

# THE SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL MAGAZINE

JULY 1967

VOLUME 68

NUMBER 3



COPYRIGHT © 1967 BY

THE SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
CHARLESTON, S. C.

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
Articles:	
The Abiel Abbot Journals, A Yankee Preacher in Charleston Society, 1818-1827, edited by John Hammond Moore.....	115
The Free Negro and the South Carolina Courts, 1790-1860, by Donald J. Senese .....	140
A Michigan Regiment in the Palmetto State, by George M. Blackburn .....	154
A Guide to the Commons House Journals of the South Carolina General Assembly, 1721-1775, by Charles E. Lee and Ruth S. Green .....	165
Reviews:	
Bargar, <i>Lord Dartmouth and the American Revolution</i> , by J. Steven Watson .....	184
De Vorsey, <i>The Indian Boundary in the Southern Colonies, 1763-1775</i> , by William L. McDowell, Jr. ....	185
Hetherington, <i>Cavalier of Old South Carolina; William Gilmore Simms's Captain Porgy</i> , by Frank Durham.....	187
Curry, <i>James F. Byrnes</i> , by Raymond A. Moore.....	188
Notes .....	191
Archives News .....	195

## A MICHIGAN REGIMENT IN THE PALMETTO STATE

By GEORGE M. BLACKBURN \*

As the great fleet of Union ships approached the coast of South Carolina in November 1861, soldiers aboard the transports strained their eyes for their first glimpse of that fabled rebel state. One unit of that expedition, the Eighth Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment, was especially eager to strike a decisive blow against the "arch-traitors of the Union." Composed largely of men from the northern, frontier settlements of Michigan, these men were staunchly pro-Union, and many were staunchly anti-slavery. Certainly they sensed the obvious contrasts between their home and coastal South Carolina, a semi-tropical region, inhabited by wealthy plantation owners who were secessionists and slaveholders. It is no wonder that the Michigan frontiersmen were struck by the contrasts, recorded their impressions, and remembered their stay in South Carolina for the rest of their lives.<sup>1</sup>

These men enlisted in the Eighth Michigan during the summer of 1861. They were sworn into Federal service at Fort Wayne, Detroit, in September, transferred to Washington, D. C., in October, and then moved to Annapolis, Maryland, in November. There the Michigan regiment heard "with boyish glee" that they were assigned to General Thomas W. Sherman's expedition.<sup>2</sup> (By the end of the war this commander had acquired the dubious distinction of being known as the "other" General Sherman.<sup>3</sup>)

Already General Ambrose Burnside had made a successful attack upon the North Carolina coast, and President Abraham Lincoln had

\* Dr. Blackburn is associate professor of history at Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, Michigan.

<sup>1</sup> "Some of our men a healthy & strong type of farmer lads were not over clean about their persons." In the voyage from Annapolis to Port Royal the Eighth Michigan was billeted with the 79th New York, who came "mostly from the Bowry . . ., natty in dress and toilet, which caused our Regt to be branded as the dirty Michiganders . . . violent scrapes and a free for all were of daily occurrence." Hatred between the two regiments was ended after heroic fighting at James Island, and the ties between the diverse units became "stronger than those of a bloody brotherhood." Arand Vanderveen, October 7, 1915, in records of the Michigan Loyal Legion, Historical Collections, the University of Michigan, pp. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Reminiscences of Oren Bumps, in records of the Michigan Loyal Legion, Historical Collections, the University of Michigan, p. 1. Hereafter cited as Bumps' Reminiscences.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Catton, *This Hallowed Ground*, Garden City, New York, 1956, p. 85.

or free.<sup>59</sup> Contradicting the view that the *Dred Scott* decision had declared that free Negroes could not be citizens of the United States, Attorney General Edward Bates stressed in an 1862 opinion that United States citizenship and state citizenship were identical concepts and that the free Negroes were United States citizens, birth in the United States being *prima facie* evidence of this condition.<sup>60</sup> The view of Bates was corroborated and that of the South Carolina courts between 1790 and 1860 rejected regarding the free Negro by the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1868 declaring that "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside," thus subordinating state citizenship to United States citizenship. The question of citizenship for all the Negroes in South Carolina, freed by the Thirteenth Amendment, was no longer a state question but one of national concern after 1868.

<sup>59</sup> 19 Howard 405. The question of Negro citizenship arose in connection with the defendant's plea of abatement, *e. g.*, Sanford's plea to abate the jurisdiction of the Federal District Court on the grounds that Dred Scott, a Negro, was not a citizen clothed with the right of access to Federal courts. Due to the manner in which the plea of abatement had been dealt with, a difference of opinion became evident on the technical question of whether it was rightly before the court on a writ of error. Although six of the justices (Chief Justice Taney, and Justices Catron, Daniel, Wayne, Grier, and Campbell) concurred in holding that a Negro could not be a citizen of the United States, only three of the six (Taney, Wayne, and Daniel) expressed the view after holding that the plea in abatement was properly before the court. James G. Randall and David Donald, *Civil War and Reconstruction*, Boston, 1961, p. 111, n. 10.

<sup>60</sup> *Official Opinions of the Attorney Generals of the United States*, ed. J. Hubley Ashton, Washington, 1868, X, 412, 388, 394.

approved a second descent. The purpose was to secure a naval base for blockade operations and also a base for attacking the interior of the Confederacy.

The Sherman expedition left Annapolis in September 1861, paused at Norfolk several days, weathered a terrible storm,<sup>4</sup> and then continued to the coast of South Carolina. The expedition was certainly no secret; both Northern and Southern newspapers speculated about its destination, though the point of attack was finally decided by Sherman and the naval commander, Flag Officer Samuel DuPont, only after the fleet was on the high seas.

Sherman and DuPont determined to seize Port Royal, South Carolina, an excellent natural harbor, which was to serve the Union fleet as its principal base of operations for the Southeastern Atlantic area.<sup>5</sup> Frantic efforts to prepare a successful defense were hopeless from the start. The two forts guarding Port Royal Sound, Fort Beauregard and Fort Walker, were inadequately gunned and manned; "defended with the valor of the brave,"<sup>6</sup> the forts surrendered to the overwhelming power of the Union fleet. Dismayed at the Union success, white inhabitants of the area fled inland.<sup>7</sup>

Understandably, the exuberant Northern invaders reacted to the capture of the forts in a different manner. Michigan troops regarded their fall as an event which would go down in history. When the Stars and Stripes were raised over the former Confederate positions, "there arose such a shout from our fleet, as it has been the fortune of few to hear, in the course of an exceeding long life."<sup>8</sup> A Michigan soldier rejoiced in the irony that South Carolina, the first state to secede, should suffer one of the first blows in the war. "How good . . . that this first blow has fallen in the rebel nursery. South Carolina ought to suffer, for it is from her teachings—the heresy of states rights—that all our troubles proceed."<sup>9</sup>

Gleeful at the fall of the forts, members of the Wolverine regiment relished reports of Southern panic and drew conclusions, later proved

<sup>4</sup> When the rumor spread that the ship was foundering, "the excitement was appalling, but with swearing of the Highlanders [79th New York] and the praying of the Michiganders she weathered the storm . . ." Bumps' *Reminiscences*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Amen, "DuPont and the Port Royal Expedition," in *Battles and Leaders*, New York, 1887, I, 671-691.

<sup>6</sup> Bumps' *Reminiscences*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, January 12, 1862.

<sup>8</sup> (Flint, Michigan) *Wolverine Citizen*, November 23, 1861.

<sup>9</sup> *Lansing Republican*, November 27, 1861.

false, about Southern bravery. One Michigan newspaper quoted an alleged statement by Governor Francis Pickens that South Carolinians were "born insensible to fear, [yet they] behaved precisely as we all expected them to. They ran away!"<sup>10</sup> One Northern colonel was convinced that his single regiment could capture Charleston, so great was the Southern "panic."<sup>11</sup> In a cocky manner, one soldier drew an historical parallel: history had shown many Knights, such as Knights of the Red Cross, and Knights Templars, but it took this war to "produce an Order of . . . Knights of the nimble feet."<sup>12</sup>

Whatever the views of the Michigan soldiers, the Federal commander, General Sherman, was unwilling to operate on the assumption of Southern panic. Procrastinating and dawdling, he kept his troops huddled under the protective guns of Union warships along the coast. As a matter of fact, the Michigan troops later drastically revised their impressions of Southern fighting ability and honor. After a disastrous Federal assault on James Island in June 1862, a Michigan officer pronounced the enemy "An honorable foe, . . . in everything honorable, and I esteem these men no mean foe physically."<sup>13</sup> Noting that many of his comrades had been taken prisoner, he felt confident that they would be well treated.

There are many stories in circulation with regard to barbarities perpetrated by the enemy upon our wounded in other localities but here in our intercourse with these men wherever [we] expect to find them most bitter they have proved themselves a fair foe. We came here upon their soil & have advanced our Pickets continually upon them, & though at first this was always attended with skirmishing & our stations often placed very near theirs, yet in no case have their Pickets fired upon ours after they have been posted. The second day after the Battle [on James Island] we offered a flag of Truce, were received by them fairly, furnished such information with regard to our wounded & missing as they could then give & the next day furnished with a list of the wounded who had been conveyed to Charleston for medical treatment so far as their names were ascertained & the day after with a corrected list. They also received clothes & other necessities from us for our wounded. I have never cherished a bitter feeling toward these men which would prompt to the

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, December 4, 1861.

<sup>11</sup> (Jackson, Michigan) *The Weekly True Citizen*, January 15, 1862.

<sup>12</sup> John C. Buchanan to his wife, Sophia, Beaufort, May 11, 1862, in Bingham Papers, Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University. All letters written by Buchanan and his wife are from this collection unless otherwise noted.

<sup>13</sup> John C. Buchanan to Sophia, Hilton Head, July 7, 1862, in Buchanan Papers, Historical Collections, University of Michigan.

exercise of any cruelty, but have regarded them as foes to my country who must be subdued in *war Enemies* & freely acknowledge that I have been surprised at the honorable course pursued in this case by them.<sup>14</sup>

But the Michigan men learned this later. In the meantime the South Carolina coast around Port Royal was open to easy Yankee occupation. Michigan troops curiously observed the countryside, so different from their own home. The South Atlantic coast was penetrated by innumerable waterways; fish, deer, turkey and other wild game abounded. More to the point and of immediate concern to troops who had been on a lengthy sea voyage, the arable land was extremely fertile, producing a veritable cornucopia of good things to eat.

While on shipboard, the troops had been "alternately starved and stuffed with 'sea pie'" (a dish supposedly made from the litter and washings of the deck), so that the troops praised "the day our feet were permitted to press the inviting soil of the Palmetto State."<sup>15</sup>

What a rejoicing and what a confusion! A more hungry, empty, knock kneed, independent lot of gormandizers never were assembled together before. In less than an hour nearly every man was in search of something to eat. . . . Some of my men . . . were not long gone before beef, mutton, turkeys, chickens, sweet potatoes, oranges, pea nuts, honey, oysters, fresh fish . . . came pouring into camp. Men now live luxuriantly but not prudently. The consequences are that they are soon sick.<sup>16</sup>

Lieutenant John Buchanan reported that coastal South Carolina was "a Beautiful Place" abounding in "Cotton, Oranges, Sweet Potatoes, figs, etc. The foliage Green as midsummer & beautiful in its very luxurience. There are a great variety of trees & shrubbery & entirely different from ours in our Mich. Home. The cotton shrub was quite a curiosity to me, as was the Orange. The fruit is delicious."<sup>17</sup>

Writing many years later, a veteran recalled Hilton Head Island as "a paradise with its shell road ten miles across on either side lined with moss covered live oak and here and there a magnolia giving forth its fragrance, and charming in its beauty." During the winter of 1861 the Michigan troops lived "like princes on the abundance of the land and sea. Lucious blackberries which grew in profusion on low vines, covered the fields, pea-nuts and sweet potatoes in abundance for the dig-

<sup>14</sup> John C. Buchanan to Sophia, James Island, June 22, 1862.

<sup>15</sup> *Wolverine Citizen*, December 7, 1861.

<sup>16</sup> *The Weekly True Citizen*, January 22, 1862.

<sup>17</sup> John C. Buchanan to Sophia, Port Royal, November 12, 1861.

ging, oysters gathered at low tide by the darkies, were plenty and cheap and the hoe cakes prepared by the good old colored aunties who had catered and cooked for the aristocrats of the land were good substitutes for the ordinary soldiers diet."<sup>18</sup>

The climate was equally welcome. The surgeon for the Michigan unit regarded the area "as one of the finest countries to live in on the continent." Since taking possession of Hilton Head Island, there had been only two or three days that he felt like wearing an overcoat and there had been but two light frosts, so that the vegetation remained as green as it was in September. "Today you can pick a boquet of beautiful flowers, even the roses are budding and blossoming. . . . It is now 9 o'clock in the evening, and yet I set in my tent sweating just as I used to do in my office last August."<sup>19</sup>

Needless to say, all remarks on South Carolina were not quite so favorable. One correspondent reported that fleas were a "great annoyance," whose "appetite seems never satisfied, and whose operations are very irritating both to the spirit and flesh." They bred with "remarkable fecundity" in the hot, dry sand. One Northerner filled a half-ounce vial two-thirds full of fleas from his blankets over a two-week period. Every soldier from the Major General down can "boast at least a square foot of blotches on his person. The bird known as the mosquito also attains a good degree of size and ferocity."<sup>20</sup> Some soldiers complained that the water was brackish, that the mid-day sun heated the sand so that it was "almost unendurable to pedestrian," and the glare of reflected light on the ocean was "trying to the eyes of all. . . ." The intense heat caused rapid cooling at night, which produced "dews almost like rain, which soak through tents, blankets, clothing, etc., etc., and is a strong element in the production of disease among the men."<sup>21</sup> James Island was a "low, marshy unhealthy place unfit for the habitation of man. It looks as though it might have been the last place made in finishing up creation when there was a scarcity of materials for making dry land. . . . The undergrowth is so thick that *Fancy Snakes* run through upon the *Bushes* which in any decent country is contrary to nature."<sup>22</sup>

But such complaints were not typical. The commander of the Michigan regiment noted in January that "the windows of my room are open,

<sup>18</sup> Bumps' Reminiscences, pp. 4, 5-6.

<sup>19</sup> *Lansing Republican*, December 18, 1861.

<sup>20</sup> *Detroit Free Press*, May 24, 1862.

<sup>21</sup> *Wolverine Citizen*, May 3, 1862.

<sup>22</sup> John C. Buchanan to Sophia, Hilton Head, July 7, 1862, Buchanan Papers, Historical Collections, University of Michigan.



balmy breezes waft the song of birds to the ear, and fresh flowers and green leaves gladden the eye.”<sup>23</sup> After returning from a visit to his Grand Rapids home, Lt. Buchanan wrote to his wife: “here at last in this pleasant land. So different from our own loved home, a fairy spot, beautiful with flowers, laden with perfume. The contrast is indeed very great. I thought the place lovely in its winter garb, now it is enchanting. The same Majestic Oaks . . . their leafy boughs . . . furnish us a welcome shade, a real luxury, strange as it may seem to you when vegetation is just starting. . . .”<sup>24</sup> The same soldier had previously noted that the “soil is fruitful, the Climate far ahead of our northern States for many kinds of produce.” Buchanan made this remark in commenting on the theory that the North might starve out the Confederates. This theory “seems foolish to me,” if South Carolina be taken as an example of the South, since there is an “abundance to eat & the probability is they can raise more.”<sup>25</sup>

The Michigan troops noted other impressive features. Beaufort was “one of the most splendid places that I have seen in a long time. The houses are furnished with the heaviest kind of mahogany furniture,” and (seemingly the ultimate praise) “about every house contains a fine piano.”<sup>26</sup> Another soldier noted that houses in the area were “furnished with the most costly furniture, principally of foreign manufacture, such as sofas, chairs, pianos, and one room with some of Phelan’s *best* billiard tables.”<sup>27</sup>

The Michigan soldiers spoke from first-hand observation in describing the contents of houses. One told of a raid in which troops marched to a planter’s house, stacked arms, appointed guards, broke ranks, and marched to the house. “The first pitch we made was for the house, not so much after plunder, perhaps, as through curiosity to see what we could find, and it may be to get something soft to go with our hard bread for dinner. . . .” After helping themselves to cream, milk, butter, preserves, and jam, among other items, the soldiers

visited, in great haste, each one trying to be first, all the different rooms, but especially the little drawers of the different Bureaus in each room. We also paid some attention to the stands, trunks, boxes, library, &c., and we found abundant evidence everywhere (but especially upstairs in the young ladies room) of cultivation, education and refinement. Of

<sup>23</sup> *Wolverine Citizen*, March 8, 1862.

<sup>24</sup> John C. Buchanan to Sophia, Beaufort, May 4, 1862.

<sup>25</sup> John C. Buchanan to Hannah Bingham, Beaufort, January 19, 1862

<sup>26</sup> *Wolverine Citizen*, January 4, 1862.

<sup>27</sup> *The Weekly True Citizen*, January 22, 1862.

course I cannot enter into a detailed account of these things, but I will simply say that each one appropriated to himself those things that seemed most pleasing in his own eye. However I found myself in a predicament a good deal like the Irishman, who on coming from his own country to this land of plenty, and seeing a dollar in the road thought it beneath his dignity to stop to pick that up, but would wait his chance for a five. I presume he is waiting yet, and so with me. . . .<sup>28</sup>

Not all the soldiers, however, waited for a five. Abundant evidence proves conclusively that widespread looting occurred, even though it was expressly forbidden.<sup>29</sup> Still, the soldiers should not bear the only blame for looting; in fact, Negroes were charged with doing most of the damage.<sup>30</sup>

One soldier recalled finding a locked trunk in a house which he did not have the courage to open, but a colored woman took it and ran away with it. Soldiers also found a cask of the best crockery and glass buried in the yard; while the soldiers did not want it, the colored "brethern" took it.<sup>31</sup> The houses of Beaufort were beautiful on the outside and gardens uninjured, but the "interiors were in a awful state, little better than a chaos of broken furniture, torn books and engravings, old letters, &c." Negroes said the damage was done by "country people," meaning the field hands.<sup>32</sup>

Clearly the Michigan soldiers were impressed by certain material features of coastal South Carolina. They also had some distinct impressions of the wealthy plantation owners who inhabited the area. Most descriptions involved self-conscious references to the high social class of the residents of such places as Beaufort as contrasted with the more plebeian Michiganians, "mud sills," or "Hessians as they call us. . . ."<sup>33</sup>

Buchanan wrote that in May the first families of South Carolina "were wont to take residence in Beaufort. They are not expected this season & it is thought by some, that some other place would be more pleasant for them, especially as the *mud sills* are here & of course could not be expected to appreciate the intelligence, refinement & chivalry of the higher born."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Grand Rapids Enquirer Weekly*, January 29, 1862.

<sup>29</sup> *Wolverine Citizen*, December 28, 1861.

<sup>30</sup> *Grand Rapids Weekly Enquirer*, November 27, 1861; *The Weekly True Citizen*, January 22, 1862.

<sup>31</sup> *Grand Rapids Weekly Enquirer*, January 29, 1862.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, November 27, 1861.

<sup>33</sup> John C. Buchanan to Sophia, Port Royal, November 12, 1861.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Beaufort, May 11, 1862.

The theme of "mud sill" versus chivalry was fairly common in letters written home. The colonel of the Eighth Michigan sent home two letters "written by the *chivalry* of that section, which bear the mark of the 'first families' by the poor spelling and ungrammatical sentences."<sup>35</sup>

Although Michigan soldiers acknowledged that the Port Royal residents were upper class, and displayed obvious signs of wealth, Buchanan claimed he saw little evidence of thrift or energy in the South. "The soil is fruitful, the Climate far ahead of our northern States for many kinds of produce. Could our northern Energy be transplanted to this Clime, the change would be startling. This might be made an Eden, but never while a portion of the human family are held in such a Bongage." Buchanan also charged the chivalry with arrogance: "The heaven gifted people born with a whip in their right hand, a spur on their right heel, no doubt to designate them as those foreordained to whip & ride the rest of the world generally."<sup>36</sup>

The invading forces had to draw conclusions about white South Carolinians from inference. On the other hand, their observations of Negro inhabitants were direct. In fact it was impossible to avoid contact with the colored folk who flocked to Northern lines as soon as the landing occurred. Federal troops frequently conversed with the Negroes and prized some of their remarks. The servant of General Thomas Drayton, Confederate commander at Port Royal, quoted the General as claiming during the bombardment of the forts of Port Royal that "the devil nor G--d A--y can't take that fort." Upon realizing that surrender was inevitable, the General called for his horse, and "as the darkey helped him into his saddle he said, '*Massa Drayton, God Almighty come, but de Yankees come wid him.*'"<sup>37</sup> Another old Negro was heard praying vigorously that "de Lord would bless *dese d--d Yankees.*"<sup>38</sup>

Not all the Federal troops were amused, however. In a letter to a Michigan friend, one officer snorted that "I wouldn't give the Servant I brot from New York for all the Contrabands I have seen about our Camps. Most of them are very stupid fellows, and very lazy. . . ."<sup>39</sup>

A veteran recalled many years later the "many handsome molatto girls, formerly house servants, who made a dashy appearance arrayed

<sup>35</sup> *The Weekly True Citizen*, January 2, 1862.

<sup>36</sup> John C. Buchanan to Sophia, Beaufort, December 22, 1861, May 11, 1862; Buchanan to Hannah Bingham, Beaufort, January 19, 1862.

<sup>37</sup> *The Weekly True Citizen*, January 22, 1862.

<sup>38</sup> *Lansing Republican*, February 12, 1862.

<sup>39</sup> James Green to Angie Bingham, Birds Island, Georgia, March 12, 1862, Bingham Papers, Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University.

in the gowns of their former mistresses." He also noted that at first the Negroes "regarded us as their saviours and were excessively polite, getting entirely off the sidewalk, doffing their hat with a 'Good mawnin Massa' but with familiarity and the joking of the boys they soon wanted the entire sidewalk to themselves."<sup>40</sup>

These observers believed it impossible to escape involvement in the slavery question. It might have been easy to say that "it is an awful thing to let the negro mix up" in the war, "but when you get down here among *the thing* itself, and hear and learn, and see, . . . you become enlisted in sympathy from daily sight."<sup>41</sup> Lt. Buchanan was certainly sympathetic.

Here . . . you see slavery as it is, poor Helpless Beings occupying the Plantations, deserted by every white Inhabitant, really incapable of doing anything without a Master. . . . These beings live in Houses white washed without, squalidly wretched within, the little Darkeys looking & acting as amusing as any of our northern Babys, perhaps using their Hands a trifle more for *scratching* purposes. I saw one mother catching vermin from the Wool of a nursing Child at Gen Draytons Plantation, which I visited when on Picket Duty. I said Auntie what are you doing there. Her only [reply] was a hearty laugh participated in by all the negroes. They seem to enjoy themselves in their Condition. Of course their wants are few. One of the Head negroes of this Plantation told me that for some time past, the times had been very hard & many of them had only a little corn to eat.<sup>42</sup>

The Michigan soldiers also agreed that "These Negroes have a truly wonderful Talent for music. I have never seen better time than in their singing & Dancing. All sing, & all Dance, from Childhood to old age."<sup>43</sup> Others were fascinated with the religious services of the Negroes, in particular the Negro "Shout."<sup>44</sup>

Sympathy for the slaves, however, did not necessarily extend to acceptance of abolition. A change of policy and commanders showed that. General Thomas Sherman, "an old foggy, dispectic . . . afraid of offending the enemy by destroying their property,"<sup>45</sup> was replaced by

<sup>40</sup> Bumps' Reminiscences, pp. 4, 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Lansing Republican*, January 29, 1862.

<sup>42</sup> John C. Buchanan to Sophia, Port Royal, November 12, 1861.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, December 29, 1861.

<sup>44</sup> For references to Negro music and religious services see author's edition of *The Diary of Captain Ralph Ely of the Eighth Michigan Infantry*, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, 1965, pp. 24, 25, 26.

<sup>45</sup> W. Ely Lewis to O. L. Spaulding, Beaufort, January 14, 1862, Spaulding Papers, Historical Collections, University of Michigan.

General David Hunter. The latter barely arrived in South Carolina before issuing his famous order freeing slaves in the Southern Department. "This caused wild excitement. . . ." <sup>46</sup> The commander of the Eighth Michigan reportedly urged his officers to resign and go home rather than obey the order. It was even said that he would surrender to the Confederates rather than serve under Hunter, because he had enlisted to preserve the Union rather than abolish slavery. <sup>47</sup> No doubt the officer was relieved when President Abraham Lincoln revoked Hunter's order.

Hunter later enlisted Negroes as soldiers, which one German speaking soldier regarded as "a shame for the entire American people and especially a disgrace for the military. . . ." When Hunter sought to secure white officers to command the colored troops, the correspondent of the *Detroit Free Press* exploded: "to the everlasting honor of the [Eighth Michigan] regiment, there was but one man found sunk so low as to allow himself to be used for any such purposes." He continued:

Tell the friends of the constitution in Michigan, if this war is to be turned into a crusade against any part of our country, and if we are asked or expected to stand shoulder to shoulder on an equality with a negro, as a soldier, the regiment here may be reckoned out, for every officer, from the highest to the lowest will throw up their commissions, and retire from service. There is such a storm brewing here that I think the whole thing will be abandoned, and the negro be again used as he has been—to do the drudgery in the army, unloading vessels, making breastworks, in short, using him anywhere to save a white man's muscle, except with a gun. Thirty thousand of them would be whipped by five hundred white men. <sup>48</sup>

Undoubtedly this reporter reflected anti-Negro sentiment by no means absent in Michigan at the time, as the files of the *Detroit Free Press* amply demonstrate.

But it was not only the "copperhead" Detroit newspaper which seriously questioned the use of Negroes as soldiers. Lt. Buchanan, a strong anti-slavery man, was convinced slavery caused the war, and that slavery must be wiped out. Yet he doubted the wisdom of an even earlier proposal by Simon Cameron, secretary of war in Abraham Lincoln's cabinet, that the former slaves be armed. Such a measure would "en-

<sup>46</sup> John M. Bessmer to John Weissert, Beaufort, May 18, 1862, Historical Collections, University of Michigan. The letter was written in German; this reference is to a typescript in English.

<sup>47</sup> *Lansing State Republican*, October 5, 1864.

<sup>48</sup> John M. Bessmer to John Weissert, May 18, 1862, Historical Collections, University of Michigan; *Detroit Free Press*, May 24, 1862.

gender strife & divide the Councils of the nation, & may embitter the minds of many who are really Union Men. I have seen none of these *Colored Gemmen* as yet who would be capable of fighting, & will venture the assertion, such is their servility that fifty of their Masters would put to flight a Reg—of them. Poor helpless creatures. . . . It would be equal folly to employ them on either side.” Curiously enough, some nineteen months later, Buchanan changed his mind, praised Negro troops highly and confessed “I would as soon they would shoot *Mr. Reb* as to do it myself.”<sup>49</sup>

But a New England abolitionist, a missionary to the South Carolina Negroes, concluded that “one might as well think of a combination among the Boston kittens to scratch the eyes out of all the Boston dogs as to look for an insurrection in this State, if the negroes on these islands are a fair sample of those on the main. . . .”<sup>50</sup>

The Michigan men soon learned that debate over the military capabilities of Negroes would be replaced by action—a movement toward the Confederate stronghold of Charleston. Federal forces landed on James Island and were repulsed with heavy loss in an assault on Southern fortifications. The Eighth Michigan was particularly hard hit. Within a few weeks the Michigan unit was ordered to the Washington area. Their South Carolina tour of duty had ended.

For the “Wandering Eighth” there were many campaigns and battles in the future, but, one wrote home, “the records of our South Carolina campaign are dear to our memories.”<sup>51</sup> The men “sigh[ed] for Beaufort often” when they were enduring the miseries of campaigning before the battle of Fredericksburg.<sup>52</sup> Maybe it was because she had enjoyed reading her husband’s description of South Carolina, that Buchanan’s wife requested him to “give me a little idea of the surrounding country. Whether you like it as well as Beaufort. I have always imagined the latter, place, as a little fairy land.”<sup>53</sup> Reminiscing before a veterans’ group many years later, one veteran told his comrades that “the dream of that winter is the sunshine of my soldier life.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> For discussion of Buchanan’s ideas on this topic see my “The Negro as Viewed by a Michigan Civil War Soldier: Letters of John C. Buchanan,” *Michigan History*, XLVII (March 1963), 75-84.

<sup>50</sup> Edward S. Philbrick, September 27, 1862, quoted in *Letters from Port Royal Written at the Time of the Civil War*, ed. Elizabeth W. Pearson, Boston, 1906, p. 89.

<sup>51</sup> *Wolverine Citizen*, March 28, 1863.

<sup>52</sup> John C. Buchanan to Sophia, Falmouth, Virginia, November 20, 1862.

<sup>53</sup> Sophia to John C. Buchanan, Grand Rapids, August 5, 1862.

<sup>54</sup> *Bumps’ Reminiscences*, p. 4.