Dear Friend,

Letters of a Civil War Soldier

First of two articles

Writing of what he called "Mr. Lincoln's Army," the Civil War historian Bruce Catton observed: "The point that is so easy to overlook nowadays, when all of the illusions about war have been abraded to dust, is that those young men went off to war eagerly and with light hearts, coveting the great adventure which they blithely believed lay just ahead. They went to war because they wanted to go, . . . and the obvious fact that in their innocence they did not have the remotest idea what the reality was going to be like does not change the fact. This was the army of the nation's youth."

These are the letters of one of those youths, Hugh C. Perkins—about 17 years of age when he enlisted in the 7th Wisconsin Regiment in the summer of 1861—written to his friend Herbert E. Frisbie, back home in Pine River, Wis. They are the particular letters of a particular soldier in a particular war. But almost a century and a quarter after the final battles of the Civil War, Hugh Perkins's words also speak to us.

The Monitor prints excerpts from these unpublished letters on this assumption—that all letters home from war are finally addressed to all of us.

Camp Randall, Wis.
September 8, 1861

Dear Friend,

We have got our guns and two suits of clothes. We got our new uniform last night. It is a nice one. It consists of a gray jacket, a gray pair of pants, and a gray cap, all fixed off with broad cloak. Our guns are a newly revised musket and very handsome.

All I have got to write on is my cartridge box, and that's good enough. . . .

★ ★ ★

Washington, D.C.
September 29, 1861

Dear Friend,

We left Camp Randall a week ago last Thursday and was just one week on the road. We had an awful old time coming here. At every depot and station on the way the ladies would come out and shake hands with all the soldiers and sometimes kiss them. We was treated first-rate on the way. At every window in every house until we got to Baltimore the women and children were swinging their handkerchiefs and hurrahing.

At Chicago the streets were covered with folks, and we had six men out of every company go ahead to clear the way. We marched through all the principal streets in the city. I never thought that Chicago was such a big place. Every little while there would such sounds go up that it would fairly make us all jump just from spatting hands and stomping of feet. I will never forget that night.

We walked through every city and was cheered by all, but when we got to Baltimore there was quite an opposition. Some of the women would holler "Hurrah for Abe Lincoln," and others at the same time were hollering "Hurrah for Jeff Davis," and they appeared to be very much excited. I seen some prisoners that was just taken and sent to Chicago. You could tell very easy the Secessionists when you met them on the street. They would look awful sour, but they dastent [dare not] say anything. The Secession streets in Baltimore were all dark, while the Union Streets was well lit up.

★ ★ ★

Arlington Heights, Va.
October 14, 1861

Dear Friend,

We have moved across the Potomac, and are now encamped on Arlington Heights, about fourteen miles from Bull

Reprinted by permission from *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 4 & 7, 1983. ©1983 The Christian Science Publishing Society. All rights reserved.

Run, where we expect to have another large battle.

My Uncle Hiram visited here yesterday. He said he had been in three or four skirmishes, but expected to have the hardest battle there he ever was in. Hiram thinks we will not have more than one hard battle, and that it will be the largest on record in modern times. He thinks that all who survive that battle will see their houses before spring.

We expect to move further on towards Dixie in a few days. Our men are all anxious for the big fight to come off.

★ ★ ★

Camp Arlington, Va.
December 7, 1861

Dear Friend,

I hear your school has commenced. I hope you will enjoy yourselves as well as we generally do winters. I wish you all the pleasure imaginable and wish I could help you enjoy it. I don't think this war is going to last many years. It is the opinion of most of the folks that we will be home next Fourth of July. I haven't been homesick yet.

Our camp is situated in a beautiful place. The boys have been ornamenting the streets with cedar trees, and it looks beautiful. They have made an arch of cedars at one end of the street, next to the parade ground, and in the middle hangs the letter "I," designating our company. The Colonel's tent they have ornamented with shells and moss so that everything looks splendid. We are going to be inspected by General [Irvin] McDowell in a few days.

★ ★ ★

Arlington Heights, Va.
January 9, 1862

Dear friend Herbert,

I have just returned from picketing again. We had a first-rate time, only it was pretty cold. It snowed a little that night for the first time here. It made the night awful noisy; and as one sat listening for Rebels, he could imaging he heard them approaching him every few moments, especially if he was a little scairt. One of the boys ordered a bush to halt, and at the same time fired on it. He shot three times at it.

Oh, Herb, I would like to see you first-rate, and all the rest of the folks in Pine River. I expect to before many months. McClellan says that this war is a-going to be short and sweet.

★ ★ ★

Camp Arlington, Va.
March 1, 1862

Dear Friend and Schoolmate,

The 22nd of February we went down to the Arlington House. The whole of McDowell's Division was there, and we had quite a celebration, after which McDowell made us a good speech, and ordered us to give three cheers for the Western boys who had been so successful in the late battles in the South and the taking of Ft. Donaldson, Ft. Henry, and other places; which we did. Twelve thousand men can make quite a noise if they are a mind to.

We all met there again yesterday and had some good orders. They were this: that the Division should be held in readyness to march at a minute's warning with knapsacks packed, and three days' rations cooked ready all the time; and the commandants of companies shall see that every rifle is in good shooting order; and that we must have our regular 40 rounds of sharp cartridges.

After the General had read the orders, the Colonel stepped out and said, "Boys, if them orders exactly suit you, you may cheer," and you had better believe we roused him up three times good. The order states that we must pack our knapsacks as light as possible, and that the officers' clothing must be reduced to a common carpet-sackful. The boys seem to be in the best of spirits, and anxious to smell powder.

I am very much obliged for the program of your school. I suppose you have a good time there this winter. I would like to be with you first-rate, but I can't yet. But I think we will be together by the 4th of July if nothing happens. If I had time I would send you a program of my school (called the Military School), and I will sometime before long.

★ ★ ★

Camp near Fredricksburg, Va.
May 16, 1862

Dear Friend,

I have seen two brisk skirmishes, where we made the Rebels run for their lives.

We still remain on the banks of the Rappahannock. We have got a splendid campground on the river bank facing Fredricksburg in a clover field. The clover is up to our knees. Am now right in a little pine grove filled with flowers of all kinds and beautiful singing birds, . . . which makes the woods a delightful resort for the soldiers.

We live first-rate, especially I and two tentmates of mine. We had the good luck to buy two or three dozen $5.00 Confederate notes at 5 cents apiece when we left our other camp, and when we came to Fredricksburg they went at par with Secesh merchants. I and Joseph Hurd have passed notes to the amount of $41.00 and taken their checks in return, which are current here at par. You may bet we live top-shelf now. We have been here 8 weeks and I haven't eat a ration yet. We buy everything we eat. We have ham and eggs, fries, cakes, tea, milk, soft bread, maple molasses, preserves, fresh strawberries, ice cream, lemonade, and everything that we want. We want to spend all our checks here as we can't get rid of them out of town.

The enemy attacked our pickets again today, but were driven back after losing about 20 horses and men. The bridges are all done as far as here; we will cross today or tomorrow. We expect a great fight.

★ ★ ★

Camp on the battlefield near Slaughter Mt., Va.
August 17, 1862

Dear Friend,

We have had long and tiresome marches all over Virginia since I last wrote to you. [Lt. Gen. Thomas J. (Stonewall)] Jackson has been reinforced and is advancing again. He has a strong line of pickets this side of the Rapidan [River].

We are now under [Gen. John] Pope. He is commanding the Army of Virginia. We will soon be engaged with Jackson's army. Now that McClellan has left the James River and they have nothing to fear from that direction, we will have to contend with the entire Secesh Army. The Secesh are down on Gen. Pope. They would hang him in two minutes if they could get him. They have ordered every officer that is taken under him to be treated as a guerrilla and hung.

Oh Herbert, I have been all over the battlefield, and it looks hard to see men buried like a lot of hogs, 12 or 15 together. But I suppose they feel just as well as though they had ever so nice a grave and coffin.

We had nothing to brag of in this fight. If anything I think we got the worst of it, but the boys are willing to try the thing once again. There is the large armies to meet soon. You will probably hear of a fight before long. *That* will be a fight. We haven't laid round here in Virginia all this time for nothing.

★ ★ ★

Camp on the battlefield, Md.
September 21, 1862

Dear Friend,

You said you did not know but I had forgot to write. It is not so. I may think of it every day, but it is easier to think of than do when on the march and expecting to meet the enemy every moment.

I have been in six battles. There is only four files in our company now. We have had the lead of this army clear from Fredrick. The Rebs have skedaddled before us. They made a grand stand here on this field for three days. In this battle our four files was not broke. We was in the hottest of the fight and lost not a man.

I was detained to help bury the dead. It was an awful sight. Some were killed so instantly that they never changed their position. Some was sitting up in the very act of loading, with their cartridges in their mouth and gun still in their hands. The Rebs fight like mad men. They will not leave the field until they are badly whipped, and sometimes they don't get a chance to leave then alive.

Herbert, I have seen some hard times and a good deal more than I expected to. My comrades and tentmates have fell on each side of me, and I am still alive and without a scratch. I have had the balls come so close that they made my face smart, but it didn't break the hide. It has got so that it does not excite me any more to be in action than to be in a corn field hoeing, or digging potatoes.

Only think of it, Herbert, of our 98 brave Waushara [County] boys, there is only eight here now fit for duty. There is not many sick at present. We have no stragglers like some companies, but still the men are gone. They have died the soldier's death or have been wounded on the field of battle. We haven't a coward in our company.

★ ★ ★

Camp on the battlefield of Antietam
September 26, 1862

Dear friend Herbert,

I have been in six very hard and hand-to-hand fights. The first we had was at Gainesville. Our brigade marched up there just at dark and engaged a whole division of Rebs. We fought an hour and 15 minutes, and our brigade lost 750 men.

The next fight we had at Bull Run, where Billy Mitchell got wounded. The next at South Mountain and two between there and here. We had the post of honor given to us at Bull Run by Gen. McClellan and have kept it ever since. We were the last to leave the field at Bull Run and have commenced every battle since then. Gen. McClellan calls us the Iron Brigade. By gaining this name, we have lost from the brigade seventeen hundred and fifty men. We have never turned our backs to the enemy in any engagement, although they have outnumbered us every fight we have had.

At the battle of South Mt. we was ordered to support a battery. We done so, and repulsed the Rebs 4 times. As they was approaching the fourth time, we got pretty near out of cartridges. At that Gen. [Abner] Doubleday came up to our Brigadier Gen. and told him in a great excitement that his brigade was out of cartridges and the battle would be taken men and all. Our little general heard his story clear through and then turned to him and said, "Don't you be alarmed about my brigade. They have got a few cartridges, I guess, and when them are gone they will hold it if they have to do it by the point of the bayonet." And we did hold it.

Herbert, you spoke about me forgetting an old friend. That can never be so long as I live, but we have been under fire for 28 days at a time and had to keep our cartridge boxes on all the time. So we didn't get much chance to write. I think I will have a chance to do better.

★ ★ ★

Camp Arlington, Va.
November 22, 1862

Dear Friend,

You said you had some thoughts of enlisting. Now I will tell you one thing. I would not advise you to enlist, for I don't know how you might like a soldier's life. But Herb, if I had not enlisted I would the first chance I could get. Others may say what they please. I like the life first-rate. If a man wants to see the world, here is the place for him. I have seen more since I enlisted than I ever expected to see in my life.

We had a grand review day before yesterday. There were one hundred and eighteen regiments there. All the head officers, McClellan and McDowell and lots of others, besides the President of the United States, Abe Lincoln, and Governor Randall of Wisconsin. Of all the cheering you ever heard, there was the best of it. They took one Secesh that day, watching our movements.

We have just received news that 1,500 [Rebels] have arrived at Alexandria and delivered their arms and offered to turn and fight for the Union. But it may not be, so we will know by tomorrow whether it is or not.

From your friend,
Hugh C. Perkins

★ ★ ★

Second of two articles

April 9 marks the 118th anniversary of the Battle of Appomattox, and Lee's surrender to Grant. These unpublished letters of a young soldier, Hugh C. Perkins, written to his friend Herbert Frisbie back home in Pine River, Wis., describe that historic moment, and offer a very personal account of the years leading up to it. Only two other Union regiments had more casualties than the 7th Wisconsin, in which Hugh Perkins served.

Near Culpeper, Va.
March 26, 1864

My dear friend,

I saw General Grant in Alexandria. He is a pretty tough-looking man for Lieutenant General, but I guess he is all right on the fight questions. He came up to the headquarters of the Potomac Army the same day I did; that was day before yesterday. He is a-going to make us get right up and climb in a few days.

Herbert, I hope the time will be when we will be together again. I have faith that we will.

★ ★ ★

Near Culpeper, Va.
April 14, 1864

Dearest Friend,

We have to drill almost all the time to teach these awkward recruits. There is some of them that take hold and try to learn, but the most of them are as awkward as mules.

The weather is very pleasant here now. We have orders to be ready to march. We have sent off all our extra clothing, and we will soon commence active service again. I expect we will see some hard fighting this summer. We are practicing twice a week, shooting at a mark. We shoot about 20 rounds, while the recruits are shooting from five to ten. I can hear some heavy firing this morning beyond the picket line. I think by the sound it is cavalry and artillery skirmishing. The boys are all in good spirits, and the raws are waiting very impatiently to be initiated in the science of battling for their country, as they call it, but as the vets term it, fighting for greenbacks.

I was on picket day before yesterday, and it was raining very hard, when General [Lysander] Cutler and several other high officials came to see how the pickets was making it. They had just got opposite our regiment when Thurstin, one of Company E boys, hollered out, "Oh, my greenbacks, how I do suffer for thee."

Old Cutler looked round and, says he, "Boys, that's pretty rough. You had ought to say 'country' instead of 'greenbacks.' "

"I know it," says Thurstin, "but, General, I can't lie. It was greenbacks that I enlisted for."

So the old fellow rode on and said no more, but I guess he thought we was a pretty hard set.

Herbert, there is no letter that I get that does me as much good to read as yours. You know just what I want to hear. Every little thing that you may think is of no account is just the very thing that does the soldier's soul good to hear, and you know it. Be sure and write as soon as you receive this.

★ ★ ★

Camp near Culpeper, Va.
May 3, 1864

My dearest friend Herbert,

The Rebs have crossed the Rapidan [River] 85,000 strong. They have advanced their picket line within three-quarters of a mile of ours. They say if we don't soon pitch in, they will. I hope they will be as good as their word, for I would a great deal rather be the attacked party than the party to attack.

I came pretty near to getting taken prisoner again while I was on picket the other day. I went beyond our line after some milk and other eatables. We went about half a mile to a house, got our dinner and some milk, and come to find out we was in plain sight of the Rebel pickets. We had just got started for camp when we saw a squad of the graybacks' cavalry coming toward us at full gallop hollering, "Halt, you — Yankees." As we had no guns our only safety was the woods, and to the pine woods we went double quick, and the Rebs after us. They chased us to our picket line, where we made a bold stand, and they retreated in good order. The recruits thought this was pretty dangerous.

★ ★ ★

Chestnut Hill Hospital, Philadelphia
May 17, 1864

Dear Friend,

I take this opportunity of informing you that I am yet alive, although I have got a pretty bad knee. It don't work worth a cent, but I think it will be all right in a short time.

We had a very hard fight the fifth of May. Our company's loss was very severe. It was a hot place, I can tell you, but we all done our best and drove the Rebels about three miles through the thickest woods you ever saw. The recruits fought like tigers.

We have the best of care here in Philadelphia, and plenty to eat. I am in hopes soon to be able to walk round again. I would like to get uptown. Philadelphia is a very nice place.

I am in hopes that this summer's campaign will settle the war. The Army was never in better condition than when we left our quarters at Culpeper. We were all in the best of spirits. I little thought of getting wounded while we were making the charge and driving the Rebels like chaff. I think we killed and wounded a great many more than they did. But our loss was very heavy after all.

★ ★ ★

Chestnut Hill Hospital, Philadelphia
May 27, 1864

My dear Herbert,

I am getting along finely. This is one of the largest hospitals in the United States. There is a splendid grove of chestnuts

close by it, with seats, swings, ball alley, and quoits, and they are all [used] every day by the more able patients. There is men among them that have been here for two years, and not a thing the matter with them. Oh! Herbert, I could almost shoot them, when they are needed as badly as they are now in the field to be playing in a hospital.

★ ★ ★

After being wounded, Hugh Perkins spent the summer in Wisconsin on furlough. In October he returned to his regiment.

City Point, Va.
October 2, 1864

Dear Friend,

The Rebel prisoners are a-coming in in droves, and they say our corps is within a mile and a half of Richmond and driving the Rebs before them. I will soon be with my old regiment again, enjoying its pleasures and hardships. God knows it will seem good to me.

★ ★ ★

City Point, Va.
October 16, 1864

Dear Friend,

You say I have friends in Pine River. Well, I suppose I have, and that's not the only place I have friends. No, Herbert, if my friends at home should all desert me, my brothers in arms would yet stick by me to the last. I have never seen a happier time in my life than these two weeks past since I have been with my old true-hearted friends.

I have got a permanent detail at division headquarters, as provost guard for General [Samuel W.] Crawford where I am now doing duty. I have no picket duty to do, no knapsack to carry on a march. In a fight we have to form a skirmish line in the rear of the main line of battle and keep the skedaddlers up to their knitting, besides taking care of prisoners.

We have plenty to do here, and the best the service affords. We have for variety mackerel, potatoes, beans, pork, beef, onions, warm light bread, sugar, coffee, molasses, pickles, pepper, salt, and vinegar. I never drawed half so many rations before, nor I never had so good an appetite. I am getting as fat as a pig.

We have to put on a great deal of style. We are the best drilled company of one hundred men you ever saw together. They furnish us shoe blacking and white gloves, and we have to have all new clothes on while on duty or parade. We are a regular band-box company.

On the [presidential] election question, there was a great many of our boys for Gen. McClellan until about a week ago. We were on picket about a mile from Petersburg. We had been on scarcely a half hour when we were up on our breastworks, both us and our Johnny friends with daily papers in our hands. We made a few exchanges of papers, when General Crawford and staff made his appearance. But the Rebs still remained on their breastwork, and hollered, "Hurrah for McClellan." Our boys hurrahed for Lincoln.

We then began to talk the matter over, and we all agreed that what the Rebels liked was just what we had no right to like, and if it was going to do them so much good to elect McClellan, we just wouldn't do it. Since that you hardly hear McClellan's name mentioned in our regiment. Three weeks ago they would have given him a majority. McClellan is played out in the Army. Herbert, you may bet it now lays with the citizens of the North.

★ ★ ★

Near Petersburg, Va.
November 1, 1864

Dear Friend,

The boys are in the best of spirits. Old Abe had distanced McClellan on this track. The Reb prisoners say they should stand it four years longer if Abe was elected, and we told them we could stand it for forty years, and anyway, as long as Abe lived he should stay at the White House. They are pretty spunky. They are just as good soldiers as us, but not better, but we slightly outnumber them.

★ ★ ★

Camp near Petersburg, Va.
November 22, 1864

Dear Friend,

We haven't been paid off yet, but we expect to every day. But we may not be until next month. If not, I will have one year's pay coming. I shall send it in Government bonds if at all possible. I will send all except fifteen dollars. If I happen to get put out of the way, I want my mother to have it all.

The Rebel deserters come in here by the hundreds every day. They say it is common talk with both officers and privates that as soon as they hear for certain of Lincoln's reelection, they will desert if it is a possible thing. They say when Abe is elected their last hope dies forever.

★ ★ ★

Near the Jerusalem Plank Road
December 15, 1864

Dear Friend,

I received your letter last night and was very glad to hear from an old friend, especially when so worn out with marching. For eight days we were on the march night and day. We tore up forty miles of railroad for the Johns [Johnny Rebs].

It was the most successful raid of the war, especially for the infantry. We have one of the finest flocks of horses and cattle captured that you ever saw.

We have not been paid off yet. We expect it this month certain.

★ ★ ★

Camp of the Provost near the Jerusalem Plank
January 3, 1865

Dear Friend,

I was just thinking, Herbert, that had I not enlisted I would

likely have been going to school this winter, hugging and kissing the Pine River belles, sleigh riding, and having all the fun imaginable. But why should we mourn departed souls or cry for spilt milk? Here I am, well and hearty after three years' hard service, and only one year and a bit of a chunk to stay; while there is hundreds of others who have not stood the racket of one campaign, and now they lay deep down in the Virginia mud, taking their last sleep. No, Herbert, I have no reason to complain, even while comparing my fare with that of the regiment.

We will be paid off by the fifteenth of this month, so says the officers. Herbert, what say you to going west after I get home? I think we would like it where the game is plenty. The boys are all talking strong of it here.

★ ★ ★

Headquarters, Third Division, Fifth Army Corps
January 22, 1865

Dear Friend,

There is no news of importance, excepting the capture of Fort Fisher [North Carolina], which you have heard of before this. For fear you haven't seen Leslie's [Illustrated Newspaper] I will send you a picture, as drawn by one of my tent mates.

We have not seen the paymaster yet. Some think he will not get here until March.

I was over to the Thirty-Eighth the other day. Had a good visit with Charley Cook, Bill Barr, and several others. We all went to bed in a bombproof [shelter], and about twelve o'clock it commenced to rain. When it had rained about two hours, the whole thing caved in, and let about two foot of water in onto our bed. Was we not in a pretty fix.

Then our tent fell from the top, and left us with no cover except the heavens, and we was obliged to stand up and take it until morning. It was then you could hear the boys say, "Oh! if I was only at home. What did I enlist for?"

"Oh!" says Charley, "I wish I was in my old mother's clothes basket and under the bed."

I told them that was nothing, but they couldn't see it that way. They have it pretty hard. They are on picket every other day, and if they miss roll call they are on every day. They are all sorry they did not go in our regiment.

★ ★ ★

Near the South Side Rail Road, Va.
March 1, 1865

Kind Herbert,

I have just been paid off.

We have had some hard marching and fighting since I last wrote you. I received your letter the day we had the fight at Hatcher's Run. We have just got settled after the hardest campaign we have had for some time. Our division lost one quarter of their men. Our brigade suffered the most of any in the division. I tell you, it was pretty hard laying down in the mud nights to sleep after a hard day's march.

Deserters come in every day. Our boys trade and converse with the Rebels, while on picket.

★ ★ ★

Camp of the Provost Guard
March 21, 1865

Friend Herbert,

The Rebs have sent more peace commissioners to Washington. There is pretty strong talk of a settlement. They know their only terms of peace.

★ ★ ★

Near Burkville, Va.
April 19, 1865

Friend Herbert,

I have seen some pretty rough times since we left camp near Petersburg. We marched about thirty miles the first day, slept all night, in the morning had a fight; got pretty badly licked. Our loss was pretty heavy. The Rebs attacked our column while marching in four ranks. The boys had no time to form a line of battle. We (Provost) formed our lines and tried to stop stragglers and send them back, but they couldn't see them go back [because of fog]. But they said they would stand as long as we would, so the line formed and we held the Rebs for about half an hour, though our loss was great.

The Johnnies (Johnny Rebs) then got on our left flank and everlastingly made us git. I never run so in my life. The trees was knocked endwise with shot and shell. The flying Yankees could be seen biting the dust in every direction. Twas a horrid sight. But our men rallied at a creek and fought rather than swim. We then turned on them, gave them a Yankee yell, drove them [back] over the same ground, and advanced one mile beyond our first line, but our loss was the heaviest.

We laid on the field that night in the rain, expecting to go in to it in the morning. But instead our whole corps moved to the left, and left that field, for we had word from [General Philip H.] Sheridan that he had been overpowered by infantry and cavalry combined. We marched about fourteen miles, made the attack in the rear of some formidable fortifications of the Johnnies.

The fight commenced, sun about two hours high, and at dark we had a whole Rebel division killed, wounded, or prisoners. Our division charged. They charged five times. It was charge after charge. The Rebs flew like chaff, but night closed the ball or we would have had the whole force.

That fight the Rebs say was the lock-picker of Richmond. They were April-fooled, although they have just the best kind of breastworks. We followed the remnant of that force night and day, skirmishing and taking prisoners and stragglers until we got them all except a few that took to their homes for safety.

We then followed after the cavalry, got in ahead of old [Gen. Robert E.] Lee, cut off his wagon train and some artillery fortified in his front, and compelled him to go about ten miles out of his way. As soon as we got him started, we (the Fifth Corps and Cavalry) again marched night and day to meet him again at Appomattox Court House, while the rest of the army followed him so close he lost his rear guard and the men of his train that was left.

The last day's march Sheridan came back and said if we could make the court house that night, we might expect glorious results, for it was the door that closed old Lee in on all sides, and retreat was impossible.

We reached the court house at about two o'clock in the morning. Lee had not yet arrived, and we rested two hours. Lee's columns could be seen at daylight, advancing slowly, driving our cavalry in the direction afore him. The cavalry came flying back. We lay behind the top of the hill. We poured in a volley [of bullets] and charged. My God what a skedaddle. We chased them through town.

Just at sunrise we came upon their force that was massed. We halted our artillery of one hundred guns, got into position, and when about ready to open the ball a second time the white flags were hoisted from every tree, and Lee wished an interview with Grant. Didn't want to surrender to Sheridan; preferred a man of his rank. I saw the whole maneuvering from the top of a house. The two generals met under an apple tree. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia.

Herbert, I think the war is played out. I think I shall be home by the Fourth. We have a chance now to enlist in the regulars for five years, but I can't see it.

Oh! Herbert, isn't it awful about old Abe. I would like to have the killing of old Wilkes Booth.

I am in hopes I will be where I can give you a better account of our campaign, as well as have a good visit with your honorable self. I think the time is close at hand.

★ ★ ★

Camp opposite Washington
May 21, 1865

Friend Herbert,

We have had some hard marching since I last wrote you. We marched through the city of Richmond and arrived once more on the banks of the old Potomac. Tomorrow is the grand review of the Potomac Army. Next day comes Sherman's Army.

That review will be a big thing, I expect. The Rebs is played out, and I expect soon to be home. We hear some talk about keeping the vets, but I can't think our Government is mean enough to do such a thing. If they do they will have trouble with them, if I mistake not.

The time never went off so slow in the world as at the present time. When we were in the field we knew we were needed, and we were willing to stay. But now there can be no earthly use in keeping us, as we can see.

Oh, Herbert, I never could stand soldiering in time of peace. Deliver me from being a regular.

I hope we will be home by the Fourth of July. What a gay time we will have, Herbert. I think I shall not stay long in Wisconsin. I think I will spend my days in old Virginia. There is a good chance for me beyond Richmond, which I will tell you of when I see you.

Write soon, Herbert. I am out of money. Please send me ten dollars.

From your ever true friend,

Hugh C. Perkins

After the war the friends had their reunion. Then Hugh Perkins returned to school in a neighboring town, and later moved to Sherwood Forest in central Wisconsin, where he went into the logging business. In the last letter in the existent collection, dated May 29, 1881, Hugh wrote: "I have got to be a very poor hand to write letters, but I like my old friends as well as ever."

These letters were compiled and edited by Marilyn Gardner, editor of the Monitor's Living page. She is the great-granddaughter of Herbert Frisbie, to whom the letters were written.

THE SLAVES FREED

Stephen B. Oates

☆ *Stephen B. Oates, a frequent contributor to our pages, is the author of biographies of Nat Turner, John Brown, and Abraham Lincoln.*

When the cold, fastidious Mississippian rose to speak, a hush fell over the crowded Senate chamber. It was January 21, 1861, and Jefferson Davis and four other senators from the Deep South were here this day to announce their resignations. Over the winter, five Southern states had seceded from the Union, contending that Abraham Lincoln's election as President doomed the white man's South, that Lincoln and his fellow Republicans were abolitionist fanatics out to eradicate slavery and plunge Dixie into racial chaos. Though the Republicans had pledged to leave the peculiar institution alone where it already existed, Deep Southerners refused to believe them and left the Union to save their slave-based society from Republican aggression.

For his part, Jefferson Davis regretted that Mississippi had been obliged to secede, and he had spent a sleepless night, distressed about the breakup of the Union and fearful of the future. To be sure, he loved the idea of a Southern confederacy; and he had warned Republicans that if the South could not depart in peace, a war would begin, the likes of which man had never seen before. But today, as he gave his valedictory in the Senate, Davis was sad and forlorn, his voice quavering. He bore his Republican adversaries no hostility, he said, and wished them and their people well. He apologized if in the heat of debate he had offended anybody—and he forgave those who had insulted him. "Mr. President and Senators," he said with great difficulty, "having made the announcement which the occasion seemed to me to require, it only remains for me to bid you a final adieu."

Several senators were visibly moved, and there were audible sobs in the galleries. As Davis made his exit, with Southern ladies waving handkerchiefs and crying out in favor of secession, Republicans stared grimly after him, realizing perhaps for the first time that the South was in earnest, the Union was disintegrating.

As Lincoln's inauguration approached and more Southern congressmen resigned to join the Confederacy, Republicans gained control of both houses and voted to expel the secessionists as traitors. Senator Lyman Trumbull of Illinois pronounced them all mad, and Charles Sumner of Massachusetts exhorted the free states to stand firm in the crisis. Michigan's Zachariah Chandler vowed to whip the South back into the Union and preserve the integrity of the government. And Ben Wade of Ohio predicted that secession would bring about the destruction of slavery, the very thing Southerners dreaded most. "The first blast of civil war," he had thundered at them, "is the death warrant of your institution."

After the events at Fort Sumter, Wade, Chandler, and Sumner called repeatedly at the White House and spoke with Lincoln about slavery and the rebellion. Sumner was a tall, elegant bachelor, with rich brown hair, a massive forehead, blue eyes, and a rather sad smile. He had traveled widely in England, where his friends included some of the most eminent political and literary figures. A humorless, erudite Bostonian, educated at Harvard, Sumner even looked English, with his tailored coats, checkered trousers, and English gaiters. He was so conscious of manners "that he never allowed himself, even in the privacy of his own chamber, to fall into a position which he would not take in his chair in the Senate. 'Habit,' he said, "is everything.' " Sumner spoke out with great courage against racial injustice and was one of the few Republicans who advocated complete Negro equality. Back in 1856 Representative Preston Brooks of South Carolina had beaten him almost to death in the Senate Chamber for his "Crime Against Kansas" speech, and Sumner still carried physical and psychological scars from that attack. The senator now served as Lincoln's chief foreign policy adviser, often accompanied him on his carriage rides, and became the President's warm personal friend.

Zachariah Chandler was a Detroit businessman who had amassed a fortune in real estate and dry goods.

 ©1980 American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc. Reprinted by permission from AMERICAN HERITAGE (December 1980).

Profane, hard-drinking, and eternally grim, Chandler had been one of the founders of the national Republican party and had served on the Republican National Committee in 1856 and 1860. Elected to the Senate in 1857, he had plunged into the acrimonious debates over slavery in the West, exhorting his colleagues not to surrender another inch of territory to slaveholders. When Southerners threatened to murder Republicans, brandishing pistols and bowie knives in the Senate itself, Chandler took up calisthenics and improved his marksmanship in case he had to fight. Once civil war commenced, he demanded that the government suppress the "armed traitors" of the South with all-out warfare.

Now serving his second term in the Senate, Benjamin Franklin Wade was short and thick chested, with iron-gray hair, sunken black eyes, and a square and beardless face. He was blunt and irascible, known as "Bluff Ben" for his readiness to duel with slaveowners, and he told more ribald jokes than any other man in the Senate, but he also had a charitable side: once when he spotted a destitute neighbor robbing his corncrib, Wade moved out of sight in order not to humiliate the man. Once the war began, he was determined that Congress should have an equal voice with Lincoln in shaping Union war policies. According to diplomat Rudolf Schleiden, Wade was "perhaps the most energetic personality in the entire Congress." "That queer, rough, but intelligent-looking man," said one Washington observer, "is old Senator Wade of Ohio, who doesn't care a pinch of snuff whether people like what he says or not." Wade hated slavery as Sumner and Chandler did. But like most whites of his generation, he was prejudiced against blacks: he complained about their "odor," growled about all the "Nigger" cooks in Washington, and insisted that he had eaten food "cooked by Niggers until I can smell and taste the Nigger . . . all over." Like many Republicans, he thought the best solution to America's race problem was to ship all Negroes back to Africa.

As far as the Republican party was concerned, the three senators belonged to a loose faction inaccurately categorized as "radicals," a misnomer that has persisted through the years. These "more advanced Republicans," as the Detroit *Post* and *Tribune* referred to them, were really progressive, nineteenth-century liberals who felt a powerful kinship with English liberals like John Bright and Richard Cobden. What advanced Republicans wanted was to reform the American system—to bring their nation into line with the Declaration's premise—by ridding it of slavery and the South's ruling planter class. But while the advanced Republicans supported other social reforms, spoke out forthrightly against the crime and anachronism of slavery, and refused to compromise with the "Slave Power," they desired no radical break from basic American ideals and liberal institutions. Moreover, they were often at odds with one another on such issues as currency, the tariff, and precisely what rights black people should exercise in American white society.

Before secession, the advanced Republicans had endorsed the party's hands-off policy about slavery in the South: they all agreed that Congress had no constitutional authority to menace slavery as a state institution; all agreed, too, that the federal government could only abolish slavery in the national capital and outlaw it in the national territories, thus containing the institution in the South where they hoped it would ultimately perish. But civil war had removed their constitutional scruples about slavery in the Southern states, thereby bringing about the first significant difference between them and the more "moderate" and "conservative" members of the party. While the latter insisted that the Union must be restored with slavery intact, the advanced Republicans argued that the national government could now remove the peculiar institution by the war powers, and they wanted the President to do it in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief. This was what Sumner, Wade, and Chandler came to talk about with Lincoln. They respected the President, had applauded his nomination, campaigned indefatigably in his behalf, and cheered his firm stand at Fort Sumter. Now they urged him to destroy slavery as a war measure, pointing out that this would maim and cripple the Confederacy and hasten an end to the rebellion. Sumner flatly asserted that slavery and the rebellion were "mated" and would stand or fall together.

WHY THE PRESIDENT HELD BACK

Lincoln seemed sympathetic. He detested human bondage as much as they did, and he wanted to stay on good terms with advanced Republicans on Capitol Hill, for he needed their support in prosecuting the war. Moreover, he respected the senators and referred to men like Sumner as the conscience of the party.

Yet to the senators' dismay, he would not free the slaves, could not free them. For one thing, he had no intention of alienating moderate and conservative Republicans—the majority of the party—by issuing an emancipation decree. For another, emancipation would almost surely send the loyal slave states—Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri—spiraling into the Confederacy, something that would be calamitous to the Union. Then, too, Lincoln was waging a bipartisan war with Northern Democrats and Republicans alike enlisting in his armies. An abolition policy, Lincoln feared, would splinter that coalition, perhaps even cause a new civil war behind Union lines.

Though deeply disappointed, the three senators at first acquiesced in Lincoln's policy because they wanted to maintain Republican unity in combating the rebellion. Sumner told himself that at bottom Lincoln was "a deeply convinced and faithful anti-slavery man" and that the sheer pressure of war would force him to strike at Negro bondage eventually.

On July 4, 1861, the Thirty-seventh Congress convened with a rebel army entrenched less than thirty miles away. Republicans controlled both houses, and the advanced Republicans quickly gained positions of leadership out of

proportion to their numbers. Many had been in Congress for years, and their uncompromising stand against slavery expansion and concessions to secessionists had won them accolades from all manner of Republicans. Like Chandler, several advanced Republicans had helped establish the national party; all were prominent in their state parties. Their prestige, skill, and energy—Chandler, for example, routinely put in eighteen-hour workdays—had helped bring them to positions of power on Capitol Hill.

In the Senate, advanced Republicans chaired nearly all the crucial committees. Sumner ran the committee on foreign relations, Chandler the committee on commerce, and Wade the committee on territories. In addition, Lyman Trumbull of Illinois, a dry, logical speaker with sandy hair and gold-rimmed spectacles, headed the judiciary committee. Henry Wilson, Sumner's Massachusetts colleague, a stout, beardless, red-faced businessman who had once been a shoemaker's apprentice, held Jefferson Davis's old job as chairman of the committee on military affairs. William Pitt Fessenden of Maine, impeccably dressed in his black jackets and black silk ties, famous for his forensic duels with Stephen A. Douglas before the war, chaired the finance committee and cooperated closely with Salmon Chase, Lincoln's Secretary of the Treasury. Fessenden had been born out of wedlock—a terrible stigma in that time—and the awful, unspoken shame of his illegitimacy had made him proud and quick to take offense, intolerant of human failings in others as well as himself. He and Sumner had once been friends, had called one another "my dear Sumner" and "my dear Fessenden," and often entered the Senate arm in arm. But Fessenden had taken umbrage at what he thought were Sumner's haughty airs, and their friendship had changed to bristling animosity. Fessenden remained "old friends" with Wade and Chandler, though, and also hobnobbed with Jacob Collamer of Vermont, a Republican conservative.

Advanced Republicans were equally prominent in the House. There was James Ashley of Ohio, an emotional, dramatic man with a curly brown mane, who chaired the committee on territories. There was George Washington Julian from Indiana, protégé of Joshua "Old War Horse" Giddings and a contentious, frowning individual who proved himself a formidable antislavery legislator. There was portly, unkempt Owen Lovejoy of Illinois, brother of Elijah, the abolitionist martyr; an eloquent antislavery orator, he headed the committee on agriculture. Like Sumner, Lovejoy was a close friend of Lincoln's—"the *best* friend I had in Congress," the President once remarked—and strove to sustain administration policies while simultaneously pushing the main cause of emancipation.

Finally there was sixty-nine-year-old Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, who controlled the nation's purse strings as chairman of the powerful committee on ways and means. Afflicted with a clubfoot, Stevens was a grim, sardonic bachelor with a cutting wit ("I now yield to Mr. B.," he once said, "who will make a few feeble remarks") and a fondness for gambling that took him almost nightly to Washington's casinos. To the delight of his colleagues, he indulged in witticisms so off color that they had to be deleted from the *Congressional Globe*. A wealthy ironmaster with a Jekyll-and-Hyde personality, he had contributed generously to charities and causes, crusaded for public schools in Pennsylvania, and defended fugitive slaves there. Crippled, as Fawn Brodie has noted, Stevens spoke of bondage "in terms of shackled limbs and a longing for freedom to dance." He lived with his mulatto housekeeper, Lydia Smith, and there is strong evidence that they were lovers. Antimiscegenation laws made marriage impossible, and their liaison not only generated malicious gossip but probably kept Stevens from becoming what he most wanted to be—a United States senator. He liked to quote the Bible that "He hath made of one blood all nations of men," yet he never championed complete equality for blacks—"not equality in all things," he once asserted, "simply before the laws, nothing else." Serving a fourth term as congressman, this bitter, intimidating, high-minded man was to rule the Civil War House and become "the master-spirit," said Alexander McClure, "of every aggressive movement in Congress to overthrow the rebellion and slavery."

As the session progressed that summer, congressional Republicans demonstrated remarkable harmony. They all wanted to preserve the Union and help the President fight the war through to a swift and successful conclusion. In agreement with Lincoln's slave policy, congressional Republicans also voted for the so-called Crittenden-Johnson resolutions, which declared that the sole purpose of the war was to restore the Union. For the sake of party unity, most advanced Republicans reluctantly supported the resolutions, too. But they agreed with Congressman Albert Riddle of Ohio that slavery ought to be destroyed. "You all believe that it is to go out, when it does, through convulsion, fire and blood," Riddle stormed on the House floor. "That convulsion is upon us. The man is a delirious ass who does not see it and realize this. For me, I mean to make a conquest of it; to beat it to extinction under the iron hoofs of our war horses."

For the advanced Republicans, the first chance to strike at slavery came late in July, after the Union rout at Bull Run. Observing that rebel forces used slaves to carry weapons and perform other military tasks, the advanced Republicans vigorously championed a confiscation bill, which authorized the seizure of any slave employed in the Confederate war effort, and they mustered almost unanimous Republican support in pushing the measure through Congress. Border-state Democrats like John J. Crittenden of Kentucky complained that the bill was unconstitutional, but most Republicans agreed with Henry Wilson that "if traitors use bondmen to destroy this country, my doctrine is that the Government shall at once convert those bondmen into men that cannot be used to destroy our country." In war, Republicans contended, the government had every right to confiscate enemy property—including slave property—as legitimate contraband.

Though the bill was hardly a general emancipation act, advanced Republicans hailed its passage as an important first step. They were glad indeed when Lincoln signed the bill into law and commanded his armies to enforce it. At last the President appeared to be coming around to their views.

But they had misunderstood him. When General John Charles Frémont, commander of the Western Department, ordered that the slaves of all rebels in Missouri be "declared freemen," Lincoln pronounced this a dangerous and unauthorized political act that would alienate the loyal border and commanded Frémont to modify his order so that it accorded strictly with the congressional confiscation act. Though border Unionists applauded Lincoln, advanced Republicans were dismayed that he had overruled Frémont's emancipation decree. Sumner declared that Lincoln "is now a dictator." Wade charged that Lincoln's opinions on slavery "could only come of one, born of 'poor white trash' and educated in a slave State." And Fessenden denounced the President for his "weak and unjustifiable concession to the Union men of the border States."

THE ADVANCED REPUBLICANS: FREEDOM "A PRESSING AND ABSOLUTE NECESSITY"

THE PRESIDENT: "THIS THUNDERBOLT WILL KEEP"

Still, the Frémont episode did not cause an irreparable split between Lincoln and the advanced Republicans, as some writers have claimed. In fact, when Lincoln subsequently removed the general from command, Trumbull, Chandler, and Lovejoy sustained the President, conceding that the celebrated Pathfinder and first standard-bearer of their party was a maladroit administrator. But in the fall and winter of 1861, advanced Republicans did mount an all-out campaign to make the obliteration of slavery a Union war objective. One after another they came to the White House—Wade, Chandler, and Trumbull, Sumner, Julian, and Lovejoy—and implored and badgered the President to issue an emancipation proclamation on military grounds. With the war dragging on, they insisted that slavery must be attacked in order to weaken the Confederate ability to fight.

Moreover, they argued, slavery had caused the conflict and was now the cornerstone of the Confederacy. It was absurd to fight a war without removing the thing that had brought it about. Should Lincoln restore the Union with slavery preserved, Southerners would just start another war whenever they thought the institution threatened, so that the present struggle would have been in vain. If Lincoln really wanted to salvage the Union, he must hurl his armies at the heart of the rebellion. He must tear slavery out root and branch and smash the South's arrogant planters—those mischievous men the advanced Republicans believed had masterminded secession and fomented war. The annihilation of slavery, Julian asserted, was "not a debatable and distant alternative, but a pressing and absolute necessity." So what if most of the country opposed emancipation lest it result in an exodus of Southern blacks into the North? "It was the duty of the President," he said "to lead, not follow public opinion."

Sumner, as Lincoln's foreign policy adviser, also linked emancipation to opinion overseas. There was a strong possibility that Britain would recognize the Confederacy as an independent nation—potentially disastrous for the Union since the Confederacy could then form alliances and seek mediation, perhaps even armed intervention. But, Sumner argued, if Lincoln made the destruction of slavery a Union war aim, Britain would balk at recognition and intervention because of her own antislavery tradition. And whatever powerful Britain did, the rest of Europe was sure to follow.

Also, as Sumner kept saying, emancipation would break the chains of several million oppressed human beings and right America at last with her own ideals. Lincoln and the Republican party could no longer wait to remove slavery. The President must do it by the war powers. The rebellion, monstrous and terrible though it was, had given him the opportunity.

But Lincoln still did not agree. "I think Sumner and the rest of you would upset our applecart altogether if you had your way," he told some advanced Republicans one day. "We didn't go into the war to put down slavery, but to put the flag back; and to act differently at this moment would, I have no doubt, not only weaken our cause, but smack of bad faith. . . . This thunderbolt will keep." And in his message to Congress in December of 1861, the President declared that he did not want the war degenerating into "a violent and remorseless revolutionary struggle." He was striving, he said, "to keep the integrity of the Union prominent as the primary object of the contest."

Advanced Republicans were deeply aggrieved. Fessenden thought the President had lost all hold on Congress, and Wade complained that not even a galvanic battery could inspire Lincoln to "courage, decision and enterprise." "He means well," wrote Trumbull, "and in ordinary times would have made one of the best of Presidents, but he lacks confidence in himself and the *will* necessary in this great emergency."

LINCOLN'S FIRST MOVE

IMMEDIATE EMANCIPATION STILL "TOO BIG A LICK"

By year's end, though, Lincoln's mind had begun to change. He spoke with Sumner about emancipation and assured the senator that "the only difference between you and me on this subject is a difference of a month or six weeks in time." And he now felt, he said, that the war "was a great movement by God to end Slavery and that the man would be a fool who should stand in the way." But out of deference to the loyal border states, Lincoln still shied away from a sweeping executive decree and searched about for an alternative. On

March 6, 1862, he proposed a plan to Congress he thought would make federal emanicipation unnecessary—a gradual, compensated abolition program to begin along the loyal border and then be extended into the rebel states as they were conquered. According to Lincoln's plan, the border states would gradually remove slavery over the next thirty years, and the national government would compensate slaveholders for their loss. The whole program was to be voluntary; the states would adopt their own emancipation laws without federal coercion. At the same time (as he had earlier told Congress), Lincoln favored a voluntary colonization program, to be sponsored by the federal government, that would resettle liberated blacks outside the country.

On Capitol Hill Stevens derided Lincoln's scheme as "diluted milk-and-water-gruel." But other advanced Republicans, noting that Lincoln's was the first emancipation proposal ever offered by an American President, acclaimed it as an excellent step. On April 10 the Republican-controlled Congress endorsed Lincoln's emancipation plan. But the border-state representatives, for whom it was intended, rejected the scheme emphatically. "I utterly spit at it and despise it," said one Kentucky congressman. "Emancipation in the cotton States is simply an absurdity.... There is not enough power in the world to compel it to be done."

As Lincoln promoted his gradual, compensated scheme, advanced Republicans on Capitol Hill launched a furious antislavery attack of their own. They sponsored a tough new confiscation bill, championed legislation that weakened the fugitive-slave law and assailed human bondage in the national capital as well as the territories. What was more, they won over many Republican moderates to forge a new congressional majority so far as slavery was concerned. As the war ground into its second year, moderate Republicans came to agree with their advanced colleagues that it was senseless to pretend the Union could be restored without removing the cause of the rebellion.

So, over strong Democratic opposition, the Republican Congress approved a bill that forbade the return of fugitive slaves to the rebels, and on March 13, 1862, Lincoln signed it into law. Congress also adopted legislation which abolished slavery in Washington, D.C., compensated owners for their loss, and set aside funds for the voluntary colonization of blacks in Haiti and Liberia, and Lincoln signed this as well. Democrats howled. One castigated the bill as an entering wedge for wholesale abolition, another predicted that liberated Negroes would crowd white ladies out of congressional galleries. Washingtonians accused the "abolitionists" in Congress of converting the capital into "a hell on earth for the white man." Republicans brushed aside all such criticism. "If there be a place upon the face of the earth," asserted a Minnesota Republican, "where human slavery should be prohibited, and where every man should be protected in the rights which God and Nature have given him, that place is the capital of this great Republic."

In June the Republican Congress lashed at slavery again: it passed a bill that outlawed human bondage in all federal territories, thus overriding the Dred Scott decision, and Lincoln signed the measure into law. Congress and the President also joined together in recognizing the black republics of Haiti and Liberia, a move that would facilitate colonization efforts in those lands. Meanwhile, a fierce debate raged over the second confiscation bill, which authorized the seizure and liberation of all slaves held by those in rebellion. Advanced Republicans not only pushed the bill with uninhibited zeal but also advocated that emancipated blacks be enlisted in the army. But even some Republicans thought full-scale confiscation too drastic, and "conservatives" like Jacob Collamer of Vermont, Orville Browning of Illinois, and Edgar Cowan of Pennsylvania sided with the Democrats in denouncing the bill as uncivilized and unconstitutional. "Pass these acts," cried one opponent, "confiscate under the bills the property of these men, emancipate their negroes, place arms in the hands of these human gorillas to murder their masters and violate their wives and daughters, and you will have a war such as was never witnessed in the worst days of the French Revolution, and horrors never exceeded in San Domingo."

On July 4, in the midst of the debate, Sumner hurried back to the White House and admonished Lincoln to attack slavery himself. Sumner was extremely disappointed in the President, for he did not seem a month or six weeks behind the senator at all. In fact, Lincoln recently had overruled another general, David Hunter, who liberated the slaves inside his lines, and again the advanced Republicans had groaned in despair. Now, on July 4, Sumner urged "the reconsecration of the day by a decree of emancipation." The senator pointed out that the Union was suffering from troop shortages on every front and that the slaves were an untapped reservoir of manpower. "You need more men," Sumner argued, "not only at the North, but at the South, in the rear of the Rebels; you need the slaves." But Lincoln insisted that an emancipation edict was still "too big a lick." And, in a White House interview, he warned border-state legislators that his gradual, state-guided plan was the only alternative to federal emancipation and that they must commend it to their people. Once again they refused.

On July 17, five days after Lincoln spoke with the border men, Congress finally passed the second confiscation bill. If the rebellion did not end in sixty days, the measure warned, the executive branch would seize the property of all those who supported, aided, or participated in the rebellion. Federal courts were to determine guilt. Those convicted would forfeit their estates and their slaves to the federal government, and their slaves would be set free. Section nine liberated other categories of slaves without court action: slaves of rebels who escaped to Union lines, who were captured by federal forces or were abandoned by their owners, "shall be deemed captives of war, and shall be forever free." On the other hand, the bill exempted loyal Unionists in the rebel South, allowing them to retain their slaves and other property. Another section empowered Lin-

coln to enlist Negroes in the military. Still another, aimed at easing Northern racial fears and keeping Republican unity, provided for the voluntary resettlement of confiscated blacks in "some tropical country." A few days later Congress appropriated $500,000 for colonization.

Controversial though it was, the second confiscation act still fell far short of genuine emancipation. Most slaves were to be freed only after protracted case-by-case litigation in the courts. And of course, the slaves of loyal masters were not affected. Yet the bill was about as far as Congress could go in attacking slavery, for most Republicans still acknowledged that Congress had no constitutional authority to eradicate bondage as a state institution. Only the President with his war powers—or a constitutional amendment—could do that. Nevertheless, the measure seemed a clear invitation for the President to exercise his constitutional powers and annihilate slavery in the rebellious states. And Stevens, Sumner, and Wilson repeatedly told him that most congressional Republicans now favored this. On the other hand, conservatives like Orville Browning beseeched Lincoln to veto the confiscation bill and restore the old Union as it was. "I said to him that he had reached the culminating point in his administration," Browning recorded in his diary, "and his course upon this bill was to determine whether he was to control the abolitionists and radicals, or whether they were to control him."

THE GREAT DAY DAWNS

PROTEST EAST AND WEST

BUT THE PRESIDENT STANDS FIRM

For several days, Lincoln gave few hints as to what he would do, and Congress awaited his response in a state of high tension. Finally, on July 17, he informed Capitol Hill that he agreed entirely with the spirit of the confiscation bill remarking that "the traitor against the general government" deserved to have his slaves and other property forfeited as just punishment for rebellion. While he thought some of the wording unfortunately vague, he nevertheless raised no objection to the sections on slave liberation. He did, however, disagree with other portions on technical grounds, especially those which permanently divested a rebel of the title to his land, and Lincoln hinted that he would veto the bill as a consequence. To avoid that, congressional Republicans attached an explanatory resolution removing most of Lincoln's complaints. Satisfied, the President signed the bill and commanded the army to start enforcing it after sixty days.

Even so, several advanced Republicans were angered by Lincoln's threatened veto and peeved by what they perceived as his legalistic quibbling when the Union was struggling for its life against a mutinous aristocracy founded on slavery. Julian, for his part, thought Lincoln's behavior "inexpressibly provoking," and when Congress adjourned, he called at the White House to find out once and for all where the President stood on emancipation and all-out war against the rebels. Julian said he was going home to Indiana and wanted to assure his constituents that the President would "co-operate with Congress in vigorously carrying out the measures we had inaugurated for the purpose of crushing the rebellion, and that now the quickest and hardest blows were to be dealt." Complaining that advanced Republicans had unfairly criticized him, Lincoln said he had no objection at all to what Julian wished to tell his constituents. In Indiana that summer, Julian announced that Lincoln had now decided on a radical change in his policy toward slavery.

In August Sumner learned that Lincoln had at last decided to issue an emancipation proclamation. Convinced that the peculiar institution could be destroyed only through executive action, Lincoln actually had drawn up a draft of the proclamation and read it to his Cabinet. But couldn't Sumner have predicted it? Lincoln had let Secretary of State William H. Seward dissuade him from issuing the edict until after a Union military victory. At the White House, Sumner demanded that the decree "be put forth—the sooner the better—without any reference to our military condition." But the President refused, and Sumner stalked out, dismayed again at what he once called Lincoln's "immense *vis inertiae*." The senator feared that only the confiscation act would ever free any slaves.

But in September Lincoln came through. After the Confederate reversal at Antietam, he issued his preliminary emancipation proclamation, a clear warning that if the rebellion did not cease in one hundred days, the executive branch would use the military to free *all* the slaves in the rebel states—those belonging to secessionists and loyalists alike. Thus the President would go beyond the second confiscation act—he would handle emancipation himself, avoid tangled litigation over slavery in the courts, and vanquish it as an institution in the South. He believed he could do this by the war powers, and he deemed it "a fit and necessary military measure" to preserve the Union.

The advanced Republicans, of course, were delighted. "Hurrah for Old Abe and the proclamation," Wade exulted. Stevens extolled Lincoln for his patriotism and said his proclamation "contained precisely the principles which I had advocated." "Thank God that I live to enjoy this day!" Sumner exclaimed in Boston. "Freedom is practically secured to all who find shelter within our lines, and the glorious flag of the Union, wherever it floats, becomes the flag of Freedom." A few days later, Sumner announced that "the Emancipation Proclamation . . . is now the corner-stone of our national policy."

As it turned out, though, the preliminary proclamation helped lead to a Republican disaster in the fall by-elections of 1862. Northern Democrats already were angered by Lincoln's harsh war measures, especially his use of martial law and military arrests. Now, Negro emancipation was more than they could bear, and they stumped the Northern states beating the drums of Negrophobia and warning of massive influxes of Southern blacks into the North once emancipation came. Sullen,

A BLACK CITIZEN'S APPRAISAL OF THE PRESIDENT

"AN AMERICAN OF THE AMERICANS"

The advanced Republicans on Capitol Hill who relentlessly pressured Lincoln toward emancipation were all white, of course. But blacks, too, played their part in influencing the cautious President. Most prominent among them was Frederick Douglass, the eloquent abolitionist speaker and writer, who was himself a former slave.

Douglass liked Lincoln personally. "In all my interviews with Mr. Lincoln," he wrote, "I was impressed with his entire freedom from popular prejudice against the colored race. He was the first great man that I talked with in the United States freely, who in no single instance reminded me of the difference between himself and myself, of the difference of color. . . ."

But when Douglass was invited in 1876 to dedicate the Emancipation Monument, a Washington, D.C., statue of Lincoln freeing a slave, he put personal friendship aside and offered what is still among the shrewdest judgments ever made of the President's role in the struggle against slavery:

". . . [Lincoln] was preeminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country. In all his education and feeling he was an American of the Americans. He came into the Presidential chair upon one principle alone, namely, opposition to the extension of slavery. His arguments in furtherance of this policy had their motive and mainspring in his patriotic devotion to the interests of his own race. . . . The race to which we belong were not the special objects of his consideration. Knowing this, I concede to you, my white fellow-citizens, a preeminence in this worship at once full and supreme. . . . You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his step-children; children by adoption, children by forces of circumstances and necessity. To you it especially belongs to sound his praises. . . . [But] while Abraham Lincoln saved for you a country, he delivered us from a bondage, according to Jefferson, one hour of which was worse than ages of the oppression your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose. . . . His greatest mission was to accomplish two things: first, to save his country from dismemberment and ruin; and, second, to free his country from the great crime of slavery. To do one or the other, or both, he must have the earnest sympathy and the powerful cooperation of his loyal fellow countrymen. . . . Had he put the abolition of slavery before the salvation of the Union, he would have inevitably driven from him a powerful class of the American people and rendered resistance to rebellion impossible. Viewed from the genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined . . . taking him for all in all, measuring the tremendous magnitude of the work before him, considering the necessary means to ends, and surveying the end from the beginning, infinite wisdom has seldom sent any man into the world better fitted for his mission than Abraham Lincoln."

war-weary, and racially antagonistic, Northern voters dealt the Republicans a smashing blow as the North's five most populous states—all of which had gone for Lincoln in 1860—now returned Democratic majorities to Capitol Hill. Republicans narrowly retained control of Congress, but they were steeped in gloom as it convened that December.

Though most Republicans stood resolutely behind emancipation, Browning and other conservatives now begged Lincoln to abandon his "reckless" abolition policy lest he shatter his party and wreck what remained of his country. At the same time, Sumner and Wade admonished Lincoln to stand firm, and he promised that he would. On January 1, 1863, the President officially signed the final proclamation in the White House. In it Lincoln temporarily exempted all of Tennessee and certain occupied places in Louisiana and Virginia (later, in reconstructing those states, he would withdraw the exemptions and make emancipation mandatory). He also excluded the loyal slave states because they were not in rebellion and he lacked the legal authority to uproot slavery there. With these exceptions, the final proclamation declared that all slaves in the rebellious states "from henceforth shall be free." The document also asserted that black men —Southern and Northern alike—might now be enlisted in Union military forces.

All in all, the advanced Republicans were pleased. Perhaps the President should not have exempted Tennessee and southern Louisiana, Horace Greeley said, "but let us not cavil." Lincoln had now "played his grand part" in the abolition of slavery, Julian declared, and "brought relief to multitudes of anxious people." "On that day," Sumner wrote of January 1, 1863, "an angel appeared upon the earth."

THE INFAMOUS INSTITUTION AT AN END

The Responsibility Apportioned

In truth, Lincoln's proclamation was the most revolutionary measure ever to come from an American President up to that time, and the advanced Republicans took a lot of credit for goading him at last to act. Slavery would now die by degrees with every Union advance, every Northern victory.

Now that Lincoln had adopted emancipation, advanced Republicans watched him with a critical eye, making sure that he enforced his edict and exhorting him to place only those firmly opposed to slavery in command of Union armies. In February rumor had it that if Lincoln wavered even once in his promise of freedom to the slaves, Wade would move for a vote of "no confidence" and try to cut off appropriations. But Lincoln did not waiver. Even though a storm of anti-Negro, anti-Lincoln protest broke over the land, the President refused to retract a single word of his decree. "He is stubborn as a mule when he gets his back up," Chandler said, "& *it is up* now on the Proclamation." "His mind acts slowly," Lovejoy observed, "but when he moves, it is *forward*."

In the last two years of the war, Lincoln and the advanced Republicans had their differences, but they were scarcely locked in the kind of blood feud depicted in Civil War histories and biographies of an earlier day. Several advanced Republicans did oppose Lincoln's renomination in 1864 because the war was going badly and they thought him an inept administrator. In addition, Sumner, Stevens, and Wade clashed bitterly with Lincoln over whether Congress or the President should oversee reconstruction. Sumner, Julian, Chandler, and a handful of other legislators also insisted that Southern black men be enfranchised. But Lincoln, sympathetic to Negro voting rights, hesitated to force them on the states he reconstructed. Nevertheless, in April, 1865, he publicly endorsed limited Negro suffrage and conceded that the black man deserved the right to vote.

In truth, despite their differences, Lincoln and the advanced Republicans worked together closely. And they stood together on several crucial issues: they all wanted to abolish slavery entirely in the South and to muzzle the rebellious white majority there so that it could not overwhelm Southern Unionists and return the old Southern ruling class to power. They also came to see that colonization was probably an unworkable solution to the problem of racial adjustment. All Lincoln's colonization schemes had foundered, and anyway most blacks adamantly refused to participate in the Republicans' voluntary program. In place of colonization, the Lincoln administration devised a refugee system for blacks in the South, a program that put them to work in military and civilian pursuits there and prepared them for life in a free society. And in 1864 the Republican Congress canceled all funds it had set aside for colonization efforts.

Most important of all, advanced Republicans cooperated closely with Lincoln in pushing a constitutional amendment through Congress that would guarantee the permanent freedom of all slaves, those in the loyal border as well as in the rebel South. Since he had issued the proclamation, Lincoln and his congressional associates had worried that it might be nullified in the courts or thrown out by a later Congress or a subsequent administration. As a consequence, they wanted a constitutional amendment that would safeguard the proclamation and prevent emancipation from ever being overturned. Accordingly, in December, 1863, Iowa senator James F. Wilson introduced an emancipation amendment in the Senate, and the following February Trumbull reported it from the judiciary committee, reminding his colleagues that nobody could deny that all the death and destruction of the war stemmed from slavery and that it was their duty to support this amendment. In April the Senate adopted it by a vote of thirty-eight to six, but it failed to muster the required two-thirds majority in the House.

After Lincoln's re-election in 1864, advanced Republicans joined forces with the President to get the amendment passed. In his message that December, Lincoln conceded that this was the same House that earlier had failed to approve the amendment. But since then a national election had taken place which Lincoln insisted was a mandate for permanent emancipation. If the present House refused to pass the amendment, the next one "almost certainly" would. So "at all events," the President said, "may we not agree that the sooner the better?"

As December passed, Republicans who sponsored the amendment plotted with Lincoln to pressure conservative Republicans and recalcitrant Democrats for their support. On January 6, 1865, a heated debate began over the amendment, with James Ashley quoting Lincoln himself that *"if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong."* A week later, Thaddeus Stevens, still tall and imposing at seventy-two, limped down the aisle of the House and closed the debate with a spare and eloquent address, declaring that he had never hesitated, even when threatened with violence, "to stand here and denounce this infamous institution." With the outcome much in doubt, Lincoln and congressional Republicans participated in secret negotiations never made public—negotiations that allegedly involved patronage, a New Jersey railroad monopoly, and the release of rebels kin to congressional Democrats—to bring wavering opponents into line. "The greatest measure of the nineteenth century," Stevens claimed, "was passed by corruption, aided and abetted by the purest man in America." When the amendment did pass, by just three votes, a storm of cheers broke over House Republicans, who danced, embraced one another, waved their hats and canes. "It seemed to me I had been born into a new life," Julian recalled, "and that the world was overflowing with beauty and joy." Lincoln, too, pronounced the amendment a "great moral victory" and "a King's cure" for the evils of slavery. When ratified by the states, the amendment would end human bondage in America.

See, Julian rejoiced, "the world *does* move." He could have added that he and his advanced Republican colleagues, in collaboration with their President, had made it move, had done all they could in the smoke and steel of civil war to right their troubled land with its own noblest ideals.

Men Behind the Masks: The James Brothers

Albert Castel

Albert Castel received a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and is currently a professor of history at Western Michigan University.

On August 7, 1863 the Liberty, Missouri *Tribune*, a pro-Union newspaper, carried the following item:

"THREE SOUTHERN GENTLEMEN IN SEARCH OF THEIR RIGHTS—On the morning of the 6th of August, Franklin James, with two others of the same stripe, stopped David Mitchell, on his road to Leavenworth, about 6 miles west of Liberty, and took from him $1.25, his pocket knife, and a pass he had from the Provost Marshal to cross the plains. This is one of the rights these men are fighting for. James sent his compliments to Major Green, and said he would like to see him."

Such was the first recorded robbery committed by Frank James. During the next two decades he, his brother Jesse, and their sidekicks, the Younger brothers, became America's most famous outlaws. Today, a century after Jesse's murder and Frank's surrender in 1882, they still possess that distinction. Here is the story of their rise to fame, along with the sometimes brutal facts behind it; facts which have been concealed by legend like a bandit's face by a mask.

Alexander Franklin James and Jesse Woodson James were born, respectively, on January 10, 1843 and September 5, 1847 on a farm near Kearney, Missouri, a town twelve miles northeast of the Clay County seat at Liberty and twenty-seven miles from downtown Kansas City to the southwest. Their father, Robert James, was an ordained minister; their mother, Zerelda Cole, attended school at a Catholic convent. In 1842, shortly after being married, Robert and Zerelda left their native Kentucky to settle in Clay County, where Robert became pastor of a Baptist church, acquired a farm and slaves, and helped found William Jewell College at Liberty. Thus the family background of Frank and Jesse seems to have been quite solid and respectable.

But it did not remain so for long. In 1850 Robert joined the rush to California in quest of gold; instead he found illness and death. Zerelda remarried twice: first, Benjamin Simms, who soon left her and then died; next, in 1859, Doctor Reuben Samuel, a quiet, acquiescent man who devoted himself to working the James' farm. Zerelda bore him four children, two boys and two girls. How young Frank and Jesse reacted to their father's departure and death, their mother's remarriages, and the influx of half brothers and sisters is unknown, as is any authentic information about their boyhoods.

In the summer of 1861 the Civil War came to Missouri. Most of the population remained loyal to the Union. However, in the hemp-growing and slaveholding counties of western Missouri many people supported the Confederacy. Among them was the James-Samuel family. Frank, now a lanky, callow-looking youth of eighteen, joined the pro-Confederate Missouri forces of Major General Sterling Price and took part in the battle of Wilson's Creek (August 10, 1861) and the siege of Lex-

From *American History Illustrated*, June 1982, pp. 10-18. Reproduced through the courtesy of Historical Times, Inc., publishers of *American History Illustrated*