

EASTERN NORTH CAROLINIANS IN THE UNION ARMY



Painting by John Paul Strain - "Landing at Fort Fisher"

The First and Second North Carolina Union Volunteer Regiments

By Donald E. Collins

The War Between the States was truly a civil war in every sense of the word. Although the popular image is of North fighting South, it is also true that Northerners in significant numbers supported the South, and Southerners in significant numbers fought for the North. Eighty-five [White] Union army regiments were recruited in the Confederate States: 51 from Tennessee; 10 each from Arkansas and Louisiana; 4 from North Carolina and Texas; 2 from Florida; and 1 each from Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Virginia. While many of these Southern Unionists confined their service to within their native states, many others took active roles in fighting against the Southern Confederacy. Alabama and Tennessee Union regiments fought under Sherman in the Atlanta campaign and joined him for his March to the Sea. At least two Tennessee regiments fought at Fort Fisher, occupied Wilmington, fought at Averasboro and Bentonville, occupied Raleigh, and were present at Johnston's surrender at Bennett Place.

North Carolina's four [White] Union regiments were: the First and Second North Carolina Union Volunteer Infantry, and the Second and Third North Carolina Mounted Infantry. The two mounted infantry regiments were stationed in Knoxville, Tennessee and saw service primarily in the mountains of Western North Carolina and Tennessee.

The two infantry regiments were organized in eastern North Carolina and remained in that region for the entire war. This paper deals exclusively with these latter two Eastern North Carolina regiments.

Why did 1,300 men from the counties of Eastern North Carolina go against their native state and join the Union army? The answer is complex and is not simply loyalty to the United States and/or opposition to slavery. The nucleus of the First and Second North Carolina regiments, those who entered in the first enthusiastic burst of recruiting, were anti-slavery men who opposed secession. That, however, is even too simple an explanation. As pointed out by historian Wayne K. Durrill in his book *A War of Another Kind*, in describing the war in Washington County, it was a form of class warfare of haves versus have-nots -the poor whites and small yeoman farmers who opposed and acted against their wealthy slave holding planter neighbors. Such men rushed to join a Union army that would help them punish the secessionist planter class.

Union soldiers were amused and impressed by the desire for vengeance of these Unionist North Carolinians. As described by a correspondent for the *New York Tribune*, they maintained "*bitter and malignant feelings toward their disloyal neighbors and hated slavery and slave holders whom they believed to be responsible for their condition.*" The earliest North Carolina Union soldiers were "*carried away with the idea that when they became soldiers they would be licensed to shoot down indiscriminately every disloyal citizen to the government they could find, and appropriate all of the property belonging to such persons to their own comfort, or to the benefit of the Government.*" These Unionists were less anti-slavery than pro-white labor. They wished to end slavery as the first step toward deporting Blacks from the country - to the benefit of the white working man.

Later recruits brought new motivations for enlisting in the First and Second North Carolina regiments. Beginning in late 1863, following the Southern defeat at Gettysburg and the down turn of the war for the Confederacy, Confederate deserters in increasing numbers found the North Carolina regiments to be safe havens from the war and from potential punishment if they returned to their former Southern units. While precise statistics on this are unavailable, it is known that at least 34 of the 97 members of Company F, Second North Carolina Union Volunteers were deserters from the Confederate army.

The economic incentives of Union service attracted many poor whites who were motivated by the introduction of bounties that paid recruits \$100 for enlisting in 1862, and increasing to \$300 in December 1863. This amounted to more than a year's pay for many destitute North Carolinians.

Economic incentives also attracted poor men with families. The government found that when it took on the poor of North Carolina, it also took on their families. The very enormity of the numbers of destitute families in its ranks proved to be an embarrassment for the government which, in trying to solve it, acted in the roll of parent and welfare organization.

Finally, the fear of Confederate retribution for joining the enemy was mitigated by Union promises of protection. Volunteers in the Buffalo regiments were promised that "*the Government of the United States would protect them and their families to the last extreme; and ... the Southern men who placed themselves under the protection of the [American] flag would, by fighting in the ranks of our army ..., be looked upon as special wards of the Government; and that any outrage perpetrated upon them, or their*

families, would be severely punished.” North Carolinians took this promise seriously and were bitter whenever it broke down.

The military status of the First and Second North Carolina regiments was that of Home Guards. Recruiting posters attracted Unionists and others with promises that service would be local and that under no circumstances would they be required to leave North Carolina. As home guards, their primary military roll was defense service at garrison towns where they served as artillerists in blockhouses, manned outposts, and did picket duty. Rarely did they work alone when beyond the garrison towns, but rather in cooperation with elements of Northern regiments. More active service included serving as scouts for Northern units and participating in reconnaissance missions - again acting in concert with non-North Carolina regiments. Perhaps the most hazardous duty involved recruiting forays into the no-man’s land of the Albemarle Sound and Roanoke/Chowan rivers region where they were regularly harassed by small bands of Confederate guerillas.

Active combat, with certain exceptions, was avoided, and normally took place during Confederate offensives against the garrison towns. The localized nature of the Home Guards doubtlessly attracted recruits to the Union regiments who, regardless of loyalty, wished to avoid frontline service in either army. During the latter years of the war, this feature attracted Southern draft-dodgers and Confederate deserters who saw the Buffalo regiments as a convenient way to sit out the war in relative safety or to avoid punishment upon returning to their original Confederate units.

By the summer of 1861, President Abraham Lincoln had already begun to recruit Southern regiments in Tennessee and Virginia. But when Charles Henry Foster¹, a Maine native who edited a newspaper in Murfreesboro, North Carolina, broached the subject in August of that year, the president’s reply was that if arms were given to a regiment of Unionist North Carolinians, they probably would not remain in their hands long.

Lincoln’s attitude changed soon after the Union occupation of Hatteras, North Carolina on August 28 of the same year. His reversal was largely a result of the influence of Colonel Rush C. Hawkins of the Ninth New York Volunteers, a.k.a. the Hawkins Zouaves. He was a compassionate Union officer whose concern for the Union people of North Carolina would not end with the conclusion of the war. Hawkins, left in command of the forts at Hatteras Inlet by General Benjamin Butler, became convinced that a third of North Carolina could be back in the Union within a short time if the government would send sufficient forces to protect those North Carolinians who wished to return to their allegiance to the Federal government.

On August 30, 1861, a delegation of Hatteras citizens met Hawkins to state their loyalty and request the protection of the army. The following day thirty citizens appeared to take the oath of allegiance to the United States. Within a week, Hawkins reported to his superiors that two hundred and fifty people had taken the oath, and *“they are still coming in.”* He suggested that *“troops could be raised here for the purpose of suppressing the rebellion in North Carolina upon the assurance that they would not be called on to go out of the state.”* Hawkins’ report came to Lincoln’s attention. As a result, he changed his mind on North Carolinians in the Federal service and authorized Hawkins to accept the services of such loyal North Carolinians, not to exceed one

¹ See author’s article *“Charles Henry Foster”*, CHAB News, vol. XXXIII, nr 1-2, 2005.

regiment, as in his neighborhood may volunteer to take up arms for the United States. He reported that fifty or sixty men enlisted and were assigned to garrison duty. However, there are no muster rolls for such a unit, and no other evidence of this enlistment is on record. Union meetings continued to spread throughout the mainland counties, nevertheless, giving continued encouragement to Hawkins and his fellow officers.

The first concrete proof of North Carolinians enlisting in separate Union organizations had to await the conquest of the coastal section of the state from New Bern northward. Following, the capture of New Bern, Beaufort, Fort Macon, and Morehead City, Unionists increasingly met in organized groups in support of the occupying army. In Craven County, citizens met under the leadership of Frederick Alford to form the Craven County Home Guards and invited all "loyal residents" to join.

The nucleus of the First North Carolina Regiment was formed in April, 1862, shortly after the occupation of the town known then and now as Little Washington, North Carolina. Mayor Isaiah Respass, after "partaking a social glass" with Union officers aboard their boat in the Pamlico River, prepared the way for a force under Lieutenant Commander A. Murray to land at the town's wharf. Murray marched his men to the Court House, raised the American flag, had his band play "Dixie," and won over some of the town's people by handing out several hundred bushels of confiscated meal and corn to the poor. The naval commander wrote to his superiors that the "*woods and swamps of this and [adjacent] Hyde County are represented as being alive with refugees from the [Confederate] draft ... They are deep and bitter in their denunciation of the Secession heresy, and promise a regiment if called to aid in the restoration of the flag.*" In addition, delegations from other parts of the county called on him and offered to raise Union companies in their towns ... "*if he [would] furnish them with arms.*" Hyde County, he reported, was "*still more enthusiastic and outspoken for the Union*" than Carteret.

Soon after Murray's arrival in Little Washington, Union sympathizers in Carteret County chose John R. Respass, the mayor's son, to make an offer to General Burnside of "a regiment of loyal men" from the county. The general accepted Respass' proposal, and the First North Carolina Union Volunteer Regiment was born. Captain Edward E. Potter of General John Foster's staff was promoted to Colonel and made regimental commander. Respass was placed second in command with the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel, a position he would soon resign, perhaps because of concern for his father who was on trial in Richmond for collaboration with the enemy. The junior Respass would later enlist in the regiment as a private.

On May 1, 1861, enlistment posters appeared addressed "*To the people of Eastern North Carolina,*" informing them that General Burnside, in command of the Department of North Carolina, had authorized the raising of a regiment in the eastern part of the state. Prospective recruits were informed that the regiment would be "*under the protection of the United States,*" and that they would be paid, clothed, and fed by the Federal government. They were further informed that the regiment was "*intended for the protection of loyal citizens.*" As a final note, those "*able to bear arms*" but who failed to join, were subtly warned with a veiled threat that the "*Government [would not] protect those who make no effort to protect themselves.*" The poster was signed by Potter and Respass. A second broadside, also signed by Potter, promised prospective

recruits that they would not only remain in North Carolina, but that they would not be moved from the county of enlistment except for battalion drill or emergency.

Although the First North Carolina had its start in Little Washington in April, most historians incorrectly credit the regiment's origin to a meeting between Hawkins and Lieutenant Charles W. Flusser with a group of Washington County Unionists in Plymouth on June 12, 1862. It was reported that within four days, enough men enlisted to fill a company of the First North Carolina. Hawkins stationed a company of his Ninth New York regiment in Plymouth to protect the new company, and Flusser stationed gunboats in the river nearby. Recruiting posts were established in the northeastern counties in August. This proved to be hazardous duty as Union authority was effective only in the few towns garrisoned by the army. Beyond those points was a no-man's land in which irregular Confederate and Union guerilla units made life uncomfortable for both sides. Companies D and E were recruited in these counties under the most trying circumstances. Chicago native Captain Enos Sanders of Company D, upon returning from a recruiting expedition to Pasquotank County in September, found that local guerillas had captured men and equipment from his home base at Shiloh in Camden County. During the following months numbers of his men would be killed, wounded, and captured in ambush and small-scale attacks by local guerilla or home guard units. His own brother, a lieutenant in the company, was shot to death while walking in Elizabeth City. Sander's attempt at revenge led to his arrest for murder, and subsequent release when the evidence mysteriously disappeared. The initial recruiting for Company E was begun by Lieutenant John Fairless, described as a *"hard-drinking, fast-living Gates county farm boy from Mentonville."* He turned Wingfield, the plantation home of a secessionist doctor high on the banks of the Chowan River, as his headquarters and recruiting base. Wingfield became notorious as a refuge for *"fugitive Negroes, lawless white men, traitors and deserters from the Confederate army."* Even union officers referred to Fairless' men as *"our home guard thieves."* The report made by Lieutenant Thomas Woodward who visited Wingfield on September 18, 1862, is worth reading: *"... I found, out of sixty three recruits, only twenty present; the others had gone to their homes or elsewhere as they chose. The captain was in a state of intoxication, threatening to shoot some of the remaining men, and conducting himself in a most disgraceful manner by taking one man's horse and making other people pay him the money to pay for them, and this, too, from people who are well disposed toward our Government. ... He has no control over his men and [by] the manner in which he conducts himself he is doing much injury to the U. S. Government. Some of the men that have gone have taken their arms or guns with them; the ammunition has all been smuggled out and sold to citizens for liquor; what remaining arms there were I took on board for safe-keeping. ... His men say they will serve under him no longer. They are now left in charge of a man they call lieutenant, with no clothing, no rations; are dependent on the county for subsistence."* Fairless was shot to death the following month during a drunken argument with a private in his own company.

The last quarter of 1862 found the men of the First North Carolina heavily involved in a Congressional campaign to elect a representative to Congress that reflected their own anti-slavery views. Charles Foster, who had failed to interest Lincoln in creating a North Carolina regiment in 1861, returned to the state in September 1862 as Recruiting Officer for North Carolina with the rank of Captain in the army. Foster had failed in an earlier attempt at a Congressional seat through a sham government on the Outer Banks.

Now he hoped to try again. He had the full support of the North Carolina regiments, but was opposed by Edward Stanly (uncle of Confederate General Lewis Armistead), the Military Governor appointed by Lincoln. The election was set for January 1, 1863. Stanly imported a former North Carolinian from Washington, D.C. named Jennings Pigott to oppose Foster. He also set regulations for voting that allowed persons loyal to the Confederacy to vote, and worked against Foster's candidacy. North Carolina Unionists came to hate the Governor because he opposed emancipation of slaves and wanted to restore North Carolina to the Union with the same social and political conditions as it had before secession.

Free Labor Associations supported and sometimes led by soldiers of the First North Carolina held meetings throughout the Union-occupied areas designed to recruit for the regiment and support Foster's candidacy. The Buffalo soldiers believed that slavery needed to be ended as the first step toward deportation of Negroes. They therefore insisted upon the vigorous and prompt enforcement of the Confiscation and Emancipation acts. They even threatened their own candidate and superior officer, Captain Foster, with the loss of their support if he failed to come out against slavery. On election day, Pigott came in first, with Foster second, despite receiving the unanimous vote of the First North Carolina. In response, an indignation meeting was held at the Court House at Beaufort on January 6, 1863. It was chaired by Abraham Congleton, a sixty-two year old private and Pitt County native in the First North Carolina and president of the Carteret Free Labor Association. Congleton had two sons in the First North Carolina and was reputed to be the man who first proposed free suffrage in the State and the abolition of land qualifications to vote. The meeting produced a strongly worded resolution that concluded with the statement that: "*as native citizens of North Carolina, and loyal men who have taken up arms for the Union, ... and inasmuch as the majority of our regiment were disfranchised through the trickery and meanness of Gov. Stanly and his confederates ... we protest against the recognition of the election of the said 'Jennings Pigott'.*" In addition, forty-five "*loyal Union citizens of Carteret County,*" members of Company F, and thirty-six members of Company G, petitioned Congress not to seat Pigott because he had the support of secessionists. On February 14, 1863, the House Committee of Elections reported against Pigott's right to a seat in Congress since the 864 total votes cast in the election was insufficient given the number of voters in the district. Governor Stanly resigned on January 15, 1863. The army, navy, and Union citizens in the state strongly opposed appointment of a successor, and none was appointed. Following the occupation of eastern North Carolina by the Burnside Expedition in February and March 1862, the military situation remained fairly static until Confederate General Robert Hoke's capture of Plymouth in April 1864. Early plans for conquering inland cities disappeared with removal of General Burnside's troops in June 1862 to join General George McClellan in the Peninsula Campaign. Most military activity consisted of small expeditions of short duration, but never to capture and hold territory.

North Carolinians did not expect to participate in major battles given their roll as garrison troops. However, on September 6, 1862, the Buffalo recruits of less than four months service found themselves in the most intense three-hour fight of their lives. At 4:00 a.m. that morning it was still dark, and the fog added to the poor visibility. Regimental Commander Colonel Potter was in the saddle riding out of town on the Plymouth road for a planned attack on Hamilton, North Carolina, with five companies

of cavalry. The North Carolinians of companies A and B and two companies of the Twenty-fourth Massachusetts were sound asleep in their barracks on the banks of the Pamlico River. That was the situation when Colonel S. D. Poole with detachments of the Seventeenth, Fifty-sixth, and Eighth North Carolina regiments, and seventy men from the Tenth Artillery acting as infantry stormed into Washington, passed the pickets, and surrounded the still-sleeping garrison. The Buffalo soldiers and their Northern comrades answered calls for surrender by firing their weapons out the windows.

The sounds of firing alerted the departing cavalry on the Plymouth road who wheeled around and charged down First, Second, and Third streets in the darkness towards the Confederates. For three hours, cavalry charged the streets, infantry fired from behind fences and between houses, and artillery fired from cross streets. Sergeant William McGowan of Company B died in trying to retrieve a field piece after two previous crews had been killed. Sergeant Thomas Jewell was wounded with his wife and child when he tried to lead them to safety from their home. By the time the Confederates retreated in the direction of Greenville, two North Carolina Union soldiers died and seven were wounded, and Colonel Potter's horse was shot from under him. Little Washington was saved from capture only by the timely action of the gunboat *Louisiana* which placed its fire through the streets with deadly effect. Confederate losses were severe.

On November 8, 1862, seventeen men of the First North Carolina under Lieutenant John B. McLane, with a combined force of thirty-seven other soldiers and sailors, boarded the steamer *North State* in Little Washington, and traveled up the Tar River to capture Greenville. At 9:00 p.m., a sandbar blocked the way, and the men transferred to a flat boat and launch. They landed at Greenville under a flag of truce and took possession of the town, which was surrendered by the mayor. Shortly thereafter, shots were fired from the bridge, and one Federal soldier was killed. In retaliation for firing on a flag of truce, the bridge was set on fire and ten Greenville citizens were taken prisoner back to Little Washington.

The following month, the Seventeenth North Carolina Regiment got some measure of revenge with the capture and destruction of much of Plymouth. The town was held by approximately two hundred men of the Third Massachusetts Infantry, Company C of the First North Carolina, and Company L, aka the First North Carolina Cavalry as the men of this unit preferred to style themselves. Between four and five a.m. a combined force of Confederate infantry, artillery, and cavalry pushed into the town with such speed that the Union troops were forced to break formation and retreat to the customs house. The Confederate artillery disabled the *U.S.S. Southfield* in the river, then turned its guns on the building in which the North Carolina and Massachusetts troops had taken refuge. For an hour, groups of Confederates moved up and down the street burning buildings, including the headquarters of Company C, with all its official records. During the battle, this company escaped without casualties, while the North Carolina cavalry reported one wounded and three men taken prisoner. The families of the two Buffalo companies were reported to be left "*in a distressful condition,*" without a change of clothing.

By January 1863, the First North Carolina Regiment had grown to eight companies. Regimental headquarters and companies A and B were located in Little Washington. Two companies, D and E, were located respectively at Elizabeth City and Wingfield on recruiting service, while C and L were at Plymouth. Of the last two companies, F was at

Beaufort and G at New Bern. Two more companies would be added: H and I at Hatteras Inlet.

From January through March, 1863, military affairs were comparatively routine for the First North Carolina. In January, Lieutenant Nathaniel Sanders, brother of Captain Enos Sanders was killed from ambush while he and two others walked home from a party in Elizabeth City. This was rapidly followed by the ambush of the family of one of Sander's officers as they were returning from their home in Pasquotank County. Sanders would eventually be arrested for murder for the punishment he inflicted on one of the suspects. He would be released, however, when the evidence mysteriously disappeared. In March, Company G under Lieutenant George Joy, with a company of the Third New York Cavalry, was involved in several skirmishes during a five-day expedition around Lake Mattamuskeet and Swan Quarter. In addition to the loss of one man, this expedition nearly resulted in the court martial of Lt. Joy when a prisoner he had taken was paraded through New Bern in a dress with a sign on his back that read: "*Guerilla caught fighting in women's clothing, and protected by Governor Stanly.*" The governor ignored the insult and pardoned Joy, a man he knew as editor of the Union army newspaper in New Bern.

On February 28, 1863, General D. H. Hill was ordered to attack Little Washington and New Bern in order to create a diversion to protect Confederate supply trains that were then foraging in the northeastern counties. After failing to take New Bern on March 14, he turned his attention to Little Washington. Generals Lee and Longstreet, concerned over the loss of life in a frontal assault, ordered Hill to take the town by siege. The only face-to-face combat in the nearly three week stalemate came on the night of March 30 and morning of the 31st. Company A, under Captain Charles Lyons was ordered to hold Rodman's Point across the river from town at all costs. The Buffalo company threw up pickets and erected an earthwork against the approaching Confederates. At 10 p.m., Lyons' men were driven back to the river. Fighting lasted until dawn when the North Carolinians were seen lying in their flatboats to escape the heavy Confederate musket fire. Their escape is credited to a Negro who jumped into the water to push the boat off a sandbar, reputedly saying, "*Somebody's got to die to get us out of this, and it may as well be me!*" The siege ended on April 15, when General John Foster escaped Washington on the *U.S.S. Escort* with plans to organize an expedition to relieve the town. This took place at the same time that General Hill received orders to call off the siege and return to Virginia with his army. Confederates left a departing note at Rodman's Point stating in part: "*Yankees! We leave you a few bursted guns, some stray solid shots and 'a man and a brother' on the wharf [i.e., the Negro who had saved the North Carolinians on March 31] whom we rescued from the waves to which some foray among his equals consigned him. But this tribute we pay you, you have acted with much gallantry during this brief siege. We salute the pilot of the 'Escort'.*" [signed] Co. K, 32 N.C. Vols. [The "man and a brother" left on the wharf referred to the Negro who had saved Captain Lyons' North Carolinians by pushing off their boat at Rodman's Point.]

The siege had a number of repercussions. All civilians who refused to take an oath of allegiance to the United States were ordered out of all Union-occupied towns. Wingfield on the Chowan River was ordered to be abandoned and destroyed. All North Carolina Union companies, except those at Hatteras Inlet, were ordered to leave Elizabeth City and other posts in the northeastern counties. Companies C, D, E, F, G, and L, which had

respectively been stationed at Plymouth, Elizabeth City, Wingfield, Beaufort City, and New Bern, were ordered to Washington, arriving there at the end of April. This rapid pullout of the North Carolina companies left a significant number of men, particularly in Company E, behind to fall into Confederate hands.

Lee's withdrawal of D. H. Hill's Confederate troops to Virginia left Union General Foster with opportunities to carry out expeditions and raids throughout eastern North Carolina. Many of these raids took place in the vicinity of Greenville. Other targets included Rocky Mount, Tarboro, Swansboro, and Kenansville. Particularly prominent in these raids was the North Carolina Cavalry company, now under command of Captain George W. Graham, a fearless New Yorker whose exploits earned the company the respect and admiration of military leaders and Northern regiments in the state.

During the latter quarter of 1863 and early 1864, the Second North Carolina Union Volunteer Regiment began to take shape under the leadership of Captain Charles Henry Foster. The regiment was essentially a failure. Its soldiers cared less about Unionism and Emancipation than the earlier more politically motivated recruits of the First North Carolina. Many of its men were ex-Confederates who were deserting in increasing numbers after the Southern defeats at Vicksburg and Gettysburg in mid-1863. These men had much to fear if captured since return to their former units meant certain death. The Second North Carolina also attracted scores of poor and destitute North Carolinians who were attracted to the service by an increase in the enlistment bonus from one to three hundred dollars in December of 1863. These men constantly petitioned/begged their officers to carry out expeditions behind enemy lines to retrieve wives and children. The poor and their families became a constant concern and worry to Federal military and civil officials. Recruiters heatedly competed for enlistees. Threats were used and aged men and young boys, and persons too ill and disabled were accepted and taken into the regiment. Such tactics brought a severe rebuke from General John Peck, in command at New Bern.

The decline of the Second North Carolina began in February 1864 during an offensive against New Bern by Confederate forces under Generals George Pickett and Robert Hoke. Company F, stationed on outpost duty at Beech Grove eight miles outside of New Bern, found itself trapped behind enemy lines. Their pleas to the New York officer in command to allow them to lead the outpost to safety were ignored until too late. Fifty-three members of the company were taken prisoner. Twenty-seven of these were former Confederates who had deserted from the Southern army. Court martials were held and twenty-two were publicly hanged within view of the citizens of Kinston.² Within two months, all but a handful of the remaining fifty-three died slower deaths in prison camps at Richmond and Andersonville.

The executions caused shock-waves in the Union army, and struck fear in the hearts of the North Carolina regiments. Their greatest apprehension about being captured appeared to be confirmed - and worse, death by hanging instead of firing squad. Colonel Edward Ripley reported the utter demoralization of the North Carolina soldiers. *"Indeed, they are already looking to the swamps for the protection they have so far failed of getting from our government. ... I believe they will inevitably, in case of a fight, become panic-stricken and have a bad effect on the rest of this slim command."* The men were further distracted when their regimental commander, now Lieutenant Colonel

² See author's article "War crime or justice", CHAB News, vol. XXXII, nr 1-2, 2004.

Charles Foster, a man who was well-loved by his men, but not by other Northern officers, was dismissed from the service.

In March, only six weeks after the hangings in Kinston, disaster struck again. General Hoke captured Plymouth on April 20 following a three-day battle. Most of companies B and E of the Second North Carolina regiment were taken prisoner. The latter company had been ordered to Beaufort the previous month and might have been saved. The order was reversed through the pleading of Captain Calvin Haggard of Bertie County who had argued that *"we are as safe here as anywhere in Union lines."* Remembering the fate of Company F in Kinston, North Carolina soldiers sought refuge any way possible. Private Joseph Pritchard removed the identification from a dead New Yorker and attempted to pass himself off as a Northern soldier. General Henry W. Wessells, in command at Plymouth, reported that *"during the siege and in the night a considerable number of North Carolina soldiers ... left their companies without authority, escaping in canoes, being picked up by our boats in the sound."* Their conduct led to a general loss of confidence in the North Carolina Buffalo regiments.

General I.N. Palmer wrote to his superior in Fort Monroe that General Peck *"not only has no confidence in them, but that he fears they will desert to the enemy."* Palmer himself had little faith in the North Carolinians and their steadfastness in the face a very superior force.

The loss at Plymouth led to another disgraceful incident involving the North Carolina soldiers. On the same day as the surrender at Plymouth, General Palmer ordered the evacuation of Little Washington and the removal of the North Carolina companies to New Bern. *"Not a particle of property was to be destroyed,"* he said in his order, *"as the move was not being made in the face of the enemy."* Despite this, the Northern occupation troops went on a three-day rampage that began at the quartermaster's store of the First North Carolina. The Buffaloes of Company L joined Northern soldiers and sailors, Negroes, and in some instances citizens. Gangs of men patrolled the city, breaking into houses and wantonly destroying everything that they could not carry away. Officers were ignored, and the pillaging ended only when there was nothing left to plunder. To make matters worse, two fires, one purposely set to destroy the bridge, spread and burned much of the town. General Palmer was outraged, calling his own men an *"army of vandals, who were 'not soldiers, but thieves and scoundrels.'"*

To add to the problems of the North Carolinians, two thousand refugees, mostly their wives and children, flooded into New Bern, Beaufort, and other towns, in need of care. For months, the Union army served as a giant welfare agency for these dispossessed persons. Pleas for aid were published in the Northern press, the U. S. Sanitary Commission extended its aid to include destitute whites, collections were taken up among Northern regiments, and North Carolina soldiers were detailed to build houses for the families of the Buffalo regiments. A tent city, to be replaced later by cottages, arose for these families on the banks of Core Sound near Beaufort. These deteriorated within months due to the poor upkeep by its residents.

Despite their low esteem among the army leadership, recruiting for the North Carolina regiments would continue well into 1865. A new Conscription Act passed by Congress in July 1864 provided that each Northern State was at liberty to obtain substitutes in the States in insurrection and have them credited to her quota. This turned the occupied eastern sections of North Carolina into prime recruiting territory. Service in the North Carolina regiments could now be credited to fill the quotas of Northern

states. The August 8, 1864 issue of the *North Carolina Times* reported that “agents for recruiting for the loyal States are thicker in New Berne than locusts, and every boat continues to bring more.” General William Tecumseh Sherman was appalled. His criticism, published in the New Bern paper, complained that “the duty of citizens to fight for their country is too sacred a one to be peddled off by buying up the refuse of other States.” The contest for men attracted corrupt agents who recruited men for their States, then sold the lists to other recruiters to be credited to yet other States.

For the remainder of the war, the North Carolinians, with the exception of Captain Graham’s cavalry company, occupied themselves primarily with garrison duty in Beaufort, New Bern, Hatteras Inlet, Morehead City, and Fort Macon. The Second North Carolina regiment, severely reduced in number following the capture of three of its six companies at Beech Grove and Plymouth, and with the loss of its regimental commander due to wounds received in a skirmish in Little Washington in January, 1865, was dissolved and consolidated with the First North Carolina regiment on February 27, 1865.

The First North Carolina cavalry, under Captain Graham, continued to win headlines and the commendations of Northern military leaders. In mid-February 1865, his company of North Carolinians took twenty-seven Confederates prisoner at Haddock’s Crossroads in Pitt County, then charged into Greenville, took possession, and captured among others, Major Demille³, Confederate Commissary General and former mayor of Little Washington. He then placed his prisoners aboard the Federal steamer *Escort*, and returned to New Bern. The following month, while the remaining North Carolinians remained on garrison duty, Graham’s cavalry joined the Union drive to link up with General Sherman’s army at Goldsboro. The North Carolina Buffalo Yankee cavalry company fought against North Carolina Confederates at Gum Swamp and Wise’s Fork. This closed the war for the Unionist North Carolinians. The First North Carolina was mustered out of Union service in June, 1865.

In June 1869, the flags of the First North Carolina Union Volunteers were placed in the office of Governor William Woods Holden by a guard of honor of United States soldiers. The Raleigh newspaper, in reporting the ceremony, commented that the “day has arrived when the men who fought under these colors are honored among the foremost of the Union heroes.” It noted that some of its members had gone on to serve the state as secretary of state (Surgeon Henry Menninger), state senator (Lt. Joseph Etheridge of Co. E, who had resigned because of feelings of incompetence to lead; Col. W. A. Moore, senator from Carteret), and as merchants, and lawyers.

The error-filled article, in praise of the North Carolina troops turned cowardice into bravery, inaccurately pointing out that 240 state Union soldiers, at the Battle of Plymouth, “stepped forth to sell their lives as dearly as possible or cut their way through the lines and escape.” With time, however, the state forgot the Buffalo regiments that fought for the Union. North Carolinians would come to remember and honor only those who fought for the Confederacy.

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³ The major was the grandfather of famed film director Cecil B. Demille