

University of Mississippi

eGrove

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

---

2012

## From Bootleggers to an Obey the Law Campus: an Analysis of the Alcohol Policies at the University of Mississippi

Scott Thomas Wallace

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd>



Part of the [Education Policy Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wallace, Scott Thomas, "From Bootleggers to an Obey the Law Campus: an Analysis of the Alcohol Policies at the University of Mississippi" (2012). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 299.  
<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/299>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

THERE IS NO DISHONOR IN DESERTION *ARMY RACIAL INTOLERANCE AND AFRICAN-  
AMERICAN SOLDIERS' DESERTION*

A Thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of History  
The University of Mississippi

by

STEVE WALLACE

May 2012

Copyright

Steve Wallace 2012

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ABSTRACT

The thesis focuses on a study concerning the desertion of African-American soldiers from the United States Army. The data were collected from the period covering the War of Independence to the mid-1960s of the Cold War. The study proposes that there are limits to which these soldiers cannot bear the burden of combat and the simultaneous fight against institutionalized racism. Some men endured their circumstances in spite of pervasive intolerance, but others simply could not make sense of the inconsistencies of their government's requirement for them to fight yet deny them basic human rights. The men believed they had the right to full citizenship, as they fought and died in defense of America. The study demonstrates that the threat of punishment or the actual use of it is not an effective deterrent to desertion when the deserters' ultimate motivation for absconding their military obligation is liberty.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who helped me and guided me through my personal crises. Their patience and words of encouragement helped me to reach this milestone in my educational career.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I express my deepest appreciation to my advisor, Dr. Chiarella Esposito. She endured my tribulations and encouraged me to continue on with my studies when I did not always have the motivation to do so. Also, I express my appreciation to my committee members, Drs. Joshua First and Charles Ross. Thank you for your support. None of my success could have been possible without the assistantship provided by the History Department to finance my studies.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1.....	3
CHAPTER 2.....	14
CHAPTER 3.....	24
CHAPTER 4.....	47
CONCLUSIONS.....	61
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	66
VITA.....	69

## Introduction

Much has been written about the contributions of African-American soldiers to the successes of the United States Army. Significantly, the historiography teems with their military experience in terms of their opposition to racial discrimination within the ranks of the Army and in the larger society. Typical of the historiographical narrative is its emphasis on African-American soldiers' patriotism as the primary instrument through which they seek to resist intolerance, and thereby effect social improvement.

Not as well understood were the other forms of resistance to racism within the ranks that African-American soldiers utilized. For instance, evidence demonstrates that they filed grievances for maltreatment at the hands of abusive officers or other military personnel; they sought redress for the Army's various discriminatory policies, chief among them was the pay inequality based upon racial differences; and finally, when all else failed, some African-American soldiers deserted. As compelling a motive as patriotism was to fight racism within the Army's ranks, it was not the only form of resistance African-American soldiers utilized.

The purpose of this thesis is to show the various other ways that African-American soldiers resisted racial intolerance within the Army as they fought to prove their patriotism. The thrust of the paper will demonstrate that African-American soldiers resorted to desertion quite often, irrespective of the social consequences. The acts of insubordination and insurrection, while a serious statement, occurred in fewer instances than desertion and thus highlight the intermediate steps some soldiers took to remedy their situation.



This thesis will show that whether soldiers opposed racism through insubordination, insurrection, or desertion, their chosen forms of resistance, albeit extreme by most standards, can be interpreted as manifestations of resistance to racism rather than indicators that some soldiers were malcontents, or that they deserted due to economic necessity, cowardice, or some other factor.

Also, the actions of the African-American soldiers under examination, as well as their reasons for deserting, reveal sham aspects of the American democratic system: these soldiers rebellions constitute an important chapter in the transformation from slaves to full, equal citizens, thus showing that African-American soldiers contributed not only to America's war efforts but also to the nation's civil, social and political progress.<sup>1</sup>

The thesis' methodology is to examine major United States conflicts in which African-American soldiers participated and highlight examples of desertion and other forms of protest. The thesis is divided in the following sections: from the American Revolution to the Civil War, the Civil War, from post-Civil War through World War I and the interwar years, and from World War II to the Cold War.

---

<sup>1</sup> This work is also conceived as a preliminary step to set the context that helps us understand desertions to USSR/Communist world during Cold War, which will be the subject of future research.

## 1. FROM THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION TO THE CIVIL WAR

Historian Benjamin Quarles has characterized the Revolutionary War as a black Declaration of Independence, in the sense that it encouraged African Americans to seek freedom and equality.<sup>2</sup> He did so because Revolutionary War African Americans interpreted this conflict differently than white revolutionaries. When white revolutionaries spoke of England trying to enslave them, they referred to British measures, such as stamp acts and trade restrictions, royal decrees, and Parliamentary legislation. To them, the war meant freedom and liberty in a politico-economic sense rather than in the sense of physical bondage.<sup>3</sup> Added to this, many white revolutionaries believed that to wage war for their independence was a duty owed to their forbearers as well as their descendants. They saw their forbears as daring pioneers in the struggle for independence. The enemy in those early times had been the American continent and the Native Americans. The first settlers, as their descendants saw them, had left Europe and faced such enemies in order to preserve self-government and liberty of conscience. By the 1770s the enemy was Britain, and it was now the duty of white revolutionaries to safeguard all the successes of their ancestors.<sup>4</sup> On balance then, white revolutionaries fought for independence in order to strengthen and improve upon the successes of their ancestors for future generations to enjoy.

---

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Quarles, *The Revolutionary War as a Black Declaration of Independence* editors Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1983), 301.

<sup>3</sup> Quarles, *The Revolutionary War*, 284.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Fantina, *Desertion and the American Soldier 1776-2006* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2006), 10.

Added to this concept of honoring their ancestors and preserving freedom for their progeny was the notion, held by many, that God had chosen America to defend and symbolize self-government for the world. The white revolutionary generation believed they were the chosen people to do God's work of defeating an empire that desired to weaken or destroy self-government everywhere.<sup>5</sup> With perceived divine guidance, then, this generation sought to preserve its history for future generations and bring freedom to the world. African Americans, on the other hand, did not have such ambitions.

For most of them, freedom extended as far as acquiring those inalienable rights that Thomas Jefferson spoke of, and they saw the war as an opportunity to win their freedom. They took seriously the meaning of natural rights and slogans of liberty and independence. Such patriotic catchphrases as "Give me liberty or give me death" meant much to them. When they could no longer reconcile the inconsistency between these ideals of the Revolution and slavery, African Americans became even more determined to win their freedom. They used freedom suits, petitions to state legislatures, and military service to redress their grievances.

Freedom suits were effective, but their usefulness was limited, as only the litigants directly involved in the case could receive freedom, provided they won the case. Freedom based on the individual proved impractical, for it was time-consuming and did not guarantee freedom to all litigants.

In order to secure collective freedom, African Americans drafted petitions to their state legislatures. Typical of such petitions was that submitted by nineteen slaves from Portsmouth to the New Hampshire Assembly in November 1779. They argued that the God of nature granted

---

<sup>5</sup> Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina, 1979), 5.

them life and freedom and that freedom is a right inherent to all human beings.<sup>6</sup> Although petitions to state legislatures could secure collective freedom for groups, it was military service in combat arms that almost assured freedom for thousands.

When hostilities in the Massachusetts cities of Lexington and Concord gave way to full-on war, both whites and African Americans (freemen and slaves) were ready to join the fight. In the early stages of the war, the government denied African Americans the opportunity to fight, since revolutionaries were fighting for *their* future. Keeping African Americans on the sidelines while whites fought for their peculiar form of democracy became a standing but provisional policy. What made their policy of exclusion partially conditional rather than absolute was the fact that the colonists understood they lacked the manpower to win a conflict outright. For that reason, they held open the option to ally themselves with other forces in order to assure victory. The colonists learned well this lesson from their forbearers, who first applied it some seventy years earlier.

On December 23, 1703, the General Assembly of the Province of South Carolina legalized the enlistment of slaves in the colonial militia. The law stipulated that in the event of actual invasions, slave-owners had to supply the colonial militia with their most trusted slaves to fight against colonial enemies. The law further specified that if any slave shall, in the course of an actual invasion, kill or take one or more invaders and produce any white person who witnessed the act, then that slave shall have his freedom.<sup>7</sup>

Bernard C. Nalty has characterized the creation and application of this law as the colonial practice of manumission in exchange for battlefield heroics. It was, as Nalty suggested, a tool

---

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Quarles, *The Revolutionary War*, 290.

<sup>7</sup> Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents*, vol.1: *A Time of Slavery* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1977), 3-4.

the colonists used to manipulate the slaves and control the Native Americans. The reason for this was the colonists lived in perpetual fear of slave rebellion or of Native American attack or of slaves and Native Americans making common cause against them. To allay fears of being turned into slaves or being annihilated, the planter class drove a wedge between the slaves and the Native Americans by playing upon slave animosity toward the Native Americans. This loathing stemmed from the Native Americans helping slave-catchers hunt down runaways.<sup>8</sup> In spite of the colonists' blatant manipulation, the slaves accepted, since they really had no other choice, the whites' scheme of army service in exchange for freedom, as this specific method of colonial exploitation was to the slaves' purpose: liberation.

Thus, slaves of the first seven decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century found their path to freedom by serving in the militia. Simply serving in the militia did not guarantee freedom, though. The slaves had to perform heroically. Those who gained their freedom also had gained white society's "acceptance," albeit that acceptance came with the condition that newly freed African Americans situate themselves on the margins of society alongside those who had gained their freedom in prior conflicts. Just as the colonists in 1703 maintained their way of life by aligning themselves with African Americans to put down the Native Americans, they would by the late 1770s use the African Americans to defeat the British.

The colonists did not conscript African Americans all at once. In fact, mobilization was a deliberate process as New England state governments tried to reconcile the obvious inconsistency of assigning African Americans to defend the liberties of a white-run country. By 1777, this issue ceased to be a concern, for the war had dragged on and prospects for a quick victory began to blur. As a result, the colonies stepped up their recruitment campaign of African

---

<sup>8</sup> Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight* (New York and London: The Free Press and Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1986), 5.

Americans. Conscription began gradually north of the Potomac River by late spring 1777 and increased as the fighting continued and as manpower shortages persisted. By 1781, colonial governments south of the Potomac were also recruiting African Americans, save South Carolina and Georgia that had forbade it for they feared arming the slaves might result in slaves becoming their masters.

African American soldiers typically were privates, who could not expect to rise above that rank. The best they could hope for was to spend their entire military career languishing among the rank and file. Many were nameless, and they routinely appeared on commanders' muster roles as 'A Negro Man,' 'A Negro name unknown,' or 'Negro Name unknown.' They served in the infantry, where they performed noncombat duties. In most cases, African Americans found themselves detailed for duty as an orderly or in support of combat operations. In this capacity, African Americans typically performed commissary (procuring food stores), foraging, and wagon duties, which were just the kinds of responsibilities that white soldiers generally disliked.<sup>9</sup> Some white soldiers so disliked such duties that they were inclined to desert rather than to continue to serve in such a capacity.

Desertion is one of the more shameful aspects of military service. The less severe consequences for deserters might range from being treated as a social outsider, to bringing shame upon their family. They would have to live with a permanent stain placed upon their military record. The result of which meant deserters would be barred from further military service and be banned from employment with the federal government. The more serious penalties for desertion were a prison sentence at hard labor or the death penalty.

---

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961, 1999), 74-75.

During the War of Independence, African-American slaves committed acts of insurrection, deserted their masters, and attempted to join ranks with the British. When captured, the colonial governments meted out punishments in accordance with traditional penalties for similar offenses.

For insurrection, slaves were put to death without benefit of clergy. For slaves found guilty of treason or betrayal, they were sold to the sugar plantations in the West Indies. To be sold to a West Indian slave-master was a drastic measure, as slave life there was comparatively worse. In the West Indies, slave-masters psychologically and physically abused their slaves to keep them in order.<sup>10</sup> In spite of the enormous risks associated with resisting racial intolerance, African-Americans slaves pressed forward for their freedom. Typically, the greatest opportunity for the greatest number of African American slaves to resist racism and gain freedom was during a war, and the War of Independence was the first major conflict.

Ironically, many African-American slaves did not fight for their freedom exclusively within the ranks of the Continental Army. A crucial reason, among several, was economic in nature. The colonists were reluctant to offer wholesale freedom to slaves, as many colonial states had an agrarian economy that would have been difficult to maintain if there were not enough slaves to work the land. With the chance at freedom while fighting for their country denied to all but a relative few, many slaves joined the British line.

In the autumn of 1775, John Murray, Earl of Dunmore and royal governor of Virginia, issued a proclamation that set free all indentured servants, slaves, or other groups who agreed to join forces with the British. For those who joined, freedom came after the war.<sup>11</sup> In the

---

<sup>10</sup> Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, 24-25.

<sup>11</sup> Quarles, *The Negro*, 19.

meantime, the British turned these slaves into soldiers. Nearly four years later in June 1779, the British again offered freedom to all slaves who deserted to the British line.

The number of slaves who realized freedom in this way has been estimated to be anywhere from 17,000<sup>12</sup> to 20,000.<sup>13</sup> They left the newly formed United States and settled in Canada, on the British islands in the Caribbean, or in various African nations.<sup>14</sup> It is impossible to know exactly how many deserted because the official war records are incomplete, and they have inaccurate recordings of some events. For example, it was not uncommon for many desertions to go unreported. Some commanders did not list desertions on strength reports in an effort to maintain morale among the rank and file. Those commanders chose instead to list them as “sick absent,” “on furlough,” or “on command.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, the inaccuracy of the records or their scarcity led to conclusions based, in part, on inferences, which also made it near impossible to account for the number of African American desertions as well.

Not much is known about the number of African-American slaves who challenged racism while serving in the Continental Army, but there were instances where they demonstrated their opposition to intolerance. Typically, these deserters were scattered throughout the brigades and regiments of the Continental Army. For instance, a return of deserters at Fort Ticonderoga, New York dated June 9, 1777, listed a mulatto, Israel Newport, in the ranks of white soldiers. He was a slave and a fisherman whose master had enlisted him in a Rhode Island regiment. At the first opportunity, Newport absconded to the British line. Another slave, Charles Valentine, appeared

---

<sup>12</sup> Quarles, *The Negro*, 172.

<sup>13</sup> Nalty, *Strength*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Nalty, *Strength*, 18. Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 197-99.

<sup>15</sup> Harry M. Ward, *The War of Independence and the Transformation of American Society* (London: University College London (UCL) Press, 1999), 135.



on a list of fifteen deserters from Virginia in May 1779.<sup>16</sup> His ultimate fate is lost to history, however. Such cases of desertion were intermittent, and usually involved slaves, according to Quarles. Nonetheless, African Americans demonstrated an inclination to oppose slavery by absconding their military duties when opportunities became available.

By the end of the American Revolution, military service had become a means by which the slaves could acquire freedom (legally or extra-legally), or freemen might improve their standing in the community. Almost equal in importance was that most African Americans, bonded or free, who performed military service developed a clear personal and legal identity. This is especially true for those who performed exceptionally well. Men, such as Crispus Attucks, Peter Salem, and Salem Poor were but a few who were legally recognized for their service.

Crispus Attucks, of course, was the first to fall during the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770. His role in the event is disputed. Some argue that he led angry townspeople in protest against a British soldier who allegedly beat an innocent boy. Other interpretations of events suggest that he was a bystander who was hit by an errant musket ball. In any event, the accepted account of his actions hold that Attucks was at the center of action. He supposedly struck the soldier who beat the young boy with a stick. The British responded with gunfire and first killed Attucks and other patriots in quick succession. The incident became known as the Boston Massacre. Whatever the actual details of the situation are, patriots did not allow the event to be forgotten. In 1888, they dedicated in remembrance of it the Crispus Attucks monument in the Boston Common, the central public park in Boston, Massachusetts.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Quarles, *The Negro*, 79.

<sup>17</sup> Quarles, *The Revolution*, 4-7.

Although not quite as well known to history as Crispus Attucks, Peter Salem is known in perpetuity. He fought in the battle of Lexington and Concord and won his freedom for his service. Salem Poor's name will also be permanently known to history due to his exceptional bravery in the face of the enemy. For his heroic deed, Poor received a petition to the General Court of Massachusetts that had the endorsement of fourteen white Massachusetts officers. Poor later served at Valley Forge and White Plains, New York.<sup>18</sup>

The patriotism these men demonstrated and that of other lesser-known African Americans insured that they would no longer be the nameless, faceless property of an owner. As military men, their names and achievements would be preserved to acknowledge their successes and inspire future generations. Nalty argues that the War of Independence set African Americans on the path to self-actualization. The African American people's path to realizing their potential took an alternate route that delayed their aspirations for the next 78 years, as the newly formed United States looked to return to its conservative ways.

In the nearly eight decades between the War of Independence and the Civil War, African Americans had very little involvement with the militia. In fact, after they helped the country gain its independence from Britain, the nation excluded them from the armed forces with the passage of the Militia Act of 1792. Essentially, this law restricted militia service to white citizens.<sup>19</sup> Hence, African Americans played no role in the two wars that followed. From 1798 to 1800, the country fought the Franco-American Naval War without the assistance of African Americans. This was the case as well in the Barbary Wars, which went on for five years from 1801 to 1805. In the Barbary Wars, the United States fought against Morocco, Algiers,

---

<sup>18</sup> Quarles, *The Revolution*, 10-11.

<sup>19</sup> MacGregor, *Blacks*, vol. 1, 92.

Tunis, and Tripoli. Racial exclusivity remained the order of the day until war broke out with Britain in 1812.

The War of 1812 prompted the Louisiana Legislature to authorize the recruitment of free men of color to help the Louisiana Militia defend the city of New Orleans against a British invasion. On December 12, 1814, the free men reported for duty, and the state militia then organized them into a 350-man battalion. A week later the militia organized another battalion of free African Americans that numbered approximately 250 men. A few days before Christmas the second battalion saw action, in which they repelled an initial thrust on the city. On January 8, 1815, both battalions fought and helped put down the British during the climatic battle before New Orleans. Unfortunately, unknown to the battalion commanders, the war had ended more than a month earlier in late December 1814, with a victory for the United States.<sup>20</sup> With victory secured, the federal government, once again, no longer needed the services of African Americans. Finally in 1834, the federal government turned those sentiments into law. With the expressed purpose of ridding the national army of any African American involvement, the government revised the Militia Law of 1792 to disband the African American militia in Louisiana, which made it illegal for any state militia to have African American soldiers. This gave the régime complete control over which segment of society would represent its army.

Later in the throes of the Civil War, where African American involvement was crucial to a Union victory, racist exclusionary practices gave way to practicality, and the government once again called upon the African American for help. Pragmatism of this sort, as in previous wars, served only as a stopgap measure. It seemed not to give the white-run government or its white citizens pause to reflect on the inconsistencies in their belief that God chose them to lead the

---

<sup>20</sup> Nalty, *Strength*, 24-25.

world. Whites appeared not to be concerned with the obvious incongruity of institutionalized racism to control the African American populace and the need to call on these presumably inferior people to help win a war. Such barefaced inconsistencies did nothing to dissuade whites of their racist sentiments or their persistent reluctance to grant African Americans their civil liberties. Moreover, whites' unwillingness to recognize the calls of African-American soldiers for their civil liberties, and whites' refusal to subsume their racist beliefs to the greater cause of winning the war influenced some desertions.

## 2. THE CIVIL WAR

The experience of the Revolutionary War steeled free African Americans and those in bondage in their desire for freedom and civil liberties. They and abolitionist groups believed that time and the right situation could bring them emancipation and full citizenship. Seven decades after the War of Independence, another war of crucial importance, the Civil War, would prove to be the opportunity African Americans had been waiting for.

On April 12, 1861 Confederate forces fired on Union troops at Fort Sumter, forced them to surrender, and there began the Civil War. Although the war began in April 1861, the federal government, under President Lincoln did not immediately allow African Americans to enter the war. Their opportunity to fight and, thereby, to realize racial justice and experience full citizenship came only when Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863.

Not long after African Americans took up arms, many began to desert, and they did so for various reasons. Some deserted out of personal greed, and others deserted due to the maltreatment they received at the hands of their white, abusive officers. Numerous men abandoned their military obligations due to familial concerns, while a considerable number of men walked out on the Union Army in opposition to the federal government's discriminatory pay policy.

Personal greed manifested itself as the crime of bounty jumping. This crime allowed both white and African American soldiers to benefit financially from a recruiting enticement known as a bounty. The practice of bounty jumping developed as a result of one of the War Department's recruiting policies. The department offered a bounty that held a generous

monetary incentive to all male civilians, white and African American, who enlisted. Some exploited the good intentions of the government at all levels in order to make money. Bounty jumpers would enlist and then collect bounties from units of the federal government, states, and towns. After receiving a bounty from one unit, they would desert that unit and then enlist with another. Bounty jumpers repeated this process until they were either caught or simply found other ways to earn money.<sup>21</sup>

The maltreatment that Union officers heaped upon their African American soldiers was, according to Joseph Glatthaar, the result of most Union officers having brought to the war their own racial stereotypes of the African American race. Rooted in the stereotypes was their view of African Americans as being innately inferior,<sup>22</sup> and from this single belief arose the justification for a myriad of abuses.

A few ways in which racially motivated abuse showed itself were in the issuance of equipment and work duties. The men received substandard clothing, tools, medical supplies, and weapons. Since African Americans were initially precluded from a combat role, Union commanders issued them inferior weapons. At the same time, some Union commanders assigned the men an inordinate amount of fatigue duty. This drew complaints from many soldiers who could not reconcile this maltreatment when they frequently saw white soldiers sitting around camp doing nothing.

Perhaps the most common cruelty was to defraud the troops or embezzle their funds. White officers of this sort would hold the money of freedmen for safekeeping. They would then invest the money for personal profit, borrow from the fund without permission, or simply steal it

---

<sup>21</sup> Ella Lonn, *Desertion during the Civil War* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: The American Historical Association, 1928), 139.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in battle: the Civil War alliance of Black soldiers and white officers* (New York: Meridian, 1991, c1990), 82.

outright.<sup>23</sup> Other forms of racial exploitation included that which white officers perpetrated against African American soldiers' wives or single women. White Officers forced themselves on the women, and some even bragged about their sexual conquests. One white lieutenant, assigned to Fort Jackson, Louisiana, was overheard boasting of having slept with every woman who worked in the laundresses' houses on the fort.<sup>24</sup> With such brazen contempt for their soldiers and the soldiers' women, it would have been improbable for anyone not to have seen such cruelties.

The soldiers, of course, did see it and made note of it but did not act on it. Instead, they appear to have remained focused on their goals of wiping out slavery that would create a better country for everyone.<sup>25</sup> Still there were those who could no longer tolerate such mistreatment, so they deserted.

Private Spencer Brown of the 5<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops (USCT) deserted sometime during the summer of 1864. He apparently abandoned his service obligation due to the army's harsh treatment of him. Brown stated that 'he was not better treated in the army than he was by his former master.'<sup>26</sup> Another instance of desertion also took place in the 5<sup>th</sup> USCT but in a different company, Company H. On September 2, 1864, officers' maltreatment of their men induced several other soldiers to desert. They apparently deserted because of the poor treatment they endured at the hands of their commander, Captain Erastus Blood. Blood had a dismal record as leader, and he was to face a court-martial for his poor leadership. He was charged

---

<sup>23</sup> Glatthaar, *Forged in battle*, 88-89.

<sup>24</sup> Glatthaar, *Forged in battle*, 91.

<sup>25</sup> Glatthaar, *Forged in battle*, 91.

<sup>26</sup> Versalle F. Washington, *Eagles on Their Buttons, A Black Infantry Regiment in the Civil War* (Columbia, Missouri: The University of Missouri Press, 1999), 47.

with, among other offenses, cowardice in battle. According to eyewitness testimony, during a skirmish with rebel soldiers, Blood hid while his men fought on.<sup>27</sup>

With respect to the African American family, soldiers found it most distressing that the government did not appear to have the best interests of their families. Most African Americans who joined the Union Army were under the impression that the army, acting on behalf of the federal government, would safeguard their families back home, according Keith P. Wilson.<sup>28</sup> This did not prove to be the case, as the government had no all-encompassing policy to address the question of sustenance for the African American family. This meant that local commanders had to devise their own policy quickly, as freedmen were steadily joining the Union line with their families camped not far away. To compound matters, the families were impoverished, without shelter, and had nowhere to turn,<sup>29</sup> so they looked to the USCT for support. Commanders opposed this, because they felt it compromised military discipline and morale, and created logistical problems, not to mention the attendant diseases that occur as a result of overcrowding.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps because of the crucial need to maintain military discipline and morale, some local commanders took strong measures.

Their solution to the problem was to develop a policy of social isolation. These commanders were stationed in the Tennessee and Mississippi Valley regions. They placed severe restrictions on women and children entering camp and the soldiers returning home. Other camp commanders moved their camps or relocated the soldiers' families to distant contraband camps. Contraband camps were created by the Union Army to accommodate escaped slaves.

---

<sup>27</sup> Washington, *Eagles*, 47.

<sup>28</sup> Keith P. Wilson, *Campfires of Freedom, The Camp life of Black Soldiers during the Civil War* (Kent and London: Kent State University Press, 2002), 176, 186.

<sup>29</sup> Wilson, *Campfires*, 183.

<sup>30</sup> Wilson, *Campfires*, 183.



Many of the men left the camps and their families behind to join the Union. The harshness of the policy achieved its intended effect: it increased discipline and brought about order. However, the policy was not without its consequences, for it prompted an increase in the number of desertions.

The anxieties created by the forced separation of the men from their families proved too much for many soldiers. Take, for instance, the effect this policy had on one unit: Captain Henry Fox, 59<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Infantry (USCI), who was assigned to the District of Memphis, had been in command a mere nine months but witnessed many of his men desert and return to their families in their home district of Bolivar, Tennessee.<sup>31</sup> As time went on, desertions continued to mount with commanders unable to control them. In fact, the desertion rates had become so high that many officers found it practical simply to ignore the problem.

Finally, the one issue creating the most controversy was the inequality of pay policy endorsed by federal government. In the late summer of 1862, in selected units, the federal government began enlisting African Americans and paying them wages equal to whites. The government authorized that privates be paid \$13 per month and authorized a \$3.50 clothing allowance. Moreover, pay would increase with rank. By early summer of 1863, the federal government reversed this policy. Citing the Militia Act of July 17, 1862, the government could only pay African American soldiers at a reduced rate. This meant that all African American soldiers (enlisted, noncommissioned officer corps, and officer corps) were to be paid, irrespective of rank, only \$10 per month, from which \$3 went toward clothing allowance.<sup>32</sup> According to Glatthaar, this reversal of policy was not a simple case of the government realizing that it had run afoul of its own law and then promptly correcting this transgression. This

---

<sup>31</sup> Wilson, *Campfires*, 185.

<sup>32</sup> Howard C. Westwood, *Black Troops, White Commanders, and Freedmen during the Civil War* (Carbondale and Evansville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 11-12.

maneuver was actually a politically expedient measure to appease the prejudiced North, which had a long-standing policy of discrimination against free African Americans in that region of the country.<sup>33</sup> As can be expected, this policy shift had an adverse effect on African American soldiers.

African-American soldiers, noncommissioned officers, officers, surgeons, and chaplains saw this shift in pay policy for what it was: blatant discrimination. They found it very much an insult because it undermined their expressed cause to fight. Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) found this policy especially distressing, as irrespective of future promotions, NCOs would not receive proportional pay increases. Meanwhile, white soldiers realized pay increases equal to their mobility through the ranks. For example, white privates and corporals earned a base pay of \$13 per month; company sergeants, \$17 per month; first sergeants, \$20 per month; and regimental sergeants, \$21 per month.<sup>34</sup> This meant that battle-hardened African American NCOs would receive the same pay as a white private still in basic training, and then African American NCOs would have to endure the insult of having to watch white privates rise through the ranks and enjoy the benefits of racial discrimination. However, African American soldiers did not simply lie down and take this blatant discrimination. The preponderance of them sought redress through appeals to the government, but the government rebuffed all grievances concerning this matter. As a result, many African American soldiers took their protest to intolerance a step further: they deserted. In the case of two predominately African American regiments, their opposition was particularly significant.

---

<sup>33</sup> Glatthaar, *Forged in battle*, 172.

<sup>34</sup> Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867; Series II: The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge, London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 364.

In November 1861, General Rufus Saxton, commander of the Port Royal Expedition, recruited a regiment of all-African American soldiers. Several months passed and Saxton had not paid his men. This left the men quite dissatisfied. Having to watch other African Americans who were non-military earn wages as officers' servants or as army laborers only fueled the men's dissatisfaction. Added to this was the humiliating ridicule the men endured from many white soldiers. By July 1862, many, if not most, of the men had deserted, leaving behind only a fraction of its required fighting strength. General Saxton made no effort to deal severely with these deserters, since he had never paid them. Instead, on August 9, 1862, Saxton disbanded what was left of his regiment.<sup>35</sup> General Saxton's situation, though extreme, demonstrated just how destructive the inequitable pay issue could be.

Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson came to understand this himself. Higginson commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> South Carolina Volunteers, a regiment composed entirely of all African American soldiers, save the white officers. He was a renowned New England scholar, Unitarian minister, and a staunch abolitionist. Higginson believed he could gain the respect and cooperation of his men if he treated them like men, and not like slaves. He felt that slavery had left his men without any feelings of self-respect or pride. Higginson sought to correct this problem by demonstrating to the men military law and discipline were based on justice. The irony in that was many, perhaps, most of Higginson's men saw no fairness in military law that was complicit in the discriminatory pay issue. The blatant injustice proved too difficult to reconcile for many of Higginson's soldiers, which resulted in desertions. Higginson himself admitted that, "desertions were attributed to the ...inequitable pay policy."<sup>36</sup> Moreover,

---

<sup>35</sup> Westwood, *Black Troops*, 63-5.

<sup>36</sup> Wilson, *Campfires*, 21.

desertions became so prevalent in Higginson's camp that it stood as the leading offense soldiers committed.

The ultimate fate of most deserters is lost to history, which leaves one only to speculate on their eventual outcome. Were any of the men able to reunite with loved ones and then perhaps have the good fortune of benefiting from the Reconstruction period? In contrast, how many others languished in the Jim Crow South? Regrettably history provides no answers, but it does account for a third category of deserters: those who could not escape the reach of military law. These men were court-martialed and found guilty of violating the Articles of War, and a violation of said articles carried the death penalty.

Union commanders considered desertion a major problem. They found that this offense dominated their notions of command and discipline. In order to prevent desertions from disrupting such notions, many commanders acted swiftly against them when they occurred. The implementation of justice proved problematic, however, for the Articles of War provided no clear definition of the crime.<sup>37</sup> Robert Alotta found evidence that some deserters were executed to set examples for the rest of the troops, rather than being executed for their crimes. Not surprisingly executions occurred along racial lines. There was a minimum of 275 soldiers executed during the war, with 54.31 percent of these foreign-born (white) or African American.<sup>38</sup> Of the convicted foreign-born, 26 percent was executed at a rate 28 percent higher than the average of the entire army. Statistics for African Americans reveal an even grimmer reality. The occurrence of executions among this group was 133 percent higher than that of all Union Army

---

<sup>37</sup> Robert Allota, *Civil War Justice, Union Army Executions under Lincoln* (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: White Mane Publishing Company, Incorporated, 1989), 16.

<sup>38</sup> This number is only an estimate, as Alotta stated that he found many files were missing information, did not have complete reports, were misreporting the facts, or contained conflicting reports.

executions.<sup>39</sup> Based upon this statistical data, Alotta concluded that an ethnic or racial factor informed some commanders' decisions concerning which groups of deserters would be an example for the rest of the troops. The author examined instances where the records of those executed contained conflicting information that suggests some commanders may have been quicker to court-martial African Americans for desertion than other racial or ethnic groups even in the face of questionable evidence.

This seemed to be the case of John M. Smith, an African American, of Company B, 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry, Colored, records provided contradictory reports. He was executed near Jacksonville, Florida on February 18, 1864, apparently for rape. Two other African Americans convicted of the same offense were executed along with Smith, according to the official report of this event from the Adjutant General's Office. This report belied that of the Massachusetts Adjutant General's Office, which listed Smith as executed for desertion at Jacksonville on February 18, 1864.<sup>40</sup>

Another instance of conflicting reports from the Adjutant General's Office was in the case of the African American Private James Quinn. He was assigned to Company A, 11<sup>th</sup> Heavy Artillery of the USCT. Private Quinn enlisted for three years on August 28, 1863 in Providence, Rhode Island. He found himself in trouble with the army when he left Camp Parapet, Louisiana on the afternoon of June 15, 1864 and did not return until 9:00 a.m. the following morning. During his time away from camp, Quinn missed two roll calls. As a result, his commander charged him with being AWOL (absent without leave). There was an additional charge of sleeping away from assigned billeting/quarters. This charge was in violation of the 42<sup>nd</sup> article of the Articles of War. Private Quinn eventually pleaded guilty to the charges and was

---

<sup>39</sup> Alotta, *Civil War Justice*, 187.

<sup>40</sup> Alotta, *Civil War Justice*, 31, 99.

apparently executed for noted offenses, as his service record indicates as much. This contradicts the Adjutant General's report that stated Private Quinn had been executed for murder. Alotta found that the Adjutant General's report might have been that of another African American soldier, one Charles Williams, who was also charged with murder.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, in the case of two African Americans, John Willis and Otto Pierce, they were listed as murderers but were executed for desertion. Why they were listed as murderers is unclear, but they did desert. Willis enlisted with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mississippi Infantry on July 1, 1863 at Four Mile Bridge. A little more than a month later, on August 21, he deserted and was later apprehended and then returned to his unit. Pierce enlisted with Company L, 5<sup>th</sup> Artillery of the USCT on March 1, 1864 at Vicksburg. On November 16, 1864, he left camp without proper authorization for four hours (12:00 noon until 4:00 p.m.) and was reported as absent without leave and subsequently charged with the offense. A separate general court-martial found Willis and Pierce guilty as charged and handed down a sentenced of death for both men. On May 26, 1865 both men were hanged.<sup>42</sup> Despite the inconsistencies in official reports or individual service records of these men and others, their executions apparently went forward without pause.

---

<sup>41</sup> Alotta, *Civil War Justice*, 136-7.

<sup>42</sup> Alotta, *Civil War Justice*, 167.

### 3. AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

The Confederate Army's surrender in 1865 was a great victory for the much more powerful Union Army, but it was also a tremendous victory for the Union's stance on states' rights. The notion that states had the right to secede from the Union had been tested and proven unworkable. This made any future secession attempts an unlikely remedy to sectional frictions. On the other hand, for African Americans the Confederate defeat meant most importantly of all that abolitionism had prevailed. It was an exciting time for African Americans because they saw opportunities to participate as full citizens in the country's new direction. They especially looked forward to having the right to vote. However, full citizenship and suffrage did not come immediately, as the principle political parties involved, the Republicans and the Democrats, decided the direction of the nation and the fate of African Americans during those first decades following the Civil War.

During the Reconstruction Era (1865 to 1876) African Americans face many challenges, as most white northerners and their political representatives as well as their white southern counterparts, did not favor extending voting rights to African Americans. This became apparent very early in the reconstruction process, where initial attempts at rebuilding the Union began with Presidential Reconstruction.

President Abraham Lincoln did not think it was necessary to grant suffrage to all African American people. Instead, he believed it was better to restrict the franchise to a select group of African Americans. In an April 11, 1865 speech, Lincoln talked about suffrage and let it be known that the civil right to vote should be extended to those African Americans who were 'very

intelligent and those who serve [d] our cause as soldiers.’<sup>43</sup> Even before that speech, Lincoln had made it clear that he intended to rebuild the country with white southern support. In December 1863, he put forth his Ten Percent Plan. Essentially the plan allowed a state to reenter the Union when 10% of the 1860 vote count from a state swore an oath of loyalty to the United States and accepted the abolition of slavery. The abolition of slavery was the most meaningful concession Lincoln made to African Americans. Lincoln came under fire from Congress, who decried his leniency toward southerners. The Radical Republicans of the congress rejected Lincoln’s proposal and offered the Wade-Davis Bill as a replacement.<sup>44</sup> This bill would give them control of Reconstruction, and Lincoln refused to sign it since he was still interested in leading the country in the aftermath of the war. This left him and the Radical Republicans at odds. Lincoln and Congress would have further battles, but before any meaningful policy matters could be agreed upon, President Lincoln was assassinated on April 14, 1865. Lincoln’s assassination left the completion of Presidential Reconstruction up to President Andrew Johnson.

Soon after succeeding Lincoln, President Andrew Johnson (April 15, 1865 – March 4, 1869) aligned himself with the plantation elite. He appointed provisional governors in southern states and left it to state legislatures, which had a white electorate, to align their constitutions to that of the United States. Johnson also extended pardons to thousands of ex-Confederates who had been excluded from Lincoln’s policy of general amnesty.<sup>45</sup>

For African Americans, Johnson’s Reconstruction policies clearly made no concessions for them. By making African American suffrage a states’ rights concern, Johnson virtually

---

<sup>43</sup> John Blassingame, *Frederick Douglass, the clarion voice* (Washington, D.C: Division of Publications, National Park Service, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1976), 34.

[http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/frdo/clarion.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/frdo/clarion.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom A History of African Americans*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (McGraw Hill: New York, New York, 2011), 236-37.

<sup>45</sup> Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, c1990), 89.



guaranteed African American disfranchisement since white southerners still believed in white supremacy. Accordingly, southern states established new constitutions and governments, which limited the freedom of African Americans through the passage of laws, known as the Black Codes. For example, African Americans were only allowed to enter into contracts that unfairly exploited them. The contracts were designed to lock in, control, and force them to work as laborers under oppressive conditions. Those who chose to quit their jobs were subject to arrest and jailed for breach of contract. The codes disallowed African American testimony in court cases involving whites designated what areas of town African Americans could live, and, most importantly, denied them the right to vote.<sup>46</sup> To be sure, this was an all out assault on African Americans, but African Americans and the Republican-led Congress fought back.

In southern states, African Americans mobilized in protest. African American political leaders held conventions, with debates centered around major issues, such as black suffrage, civil rights, economic issues, education, equality before the law, and land policies. The overall aim of the conventions was to demand equality before the law and suffrage. They encouraged all delegates to protest peacefully to civil authorities and the Freedmen's Bureau about violence and fraud, as an attempt to secure redress for their grievances through formal channels.<sup>47</sup>

The Republicans, with control of Congress, made a legislative effort to provide a remedy to the Black Codes. In the spring of 1866, they passed the Civil Rights Act, which essentially protected African Americans from employment and housing discrimination based on race and color. Thus, African Americans could expect the federal government to insure their rights to make contracts, bring lawsuits, and enjoy the benefit of any laws and proceedings for the security of person and property. In addition to the Civil Rights Act, in 1867 the Republicans

---

<sup>46</sup> John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, ninth edition, 237-38.

<sup>47</sup> Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 49-52.

seized control of Reconstruction from President Johnson and then passed the Reconstruction Act of 1867. It required all ex-Confederate states (except Tennessee) be divided into five military districts and occupied by Union soldiers. It ordered that none of the states could be reinstated to the Union without first ratifying the Fourteenth Amendment, which guaranteed the citizenship of all persons born or naturalized on US soil. The Fourteenth Amendment also prohibited any state laws that limited the civil rights of all citizens or denied them equal protection under the law. Also, during this period, African Americans held public office. They served in the United States Senate, the House of Representatives, in state legislatures, and continued to serve in the Union Army.<sup>48</sup>

Congressional Reconstruction made significant gains for the country and did much to improve the social condition of African Americans, but Congress's policies and programs could not be sustained. That was due to corruption within the Republican provisional governments in the south, southern states dogged push for control of Congress, the deaths of leading Radical Republicans, and the presidential election of 1876. The election was particularly devastating to African American progress, as the eventual winner, Rutherford B. Hayes, a Republican, withdrew all Union troops from southern states, shortly after taking office, thereby ending Reconstruction. For African Americans, the end of Reconstruction did not portend anything good.

With the end of Reconstruction, southern states promptly pushed African Americans to the margins of society, first with state constitutions that legalized segregation. Then at the federal level when in 1896, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation was legal as long as it was separate but equal in the case of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*. The effect of the Plessy decision

---

<sup>48</sup> Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 110, 122.

sanctioned existing segregation laws that denied African Americans access to state universities, ballet boxes, jury seats, parks, libraries, neighborhoods, and other public places and services.<sup>49</sup> The Plessy decision removed any appearance of equality and severely limited African American opportunities for social and economic advancement.

Despite of the unsympathetic constraints placed upon African Americans' economic and social mobility, there was still one place where they had opportunities and that was the army, thanks to the efforts of the Radical Republicans to secure this space for them during Reconstruction. Although the army was not immune from the effects of the Plessy decision, African American males could enjoy a modicum of prosperity relative to that most African American civilians experienced.

After successfully lobbying Congress to include African Americans in the military, on July 28, 1866, the United States Congress passed legislation to establish the first peacetime military. African American inclusion was not this straight forward, however. There were white politicians who lobbied for an all white military. After some negotiating, opposing sides agreed to allow African Americans to serve. Accordingly, a provision of the 1866 legislation authorized Congress to establish six regiments of African American soldiers for those desiring to serve a tour of duty or to have a military career.<sup>50</sup> Congress designated four regiments as infantry and the remaining two regiments as cavalry, and by spring 1869 the regiments had been raised and ready for duty. The infantry regiments were named the 38<sup>th</sup>, 39<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>, and 41<sup>st</sup> infantries. The cavalry regiments were named the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> cavalries.<sup>51</sup> The four infantry regiments served

---

<sup>49</sup> John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 270-71.

<sup>50</sup> Nalty, *Strength*, 51.

<sup>51</sup> Nalty, *Strength*, 51.

principally on the more remote military posts in the western and northern frontiers, while the cavalry operated in the southwest.

The policy of concentrating African Americans in racially segregated units in remote outposts created considerable hardships (owed primarily to racism and contempt) and tested the military commitments of buck privates and career soldiers alike. However, well-intentioned radical Republicans had created a place where African Americans desirous of serving their country, and, perhaps making a career out of it, now had that choice. Many chose to do the latter, and so from 1869 to the turn of the century, African Americans served primarily in those regiments, where they fought marauding Native Americans, protected settlers, and performed other duties. The duty was not ideal, but it did provide a means of living that was comparatively better than that of many African American civilians. Nonetheless, just as men deserted from the War of Independence and the Civil War, they did so in the 48 years leading up to World War One.

Though African Americans deserted, the army experienced comparatively fewer desertions from them than it experienced from whites. A study of desertions that covered the period of 1883-1889 revealed that all African American regiments, infantry and cavalry, had a desertion rate of 2 percent, even though they were assigned to the coldest, hottest, and unhealthiest posts. Whites that drew assignments at posts with comparable conditions, on the other hand, had an average desertion rate over the same period of 12.7 percent.<sup>52</sup> The report

---

<sup>52</sup> United States Congress, House Executive Documents, *Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1888-1889*, 3.

found that the low desertion rates of African Americans were largely owed to the persistent racism in society.<sup>53</sup>

Arlen Fowler, *The Black Infantry in the West 1869-1891*, added another factor. He suggests that those units with good morale, discipline, and *esprit de corps* experienced the fewest desertions.<sup>54</sup> Fowler found that African American regiments developed a strong *esprit de corps* from a number of sources, but the fact that they belonged to all-African American regiments contributed most to their high morale. The men had a strong desire to prove to the army, to society, and to themselves that they could soldier just as well as whites<sup>55</sup>

In spite of minimal incidents of desertion, the fact remains that some African American soldiers would still “go over the hill,” as it were. For them to disregard the sanctity of their oath of enlistment, these deserters must have had compelling reasons. It is not a stretch to suggest that intolerance and contempt were compelling enough motives. In addition to the racism and contempt they experienced, desertions may have been the result of a simple case of some soldiers realizing that the monotony of duty was too much to bear, while others deserted in protest of questionable leadership.

The racism African American soldiers experienced in the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry in 1867 was typical. The 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry drew an assignment to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The post commander welcomed the regiment by providing the troopers with a campsite that was actually a bog. He then complained about the soldiers’ muddy uniforms as well as their muddy tents.

---

<sup>53</sup> United States Congress, House Executive Documents, *Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1888-1889*, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Arlen L. Fowler, *The Black Infantry in the West: 1869-1891* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1971), 79.

<sup>55</sup> Fowler, *Black Infantry*, 79.

Most galling of all, he ordered the men not to come within 15 feet of a white soldier.<sup>56</sup>

Contempt, with regard to community relations, was quite common. An example of it took place in January 1870, in the community of Starr County, Texas. A detail of Buffalo Soldiers from the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was on patrol on the Texas frontier. The name Buffalo Soldiers was a nickname that the Native American tribes who they fought gave them. Native Americans gave them the name because their hair was curly like that of the buffalo. The Buffalo Soldiers' original name was the Negro Cavalry.

In any event, Sergeant Edward Troutman led the detail of Buffalo Soldiers from the 10 Cavalry that was on patrol on the Texas frontier. Suddenly, they found themselves in an ambush perpetrated by ten townsmen. Sergeant Troutman and his men fought their way through the trap, suffering two casualties and killing one of their assailants. Later, a grand jury released eight of the suspects and acquitted the ninth. That same grand jury indicted Troutman and two of his men for murder. Until a change in venue, the men faced a probable conviction of murder in that small town.<sup>57</sup> To be sure, the ridiculous racial restrictions some white officers placed upon African American soldiers and the racism African American troops endured from local communities alone could have compelled some to desert in opposition, but the nature of military life also could induce some to desert.

The activities of daily living in the regiments, which were generally the same for soldiers both African American and white, could be excruciatingly monotonous. A typical day began with reveille at 0545 hours (5:45 am). Breakfast followed and then there was a fatigued-duty formation at 0730 hours (7:30 am). At 1215 hours, the men were recalled from fatigue duty for lunch. Lunch went on until 1300 hours (1:00 pm), at which time there was yet another fatigue

---

<sup>56</sup> Nalty, *Strength*, 52.

<sup>57</sup> Nalty, *Strength*, 54-55.

call. The men worked until the evening when they were recalled from fatigue duty at 1630 hours (4:30 pm). Fifteen minutes later they had drill, which went on for 45 minutes. At 1715 (5:15pm) hours, those selected for guard duty reported for guard mount.<sup>58</sup> Guard mount is essentially one of several methods to prepare the guard detail for duty. It begins in the company/troop area with the first sergeant performing a visual inspection of the detail. After inspection, the senior member of the guard detail reports to the sergeant of the guard (SOG). The SOG then organizes the detail for specific assignments and then gives the men their assigned posts.<sup>59</sup> After guard mount, the entire regiment had dinner. The last formation took place at 2100 hours (9:00 pm) with taps. The next morning, and every morning, this nearly unvaried process began once more, and, in terms of the mechanics of executing guard duty, in general, not much has changed over time. With the exception of Sundays, unit officers occasionally suspending nonessential duties, or being on patrol engaging Indian war parties and rounding up cattle rustlers, the men kept this routine year round.<sup>60</sup> One can argue that such a tedious daily existence alone could have encouraged many desertions, but no evidence as yet corroborates this.

Due to an apparent lack of confidence in leadership, a few Buffalo soldiers assigned to Troop A, 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry at Fort Concho near the Texas panhandle deserted their unit on or about July 30, 1877. The white troop commander was Captain Nicholas Nolan. He had been given the task of tracking down Indian war parties that attacked stations along the stagecoach line between San Antonio and El Paso. On one mission, Nolan went in search of the Mescalero Apache raiders, who were known to attack these stations. The pursuit began on July 19, 1877.

---

<sup>58</sup> Marvin Fletcher, *The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army 1891-1917* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1972), 80.

<sup>59</sup> Headquarters Department of the Army: Guard Duty, Field Manual 22-6 (Washington DC: Department of the Army, September 1971), Chapter 6, par. 33-36, 6-1.

<sup>60</sup> Fletcher, *Black Soldiers*, 80.

This particular summer was the driest in years, but for several days Nolan's men found drinking water by digging into dried lakebeds and streams. Eight days later, the 27<sup>th</sup>, they could find no more. A civilian guide struck out alone in search of water but never returned. Nolan sent eight of his men, bearing as many canteens as they could manage, to find the guide. The men found neither him, nor the spring he sought. In the days that followed, the unit could find no fresh water but the morning dew, which they managed to soak up with towels. This proved insufficient, as some men grew weak and collapsed. Four men died, Nolan left behind one soldier whose body they never recovered. Another four men, perhaps out of fear that they might meet the same fate, lost faith in the captain and deserted the troop. They struck out on their own and made it to safety. After eighty-six hours in the wilderness, the unit found drinking water. Once the men rested, the unit returned to the fort, and Nolan pressed charges against the four deserters.<sup>61</sup> The results of those charges are unknown. The racism and the public's contempt before 1890 were mild compared to that after 1890. Going into the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, society became more racist with the army mirroring it.

Before 1890, the War Department discouraged racism within its ranks because it needed a military presence on the frontier. The department assigned African American troops to the region since there were not enough whites to fill the job. After 1890, wars with Native Americans declined to the point that the army no longer required a strong military presence there, and so the War Department withdrew its forces. With the withdrawal, the War Department no longer saw the need to discourage racism. In time, the army abandoned many posts on the frontier. It also increased its ranks while setting up units closer to population centers, bringing the army into contact with society and providing an opportunity for racism

---

<sup>61</sup> William H. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 156-164.



within its ranks to surface. As stated above, the Plessey decision made racism a legal fact of life. The case did not go unchallenged, though. Proponents of civil liberties in *Williams v. Mississippi* questioned the constitutionality of the Supreme Court ruling. The case ultimately made its way to the Supreme Court, where in 1898, the high court upheld the restrictions of franchise. This paved the way for other southern states to craft similar laws.<sup>62</sup> With the approval of the Supreme Court and the endorsement of the federal government, the nation set about formalizing racism.

The army followed suit with a policy of segregation. Its program of segregation was thorough and complete. For example, the army included in its policy that separation of the races applied to recruiting stations, posts' facilities, and even to whom soldiers could marry.<sup>63</sup> The army's racial discriminatory policy notwithstanding, some African Americans continued to see military service as a more appealing alternative to civilian life. Even US colonialism, and the racial ideas encouraged by it, did not completely deter African Americans, as their involvement in the Spanish-American War and the conquest of the Philippines demonstrate. In the war with Spain and the Philippine expedition, African Americans accounted for themselves quite well. This is not to say that they fought without some resentment about their country's imperialist inclinations. Moreover, African American leaders in the civilian sector fiercely contested what they considered to be an American form of imperialism.

In general, the anti-imperialist African American intelligentsia believed that US rule in the Philippines was not as benign as the government claimed. Proof of this, they argued was whites' common use of the term "nigger" when referring to Filipinos. More ominous was the treaty between the US government and the Sultan of Sulu, which sanctioned slavery in the Sultan's

---

<sup>62</sup> Fletcher, *Black Soldiers*, 153.

<sup>63</sup> Fletcher, *Black Soldiers*, 157.

Philippine sphere of influence.<sup>64</sup> The African American intelligentsia's objections to the Philippine situation ranged from moderate to extreme. E. E. Cooper of the *Colored American* criticized the glaring inconsistency between US attempts to Christianize and civilize the Filipino people and America's apparent need to do it at the point of a gun. Booker T. Washington, who was regarded by many as the chief spokesman of the African American race, questioned the wisdom of bringing the Filipino people under US rule when the government had not dealt with the Indian and African American problems at home.<sup>65</sup> What might be interpreted as extreme views on the Philippine situation came from men like John E. Bruce. Bruce was a popular African American columnist who stated that the US would go to the Philippines and deny the Filipino peoples' opportunity for liberty. The outspoken Henry M. Turner, a senior bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, advised African Americans not to help conquer the Philippines while their own country denied them basic human rights.<sup>66</sup> Also, various African American civic and church groups passed resolutions condemning American imperialism. The African American intellectual, W. T. Scott of Cairo, Illinois, formed an anti-Imperial and anti-Expansion group organization to mobilize African American opposition to the Philippine policy. A similar organization with the same agenda, the Black Man's Burden Association, mobilized support by playing up the situation of the African American in the US and the treatment of the Filipino people as an extension of US policy toward African Americans.<sup>67</sup> On the whole, the dissenting voices to the war appear to have been sufficiently widespread to inform the African American soldier's attitude towards American imperialism.

---

<sup>64</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "Black Americans and the Quest for Empire, 1898-1903," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Nov. 1972), 559.

<sup>65</sup> Gatewood, "Black Americans," 558.

<sup>66</sup> Gatewood, "Black Americans," 549.

<sup>67</sup> Gatewood, "Black Americans," 559-560.

In the Philippine expedition, where more than five thousand African Americans served, one can speculate that many, if not most, of the men could not reconcile helping to conquer other people of color, and then having to stand by and watch as their country installed a policy of apartheid to that island nation. While the sentiments of the majority of men have not been objectively substantiated, there is evidence to show that some African American soldiers were unhappy with their predicament and sought to improve it. Some official documents demonstrate that of the five thousand African Americans who served in the Philippines, there were twenty-nine desertions among the four regiments. Nine of the twenty-nine men actually deserted to the Filipino line.<sup>68</sup>

While twenty-nine deserters out of five thousand men represents a small number (0.003 percent), three factors explain why more African American soldiers did not desert. Firstly, the Philippines are in the Pacific Ocean, more than 2000 miles north of New Guinea, approximately 1088 miles east of Indonesia, and 1930 miles south of mainland China.<sup>69</sup> It is possible that some would-be deserters contemplated escaping to countries near the Philippines but may have decided against this due to the great risks involved in negotiating the open ocean. Secondly, deserters, especially those who took up arms against the US, if captured could not expect to be dealt with humanely. They, like their Filipino revolutionaries, were no longer considered to be soldiers, but were seen as simple criminals or bandits. Thus, when captured, Filipino revolutionaries and African American deserters who took up the Filipino cause faced harsh punishment.

Two common forms of punishment were the water cure and rope torture. The water cure

---

<sup>68</sup> Michael C. Robinson and Frank N. Schubert, "David Fagen: An American Rebel in the Philippines, 1899-1901," *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 44, 1975, see footnote 23, 73.

<sup>69</sup> [www.distancefromto.net](http://www.distancefromto.net) (accessed on 2 December 2011).

is similar to present-day waterboarding in that water is forced down a person's throat, giving him the feeling that he is drowning. Rope torture was a simple rope and pulley system. First US forces would tie prisoners' hands behind their backs and attach the lifting rope to the prisoners' wrists. Then the prisoners were raised and lowered violently to extract information from them.<sup>70</sup>

Even for African American soldiers who desired to desert but not join Filipino revolutionaries or any other enemy of the US, the risk was still very high. It is likely that any such deserters, had they been captured by US forces, quite possibly would be put to death, as military law authorized the death penalty for any and all US military personnel who deserted during times of war. Moreover, given prevalent racist attitudes of the early twentieth century, death by firing squad was likely to take place.

Lastly, the African American intelligentsia and African American emigrates to the Philippines had advised against a mass exodus of poor African American laborers to the Philippines, as they believed that African Americans could not compete with Filipinos for that country's resources.<sup>71</sup> As early as the Spanish-American War, which began in 1898, the African American intelligentsia had contemplated the prospects of African American emigration to Cuba, Puerto Rico, or the Philippines. Thus, the word was out before the Philippine Insurrection that African American settlement in the Philippines was not feasible. This may be an additional reason why relatively fewer African American soldiers deserted during this campaign. Still, some were compelled to desert.

The most famous African American deserter in the Philippine Insurrection of 1899-1902

---

<sup>70</sup> E. San Juan, Jr., "African American Soldiers in the Philippine Revolution," *The Philippines Matrix Project*, <http://philcsc.wordpress.com/2009/06/27/african-american-soldiers-in-the-philippine-revolution/> (Accessed on 2 December 2011). The Philippine Matrix Project is an online journal that is dedicated to political issues concerning the self-determination of the Philippines.

<sup>71</sup> Gatewood, "Black Americans," 554.

was Corporal David Fagen who joined Emilio Aguinaldo's army, who commanded his own unit of *insurrecto* troops.<sup>72</sup> Fagen was born in Tampa, Florida around 1875. Not much is known about his early life, however. His father worked as a merchant, and he was a widower. Fagen worked in town as a laborer for Hull's Phosphate Company.<sup>73</sup>

Fagen's path to the Philippines began on June 4, 1898, when, at the age of twenty-three, he enlisted in the twenty-fourth Infantry. The infantry unit, coincidentally, happened to be in Tampa at the time. He joined up with his unit and did a stint in Cuba. Afterwards the unit returned to the US. In January 1899, the army discharged Fagen, along with several hundred other soldiers, to reduce the ranks to peacetime strength. Not to be dissuaded of his desire for military service, Fagen reenlisted a month later on 12 February at Fort McPherson, Georgia. He then received orders assigning him once again to the Twenty-fourth Regiment, which had moved to a fort in Wyoming. Four months later, in the summer of 1899, Fagen arrived in the Philippines. By autumn, he found himself clashing with *insurrectos*.<sup>74</sup> Not only did he and his fellow African American troops clash with Filipino revolutionaries, they also clashed with Jim Crow.

Just as African American soldiers endured racism back in the United States, they had to endure it equally as much in the Philippines. Here white commanders also maintained the Jim Crow norms of segregation. Such commanders segregated military installations under their command. They barred African American soldiers access to posts facilities, such as barber shops, restaurants, other accommodations, and obviously any place where African American soldiers encountered a "Whites only" posting. Segregation was so tenaciously and extensively

---

<sup>72</sup> Robinson, "David Fagen," note 23, 73.

<sup>73</sup> David Fagen (1875-?), "The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed," Blackpast.org, <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aaw/fagen-david-1875> (accessed on 26 June 2011).

<sup>74</sup> Robinson, "David Fagen," 73-4.

enforced that some brothels in Manila were set off limits to African American soldiers.<sup>75</sup>

Mob violence also manifested itself in a form akin to the lynchings practiced in the “states.” Small numbers of African Americans, be they males, females, or even children might find themselves outnumbered by angry whites who numbered anywhere from two people to a mob. In the Philippines, a African American, and one-time sergeant of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry, F.E. Green, found himself in just such a predicament. Green had taken his discharge in Manila and decided to remain there for an unknown period of time. It was there that he encountered several intoxicated white soldiers from I Company, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry. It is unclear who instigated the ensuing fight, but events evolved into the drunken whites chasing Green into a hotel dining room, where the white soldiers cornered Green. They then picked up chairs and other hotel furniture and began to beat him. Green may have been beaten to death had the sergeant of the guard not arrived and put a stop to the lynching.<sup>76</sup> If Green had been murdered, then it was not at all certain that the white soldiers involved would have faced any serious legal problems, given usual army policy. One example of race-motivated violence going unpunished involved a general officer.

Brigadier General Fredrick Funston, commander of forces in the northern islands, once ordered two Filipino prisoners lynched without the benefit of a trial or hearing. A couple of willing white soldiers acquired two ropes, bound the prisoners, placed a noose around each prisoner’s neck, ran them up a tree, and then strung them from one of its limbs until they died.<sup>77</sup> Such instances of the bald-faced brutality of mob violence perpetrated on African American soldiers, by white foot soldiers as well as some general officers, challenged African American

---

<sup>75</sup> Scot Ngozi-Brown “African-American Soldiers and Filipinos Racial Imperialism, Jim Crow and Social Relations,” *Journal of Negro History*, vol. 82, No.1 (1997), 44-45.

<sup>76</sup> Ngozi-Brown, “African-American Soldiers,” 45.

<sup>77</sup> Ngozi-Brown, “African-American Soldiers,” 45.

soldiers' loyalty to their country. Most remained loyal, but a few could not.

Fagen's first few months in the Philippines were somewhat unstable, for he had experienced difficulties with his superiors. Some close to the situation suggested that Fagen might have been picked on. Fagen's superiors ordered him to carry out undesirable tasks such as latrine duty and KP duty.<sup>78</sup> KP (kitchen police) duty is that which is assigned to military personnel for some minor infraction. Personnel are to perform non-cook duties pertaining to preliminary preparation of fruits and vegetables, sanitation and cleaning of dining facility buildings and equipment.<sup>79</sup> KP duty can be especially difficult because it is done in addition to all regular duties, since military kitchens often open before and close after normal duty hours. Hence, the nature and frequency of KP duty might have further led to Fagen's deteriorating relationship with his superiors. Fagen continued to have run-ins with the leadership, and he tried to remedy the situation by transferring on three separate occasions, but had no success.<sup>80</sup> Fagen's position within his unit was probably very awkward by this time, and it would not be a leap in logic to suggest that his strained relationship with the leadership and the alienating elements of far-reaching racism, and nearly unchecked violence against people of color informed, on some level, his decision to desert the army.

On November 17, 1899, Corporal Fagen severed relations with his unit and the US Army. Apparently Fagen had resigned himself to desertion for some time before he actually did so, because the night he deserted an *insurrecto* officer waited near the company area to assist him. Also, the officer brought with him a horse for Fagen. The two then slipped away and went to

---

<sup>78</sup> Robinson, "David Fagen," 73.

<sup>79</sup> Army Regulation 310-25, *Dictionary of United States Army Terms*.

<http://www.apd.army.mil/AdminPubs/ProductMap.asp>, The Army Publication Directorate (accessed on 15 December 2011).

<sup>80</sup> Robinson, "David Fagen," 74.

Mount Arayat, an extinct volcano, which was a guerilla hideout.<sup>81</sup> Nine months after Fagen deserted, word of his insurrectionist exploits became public.

The print and radio media reported that Fagen had been involved in clashes with his former soldiers since August 1900. He would continue to fight US forces until January 17, 1901. On a few occasions, Fagen grappled with General Funston, who was reportedly the army's best guerilla chaser. In one foray into US space, Fagen led 150 *insurrectos* in the capture of a team launch. The guerillas managed to unload some of the military cargo before US and Filipino forces intervened. Fagen and his men then slipped into the jungle and made their way back to Mount Arayat. After news of this reached the US, the *New York Times* promoted Fagen to "general."<sup>82</sup> In a like manner, Fagen's men also symbolically promoted him. They promoted him from first lieutenant to general officer, and they fondly referred to him as "General Fagen."<sup>83</sup> The man to whom Fagen answered, General Jose Alejandrino, though impressed with Fagen's leadership skills, was not inclined to offer so generous promotion to his star pupil, however. The general felt it more fitting to promote Fagen to captain. The promotion became official on September 6, 1900 when Fagen received his commission.<sup>84</sup>

While the press praised Captain Fagen for his cunning and audacity, it also characterized him as a brutal leader who tortured and murdered American prisoners. Such a portrayal seemed less believable after two American soldiers, who were former prisoners of Fagen, came forth and contradicted such reports. African American Private George Jackson of the Twenty-fourth Infantry stated that Fagen did not torture and kill any American prisoners. A white Lieutenant

---

<sup>81</sup> Robinson, "David Fagen," 75-6.

<sup>82</sup> Robinson, "David Fagen," 76.

<sup>83</sup> Robinson, "David Fagen," 30.

<sup>84</sup> Robinson, "David Fagen," 30.



Frederick Alstaetter stated that he had been treated well by Fagen.<sup>85</sup> Conflicting stories of Fagen's supposed brutality toward American prisoners were of no real consequence, as the Captain had committed himself to the rebel cause irrespective of the outcome: at this juncture, public opinion was unlikely to shake his resolve. The captain continued guerilla operations, but the rebellion showed signs of weakening. By the spring of 1901, US forces had overwhelmed the rebels. Fagen's senior officers began to surrender. General Alejandrino surrendered in May, and General Urbano Lacuna surrendered a few days later. News of Lacuna's surrender prompted Fagen to part with the *insurrecto* camp, and so he, now married to a Filipina, found refuge in the mountains of Nueva Ecija. For the rest of 1901, the army hunted for Fagen but had no luck in finding him. Even some bounty hunters joined the hunt, but they fared no better than the army. By December 1901, however, one bounty hunter appeared to have located Fagen.

On December 5, 1901, the native bounty hunter, Anastacio Bartolomé, produced the 'slightly decomposed head of a negro' to authorities at the US outpost of Bongabong in Nueva Ecija. Bartolomé claimed the head to be that of Fagen. The bounty hunter produced some weapons and clothing, a pair of field glasses, Fagen's commission, and the West Point ring of one of Fagen's former captives, Lieutenant Frederick Alstaetter as proof of Fagen's identity.<sup>86</sup> The press and the army eagerly accepted Bartolomé's claims and announced Fagen's death. An official inquiry found evidence to the contrary, however.

The officers who received the bounty hunter were suspicious of his claims and investigated the matter further. They sought confirmation of Fagen's identity from his former company. The officers did not find evidence to confirm Fagen's death. Consequently, the official report on the Fagen event is titled 'The Supposed Killing of David Fagen.' Furthermore,

---

<sup>85</sup> Robinson, "David Fagen," 78.

<sup>86</sup> Robinson, "David Fagen," 50.

there is no official record of payment of an award to Bartolomé, according to Robinson and Schubert.<sup>87</sup> Because there is no creditable account of Fagen's life after the United States put down the Philippine insurrection, there can only be speculation about how the rebel lived out the rest of his life. It would not be a stretch to say that Fagen did not die at the hands of Bartolomé. It is possible that he hid among the Negritos in the dense, overgrown backcountry of Nueva Ecija where he may have lived a long, full life.

Whether Fagen survived or not, his rebellion was significant because it points up the extent to which some African American soldiers would go in pursuit of alternatives to the United States' unequal form of democracy when opportunities presented themselves. Over time, other opportunities became available, and African Americans took advantage of them. To be sure, the African American's purpose for joining the army was to show his patriotism to white America, to prove he was worthy of being called an American. If service to the country was, indeed, the litmus test for full citizenship, then African Americans had passed that test, as the overwhelming majority African American soldiers who served in the Philippines served their country well. They fought competently and bravely, but their contributions to America's cause did nothing to lower racial barriers. In fact, life became more difficult for African American soldiers, as racial intolerance intensified and occasionally violence became the result of it. Typical of such intolerance was the Brownsville Affair.

On August 13, 1906, three companies of the Twenty-fifth Regiment, composed of African American soldiers, were involved in a riot in Brownsville, Texas. One white civilian was killed and another was wounded. President Theodore Roosevelt took action. Based upon an inspector's report that concluded African Americans had murdered and maimed Brownsville

---

<sup>87</sup> Robinson, "David Fagen," 81.

citizens, Roosevelt dishonorably discharged all those who were involved and barred them from future military service or civil service positions.

In January 1907, the Senate Military Affairs Committee investigated the Brownsville matter. Several months later, the committee released its findings. The majority found the president had acted within the limits of his authority as commander in chief. On the other hand, a minority, led by Ohio Senator Joseph B. Foraker, an opponent of Roosevelt-condemned the conclusions of the majority and presented evidence that they believed could explain how white citizens had framed the African American soldiers. Foraker produced evidence that white citizens had fired shots and later produced spent cartridges they claimed belonged to the soldiers of the 25<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Roosevelt considered Foraker's argument but remained unconvinced of the soldiers' guilt in this issue. Thus, the dishonorable discharges stood until 1972. That was when the Army investigated the incident and found the men of the 25<sup>th</sup> to be innocent. All those involved received a presidential pardon and an honorable discharge.<sup>88</sup> In the final chapter of the Brownsville Affair, the evidence showed that several white Brownsville citizens had fired shots and blamed it on the soldiers in a successful attempt to frame them. In spite of such intolerance and the violence that often accompanied it, African Americans continued to seek service military. Most simply withstood the racism, but some found the army's discriminatory policies and other alienating factors too much to endure.

In the years following the Philippine war even until the outbreak of World War I, racism in the military showed no signs of abating. Undaunted, many young, adventurous and patriotic African-American soldiers such as Private Charles B. Ceres enlisted with the hope of going to

---

<sup>88</sup> Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers African-American Troops in World War I* (Da Capo Press: NY, NY, 1974), xii.  
Gary A. Donaldson, *The History of African-Americans in the Military* (Krieger Publishing Company: Malabar, Florida, 1991), 77-78.

Europe to fight the Germans. Within a few years of service, racism and indifference left young Ceres disillusioned with the army, and so he deserted.

Private Charles B. Ceres enlisted on September 9, 1914 at the age of 21. Presumably he was from East St. Louis, Illinois, since his mother lived there. On September 5, 1918, nearly four years after enlisting, Private Ceres deserted. At the time of his desertion, Ceres was assigned to Troop F, 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. Private Ceres made his way to Mexico, where he spent thirteen years on the run. He lived there at the Mexican government's pleasure, insofar as he, like all foreigners, paid a yearly fee of ten pesos (\$10.00). If foreigners were unable to pay this fee, then they were obliged to leave the country. At some point, Ceres could no longer find work to support himself, and the Mexican government asked him to leave. In need of money simply to leave the country and apparently nowhere else to turn, Ceres reached out to his former employer, the federal government, specifically the War Department. On two separate occasions, Ceres tried to communicate with someone within the department but received no reply, he stated. Then, on June 23, 1932, Ceres went to the American Consulate in Guadalajara, Mexico to explain his situation. In a handwritten statement, Private Ceres explained his reasons for deserting were due to "race discrimination," his "failure to get to go overseas when ... [the country was] ... at war with Germany, but last and principally, was the murder of my mother who fell a victim to mob violence in East Saint Louis, Illinois in 1917."<sup>89</sup> By July 22, 1932, the War Department reported that it had received Private Ceres's file. However, the military did not yet have Ceres in custody, and it was, according to the Secretary of War, a general rule that the department made no attempt to adjudicate the case of Ceres or any soldier absent without authority who is amenable to trial

---

<sup>89</sup> American Consul Raleigh A. Gibson, "Report to the War Department, 30 June 1932," National Archives and Research Administration (NARA), College Park, MD, Record Group 59, Department of State, Box 4968, Decimal File 1930-39.

until he is under military control.<sup>90</sup> The ultimate outcome of Private Ceres's situation remains a mystery, as no further communiqués regarding Ceres have been found.

---

<sup>90</sup> American Consul Raleigh A. Gibson, "Report to the War Department, 30 June 1932," Record Group 59, Department of State, Box 4968, Decimal File 1930-39.

#### 4. WORLD WAR II AND THE COLD WAR

In the early stages of the war, planners in the War Department calculated that the United States, with the help of the Allies, could defeat the Nazis without the assistance of African Americans. In the early going, this seemed possible, but as the war dragged on a quick victory was not to be had. As a result, troop casualties mounted, creating manpower shortages. By 1945, this development forced the military to draft African American soldiers and train them for combat. Even as the army officials complied with this mandate, white officers and white noncommissioned officers (NCOs) remained unmoved by calls for racial inclusion and did only what was asked of them and no more. African American soldiers also held steadfastly to their demands for racial integration of the army. It is important to examine the racially charged powder keg of the relationship between African American and white soldiers. Incidental, but quite relevant, to this relationship is its interplay with the German people, who were still grappling with their own unresolved racism. In addition, and most importantly, this chapter examines the changing meaning of desertions for African American soldiers and their continued collective transformation.

While training in the States, specifically in the South, many African American soldiers had to endure mob violence, verbal abuse, and the constant threat to their lives. For some, service to the country was too great a risk, so they deserted. In 1941 and 1942, the names of African American soldiers peppered desertion lists maintained by the Adjutant General's Office.

In a small Arkansas town, a few hundred men deserted their unit after a mob of angry whites attacked them. In the summer of August 1941, African American soldiers from Detroit

and Chicago assigned to the 94<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion were in Gurdon, Arkansas, to train before deploying to Europe to fight fascism. On August 13, 1941, these soldiers, led by a white officer, marched through that small town. White citizens, ostensibly, took exception to the march and hurled racial slurs and other abusive language at the soldiers. White officers quickly quelled the situation, and the battalion went on its way. Later that night at the battalion's bivouac site, many of those same white citizens of Gurdon invaded the camp and attacked some of the African American soldiers. White officers and African American noncommissioned officers quickly restored order and then sent the incensed whites on their way. To avoid further confrontations, the battalion commander ordered his unit to move to a campsite farther from town. A white captain then led the battalion to the new campground. As the battalion marched unarmed down the road to the new bivouac site, the local police literally drove the men from the road at gunpoint. A mob of angry whites that stood nearby moved in, swore at, and abused the African American soldiers. The police officer in charge struck the white captain who was leading the battalion. More ominously, all this happened while two truckloads of white military police (MPs) sat nearby in full view of the incident but did not intervene.<sup>91</sup>

These two days of mob violence surely only validated the belief held by the majority of African American soldiers in the battalion that the "democratic" government, its army, and its justice system could not be trusted to protect the rights of African Americans. To escape the immediate threat to their lives, most of the men retreated to the woods, where they collected themselves and worked out a solution to their predicament. Ostensibly some 200 out of 1500

---

<sup>91</sup> Record Group 65.4, Records of the National Bureau of Criminal Identification (NBCI), International Association of Chiefs of Police, Microfilm Publication M1085 (African Americans in the Military Part 2: Subject files of Judge William Hastie, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War), in a memorandum from Judge Hastie to the Adjutant General, dated 10 October 1941, reel 12-26, frames 3-7; NARA, College Park, Maryland.

African American soldiers in the battalion decided mutually or individually to desert. They had decided that serving in the army in the South was too dangerous. The resolve of the men was such that when they emerged from the woods, they walked back to respective homes of record in Chicago and Detroit. Significantly, the men walked along southern highways and country roads, risking apprehension by the army or worse being lynched by an angry mob. Not all escaped, as the army indeed was able to apprehend some soldiers.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, the deserting African American soldiers of the 94<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion demonstrated the nascent, shared revolutionary spirit for social and racial justice that would gain momentum after all hostilities in Europe ended. It would be in post-World War II West Germany where African American soldiers came to appreciate fully the political implications of desertion, albeit within the context of the Cold War.

In the early stages of the Cold War, the principal combatants, the United States and the Soviet Union, used propaganda to fight for the hearts and minds of the world. Both sides were keenly interested in recruiting the newly decolonizing nations of Africa and Asia. The United States encouraged these new states to align themselves with the ideologically democratic West under American guidance. The USSR countered with a deluge of news about lynchings, unrelenting disfranchisement of African Americans in the South, and ongoing segregation to indict American democracy as a fraud.<sup>93</sup> Although the Cold War was in its early stages, Communism realized some early propaganda victories in that some African American soldiers stationed in West Germany deserted to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to escape the federal government's discriminatory policies that the US Army had imported into West

---

<sup>92</sup> Record Group 65.4 Records of the National Bureau of Criminal Identification (NBCI), in a memorandum dated 13 October 1941 from Gloster B. Current-Executive Secretary of the NAACP to Walter White also of the NAACP, reel 12-26, NARA.

<sup>93</sup> Maria Höhn and Martin Klimke, *A Breath of Freedom The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany* (New York, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 68.



Germany. But, unfortunately, these men did not exactly find racial equality in the GDR, as German intolerance was pervasive and apparent.<sup>94</sup>

In some respects, German intolerance can be traced back to the Versailles Treaty, whose legal restrictions stripped the country of her ability to make war with or defend herself against another nation. The treaty set severe limits on the number of military personnel Germany could have, outlawed conscription, prohibited the import and export of weapons, and in general prohibited the Germans from building any substantial fighting force. Such measures left the Germans powerless, and they created much German antipathy for the Allies. What the Germans found especially galling was the treaty's stipulation that Allied forces occupy Germany as a guarantee of German compliance for a period of 15 years. The French, Germany's archenemy, further increased German antipathy for the Allies, in general and the French in particular, when they went into the Rhineland and disrupted the local economies there, which put thousands of Germans out of work. In addition, the French brought in as part of their occupying force colonial troops that was comprised of Moroccan and Senegalese soldiers, and the force was estimated to be between 14,000 and 25,000 strong.<sup>95</sup>

The politically conservative Germans responded to the Allied occupation with a nationalist propaganda campaign focused on wresting the country from Allied control. The Germans specifically targeted the French because they perceived the French as posing the greatest threat to the country. Specifically, the Germans believed the French purposely used colonial troops to destroy the German race. Accordingly, the Germans' nationalist campaign methodology was to play upon the nationalist sentiments of the German people, foment German racial hatred and

---

<sup>94</sup> Höhn, *A Breath of Freedom*, 127.

<sup>95</sup> Maria Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: the German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 89.

xenophobia, and seek the support of the international community. The campaign became known as the “Black Horror” campaign, and the leading voice in Germany's racist discourse was the Reich government, which was led by the Majority Social Democrats (SPD) and endorsed by all parties in the national assembly except the Independent Socialists (USPD). The central feature of “Black Horror” propaganda was its obsession with African soldiers' alleged sexual excesses and the perceived threat the African libido posed to the international community (in reality the Western world). In appeals to the international community, Germany applied racialized language warning that the French colonial “savages” possessed an unbridled sex drive that posed a danger to the honor, health and life, and purity and innocence of German women and children, as well as men and boys.<sup>96</sup> Such racially charged entreaties aroused racist sympathies from organizations both home and abroad.

A leading voice from abroad was that of England's Edmund Dene Morel, who was a labor politician and author of the pamphlet *The Horror on the Rhine*.<sup>97</sup> As a show of solidarity with the German cause, Morel gave a racialized critique of African colonial occupiers. He was critical of France's choice to install African colonial soldiers on German soil, but he reserved his most damning criticism for the black colonial occupiers. He argued that the sexual instinct of Africans was essential to their racial survival due to his analysis that “among the more primitive . . . races inhabiting the tropical and sub-tropical areas of Africa, the sex-impulse is a more instinctive . . . more spontaneous, fiercer, less controllable impulse than among Europeans.”<sup>98</sup> Morel further warned that the Africans’ sexual requirements, in the absence of African women,

---

<sup>96</sup> Julia Roos, “Women’s Rights, Nationalist Anxiety, and the “Moral” Agenda in the Early Weimar Republic: Revisiting the “Black Horror” Campaign against France’s African Occupation Troops,” *Central European History* 42 (2009), 474.

<sup>97</sup> E.D. Morel, *The Horror on the Rhine* (London: Union of Democratic Control, 1921); Roos, “Women’s Rights,” 477.

<sup>98</sup> Morel *Horror*, 9-10; Roos, “Women’s Rights,” 478.

would continue to be satisfied by white women.<sup>99</sup> The racist language of Morel's response demonstrates the effectiveness of German demagoguery. Other organizations also rendered commentary that was peppered with racist language as well.

Morel did have sympathizers in the US. There was one main organization, "The American Campaign Against the Horror on the Rhine." Edmund von Mach, a German-American, led the organization. On February 28, 1921, von Mach organized a rally to show solidarity with Morel and the campaign against the *Rhine Horror*. In attendance were more than 12, 000 members, with many of them being Americans of German birth and others who sympathized with the Irish Sinn Fein. At the time of the Rhine Horror protest, Sinn Fein was working to end British rule in Ireland. Attempts to garner the support of Irish Americans and that of sympathizers may have been partially responsible Sinn Fein's presence in New York. Speakers of note were Supreme Court Justice Daniel F. Coholan; American Legion Lieutenant Colonel A. E. Anderson; Otto Stiefel, a Newark, New Jersey lawyer; the Reverend M. A. L. Hirsch and Major Carl Lentz, who were both honorary Vice Presidents of the New York Campaign Committee against the *Horror on the Rhine*; and New York City Mayor John F. Hylan who had been since 1918 accused of having ties to von Mach.<sup>100</sup> Speculation of the mayor's involvement with von Mach only increased because he permitted the meeting to be held without interference or objection.<sup>101</sup>

In Germany, the League of Rhenish Women (Rheinische Frauenliga, or RFL), with financial support from the German foreign office, disseminated propaganda abroad that detailed reports of rapes, and, to a lesser extent, non-sexual violent crimes allegedly committed by French

---

<sup>99</sup> Roos, "Women's Rights," 478.

<sup>100</sup> Edith Cavell, "12, 000 in Garden under Police Guard Attack France," *New York Times*, March 1, 1921.

<sup>101</sup> "Big Rally of Legion to Give Rhine Reply," *New York Times*, March 10 1921, (no attribution given).

colonial occupation soldiers. They highlighted the personal accounts of women victimized by the “black savages,” stressing the women’s shame and mental anguish.<sup>102</sup> Other groups also responded, perhaps out of contempt or embarrassment, to colonial occupation soldiers’ rule over the German people with racist rhetoric: “the subjugation of the German people to the violent rule of coloreds from the lower and lowest classes of civilization.”<sup>103</sup> Such racially charged rhetoric was typical of the propaganda the Germans and the West employed to its way of life.

In the years immediately following World War II and on into the 1950s and 1960s, Conservative German commentators exhibited similar discriminatory inclinations. They blamed the African American presence for the country’s social decline, citing the sexual threat that the soldiers supposedly posed to local women and youngsters. The mayor of the town of Koblenz warned that extra caution must be taken to protect the younger generation of Germans from the African American soldiers, since it is well-known that these troops have an uncontrollable sex drive.<sup>104</sup>

Such sentiments were clearly passed along from the post-World War I era, and the conservative Germans made similar racist comments throughout the 1950s and 1960s. To be sure, African American GIs complained about the comments and they complained about the tangible discrimination they encountered, but these GIs negotiated their way through it all to find a place within society. On the one hand, African American soldiers were taken aback by German racism, while on the other hand, they found the Germans to be friendly. Overall, the African American soldiers’ response to German racism was unexpected.

In many instances, African American soldiers explained away intolerance as American

---

<sup>102</sup> Roos, “Women’s Rights,” 480.

<sup>103</sup> Roos, “Women’s Rights,” 481.

<sup>104</sup> Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins*, 94.

racism exported to Germany. This is not surprising since some of racial discrimination these GIs faced in German communities was similar to that which they faced back in the United States. The kinds of discrimination that African American GIs experienced in Germany was mostly associated with them being denied housing or access to bars and pubs that were immediately surrounding American military bases, according to the findings of a civil rights investigation done by US authorities. This civil rights investigation also concluded that soldiers who ventured outside of the American military environment, encountered little problems. The same investigation determined that discrimination in communities surrounding American military bases existed because Germans began to embrace the discriminatory practices of white Americans.<sup>105</sup> For African American GIs, the results of the investigation simply validated what they knew to be the case. This can help to explain how they were able to reconcile the German discrimination they encountered. By resolving that the problem of German discrimination was actually an American problem, African American GIs allowed themselves to envisage a life as an expatriate living abroad, and their early years in post-World War II Germany suggested that this was the case.

From the end of the war until the early 1950s, African American soldiers found life in West Germany to be a liberating experience. This was especially so in the Rhineland, where, for the most part, African American soldiers found the German civilians to be very friendly. These Germans sought out African American soldiers and associated openly with them, and the soldiers happily responded in kind. German civilians' acceptance made African American soldiers realize that they had the freedom to move around the country as they pleased and associate with whomever they desired. They attended local church services with German civilians,

---

<sup>105</sup> Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins*, 101.

accompanied them to dances in village pubs, and partook in performances in opera houses. They also openly dated German women, with a fair amount of these relationships resulting in marriage and the establishment of a family.<sup>106</sup> The freedom to enter an establishment or use a facility without signs posted “whites only” or otherwise be denied basic human rights because of racial prejudice was indeed a liberating experience for African American soldiers. Unfortunately, such freedom did not go unfettered because the adherents to racism within the US Army stationed in West Germany were none too happy about their African American soldiers’ newfound freedom, and they intended to put a stop to it.

To mitigate the “damage” done by liberal Germans, the US army imposed strict segregation codes on military installations and towns and villages surrounding them. Whenever MPs encountered African American soldiers dating white women, they verbally and physically abused them. Some Red Cross clubs closed their doors to African American soldiers to avoid interracial dances or dating.<sup>107</sup> On some military installations, the segregation was absurdly enforced. It was not enough that segregation demanded that African American and white soldiers use the same swimming pools at different times, but it required that after African American soldiers used the pool, it be emptied and refilled with fresh water before white soldiers could use it.

These overt manifestations of racism were ridiculous, and they did not stop there. The army went on to construct a segregated training camp. Furthermore, many installation commanders had all entertainment facilities near their installations properly instructed, even

---

<sup>106</sup> Höhn, *A Breath of Freedom*, 47. The American military never kept records of how many interracial marriages took place; however, according to American military chaplains’ estimates, approximately 10-15 percent of all marriages between GIs and German women in the 1960s and 1970s involved an African American partner; Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins*, 264, n.111.

<sup>107</sup> Nalty, *Strength*, 234.

warned, that they had a role in preventing race mixing. Even the white rank and file soldiers made it their responsibility to enforce America's racial codes. For their part, they forced African American soldiers off the sidewalks, beat them and verbally abused them in front of Germans, and beat them when they attempted to enter facilities whites had claimed for themselves.<sup>108</sup> It was treatment such as that just described which left many African American soldiers disillusioned with American-style democracy that had emerged in post-World War II West Germany. It would be this so-called democracy that compelled some African American soldiers to look toward the East where Communism promised equality for everyone.

From 1953 to 1963, the GDR housed a group of five African American deserters in the town of Bautzen in East Saxony. The government put them in the "House of International Solidarity," where the men received German language lessons, political education in Marxism and Communism, and an opportunity to learn a trade or be trained for industrial labor. The deserters were Charles Lucas, Arthur Boyd, Raymond H. Hutto, Willie Avent, and James W. Pulley. The men seemed to have found Communism to their liking, since they became productive members of society.

For example, Lucas, born in 1916 in Xenia, Ohio worked as a cook and a baker in a state-owned department store and became a local boxing star.<sup>109</sup> Arthur Boyd of Long Island, New York married a woman from East Berlin and became a metal worker. Raymond H. Hutton from Georgia took a job in a coal and gas combine near Dresden. William Avent distinguished himself by becoming a prominent member of an organization committed to improving the German-Soviet friendship. James W. Pulley seemed to have fared much better than the others,

---

<sup>108</sup> Höhn, *A Breath of Freedom*, 55-56.

<sup>109</sup> Peter Koepf as reported in the *Atlantic Times*, September 2009 (this is a monthly online magazine) [www.atlantic-times.com/archive\\_detail.php?recordID=1890](http://www.atlantic-times.com/archive_detail.php?recordID=1890), 2009, (accessed 20 July 2011).

as he had a successful career as a pop singer. Pulley deserted his unit in Augsburg and escaped with his East German girlfriend in 1955. He worked as a boilermaker in Görlitz. While at a dance, it was found that Pulley had singing talent. Pulley toured with the Dresden dance orchestra and toured throughout the GDR.<sup>110</sup> Although the deserters seemed to have integrated fairly well into East German society, assimilation was not all that it appeared to be.

In the spring of 1954, a Soviet report revealed some troubling developments at Bautzen. The community had kept the deserters somewhat isolated. Some deserters had difficulties with their political education and the professional training program. Local authorities were inattentive to the deserters' needs. Lastly and quite ironically, the deserters frequently had to endure racial discrimination.<sup>111</sup> To what degree discrimination affected deserters in Bautzen is not known because the Soviet report made no mention of it. Nonetheless, racial discrimination may have had negative effects on at least one of the deserters.

Charles Lucas, or Charly as he preferred to be addressed, came to the GDR with the belief that Communism would allow him the freedoms he once enjoyed in West Germany. For a while at least, Communism seemed to meet his expectations, and he declared as much in an East German newspaper: 'While there is race discrimination in the U.S., in the Soviet Union all people are equal.'<sup>112</sup> The Stasi (the State Security Service of East Germany) monitored Charly's comings and goings and maintained a file on him to evaluate his commitment to the Communist cause. Once satisfied that his political views were in line with his public statement, the Stasi felt they could trust Charly. In fact, the Stasi's trust in Charly was such that the agency felt comfortable enough to recruit him as an informant. The Stasi had Charly primarily observing

---

<sup>110</sup> Höhn, *A Breath of Freedom*, 127.

<sup>111</sup> Höhn, *A Breath of Freedom*, 127.

<sup>112</sup> Koepf, *Atlantic Times*, 2009.



foreigners in the House of International Solidarity who may have had subversive inclinations.<sup>113</sup>

Though Charly involved himself in the Communist movement, he began to show signs that he was not completely happy with his situation.

Charly had problems with German language training, and he experienced problems developing personal relationships. In 1951, he ended his relationship with his West German fiancée, who had made life-altering sacrifices for the sake of the relationship, for she followed Charly to the GDR. After the breakup, Charly began relationships with multiple women but committed himself to none of them. In late March 1956, he finally married one of his girlfriends, and that was when his unhappiness became obvious. Within a few months of the marriage, Charly's wife said she found her husband often silent and despondent. Charly's outlook on things were much darker than could have been imagined, for on June 12, 1956 he was found dead in his apartment. Apparently Charly had committed suicide by turning on the gas tap in the kitchen, according to forensic reports. In an interview with East German police, Charly's wife stated that her husband had a scheduled trip abroad, and on that trip she felt that he might leave the country and never return. As things turned out, Charly missed that opportunity and fell into depression. Also, Charly's wife suggested that her husband's depression was exacerbated by homesickness.<sup>114</sup> The official report on the circumstances behind Charly's death took into consideration only the tangible evidence. It made no mention of the psychological toll of the racial abuse and discrimination, the isolation, and the indifference the Soviet authorities may have had on Charly and other African American deserters.

Though Charly's time as a Communist ended tragically, he and other African American deserters used the act of desertion as an instrument to protest racism in America and the racist

---

<sup>113</sup> Koepf, *Atlantic Times*, 2009.

<sup>114</sup> Koepf, *Atlantic Times*, 2009.

practices America had exported to Germany. Thanks to the African American soldiers' experience in the war and post-war Germany African American deserters came to understand the political implications of their cause.

World War II was the defining moment for the collective transformation of African American soldiers who fought in Europe.<sup>115</sup> Much has been reported on the metamorphosis the African American soldier experienced in that war. In interviews, the theme of their experiences was their transformation into manhood. Accounts given by two soldiers are representative of the group experience. One stated that 'I joined the army as a nigger and returned as a man.' The other reminisced that his experience in Europe was the 'only time in my life I felt like a man.'<sup>116</sup> To be sure, African American soldiers had made a transformation into manhood, but their collective "coming of age" had far greater significance than simply reaching adulthood. This group of men, only eleven percent<sup>117</sup> of the total number of African Americans who served during the war from all four branches, came to understand that they did not fight simply to secure peace and justice for themselves or for African Americans back in the states. These GIs came to understand the excesses of racism and segregation: no matter whether it was Nazism sponsored by the German state or it was cloaked in democracy and promulgated by the United States, they were a danger to peace and justice across the globe.

---

<sup>115</sup> See for instance, Neil McMillen, *Remaking Dixie: the impact of World War II on the American South: chapter VI. Fighting for What We Didn't Have: How Mississippi's Black Veterans Remember World War II*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, c1997), 103; Steve Estes, *I Am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 11; Lou Potter, *Liberators: Fighting on Two Fronts in World War II* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1992), 270.

<sup>116</sup> Höhn, *A Breath of Freedom*, 32.

<sup>117</sup> Peter M. Bergman, *The Chronological History of the Negro in America* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969), 495.

During the Cold War, African American soldiers stationed in Europe had to endure not only American racism but German racism as well. The form of German intolerance the men suffered was not just residual Nazism, as might be expected. Quite to the contrary, it was also the racism of the post-World War I occupation that African American GIs encountered. The men endured racial abuse, both verbal and physical, spurred on by an entrenched conservative faction of Germans. Conservative Germans continued to make similar racist comments throughout the 1950s and 1960s. To be sure, African American GIs complained about the comments, and they complained about the tangible discrimination they encountered, but GIs negotiated their way through it all to find a place within society. On the one hand, they found the Germans to be friendly. On the other hand, they were taken aback by German racism, but their response to it was surprising.

Instead of decrying German racism in the same manner that they did when condemning American racism, African American GIs tended to rationalize German racism as an unfortunate evil that the United States heaped upon the German people. Informed by their positive experiences with local Germans, official government findings, and the counter-balanced findings of the African-American intelligentsia led African American soldiers to conclude that the racism they encountered in Germany was a local manifestation of the racial inequality back home in America.

## Conclusions

By 1960, African American contributions to war and US national security had not yet yielded a full integration of African American soldiers into the army. Nevertheless, during the decade of the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement matured and thoroughly converged with the soldiers' own struggle for racial equality. Both with their contribution in America's wars and with their rare but highly symbolic, open rebellions against a racist army, African American soldiers had clearly played a part in the collective transformation of their people from slaves to full citizens.

Their initial steps toward this collective transformation began more than seven decades prior to the Revolutionary War, when colonial slave owners gave freedom to every slave who fought heroically against the colonies' enemies. Slaves who gained liberty this way were happy with their individual freedom, but for most freedmen that happiness had to be bittersweet since their family and friends remained in bondage. At the time, there was little that freedmen could do to change the situation since there were too few of them to form activist groups that could effectively advance the slaves' desire for freedom. Thus, notions of collective freedom were ideas that had not yet taken form. Still, many African Americans were optimistic that they would gain their freedom because military service had become an established means by which they could acquire it.

African Americans' hopes of gaining freedom proved to be more than fanciful thinking at the close of the American Revolutionary War, as slaves by the thousands gained their freedom. The significance of this war to many African American soldiers was that this conflict was where

their notions of the righteousness of desertion developed. To be sure, their beliefs sprang partially from the idea of manumission in exchange for battlefield heroics. However, their attitudes on desertion were also informed by the anti-slavery actions of white abolitionists, African Americans, and the colonial governments surely help to inform slave soldier.

Anti-slavery groups, such as the Quakers, the Puritans, and other anti-slavery societies effected action against slavery principally by advocating the return of all people of African descent to Africa or giving them a good Christian education.<sup>118</sup>

African Americans took legal action by suing their masters, arguing their rulers restrained them from their freedom. They filed petitions to secure collective freedom, and they fought alongside the colonies against colonial enemies.

Colonial states took measures against the foreign slave trade. In 1766, then years before the War of Independence, Massachusetts legislators moved for a law to prohibit the import and purchase of slaves. Other New England colonies made similar moves. In Pennsylvania helped kill the slave trade there when in 1773 it adopted a prohibitive tax on the importation of slaves.<sup>119</sup>

Thus, the actions of abolitionists, African American themselves, and the colonial governments in the age of revolution underpinned slave soldiers' beliefs in the virtue of their notion that desertion was a real means to an end. The slave soldiers had what they surely interpreted as legitimate reasons to desert their military duties. They witnessed abolitionist groups speak and act against the institution of slavery. They observed other slaves take an active role in securing their own freedom. Moreover, they saw colonial states enact measures to prevent the growth of the institution. The beliefs the slave soldiers developed in this war they

---

<sup>118</sup> Quarles, *The Negro*, 33-35.

<sup>119</sup> Quarles, *The Negro*, 40-41.

passed on to those who followed, and some of those beliefs, particularly the conviction of desertion as a legitimate remedy to racial intolerance, manifested itself time and again.

In the Civil War, it appeared that African American soldiers responded to discrimination with more conviction than in the past. In this war, they once more deserted in protest to abusive officers. But they also deserted due to familial concerns and in opposition to the discriminatory pay policy.

Officer abuse was the result of their initial assumptions about African Americans being racially inferior. From this single assumption arose the justification for a myriad of abuses. Some white officers assigned African American subordinates inferior equipment, embezzled their money, and sexually abused African American women. Most of the soldiers tempered their outrage, keeping their focus on the larger goal of defeating slavery. Others deserted in protest, though.

White commanders, for the sake of maintaining discipline and morale, separated African American soldiers from their families. Their men responded by deserting in protest and then reuniting with their families.

The discriminatory inequality in pay issue created the most controversy. African-American soldiers saw the policy for what it was: blatant discrimination. They found it very much an insult because it undermined their expressed cause to fight. The preponderance of them dutifully responded by seeking redress through appeals to the government, but the government rebuffed all grievances concerning this matter. As a result, many African American soldiers took their protest to intolerance one step further: they deserted. The ramifications of which had a telling effect on some units, in which one regiment commander had to disband the regiment because only a few men after mass desertions. In another regiment, the regimental commander

felt compelled to acknowledge that high desertion rates among his men was the result of the discriminatory pay policy. It appeared that desertion in protest of racial intolerance had taken the form of leverage that might bring about change.

In the decades following the Civil War, African Americans continued to serve in the US Army despite its discriminatory policies, as military service provided a relatively better living than what could be had in the civilian service. However, even as they served their country, the men continued to desert in protest of intolerance.

As the world approached the twentieth century, imperialism among European states became fashionable. The United States followed suit and extended its sovereignty to the Caribbean and the Philippines under the guise of Christianizing and civilizing these nations. The African American intelligentsia railed against it, citing the inconsistencies of imperialist pursuits while ignoring the racial issues back in the states.

The African American intelligentsia in this way informed the opinions of African American soldiers who surely held mixed feelings as they helped dominate other people of color. In an indirect way, the print and radio mediums geared to a predominantly white audience also informed African American soldiers' opinions on desertion.

After news that Corporal Fagen deserted in protest of intolerance and US hypocrisy in the Philippines, the white media played up his military exploits, thereby giving him and perhaps African American desertions some sense of legitimacy.

World War II and the Cold War brought a change in attitude to African American deserters. Their opposition to intolerance at this juncture took on a greater significance than simply deserting to protest racial discrimination. Their efforts demonstrated the nascent, shared revolutionary spirit for social and racial justice that would gain momentum after all hostilities in

Europe ended. It would be in post-World War II West Germany where African American soldiers came to appreciate fully the political implications of desertion, albeit within the context of the Cold War.

The significance of desertion for African Americans was its usefulness as an instrument to protest American racism throughout the country's existence. Since the colonial era, African Americans have deserted the Army as a response to racism. In the early formation of the nation, African American soldiers opposition to racism netted them individual freedom. In subsequent conflicts, circumstances such as US imperialism expanded their worldview. They began to understand how the excesses of racism and segregation threatened justice and peace across the globe. Those men who deserted to the GDR understood this and some made public statements that carried inferences against racism. Thanks to the African American soldiers' experience in the war and post-war Germany African American deserters came to understand the political implications of their cause.



## List of References

(NBCI), Record Group 65.4 Records of the National Bureau of Criminal Identification. *African Americans in the Military Part 2: Subject Files of Judge William Hastie, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War*. Military Records, College Park, Maryland: NARA, 2011.

Alotta, Robert I. *Civil War Justice, Union Army Executions under Lincoln*. Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: White Mane Publishing Company, Incorporated, 1989.

Berlin, Ira, Joseph P Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland. *Freedom A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867*. Edited by Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy and Leslie S. Rowland. Cambridge, New York, England, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Blackpast. *Blackpast*. June 26, 2011. www.blackpast.org (accessed June 26, 2011).

Blassingame, John W. *Frederick Douglass, the clarion voice*. Washington DC: Division of Publications, National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, 1976.

Cashin, Joan. *The War Was You and Me*. Princeton and Oxford, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Donaldson, Gary A. *The History of African-Americans in the Military*. Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 1991.

F. D. Grant of LexisNexis Academic & Library Solutions. "War Department, U. S. A. Annual Reports, 1917 vol. 1." *Annual Report of the Secretary of War*. Vol. I. Serial Set Digital Collection. Washington, DC, November 02, 2006.

Fantina, Robert. *Desertion and the American Soldier*. New York, New York: Algora Publishing, 2006.

Fletcher, Marvin. *The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army 1891-1917*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1972.

Foner, Eric. *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877*. New York, New York: Harper & Row, 1990.

Fowler, Arlen L. *The Black Infantry in the West: 1869-1891*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1971.

Franklin, John Hope and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. *From Slavery to Freedom*. New York, New York: McGraw Hill, 2011.

Franklin, John Hope, and Alfred A. Jr. Moss. *From Slavery to Freedom*. 8th. New York, New York: McGraw Hill, 2000.

Frey, Sylvia R. *Water from the Rock*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Gibson, Raleigh A., American Consul. *Report to the War Department, 30 June 1932*. Government, College Park, Maryland: National Archives and Research Administration, 2010.

Klimke, Maria Hohn and Martin. *A Breath of Fresh Freedom*. New York, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.

Leckie, William H. *The Guffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003.

Lonn, Ella. *Desertion during the Civil War*. Gloucester, Massachusetts: American Historical Association, 1928.

McPherson, James M. *Ordeal by Fire, The Civil War and Reconstruction*. New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1982.

Nalty, Bernard C. *Strength for the Fight*. New York, New York: The Free Press, a Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1986.

Ngozi-Brown, Scot. "African American Soldiers and Filipinos: Racial Imperialism, Jim Crow, and Social Relations." *Journal of Negro History* 82, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 42-53.

Quarles, Benjamin. *The Negro in the American Revolution*. Chapel Hill and London, North Carolina : The University of North Carolina Press, 1961, 1996.

—. *The Revolutionary War as a Black Declaration of Independence*. Edited by Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman. Charlottesville, VA: The University of Virginia Press, 1983.

Schubert, Michael C. Robinson and Frank N. "David Fagen: An American Rebel in the Philippines, 1899-1901." *Pacific Historical Review* 44 (1975): 68-83.

Scientists, Federation of American. *FAS*. July 1, 2011. [www.fas.org](http://www.fas.org) (accessed July 3, 2001).

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

State Department. *Report of Desertion of Charles B. Ceres*. Government Communicae, Guadalajara: The State Department, 1932.

United States Congress, House Executive Documents. *Annual Report of the Secretary of War: 1888-1889*. Government Document, Washington DC: United States Government, 1889.

Washington, Versalle F. *Eagles on Their Buttons, A Black Infantry Regiment in the Civil War*. Columbia, Missouri: The University of Missouri Press, 1999.

VITA

Steve Wallace

2 May 2012

Personal Data

Business Address: History Department  
University of Mississippi  
310 Bishop Hall  
University, MS 38677  
Phone: 662-915-7148

Home Address: 165 Private Road 3049  
Oxford, MS 38655  
Home Phone: 662-234-5475  
[swallac2@olemiss.edu](mailto:swallac2@olemiss.edu)

Education

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University

Major: History  
Degree: B.A. 2004

University of Mississippi

Major: History  
Degree: M.A. in progress

Professional References

Chiarella Esposito, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Department of History

University of Mississippi

Oxford, MS 38677

Work phone: 662-915-7568

[Esposito@olemiss.edu](mailto:Esposito@olemiss.edu)

Joshua First, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Department of History

University of Mississippi

Oxford, MS 38677

Work phone: 662-915-6946

[jfirst@olemiss.edu](mailto:jfirst@olemiss.edu)

Susan R. Grayzel, Ph.D.

Full Professor

Department of History

University of Mississippi

Oxford, MS 38677

Work phone: 662-915-3455

[sgrayzel@olemiss.edu](mailto:sgrayzel@olemiss.edu)