Abijah Tenny and Assistant Surgeon Eliab Macy within a month of each other, the former citing back injury sustained during the Camden campaign, the latter bedeviled by dyspepsia and dysentery to the point of prostration. Chaplain Hutchinson also resigned due to general disability and personal finances. Officers also resigned due to ailments ranging from variocule (scrotal swelling) and chronic diarrhea, to liver inflammation. Captain Ethan Earle cited an ankle injury sustained at Prairie D’Ann when his horse fell on him, as his reason for departing the regiment. The most debilitated was Lieutenant Horace Johnson whose list of ailments included recurring typhoid fever, anemia, and almost complete loss of vision in one eye.⁶⁵⁶ The spate of medically-related resignations can be interpreted in two ways: the resigning officers no longer could sustain their service due to ailments preventable today, but beyond the ability of Civil War

⁶⁵⁵ *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. 1, 574-599*; Special Order Number 9, Headquarters First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers, Fort Smith, May 25, 1864; Special Order Number 19, First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers, Fort Smith, August 6, 1864, *RG 94: Adjutant General’s Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁶⁵⁶ *RG 94, 79th USCT (New) Combined Military Service Records*, Ethan Earle, George W. Hutchinson, Horace Johnson, Eliab Macy, Daniel McFarland, John Overdear, Andrew Smith, Abijah Tenny. It is tempting to examine the disease-related resignation causes, the cases of dysentery appear straight forward, but liver inflammation and Typhoid fever point to recurring malaria is a potential agent, especially when Lieutenant Johnson is examined. Postulating any connection with combat-related trauma does not appear fruitful, as no note appears in Earle’s journal or any of the cited men’s files. Earle appears to have compelling reasons related to dissatisfaction with the promotion process based on his later actions in November 1864.

medicine to cure, and the officers knew medical discharges had the greatest acceptance rates, especially when certified by one's regimental surgeons.

Officer losses, combined with the loss of veteran company grade Non-Commissioned Officers, left the regiment with a diminished capacity for leadership. The Camden Campaign exacted a thirty percent loss of company grade officers (nine from a complement of 30), resignations reduced and the headquarters staff by three (four if the perennially absent Lieutenant Colonel Bowles is included). A turnover rate of this magnitude changed the character of the regiment's officer corps and required less experienced Lieutenants filled the roles of Captains. Colonel Williams's absence from the regiment, devolved command to Major Ward, one of the stalwarts in the officer ranks. Temporary officers joined the regiment under orders in order to help compensate for its manpower losses. However, only Eli Bouten, one of the six temporary officers seconded from the Thirteenth Kansas Infantry and the Ninth Kansas cavalry accepted the offer of a commission in the regiment.⁶⁵⁷ New permanent regimental officers to replace those that resigned did not muster until January 1865.

The performance of the First Kansas colored may not have affected the decisions of temporary officers to join the regiment. Cavalry Sergeants may have wanted to stay in

⁶⁵⁷ Special Order Number 9, , May 29, 1864; Special Order Number 13, Headquarters, First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers, Fort Smith, June 20, 1864; Special Order Number 15, Headquarters, First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers, Fort Smith, July 10, 1864; Special Order Number 16, Headquarters, First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers, Fort Smith July 17, 1864, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*. Former First Sergeant Eli F. Bouten of the 13th Kansas Infantry, and First Sergeants E.G. Snyder and Enoch Smith of the Ninth Cavalry accepted Second Lieutenant Commissions in Companies E, D and F respectively. Former Ninth Cavalry non-commissioned officer Sergeant Willis Meyers also accepted a commission in Company F. Thirteenth Kansas Infantry enlisted soldier Sergeant John Richardson entered service with Company I and fellow Thirteenth Kansas Infantry First Sergeant Thomas Payne and Sergeant Crookham joined Company K. Quartermaster Sergeant Andrew McLaughlin of the Thirteenth Kansas Infantry reported to Company H as the acting First Sergeant. Temporary commissions ensured the regiment could conduct operations, but demonstrate a continuing reluctance by white Kansan soldiers to serve in the Colored regiments for an extended duration.

their more prestigious outfits. White Kansans may also have declined commissions because of discomfort over a more permanent commitment to black soldiers, and by extension their particular politicized status as fighting units. However, no evidence of overt racism exists in the regimental records. Kansas white regiments displayed little reluctance after early 1863 to serve alongside black units, especially after the First and Second Kansas Colored regiments displayed their fighting spirit.

The new permanent officers that joined the regiment would be the product of promotion boards designed to select the best white officers for black regiments. Senator Lane's ability to directly commissioning diminished as voluntary commissioning of white officers across the Union Army replaced local appointments. The loss of the Lane's appointees that originally led the regiment affected its distinctive abolitionist character, far too many of the original officers killed, captured or resigned to retain the regiment's connection with the formative battles of Island Mound and Cabin Creek. The enlisted character would change too, albeit slowly. The once clearly Missouri-Kansas composition, gave way to a hybrid organization pared by casualties and altered by Arkansas recruits.

Several factors may have ensured continuity in the ranks while the regimental officer structure changed. Although injuries plagued the ranks and resulted in discharges through 1865, no drastic non-combat enlisted personnel changes occurred in the period May to December 1864. The overt reliance on Colored Regiments to perform garrison fatigue duties policy may have influenced desertions in the past, but army-wide discontent amongst black regiments aroused by fatigue duty and the inordinate number of labor details, officially ended in June 1864. Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas, the

officer responsible for the overall recruiting of black soldiers throughout the Union Army issued Orders Number 21 in June, and directed the practice of using black soldiers disproportionately as labor on fortifications be discontinued in order to prepare the men for combat duties.⁶⁵⁸ Black men did not enlist to work as stevedores or camp details, they hungered for the chance to fight the enemy on the field of battle. Spadework appeared too much like the lot of the common laborer, and soldiers sought battle, not a renewal of manual labor that smacked of slavery's repressive overtones.

Summer 1864: Renewed Combat and Challenges

The Confederate armies of Generals Maxey and Cooper were not idle during the summer of 1864, and renewed their efforts to isolate Fort Smith and Fort Gibson as part of their plans to retake control in the Trans-Mississippi. Large numbers of Confederate troops haunted the vicinity of the Arkansas River and Fort Gibson, alert for any lapse in Union defenses. The Arkansas River played a vital part in Thayer's supply strategy, a weakness that Confederate Colonel Stand Watie exploited in one of the most audacious raids of the Civil War.

Watie, on June 15, successfully ambushed the steamer *J.R. Williams* while it transited between Fort Smith and Fort Gibson. Onboard the steamer a rich cargo of supplies and Indian goods awaited, guarded by a detachment of the Twelfth Kansas Infantry. Watie's Indians and opened fire on the steamer from carefully prepared artillery positions along the riverbank, precipitating a panic amongst the Union infantry, which jumped overboard to escape. The steamer ran aground and sans escort, surrendered its cargo of 150 barrels of flour, 16,000 pounds of bacon, and a large number of commissary stores. The Indians quickly lost discipline in the ensuing scramble, and after taking their fill a considerable

⁶⁵⁸ Thomas Orders No. 21, June 14, 1864. *The Negro in the Military Service*, Roll IV, document 2620.

number of Creeks and Seminoles returned home.⁶⁵⁹ The Union survivors made their way to Fort Gibson and roused the Second Kansas Colored and the Second Indian Home Guard to pursue the Indians and recapture the cargo. The pursuit, although quickly organized did not prevent the looting and burning of the steamer, and confirmed Thayer's inability to interdict Confederate raids.

The loss of the *J.R. Williams* cargo attested to the difficulty in maintaining Union supply lines on the river. Adding to Thayer's supply woes, when water levels dropped during the late summer, steamers could not navigate the river to bring in vital supplies. General Thayer had warning of the river's limitations, and despite four steamers delivering their cargoes safely to Fort Smith in July, experienced boat captains warned Thayer that the water levels appeared unlikely to sustain any additional steamers from Little Rock.⁶⁶⁰ Thayer's logistical alternative, wagon trains, played to the Confederate strengths in cavalry, and the distance from Fort Scott to Fort Gibson endangered Thayer's strategy for the defense of Fort Gibson and Fort Smith.

Confederate forces in Indian Territory faced their own conundrum as they planned to cut Thayer's supply lines: their own logistics could not support a large force along the Arkansas River, and its tributary the Poteau River, for long periods. Despite capturing hundreds of Federal wagons during the Camden campaign, "only ten had been forwarded to Indian Territory."⁶⁶¹ Without wagons to bring supplies to the Confederate army, their advantages of numbers and mobility amounted for naught. General Maxey possessed a secret weapon that could even the odds if Maxey could utilize the intelligence provided

⁶⁵⁹ Colonel Stand Watie, Report Number Two, Capture of the JR Williams, June 17, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part I: Reports*, 1012-1013.

⁶⁶⁰ Edwin C. Bearss, "General Cooper's CSA Indians Threaten Fort Smith," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Volume 26, Number 3 (Autumn, 1967): 260.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid*, 264.

by a spy at Fort Smith. Maxey's spy furnished detailed plans of the Federal defenses at Fort Smith and confirmed the departure of several units leaving the fort to aid General Steele elsewhere. The spy, B.D. Ford also reported low morale and fewer than two thousand defenders.⁶⁶² Confederate General Cooper acted on the intelligence to stage an attack on an isolated Federal cavalry regiment outside the fort's defenses.

The Poteau River served as no significant impediment to Confederate forces, and Cooper's raiding party crossed with no opposition. A reconnaissance of Fort Smith's defenses on July 26 confirmed its lack of preparedness, and after a leadership council that evening, Cooper directed Brigadier General Richard Gano of Maxey's command to raid the Federal lines. Subsequently, in a lightning attack the morning of July 27 Gano's force routed the Sixth Kansas Cavalry at Massard Prairie in an engagement within five miles of Fort Smith. The Confederate forces suffered a defeat amidst victory; despite routing the regiment, the Confederate withdrawal afterwards cost Cooper's command a wagon train that entered Fort Smith with desperately needed supplies.⁶⁶³ The Confederate operations around Fort Smith gained urgency as General Cooper interpreted the poor Federal defense at Massard Prairie as a sign that an attack on Fort Smith could capture the town and compel a Federal retreat.

General Cooper's army, emboldened by its success, on July 31, attempted to assault the Fort Smith defenses. Cooper's forces achieved initial success in pushing in the Federal pickets, but failed to breach the defenses after General Thayer counterattacked

⁶⁶² Ibid, 266. Thayer recognized this threat and countermanded orders for the Eleventh U.S. Colored to march to Little Rock.

⁶⁶³ Edwin C. Bearss, "General Cooper's CSA Indians," 272-273.

with the aid of several batteries of Federal artillery.⁶⁶⁴ Furthermore, Captain Earle's journal mentions an attack in which the First Kansas Colored defeated the enemy, but without his usual elaboration of events, although two companies of the First Kansas Colored deployed to protect the guns against the Confederates.⁶⁶⁵ Cooper's chance to capture Fort Smith passed and his forces resumed their pattern of raiding Federal supply lines and burning hay camps. A Confederate soldier noted, "I don't think Maxey intends to take Fort Smith. We keep our horses, rode down scouting and picketing. Two hundred red men left our camps yesterday evening going thru the vicinity of Fort Gibson to burn some hay..."⁶⁶⁶ Bigger developments concerned Confederate strategists in the west, particularly Major General Price, who sought to take the war into his home state of Missouri. The massing of Confederate forces did not escape attention, and when Price led his army north into Missouri, Kansans employed Price's preparatory period to undertake some revolutionary military preparations of their own.

The Price Campaign

As military affairs in Indian Territory and western Arkansas returned to the familiar pattern of raid and reprisal, wartime Kansas also prepared for a resurgent Confederate army and the potential for an invasion of the state. Several announcements, by their provocative tone, indicated growing accommodation with Kansas's black population. George Dimon, the mayor of Fort Scott appealed to all citizens regardless of color to form militia companies to defend Fort Scott in case of emergency. This proposal

⁶⁶⁴ Report Number Fourteen, Major General Samuel Maxey, July 30, 1864; Report Number Fifteen, Brigadier General Douglas Cooper, August 10, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part I: Reports*, 29-36.

⁶⁶⁵ Report, Brigadier General Thayer, August 3, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part II*, 538-539. Earle, *Journal*, 58.

⁶⁶⁶ J.M. Lynch to Caroline (Lynch) Bell 31, August 1864 as cited in Edward Dale and Gaston Litton. *Cherokee Cavaliers*. (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 184.

received particular emphasis a week later, but with biting criticism, when the author of a letter to the editor suggested that blacks profited from white military service despite having a common interest in Fort Scott's safety. The author urged the use of "all power and influence [at the authorities' command] to organize blacks into companies...else [blacks] shall imagine we are fighting while they...enjoy their ease."⁶⁶⁷ The letter did not evidence any doubt regarding the ability of blacks to fight. Instead it demanded that blacks do their share to protect Kansas, a reversal of the prevailing attitudes in Kansas when the First Kansas Colored formed. Black men had proved they could fight, and now were expected to fight for Kansas if the state called on their services.

Mustering for militia service did not equate to unconditional social acceptance, and certainly did not constitute any endorsement of equality between the races. The deteriorating situation in Indian Territory and Fort Smith, and the decision to send refugees north to Kansas endeared few Kansans to the refugees. Fort Scott's role as host to refugees from points south appeared increasingly strained as violence between blacks and whites escalated, and in one case the murder of a white Kansan soldier by a black refugee how little racial equality had advanced despite black service. The *Fort Scott Daily Monitor*'s urged that the black population be "taught their place." Black refugees that proved willing received a fair opportunity, but the increasing numbers of indigent black refugees dependent on aid from the fort strained social bonds. The *Fort Scott Union Monitor* also backed a concealed weapons ban for blacks within the bounds of the fort's jurisdiction.⁶⁶⁸ Kansans extended a grudging welcome to black refugees provided they

⁶⁶⁷ "Proclamation of George Dimon, Mayor of Fort Scott," May 31, 1864; "Practical Suggestions," June 8, 1864, *Fort Scott Daily Monitor*.

⁶⁶⁸ "We Protest" *Fort Scott Union Monitor* 16 June 1864; "Another Outrage. A Soldier Murdered by a Darkey," June 20, 1864, *Fort Scott Daily Monitor*.

proved useful, but indolent refugees generated resentment. The spirit of opposition did not publicly extend to the black regiments of Kansas and their families, and the performance of the First and Second Kansas Colored remained a matter of pride for the Fort Scott press.

The failed Confederate assault on Fort Smith alerted the First Kansas Colored's men that their foes were not a spent force. The Confederates remained a skilled and deadly enemy, and the guerrilla raids called for increasingly larger escorts to protect outposts and supply trains. Details to support the Frontier Army continued unabated, and in August the regiment departed Fort Smith en route to Fort Gibson with a provisions train under the command of Captain John Graton.⁶⁶⁹ Fort Gibson's need for government rations to feed its refugees increased throughout the summer as Confederate raids took a toll on attempts to establish local farms. Escorting supply trains had proved deadly for the regiment in the past, and Union trains drew Confederate parties eager to try their hand at capturing the laden trains during transit.⁶⁷⁰ The distances between Fort Smith and Fort Gibson, as well as Federal supply depots at Fort Scott and Little Rock left General Thayer with the unenviable and conflicting duties required to preserve the Union's hold on Indian Territory.

Thayer's District of the Frontier covered an immense amount of territory and garrisoning the twin forts of Gibson and Smith stretched his logistics to the limits. The

⁶⁶⁹ Earle, *Journal*, 58.

⁶⁷⁰ Special Order 147, Department of Arkansas, Little Rock, June 27, 1864, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*. Lieutenant Colonel Bowles remained in Kansas, and Major Ward departed Fort Smith at the end of July to procure new weapons for the regiment from the arsenal at Saint Louis.

Camden Campaign adversely impacted operations in significant ways also, and the wagons lost in the campaign were sorely missed. Garrisoning forts and defending trains sapped Thayer's strength, preventing him from striking a decisive blow against his Confederate foes.

The First Kansas Colored's reputation for guarding trains did not suffer despite Poison Spring. The First Kansas Colored had successfully brought through trains from Fort Scott in the past, and fought determined battles. The First Kansas Colored could be relied upon to do its duty stoically, and professionally. The chance of the First Kansas Colored surrendering a train appeared beyond the pale, and the black infantry would not surrender a train given their enemy's intense hatred and history of massacre. The First Kansas Colored fought, dug, and marched in Union service, dedicated to service until the war ended in Union victory.

The march of the First Kansas Colored from Fort Smith to Fort Gibson in September 1864 began like so many other escort duties, and the infantry successfully escorted the train along the dusty trail to the austere surroundings of Fort Gibson. The regiment received additional orders to form hay details after arriving at Fort Gibson. Mowing down the prairie grass in order to create a stock of fodder for the winter was an essential task. Sustaining the cavalry and the long trains of mules and horses required the maximum commitment of men to ensure that the supply line stayed open despite Confederate guerrillas and the ever-present threat of ambush. However, for Company K, the summer's hay making details ended with a horrific massacre akin to that of Poison Spring.

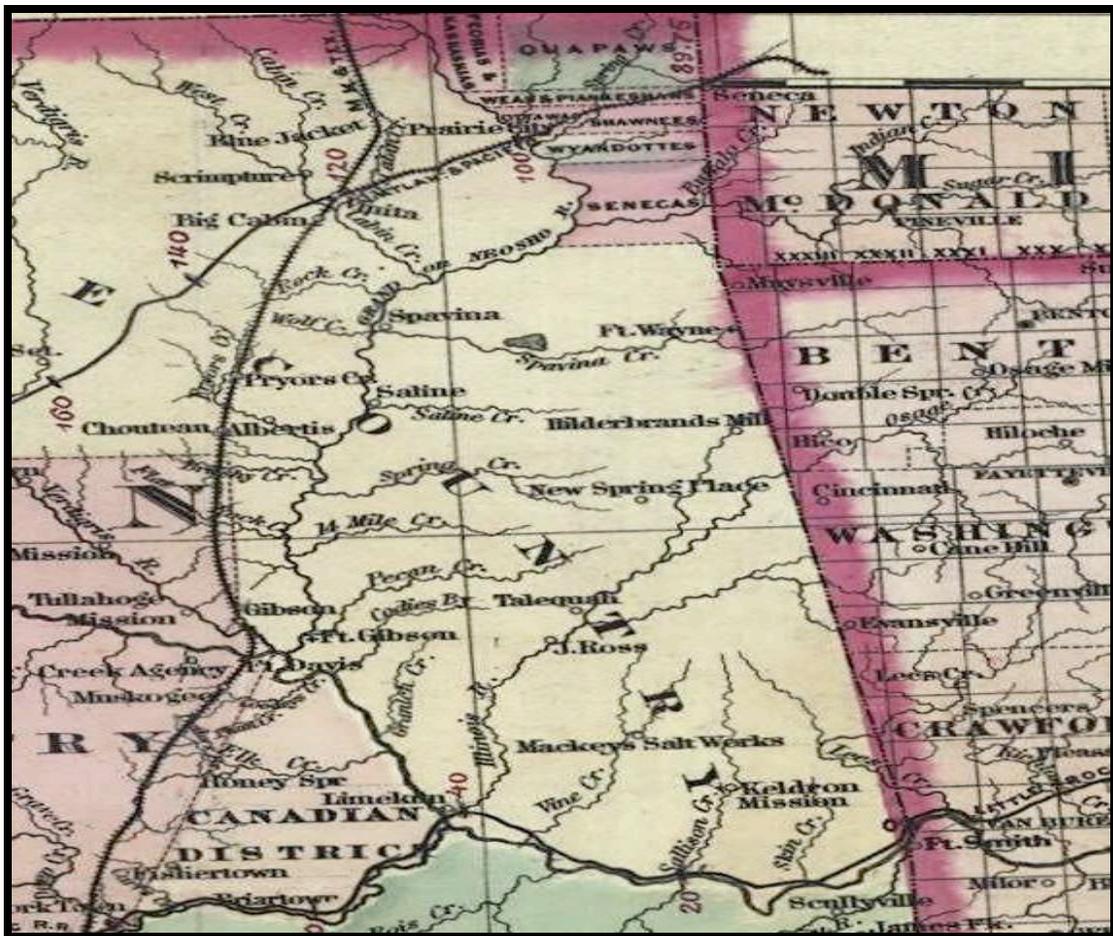
Chapter 9

“All Men regardless of race shall serve”

The First Kansas Colored arrived at Fort Gibson as a regiment markedly different from the one that allied forth from Fort Smith in late March 1864. The regiment had undergone three periods of transformation by this time. The first period occurred between August 1862 and spring of 1863 when the regiment weathered its growing pains, shed blood for the Union at Island Mound, and then mustered for service at Fort Scott. The second transformation occurred in the summer of 1863 and winter of 1864 following the heady victories at Cabin Creek, Honey Springs and the garrisoning of Fort Smith. The third period, and the most traumatic, transpired between the Camden Campaign and the regiment's arrival at Fort Gibson. The First Kansas Colored was a veteran unit by September 1864, and although its personnel turnover had been significant, the regiment remained a stalwart unit of fighting men prepared to make whatever sacrifice necessary to ensure the freedom of the black race.

Over the next several months the regiment would serve a variety of roles across the District of the Frontier. The Army of the Frontier's cavalry force had lost much of its offensive capability due to a lack of remounts and the lingering effects of a drought killed the grass that the cavalry horses used for fodder. Infantry could march to locations that the cavalry could not defend, and provide supply trains with essential escorts while the cavalry slowly rebuilt its strength. The Army of the Frontier was in dire straits, but the First Kansas Colored could be depended upon to hold the line until the Army of the Frontier could return to offensive operations.

The Army of the Frontier's tactical situation deteriorated appreciably in September 1864. The army's difficulties in large part derived from the persistence of Confederate guerrillas. The army's problems were exacerbated by its inability to sustain its forces in the wake of a drought that produced die off of forage and food crops across its area of operations. Despite the presence of the Third Wisconsin Cavalry at Fort Smith, Thayer was unable to stop guerrilla raids because his cavalry's mounts no longer possessed the physical capacity for long campaigning.



Map 9: Western Arkansas and Indian Territory⁶⁷¹

⁶⁷¹Colton's New Map of the State of Texas : the Indian Territory and Adjoining Portions of New Mexico, Louisiana, and Arkansas," New York : G.W & C.B. Colton & Co., 1872. *Library of Congress*. <http://www.loc.gov> (accessed May 1, 2011).

Colonel Stephen Wattles's command at Fort Gibson occupied a tenuous position in Thayer's supply chain, and the demands of escorting trains from Fort Scott to Fort Smith while also securing the lines of communication to Baxter Springs left Wattles without enough manpower to perform this vital mission. Therefore General Thayer ordered Colonel Williams on September 14, 1864 to lead the Second Brigade (then comprising the combined regiments of the First and Second Kansas Colored Infantry, the Eleventh Colored Infantry, the Fifty-Fourth United States Colored Infantry, and a section of white artillery of the second Arkansas Battery) west to support Colonel Wattles.⁶⁷² This large force had orders to stop raids on the Union hay cutting detachments, and to protect the camps of government contractors.

Sustaining the Union regiments at Fort Gibson required massive amounts of forage. Unfortunately, the pasturage in the immediate vicinity of Fort Gibson could not supply those needs. Hay cutting expeditions fanned out into the prairies to cut the necessary forage in anticipation of another lean winter. Captain Graton's First Kansas Colored - consisting of six companies (approximately four hundred soldiers) - remained at Fort Gibson to augment Colonel Wattle's Indian Regiments. Four companies of the First Kansas colored remained at Fort Smith.⁶⁷³ Therefore, when Company K marched forth

⁶⁷² Brigadier General Thayer to Lieutenant Colonel W.D. Green, Adjutant General, Department of the Arkansas; Thayer to Colonel S.H. Wattles, Headquarters District of the Frontier, Fort Smith, sep 8,14,1864, *OR: Series I, Vol 41, PT III: Correspondence*, 105, 188.; Janet B. Hewitt (ed.) *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Part II, Record of Events, Volume 78, Serial No. 90* (Wilmington, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1998), 614-671. The First Kansas Colored arrived with four companies at Fort Gibson on September 18, 1864, the same day of the engagement at Flat Rock.

⁶⁷³ Janet B. Hewitt, *Supplement to the Official Records*, 614-671; Wiley Britton. *The Civil War on the Border, Volume II*, 244-247. September 1, 1864 the regiment recorded six companies of the First Kansas Colored at Fort Gibson. The pattern of detailing the regiment as both guards and labor varied little form

fifteen miles north of Fort Gibson in early September to cut hay near Flat Rock, Indian Territory, adequate strength seemed to be available.

The hay camp, including the mowers, hayricks and wagons, lay in a well-watered depression not far from the Grand River. The depression contained a number of water lily dotted shallow pools surrounded by shaded overhanging banks of willows.⁶⁷⁴

Although an ideal camp for hard working soldiers, and a welcoming oasis from the September heat, the camp proved less than ideal for defense. The area offered little in the way of natural defensive features and if attacked, could expect little relief from Fort Gibson.

The detachment at Flat Rock contained a mix of infantry and cavalry, the latter from the Second Kansas Cavalry. This one hundred and twenty-five man detachment was presumably able to defend itself from a typical raid, but the situation changed in late September. Keenly aware of Thayer's dependence on supply trains and local foraging, Confederate General Samuel Cooper made the destruction of hay camps and interdicting Thayer's supplies his top priority throughout Indian Territory and western Arkansas. Depriving Thayer of mobility could be accomplished by destroying fodder and the ensuing loss of cavalry would make Thayer's supply trains vulnerable to seizure. Stand Watie's raiders proved this supposition in August when the Union garrison at Fort Smith was unable to defend a hay party within a short distance from Fort Smith.⁶⁷⁵ Watie's raiding demonstrated that the Federal garrison controlled only the immediate area around the forts of Gibson and Smith. A more audacious undertaking could potentially compel

post duty at Roseville, but more significantly removed the majority of the regiment from fortification duties at Fort Smith where the fatigue details grated on veterans accustomed to campaigning.

⁶⁷⁴ Wiley Britton. *The Civil War on the Border, Volume II*, 244-247

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid, 243 – 244; W. David Baird, (ed). *A Creek Warrior for the Confederacy: The Autobiography of Chief G.W. Grayson*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988, 93.

an evacuation of the forts and a return of the balance of power in Indian Territory to the Confederacy.

Perhaps emboldened by their success and of the movement of Confederate forces under General Price into Missouri, Watie and Gano planned a raid upon the Federal supply train at Cabin Creek. Gano assembled a composite army of Cherokees to ride north in search of the Federal supply train moving south from Fort Scott. The wide gaps between Federal commands at Fort Scott, Cabin Creek, Fort Gibson and Fort Smith created opportunity for the fast-moving Confederate army. Supplemented by artillery and sound intelligence, the Confederate force was confident that it could overwhelm Union posts and capture the train. The cargoes would yield a bounty of rations, materiel, and animals to raise morale and fighting capability for the spring campaigns of 1865.

The prairie dawn on September 18, 1864 opened with little sign of enemy activity. As the day advanced, however, riders appeared in the distance. The approach of Gano's advance party at Flat Rock initially elicited little alarm, for the Union detachment assumed the riders to be a small raiding party. The detachment commander, Captain E.A. Barker of Company C, Second Kansas Cavalry, reacted to reports of several hundred riders crossing the Verdigris River by forming up his detachment in a ravine to the rear of the camp while he moved forward to ascertain the enemy's intentions. What greeted Barker when he cleared the rise shocked him into retreat. He faced the entire force of Gano's army, an estimated thousand to fifteen hundred cavalry supported by six guns.⁶⁷⁶ The hay cutting party lay in the path of the advancing army, a force that included the vengeful horsemen of the Twenty-Ninth Texas Cavalry and their Choctaw allies, the

⁶⁷⁶ Report Number 7, Captain E.A. Barker, Company C, Second Kansas Cavalry to the Adjutant General, Washington, D.C. September 20, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part I: Reports*, 771-772.

nemeses of the First Kansas Colored. Burning desire to revenge themselves upon the perpetrators of the reprisals at Jenkins' Ferry fueled a massacre unequalled in the regiment's history.

Barker immediately attempted to marshal his men for a defense of the camp, presumably in the hope that the sound of battle might rouse reinforcements from Fort Gibson. General Gano took position on a rise near the camp and organized his forces for attack. Colonel DeMorse's Twenty-Ninth and Thirty-First Texas regiments assumed positions on the right flank, and Brigadier General Stand Watie's Cherokee and Creek Indians took the left. The Confederate battle plan featured an attack from five directions. Confederate infantry closed to within two hundred yards before fighting began. The detachment fought bravely, repelling three charges over the period of half an hour. Deciding that he was in imminent danger of being overwhelmed, Barker attempted a breakout with his remaining mounted cavalry. The black infantry and Barker's dismounted cavalry received orders to make for the Grand River timber, a line of trees over a mile away. Barker's cavalry then charged the Confederates, but only fifteen soldiers made their way through to Fort Gibson.⁶⁷⁷ The Federal defense did not collapse with Barker's desperate charge. The remaining soldiers in the ravine formed for battle under Lieutenant Thomas Sutherland of Company K, First Kansas Colored.

The black soldiers of the First Kansas Colored expected no relief from Fort Gibson or a miraculous escape. Many veterans survived Poison Spring and knew their fate before the battle began. Their survival depended on causing so many casualties and delaying the Confederates that their forces would break off and abandon the attack. The Confederate

⁶⁷⁷ Report Number 7, Captain E.A. Barker, Company C, Second Kansas Cavalry to the Adjutant General, Washington, D.C. September 20, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part I: Reports*, 771-772; Wiley Britton, *The Civil War on the Border, Volume II*, 244-247 .

forces pressed the infantry from the start, their numbers and multi-directional assaults forcing the Union soldiers to fire volleys at their attackers in an attempt to keep them off balance. Wiley Britton quotes one of the First Kansas Colored's survivors, George Duval, as describing the battle as one of several sequences of "charge, volley, and recovery." The deciding factor in the engagement, the Confederate artillery, fired several volleys of grapeshot into the infantry ranks, and when the infantry's ammunition ran low, Lieutenant Sutherland ordered the men to disperse in order to save themselves. The Grand River timber offered some shelter, but it lay too far from the ravine. Some of the infantry sought the banks and pools of the ravine, while others tried to hide in the tall grass. What then occurred exceeded the savagery of Poison Spring.

After war's end Britton interviewed the black survivors of the battle, and their individual escapes capture the imagination. While Confederates hunted down black soldiers, the white Kansans that survived the initial exchanges entered captivity as prisoners. No quarter was asked or given the black infantry. Survivors hid in pools deep enough to conceal them in the dying prairie light, their noses barely breaking the water's surface, and their bodies shielded by lilies. One man who had found concealment in a collection of driftwood escaped the ravine during the night by crawling between Confederate pickets, his gun firmly in hand. The survivors reported listening to the Confederates calling out to one another as they discovered, then killed black soldiers. Three thousand tons of hay, mowing machines and ricks lit the macabre scene as they burned into the night. Gano's army camped at the hay making camp that night, then continued on their way the next day.⁶⁷⁸ Surprisingly, they brought with them five black

⁶⁷⁸ Wiley Britton, *The Civil War on the Border, Volume II, 244-247*; W. David Baird, (ed). *A Creek Warrior for the Confederacy*, 95-96.

soldiers of the First Kansas Colored that survived the battle, prisoners with an uncertain future. Lieutenant Sutherland also survived, but his fate seemed equally precarious.⁶⁷⁹ A white officer in a Colored Regiment could expect a noose or firing squad based on all known punishments exacted by Confederate armies on white officers.

Confederate accounts of the engagement differ slightly from Union accounts. General Gano claimed that a parley attempt under flag of truce took fire from the Union soldiers, and blamed this incident for the slaughter that followed. Chief Grayson, a Creek officer under Watie's command, remembered the Indian troops "hunting [the blacks] in the grass like game, shooting down rather than take them prisoner," Grayson's intervention saved Sutherland, "Blacks, he said, were being killed, not white men." Even so, Grayson's memoirs portray a warrior disgusted and shocked by the same events that Gano took in stride.⁶⁸⁰ The historian James Monaghan continued the tale of massacre, citing "mounted Cherokees jogging up and down through the uncut hay, shooting men like rabbits," and some Monaghan claimed, "Rose from the weeds calling, 'O! Good master, save and spare me.'" Men hiding in pools died from gunshots and the Cherokee hauled them from the water.⁶⁸¹ White men would not be treated the same as their black soldiers; race mattered in how captives were taken, or not.

Confederate reports detail the aftermath of the lopsided engagement and the extent of the disaster. General Watie's terse battle report referenced "a Union camp destroyed, one hundred killed and eighty-five captured." Gano proved more detailed in his report, and

⁶⁷⁹ John Graton, Letter September 29, 1864, *John Graton Collection*, Kansas State Historical Society.

⁶⁸⁰ W. David Baird, (ed). *A Creek Warrior for the Confederacy*, 96.

⁶⁸¹ James Monaghan. *Civil War on the Western Border: 1854-1865*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955), 308.

listed Union losses as “seventy-three dead, mostly negroes.”⁶⁸² Gano’s reported only three wounded as his losses, a disproportionate number given the estimated two hours of combat that elapsed. Company K however suffered horrifically, the annihilation of the company a serious blow to the First Kansas Colored, a grim reminder that the war of extermination against black Union soldiers continued unabated. The handful of survivors and prisoners verifies that a concerted effort to kill black soldiers took place at Flat Rock, a war crime in any other historical context. The next day a Union patrol from the second Kansas Cavalry arrived at the battlefield, perhaps drawn by large numbers of carrion scavengers, to report the vast incongruities between the two Union forces. White men received decent burial, but the naked corpses of black soldiers and teamsters littered the ground, and lagoons, with gaping wounds and slit throats stark witness to their last moments.⁶⁸³ Not mentioned, but evident to experienced cavalymen of the patrol, the wide swathes of torn prairie and deep ruts of gun carriages informed the Union horse soldiers that a great host had occupied the site briefly, then set northwards for the Texas Road.

The string of Union defeats continued after Flat Rock. Generals Gano and Watie wasted little time, driving their command up the Texas Road to Watie’s old ambush site at Cabin Creek. Reports of a massive Union supply train proved to be accurate, and the Confederate force possessed for the first time in a long while the numbers, firepower, and determination to overwhelm the Federal garrison at Cabin Creek. The Second Battle of Cabin Creek pitted Confederate Indian against Union Indian, and laid open the Union’s logistical weaknesses in the Indian Territory.

⁶⁸² Brigadier General Richard M Gano to Brigadier General Cooper, Camp Bragg, September 29, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part I: Reports*, 788 – 789; Brigadier General Stand Watie to Brigadier General Cooper, September 23, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part I: Reports*, 784 – 785; James Monaghan *Civil War on the Western Border: 1854-1865* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955), 308.

⁶⁸³ *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, 29 September 1864.

At first glance the fortified Union camp at Cabin Creek appeared well prepared for defense, and contained between 900 and 1,000 defenders from the Indian Home Guards, Cavalry from Fort Scott, and Fort Gibson, and various armed teamsters and unattached Union Indians. A nighttime raid on September 18 probed the Union lines, and between 3:00 AM and 9:00 AM on September 19, the Confederates assaulted the Union camp with artillery support. A general panic ensued in the Union ranks as Gano's men breached the defenses, and the Confederates gained their objective as Union troops fled in all directions. The prize of one hundred and thirty wagons fell into Gano's hands, but the possibility of pursuit compelled him to burn an estimated ten ricks of hay, mowing machines, and an estimated one hundred and twenty unserviceable wagons. The value of the train, estimated at \$1,500,000 lay not solely in the valuable cargo, but in the impact of the defeat.⁶⁸⁴ The earlier passage of Gano's forces and the deadly swathe they cut through Union detachments as they headed north alerted General Thayer at Fort Smith of a disaster in the making. If he could not stop the Confederate army, they would escape with the contents of the train into the fastness of Indian Territory where Thayer's forces could not pursue effectively.

Thayer's forces could not muster a significant cavalry force to contest Gano's raiding force for a number of reasons. Thayer's cavalry lacked suitable horses for a pursuit, the horseflesh having suffered from overuse and the constant demands on cavalry to fight guerrillas across western Arkansas. Although Thayer could send forth infantry regiments, he could not guarantee his artillery horses could transport guns quickly

⁶⁸⁴ Brigadier General Stand Watie to Brigadier General D.H. Cooper, Camp Bragg, October 3, 1864; Brigadier General Gano to Brigadier general Cooper, September 29, 1864, *OR, Series I, Volume 41, Part I: Reports*, 784-788, 789-191.

enough to provide support should a general engagement occur. Therefore Thayer ordered Colonel Williams with his Second Brigade to intercept the Confederates.⁶⁸⁵

Colonel Williams mustered his command for a punishing march north to intercept the Confederate army before it could escort away the wagon train captured at Cabin Creek, and in a prodigious effort, the Second Brigade covered eighty-two miles in forty-six hours. The effort paid off however, and Williams' men arrived at Pryor's Creek about 11 A.M. on September 19, where shortly afterwards it met Gano's advance guard flush with plunder after Cabin Creek. Williams gamely formed his line despite its fatigue and skirmished with Gano's forces until 4:30 P.M.⁶⁸⁶ Colonel Williams possessed the experience and wisdom to avoid seeking a general engagement, and having assessed his men's condition and the numbers of the enemy, determined to fight the Confederates after reinforcements arrived. The First Kansas Colored's veterans performed a prodigious feat of marching to catch up to the Confederate army, and although the wagon train fell into Confederate hands, capturing the train and keeping it were two different things.

The likelihood of a battle over the wagons appeared high, but the Confederates held significant advantages regardless of the slow-moving train. Williams' troops lacked the one thing that could have shaped the battle; the relief force lacked cavalry, the entire command composed of infantry and artillery. Williams's battery engaged the Confederate artillery when Gano's forces closed to within range of his Parrott guns, scoring several hits that forced the Confederate crews to seek shelter behind some nearby earth

⁶⁸⁵ Thayer to Steele, undated communication, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part I: Reports*, 24.

⁶⁸⁶ Report Number 2, Colonel Williams 79th United States Colored Troops, Pryor's Creek, September 20, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part I: Reports*, 765.

mounds.⁶⁸⁷ Battle seemed eminent, but the exhausted soldiers of the First Kansas Colored did not fight that evening, the night fell before an engagement developed.

The differences between the opposing forces were significant. Although encumbered by the wagon train, the Confederate force was mounted, and Williams' foot-sore soldiers could not match their mobility. While the regiment rested, the Confederates endeavored to move the wagon train away from the blocking force. Generals Gano and Watie executed an ingenious ruse to deceive Williams as to their intentions. A wagon was driven across rocky ground throughout the evening and into the early morning hours to "give the impression that the wagons were being corralled for the night while Confederate troops escorted the wagon train from the area. In the morning, despite Williams' efforts, the Confederate army was gone, and with it, the train.⁶⁸⁸ The loss of the train did not occur for any inadequacy on Williams' part, the eighty-two miles march from Fort Gibson exhausted his men, and they needed rest before attempting any further action. While his men slept and the deception played out, the bulk of the train moved beyond Williams' reach, slowly moving westward towards the Arkansas River.⁶⁸⁹ Williams stayed at Pryor's Creek one more day and then returned to Fort Gibson to assess the damage to the First Kansas Colored, and to report the train's escape.

The First Kansas Colored's soldiers discovered on their return to Fort Gibson that the loss to Company K exceeded the losses at Honey Springs. Taken in isolation, the company had suffered the greatest single-day loss of any company in the First Kansas

⁶⁸⁷ Report Number 2, Colonel Williams 79th United States Colored Troops, Pryor's Creek, September 20, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part I: Reports*, 765; Letter detailing Williams' attempt to engage Gano in battle, Fort Gibson Cherokee Nation, September 22, 1864, John Gratton Collection, Kansas State Historical Society,

⁶⁸⁸ Lawrence M. Hauptman. *Between Two Fires: American Indians in the Civil War*. (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 57.

⁶⁸⁹ Lary C. Rampp and Donald L. Rampp. *The Civil War in the Indian Territory* (Austin, Texas: Presidial Press, 1975), 114.

Colored for the entire war. Wagon escort and hay parties proved dangerous missions, the Confederates having proven adept at harrying hay making parties and overwhelming fixed defenses alike. The First Kansas Colored's men performed train escort as a regular duty at beleaguered Fort Gibson, and while losses were assessed, escorted wagon trains between Fort Smith and Fort Gibson, a duty that exposed the men to the constant threat of attack. Trains took between three and four days to complete the trip between these posts, and seldom did a single company accompany a train. When escorting trains the men departed with full allocations of ammunition, forty rounds to the man. Their haversacks contained little but hardtack; the escort could not afford to forage for sustenance and neglect the train, therefore it marched light and fast.⁶⁹⁰ Flat Rock proved that the penalties for unprepared and isolated detachments attempting to supply Fort Gibson with vital forage, could be incredibly high, especially if the parties were composed of black soldiers. Few returned from Flat Rock, and the number of wounded personnel recovered testified to the fierce fighting and dreadful slaughter that followed the brief engagement at Flat Rock.

The loss of the Federal train at Cabin Creek threw the District of the Frontier's logistics into disarray. The sudden and successful raid convinced other Federal commanders in Kansas that their southern flank stood wide open to attack. The movement of thousands of Confederates north of Fort Gibson also highlighted the impact that the raid would have on Thayer. The aggregate losses in transport presented Major General Curtis in Kansas with a difficult choice between sustaining Thayer's forces, or exposing another train to attack. The Confederate army under Gano and Watie remained

⁶⁹⁰ Special Order 19, Captain Graton to Captain Huddleston, Headquarters First Kansas Colored Infantry, Fort Gibson. *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

intact and posed a deadly threat to southern Kansas. Should the raiders choose to strike again, Fort Scott could feel their wrath. Militia and regular regiments received notice to prepare for an attack, and Thayer's commander at Fort Gibson, Colonel Adams, added to the confusion by reporting an anticipated attack by over five thousand Confederates at his post.⁶⁹¹ In the midst of the growing apprehension about the Union hold over the Indian Territory, General Thayer insisted on his ability to hold Fort Smith despite the loss of the supply train at Cabin Creek. His efforts became increasingly difficult to maintain however, as the District of the Frontier faced unexpected threats from a new southern army that appeared intent on driving him from Indian Territory.

The District of the Frontier operated under constraints that bedeviled Thayer's planning and personnel allocations. Defending the line from Fort Gibson to Fort Smith, as well as western Arkansas often forced Thayer to operate in the absence of intelligence regarding his enemy, and outside ready reinforcement from General Steele's forces at Little Rock. Less than a week after the Second Brigade marched to Fort Gibson, disturbing news reached Thayer just before communications with Little Rock were cut off, that General Price, with an army estimated at 15,000 men, crossed the Arkansas River at Dardanelle and appeared destined for Thayer's district where it met with the Choctaw Nation. Thayer immediately ordered Colonel Wattles to dig rifle pits and throw up barricades around Fort Gibson, and to prepare for an imminent attack by Price's army. Thayer also ordered Wattles to send Williams' regiments to follow the enemy if they

⁶⁹¹ Major General Curtis to Major General Rosecrans; Major General Curtis to Kansas Governor T. Carney, Fort Leavenworth September 20, 1864; Major General George Sykes to Major C.S. Charlott, Headquarters, District of South Kansas, Lawrence, September 23, 1864; Thayer to Steele, Headquarters District of the Frontier, Fort Smith, September 24, 1864; Major General Curtis to Major General Sykes, Fort Leavenworth September 27, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part III: Correspondence*, 278 – 279, 335, 341, 427. In addition to the personnel losses of the Union forces at Flat Rock and Cabin Creek, 202 wagons, 5 ambulances, 40 artillery horses and 1,253 mules were captured. The Confederates seized enough materiel to sustain their efforts into 1865 with this single raid.

made an attempt to seize the supply train at Cabin Creek, with the exception of one regiment to secure and return the hay making machines back to Fort Smith if possible, situation depending.⁶⁹² Internal department communications reflected doubt however, and Thayer attempted to consolidate his forces as Price's army crossed the border into Missouri.

Kansas black militias form

The danger that Price's army posed to Kansas was accentuated by Thayer's decision to concentrate his forces at Fort Gibson and Fort Smith. This left the southern border of Kansas open to raids. Thayer believed that he could hold the forts, and claimed rations sufficient to weather a siege existed at Fort Smith. His guidance for Fort Gibson's defense involved a combination of reconnaissance to maintain situational awareness, rations reductions, and further fortification of Fort Gibson.⁶⁹³ While Thayer's army braced for attack, Union forces in Kansas adopted a solution that may have been influenced by the fighting skill and valor of the First and Second Kansas Colored.

The situation in Indian Territory and Price's invasion of Missouri called for extreme measures to defend Kansas. General Curtis recognized the utility of Kansas' black male population and contrary to state militia laws, issued General Order 54 authorizing all men regardless of color between ages eighteen and sixty to arm themselves. As a result, fourteen companies of black militia enrolled for the state's defense. Former First Kansas Colored officer Henry Seaman commanded one of those militia companies, Company E, First Battalion from Mound City. Additional black militia companies formed at

⁶⁹² Major General Sykes to Major Charlot, Paola, Kansas, September 17; Thayer to Wattles, Headquarters District of the Frontier, Fort Smith, September 18, 19, 1864, *OR: Series I, Vol 41, PT III: Correspondence*, 235-236, 238, 249.

⁶⁹³ Thayer to Steele HQ; Thayer to Wattles, Headquarters District of the Frontier, Ft Smith, September 24, 28 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part III: Correspondence*, 341, 439.

Leavenworth and Wyandotte.⁶⁹⁴ Black men proved willing to serve when martial law suspended Kansas's militia laws that barred black militia membership. Unlike enlisting in the twin Kansas Colored regiments, black men could remain close to their communities and serve in local defense with the high likelihood of short-term service, and minimal disruption to their private lives.

A sign of the growing awareness of blacks' utility to Kansas appeared at the beginning of October, when a Fort Scott newspaper carried advertising for a unit of black light artillery commanded by black officers. The recruiter for the new battery was Lieutenant William D. Matthews, who had been recruiting since June, 1864. Joining him was Lieutenant Philip Minor, who commanded a two-gun section of Parrott guns, and Lieutenant Henry Copeland. The three men were former officers of Company D, First Kansas Colored.⁶⁹⁵ The trio was not alone. Roger Cunningham estimated eleven black men officered the companies of the First Colored Militia Regiment.⁶⁹⁶ Kansas papers urged black militia enrollment, and the *Kansas Tribune* and the *Leavenworth Daily Times* carried reports of the black community's willingness to serve as soldiers.⁶⁹⁷ Organizing the overall black militia effort was another former First Kansas Colored officer, Second Kansas Colored's Captain Richard Hinton.

The Price Raid forced Kansan whites to reconsider the enrollment of blacks into the state militia, an action contrary to the state constitution. The *Leavenworth Evening*

⁶⁹⁴ Roger D. Cunningham "Welcoming 'Pa' on the Kaw: Kansas's "Colored" Militia and the 1864 Price Raid" *Kansas History* (Summer 2002), 89-90; *RG 94: Seventy-ninth U.S. Colored Infantry (New), Combined Military Service Records, Gilbert Van*. Cunningham cites the case of Gilbert Van, who later enlisted with the First Kansas Colored for the duration of the war. Van is a compelling example because he volunteered for the emergency, then apparently felt inspired to enlist after his experience convinced him of the need for black men elsewhere to fight the Confederacy.

⁶⁹⁵ Recruiting broadside, October 1, 1864, Fort Scott *Daily Monitor*

⁶⁹⁶ Roger D. Cunningham "Welcoming 'Pa' on the Kaw," 91-93.

⁶⁹⁷ October 11, 16, 1864, *Kansas Tribune*; October 12 *Leavenworth Daily Times*.

Bulletin agitated for full enlistment of all eligible Kansas residents during the summer of 1864, and advocated a militia organized “without regard to color.”⁶⁹⁸ When Confederate General Price’s army approached Kansas City in mid-October, it generated a flurry of correspondence, and Union commanders demanded that all eligible men be rushed to defend Kansas’s borders. Captain Richard Hinton of the Second Kansas Colored to was ordered to “bring forward all colored troops, [and] procure arms and equipments as are usually given to other volunteer troops...Captain Hinton will also collect all colored troops...[and] bring them forward with all speed.”⁶⁹⁹ Orders also specifically dictated the formation of black artillery sections - including Lieutenant Philip Minor’s section - and the forwarding of black militia composed of overage and invalid men from Lawrence to join the Union ranks against Price’s army. Reports of black artillerymen deserting the light artillery battery in Leavenworth were met with orders to arrest the deserters and return them to duty.⁷⁰⁰ Kansas’s state of emergency dictated that all possible manpower be concentrated for the state’s defense. Therefore, the Union army commandeered the steamer *Benton* to speed the black militia toward the Union lines, and committed the “Iron Clad” cavalry from Leavenworth to join the Union forces south of Kansas City.⁷⁰¹ The former refugee slaves turned Union soldiers added valuable strength to the border defenses, and the conspicuous mustering of blacks gave notice that Kansans could put aside personal opinions on race when invasion threatened all. Kansan blacks were allies

⁶⁹⁸ Roger D. Cunningham, “Welcoming Pa on the Kaw: Kansas’s Colored Militia and the 1864 Price Raid,” *Kansas History* (Summer, 2002), 92.

⁶⁹⁹ Major C.C. Charlot, AAG Department of Kansas, Special Field Order HQ Army of the Border, near Independence, MO, Oct 19, 1864; John Williams AAG to Major General Curtis, Fort Leavenworth October 20, 1864; R.J. Hinton to Major Charlot, Kansas City, MO Oct 20, 1864. *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part IV: Correspondence*, 117, 143, 149.

⁷⁰⁰ John Willans AAG to Captain R.D. Mobley, October 21, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part IV: Correspondence*, 167.

⁷⁰¹ R.H. Hunt to Captain Willans, Wyandotte Oct 16, 1864, Major C.S. Charlot to Captain Hinton, October 20, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part IV: Correspondence*, 15, 167.

of convenience however, and white support diminished when the emergency abated.

While the danger of Price's Raid receded after his defeat, the threat posed by Confederate armies in Indian Territory did not. General Thayer's troops stood directly in the path of Price's retreat, and the threat of attack from Gano to the Union army's rear forced Thayer to order a series of contradictory troop movements in order to meet both threats.

Price's Retreat and threats to the District of the Frontier

News slowly filtered back to General Thayer of the fighting in Kansas and Missouri, but the lack of solid intelligence blinded Thayer to the enemy's exact locations within his massive command. Thayer nervously queried the commander at Fort Gibson, Colonel Wattles for reports of the enemy's movements, and if attacked, directed Wattles to use the Second Brigade to contest any assault. The First Kansas Colored and the Eleventh United States Colored Infantry, although primarily employed as train escorts could assemble swiftly to deter any direct attack upon Fort Gibson. Thayer's orders contained a second proviso; if Wattles felt the situation secure, he would send the fort's corn supply in a supply train to Fort Smith under the escort of the First Kansas Colored.⁷⁰² Thayer's needs outweighed Wattle's. Fort Gibson's corn would sustain Fort Smith if the Confederate army attacked. Fort Smith was the key to western Arkansas and if it fell, the Union strategy for the district would collapse. Despite rumors of Fort Smith evacuation in Kansas papers, Thayer's intended to hold Fort Smith to the exclusion of all other forts and outposts under his command. Accordingly, Wattle's was ordered to move his command to Fort Smith, excepting a skeletal garrison to hold Fort Gibson and destroy

⁷⁰² Thayer to Wattles, Headquarters District of the Frontier, Fort Smith, October 9, 11, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part III: Correspondence*, 725, 727; Major General Steele to Major General Canby, Little Rock, October 31, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part I: Reports*, 853.

military stores, if an attack on Fort Smith appeared imminent.⁷⁰³ Reports of General Price's impending entry into the Indian Territory forced Thayer's hand, and Colonel Wattles release his reserve, including the First Kansas Colored, for the defense of Fort Smith.

The First Kansas Colored departed Fort Gibson on October 20, just as reports of Price's army at Springfield caused panic in the Army of the Frontier. The Union army in Indian Territory prepared for the worst, the potential for the sack of Kansas and the re-entry of Price's army into Indian Territory a very real threat if the Union failed to defeat the Confederate general's army. While Williams' brigade marched east, events in Kansas decided the fate of the Union in Kansas and Indian Territory.

The battles of the Big Blue, and then the culminating of Westport on October 23 broke Price's army, and it retreated south into Indian Territory, groping toward the safety of the Arkansas River. Thayer lacked precise intelligence about the location of Price's forces and unsure if the Confederate general would strike at Fort Gibson or Fort Smith, queried Colonel Wattles at Fort Gibson as to Price's location. Thayer's last dispatch from Fort Gibson mentioned Price about forty miles from the Fort. General Thayer could not deploy his forces with certainty until his scouts confirmed Price's location.⁷⁰⁴ The situation in western Arkansas and General Price's entry into Indian Territory did not offer Thayer many options. Cooper's undefeated Confederate army could count on support from guerrilla bands, and General Gano maintained a significant number of men just

⁷⁰³ Headquarters District of The Frontier, Fort Smith, October 13, 1864 Thayer to Colonel C.W. Blair, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part III: Correspondence*, 832; Thayer to Wattles, Headquarters District of the Frontier, Fort Smith Oct 18, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part IV: Correspondence*, 74-75. Fort Scott papers reported Thayer's command ready to abandon Fort Smith, a course of action unlikely given Thayer's intent to defend the post.

⁷⁰⁴ Thayer to Wattles, October 27, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part 4: Correspondence*, 272; Thayer to Wattles, Headquarters District of frontier, Fort Smith, October 1, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part 3: Correspondence*, 531.

south of the Arkansas River, well positioned to strike at Thayer's army. General Cooper's strategy to slowly strangling Fort Smith's supply paid dividends by forcing Thayer to retain his Union garrison Fort Smith. General Steele – Thayer's superior – knew that Thayer could not afford to abandon his supply line to Little Rock to marshal a reconnaissance in force to locate Price's army. If General Price united with General Gano on his way south through Indian Territory, Fort Smith could fall to their combined armies.⁷⁰⁵ Until Thayer received relief, the Union garrison at Fort Smith remained tied to the fort.

Thayer possessed a finite number of regiments to contest Price if he chose to attack Fort Smith. When Thayer ordered the First Kansas Colored, the Fifty-Fourth United States Colored Infantry and a section of the second Arkansas battery to make hast to Fort Smith, the troop movements attracted General Cooper's attention.⁷⁰⁶ The departure of the Colored regiments may have influenced Cooper to conduct a demonstration against Fort Smith's vicinity. Almost blind due to poor intelligence, Thayer reasonably assumed Cooper's Confederates were massing for an attack in support of Price's forces.

Spurred into action by Price's entry into the District of the Frontier, Union efforts at Little Rock to relieve Thayer accelerated. General Steele saw opportunity in Price's defeat, and acted with this potential in mind. Mindful of Thayer's supply requirements and limited offensive capacity, Steele sent a supply train escorted by 3,500 cavalry and 1,500 infantry to Fort Smith. Reinforced, Thayer's command would have the combat

⁷⁰⁵ Report of Major Thomas Derry, Third Wisconsin Cavalry, Little Rock, October 14, 1864; Report Number 1, Headquarters Department of Arkansas, Little Rock October 24, 1864, Major General Steele, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part I: Reports*, 819, 852. Thayer lacked more than forty days rations, a major factor mitigating against even limited offensive action against Cooper's army.

⁷⁰⁶ Thayer to Wattles, Headquarters District of The Frontier, Fort Smith, October 19,20, 1864, *OR: Series I, Vol 41, PT IV: Correspondence*, 107-108, 130-131. Thayer's intelligence did not clearly enumerate Price's troop numbers. Therefore Thayer's orders appear prudent given estimates of 7,000 men under Gano and an estimated 15-20,000 men under Price.

power to halt Price if he attempted to cross the Arkansas River anywhere between Fort Smith and Little Rock.⁷⁰⁷ As the situation developed, Thayer, informed of Price's defeats at Westport and Mine Creek (near Fort Scott) and reassured by reports that Price lacked the artillery for a siege, ordered Colonel Wattles to remain at Fort Gibson to watch for General Price's army and contest its passage. Major General Curtis and Major General Steele both intended to employ Thayer's army to arrest Price's retreat. Thayer didn't believe Price would halt to fight however, and predicted Price would retreat until the safety of the Red River and the Confederate forces assembled in southwest Arkansas.⁷⁰⁸ Ultimately Price's demoralized army passed by Thayer's fortifications without offering battle; Thayer's army didn't fire a single shot at Price's retreating army.

Price, likely aided by intelligence provided by spies and scouts, crossed the Arkansas River at Webber's Falls through the gap between the Union commands at Fort Gibson and Fort Smith. Cooper's cavalry screened Price's retreat by massing near Webbers' Falls. Thayer, unnerved by the prospect of losing Fort Smith to Cooper while in pursuit of Price, abandoned the pursuit with the weak excuse that "he thought the pursuit over."⁷⁰⁹ Price escaped with the remains of his once massive army to lick his wounds after the disastrous conclusion of his failed raid into Missouri. It was now the Confederate's turn to assess their army's viability, large numbers of troops having been lost in Price's adventure.

⁷⁰⁷ Brigadier General Thayer to Colonel Charles Jennison, Headquarters District of the Frontier October 24, 1864; Major General Reynolds to Major General Canby, Headquarters 19th Army Corps, Mouth of White River, October 26, 1864, *OR: Series I, Vol 41, PT IV: Correspondence*, 218, 248.

⁷⁰⁸ Curtis to Thayer, Fort Scott, October 26, 1864; Thayer to Wattles, Headquarters District of the Frontier, Ft Smith, October 27, 1864; Wattles to Thayer, November 2, 1864; Steele to Thayer, Little Rock, October 29, 1864; *OR: Series I, Vol 41, PT IV: Correspondence*, 249, 272, 308-309, 1040.

⁷⁰⁹ Thayer to Wattles, Thayer to Brigadier General Sanborn, Thayer to Steele, Headquarters District of the Frontier, November 1, 8, 12 1864; Steele to Brigadier General C.C. Andrews, Little Rock, November 12, 1864, *OR: Series I, Vol 41, PT IV: Correspondence*, 386, 493, 534

Regrouping

The fall's campaigning spared the First Kansas Colored little time to rest or refit. The regiment returned to Fort Smith in time to construct regimental winter quarters under the supervision of Lieutenant E.F. Bowton. The systematic dismantling of abandoned homes supplied lumber for quarters, and Captain Graton felt this particular duty the just deserts of southern secessionists.⁷¹⁰ Regimental garrison duties drew men away from the command to perform their duties as blacksmiths, orderlies, charcoal burners, and ambulance drivers. The regiment also detailed escorts for the embattled steamers plying the Arkansas River. Companies B and F served as escorts in November aboard the steamers *Carrie Jacobs* and *Green Durbin*, on the return run to Little Rock.⁷¹¹ A staple of the regiment, wagon train escort duty continued into December, and when the steamer *Doane* struck an obstacle in the Arkansas River on December 16, the regiment escorted a recovery train to Clarksville to salvage the steamer's cargo before rebels could seize it.⁷¹² Civil War armies in the west operated on a seasonal routine, and as winter settled upon the land, the pace of operations slowed. During this period the regiment slowly reconsolidated its ranks and received returning members of the command from their various duties across the department.

Major Ward returned to the regiment in early December when his time on Major General Curtis's staff ended with the collapse of Price's campaign. The regiment also

⁷¹⁰ Company A Record Books, October entries, *RG 94 Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT, Order Book, Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4*; Special Order 21, October 28, 1864, RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.; Graton letter to spouse, November 27, 1864, Graton Collection, Kansas State Historical Society.

⁷¹¹ Company A records, Janet B. Hewitt, *Supplement to the Official Records*, 633-636.

⁷¹² *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part IV: Correspondence*, 838.

received a new veteran Surgeon, J. Fulton Ensor, from the First Maryland cavalry.⁷¹³ New officers joined the rosters of the companies as well, Lieutenants William R. Smith formerly of the Twelfth Kansas Infantry joined Company A, and James A. McGinnis of the Ninth Kansas Cavalry joined Company D.⁷¹⁴ Lieutenant Colonel Bowles finally dropped off the Regimental rolls. Bowles, the regiment's capricious second in command, was dismissed from military service after over almost a year's absence from the regiment.⁷¹⁵ Captain John Graton greatly resented Bowles for Graton possessed knowledge of Bowles activities in Kansas that made him especially bitter. Graton claimed "Bowles lays around home yet, has gone into the tanning business, reports say he lays around home to watch it...Williams is using every exertion to get him out of the service...[he] draws \$165.00 a month, [and] sleeps with his wife."⁷¹⁶ Bowles had not committed any crime during his absence, but his actions revealed a man no longer

⁷¹³General Field Orders 7, George S. Hampton Assistant Adjutant General, Headquarters First Division, Army of the Border, November 22, 1864, OR: Series I, Volume 34, Part IV: Correspondence, 650; Special Orders 258, Headquarters Department of Virginia and North Carolina, Sept 19, 1864; Appointment of Surgeon J. Fulton Ensor, Sanford B. Hunt, Office Surgeon in Chief, Headquarters District of the Frontier, Fort Smith, November 7, 1864, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Book, E112-115, PI-17, vol 2 of 4*. The detachment of officers to duties with higher command staffs and the ever-present regimental duties forced the regiment's officers to rely increasingly upon their Non-Commissioned Officers to conduct the daily training and maintenance of the regiment's companies.

⁷¹⁴ Appointment Order William Smith, Special Orders 27, December 11, 1864; Appointment Orders James McGuinness, Special Orders 28, Captain John Graton, Headquarters First Kansas Colored, Fort Smith, December 28 1864, *RG 94 Records of the Adjutant general's Office, Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT, Order Book, Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4*.

⁷¹⁵ Secretary of War to Major General Curtis, War Department, Adjutant General's Office, Washington, June 20, 1864; Special Orders 143, Headquarters Department of Kansas, Fort Leavenworth, July 7, 1864; Special Orders 452, Secretary of War, War Department, Adjutant General's Office, Washington Dec 17, 1864, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Book, E112-115, PI-17, vol 2 of 4*. Bowles, claimed resignation in 1863, but Senator Lane on July 11, 1864 petitioned Major General Curtis to grant Bowles detached service as "a good friend of mine and a good officer." Ultimately, despite employment on a Court Martial board and multiple chances to keep the War Department apprised of his actions, Bowles was dishonorably dismissed for neglect of duty in not rendering the reports required by paragraph 468 of the Army Regulations, absence without leave, and for repeatedly disobeying War Department orders directing him to rejoin his regiment. Major Ward's promotion to Lieutenant Colonel followed shortly afterwards.

⁷¹⁶ Letter Graton to spouse, November 27, 1864, Fort Smith, Arkansas, *John Graton Collection*, Kansas State Historical Society.

committed to the cause, and seemingly content to manipulate the military to achieve his own ends.

The regimental recruiting detachment left Kansas during this time, in part prevented from entering Indian Territory during Price's Raid. When Price's forces retreated, the recruiting detachment in Kansas set forth for Fort Smith to rejoin the regiment. The group of seven men consisted of Captains Welsh and Thrasher, Lieutenant Macy, the chaplain of the 13th Kansas, Chaplain Gardner, and three Kansas soldiers. The recruiting party entered Indian Territory in November, perhaps convinced that danger had passed with Price's defeat. However, the small detachment fell afoul of the dregs of the Confederate army as Quantrill's guerrilla band moved south to greener pastures. The guerrillas ambushed the party at Timber Hills on November 19, and slaughtered its members in a flurry of gunshots, leaving little but bloody scraps of clothing, discarded Enfield rifles and Captain Welsh's personal papers. Captain Thrasher and two soldiers escaped, and Thrasher later wrote Lieutenant Eberle Macy's father to inform him of the circumstances of his son's death and that of Captain Welch. Thrasher's letter described a hundred bushwhackers attacking the small group, a pattern Quantrill's band employed with success in Kansas and Missouri.⁷¹⁷ The Confederate raiders took no prisoners.

The detachment's annihilation affected Captain Graton especially hard. His wrote "The First Nigger is out of luck this year, a week ago yesterday Capt[ain]s Thrasher and Welch, L[ieutenant]t Macy and four or five others were set upon by a party and it is

⁷¹⁷ Richard J Hinton, *Rebel Invasion Of Missouri And Kansas, And The Campaign Of The Army Of The Border Against General Sterling Price in October and November 1864*. Leavenworth, Kansas: Chicago, Church and Goodman, 1865, 305-307. Thrasher's letter to Macy's father details an ambush six miles north of Cabin Creek on 19 November. The small party had attempted to pass through an area that was known to be haunted by bandits, and was the scene of at last three major actions against Union forces.

supposed that they are either killed or captured... Macy belongs to my co[mpany], and has lately been married.”⁷¹⁸ The loss of another two veteran officers of the regiment cut deeply. However, some men saw opportunity in this loss, and a most unethical act occurred when a brother officer used their deaths to insinuate his way back into the regiment.

Ethan Earle, upon hearing of the deaths of his one-time fellow officers, used the occasion to petition Senator Lane for an appointment as Major of the regiment, claiming that the Regiment faced imminent annihilation because of its incompetent and unpopular commander.⁷¹⁹ Earle crudely claimed that Colonel Williams promised the position of regimental major to him. Earle’s claims went unanswered; Senator Lane never pursued a Major’s commission for Earle, and Williams had no interest in doing so. Earle burned bridges when he forced his commission upon Lane, and his political maneuverings may have been his undoing after he resigned his commission.

The Evacuation of Fort Smith

The crisis sparked by Price’s Raid and the Army of the Frontier’s inability to curb guerrilla efforts in western Arkansas precipitated a thorough reexamination of the Army of the Frontier at Fort Gibson and Fort Smith. The conclusion: Thayer lacked control over the regional economy, failed to reinvigorate efforts to establish farming communities capable of supplying the District of the Frontier’s needs, and continually relied on other commands for logistical support for increasing numbers of refugees.

⁷¹⁸ Letter Graton to spouse, November 27, 1864, Fort Smith, Arkansas, *John Graton Collection*.

⁷¹⁹ Letter Ethan Earle to Senator James Lane, November 25, 1864, *file RH M528, Lames Henry Lane Collection*, Kansas State Historical Society. Earle referred to himself as “the old Captain,” as if his former soldiers cherished his memory, an example of abolitionist paternalism reasserting itself in the presence of opportunity. The “incompetent officer” in question was Captain Graton, a man beset by an officer shortage, widely spread companies, and the absence of Major Ward on detached service with Major general Curtis during the Price Raid into Missouri.

Thayer's logistical problems appeared to have only one solution - the evacuation of Fort Smith - and the garrison's movement downriver to Little Rock.

The garrisons could not abandon their duties immediately. General Thayer proved a man of insight and compassion as he attempted to carry out the evacuation order. Unpaid soldiers, unpredictable transport and ongoing defensive operations all tested his abilities. River steamers continued to supply his command, but several wrecks in mid-December, including that of the steamer *Doane*, demanded that Thayer disperse his resources to conduct cargo salvage operations. Thayer also requested that the garrison at Fort Smith be paid since paymasters had not paid the men of his command for at least four months, and soldiers' pay arrears were beginning to affect morale.⁷²⁰ The pay issue hit close to home, and as winter set in, soldiers' families faced starvation if they could not procure food.

The evacuation orders for Fort Smith arrived at the worst possible time for Fort Smith's inhabitants. Forage proved impossible to obtain in quantity, and rations equally so. Steele's order stressed Thayer's abilities, and those of his command to the limit. A recapitulation of Thayer's command provides an understanding of the massive scale of the evacuation:

I have but 100 teams, ninety five of them loading up with forage eighteen miles below Clarksville. I have here twenty-five pieces of artillery but no artillery or cavalry horses. I can only move the artillery by taking mule teams which will require fifty, thus leaving me fifty teams for other transportation. I cannot leave before the trains from Fort Scott arrive around the 1st January...I have here 170 tons of ordnance stores, and 205 tons of quartermaster stores. When we leave Fort Smith the inhabitants will be left to the mercy of guerrillas, and loyal people will be subjected to terrible suffering. Those not killed outright will be robbed of their subsistence, and in a short time will be

⁷²⁰ Major General Thayer to Lieutenant Colonel Greene, Headquarters District of the Frontier Dec 12, 16 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part IV: Correspondence*, 943.

in an actual state of starvation. There are at least 500 persons, both black and white with no transportation and there is none that can be obtained here. I respectfully ask that a train as large as can be spared be sent here to assist in transporting government stores and removing these people. The Indian troops were raised for service in the Indian Territory and any attempt to remove them would be disastrous. They will become entirely demoralized and utterly unfit for duty elsewhere. All those Indians not in the service are of that class denominated refugees, and should they be moved in any direction it should be Fort Scott Kansas. Unless I receive instructions to the contrary I shall leave the Indian troops where they are. I will be making all my preparations to move as soon as my trains arrive.⁷²¹

Thayer's problems could not be solved merely by removing the military garrisons of Fort Gibson and Fort Smith; he had to consider the effect upon the families of the soldiers and their needs as well as where they would go. His Indian regiments could not be compelled to depart Indian Territory, and any move perceived as abandoning them to the Confederate guerrillas would be a morale debacle. Thayer could not abandon the civilians in his district, especially in the middle of winter, despite military demands. Thayer also had to consider the needs of his sick soldiers. The men could not march with the escorts or serve actively on the steamers. Their needs demanded additional boats to ensure the evacuation didn't create unnecessary casualties by exposing wounded or sick men to hard service. Surgeon Ensor boarded the *Annie Jacobs* to tend to the First Kansas Colored's soldiers, and ensured the regiment possessed a dedicated medical asset for the evacuation proceedings.⁷²²

Obtaining transport and escorts for the exodus south created a great stir of activity at Fort Smith. The increase in river traffic also proved an unmistakable signal to

⁷²¹Thayer to Steele, Headquarters District of the Frontier, Dec 17, 1864, *OR: Series I, Volume 41, Part IV: Correspondence*, 866-867.

⁷²²Sanford B. Hunt, Office Surgeon in Chief, Headquarters District of the Frontier, Fort Smith, December 23, 1864, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Book, E112-115, PI-17, Volume 2 of 4*.

Cooper's forces in Indian Territory. Interdicting steamers could provide the Confederates supplies to weather the winter and prove their ability to strike Union supply lines with impunity. The Confederate forces wintering over in Indian Territory consumed massive amounts of forage and foodstuffs. The summer campaigns of 1864 came with a high price for the Confederate Indians, especially the Choctaw. Fort Smith's proximity to the Choctaw Nation resulted in many foraging expeditions, Confederate and Union, and the military columns stripped the country of its stocks of corn and cattle. Confederate soldiers remaining in the Choctaw and Cherokee Nations appropriated so much food that the Indian civilians faced starvation. Fort Gibson fared little better despite supply trains and steamers.⁷²³ Fort Smith's evacuation would have effects that rippled across the region and touched on nearly every inhabitant's existence.

Over the next several weeks, preparations for evacuation did not disrupt necessary military activities, and foraging expeditions continued to extract sustenance for Fort Smith from an ever-widening geographical area. Contemporary depictions of areas near Fort Smith, and those beyond a day's ride were striking. Captain John Graton's letters often mention food, and when the regiment foraged fifty miles north to Cane Hill in the Cherokee Nation it found a bounty of apples and over three hundred hogs.⁷²⁴ Food could be had, but the difficulty of finding enough to feed an entire army exceeded the ability of Fort Smith's soldiers and the devastated farms of western Arkansas.

⁷²³ P.P. Pitchlynn, Principal Chief of Choctaw Nation to Major General Maxey Executive Office, Eagletown, CN, December 29, 1864, *OR: Series I, Vol 53: Supplement, Serial No 111*, The National Historical Society, 1971, 1035; Arrell Morgan Gibson, "Native Americans and the Civil War," *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Autumn, 1985), 391-392.

⁷²⁴ Graton letter, Fort Smith, Arkansas January 5, 1865, *John Graton Correspondence Collection*, Microfilm Box 913.

The First Kansas Colored's soldiers possessed few opportunities to enjoy the rich bounty of Cane Hill. The evacuation of Fort Smith required details from the regiment to picket the north side of the Arkansas River, while other companies assisted with the loading and unloading of steamers, and processing refugees for departure from Fort Smith.⁷²⁵ Securing the cargoes of damaged or grounded steamers also demanded the regiment's attention. When steamers such as the *Doane* grounded on sand bars or struck sunken tree snags, the garrison executed a forced march to the wreck site. The *Doane's* wreck required the regiment to march seventy miles south along the Arkansas River, then back again as escorts for wagons full of salvaged goods. The pressing need for salvage operations eased somewhat at the start of the year when the evacuation order was cancelled after vigorous protests by civil and military leaders.

Perhaps persuaded by the appeals of Unionist Arkansans that abandoning the fort could signal an end to the ongoing efforts to bring Arkansas back into the Union fold, President Lincoln countermanded the evacuation order before Fort Smith had been completely abandoned. Lincoln ordered General Grant, if necessary, to reoccupy the fort.⁷²⁶ C.P. Bertrand, the former mayor of Little Rock, appealed to President Lincoln, citing the loss of congressional districts and counties in a state that recently conducted elections in favor of the Union. Kansas's newspapers offered other reasons for retaining Thayer's forces at Fort Smith, and the Fort Scott *Weekly Monitor* opined that abandoning Fort Gibson and Fort Smith would endanger Kansas. Evacuating the forts made neither military nor moral sense since General Joseph Reynolds, Steele's replacement as

⁷²⁵ Brigadier General Thayer to Colonel Williams, Headquarters Frontier Division, Seventh Army Corps, Fort Smith, January 8, 1865, RG 94: *Adjutant general's office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁷²⁶ Edwin C. Bearss and Arrell M. Gibson, *Fort Smith: Little Gibraltar on the Arkansas*, Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010, 293-294.

commander of the District of Arkansas, retained 40,000 men at Little Rock. Although Reynolds halted the evacuation, he commanded all Colored regiments to march to Little Rock.⁷²⁷

The First Kansas Colored's move to Little Rock began on January 16, 1865, a combination of marches and riverboat escort duties along the Arkansas River. Their time at Fort Smith - on half rations because of Confederate raids on river-borne supplies - had been exceedingly difficult.⁷²⁸ The boats continued to require escort details while transiting the river, and when boats risked travel with inadequate escorts or no protective detail, guerrilla bands struck. A Confederate attack at Ivy Ford on January 17, 1865 captured the steamer *Chippewa*, and guerrillas took a large number of refugee families and blacks into captivity.⁷²⁹ The river could no longer be counted as a safeguard against raids.

The Confederate attack at Ivy Ford compelled Thayer allocate increasing numbers of men to ensure the river remained open. Colonel Thomas Bowen of the Thirteenth Kansas Cavalry, who commanded the escort for the steamers on the Arkansas River, reported as many as 1,500 Confederates with artillery threatening to cut river traffic. Consequently, the First and Second Kansas Colored arrived at Dardanelle on January 21, and secured the cargo of the *Annie Jacobs*. When news of the brigade's arrival at Dardanelle reached

⁷²⁷ Fort Scott *Weekly Monitor*, January 12, 1865.

⁷²⁸ General Orders 1, Colonel Williams, Headquarters Second Brigade, Frontier Division, Fort Smith, January 16, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Graton letter, Fort Smith, Arkansas January 15, 1865, *John Graton Correspondence Collection*, Microfilm Box 913.

⁷²⁹ Report Number 1, Colonel Abraham H. Ryan, Third Arkansas Cavalry (Union), Lewisburg, Arkansas, January 27, 1864; Report Number 3, Major General Magruder, General Orders 18, Headquarters District of Arkansas, Washington, Arkansas, January 25, 1865 by command of MG Magruder, *OR: Series I, Volume 48, Part I: Reports and Correspondence*, 13,16-17.

Confederate ears, the raiders withdrew southwards.⁷³⁰ Williams did not attempt to pursue the mounted guerrillas but instead remained in the vicinity of Dardanelle while his brigade foraged for a few days.

While his brigade consolidated its positions, local southern sympathizers cursed the black infantry's foraging parties and their white officers. One foraging expedition in Dardanelle conducted by a Union officer and black troops, garnered two full wagons of corn, several hundred pounds of meat and chickens, and potatoes. According to the diary of the aggrieved party, the family deprived of these victuals prayed for God's strength to resist the "hateful negroes." The passage of the Union steamer escorts left wrecked communities in their wake. Many log homes in Dardanelle burned to keep Federal troops warm and to shore up entrenchments.⁷³¹ Convinced that the lack of Confederate opposition no longer required his brigade's intervention, the Second Brigade resumed the march south to Little Rock. Though no resistance was encountered for the rest of the march, two men of the First Kansas Colored drowned at Ivy Ford.⁷³² The First Kansas Colored arrived at Little Rock prepared for the next chapter in the regiment's history.

⁷³⁰ Report Number 2, Operations January 17-24, 1865, Colonel Thomas M Bowen, Thirteenth Kansas Infantry, Commanding US Transports, Jan 24, 1865; Brigadier General Thayer to Major John Levering, Assistant Adjutant General, Department of Arkansas; Colonel Ryan to Major General J.J. Reynolds, Dardanelle, Arkansas, January 21, 22, 1864; *OR: Series I, Volume 48, Part I: Reports and Correspondence*, 15, 605, 613.

⁷³¹ Morrow, Mary Hannah Johnston, 1847-1876, Diary and related materials, (1862...1869), 1876, *Series I: Diary, Folder 2: Bound Volume*, MS M 834.320, Loc 121, Special Collections, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, 23-24.

⁷³² "First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers – Infantry," *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. I*, Privates Dewly and Drisdorn drowned and Private Buchamp expired January 12, 1865 at Fort Smith.

The First Kansas Colored experienced many traumatic changes during the campaigns of 1864. The Regiment lost many of its soldiers to combat, and the indiscriminate massacre of wounded and captured personnel. Officers resigned in large numbers, depriving the regiment of veteran leadership at a time when the regiment's enemies increased their efforts to destroy the regiment. Guerrilla warfare increased in scope and intensity in western Arkansas, and the regiment responded by supporting Union efforts at fort Gibson and Fort Smith. The First Kansas Colored served as the lynchpin of Thayer's Second Brigade, the most experienced of the Colored Regiments continually escorting trains and responding to raids throughout the fall. The effect of the Regiment's efforts is difficult to measure in quantitative terms, but the intensity of Confederate hatred confirms the Regiment's place as one of the District of the Frontier's most effective units. Poison Spring did little to dim the value of the regiment, and despite serving as part of the Army of Arkansas at Jenkins' Ferry, the regiment soldiered on as the premium Colored Regiment in western Arkansas.

The regiment's identity had evolved during the campaigns of 1864, and by December the transition from once-despised experiment to valued combat formation was complete. The Federal government recognized the place of black soldiers in the army by systematizing the Colored Regiments, removing state and assigning numerical designations. Instead of the First Kansas Colored being a state regiment, it became a

United States Regiment, the Seventy-Ninth Regiment United States Colored troops.⁷³³ Its distinct Kansas identity was now subsumed to its national role in the union war effort.

The regiment experienced a final evolution in its character at Little Rock. The campaigns of 1863 and 1864 exacted a high toll on soldiers, and many continue to endure the pain of half-healed wounds and disease. The disabled veterans of the regiment began to leave service in the spring of 1865, honored men who gave much to attain their freedom. The First Kansas Colored's service at Little Rock would witness the final disintegration of the Confederacy, and the stirrings of Reconstruction in Arkansas.

The First Kansas Colored's record of military service begun at Island Mound and sustained through Price's raid, established a timeless reputation for excellence. The regiments sustained the pride of black Kansans at a time when resentment toward refugees in Kansas spiked as the result of increasing numbers of refugees. The First Kansas Colored's officers and men continued to serve the Union cause with fidelity and stoic steadfastness, a tradition the regiment sustained as its men marched southward to Little Rock and new missions.

⁷³³ Secretary of War, Orders Number 27, December 13, 1864, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Book, E112-115, PI-17, vol 2 of 4.*

Chapter 10 Jubilee

When the First Kansas Colored departed Fort Smith, it left behind a community to which it possessed links through its soldiers and their families. Little Rock was a relatively unknown place for many, and although the regiment rested several days outside the city after the retreat of Camden, the likelihood that the fatigued men of the regiment explored the vicinity for anything but food appears slim. Little Rock would tempt many with its dubious entertainments, the allure of liquor, horse racing, gambling and prostitutes too difficult for some to resist. Little Rock, and the regiment's subsequent posting, Pine Bluff, also gave soldiers the opportunity to directly aid in improving the welfare of black refugees by establishing security and protection in a state where the new relationship between the races was undergoing agonizing birth pains.

The First Kansas Colored arrived at Little Rock in two phases. Company F, which served as the escorts aboard the steamers *Carrie Jacobs* and *Green Durbin*, reached Little Rock when *Carrie Jacobs* docked on December 29, 1864.⁷³⁴ Company F debarked and marched to a camp located near the Arkansas River and a Freedman's home. Lieutenant Creps' men then shared picket duty with Captain Herrick's company of the Sixty-Ninth United States Colored Infantry. The soldiers of Company F received six four-man wedge tents and a wall tent for Creps. The tents served as the company's domiciles until a cavalry picket relieved the company of its detail on February 15, 1865. While awaiting the remainder of the regiment, Creps and his men took in their new surroundings and

⁷³⁴ Janet B. Hewitt (ed.) *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Part II, Record of Events, Volume 78, Serial No. 90* (Wilmington, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1998) 633-636.

swapped war stories (and more tangible items) with black Arkansans who served the Union army's various departments.

Little Rock changed greatly between April 1864 and February 1865, and the situation Company F's soldiers now experienced constituted a radical change from operations at Fort Smith. The refugee numbers at Little Rock had swelled prior to the regiment's arrival, but General Reynolds refused to expend great sums of money to maintain them, and shipped them north by all available means.⁷³⁵ Albert Smith, a contractor in the Quartermaster Department during January 1865, recorded the comings and goings of riverboats along the Arkansas River. His letters detailed the constant movement of vessels transporting as many as fourteen hundred refugees apiece to Cairo, Illinois. Food speculation was rife, and the price of food commodities shot up as demand increased. Purchasing basic foodstuffs such as flour and potatoes exceeded the ability to pay of many refugees. Begging for scraps of bread became the norm.⁷³⁶ Harris hypothesized that the boat traffic was linked to preparations for a spring campaign into Texas.⁷³⁷ Events proved Harris correct, but for the black soldiers of the First Kansas Colored and Williams' Second Brigade, their arrival at Little Rock presaged a new period of service as garrison troops.

The Regiment's arrival in late January brought it closer to a major depot than it had been seen since the formative months at Fort Scott. Perhaps in recognition of their new duties as garrison troops, the Regiment's soldiers received issues of equipment to replace

⁷³⁵ Linda W. Reese "Cherokee Women in Indian Territory, 1863-1890" *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Volume 33, Number 3 (Autumn, 2002), 283. The cost for Indian and black refugees at Fort Gibson alone rose to nearly \$250,000 by the end of summer 1865.

⁷³⁶ Albert Harris letter home, January 1, 1865, *Harris, Albert 1811-1905, Correspondence, 1864-1866. Box 1, Folder 1, Loc 1152, MS H24.346 Harris*. Special Collections, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.

⁷³⁷ Albert Harris letter home, January 15, 1865, *Harris, Albert 1811-1905, Correspondence*.

worn or lost items, many receiving caps, trousers, shirts, drawers, boots or bootees, stockings, blouses, blankets and waterproof gum blankets.⁷³⁸ The new clothing improved the unit's appearance, and once the entire regiment occupied their campsite, the men received orders to begin construction of new barracks from newly sawed lumber instead of demolishing private homes for materials. The regiment's companies also turned in surplus ordnance and equipment.⁷³⁹ The construction order implied permanency, and the First Kansas Colored underwent a period of comprehensive refit and training to prepare the unit for operations around Little Rock.

While the First Colored performed duties as pickets and provost guards, the white regiments of the Army of Arkansas undertook an expedition to the Saline River. It is unknown why the white regiments departed while the Colored Regiments remained, but it is reasonable to believe that black regiments freed up white ones for campaign, and therefore did not constitute part of Reynold's army. If this was the case however, it represented a step back for the regiment, and the re-imposition of the sort of servile roles that the First Kansas Colored had not performed since spring, 1863. The expedition returned after three weeks absence and at once began to prepare for embarkation. The white regiments were to be transported to New Orleans where they would be part of a new campaign in Texas. Rumors of a coming peace were everywhere but proved premature.

⁷³⁸ Company returns for January and February, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁷³⁹ Special Orders 3, Headquarters Second Brigade, February 14, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4;* Special Orders 6, Major Ward, Headquarters, Seventy-Ninth United States Colored Infantry, Little Rock, February 17, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4.*

Substitutes, test officers, and demotions

Change was afoot in Arkansas in the spring of 1865, and Major General Reynolds, confident of Union control in central Arkansas, renewed steamer travel to Fort Smith. A draft call went out in mid-February, and two hundred and fifty men, including a number of black men entered the Union army. Many of these joined as substitutes for whites desiring to avoid military service. Contractor Albert Harris admitted operating his quartermaster detachment with one eye to buying a black substitute if the draft called him for return to the army's ranks. Harris felt little shame in buying the services of a black substitute and was confident that he could get one for two hundred dollars instead of paying much more for a white substitute.⁷⁴⁰

Substitutes offered one solution to the Union army's manpower woes, and gave large numbers of black men a financial incentive to enlist. Whereas patriotism and appeals to the welfare of the black race failed, money swayed some men to enter military service. The time-honored practice of hiring men as substitutes to replace draftees or those averse to military service was a means of fulfilling their obligations as soldiers, without the inconvenience of actual soldiering. Federal substitutes entered into a binding agreement that obligated them to serve in the Union army, and in exchange the substitute received a sum ranging from two hundred to five hundred dollars. The money gained from the agreement could give a poor man the ability to improve his station, while the substitute gambled that he would not die in service before his term expired.

The First Kansas Colored's first group of substitute soldiers entered service between February and March 1865. However, despite one hundred and sixty four men listed as substitutes or unassigned men in the regimental records, none of this former

⁷⁴⁰ Albert Harris letters home, February 8, 19, March 18, 1865, *Harris, Albert 1811-1905, Correspondence*

group joined the regiment before the Civil War's conclusion.⁷⁴¹ Substitutes could have potentially resolved most of the First Kansas Colored's manpower shortage, but the training period required to prepare men for military service and the associated transportation requirements kept substitutes from having any impact on the First Kansas Colored's operations in Arkansas. The surrender of General Lee's army in Virginia also made these potential substitutes redundant, and so their service is a footnote to the regiment's history.

The few replacements that filled the First Kansas Colored's ranks in 1865 went to Company K. The Company mustered thirty men in January 1865, but between February 20 and 24 twenty-seven men hailing from Kansas and Iowa mustered into Company K at Little Rock.⁷⁴² Company K, on the eve of the Civil War's conclusion, finally possessed enough men to perform its duties. The addition of new manpower came at an ideal time; as a whole the regiment gained few recruits at Little Rock. The Regiment, after two years of hard service reported four hundred and fifty-five men present for duty out of an aggregate strength of just over six hundred men.⁷⁴³ Over one hundred and fifty men absent from the regiment deprived it of nearly a quarter of its strength, a huge number when considering that many listed as absent were sick, deserters, or on detached duty at posts ranging from Fort Scott to Little Rock. The regiment's authorized strength of over eight hundred men would never again be attained despite attempts to obtain manpower throughout the spring of 1865.

⁷⁴¹ "First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers – Infantry," *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. 1*, 597 – 599. Nearly all of these men mustered out of service at Benton Barracks, Missouri on May 12, 1865.

⁷⁴² "First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers – Infantry," *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. 1*, 594-597.

⁷⁴³ Monthly Report for Second Brigade, First Division, Headquarters Department of Arkansas, Little Rock, February 6, 1865, *OR: Series I, Volume 48, Part I: Reports and Correspondence*, 756.

Manpower changes in the regimental ranks occurred with increasing regularity during the Regiment's time at Little Rock. The turnover in many cases was prompted by promotions or reductions that occurred as the result of regimental reorganization. Surplus Non-Commissioned Officers, those with long service records and newly promoted Sergeants alike, received demotions as the regimental Non-Commissioned Officers numbers decreased in order to meet manning requirement regulations. Each company could possess one First Sergeant, one Sergeant for every sixteen soldiers, and a Corporal for every eight soldiers.⁷⁴⁴ The key to gradually implementing an otherwise demoralizing measure was to not replace men reduced for misconduct or discharged for disability. Initially few men received demotions, but as the year progressed, demotion and promotion rates accelerated with proximity to the temptations of Little Rock's gambling dens and prostitutes, attempts to break the monotony of camp life, and challenges to white authority by Non-Commissioned officers.

The Regiment's officer ranks also experienced changes as the result of promotions to fill company command positions left vacant since the previous fall. First Lieutenants Benjamin Jones and Shebua Creps, and Second Lieutenant Granville Lewis received Captain's rank and company commands, and Second Lieutenant Eberly Macy rose to First Lieutenant.⁷⁴⁵ These promotions finally restored the regiment to balance in its commissioned ranks.

⁷⁴⁴ "First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers – Infantry," *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. 1574 – 597*; General Orders 4, Headquarters Second Brigade, First Division, Seventh Army Corps, Little Rock, February 17, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4.*

⁷⁴⁵ Special Orders 8, By order of the secretary of War, Vicksburg, Mississippi, January 26, 1865. *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

New officers for Colored Regiments no longer relied on patronage from powerful politicians, but received commissions from boards charged with promoting men that met physical, moral and mental standards, as well as professional proficiency for the new rank. New officers for Colored Regiments needed to meet educational requirements that stressed reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography in addition to knowledge of the skills appropriate for the office sought.⁷⁴⁶ Many white applicants came forward for positions in Colored Regiments, but desire and ability didn't always translate into commissions. One for whom the commission system worked, former Private John H. Mockett a musician formerly of Company F, Twenty-Eighth Wisconsin Infantry, joined the regiment after being appointed a Lieutenant by a commissioning board.⁷⁴⁷ Mockett possessed combat experience, but perhaps more importantly, he willingly sought a commission in a Colored Regiment in lieu of service in a white one. Mockett's reasons for seeking a commission are not recorded in his service record, but the prestige of rank and increased officer pay must have been a strong incentive.

As the war stabilized in Arkansas and concluded in Virginia, regimental officers tendered resignations in increasing numbers. Officers departed the regiment beginning in March. Lieutenant William Gibbons, the regimental adjutant, resigned after receiving a surgeon's certificate for disability.⁷⁴⁸ Soon afterwards Captain Granville Lewis received a leave of absence to attend to family and business affairs after Regimental Surgeon

⁷⁴⁶ "Extract General Orders 17 of 1864, Headquarters Military Division of West Mississippi, Special Orders 48, Major General J.J. Reynolds, Headquarters Department of Arkansas, Little Rock, Feb 23, 1865, *RG 393, Part II, Record 1171, General Orders Issued by the Department of Arkansas*, 635.

⁷⁴⁷ Special Orders 65, Major General Reynolds, Headquarters Department of Arkansas, Little Rock, March 18, 1865, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁷⁴⁸ Special Orders 40, Headquarters, Department of Arkansas, February 14, 1865, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

Ensor diagnosed him with bilious fever, nostalgia (depression), and chronic hepatitis.⁷⁴⁹

Captain William Smallwood also tendered his resignation, citing continuous service for years, family sickness and business concerns at home as his compelling factors.⁷⁵⁰

Officer resignations did not occur without significant outside influence. Events in Virginia gave many military men pause, and the necessity for continued service appeared less urgent after Richmond's fall.

Prisoners of War return

Treatment for black prisoners of war changed little between 1863 and 1864, and the record of treatment for this time period is a sad tale of abuse and murder. Records going back to the fall of 1863 detailed the sale of black soldiers after capture, despite President Lincoln's threat to punish Confederate prisoners harshly for each black soldier enslaved. Confederate authorities, by 1864 however, increasingly sought to minimize reports of this practice. Confederate authorities in Arkansas, although reporting the names of captured blacks in labor bureau communications, adopted a lower profile approach to processing black prisoners. Instead of the open defiance of earlier executions and enslavements, black captives traveled with their captors to regional depots where prisoners remained until transported south to Texas.⁷⁵¹ First Kansas Colored prisoners of

⁷⁴⁹ Special Orders 83, Headquarters Department of Arkansas, Little Rock, April 4, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; *RG 94: Granville Lewis, Combined Military Service Records*. A surgeon's certificate of disability appeared in order, but Lewis's discharge was countermanded in June, and he returned to the regiment to serve as Provost Marshal at Pine Bluff until the regiment mustered out of service.

⁷⁵⁰ Special Orders 94, Department of Arkansas, April 9, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*. On April 19 Smallwood's resignation received approval, perhaps in recognition of the recent Union victory against Lee's army in Virginia.

⁷⁵¹ Report of Major General Banks, October 11, 1863; General Order 252, President Abraham Lincoln, Washington D.C. July 31, 1863, *OR: Series II, Volume 6, Prisoners of War*, 54, 163; General Braxton Bragg to Governor Z.B. Vance, North Carolina, April 21, 1864; Lieutenant Colonel Edward P. Turner to Colonel R.G. Shaver, Camden, Arkansas November 10, 1864, *OR: Series II, Volume 7, Prisoners of War*, 1116.

war experienced a variety of treatment while in Confederate custody, and their stories reveal the extent to which black soldiers suffered a double penalty for military service.

The soldiers captured at Poison Springs and Flat Rock survived after their capture, despite being taken during major military operations. The story of indiscriminate massacre at Poison Springs has another side that few reports Union of Confederate adequately address. Not all prisoners died at Poison Springs. The regimental Combined Military Service Records reveal that at least eight men entered captivity after the battle. The Poison Springs prisoners of war endured widely varying treatment, and race entered into that equation in surprising ways. Captain Armstrong who became a prisoner at Poison Spring, entered captivity at Tyler, Texas but according to reports from other prisoners avoided punishment as a white officer by posing as a Private in the Thirty-Sixth Iowa.⁷⁵² White service alongside black regiments did not equate to immediate execution, a situation that appears influenced by the muddle of captives after the battle. The fact that Armstrong escaped sure execution as an officer of the hated First Kansas Colored is due to his abandonment of his role as an officer, and captivity as a Private rather than death as a Captain.

The fates of black soldiers did not appear to have changed any from Poison Springs to Flat Rock. Both battles featured wounded soldiers being executed by vengeful Confederates, but the few that escaped execution proved the very rare exceptions. Private Montgomery Ridings, although sustaining wounds at Poison Springs, didn't enter a camp but died in prison at Camden. The fate of individual prisoners is murky, and official records reveal little of what happened in the prisoner of war camps. Private

⁷⁵² Service Record of Andrew Armstrong, *Combined Military Service Records, USCT, 79th Infantry (New), M1921*.

Thomas Payne traveled to Marshall Texas, and then escaped to Shreveport in July, 1865 in time to rejoin the regiment at Pine Bluff. Little is known of Private Jacob Rogers, Charles Whittaker, Charles Blackburn, Crayson McMurtry, and Amos Solomon but they too survived the war.⁷⁵³ Sergeant James Brown, Corporal Isom Wood, and Privates Perry Clarkson, John Gains and London Thompson of Company K accompanied victorious Confederate forces to unspecified camps in Texas, and once there, remained listed as prisoners of war until October 1865. Private Thompson went to Hunstville.⁷⁵⁴ Lieutenant Sutherland, like Armstrong went to Tyler, Texas, but his experience is unknown.⁷⁵⁵

The unexpected return of prisoners of war in February 1865 restored to duty a number of individuals listed as missing or formally registered as prisoners of war. A prisoner exchange brought Captain Armstrong back to the regiment after a long period in the prisoner of war camp at Tyler, Texas. Although granted a thirty-day leave of absence, and paid for his time in a prisoner of war camp, Armstrong immediately rejoined his regiment.⁷⁵⁶ The rumor that Confederates killed all prisoners captured at Poison Springs and Flat Rock proved false, and Armstrong's desire to regain his company command may have been influenced by his treatment while a prisoner. Armstrong brought news of other First Kansas Colored officers and soldiers captured in battle, and confirmed that Lieutenants Sutherland and Hitchcock enjoyed good health. Six soldiers also weathered

⁷⁵³ *Combined Military Service Records, USCT, 79th Infantry (New), M1921.* Record of Andrew Armstrong, Private Montgomery Ridings, Private Thomas Payne, Private Jacob Rogers.

⁷⁵⁴ *Combined Military Service Records, USCT, 79th Infantry (New), M1921.*

All black Company K prisoners were Wyandotte enlistees and therefore appeared to have been spared re-enslavement by Arkansas slave owners, but the distinction is minor. Thompson obtained his release June 20, 1865, but due to organizational changes and errors did not reach his regiment until its muster from service.

⁷⁵⁵ *Combined Military Service Records, USCT, 79th Infantry (New), M1921.* Lieutenant Sutherland remained at Tyler, Texas until paroled at Red River May 27, 1865.

⁷⁵⁶ Special Orders 22, Headquarters, First Division, Seventh Army Corps, Little Rock, February 22, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Special Orders 55, 58, Major General Hurlbut, Department of the Gulf, New Orleans, February 27, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4.*

their time in confinement at Tyler, but unlike the white Union officers, the black soldiers had slim chances for an exchange.⁷⁵⁷ The prospects for prisoner exchange and confirmation of living black prisoners in Texas must have been compelling news when Captain Armstrong shared it with his fellow officers. However, throughout the regiment, especially in the enlisted ranks, manpower remained in its usual state of flux.

The numbers of soldiers in the regiment also decreased as personnel received medical exams that determined their fitness for continued military service. Disability discharges commenced in February and peaked in June 1865 as the regiment discharged medically men previously retained on regimental rolls. Although disability created by wounds sustained in combat was a major consideration, many soldiers received surgeon's certificates of disability for ailments that included consumption, organic conditions such as "constitutional depravity," asthma and rheumatism, and scrofula. Men otherwise subject to retention due to demand for bodies to fill the ranks no longer served a purpose as the war approached its conclusion.

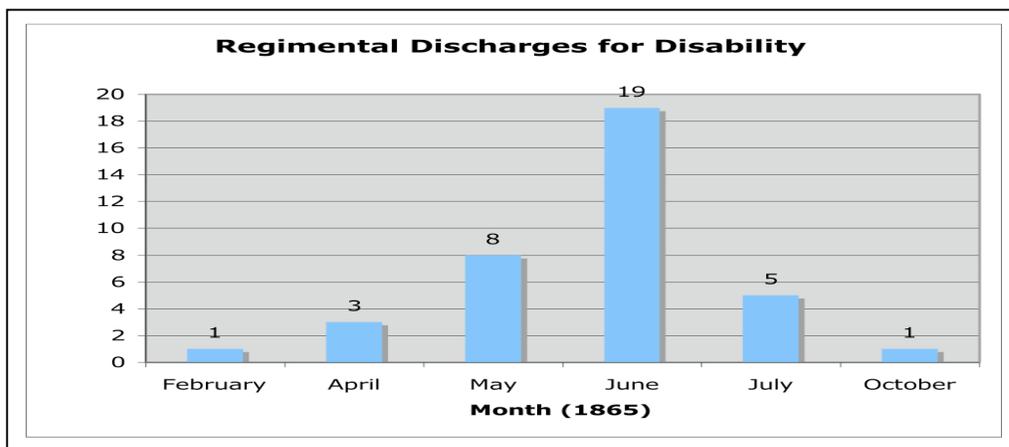


Chart 6: Regimental Discharges for Disability⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵⁷ Graton Letter, March 12, 1865, *John Graton Correspondence Collection*, Microfilm Box 913.

⁷⁵⁸ "First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers – Infantry," *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. 1*, 574-599.

Chart 6 depicts the trend in manpower reduction as the First Kansas Colored discharged men throughout the spring and summer. Private Henry Thatcher, amongst those discharged from the ranks, suffered from a condition that could have been avoided by more thorough recruiting practices: Thatcher was in the Regimental Surgeon's estimate not over fifteen years of age and unfit for military service.⁷⁵⁹ Unlike the underage soldiers detected in 1863, Private Thatcher left the service, but with a disability pension.

Racial advancement and civil rights backsliding in Kansas

Buoyed by the successes in fall 1864, the black community in Leavenworth rode a wave of confidence over its contributions to the defeat of General Price's army. The community's pride stemmed in part to the performance of the black state militia when Price's army neared the Kansas border. One observer believed that the black community's sacrifices were vindicated when the black militia marched into Missouri without hesitation when ordered, whereas the white Kansas militia refused to cross the state line to bring battle to Price's forces in Missouri.⁷⁶⁰ New opportunities opened up for black men during the uncertain period of fall, 1864, and news of the promotions of Lieutenant William B. Matthews and Second Lieutenant Philip Minor as officers in the Independent Light Artillery Battery may have reached the regiment through letters from home. The report of black men wearing officers' shoulder boards apparently elicited little backlash from white Kansans at this time, and became a source of hope for the

⁷⁵⁹ Service Record of Private Henry Thatcher, *RG 94: 79th USCT Infantry, Combined Military Service Records*.

⁷⁶⁰ "Kansas Correspondence," John Turner, *The Christian Recorder*, February 4, 1865.

Leavenworth black community.⁷⁶¹ The fidelity of black men to the Union cause in Kansas did not waver despite the threat of invasion. Freedom remained the goal of black communities across the Union, and they willingly paid in the lives of their young men to attain it.

Black refugees also sought to reunite with absent soldiers, their entreaties reaching sympathetic ears in the influential *Christian Recorder*. The collapse of slavery enabled once divided families to gather together their separated parts. Many Kansas black communities came from predominantly Missouri origins and refugees attempted to use the few resources available to them to reach their loved ones outside of Kansas's borders. *The Christian Recorder*, assisted these efforts, and attempted to reunite families with their soldiers. One appeal for the whereabouts of a missing soldier was the example of Mrs. Fannie Robinson of Clay County Missouri, who sought Private Caryl Robinson by posting an [advertisement].⁷⁶² It is unknown if Mrs. Robinson located her family member, but regimental records contain evidence of Charles Robinson who enlisted at Leavenworth in August, 1862 and mustered out in October 1865.⁷⁶³ Robinson's enlistment at Leavenworth at a time when many Clay County men enlisted lends credence to this sort of appeal.

Social changes and refugee life at Little Rock and Pine Bluff, Arkansas

Although nothing in the First Kansas Colored's records indicates the number of soldiers' families that accompanied their men to Little Rock, at least some attempted to follow their men to Little Rock. Black refugees remained the most vulnerable population

⁷⁶¹ "Black Artillery Company Under Black Officers" *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, as quoted in Ira Berlin (ed.). *Freedom A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 91.

⁷⁶² "Information Wanted," *The Christian Recorder*, July 1, 1865 (repeated 22 July).

⁷⁶³ Extracted from *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. 1*.

around Union camps, for despite the privations experienced by whites and Indians, the latter two groups could not be re-enslaved. The war created a playground for speculators and Reynolds recognized their pernicious influence on the economy. Life at Little Rock was not easy for any civilian, and in recognition of that fact, General Reynolds issued orders to the military commissaries to supply “subsistence stores to families of enlisted men, now in service, or widows and orphans of deceased soldiers, at cost price, not to exceed in quantity one ration to each adult person.”⁷⁶⁴ This mercy toward soldiers’ dependents carried greater import for the families of black soldiers given their extremely low pay and lack of availability to tend to their family’s needs.

Secretary of War Stanton may have understood the powerful influence of family when he urged President Lincoln to extend the emancipation granted to slaves in Confederate states to the families of black soldiers from Border States. Stanton urged the emancipation of soldiers’ family members for military purposes also, and he believed that emancipation could increase black military enlistments at a time when every man that could serve was needed in the field against the Confederate armies. Liberation could also compel greater morale and efficiency in the ranks, the obvious point being the decrease in desertions influenced by anxiety over dependents.⁷⁶⁵ Granting freedom to the families of serving soldiers sent a message to black soldiers that their sacrifices sustained the Union and that their service mattered to the greater body politic. However, ill discipline in the ranks sent another message, and was dealt with through a system of passes and punishments.

⁷⁶⁴ Special Orders 39, Major General J.J. Reynolds, Headquarters Department of Arkansas, Little Rock, February 13, 1865, *RG 393, Part II, Record 1171, General Orders Issued by the Department of Arkansas*.

⁷⁶⁵ Secretary of War Stanton to President Lincoln, March 3, 1865, *Negro in the Military Service*, documents 3589-3590.

Discipline and Punish

The lack of a threatening enemy created an environment in which Major Ward was forced to impose military discipline to ensure that the temptations of Little Rock did not undo the regiment's record of proud service. Whereas field service and the need for constant readiness honed the regiment into a fine combat unit, garrison service with its many distractions threatened discipline. Ward demanded increased standards of discipline from the regiment, and required details to report condition and accountability after every excursion from the camp. Men marched to their quarters under the leadership of Non-Commissioned Officers after completing details and Ward demanded greater pride in appearance for the camp, extending so far as to prohibit cutting down trees in the vicinity of the camp.⁷⁶⁶ Colonel Williams issued further instructions to officers and soldiers prescribing camp discipline and proper wear of uniforms. Passes also received attention and Williams reserved approving authority to his headquarters for any passes issued for departure from camp after tattoo.⁷⁶⁷ Military discipline marked the First Kansas Colored's early reviews by senior Union officers, and both Ward and Williams understood that when discipline breaks down, the unit suffers for real and perceived indiscretions. The Regiment no longer operated with the same impunity it once possessed at Forts Gibson and Smith; eyes watched the regiment for signs of ill

⁷⁶⁶ General Orders 1, Major Ward, Headquarters, 79th USCI, Little Rock, March 2, 1865, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁷⁶⁷ General Orders 9, Colonel Williams, Headquarters, Second Brigade, Little Rock, March 10, 1865, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

discipline. Houses would not be torn down for barracks, and trees would not fuel campfires unless approved by the regimental commander.

Signs of relaxed moral and military indiscipline abounded in Little Rock. Union soldier Albert Harris described Little Rock in October 1864 as harboring “[very numerous] whiskey shops and gambling houses... Things are carried on very loos(sic) in Little Rock. [Compared] To what they are at other military posts.”⁷⁶⁸ The actions of white officers came under increased scrutiny, and practices perhaps once tolerated received harsh sentences. Prostitution was also circumscribed; venereal disease could debilitate a man, and in an era that predated prophylactics abstinence was the best policy.

Military camps and prostitution have a long association stretching back to the dawn of warfare. The needs of soldiers did not trump military discipline and when officers openly flouted their authority to keep prostitutes as “temporary wives,” the consequences on subordinates damaged morale. General Reynolds imposed a heavy toll on one officer who transgressed against the standards expected of his class, and Captain S.W. Yearlick of Company A, Sixty-Ninth United States Colored Infantry paid for his indiscretions by his dismissal from service for openly keeping a prostitute. Yearlick and his paramour received three days notice to leave the department of Arkansas.⁷⁶⁹ Captain Yearlick’s example notwithstanding, Major Ward imposed additional restrictions on patronizing prostitutes, and threatened imprisonment and the loss of a month’s pay for the first offense of “harboring a woman in or around the camp” without permission. The woman

⁷⁶⁸ Albert Harris, Little Rock, October 30, 1864, Harris, Albert 1811-1905, Correspondence, 1864-1866. Box 1, Folder 1, Loc @ 1152, MS H24.346 Harris, [3-1/23]. University of Arkansas-Fayetteville archives.

⁷⁶⁹ Special Orders 53, Major General J.J. Reynolds, Headquarters Department of Arkansas, Little Rock, March 1, 1865, *RG 393, Part II, Record 1171, General Orders Issued by the Department of Arkansas*.

would be sent to the Freedman's Home.⁷⁷⁰ Although harbored women could be family or unapproved laundresses, Ward drew the line quite firmly against conduct that could adversely affect the regiment's discipline.

The necessity for imposing discipline is evident in the regimental records. Desertions, although not a major disciplinary factor at Little Rock, did not fade away. Soldiers that deserted in previous periods found their way back to the regiment, and at least two returning deserters returned to ranks in March.⁷⁷¹ Personal motivations for voluntary return are not recorded, but deserters enjoyed little protection amongst the hostile Arkansas refugee populations, and may have sought military camps for protection and the assurance of sustenance in the lean wartime economy. One of the most curious states of affairs to develop occurred in May when two men of Company F with absentee periods of fifteen months and eighteen months respectively returned on May 17, and forfeited pay and allowances. Another pair of suspected deserters returned to ranks with no loss of pay, their absence explained away as unavoidable due to reasons beyond their control.⁷⁷² The most likely cause for the latter two soldiers' lack of penalty is simple separation from their command while the regiment moved between Fort Smith and Little Rock.

⁷⁷⁰ General Orders 2, Lieutenant Colonel Ward, Headquarters, 79th USCI, Little Rock, Arkansas, May 21, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4*. A second offense earned the male party a thirty-day period of confinement at hard labor. The fine assessed for the first offense went to benefit Colored Schools, a humane way to assess a fine without appearing arbitrary to the black soldiers of the regiment.

⁷⁷¹ Special Orders 35, Brigadier General Frederick Salomon, Headquarters, First Division, Little Rock, March 4, 1865; Special Orders 8, Major Ward, Headquarters, 79th USCI, Little Rock, March 13, 1865, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*.

⁷⁷² General Orders 24, A.J. Kendrick, Assistant Adjutant General, Headquarters, First Division, Little Rock, May 17, 1865; Special Orders 60, District of Arkansas, May 30, 1865; Special Orders 88, Brigadier General Solomon, Headquarters, First Division, Little Rock, May 17, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4*.

Individual soldiers left behind in hospitals also filtered back to the regiment throughout the spring, as individuals or in pairs.

Deserters in military custody at other locations proved a nuisance and as a result most received discharge papers. The case of Private David Reed is one example of a soldier that deserted, was recaptured, then escaped, and finally returned to military custody only to enter the hospital at Fort Scott in order to treat a raging case of gonorrhoea. Scott applied for removal from deserter status, but received a dishonorable discharge.⁷⁷³ While the Civil War demanded manpower, deserters could expect to be hunted by professional “deserter catchers” willing to return men to military control for a \$30 bounty. Escaping a Union camp failed to offer many alternatives to deserters. Although refugee communities could offer temporary amnesty if so disposed, vengeful whites existed on the fringes ready to seek redress for real or imagined insult or injury.

Bounties, whether for catching deserters, or enlistment provided financial inducement in cases where little else may have convinced men to risk life and limb. The subject of enlistment bounties reentered discourse in renewed strength in the summer of 1865 when a series of enlistment bounties extended to black soldiers that could prove their status as freedmen prior to April 19, 1861. Men fitting that definition could receive bounties between \$100 and \$300 and if wounded in combat could expect to retain that bounty as if they completed their term of service. Black draftees and substitutes also received the financial inducement of \$100 for military service.⁷⁷⁴ The bounty did not address the

⁷⁷³ Service Records of Private David Scott, *RG 94: 79th USCT Infantry, Combined Military Service Records*.

⁷⁷⁴ “Bounties to Colored Troops,” Postmaster General’s Office, Washington, D.C., May 26 1865, *Negro in the Military Service*, document 3650.

status of many black soldiers that enlisted after achieving their freedom by escaping from slave states.

Disciplinary problems increased as the regiment remained in the vicinity of Little Rock. Although the city could be blamed for temptations such as gambling dens and prostitution, reports of disciplinary infractions amongst the ranks crop up increasingly after April 1865. Throughout the month of May soldiers received punishment worthy of mention in the regimental records. First Sergeants Dabney Snyder and Jeremiah Hall's unsoldierly conduct and disrespect to a superior officer resulted in a reduction to the ranks. First Sergeant John Yokum of Company D also rejoined the ranks after being reduced for inefficiency and neglect of his duties. Private Charles Jennison, at the other end of the enlisted ranks, received a more punitive punishment for disobeying orders and violating Article Nine of the Laws of Warfare, an article that includes striking a superior or threatening bodily harm. Jennison's sentence of hard labor for the remainder of his enlistment and forfeiture of all pay and allowances after February 1865 implies that Private Jennison may have been in an altercation that warranted his sentence.⁷⁷⁵ The cycle of reductions continued into the summer, and appears to have centered primarily on Non-Commissioned Officers neglecting their duties, going absent without leave, and disobeying orders.⁷⁷⁶ Some examples of Privates receiving severe punishments may have been in part due to an increasing awareness of the effect of how soldiers interacted with the local community.

⁷⁷⁵ Special Orders 9, 19, 21, Lieutenant Colonel Ward, Headquarters, 79th UCI, Little Rock, May 2, 21, 25, 1865; General Orders 20, Major General Salomon, Headquarters, First Division, Little Rock, May 9, 1865, RG 94: Adjutant general's office, *Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4.*

⁷⁷⁶ Special Orders 20, 22, Lieutenant Colonel Ward, Headquarters, 79th USCI, Little Rock, May 28, June 4, 8, 1865, RG 94: Adjutant General's office, *Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4.*

The case of Private Jacob Berman is interesting because of the severe penalty he paid for transgressing against military regulations. Private Jacob Berman of Company I on July 21, 1865, was declared guilty of violating the frequently cited Article 9 of the Law of War. Although found guilty of conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline, Berman was sentenced to wear a twenty-four pound ball and chain, forfeit six month's pay, and to be confined for six months at the Little Rock prison. Berman's sentence was finally remitted October 3, 1865.⁷⁷⁷ Article 9 contains punishments for infractions varying from insubordination to striking a superior Non-Commissioned Officer or Non-Commissioned Officer. In the absence of detailed information about Berman's offense, he may have threatened violence to a superior and been made an example for others.

The reductions of First Sergeant John Whalon of Company B and Commissary Sergeant Robert Cox for conduct unbecoming a Non-commissioned officer, when taken with earlier reductions for First Sergeants, indicates that insubordination increased in the ranks, perhaps a reason for increased penalties. However, superior performance had its rewards also, and Sergeant Milton Bassett, having served meritoriously, replaced Whalon.⁷⁷⁸ The restlessness of soldiers more accustomed to field duty than garrison details, and the atmosphere of uncertainty of what the regiment would do next may have contributed to the sudden spike in insubordination. However, whereas some individuals returned to the ranks, others rose to replace them in almost equal numbers, and in some

⁷⁷⁷ General Orders 55, Headquarters, First Division, Little Rock, July 21, 1865, RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4; Service Record of Jacob Berman, Special Orders 234, Major General J.J. Reynolds, Headquarters Department of Arkansas, Little Rock, October 3, 1865, RG 94: 79th USCT Infantry, Combined Military Service Records.

⁷⁷⁸ SO 35, 36, Captain Graton, Headquarters, 79th USCI, Pine Bluff, August 25, 1865 RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4.

cases reductions appear in the same paragraph as promotions for the same positions in the regimental orders.

The reasons for increased disciplinary actions do not devolve into readily discerned incidents, but may have been affected by the proximity of the regiment's soldiers to free blacks. After the regiment deployed to Pine Bluff, a location surrounded by freedmen camps, Lieutenant Colonel Ward's response to unauthorized absences from camp and entering domiciles without authorization intensified, and in recognition of increased fraternization and pass abuses, Lieutenant Colonel Ward threatened dire consequences. The sutler store, a popular place for impromptu gatherings, to facilitate management of the soldiers, was closed after retreat roll call.⁷⁷⁹ Closing the sutler store to lingering groups of soldiers was an internal camp measure, but outside camp, soldiers came under intense scrutiny. Major Ward utilized pass control and movement restrictions to prevent circumventing pass restrictions, especially to control soldiers departing camp to execute "official duties." It is reasonable to hypothesize that these measures concerned fraternization given Ward's previous orders in Little Rock regarding keeping women in camp. Entering domiciles to conduct "business" of whatever unsanctioned nature appears to be a recurring problem given the number of reductions due to conduct unbecoming and disobeying orders.

Officers appear to have been charged with increased police duties, and while in Little Rock and Pine Bluff, officers were ordered to improve their appearance when departing camp. In addition, orders compelling officers wear a complete uniform and carry side

⁷⁷⁹ General Orders 6, Lieutenant Colonel Ward, 79th USCI, Pine Bluff, August 1, 1865, Special Orders 37, Headquarters, 79th USCI, Pine Bluff, August 30, 1865, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

arms suggest that when outside the camp, officers were expected to impose discipline through direct action. Ward specifically reminded his officers that when departing on detail, they were expected to enforce Article 27 of the Law of War. This particular article granted officers the authority to intervene in disputes and to stop any disorders on the part of soldiers, as well as arrest them for violating military law.⁷⁸⁰ Officers were in effect deputized to maintain order and if necessary impose order by force if necessary to preserve the peace. Officers could not legally dismiss any act that fell under their purview regardless of their personal inclinations. The absence of civil structures to enforce the peace, and the existing state of martial law made Union officers the de facto police of their areas of responsibility.

The Soldier's life and matters of general health

Over the course of these final months of the war, maintaining regimental fitness and readiness for Provost Marshal details required attention to matters besides protection against moral contagion and venereal diseases. The additional details performed by soldiers, whether as ambulance corps wagons drivers, or as fortification and camp laborers necessitated improvements in sanitation and diet to sustain health. Foodstuffs improved in variety and availability at Little Rock, aiding the recovery of soldiers from their exertions. Captain Graton reveled in the variety of food that could be purchased or requisitioned. In lieu of hardtack, soldiers in garrison could bake soft bread, and the military commissary offered food previously unavailable at Fort Gibson and fort Smith in quantity: potatoes, sauerkraut, dried fruit, fish, bacon, rice, beans and molasses. Many of these items re-entered soldiers' diets as well, the latter three part of a soldiers' ration

⁷⁸⁰ Special Orders 127, Major General Salomon, Headquarters, First Division, Little Rock, July 10, 1865, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

when available, and the inclusion of vegetables rich in nutrients helped ward off disease in men fatigued from manual labor. Perhaps most importantly, the men of the regiment enjoyed leisure time, and regimental officers played a game of ball against the Second Kansas Colored's officers.⁷⁸¹ Other diversions such as gambling and prostitution offered more risky entertainments. Gambling appears to have been a favorite vice for the First Kansas Colored's soldiers, but could lose one more than the pay in their pockets.

Many of the camp diversions of soldiers in other theaters also figured in the life of the First Kansas Colored's men. However, when Non-Commissioned Officers played a game of "chuck o luck" against their soldiers, the men forfeited the \$553 pot and their rank. Colonel Williams tried, sentenced and convicted the offenders, then offered up the proceeds for the education of freedmen.⁷⁸² Fun could be had in the camps, but Williams decided that gambling transgressed fun and became fraud. The fact that Williams and Ward both preferred to bestow Freedmen's Homes with otherwise contraband made the fines and penalties serve a purpose that avoided the perception of arbitrary punishment.

There remained quite a lot of work to be performed in the regimental camp in addition to fatigue details and picket duty. Despite over a month's occupation in the camp, few quarters housed men. Cookhouses resembling shacks appeared to be the extent of construction, and Captain Graton sourly remarked that it would be summer before barracks housed men. The situation resolved by late April however, perhaps in part due to new directives giving men engaged in barracks construction credit for fatigue duty.

⁷⁸¹ Graton Letters, March 5, 19, 1865, *John Graton Correspondence Collection*, Microfilm Box 913; Special Orders 9, Major Ward, Headquarters, 79th USCI, Little Rock, March 17, 1865, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁷⁸² Colonel Williams to Colonel John Levering, Headquarters, Second Brigade, Little Rock, May 25, 1865, *J.M. Williams Papers, MS 545*, Kansas State Historical Society.

Graton's letters mention the progress of construction, and when the quarters were completed, the officers occupied spacious houses that contained kitchens, a bedroom and an office.⁷⁸³ Soldiers occupied barracks in groups, some in two-story buildings. The completion of barracks and increased sanitary discipline in camp may have saved lives in the coming summer months, when the environment created a lethal series of challenges to the men's welfare.

Soldiers experienced a new development in their personal lives in April when Regimental Adjutant Hughes received orders to requisition material for making wills at the urging of the medical department.⁷⁸⁴ The implications of this development coming from the medical department are a grim reminder that although the regiment's soldiers enjoyed relative peace, the environment favored a greater enemy than Confederate infantry. Little Rock hosted thick clouds of mosquitoes during the summer, and their deadly diseases began killing and disabling about the same time as the call for wills.

A survey of medical records revealed a rise in the number of soldiers reporting for sick call with the tell tale symptoms of malaria. The chills and sweats of the disease appear to signal a near-pervasive malaria epidemic amongst the ranks, and the diagnosis of quotidian malaria makes it clear that the men of the regiment suffered from recurring bouts of malaria during their time in Arkansas. The camp fevers of Fort Scott killed many recruits in 1863, but malaria left men alive, but unable to perform their duties efficiently. Chills every twenty-four hours and associated symptoms of swollen livers,

⁷⁸³ Circular, Major Ward, Little Rock, March 16, 1865, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT, Infantry Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4*; Graton Letters, March 5, April 30 1865, *John Graton Correspondence Collection, Microfilm Box 913*.

⁷⁸⁴ Special Orders 12, Major Ward, Headquarters, 79th USCI, Little Rock, April 1, 1865 *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*.

jaundice and weakness signaled a widespread incidence of malaria among the troops of the First Kansas Colored.⁷⁸⁵ Disease, unlike Confederate bullets respected no fortifications and overcame even the most stalwart soldiers. Managing personnel numbers required continual attention to matters of diet, recreation, and personal hygiene.

The black community of Little Rock and Pine Bluff shared medical facilities with the soldiers of the First Kansas Colored, and when the groups mixed, as at Fort Smith, the results could be lethal. The shared hospitals were frequently cited as substandard by inspectors, and lacked sufficient medical staff. As a result of neglect, disease and unhygienic conditions, at Pine Bluff's black military hospital ninety-two of three hundred and forty-three patients died.⁷⁸⁶ Ironically, at Little Rock the regimental surgeon interacted with local black refugees and freedman's camp occupants while he treated his patients. Captain Huddleston's company supplied some of the military labor at Little Rock's general hospital, and after relieving the One Hundred and Thirteenth United States Colored Infantry, the company provided security, nurses, and manpower for the hospital, assisting Assistant Surgeon Lacky.⁷⁸⁷ Many of the regiment's soldiers passed through the medical system at both locales, the men continuously under assault by the region's endemic mosquitoes.

⁷⁸⁵ Survey of Regimental and General Hospital sick call slips, *RG 94: Entry 534, 79th USCT, Medical Records*. Analysis of medical records indicates a correlation between seasons and disease incidence in the vicinity of Little Rock and Pine Bluff. The country surrounding both locations abounds in bayous and swamps ideal for mosquito populations. The mortality rate for February through June belies the seriousness of the malaria threat. A survey of medical records for soldiers with surnames beginning with the letter A - B reveals at least fifty percent of the men suffered from some variety of fevers during the period November 1864 to September, 1865, in addition to a variety of skin and venereal diseases. Major Ward's precautions against prostitution appear prudent given the potential for debilitating non-combat "wounds."

⁷⁸⁶ Bobby L. Lovett, "African Americans, Civil War, and Aftermath in Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Volume 54, Number 3 (Autumn, 1995), 328-329; *OR: Series I, Volume 14*, p 636.

⁷⁸⁷ Special Orders 55, Brevet Brigadier General Williams, Headquarters Second Brigade, Little Rock July 7, 1865, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*.

The war continues in Arkansas

While the regiment continued to support the ongoing Union operations in Arkansas throughout the spring, events in the east impacted the dynamic in the west where Confederate forces remained viable. The surrender of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia elicited great hopes for peace, and at Little Rock a spectacular salute of two hundred guns blasted forth in celebration.⁷⁸⁸ However, the exultation attending victory turned to ashes days later when Little Rock's church bells pealed to announce another great event that overshadowed the Union's victory. President Lincoln's assassination affected the soldiers deeply, and the Regimental Surgeon remarked, "Every person in the United States will feel that they have lost a father." Captain Graton mourned President Lincoln as the greatest American since George Washington.⁷⁸⁹ The Great Emancipator's death affected the black soldiers deeply, and although not documented, his assassination may have created great anxiety regarding the future of black men. President Lincoln granted freedom by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, but the Civil War's conclusion was yet to come.

President Lincoln opposed slavery in his public and private endeavors. One of the Union's greatest threats in 1864, the northern Peace democrats (referred to as "Copperheads") threatened to restore the status of slavery to its *ante bellum* status as part of their peace platform.⁷⁹⁰ Many northern civilians continued to oppose black soldiers into early 1865, and at least one congressman was rebuked by President Lincoln who

⁷⁸⁸ Special Orders 90, Major General Reynolds, Headquarters, Department of Arkansas, Little Rock, April 13, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, 79th USCT, Regimental Order Book E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4.*

⁷⁸⁹ Graton Letters, April 18, 1864, *John Graton Correspondence Collection*, Microfilm Box 913.

⁷⁹⁰ See Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

reminded the politician that “although he would not fight to free negroes, some of them seem willing to fight for you.”⁷⁹¹ The loss of Lincoln’s mediation skills before Reconstruction could be implemented left the so-called “Radical Republicans” to assume leadership of the Union’s efforts. Because the war continued in the west and Confederate armies remained in the field, so would black regiments.

The loss of President Lincoln’s leadership did not shake the Union’s resolve to complete the defeat of the remaining Confederate forces. Regimental officers soon received indications that the war would commence again in Arkansas against the last remaining holdouts in Texas. A spate of officer promotions, and the issuance of pay after eight months on April 18 and again on April 30, may have caused many to ask what the next step would be for the army of Arkansas. Captain Graton thought that a new campaign was about to begin, a grand movement of armies acting in two columns against Texas, but with uncertainties regarding participation by the First Kansas Colored.⁷⁹² The uncertainty period ended in early May when the regiment received orders to board vessels to continue the elimination of the guerrilla threat south of Little Rock.

Several companies of the First Kansas Colored possessed experience in amphibious operations, albeit gained while serving as steamer escorts during the winter months. The recently promoted Lieutenant Colonel Ward embarked a combined force consisting of three companies of the First Kansas Colored and forty cavalry on May 13, onto the steamer *Rose Hambleton*, and the expedition initiated a series of landings that searched for the camps of hard core Confederate holdouts. One man surprised in the bush by soldiers of the expedition attempted to escape, but Ward ordered him shot after capture.

⁷⁹¹ Joseph Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 205.

⁷⁹² Graton Letters, April 18, 1865, *John Graton Correspondence Collection*, Microfilm Box 913

Despite the lack of contact with guerrillas during the expedition, Captain Graton didn't feel the officers of the regiment entirely safe from danger after returning to Little Rock. Graton railed against the temptations of the city and felt that the officers' gambling, whiskey, and prostitutes, made them morally depraved: "wives have more to fear [from the causes] than the bullets of the enemy."⁷⁹³ The once formidable bushwhacker threat against Union units disintegrated in the face of impending Confederate defeat, and southern men began to return to homes despoiled by war. The First Kansas Colored's men did not have the luxury of returning home, and remained in garrison at Little Rock. Their aggregate strength dwindled at little Rock for a number of reasons, foremost amongst them discharges for disability.

Maintaining the peace

The First Kansas Colored's soldiers drew structure from their daily routine, and the imposition of additional camp restrictions further defined the scope of soldiers' daily lives. Maintaining martial proficiency demanded not only drill, but also weapons practice. Soldiers retained their arms while in camp as expected, but unless expending some of the thirty rounds authorized for target practice, men leaving camp with weapons faced confinement for a week in the guard house, and the exorbitant fee of \$1.00 for ammunition.⁷⁹⁴ Wards' directives do not appear to stem from any particular episode, but ensuring that armed black soldiers did not antagonize the populace by wandering the streets with loaded muskets while not performing their official duties could ease the

⁷⁹³ Graton Letter, May 13, 1865, *John Graton Correspondence Collection*, Microfilm Box 913; Report Number 1, Scout from Little Rock to Bayou Meto and Little Bayou, Arkansas, LTC Ward, 79th USCT, Headquarters, 79th USCT, Little Rock, May 2, 1865, *OR: Series I, Volume 48, Part I: Reports and Correspondence*, 258-259.

⁷⁹⁴ General Orders 3, 4. Lieutenant Colonel Ward, Headquarters, 79th USCI, Little Rock, June 18, 21, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4.*

efforts of the Provost Marshal of the city. The Provost Marshal imposed peace on the city by maintaining a monopoly on violence, and by restricting the numbers of weapons in circulation. Strictly controlling firearms may have ensured a relatively stable civilian populace, but within the camps a serious lack of discipline evidenced itself on an increasing basis in the summer of 1865, and became so widespread that every month's regimental orders contained notices of reductions or promotions to fill gaps created by disciplinary infractions.

One had to acknowledge that the Regiment's disciplinary woes worsened in June. The top ranks of the regimental Non-Commissioned Officers, in particular, displayed heightened levels of insolence and incompetence while performing their duties. The surrender of the last of the Confederate forces in July 1865 may have influenced the senior Non-Commissioned Officers' behaviors. Increasing citations and reductions for disobeying orders and insubordination indicate increasing tension between officers and soldiers, but no single cause can be cited. Hospital Steward Gibbons avoided incarceration on grounds of a formality, but two Corporals were reduced to the ranks while four received promotions in order to replace reduced men.⁷⁹⁵ Corporals could be expected to lapse in their military bearing in part due to inexperience or inability to adjust to leading men who were messmates a short time before their promotions. Reductions of senior enlisted personnel cast doubt on their professional bearing, and commitment to their covenant with their race to serve as upright men deserving of respect and emulation.

⁷⁹⁵ General Orders 30, Headquarters, First division, Little Rock, June 2, 1865, Special Orders 2, Headquarters, 79th USCI, Little Rock, June 11, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4.*

The reduction of Company First Sergeants Thomas Montgomery and Harrison Reed, and their return to the ranks, after trial and conviction for charges of disobeying orders and conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline, set the tone for the performance expected from black soldiers as the Civil War's pace wound down in the west. Reed's punishment is unusual because he also received a public reprimand from Lieutenant Colonel Ward in front of the regiment. However, if former First Sergeants Reed and Montgomery stood as examples of miscreants, the actions and deportment of returning prisoners of war did them great credit. The return of First Lieutenant Bethuel Hitchcock and First Sergeant Randolph Morgan from imprisonment confirmed their fidelity, and along with other former prisoners that rejoined the regiment after repatriation, the staunch faith of most men of the Colored regiments in the cause of freedom and the Union. Instead of taking the standard thirty-day leave of absence proffered to returning prisoners, both men immediately rejoined their companies and assumed their former duties.⁷⁹⁶ Insubordination charges, despite the few details written in the Regimental records, give an incomplete record of discipline across the regiment. More serious crimes demonstrate that black regiments, like their white counterparts, contained elements inured to moral approbation, and primed for crime. Two Company K soldiers personified some of the worst sort of behavior that a soldier could exhibit toward civilians, a heinous act of betrayal and premeditated murder that left no room for doubt about a the loss of discipline beginning to affect the regiment.

Captain Graton described the murder of one civilian and the attempted murder of a second in lurid tones. Privates George Dixon and John Johnson of Company K enticed

⁷⁹⁶ Special Order 23, Lieutenant Colonel Ward, Headquarters, 79th USCI, Little Rock, June 12, 25, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4.*

an old man and a boy into following them into some woods with the tale of changing hidden money for the civilians' Federal greenbacks. The unsuspecting civilians followed and the soldiers robbed them of \$400.00, after killing the old man and wounding the boy so severely they also thought him dead. After identification, trial, and sentencing, Johnson jumped into the river and drowned on account of the eighteen-pound chain and iron ball to which he was shackled. George Dixon was hanged on July 21, 1865.⁷⁹⁷

Mistreatment of black soldiers

Stories of equally horrible problems in Kansas appeared to have been limited to the vicinity of the Independent Light Artillery Battery's Camp Sully. The coercive enlistment practices utilized to create the battery, described in a letter delivered to Captain H. Ford Douglas, were a litany of abuse and horror. Seeking to be mustered from the service, enlisted men claimed that they were beaten, imprisoned, held under water in the nearby river, starved, and left exposed to the elements until they agreed to enlist. Captain Douglas added his own observations that men were starved to exhaustion to compel enlistment, and stated that he was prepared to swear to this treatment and could produce over a thousand witnesses.⁷⁹⁸ Shortly thereafter, the Union Department Commander ordered the battery disbanded. Without question the accusations of mistreatment and violent coercion would not have been ignored in a white unit. It is unknown why Douglas, if he knew such abuses provided his manpower for the battery, did not confront them sooner. His complaint in June 1865 is extremely controversial

⁷⁹⁷ Graton letter, June 25, 1865, *John Graton Correspondence Collection*, Microfilm Box 913; "First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers – Infantry," *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. 1.*

⁷⁹⁸ Gabriel Grays et al to Captain H. Ford Douglas, 19 June, 1865, filed with D-76 1865, Letters received, Series 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94: B-396; Captain. H. Ford Douglas to Second Lieutenant Juno Barber, 20 June 1865, filed with D-76 1865, Letters received, Series 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94: B-396 as cited in Ira Berlin (ed.). *Freedom A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867*, 659.

because Douglas's battery did not play any significant role after Price's defeat in late 1864.

Mistreatment of soldiers could take many forms. Unlike the shocking treatment accorded the black artillerists in Leavenworth's Camp Sully, mistreatment of the First Kansas Colored's soldiers took the form of pay inequities that occurred after normalization of pay occurred in March, 1865. Colonel Williams, Lieutenant Colonel Ward, and the Company Commanders of the regiment addressed the Secretary of War with an appeal to pay the men of the First Kansas Colored the same as white regiments backdated to their initial enlistments in August, 1862. Williams' attempt to collect back pay for his regiment foundered on Federal bureaucracy, and adding insult to injury, Williams' soldiers were refused back pay because Senator Lane lacked authorization to offer equal pay at the time of enlistment in August 1862.⁷⁹⁹ The pay inequities endured by black soldiers across the Union army prior to pay equalization prevented many from gaining access to sutler stores, and may have contributed to desertion rates and a general lack of motivation to seek greater responsibility. When Sergeant Majors, First Sergeants, and Privates earned the same pay for unequal duties and responsibility levels, remaining a Private with minimal responsibilities seemed a sensible thing for unambitious men.

Pay remained an issue for black soldiers throughout the war. The issue of pay extended far beyond wallets or gambling circles, and affected the black community as a whole. Remittances home could not be relied upon to offset expenses for civilians in Kansas, and pay often went un-issued for long periods of time when paymasters transited between commands. The previously inadequate \$10.00 per month, \$7.00 after clothing

⁷⁹⁹ Colonel J.M. Williams to Honorable Secretary of War, 5 July 1865, W-558, Letters received Series 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94: B-298, from. Ira Berlin, (ed.). *Freedom A Documentary History*, 364-368.

was deducted, could not sustain families, and memories of the pay disparity rankled even after the War Department approved equal pay for black soldiers in July 1864. Most black soldiers supported families in improvised housing near military camps, and the additional meager pay that laundresses, cooks, or teamsters could earn to purchase food or clothing failed to keep pace with wartime inflation and availability.⁸⁰⁰ Williams understood pay difficulties; his own pay was stopped because he failed to clear accounts from when he was a captain in the Fifth Kansas Cavalry. Ultimately Williams requested a leave of absence to travel to Washington D.C. to settle his accounts, and remained absent from the Second Brigade into late July.⁸⁰¹ Williams' financial woes and those of other white officers reflect the difficulty of all ranks to maintain their fortunes, and several First Kansas Colored officers cited monetary concerns in their resignations. When pay drought combined with the ennui of camp life and the realization that the war was over, discipline problems surfaced in the Regimental ranks.

Maintaining discipline among garrison troops proved a challenge to the professionalism and creativity of officers. The Second Brigade of General Salomon's First Division drilled for six hours per day, six days per week, and although men maintained their proficiency with their .58 rifles and .69 caliber muskets, some problems occurred when men exited the camp on leave or for Provost Marshal duties. Captain Armstrong shocked many when he was charged on July 17 with "assault with intent to kill" in Cairo, Illinois. According to regimental records, Armstrong shot and killed Private Flynn, a soldier that Armstrong accused of murdering a soldier, when he

⁸⁰⁰ Colonel Williams to Secretary of War with endorsements, 5 July 1865, W-558, 1865, Letters received Series 360, Colored Troops Division, RG 94: B-298, as cited in Ira Berlin (ed.). *Freedom A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867* 421, 659.

⁸⁰¹ Special Orders 153, 378, June 29, 18 July, 1865, James Williams, *RG 94: 79th USCT Infantry, Combined Military Service Records*.

attempted to escape Armstrong's custody. Armstrong was acquitted, but his use of deadly force was an unsettling footnote to his post-prisoner of war military service.

Needless to say his leave of absence had not turned out very well.⁸⁰²

Homeward Bound

The departure of white soldiers in the summer of 1865 was matched in some cases by the mustering out of First Kansas Colored soldiers assigned to details apart from the regiment. Soldiers at Leavenworth Kansas, either as members of detachments established to facilitate logistical operations or soldiers incarcerated for desertion, mustered out in six distinct periods, between June 7, 1865 and November 29, 1865. Two men mustered out from Little Rock in June are a divergence from the Regimental discharges for disability, and at least one was mustered out as a result of his incarceration.⁸⁰³

The First Kansas Colored continued to receive prisoners of war throughout the fall. Despite their period of imprisonment, the repatriated soldiers from various companies remained in ranks until their muster out from service with the general regimental muster on October 1, 1865.⁸⁰⁴ Deaths continued to occur after the regiment's relocation to Little Rock and later deployment to Pine Bluff. Sixteen deaths recorded between February and October 1865 serve as witness to the fact that no regimental members died

⁸⁰² General Orders 49, Major General Salomon, Headquarters, First Division, Little Rock, July 2, 1865, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*; Company E recapitulation of weapons and equipment for August, 1865, *RG 94: Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Order Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 3 of 4*; Official Communication from Shiloh, Richland County, Ohio, forwarded Leave of Absence to War Department. July 6, 22, 1865, *RG 94: Combined Military Service Records*.

⁸⁰³ Musters Out Detachments, "First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers – Infantry," *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. 1*.

⁸⁰⁴ Prisoner of war Regimental Muster Roll records, "First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers – Infantry," *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. 1*.

as the result of combat in this time period, but that most died from disease with the exception of the men sentenced to execution for the premeditated murder of civilians.

Company	Number	Cause of Death	Date of Death	Location of Death
C	1	Disease	February 15, 1865	Fort Scott
C	1	Fever	July 23, 1865	Little Rock
C	1	congestive fever	September 24, 1865	Pine Bluff
E	1	Dropsy	June 1, 1865	Little Rock
E	1	Disease	February 21, 1865	Little Rock
E	1	congestive fever	July 2, 1865	Fort Smith
E	1	Disease	September 26, 1865	Pine Bluff
F	1	Disease	February 9, 1865	Little Rock
F	1	intermittent fever	July 19, 1865	Little Rock
G	1	Scrofula	May 20, 1865	Little Rock
G	1	typhus fever	August 2, 1865	Fort Smith
G	1	Scrofula	Unknown	Little Rock
H	1	inflammation of bowels	May 17, 1865	Little Rock
K	1	chronic diarrhea	August 1, 1865	Little Rock
K	1	Suicide	June 23, 1865	Little Rock
K	1	hanged	July 21, 1865	Little Rock

Table 9: Regimental Causes of Death, February – October 1865⁸⁰⁵

The symptoms of the deceased indicate that their deaths resulted from mosquito-borne diseases, especially when febrile fevers accounted for the majority of losses.

The First Kansas Colored received new orders directing the regiment to assume duties previously performed by white cavalry regiments. When the white regiments neared their muster-out date, on July 25, Major General J.J. Reynolds ordered the First Kansas Colored to march to Pine Bluff, Arkansas to assume garrison duties at that place.⁸⁰⁶ The regiment's arrival at Pine Bluff did not significantly change the nature of their duties. Although engaged as primarily as the garrison and Provost Marshal detachment for Pine Bluff, companies of the regiment also performed Provost Marshal duties at the towns of

⁸⁰⁵ Regimental Mortality and Morbidity, "First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers – Infantry," *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861-1865. Vol. 1.*

⁸⁰⁶ Special Orders 174, Major General J.J. Reynolds, Headquarters Department of Ark, Little Rock, July 25, 1865, *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Regimental Order Book, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 2 of 4*

Monticello and Warren, Arkansas. The march of the First Kansas Colored to Pine Bluff exposed the men to new environmental conditions from which many men contracted malaria. Pine Bluff served as a key logistical center for the Army of Arkansas during the Civil War, and a sizeable freedman community remained after the war to farm. The return of many discharged white southern soldiers to the vicinity heightened racial tensions, but with the First Kansas Colored conveniently located to intervene should violence erupt, no incidents of note were recorded in regimental records.

The first intimations of the First Kansas Colored's impending muster-out appear in regimental records the second week of September. The relatively uneventful Provost Marshal duties of Captain Crep's Company F began at Warren, Arkansas on September 8, but their duties and those of the regiment ended September 20 when the regiment received instructions to concentrate at Pine Bluff to prepare for muster-out. The process of preparing men and equipment lasted for a little over two weeks, ordnance and equipment passing from the companies to Lieutenant Colonel Ward's control and from there to the Department of Arkansas. The soldiers maintained their arms, and service records reflect that many accepted charges equal to nearly half the monthly pay of a private in order to keep their weapons; many men left military life wearing Union blue uniforms and carrying the accoutrements to service their Springfield muskets.⁸⁰⁷

The First Kansas Colored's soldiers officially mustered out of service October 1, 1865, with soldiers that enlisted in Arkansas returning to their places of origin if the men desired. The regiment's enlisted Kansas soldiers remained for a brief period in Arkansas while their commanders accounted for equipment and stores, and began movement to the

⁸⁰⁷ *RG 94: 79th USCT Infantry, Combined Military Service Records.*

riverboat *Prairie Rose* for return to Kansas. The final regimental casualties in Arkansas passed away in general hospitals in Little Rock and Pine Bluff between September 7 and September 22, and at least four fell prey to fevers of various types. Additional men died while the regiment moved north aboard the steamer *Prairie Rose*; at least four men succumbed to fevers. The final recorded regimental casualty occurred in Leavenworth when a soldier of Company G passed away from typho-malarial fever on October 27, 1865.⁸⁰⁸ Surviving the pestilential Arkansas environment could legitimately be accounted the last campaign of the First Kansas Colored's service.

The soldiers that enlisted in 1862 fulfilled their enlistments with honor. However, some of the regiment's officers never completed this final stage of movement. Perhaps sensing the regiment's impending muster out of service, a minority of officers took leaves of absences in August and September, and several never reported back to the regiment due to a combination of medical ailments.⁸⁰⁹ The last acts of several regimental officers should not cast doubt upon the whole, and as made evident by their military service records, the majority of the regiment's officers applied for retention on the rolls after the war, and most were accepted. Very few remained in the Union army after the regiment marched north. The general reduction in the size of the Union army meant that those that remained would lose rank in order to remain, a too bitter pill for most. Whatever their motivations, whether the reliability of a job that out-paid civilian occupations, especially for young men, or a sincere desire to remain with a Colored Regiment in what became a post-war army dominated by Colored regiments in the south, the fact that many proved

⁸⁰⁸ *RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, 79th USCT Infantry, Descriptive Book Companies A-K, E112-115, PI-17, Vol 1 of 4.*

⁸⁰⁹ Ramson Ward, Augustus Sholes, Elkaniah Huddleston, Military Service Files, *RG 94: 79th USCT Infantry, Combined Military Service Records.*

willing to extend their service with a black regiment is evidence of a deeper commitment. Two notable exceptions remained in the ranks however: the last regimental surgeon, Chauncy Burr volunteered to remain in the service in “whatever capacity he could serve,” and Brevet Brigadier General. Williams accepted a Captain’s commission in order to continue his military service.⁸¹⁰ Williams seemed to enjoy being a soldier, and possessed a talent for war. His service would take him through the Indian Wars where he received a Major’s brevet for valor in Arizona, and in 1871, when too disabled to serve any longer, Williams took the fight to Washington D.C. where he would fight once again for his men.

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A brief analysis of the regiment’s performance encapsulates the price paid by the regiment’s personnel for their service. Regimental records, although incomplete, contain mention of two hundred and fifty-four men who died from wounds, disease, and accidents. Dozens received discharges due to disability, and although a black mark against the regiment, at least fifty-three deserted, but at least twenty percent returned to service, some of who died as a result to recommitting themselves to the Union cause. These raw numbers fail to truly reflect the regiment’s performance. The eighteen separate battles, skirmishes, and raids undertaken by the regiment during its service reveal it to be a hard-fighting, dependable command. Only in the last few months of the regiment’s service did any indication of widespread disciplinary problems arise, barring the rough-and-tumble days of the regiment’s formation at Fort Scott. The First Kansas Could march off the Prairie Rose with heads held high and secure in the knowledge that

⁸¹⁰ Chauncy Burr, James M. Williams, Service Files, *RG 94: 79th USCT Infantry, Combined Military Service Records; James Williams Papers, MS 545*, Kansas State Historical Society.

their service had secured for them the right to be called men, and evidence that black men shirked no duty in their service.

Returning to civilian lives proved a different challenge for many of the regiment's veterans. Although the armies of the south lay prostrate, and slavery as an institution no longer countenanced, achieving equality in the post-war United States opened a new battleground for the black veterans of the First Kansas Colored. War did not prove the sweeping catalyst that many hoped would transform their lives; white America debated what to do next as freedmen also exercised their new freedoms in American society. Kansas, the land of abolitionists and pioneer in black enlistment did not openly embrace social change. Black military service proved that the black race was not a fawning or corrupted shadow of mankind, or that if free from the subjugation of white slave owners; the race would revert into savagery. The tropes of slave, master and assumed racial superiority entered a new phase of redefinition, and many that deferred their judgment of the black Kansas communities, no longer could ignore a population that wanted to exercise their ability to gain home and hearth in Kansas. Former contrabands did not depart en masse after muster out of service, but remained, and added their voices to the demand for racial equality.

Chapter 11
Conclusion
“What shall become of the Negro?”

The First Kansas Colored arrived in Leavenworth, Kansas to great acclaim on December 23, 1865. Following the regiment’s march through the streets, the black community feted the veterans with a reception at the A.M. E. Church . As the regiment formed up in front of the church, General Williams and Lieutenant Colonel Ward reviewed the troops. A moving speech by Col. Daniel R. Anthony, who welcomed the veterans on behalf of Leavenworth’s white citizens, followed. Anthony’s address encompassed the entirety of the Regiment’s experience, paying tribute to the black soldiers on behalf of a grateful government and “the vindication of the courage and manhood of the African race.” He frankly acknowledged the mistake that whites made by refusing the military service of black men. “We lacked the courage to say we wanted you to fight in defense of the nation. Instead we said we want you as laborers...[W]e will enroll you in companies and for your protection we will arm you.”⁸¹¹ Anthony admitted that the failures of white Union troops opened the door to black enlistment, a development that might never have occurred if the Union had not lost as many men as it did in 1862.

Anthony’s speech tackled the race issue head-on, for addressed the post-war conundrum many whites faced: What to do with the Negro? He excoriated those that

⁸¹¹ “A Gala Day In Leavenworth, Kansas. Reception of The First Regiment Kansas Colored Troops,” *The Christian Recorder*, December 23, 1865. *The Christian Recorder* is an invaluable source for information written by local Kansas black social and religious leaders on the affairs of their communities. What information the Kansas newspapers lacked, the *Recorder* shared by reprinting the correspondence sent in by many of its readers.

avored colonization in lieu of civil rights and implored the black veterans to forge a new identity for the black community now claiming its status as freedmen.. “Now, by morality, industry and economy, brand that other lie that [N]egroes are vicious, lazy and improvident, Anthony averred.”⁸¹² The First Kansas Colored’s men, Anthony and other white Kansans believed, represented the best example for others to follow. Significantly, the approbation of those who agreed with Anthony was conditional. The First Kansas Colored finally had its parade, but it came with caveats for the men to make the best of their liberty. As it happened, Leavenworth proved an excellent place for black veterans to demonstrate their worth, and in the months following the end of the Civil War, black businesspeople and residents alike solidified their wartime sacrifices by participating actively in the economic life of the city.

While the First Kansas Colored fought battles against Confederates and their white sympathizers in Arkansas and Indian Territory, the rapidly expanding black Kansan communities underwent the painful transition from slave to citizen, often with little or no assistance from the larger white community. Former slaves possessed potential and desire but little else, and unscrupulous Kansans often took advantage of their ignorance to cheat them of the little money or property the refugees possessed. Clashes between groups at the lowest levels of Kansas society also occurred with the Irish and black communities pitted against one another for unskilled jobs in an increasingly polarized society. H.C. Bruce, a former contraband turned businessman in Leavenworth remembered the Irish forming mobs to “clane [sic] the nagurs [sic] out from the Baptist

⁸¹² “A Gala Day In Leavenworth, Kansas. Reception of The First Regiment Kansas Colored Troops,” *The Christian Recorder*, December 23, 1865.

church in Leavenworth.”⁸¹³ The presence of Colonel Anthony forestalled violence between black and Irish mobs. His reputation for firm resolve and desire for orderly discourse was happily enforced by the power of the city police.⁸¹⁴ Anthony had a well-established reputation for violence against mobs, slave owners, and unwelcome visitors to the city. His close friend, William D. Matthews of the First Kansas Colored served as a constable on his city’s police force, and Anthony’s history as a conductor on the Underground Railroad sensitized him to the needs of the Leavenworth black community.

The black community of Leavenworth, a cohesive group at the beginning of the conflict, had contributed many of the First Kansas Colored’s initial recruits. Solidarity gradually decreased as contrabands entered the state, and free blacks sought to impose a measure of dominance over the new arrivals. Many free blacks owned businesses or practiced trades, and their time spent in Kansas before the war fighting for a place in Kansas’s society may have influenced how they interacted with the new arrivals. Free blacks referred to black refugees with the same term employed by white soldiers who liberated persons from neighboring slave states: contraband. The “contraband” label served to differentiate free from slave and distinguished established residents (those that had patiently built their lives in racially stratified pre-Civil War Kansas) from the largely unskilled, penniless former slaves that now were competing for jobs and status. Newly liberated slaves outnumbered free blacks in Kansas by a factor estimated at “ten to one” by one contemporary observer, and the latter imposed their will by establishing social circles that sought to exclude “contrabands” from exercising a voice in political or social

⁸¹³ H.C. Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty-Nine Years a Slave, Twenty-Nine Years a Free Man*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, 119.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*

affairs.⁸¹⁵ Racism and social strife influenced the new Leavenworth black community's character, although individuals were expected to make their own way by the merit of their labor.

One measure of the impact that the migration of blacks into Kansas had on local communities can be gauged by the entries in city directories. Leavenworth, possessed a nascent black community at the start of the war, and by the end boasted a number of fully employed black citizens, some in such highly specialized trades as blacksmithing, masonry, and carpentry. Leavenworth possessed a large number of lesser skilled workers as well predominately laborers, but also laundresses, barbers, and cooks; at least thirty soldiers also claimed Leavenworth as their residence.⁸¹⁶ Although not fully representative of the black communities across Kansas, the black citizens listed in the city guide possessed enough wealth to afford to advertise their presence. The importance of the listings of these businesspeople and soldiers, when compared to the absence of black demographic data from earlier in the Civil War, offer proof of their contribution to Kansas society. Their presence in Leavenworth confirms a sense of permanency in their residency, and no reports exist of a massive black influx back into Missouri. The black community of Kansas wanted recognition for their contribution to the Union war effort, and former black soldiers led the charge for equality. Emancipation no longer sufficed. Black Kansans wanted equal rights and at the top of their list was suffrage.

One needs acknowledge that the demand for a greater voice in Kansas and rights for black residents preceded the return of the First Kansas Colored's soldiers to Kansas. Lacking a deep historical basis in Kansas, blacks communities possessed an organizing

⁸¹⁵ H.C. Bruce, *The New Man*, 79-80.

⁸¹⁶ *Leavenworth City Directory 1865-1866*. Braunhold and Crowell, Leavenworth Kansas 1866.

structure in their religious communities. The Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E. Church) in Leavenworth, one of the most influential of the religious organizations in Kansas, nurtured black political aspirations while celebrating the numbers of black mechanics entering trades. To that end, the A.M.E. Church hosted the State Convention of Colored Citizens of Kansas on October 6, 1865, a convocation at which black delegates from across the state met for three days. The Convention sent resolutions to the Kansas Legislature and Congress, and heavily emphasized the service of black soldiers as entitling blacks to equal rights.⁸¹⁷ Local leaders and visiting black dignitaries stressed the need for black Kansans to change their status in Kansas through political means, and personal actions.

Black community leaders enacted change through several different avenues. Blacks were exhorted by leaders in their communities to branch out into new trades, and abandon the ones tainted with traditions of servitude such as waiters and barbers. Their aim was to see large numbers of their brethren take up skilled trades, stressing that mechanics and laborers were in demand in Kansas. Blacks wanted “wealth and position,” and such aspirations appeared possible in the heady days of emancipation.⁸¹⁸ One visitor, Bishop Campbell, urged the black Kansas communities to improve their station, and while integrating into Kansas communities to “form leagues and societies, make petitions to the state’s political bodies, and to raise funds to buy positions if necessary.”⁸¹⁹ Politically, the A.M.E. Church and black community leaders backed Senator Lane, who received their backing due to his support of human rights, and black

⁸¹⁷ “Leavenworth Correspondence,” *The Christian Recorder*, October 28, 1865.

⁸¹⁸ “Our Development,” *The Christian Recorder*, April 7, 1866.

⁸¹⁹ “Leavenworth Correspondence,” *The Christian Recorder*, October 28, 1865.

rights. Many of the men who exercised influence in the Leavenworth black community maintained their primacy after the war, and enjoyed links to the charismatic senator.

The demands for civil rights did not place too great a strain on Kansan society, but suffrage threatened the established social order in a way that emancipating slaves did not. Suffrage embodied a change in the social order that required white and black Kansans to renegotiate the social contract understood by all during the Civil War, namely that Kansas would shield blacks from Confederate slave owners in return for faithful service in the state's military, farms, and wartime economy. The end of the war did not translate into universal equality for Kansans, and generated ferocious debate in black and white circles alike. Senator Lane, during a reconstruction meeting in Kansas in January 1866, expressed his support for protecting black civil rights and freedom, but he balked at granting suffrage. Lane's opposition came from the imposition of suffrage against the interests of the states. Lane favored individual state ratification of a constitutional amendment, in part because he believed such a ratification scheme would avoid bloodshed between the black and white races.⁸²⁰ Lane's stance on rights and suffrage depended on a very clear definition of the rights and privileges of blacks in Kansas's society. The Civil War goal of Emancipation served a purpose for anti-slavery Kansans, uniting the populace of Kansas in opposition to the slave holding south, and providing valuable labor and soldiers for Kansas.

The debate over conferring full racial equality in Kansas appeared little affected by the recent service of the black militia during the Price Raid, or the sterling service of the First and Second Kansas Colored Infantry Regiments, and the Independent Light

⁸²⁰ "Speech of Gen. James H. Lane – Reconstruction Meeting in Kansas-Endorsement of President Johnson's Policy," *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* January 7, 1866, published *New York Times* January 21, 1866.

Artillery Battery at Fort Leavenworth. Although many Kansans supported protection of the civil rights gained by blacks during the Civil War, civil rights and equality were two issues that did not mean the same thing. Granting blacks suffrage would grant the appearance of equality, but in post-Civil War Kansas, suffrage was out of the question for the returning white veterans and communities attempting to ensure that free white men would have the ability to retain their social and economic primacy. During the war, former Governor Charles Robinson believed that the majority of Kansans favored equal rights for all and claimed that the word “white” had been inserted into the state constitution to earn favor in Washington D.C.⁸²¹ The pressures of the war and the need for black support for the war effort may have affected Robinson’s assessment, for he could not have known that there would be a political backlash against blacks when white citizens tried to resume lives disarranged by war.

Less than six months after the First Kansas Colored’s soldiers enjoyed the thanks of the citizens of Leavenworth, the intensification of political wrangling brought out sentiments suppressed during the war. John Wright, the publisher of the *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* wrote that blacks should not claim social equality, and opined that the great majority of blacks lacking the capacity for the political privileges that whites enjoyed.⁸²² Wright’s sentiments stand as testimony to the degree to which pre-war racial attitudes quickly crept back into Kansans’ consciousness despite the growing politicization of Kansas’s black communities throughout 1864 and 1865, and into 1866. Black Kansans increasingly met resistance from whites fearful of economic competition and unsure of the ability of free blacks to determine the state’s political direction on equal

⁸²¹ Charles Robinson letter, *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, January 5, 1864.

⁸²² John w. Wright, *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, June 13, 1866.

footing with white residents. Some black leaders attempted to force change locally by acting on the national stage.

Former First Kansas Colored officer William D. Matthews possessed local and national influence. Matthews, a recognized leader in the Leavenworth black community, represented Kansas's blacks at a series of National Conventions held in early 1866. National agitation for black suffrage intensified in early 1866, and veterans and black political leaders stridently advocated change on a national level. Black veterans meeting at the National Hall in Philadelphia in January 1866 urged delegates, amongst them representatives from Kansas, to seek equal rights with whites, their military service in the Civil War payment for civil rights to include suffrage, for the entire race. Former First Kansas Colored Infantry soldiers William D. Matthews and Richard Hinton represented the black community of Kansas; the former was elected as president of the convention, and the latter was proud to claim the right as the first to enlist black soldiers. A second national meeting at Washington D.C. on September 1, 1866 concluded with delegates demanding suffrage for their role in preserving the Union. The convention charged veterans to ask their neighbors "in the name of sympathy and the battles they fought in the defense of the country, to grant them all their rights."⁸²³ Black military service presented the black community with a powerful moral and political weapon to use in the fight for suffrage.

Black and white veterans in Leavenworth, Kansas, fought to keep the issue of suffrage alive while Kansans still remembered the contributions that blacks in military service had made to putting down the Confederacy's rebellion.. H. Ford Douglas, former commander of the Independent Light Artillery Battery appealed to the black community

⁸²³ "Colored Soldiers' and Sailors' Convention," *The Christian Recorder*, January 12, 1867.

and First Kansas Colored veterans, citing his own military service as an example of how hard he had to fight to serve the Union. Douglas also addressed strife within the veteran community, acting as peacemaker between Henry Langston who excoriated whites in general for their involvement in slavery, and Richard Hinton who defended the white race. Racial partisanship amongst the whites that commanded black troops, and black veterans weakened the cause of black suffrage as the two races shared service against a common enemy.⁸²⁴ Interestingly enough, the Leavenworth community supported interracial social discourse among school students at academic events, and three free colored schools, two of which possessed black schoolteachers operated in Leavenworth.⁸²⁵ Less overt than political conventions, but perhaps more persuasive on a local level, black schools proved that blacks could elevate their place in society. While political leaders fought with rhetoric against racism, students made favorable impressions with their eagerness to educate themselves.

Nonetheless, intolerance, while tempered by wartime experience, received support from unlikely sources. One example that influenced whites was the speech of Honorable John Randolph of South Carolina at the Kansas Constitution convention. Randolph expressed the belief that blacks possessed all the traits of an inferior race, that blacks were “a cross between the Baboon and the man,” evident from “woolly, lips thick, nose flat, skull thick- and couldn't any anatomist tell the bones of a nigger from those of any human being's? ...Niggers were animals, but a little more intelligent than a dog, and, but are remove from the baboon.”⁸²⁶ Few sought to refuse his racist rant by citing the record

⁸²⁴ H. Ford Douglas, obituary, *The Christian Recorder*, November 25, 1865.

⁸²⁵ “From Kansas,” *The Christian Recorder*, July 14, 1866.

⁸²⁶ “Thoughts of a Self-Made Colored Man,” *The Christian Recorder*, June 16, 1866.

of the Kansas colored regiments. But the words of a former Confederate carried less weight than fears of competition between the races for the future of Kansas.

The status of the black citizens of Kansas depended on political solutions, and the rule of law. Blind racism no longer held sway, but regardless of the wishes of the black populace of Kansas, when the issue of suffrage came to a vote on November 5, 1867, 10,483 votes were cast for extending suffrage, but 19,421 against excising “white” from the state constitution. When the Fifteenth Amendment passed in Congress extending suffrage to blacks, ratification devolved to the states for approval, and Kansas ratified the Amendment on March 30, 1870.⁸²⁷ The national debate presented Kansans with a choice that fitted into the national debate over race, rights, and suffrage.

The ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment changed little for black men serving in the post-Civil War army. Two regiments of black infantry guarded the western reaches of the state, and their service echoed the wartime beliefs of many whites toward the abilities of black men. Black soldiers at Fort Hays, Kansas, fought against old prejudices anew. According to one black soldier, white ranchers expressed the belief that blacks would not fight. The past achievements of the black Kansan regiments appeared to have faded with time and proximity. Whites expected that black men would bow to white superiority. However, according to Henry Carpenter, a black soldier at Fort Hays, the hostile Indian tribes of western Kansas regarded black soldiers “with holy terror,” and at least one attack black soldiers ended with Indians fleeing while shouting the refrain “nigger, nigger, nigger.”⁸²⁸ Once again black men fought for respect and recognition on a mission that offered neither despite their service. The post-war racial situation in

⁸²⁷ Daniel Wilder, *Annals of Kansas*, Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1875, 467.

⁸²⁸ Henry Carpenter letter, Fort Hays, Kansas, “Letter from Kansas,” *The Christian Recorder*, November 16, 1867.

Kansas reflected the growing collective amnesia of white America, and as Reconstruction began to falter in the face of resurgent white Southern political influence, black achievements became irrelevant to many.

The effect of black military service on American politics is difficult to judge out of context. Perhaps the legacy of the First Kansas Colored's military performance and the character of its soldiers are best understood by examining how communities restructured in the first few years after the Civil War. Where once communities possessed few black residents, by 1865 most Kansas communities supported small communities determined to improve their lot in life. Instead of southern racial ideologies ruling local interactions, shared combat experience brought blacks and whites together in ways unfathomable before the Civil War. Black communities proved industrious additions to their Kansas host cities, and the memory of wartime sacrifice left an indelible impression on the white officers that commanded the black men of the First Kansas Colored.

The bond between commanders and men remained strong after the war. Decades after the war veterans of the regiment gathered in Leavenworth to celebrate their bond in Grand Army of the Republic halls, and as the nineteenth century entered its final decade, soldiers and officers united to relive their youth. Colonel Williams proved a steadfast supporter of his veterans, visiting Washington D.C. to lobby for their behalf and faithfully supporting pension claims submitted by his soldiers with affidavits of support. The mass meeting drew the support of the local black community and many of all ages flocked to listen to Brevet General Williams and others speak of the past. Other First Kansas Colored officers and Non-Commissioned Officers joined Williams in the celebration; Captains Huddleston, Matthews, and McFarland all enjoyed the respect of

their veterans, as did Sergeants Joe Carris, Dempsey Legett, John Matthews, Henry Yokum, and Alex Collins. Williams' speech transformed the regiment's most tragic battle into triumph, and he favorably compared the Poison Springs to the legendary battles of Thermopylae and Balaclava. His most outstanding achievement in Washington D.C., the creation of records for the War Department, detailed the First Kansas Colored's performance at the battles of Island Mound, Poison Springs, and Jenkins' Ferry.⁸²⁹

Williams' determination to ensure that his regiment's service did not disappear from the records of the Civil War served as a fitting tribute both to the men and to his leadership.

The gathering placed the service of the First Kansas Colored into perspective for many that may not have known the regiment's story of bravery and sacrifice. Colonel Anthony regaled the audience with tales of Williams' early awkward days as a soldier, and William D. Matthews praised his one-time commander for his support in gaining Matthews a well-deserved pension after many years of fighting for recognition.

Williams' words carried weight, and his efforts to introduce bills in the house and senate proved his commitment. The audience included veterans of black Civil War infantry, artillery, and cavalry units, and when Williams praised William D. Matthews for his military service and pre-Civil War work in the Underground Railroad, he did so unreservedly and with great enthusiasm. The elected committee of black veterans paid Williams a great complement at the closing of the meeting, and declared that not for Williams' efforts, "The fate of black men would have been the fate of the Chinese, and the emancipation measures and bills passed to enfranchise all blacks never advanced for

⁸²⁹ "A Reunion – A Perfect Love Fest Held at G.A.R. Hall," The *Leavenworth Times*, October 8, 1890.

consideration.”⁸³⁰ The obligation between commander and soldier, the leader and the led lasted long after the debris and ruin of the Civil War passed into history.

Judging the commitment of white Kansans to their black soldiers is a difficult task. It is too easy to declare white officers in black regiments to be abolitionists, and to assume their commitment derived from deep-seated convictions about racial equality and worth. Each man mustered his own secret passions and motivations. Former Underground Railroad conductors populated the First Kansas Colored’s officer ranks in the early days of the regiment, but so did political appointees of Senator Lane. Contrasting the degree of commitment demonstrated by Captain Gardner with that of Captain Van Horn may offer some basis for comparison, but to do so would overlook the degree to which these men stood staunchly before their men in garrison, and with the ranks in combat.

A better statistical measure of commitment may be determined from the regiment’s record books, and the travails endured by all. Officers could and did resign their commissions before the war concluded, but many gave their lives and freedom in service to their men. The uncertain fate of white officers in black regiments during the bloody conflict dissuaded many white men from seeking commissions in black regiments, but those that accepted the honor proved on the whole to be honorable and committed. The First Kansas Colored’s service records contain countless examples of personal courage, but paper cannot convey the visceral reactions of men in combat, however eloquent. The more mundane regimental rolls and medical records show a composite picture of a regiment staffed by men committed to the cause of freedom. Many veterans suffered life-long disability as a result of their service, and white officers shed their blood

⁸³⁰ “A Reunion – A Perfect Love Fest Held at G.A.R. Hall,” *The Leavenworth Times*, October 8, 1890.

alongside their men. The regiment's officers attended to their men's needs when possible, and endured along with them the vicissitudes of tiresome details in Union installations where reduced rations and seasonal illness affected all.

Regimental statistics reveal a regiment of deep experience and shattering loss. The First Kansas Colored lost the greatest men of the Kansas regiments, and lost the most of any regiment in a single battle.⁸³¹ The regiment does not however, appear anywhere near the top of any list of surrendered soldiers, despite the temptation for self-preservation at such horrific battles as Poison Spring and Flat Rock. Officers entered captivity alongside their men, but as small clusters of captured men. Officers died during battle and after losing personal fights against disease, while many of their men passed away in southern lands from a variety of causes. The initial days of Kansan disapproval and War Department opposition winnowed the wheat from the chaff, and a number of potential officers deigned to refuse commissions. The men that fought eighteen separate engagements from Island Mound to Ivy Ford did so knowing all the while that a noose awaited them.

Isolated incidents illustrate the bond between the First Kansas Coloreds officers and men, whether the surreptitious sale of coffee in exchange for eggs to sustain sick men, or hard-fought battles where officers and Non-Commissioned Officers stemmed the flight of exhausted men from vengeful Confederate pursuers. The men of the First Kansas Colored wanted recognition as fighting men, soldiers willing to weather bouts of garrison utilization as labor in exchange for the opportunity to engage the enemy in battle. The regiment's soldiers believed Frederick Douglass's exhortations for "men of color" to

⁸³¹ A Reunion – A Perfect Love Fest Held at G.A.R. Hall," *The Leavenworth Times*, October 8, 1890.

seize their freedom rather than wait for white men to give it to them. Many eligible black men remained in communities far from battle, their hearts unmoved by appeals for service. Their decision cannot be fairly condemned for the men of the First Kansas Colored fought bravely for pay less than white counterparts, and their families endured long pay droughts. Life at home beside a warm fire and with a full belly paled in comparison to the clash of arms and the acrid smell of burnt powder.

Redemption and renewal could be earned in the First Kansas Colored's ranks. Many men that sought succor outside the military while hiding away as fugitive deserters later returned to the ranks, and in some cases died as a result of that fateful decision. The ranks of the First Kansas Colored beckoned with the siren call that pulls at young men's souls, the chance to measure oneself in battle. Military service offered the opportunity for glory and adventure, but the charnel house stench of battle's aftermath tempered many men's resolve. The regimental rolls offer silent testimony to their commitment, many men that enlisted in summer and fall of 1862 mustered out in October 1865 with the knowledge that they had stayed the course and earned their manhood against white opposition. Men like First Sergeant Clement Johnson took strength from personal goals that transcended glory or adventure. Johnson sought to redeem his family from slavery, and when he reunited with them, he continued to fight to ensure their freedom. White officers could resign if war's enchantments no longer appealed, but black soldiers fought for the duration of the war. Failure meant slavery, and conversely, victory became freedom.

The service rendered by black soldiers to the Union cause in the Indian Territory, Missouri, Kansas, and Arkansas created dividends for the refugee communities from

which many originated. Black service shielded their families from retribution, and opened the borders of Kansas to refugees in search of a better life to replace the one they abandoned when they moved north by foot, wagon, and boat. The First Kansas Colored's black soldiers proved excellent citizens after the war, and enriched Kansas with their skills and devotion. Black veterans could stand tall with the knowledge that they bolstered the Union cause at Cabin Creek, Honey Springs, and during the Camden Campaign. The same newspapers that doubted the wisdom of enlisting black men for soldiers as potentially damaging to the cause of abolitionism, later reported the feats of the First and Second Kansas Colored and the black infantry's outstanding performance. When white southerners marched into battle equipped with shackles, the First Kansas Colored's men laughed after their victory, and when white Union soldiers fought alongside them, many remarked in the same report of the men's humanity toward prisoners. As the war progressed and wrathful southern guerrillas and soldiers massacred black soldiers at Sherwood, Poison Springs, and Flat Rock, black men fought back, not content to suffer without seeking redress. Utilizing the term "race war" to describe the escalating cycle of violence misrepresents black military responses. Black soldiers met white atrocities with firm resolve and after Fort Pillow, increasing numbers of black soldiers vowed to treat their Confederate enemy as they had been treated. Though both sides were familiar with the biblical adage of an eye for an eye, Confederate consternation over black retaliation reflects the degree to which the changing racial paradigm deranged their understanding of the world.

The experiment first inaugurated in Kansas in 1862 arose from the ambitions of Senator James Lane, but it took committed men such as James Williams to make it a

reality, On the other side, James Montgomery and Charles Jennison sought to destroy the new creation if they could not control it. Surviving first contact at Island Mound and muster in January 1863 ensured that the First Kansas Colored would become a reality. The overriding question of “what to do with the Negro,” in Kansas during and immediately after the war tested long established social norms. The Thirteenth through the Fifteenth Amendments answered the question on a national level and generated - often grudgingly - state approval. Black military service obviated potential answers to the question, for blood spilled on battlefields proved a persuasive answer to suggestions that blacks be colonized elsewhere, or denied citizenship on the basis of racial mythologies. The former slaves who found their way to Kansas became citizens, and their descendents continue to serve America in the military to this day. The possibility that the Civil War could have ended with slavery intact galvanized black men into action, and from the first days of the war, black men offered their service until the Federal government accepted.

The liberty and rights accrued unto black Americans after the Civil War suffered many setbacks, but race no longer justified slavery. The lasting legacy of the First Kansas Colored and the “Colored Regiments” that served everywhere in the Union Army is with us today, despite the collective national amnesia that descended upon America after the collapse of Reconstruction. Black citizens fought long battles to reassert their dignity and right to equality in America. One fact is clear. The unstinting service of the First Kansas Colored Regiment eradicated the pigmentation of one’s skin as a sign of bondage.

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