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DAVID M. GOLD

FRUSTRATED GLORY: JOHN FRANCIS APPLETON
AND BLACK SOLDIERS IN THE CIVIL WAR

There is irony in the fact that Robert Gould Shaw and not John Francis Appleton died directing black men in battle during the Civil War. Shaw, the real-life hero of the motion picture *Glory*, hesitated before accepting command of a black regiment; Appleton wanted nothing more than to lead black soldiers in their fight for freedom. Shaw fell before Fort Wagner at the head of his charging regiment; Appleton had a black regiment, too, but it never faced the enemy. *Glory* is an inspiring, true story, but it is not typical. The frustration of Appleton's quest by racial prejudice and red tape typified the experience of idealistic white officers serving in black units.¹

Appleton, of Bangor, Maine, was born in 1838, less than a year after Shaw, to a socially prominent family of New England Unitarians. (The Boston branch of the clan belonged to the same caste of Brahmin merchants as the Shaws; the Appletons of Maine were, relatively speaking, poor cousins.) His father, the scholarly lawyer and legal reformer John Appleton, was at that time a luminary of the Maine bar who would later be among the first members of Maine's Republican party and would serve as the state's wartime chief justice. Unlike Shaw, who was an indifferent student and college dropout, the younger Appleton excelled in his studies. He attended Bowdoin College, where he belonged to the Peucinian Society (a literary club) and to the crew that, according to one account, "pioneer[ed]...college boat racing on the Androscoggin." After graduation he entered the office of one of Bangor's most successful attorneys to prepare for a career in law.²

As the son of a state supreme court justice, Appleton enjoyed bright professional prospects. But his father had instilled in him a love of the Union and a hatred of slavery, and when the Civil War erupted, an acquaintance later recalled, the law student "felt himself called to take active part in the defense of his country, and of those principles which he cherished with

John Francis Appleton of Bangor, Maine, began his Civil War career as captain of Company H, Twelfth Maine Volunteers. After distinguishing himself at Port Hudson on the Mississippi, he accepted an assignment commanding a newly formed black brigade.

Photo courtesy James B. Vickery



a deep and intelligent conviction.” On July 4, 1861, Appleton wrote to Governor Israel Washburn requesting an appointment as first lieutenant in the Seventh Maine Volunteers. “In this greatest and grandest struggle of all time,” he vowed, “I should strive to so conduct myself as not to tarnish the fame of my State or my Country.”³

By 1861 Appleton had already had some preparation, however minimal, for military service. At Bowdoin the students gathered every May for a slapdash “training” that consisted mostly of parading and speechmaking and was not taken seriously by anyone. But Lieutenant Colonel Appleton and the other officers cut dashing figures and gained at least a rudimentary knowledge of the drill. Back in Bangor in the late summer of 1860, Appleton helped organize the Hamlin Guards, an independent militia company whose main purpose seems to have been to campaign for Republican presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln and his running mate from Maine, Hannibal Hamlin. The Guards did hold drills, though, and according to one observer “made a handsome and soldier-like appearance.”⁴

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After the fall of Fort Sumter, Lincoln called 75,000 state militiamen into the federal service for three months to supplement the pitifully small regular army. However, it quickly became apparent that a much larger force would be needed to fight a much longer war than originally anticipated. In May the president called for 42,000 three-year volunteers, and in June Congress authorized him to raise a half-million troops. Ambitious patriots responded by opening recruiting offices and encouraging their fellow citizens to sign up in defense of the Union. The volunteers were grouped into companies of about one hundred men each, and then into ten-company regiments. The men elected the lieutenants and captains, and the state governors commissioned the regimental officers (majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels).⁵

In May 1861 President Lincoln called for a half-million volunteers to meet the crisis of the Union. Like many other ambitious and patriotic citizens, John Francis Appleton recruited through notices such as this. With a complement of men, Appleton was commissioned as captain.

BANGOR WHIG & COURIER
(October 9, 1861), courtesy of the
author.



BUTLER'S New England Brigade!

Composed of Regiments from each of
the New England States.

No. Citizens, all. Attention.

Our Beloved Country is in Danger.

Our Glorious Constitution is Imperilled.

TO ARMS! TO ARMS!!

Secret Service!

Major General B. F. BUTLER,
TO COMMAND.

The elegant son of Maine, **GEORGE F. SHEP-
LEY**, will be Colonel. Hon. **WILLIAM K. KIM-
BALL**, Lieutenant Colonel.

Ably bodied, intelligent and temperate men are
wanted, to make this the *crack* Company of the best
Regiment yet formed in the State.

Pay—\$13 00 a Month; \$3 00 from Saved
Rations, making \$16 00 per Month, and One
Hundred Dollars at the End of the War.

Come, then, Young Men of Maine, be not unwor-
thy of your Revolutionary Ancestors!

"We must conquer, or be conquered."

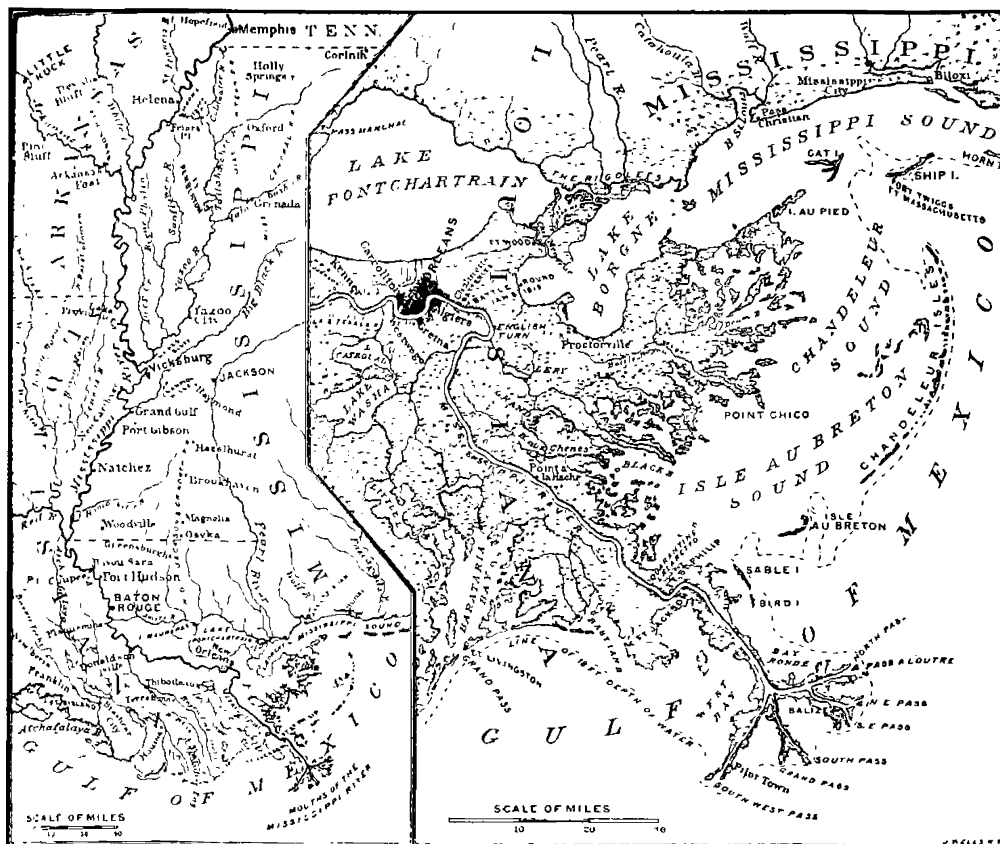
Recruiting Office at No. 19 Central Street.

JOHN F. APPLETON,

Recruiting Officer.

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Perhaps because the volunteers themselves and not the governor usually chose the company officers, Appleton failed to get the appointment he sought from Governor Washburn. On July 13 he asked the governor to recommend him for a lieutenantcy in the regular army, but again to no avail. However, Appleton had more luck with General Benjamin F. Butler, who authorized Appleton to recruit men for the New England brigade Butler was recruiting for an expedition to Virginia. (Its destination was soon changed to New Orleans.) On October 9, a notice appeared over Appleton's name in the *Bangor Whig and Courier* calling upon "Able bodied, intelligent and temperate men" to create "the *crack Company* of the finest Regiment [the Twelfth] yet formed in the State." The pay would be thirteen dollars per month plus a \$100 bonus at the end of the war, but



In January 1862 the Twelfth Maine sailed for Ship Island (upper right), a staging base for the capture of New Orleans. The Union campaign to open the Mississippi would proceed from New Orleans to Vicksburg and Port Huron, where Appleton demonstrated great valor under fire. *BATTLES AND LEADERS OF THE CIVIL WAR*, volume 2 (1887).

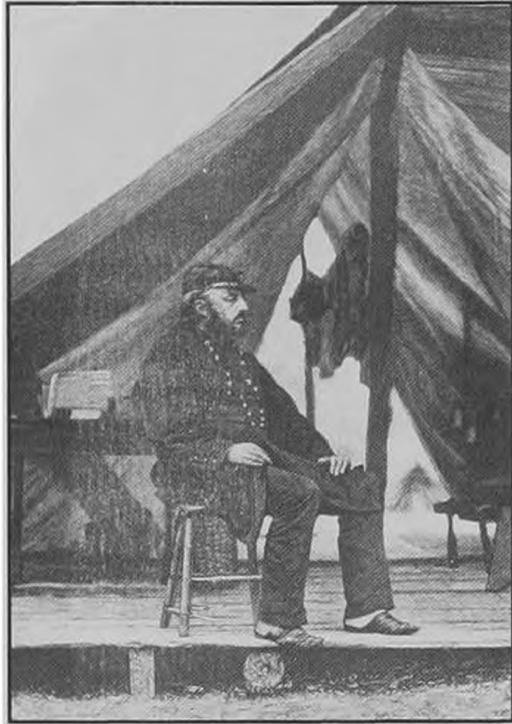
FRUSTRATED GLORY

Appleton added an appeal to honor: "Come, then, Young Men of Maine, be not unworthy of your Revolutionary Sires!"⁶

After recruiting enough men, Appleton received a commission as captain of Company H, Twelfth Maine Volunteers. On November 24, eight days after being mustered in at Cape Elizabeth, his regiment sailed for Massachusetts and went into camp at Lowell. On January 2, 1862, the Twelfth Maine boarded the steamer *Constitution*, bound for Ship Island in the Gulf of Mexico, twenty miles from Biloxi, Mississippi. The island had been occupied by Federal forces the preceding September and would soon serve as the staging base for the capture of New Orleans. Novelist John William De Forest, who arrived at Ship Island as a captain in the Twelfth Connecticut Volunteers on March 10, described it as "the sandiest region this side of the Great Sahara." The men at Ship Island, wrote De Forest, endured a host of tribulations: making a campground of "a distracted rabble of sand hills"; doing without tents because the tent pins had been left in Boston; dining on "fat pork cut up into dice and stewed with scraps of hard bread." Conditions improved once the initial vicissitudes of setting up camp had been overcome, but still De Forest described existence on Ship Island as "a healthy, monotonous, stupid life [that] makes one long to go somewhere, even at the risk of being shot."⁷

The Twelfth Maine stayed on Ship Island until May 4, "perfecting itself in drill and discipline," according to the historians of Maine's Civil War regiments. Following the capture of New Orleans by Federal forces, the Twelfth moved to the city, where it guarded the United States Mint until October.⁸

Appleton's company participated in a skirmish at Pass Manchac in June, but that did not satisfy the captain's thirst for greater responsibility and for more intense activity than police duty at the Mint. The solution seemed to be an appointment as a line officer in one of the new regiments being formed in Maine, or at the very least a promotion within the Twelfth. The latter would not take him out of New Orleans, but it would entail greater responsibility. The simple lack of confrontations with



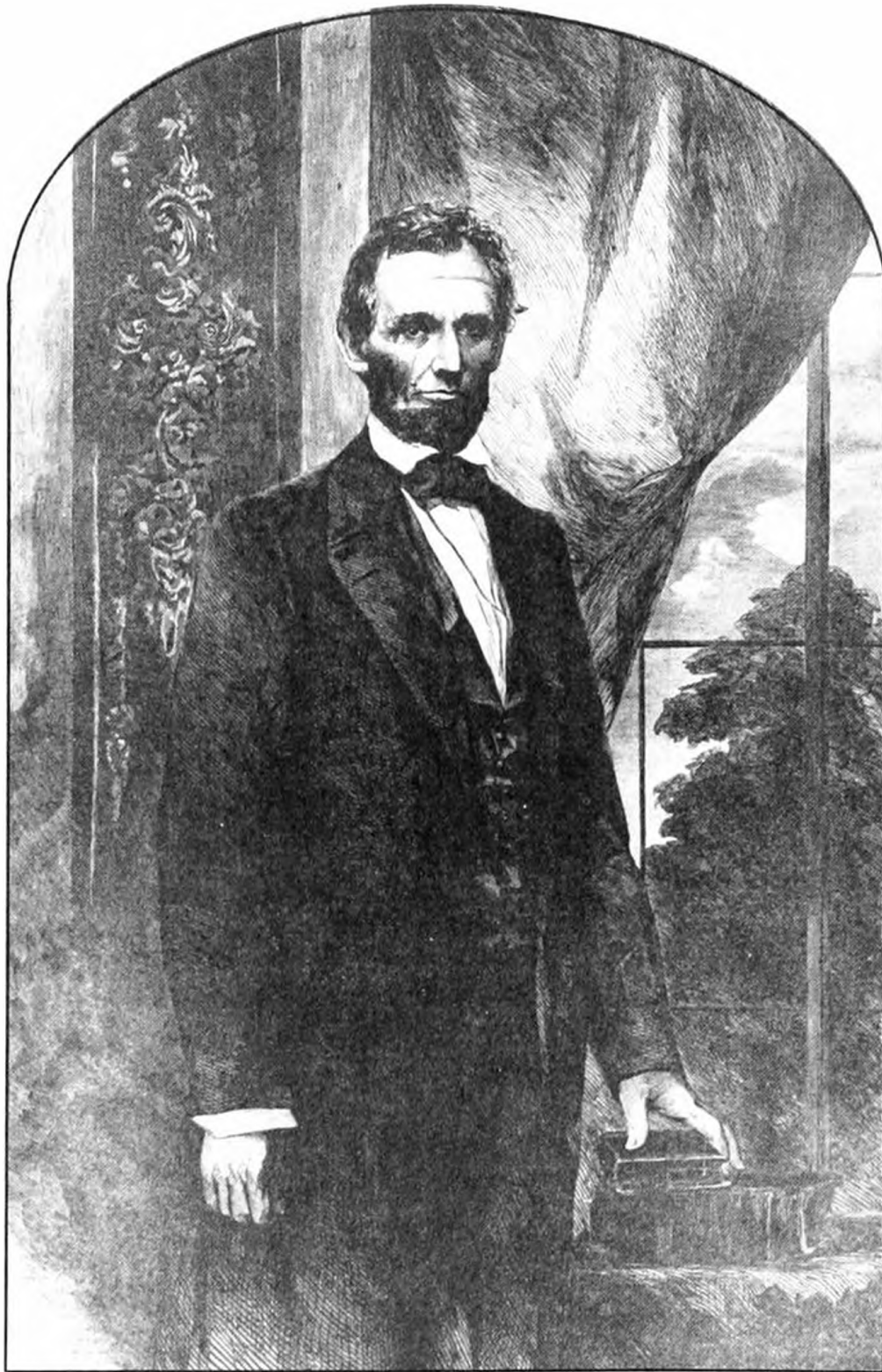
Major-General Benjamin F. Butler, in command of the military forces at New Orleans, appealed to the idealistic young Appleton as an efficient administrator and a champion of the black fighting man.

*BATTLES AND LEADERS OF
THE CIVIL WAR, volume 2 (1887).*

the enemy, however, constituted a major roadblock on the path to promotion. At Camp Parapet, eight miles from New Orleans, De Forest noted in July that “nobody is killed and nobody gets scared into resigning; there is not a chance for a captain to become a field officer.”⁹

Regimental politics might also have doomed Appleton’s efforts to get a promotion within the Twelfth. According to historian Louis C. Hatch, the Twelfth Maine ought to “have been called the Democratic regiment. General Butler [a Democrat at the outset of the war] took special pains to select Democrats for officers, as he believed that they had been discriminated against by a Republican administration.” Moreover, with the exception of the surgeon and assistant surgeon, all the original field and staff officers had been from western Maine, and easterners complained of a geographical bias.¹⁰

The possibility of promotion in one of the new regiments still beckoned, however, and Governor Washburn received letters from an imposing array of military and political personalities commending Captain Appleton. But Washburn proved



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By 1863 it had become obvious to many that ex-slaves were a valuable military resource. Following the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, the War Department authorized the recruitment of black soldiers in Louisiana. *Lincoln sketch from BATTLES AND LEADERS OF THE CIVIL WAR, volume 2 (1887); recruiting poster courtesy Chicago Public Library Special Collections Division and Lawrence Lee Hewitt.*

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unwilling or, perhaps due to similar pressure from other quarters, unable to meet their request. For the time being, Appleton remained in New Orleans as captain of Company H.¹¹

After a month at Camp Parapet, and exactly one year and three days after being mustered in, the Twelfth Maine moved again, upriver to Baton Rouge for more garrison duty. It had been an uneventful, frustrating year for Appleton, soon followed by the added disappointment of Butler's removal from command of the Department of the Gulf.

Butler's policies as commander in the South appealed to the idealistic young captain.¹² An efficient administrator who had cleaned up New Orleans physically and sternly suppressed flagrantly disloyal activities, Butler had also become the champion of the black fighting man. Black spokesmen had advocated using Negroes as Union soldiers since the beginning of the war, but the general public refused to consider it at first. In the spring of 1862, General David Hunter formed the First South Carolina Colored Regiment, but his coercive recruiting measures and opposition from the administration in Washington led to its disbandment later that year. At Camp Parapet, General John Phelps of Vermont tried to form regiments from the slaves pouring into the camp, but Butler would not let him proceed without War Department authorization. However, Washington expected Butler to raise troops to help hold New Orleans, and the large black population of Louisiana was the best source of soldiers. The officers of the First Native Guards, a Louisiana militia unit of free blacks never used by the Confederate government, agreed to help. Butler requested positive authorization to raise black regiments, but Secretary of War Stanton left the matter to Butler's discretion. In the fall of 1862, under Butler's orders, 2,700 black men, free and slave, were mustered into the Union army as the First, Second, and Third Louisiana Native Guards.¹³

The Negro soldiers impressed the men of the Twelfth Maine with their spirit and ability. An officer named Dickey wrote to his father in Orono that the black regiments "are

composed of smart men, and I believe just as good men to fight as we have. They learn quick, and take pride in doing their duty well." The performance of the black troops persuaded many white soldiers that the Civil War should be a war for freedom as well as for Union. "I never was an abolitionist before I came here," wrote Dickey, "but I must says [sic] that I am now. Let the best be done with the negroes that is possible after the war; but let us use them to our advantage now, for they can be of great service to us."¹⁴

Even before Butler organized the Louisiana Native Guards, Judge Appleton had written to Senator William Pitt Fessenden "that our only hope of success is in arming the black man as well by way of terror to the master as for the sake of the efficient aid they are capable of rendering in the field." The jurist was a step ahead of public opinion, but soldiers' letters like Dickey's helped convince more and more northerners that they were wasting a valuable military resource by refusing to let blacks fight. With the public growing more receptive to the idea of black soldiers, and with the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, Lincoln felt the time had come; on January 13, the War Department authorized General Daniel Ullmann, a New York politician, to recruit soldiers in Louisiana for a black brigade.¹⁵

Ullmann's brigade was to consist of four regiments (later expanded to five), the officers to be selected in cooperation with the governors of Maine, Massachusetts, and New York. Although enough northerners had accepted the idea of blacks as cannon fodder to make the organization of Negro units a reasonable political risk for the president, most people believed that blacks would make inferior fighting men, and it was widely regarded as beneath the dignity of a gentleman to command them. Seeking to lend respectability to his organization by choosing competent officers with prominent names, Ullmann asked the vice president to recommend someone for colonel of the "Maine" regiment of his brigade. Hamlin named Captain Appleton, who, he said, had "acquitted himself well and bravely in the service." Ullmann then offered the lieutenant colonelcy

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to the vice president's son, Cyrus Hamlin, who refused to take any rank less than colonel and rejected the general's suggested that Appleton be assigned the subordinate position. As a result, Ullmann wound up allotting two regiments to Maine, one commanded by Appleton and the other by Hamlin.¹⁶

Maine's Governor Abner Coburn, who had promised Ullmann his "hearty cooperation" in organizing the brigade, objected to Appleton's appointment. He remembered seeing Appleton as an eager young recruiter in 1861 and still thought of him as a "boy." Implying that the selection had been made merely to please Maine's chief justice, Coburn complained to Vice President Hamlin that Appleton was "too young and inexperienced in the world...to command a thousand men." Hamlin stood by his decision, insisting that Appleton had earned the appointment. Appleton received Ullmann's approval, and on February 20 the War Department assigned him the command of the Fourth United States Volunteers, although his colonel's commission did not reach him for four months.¹⁷

Even though it meant a promotion and, perhaps, relief from the tedium of garrison duty — no one yet knew for sure what use would be made of the new black brigade — Appleton's acceptance of the colonelcy required moral courage. Many of the white and black officers in the Negro regiments organized by Butler had unsavory personal and professional reputations, and the racial prejudice that infected so many white soldiers led them to cast opprobrium upon whites who stooped to command blacks. After the war, General Ullmann bitterly recalled the "contemptuous treatment" his subordinates had received "from General and other officers, who heaped indignities upon 'Nigger Officers,' as they were wont courteously to style us." Accepting a commission in his brigade meant "facing a whirlwind of prejudice" and inviting "the desertion of friends and the implacable hatred of enemies." The Confederate government threatened with death the officers of black units who should fall into their hands.¹⁸

Appleton knew full well that he risked social ostracism in joining Ullmann's enterprise, but he felt that patriotism de-

manded nothing less. A Louisiana correspondent of the *Whig and Courier* wrote of Appleton, "I think he does a praiseworthy thing in taking his colored regiment. He knows it is unpopular in this department; therefore as a gentleman, and a man of standing to step boldly out and take a despised command because he thinks he is doing his country a service by it, is a hero.... His friends may be proud of him."¹⁹

While the process of organizing Ullmann's brigade proceeded in New York, Appleton remained on duty with the Twelfth Maine in Baton Rouge. In March his regiment finally began to move toward serious combat and its first moment of glory. Union forces had gained control of most of the Mississippi River, but the rebels still held the section between Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Port Hudson, Louisiana, giving them access to the western part of the Confederacy and its invaluable supplies. At the end of March, with Grant in the midst of his Vicksburg campaign, General Banks set out to capture Port Hudson. (He hoped in vain to get help from or at least to act in concert with Grant.)²⁰

Believing Port Hudson to be too well protected by steep cliffs to be taken by a move directly up the Mississippi, and wishing to cut off an important supply source for the stronghold, Banks decided to march his men through the swamp country along the Bayou Teche to Alexandria on the Red River, and then move down to the Mississippi, crossing at a point north of Port Hudson and surrounding the citadel. The expedition began on March 25 when Banks ordered General Cuvier Grover to take a brigade, including the Twelfth Maine, by transport from Baton Rouge to Donaldsonville, and thence by rail and on foot to Berwick Bay. Meanwhile, the main body of the expeditionary force arrived at nearby Brashear City from New Orleans. By April 11 the troops were ready to move.

Apart from the skirmish at Pass Manchac, the march up the Teche was Appleton's first real taste of war. It was not very pleasant. The fighting with General Richard Taylor's Confederates, in woods, swamps, and muddy cane fields, was bad enough,

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but the treks in between were worse. Thousands of feet churned up blinding, suffocating clouds of dust, until the soldiers were covered from head to toe with dirt and sweat. Their feet became blistered, and they suffered from agonizing rashes. “But are there no comforts, no pleasures, in forced marching? Just one,” wrote John William De Forest, who was part of the expedition. “Yes, compared with the incessant anguish of going, there was a keen luxury in throwing one’s self at full length and remaining motionless. It was a beast’s heaven; but it was better than a beast’s hell – unsupportable fatigue and pain.”²¹

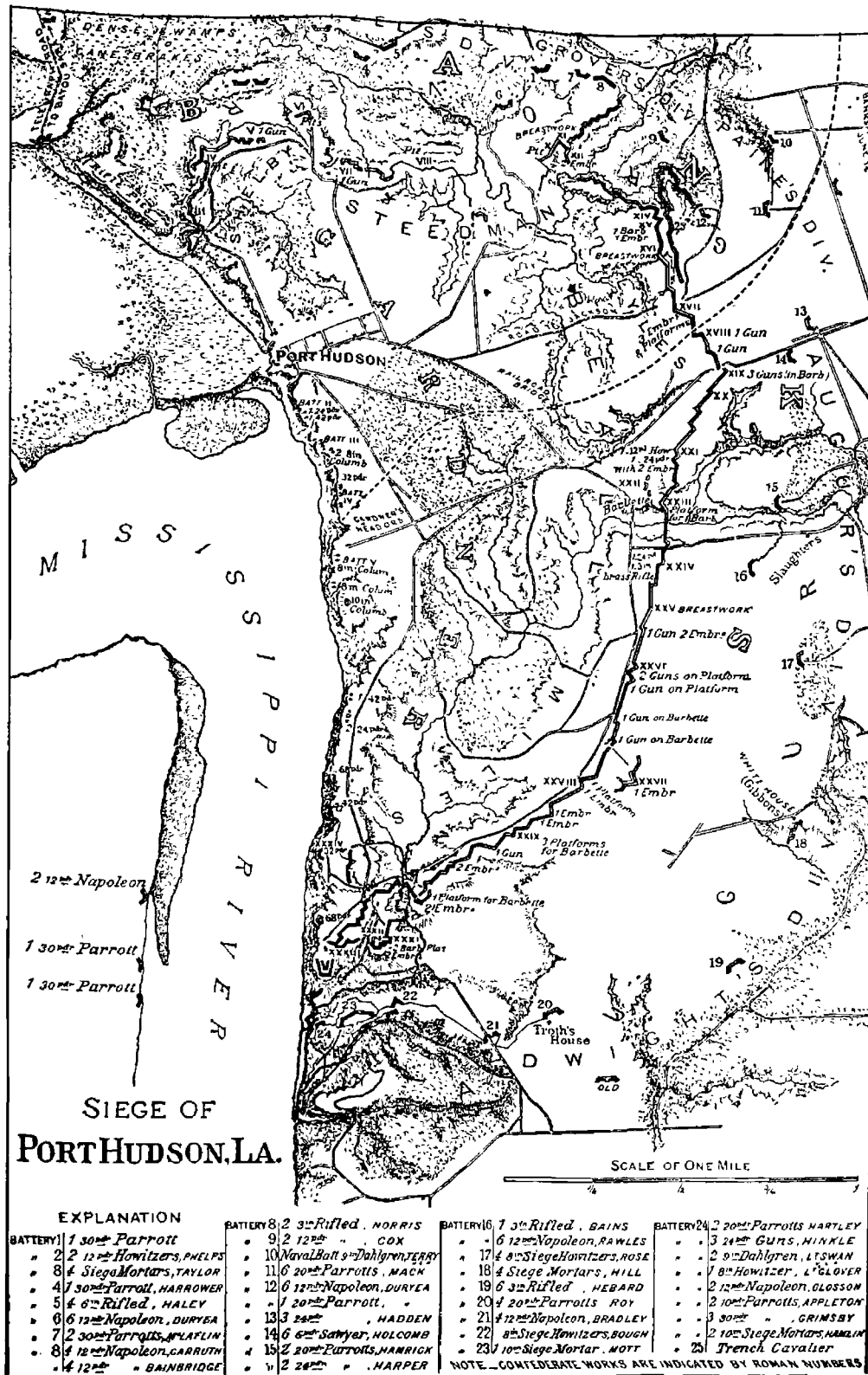
While Appleton marched up the Teche with Banks, the organization of his regiment in Ullmann’s brigade devolved upon Isaac S. Bangs, formerly of the Twentieth Maine. Ullmann and his officers arrived in Louisiana on April 20. Four days later Appleton, who had still not received official confirmation of his appointment as colonel of the Fourth United States Volunteers, wrote to Ullmann from Opelousas that he had been denied a furlough to visit New Orleans. “I understand,” he explained, “that [Colonel Kimball of the Twelfth Maine, commanding the second brigade of Grover’s division] disapproved my application for leave with the remark that an officer in his Rgt would have to resign before he should take a position in a Colored Regt.” Appleton, of course, refused to resign. He closed his letter with the suggestion that Ullmann immediately send officers to Opelousas, as it seemed a prime spot for recruiting black soldiers.²²

Banks’s army approached Port Hudson late in May, completing its investment on the 22nd with help from naval vessels on the Mississippi. There were 7,450 rebels inside the Confederate works, 30,000 Federals outside.²³ But numbers alone fail to tell the whole story. To reach the stronghold, many of the men in blue would have to advance across broken ground, through thick woods and ravines clogged with brush and felled trees, in the face of fire from protected Confederate positions. Nevertheless, Banks did not immediately settle into a siege. Instead, he ordered a general assault for the 27th, with General Weitzel on the Union right expected to carry the greatest burden.



Appleton's first real taste of combat came on the road to Port Hudson. Fighting among the bayous, woods, and cane fields was brutal, but the long marches between skirmishes were equally debilitating. *BATTLES AND LEADERS OF THE CIVIL WAR, volume 3 (1884).*

The attack began in the early morning of the 27th. It quickly degenerated into confusion, for Union commanders could not communicate with or even see each other through the dense woods and broken terrain; their orders were unclear; and they failed to coordinate their actions. Order could not be maintained on the obstacle-strewn landscape, and the withering rebel fire caused some exposed advance units to panic. Yet there were deeds of glory, such as the charge of the Twelfth Maine, positioned with Grover on Weitzel's left. After the 159th New York failed to dislodge the First Alabama, which was situated behind a breastwork on a gully-ridden hill across Little Sandy Creek, Grover ordered the Twelfth and two Connecticut regiments to attack the Fifteenth Arkansas. The Maine troops led the advance. De Forest, an eloquent witness to their valor, observed, "A single regiment, 400 strong, stepped forth...to do what would have been hard work for a brigade. Under fire from half a mile of hostile rampart it rushed with a prolonged yell through the



Appleton's Twelfth Maine advanced with General Grover's Division, top right on the map. The Fifteenth Arkansas is indicated by the Roman numeral XV. **BATTLES AND LEADERS OF THE CIVIL WAR**, volume 3 (1884).

abatis of felled trees, diminishing in numbers at every step until not a hundred reached the ditch. One nameless hero sprang upon the earthworks, bayoneted two of the garrison, and fell pierced with three bullets. Thirty or forty of his comrades seized an old shell of a building at the base of the fortifications, and held it amidst a furious spitting of musketry, until slaughtered or driven out by an overpowering fire. It was an ill-advised, unsupported, heroic, and hopeless effort." The soldiers named the hill Fort Desperate because of the fierceness of the fighting.²⁴

According to one of Appleton's comrades, probably Captain J. F. Godfrey of the Second Louisiana Cavalry, during the Twelfth Maine's valiant charge, Appleton conducted himself heroically. "On the 27th of May," wrote this witness, "while our soldiers were struggling through the thorns and underbrush, cut down by rebel bullets at every step, a small detachment of men reached the ditch in front of the rebel works, and there a few brave men, the remnant of a brigade, exhausted, stopped. But Capt. Appleton alone among the ten thousand who fought that day, mounted the rebel parapet and stood there alone facing the whole rebel army, a mark for a thousand rifles, stood there powerless except to die." Appleton trusted in providence to protect him. The next morning he told Godfrey that as he stood exposed to the Confederate sharpshooters he thought of the biblical passage, "Not a sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge of your Heavenly Father, and ye are of more value than many sparrows." Godfrey claimed that after the fort surrendered a Confederate officer told him that he could not bear to see such a brave young man die and ordered his men not to fire.²⁵

Appleton escaped injury on the 27th, but the Union losses were staggering: nearly 300 killed; more than 1,500 wounded; over 150 missing; and almost nothing had been gained. The Federals settled into a regular siege, digging rifle pits and building breastworks, slowly moving closer to tighten the noose around the Confederate stronghold. Sniping continued, and fighting took place outside Port Hudson as Confederate cavalry and mounted infantry tried to relieve the pressure on the rebel

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garrison. For the most part, the Union soldiers' existence grew ever more monotonous and unpleasant. They endured bugs and heat, an unchanging diet, a shortage of water (almost none for washing), and the same ragged uniforms with which they had begun the campaign.

Life for the rebels was no better, of course, and Banks learned from prisoners and deserters that their supplies were low and their morale sinking. He also discovered that he had overestimated the strength of the garrison. Heartened by this information and eager to make an end to the costly siege, Banks ordered another grand assault for June 14. It was a repeat of the first bloody repulse, resulting in another long casualty list with nothing to show for it.

According to Isaac S. Bangs, Appleton once again conducted himself coolly and gallantly, but his account, delivered many years after the war, may have confused the first and second assaults. Official records show, however, that Appleton volunteered for a storming party to spearhead a third assault. On June 15 Banks issued an order congratulating his troops for their "steady advance...upon the enemy's works" and calling for a "storming column of 1,000 men, to vindicate the flag of the Union and the memory of its defenders who have fallen!" With the promise of medals and promotions, the general got his volunteers, but most of those who came forward had not seen the worst of the fighting in the first two assaults. Appleton's reckless courage was exceptional.²⁶ The storming party, called the "forlorn hope," underwent special training while Banks prepared a new attack. Fortunately, the attack never came off because the Confederates surrendered after learning of the fall of Vicksburg on July 4.

In the meantime, Appleton continued trying to get his commission as colonel of a colored regiment. "Anxious to take [his] true position as soon as possible," on June 23 he suggested to Ullmann that they see Banks together. "From what I learn I doubt if I ever should receive an 'order' sent through the usual channels," he wrote, "and it strikes me as the best way to get the



Fort Desperate, spring 1863. *National Archives photo, courtesy Lawrence Lee Hewitt.*

order from Genl Banks direct.” Two days later Banks ordered Appleton to report to Ullmann as colonel of a Negro regiment.²⁷

Several of Appleton’s fellow officers gave it as evidence of his devotion to duty that he had stayed with his company throughout the Port Hudson campaign rather than leave to join Ullmann. As already indicated, such testimony did not accurately reflect Appleton’s feelings; he had been writing to Ullmann since April trying to get his commission. Nevertheless, as General Charles Hamlin observed after the war, Appleton’s valorous conduct during the Port Hudson campaign deserved special praise in view of his knowledge that the commission had been issued by the War Department and that his superior officers objected to his accepting it.²⁸



The assault of the Second Louisiana (Colored) Regiment on the confederate works at Port Hudson, May 27, 1863. Black troops allowed into combat distinguished themselves bravely, but few were offered such an opportunity. A contemporary illustration (facing page) depicts the more typical fate awaiting black volunteers in the Union army. Both illustrations are from *THE AMERICAN SOLDIER AND SAILOR IN WAR* (1898).

Whatever their sentiments about black soldiers, Appleton's comrades in the Twelfth Maine bid him a fond farewell. A committee headed by Colonel Kimball, who in April had tried to prevent Appleton from joining Ullmann's brigade, expressed its regret at the loss "of so brave, faithful, and gallant an officer...an accomplished gentleman, and a faithful friend."²⁹

On July 25 Appleton was mustered out as captain of Company H and enrolled as colonel — not of the Fourth United

THE CIVIL WAR IN THE UNITED STATES.



SCOUTS



BUILDING ROADS



TEAMSTER OF THE ARMY



ON PICKET



WASHING IN CAMP



COOKING IN CAMP

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States Volunteers, but of the Ninth Regiment, Corps d’Afrique. Ullmann had arrived in New Orleans in late April and headed for Opelousas to meet Banks while his officers started recruiting for their regiments. He returned with an order proposing “the organization of a corps d’armee of colored troops to be designated as the ‘Corps d’Afrique.’” Banks intended to incorporate Ullmann’s brigade and the Louisiana Native Guards into this new organization, but he had no important place for Ullmann himself in his plans, and the New Yorker resented it. Ullmann apparently believed that Banks meant to wrest control of the black units from him so that they could be shunted aside in deference to the racial prejudice of the local planters. “Gen. Banks talks and writes very well on this question of arming blacks,” he wrote to Vice President Hamlin, “but his action comes limping in the rear at a vast distance. He is striving too much to make friends among these planters, whose loyalty is a simple farce.” Cyrus Hamlin, who also objected to Banks’s “milk and water policy,” complained to Ullmann about Banks’s plan to limit the colored regiments to 500 men instead of the usual 1,000, and he foresaw problems of organization and rank if Ullmann’s brigade were to be included in the new Corps d’Afrique. Nevertheless, on June 6 Banks’s Order No. 47 renamed the First through Fifth regiments of United States Volunteers the Sixth through Tenth regiments of the Corps d’Afrique. From the time Banks first proposed the new organization, recalled Bangs, “Practically, we were never under [Ullmann’s] orders.”³⁰

The Corps d’Afrique was divided into two divisions of two brigades each. Appleton reported for duty in July and immediately assumed command of the Second Brigade, First Division (including the Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth infantry regiments) at Port Hudson. His most pressing task was to fill up the brigade, a job that took far longer than the thirty days the War Department hoped for. Banks cooperated half-heartedly at best, and Ullmann complained that the great amount of time his officers and men spent digging trenches practically prevented recruiting. Even after the official organization of his brigade’s

regiments in early September, Appleton communicated with Ullmann, nominally in command of the First Division, and Colonel A.B. Botsford, superintendent of recruiting for the Corps d'Afrique, on the subject of raising troops. As of the 12th, only one of his four regiments was full, and as late as October 31 three were well below their authorized strength of 500 men.³¹

Ullmann vigorously objected to the tepid cooperation he received from the army and from the politicians in Washington. In December 1863 he protested to Senator Henry Wilson about the unequal pay and unserviceable arms his soldiers had to accept, and about the "ignorant and boorish" field and noncommissioned officers being thrust upon the corps by opponents of black troops. Worst of all were the duties assigned to the Negroes. "The first point to settle is whether it be intended to make these men soldiers or mere laborers," declared Ullmann. Compelled to work as "diggers and drudges," his men had little time for drill, months at a time going by "without the possibility of any drill at all." Ullmann requested that Wilson, head of the Senate's military affairs committee, help obtain justice for the corps and the country by allowing his organization to develop as an equal, competent fighting force.³²

Appleton, too, quickly discovered that he and the army had differing notions regarding the use to be made of black soldiers and the respect they deserved. Within weeks of taking command of the Second Brigade, he complained to Captain George B. Halstead, aide to corps commander General George L. Andrews, of the heavy guard details his men were being assigned. "Officers and men are on every other day," he wrote, "it is impossible to proceed with any expedition in drilling, or to do much in the way of fatigue duty on the brigade line." Halstead replied acidly that perhaps the brigade's officers ought to be more efficient and to prevent straggling so as to reduce the number of details. A few days later Appleton protested the treatment of one of his guard details by the provost marshal. After several unanswered inquiries on the matter, Appleton testily complained to Halstead about the "unwarrantable assumption" of the provost marshal in assigning the officers of the detail to other duties. Defending

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the provost marshal's actions, Halstead remonstrated: "The tone of [your] remarks...is hardly called for."³³

The denouement of the Halsted episode is unknown, but the affair must have made Appleton wonder what sort of future he had at Port Hudson. Soldiers of the Louisiana Native Guards had proven themselves in battle during the May 27 assault, but black troops still encountered resentment and discrimination from many quarters, including (so it probably seemed to Appleton) Andrews and the provost marshal. Moreover, as at New Orleans and Baton Rouge, he chafed at being back on garrison duty; he yearned to command black troops in battle.³⁴ On September 2 Appleton vented his feelings to General Butler, the incipient radical Republican, who would soon be in the field again recruiting black soldiers in Virginia. Appleton asked Butler for a "recommendation to raise a [colored] Brigade. I may be presumptuous but as things go here now I know that I can command and maneuver a Brigade better than some who now have permission." Praising the general for his stand on slavery and urging him to "scourge these Copperheads," Appleton closed with the plea that Butler help get him into the Department of Virginia and North Carolina "in any position."³⁵

A dispute with Colonel Clark of the Seventh Regiment over priority of rank and command of the brigade only heightened Appleton's desire to serve under Butler in the East. On November 29 Butler assured his former protege that he would keep him in mind, but at the moment he had no "command equal to your present one" available. Undeterred, in December Appleton renewed his request to raise a regiment or to serve as inspector of colored troops under Butler, even if it meant dropping down "a peg or two" in rank.³⁶

Appleton spent very little time at Port Hudson after being temporarily superseded by Clark around August of 1863. On September 17 he received a pass to New Orleans for himself and two black servants to settle certain matters connected with his old company in the Twelfth Maine. Soon after his return on the 26th, General Andrews tried to place him on the New Orleans

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Board of Examiners, established by the War Department to supervise the selection of officers for black units. However, when Appleton arrived in the Crescent City on October 13, he found that the appointment had not come through. Andrews thereupon approved a short leave for Appleton to go to Washington to see about the matter, stipulating that Appleton bring back all the good officer material he could find.³⁷

Presumably Appleton went to the capital, but there is no evidence that he ever served on the Board of Examiners. On October 28 he received a leave to go north, and some time in November he arrived at Bangor on what may have been his first visit home since leaving two years before. He returned to Louisiana on January 16, 1864. Somehow the conflict with Colonel Clark was settled to Appleton's satisfaction, for by the end of the month he was back in command of the Second Brigade, there to stay until his resignation from the army. From Port Hudson he continued his campaign for a transfer to Virginia, but without the cooperation of his superiors. Appleton's military service record shows him in command of the Second Brigade of the Corps d'Afrique's First Division in the spring of 1864, but lists him as absent for the months of March through June. There is no evidence extant as to where he was and what he was doing during that period, but his absence may have been related to his persistent efforts to be assigned to the east.³⁸

It is also possible that Appleton's absence from his post had something to do with his health. As early as August 17, 1863, he explained a delay in writing to Ullmann by saying, "I was on my back from sickness [and] could not very well muster up courage to write or do anything else." Disease killed twice as many Civil War soldiers as did battle injuries, and the Louisiana climate brought down many northern men. The wretched conditions on the Teche campaign and during the siege of Port Hudson surely weakened the constitutions of many of the men. By the spring of 1864, "the poison of Louisiana swamps" had begun to work its deadly mischief on Appleton.³⁹

On July 25, having failed to obtain a transfer to Butler's command, his health deteriorating, and his hopes for his black

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soldiers thwarted, Appleton tendered his resignation from the service. His regiment, now called the Eighty-First United States Colored Infantry, had been consolidated with several other black regiments in July, which, as Appleton noted in his letter of resignation, “renders my presence here supernumerary.” There seemed to be no point in staying on. On July 29 he received an honorable discharge.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, Appleton retained his interest in the success of black soldiers. General Ullmann had conceived a plan to turn Port Hudson into a training camp for black troops of all arms so that combat-ready reserve battalions would always be available and the armies in the field could be kept at full strength. He also hoped to have black troops conduct a separate campaign, reaping the full credit or censure their performance merited. Appleton wrote home endorsing the scheme, and his father conveyed the message to Senators Fessenden and Charles Sumner, but nothing ever came of it.⁴¹

Appleton’s own future was unsettled. For several months he tried unsuccessfully to get the sutlership at the post of Morganza, commanded by Ullmann. Butler finally offered him a position in the east, but with his heart’s desire within reach, Appleton had to turn it down. “To refuse was certainly one of the hardest things I ever did,” he told Ullmann in December, “but I think that under the circumstances I could do nothing less.” One can only guess at what those circumstances were, but Appleton’s poor health must have figured in his decision. Since returning home, probably in late August or early September, he had “been unwell suffering from ‘general debility’ and latterly for over two months confined to the house by reason of a sprain.” If for no other reason than his weakened physical state, Appleton’s army days were over for good.⁴²

On June 22, 1867, Colonel Appleton received a brevet as brigadier general for “faithful and meritorious service.” By that time he had resumed his legal career in Bangor. However, in November 1868, Appleton set the law aside to accompany his younger brother Edward to their uncle Elisha Allen’s home in

Hawaii, where Edward hoped to recover from tuberculosis and John from the continuing effects of “swamp fever.”⁴³

The journey did not accomplish its purpose; Edward died at his uncle’s home in July 1869. John stayed on, but his health remained poor; according to Elisha Allen’s son, he caught consumption from Edward on the long sea voyage around Cape Horn. Fifteen months after leaving Bangor, John sailed for San Francisco, thence to make his way home overland. While he lingered in California trying to gather strength for the rest of the trip, his father’s political friends secured John’s appointment as a federal judge in Texas so that he would not have to return to the rigorous Maine climate. As in 1864, when General Butler had finally offered him an appointment, Appleton had but to say yes to fulfill his desires. But he knew he was dying, and once again he sadly declined.⁴⁴

On May 28 Judge Appleton received a telegram from California saying that John was in “very feeble health.” Frederick, another Appleton son, then an attorney in Boston, set out for California. On August 4 the brothers arrived home in Bangor; on the evening of the 31st, three days after his thirty-second birthday, John Francis Appleton died in his father’s house.⁴⁵

On November 3, 1870, the Penobscot County bar held memorial proceedings for Appleton. The official resolutions spoke of his “courage and ability” as a military officer, and the intelligence, integrity, and sense of honor that “gave promise of a brilliant and useful career, as a citizen and a lawyer.” Of all his attributes, said Charles Hamlin, “it was his nobleness which predominated...and gave him such deep and abiding love of all his associates, not only at home, but in academical and army life; that nobleness of heart and intellect which gives the world assurance of a man.”⁴⁶

The most fitting testimonial to Appleton’s life, though, came from a former comrade in arms years after the bar’s memorial proceedings. In 1901, when propriety no longer demanded eulogistic prose, Isaac S. Bangs described Appleton as “my ideal conception of the exalted, spotless character of

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Tancred: 'the very perfect gentle knight.'" Tancred, a leader of the First Crusade, succeeded, at least temporarily, in freeing Jerusalem from the hand of the infidel. Appleton, the nineteenth-century knight, so well-suited to the task, met only frustration in his crusade to let black Americans fight for their freedom.⁴⁷

NOTES

¹On Shaw, see Peter Burchard, *One Gallant Rush: Robert Gould Shaw and His Brave Black Regiment* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965). The relationship between black Union troops and their white officers is treated in Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

²*Bangor Daily Whig and Courier* (hereafter W&C), March 5, 1856, May 25, 1857, March 7, 1891, September 6, 1870. A brief sketch of Appleton's life is given in *Biographical Encyclopedia of Maine of the Nineteenth Century* (Boston: Metropolitan Printing & Engraving Company, 1885), pp. 372-74. On his father, see David M. Gold, *The Shaping of Nineteenth-Century Law: John Appleton and Responsible Individualism* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1990).

³W&C, November 4, 1870; *Biographical Encyclopedia*, p. 373; John Francis Appleton [hereinafter JFA] to Israel Washburn, July 4, 1861, Civil War Correspondence – Governor [hereafter Corr. Gov.], V, 32, Maine State Archives, Augusta.

⁴Louis C. Hatch, *The History of Bowdoin College* (Portland, Maine: Loring, Short & Harmon, 1927), pp. 260-61; W&C, May 24, 1858, September 4, 1860.

⁵James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 1982), p. 165.

⁶JFA to Israel Washburn, July 13, 1861, Corr. Gov., V, 118; JFA to John Hodsdon, September 30, 1861, Civil War Correspondence Adjutant General [hereafter Corr. Adj. Gen.], IX, 137, Maine State Archives; W&C, Oct. 9, 1861.

⁷William E.S. Whitman and Charles H. True, *Maine in the War for the Union: A History of the Part Borne by Maine Troops in the Suppression of the American Rebellion* (Lewiston, Maine: Nelson Dingley, Jr. & Company, 1865), pp. 288-89; John William De Forest, *A Volunteer's Adventures: A Union Captain's Record of the Civil War*, edited by James H. Croushore (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), pp. 3-7.

⁸Whitman and True, *Maine in the War*, p. 289.

⁹De Forest, *Adventures*, pp. 31-32.

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¹⁰Louis C. Hatch, *Maine: A History* (1919; reprint, Somersworth, New Hampshire: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1973), p. 517n; Whitman and True, *Maine in the War*, p. 288; John Appleton to Israel Washburn, August 13, 1862, Corr. Gov., XXXVI, 143.

¹¹Eugene F. Sanger, D.R. Hastings [Major], William K. Kimball [Lieutenant Colonel], F. Thompson [Lieutenant, Company I], S.C. Farrington [Captain, Company F], and M.N. Robinson [Captain, Company G] to Israel Washburn, July 15, 1862, Corr. Gov., XXX, 59; John Appleton to John Hodsdon, August 3, 1862, Corr. Adj. Gen., XXII, 57; John Appleton to Israel Washburn, August 7, 1862, Corr. Gov., XXXV, 65; John H. Rice *et als.* to Israel Washburn, August 1, 1862, Corr. Gov., XXXIV, 12.

¹²Appleton and Butler also liked and respected one another. See, for example, JFA to B.F. Butler, December 15, 1862, and B.F. Butler to William Pitt Fessenden, April 11, 1864, in *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler During the Period of the Civil War* (Norwood, Massachusetts: privately printed, 1917), II, pp. 547-48 and IV, 60.

¹³McPherson, *Ordeal*, pp. 380-81; Bell Irvin Wiley, *Southern Negroes, 1861-1865* (1938; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), p. 295; Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: Longman, Green & Co., 1956), pp. 4-7, 33-66; Mary F. Berry, "Negro Troops in Blue and Gray: The Louisiana Native Guards, 1861-1863," *Louisiana History*, 8 (Spring 1967): 167-77.

¹⁴W&C, December 15, 1862.

¹⁵John Appleton to William Pitt Fessenden, August 22, 1862, William Pitt Fessenden Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society; Charles Eugene Hamlin, *The Life and Times of Hannibal Hamlin* (1899; reprint, Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1971), II, pp. 430-33.

¹⁶I.S. Bangs, "The Ullman [sic] Brigade," in *War Papers Read Before the Commandery of the State of Maine, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, II (Portland, Maine: Lefavor-Tower, 1902), p. 293; Cornish, *Sable Arm*, pp. 101-02; Hannibal Hamlin to Daniel Ullman, January 23, 1863, Daniel Ullman Papers, New-York Historical Society; Cyrus Hamlin to Hannibal Hamlin, January 25, 1863, Hannibal Hamlin Papers, Library of Congress (microfilm).

¹⁷Abner Coburn to Daniel Ullmann, January 24, 1863, Daniel Ullmann Papers, in *Generals' Books and Papers, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s-1917, Record Group 94, National Archives Building*; Abner Coburn to Hannibal Hamlin, January 30, 1863, Hannibal Hamlin Papers; Hannibal Hamlin to Abner Coburn, [date unclear] February 1863, Corr. Gov., XXXIX, 180; JFA to [unidentified], December 21, 1863, Compiled Military Service Record, Record Group 94.

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¹⁸John D. Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), p. 208; De Forest, *Adventures*, p. 51; Daniel Ullmann, *Address by Daniel Ullman, LL. D., Before the Soldier's and Sailor's Union of the State of New York, on the Organization of Colored Troops and the Regeneration of the South* (Washington: Great Republic, 1868), pp. 3, 5; Wiley, *Southern Negroes*, p. 312 n. 55.

¹⁹W&C, April 14, 1863.

²⁰The following discussion of the Port Hudson campaign is based chiefly on Winters, *Civil War in Louisiana*, pp. 221-83, but see also Edward Cunningham, *The Port Hudson Campaign, 1862-1863* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963) and Lawrence Lee Hewitt, *Port Hudson, Confederate Bastion on the Mississippi* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

²¹De Forest, *Adventures*, p. 96.

²²Bangs, "Ullman Brigade," p. 295; JFA to Daniel Ullmann, April 24, 1863, JFA Military Service Record. Appleton sent Ullmann a second letter on the subject from Barre's Landing on May 2 (also in his Military Service Record).

²³Hewitt, *Port Hudson*, p.132 n. 14, p. 136. Hewitt notes that about 20 percent of the Confederates inside Port Hudson were too sick for duty. Estimates of the number of Federal effectives vary widely. Lieutenant Colonel Richard B. Irwin, who took part in the siege, once placed the number at 10,000. *History of the Nineteenth Army Corps* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1892), p. 172. McPherson, *Ordeal*, p. 333, uses the figure of 15,000. Cunningham estimates Banks's maximum effective fighting strength to have been 25,000-27,000 around June 1.

²⁴De Forest, *Adventures*, p. 113; Cunningham, *Port Hudson*, p. 52. Hewitt's *Port Hudson*, pp. 151-54, gives a slightly different account but confirms that the Twelfth Maine led the desperate attack.

²⁵W&C, September 2, 1870.

²⁶Bangs, "Ullman Brigade," p. 295; *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Ser. 1, XXVI, Part 1, pp. 57-66; Cunningham, *Port Hudson*, p. 95. Winters, *Civil War in Louisiana*, p. 274, erroneously states that only 300 men volunteered for the "forlorn hope." In fact, Banks got his 1,000 volunteers with a few to spare, although some were rejected. See Irwin, *Nineteenth Army Corps*, pp. 212-13, 488-506.

²⁷JFA to Daniel Ullmann, June 23, 1863, JFA Military Service Record; Special Order No. 150, June 24, 1863, JFA Military Service Record.

²⁸W&C, July 1, 1863, November 4, 1870.

²⁹W&C, July 15, 1863.

³⁰Bangs, "Ullman's Brigade," pp. 302-04, 307; Daniel Ullmann to Hannibal Hamlin, June 10, 1863, Hannibal Hamlin Papers; Cyrus Hamlin to Ellen E. Hamlin, May 11, 1863, Hannibal Hamlin Paper; Cyrus Hamlin to Daniel Ullmann, May 12, 1863, Generals' Papers, Box 38, Record Group 94. Cornish, *Sable Arm*, pp. 127-28, 142-43, defends Banks against charges of racism and deference to the planters. Ullmann's officers resented being deprived of their designation as United States Volunteers. See Daniel Ullmann to Richard C. Drum, April 16, 1887, in Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, editors, *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents*, II (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1977), pp. 37-38.

³¹*War of the Rebellion*, Ser. 1, XXVI, Part 1, p. 609, Ser. 3, III, p. 1115; Bangs, "Ullman Brigade," p. 308; Alban B. Botsford to JFA, September 12, 1863 (two letters), Generals' Papers, Box 38, Record Group 94; JFA to Daniel Ullmann, September 12, 1863, Daniel Ullmann Papers, New-York Historical Society. The Second Division of the Corps d'Afrique had only one brigade by the end of 1863, the other having "disintegrated." *War of the Rebellion*, Ser. 1, XXVI, Part 1, p. 896n.

³²Daniel Ullmann to Henry Wilson, December 4, 1863, in *War of the Rebellion*, Ser. 3, III, pp. 1126-28.

³³JFA to George B. Halsted, August 24, 1863, August 27, 1863 (with Halsted's replies on the backs), Generals' Papers, Box 38, Record Group 94.

³⁴The soldiers themselves were just as eager for action. A lieutenant in Appleton's regiment reported in April 1864: "A few days since we had two colors presented to us, and the Regt formed a square, and every man and every officer got down on his knees and swore — so help him God — those colors never be taken from us, — and I believe they never will be. Every man said he would die by them. I never saw troops that wanted to get into a fight quite as much as they do. You will hear a good account of us when we do go in." W&C, May 24, 1864. Their desires notwithstanding, the Eighty-First United States Colored Troops (or Infantry), as the Ninth Regiment of the Corps d'Afrique was renamed, remained on garrison duty for its entire term of service.

³⁵JFA to Benjamin F. Butler, September 2, 1863, JFA Military Service Record.

³⁶JFA to Benjamin F. Butler, November 19, 1863 (Butler's reply of November 29, 1863 on back) and JFA to [unidentified], December 21, 1863, JFA Military Service Record.

³⁷JFA request for leave and approval by General George L. Andrews, September 17, 1863; JFA to George L. Andrews, October 13, 1863; George L. Andrews to JFA, October 13, 1863, all in JFA Military Service Record. The

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Union army used the tens of thousands of slaves who fled to its lines in a variety of capacities: laborers, artisans, cooks, and nurses, as well as servants for the officers. Wiley, *Southern Negroes*, p. 341.

³⁸*War of the Rebellion*, Ser. 1, XXXIV, Part 2, p. 197; JFA to A.F. Puffer, January 27, 1864, in *Correspondence of Gen. Butler*, III, p. 338; John Appleton to William Pitt Fessenden, March 27 1864, William Pitt Fessenden Papers; James Parton, *General Butler in New Orleans: History of the Department of the Gulf in the Year 1862*, 16th edition (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1866), p. 585; Benjamin F. Butler to William Pitt Fessenden, April 11, 1864, in *Correspondence of Gen. Butler*, IV, p. 60; JFA Military Service Record.

³⁹JFA to Daniel Ullmann, August 17, 1863, Daniel Ullmann Papers; McPherson, *Ordeal*, p. 383; W&C, November 4, 1870.

⁴⁰JFA to George B. Drake, July 25, 1864, JFA Military Service Record.

⁴¹JFA to William Pitt Fessenden, July 3, 1864, William Pitt Fessenden Papers; John Appleton to Charles Sumner, July 31, 1864, Charles Sumner Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁴²JFA to Daniel Ullmann, August 6, 1864, December 21, 1864, JFA Military Service Record.

⁴³JFA Military Service Record; W&C, April 12, 1866, November 12, 1868, November 4, 1870; Bangs, "Ullman Brigade," p. 295.

⁴⁴W&C, May 2, 1870; Mrs. William F. Allen to Mrs. [Elisha H. ?] Allen, November 26, 1869, and William F. Allen to Elisha H. Allen, February 8, 1870 (and attached note), Elisha H. Allen Papers, Library of Congress; John Appleton to Charles Sumner, April 3, 1870, Charles Sumner Papers; JFA to John A. Peters, in W&C, September 6, 1870.

⁴⁵W&C, June 1, 1870, June 16, 1870, August 5, 1870, September 2, 1870.

⁴⁶W&C, November 4, 1870.

⁴⁷Bangs, "Ullman Brigade," pp. 295-96.

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