

Free Blacks And The U.S. Army; Lee Offers Resignation

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Charleston Harbor continued to be the scene of a great naval bombardment from Union ships against the fortification known as “Battery Wagner.” A spit of land with small cannon installations, the ramparts hardly covered all sides. Yet to the detriment of Union commanders, it served to keep ships from entering the Harbor and proceeding to Charleston City. However, the continued barrage distracted Confederates long enough for the opposition to prepare a new weapon. This was known as the Swamp Angel, a 16,500 pound rifled Parrott cannon with an eight-inch bore. It was positioned on Morris Island in an earthwork made of sandbags known as the Marsh Battery.

In Washington, President Lincoln continued to receive criticism for the Emancipation Proclamation, effected January 1, 1863. Writing to General Banks in regard to Louisiana affairs, Lincoln noted, “I am an anti-slavery man.” Continuing he recalled his keynote address, “for my own part I think I shall not, in any event, retract the Emancipation Proclamation; nor, as executive, ever return to slavery any person who is free by the terms of that proclamation or by any of the acts of Congress.” Many in his own party furiously disagreed on the importance of the institution of slavery and abolitionist thought fueled conservative vigor to fight legislation bringing equality of rights to freed blacks.

Back in Virginia, few could deny the tenacity of the “Grey Ghost”, John S. Mosby. As the head of Mosby’s Rangers, the 43rd Battalion, 1st Virginia Cavalry, Mosby often irritated Union commanders with his quick ambush and retreat tactics. On August 6th, the Rangers swarmed an entire Union wagon train near Fairfax Court House, Virginia, capturing horses,

supplies and the wagons themselves. The remaining forces not killed were left stranded, red-faced and cursing the name of “those damned Ghost Raiders.” With small skirmishes taking place at Cacapon Mountain and Moorefield, Western Virginia, the North proceeded with a day of thanksgiving for recent victories at Gettysburg. Church services and suspension of business marked the occasion, following Lincoln’s call for the day of remembrance.

After leaving Brazil and sailing across the South Atlantic Ocean, the C.S.S. *Alabama* began its South African Expeditionary Raid, following the capture of *Sea Bride*, a Union bark. On August 9th, she would fire upon and capture the *Marth Wenzell*, but released the ship after securing all valuable supplies. The *Alabama* worked its way slowly back and forth in the vicinity of Cape Town. The hunt for Chinese clipper ships ultimately failed and with the U.S.S. *Vanderbilt* on its trail, the *Alabama* would end the expedition later in September of the same year.

In a telegraph sent directly to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee tendered an offer of resignation from command of the Army of Northern Virginia. Lamenting on recent losses and poor health, he wrote “I, therefore, in all sincerity, request your Excellency to take measures to supply my place.” The season had started with the amazing triumph at Chancellorsville, but became dark after the massive embarrassment of the Gettysburg campaign. A deep depression and poor physical condition, including bouts of digestive disorders and a possible heart attack forced Lee to reassess his position in the Army. Davis quickly declined the resignation.

The debate had gone on since long before the war about the proper role for freed blacks in American society. Very few, except the most extreme abolitionists, advocated full rights and equality. As war continued, there was dispute as to whether blacks could, would, or even should,

be allowed to enlist as regular U.S. Army forces. Despite earlier disparagement of Negro troops, Lincoln wrote on August 9th to Grant suggesting, “if applied vigorously [Negros], will soon close the contest” and thus bring an end to the bloodshed.