

Civil War 150 — KidsPost and Profile

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INNOVATIONS OF THE CIVIL WAR



An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

THE CIVIL WAR 1861-1865

Faces of the Young During the Civil War

There were lots of beards in the Civil War. President Abraham Lincoln had one. The famous Confederate general Robert E. Lee had one. But many of the average young men who served in the armies of the North and South did not.

Why? Because they were too young. It's easy to forget that thousands of Civil War soldiers were teenagers, and many looked like boys — too young to shave.

In 2011 with the 150th anniversary of the start of the war, which lasted from 1861 to 1865, the Library of Congress held a new exhibit of photographs of average Civil War soldiers and their families.

The photographs were collected by a Virginia man named Tom Liljenquist, who in 2010 gave them to the library. And one

of the amazing things about the collection is the young faces of the northern Billy Yanks and southern Johnny Rebs.

Sometimes, their hats are too big. Sometimes their coats look too big. Most of them look serious. They wanted to serve their country, and, maybe, find some adventure. But the war was no fun. And some of the soldier and sailor boys look a little scared.

They signed up for the Army and Navy anyhow, and before they marched away, a lot of them stopped to have their pictures taken, which was a huge deal in those days. It's lucky for us, because now we get to see what they looked like, even though in most cases their names have been forgotten. ■

— Michael E. Ruane

May 29, 2011



LILJENQUIST FAMILY COLLECTION OF CIVIL WAR PHOTOGRAPHS/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
This unnamed girl is thought to be holding a picture of her dead father, who probably was a soldier in the war, because she is wearing "mourning ribbons" on her sleeves.



A young Confederate soldier sat for his picture before leaving his family. There are not many photographs of Southern troops in the collection. That may be because there were fewer photographers in the South, or the South's defeat brought destruction of these images.



One of the few images to identify the subject, this is drummer boy Samuel W. Doble, 16, of the 12th Maine infantry regiment. His father was a cook in the regiment. When Samuel got sick soon after this photograph was taken in Lowell, Mass., he was sent home. He later joined the cavalry, and, although a horse fell on him, he served out the war. He lived to be 79.

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A boy determined to serve his country

Johnny Clem volunteered for the army at age 9

The Civil War is sometimes called "The Boys' War," because so many soldiers who fought in it were still in their teens. The rule in the Union Army was that soldiers had to be 18 to join, but many younger boys answered "I'm over 18, sir," when the recruiter asked.

Many of the youngest boys served as drummers; they weren't supposed to be fighters, but they did a very important job during the Civil War. You've probably seen pictures of a boy walking beside the marching soldiers, beating his drum to keep them together. But this wasn't the drummer's most important — or most difficult — job.

In the noise and confusion of battle, it was often impossible to hear the officers' orders, so each order was given a series of drumbeats to represent it. Both soldiers and drummers had to learn which drumroll meant "meet here" and which meant "attack now" and which meant "retreat" and all the other commands of battlefield and camp. (The most exciting drum call was "the long roll," which was the signal to attack. The drummer would just beat-beat-beat — and every other drummer in hearing distance would beat-beat-beat — until all that could be heard was an overwhelming thunder pushing the army forward.)

When the drummer boys weren't needed for sounding the calls, they had another job. They were stretcher bearers. They walked around the battlefield looking for the wounded and brought them to medical care.

Many young boys marched off to war looking for adventure, but they found hard, dangerous work along with it.



Johnny Clem, a sergeant by the time he was 12, was one of the youngest Union soldiers.

Many say that Johnny Clem, who ran away from his home in Ohio when he was 9 to follow the Union troops, was the youngest boy to fight in the Civil War. Of course, the Union Army turned him away. In addition to being so young, he was small for his age. But Johnny tried again, and when he refused to go home, troops from Michigan adopted him as their mascot and drummer boy.

The story tells us that the officers contributed some of their pay so he could earn a soldier's salary of \$13 a month. They had a little uniform made for him, too, and later they had a rifle cut down to size for him. Johnny was a brave fighter. By the time he was 11, he was enlisted as a regular soldier. He would spend much of his life in the Army; he was a brigadier general when he retired in 1915.

People were fascinated by stories of Johnny the boy soldier. Some of the stories were legends, but military records show that Johnny's military career did, in fact, begin at age 9. He lived to be 85 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. ■

— Carolyn Reeder
February 22, 2012



BIGSTOCK

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THE CIVIL WAR 1861-1865

Navigating between North and South



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

A view of the C&O Canal above Georgetown in 1861. It ran along the border between the Union and the Confederacy.

If you were a child in a boating family on the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal 150 years ago, war would never be far from your thoughts. Why? Because your days — and nights — were spent along the boundary between the Union (North) and the Confederacy (South) as the canal followed the Potomac River's Maryland shore.

As you walked on the towpath beside the mules pulling the boat or you did chores in the boat's small cabin, you would pass the camps of Union soldiers. You hoped they would do their job well and keep Confederate raiders from crossing the Potomac to damage the canal.

Sometimes at night you would be awoken by pounding hoofbeats on the towpath. You would hold your breath, hoping they didn't stop. Hoping it wasn't Confederates who would steal your mules — or even burn your family's

boat. Hoping it wasn't a Union officer saying the army needed your boat to move troops or to be part of a floating bridge.

And always there was the fear that Confederates would make a cut in the canal bank so the water would flow out. Or that they would sink boats to block the waterway so no traffic could pass. If your family couldn't deliver its cargo, no money would be earned. How would you manage then?

Today, the C&O Canal National Historic Park is a beautiful natural area, and the towpath is the perfect place to walk or bicycle. But in the early 1860s, the canal played an important part in the Union war effort. Long, narrow boats brought hundreds of tons of coal the 184 miles from Cumberland, Maryland, to Georgetown to fuel the Navy's steamships. The boats also delivered grain to feed horses and make bread

for soldiers. That was why the Union protected the canal — and why the Confederates tried so hard to destroy it.

In December 1861, Confederate General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's men tried several times to destroy one of the dams that was important to operating the canal. First the Confederates bombarded the dam with cannon fire; later they waded into the freezing water and hacked at it with tools.

After they withdrew, the Union defenders helped canal workers repair the dam. To the relief of boating families and the U.S. government, the entire canal reopened. Coal would be delivered, and the boaters would be paid. ■

— Carolyn Reeder
December 7, 2011

Carolyn Reeder is giving readers a kid's-eye view of the Civil War. Her books include Shades of Gray and Captain Kate.

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Civil War hero Robert Smalls seized the opportunity to be free

BY AVIS THOMAS-LESTER

• Originally Published March 4, 2012

He sat at the conference table next to Frederick Douglass as they tried to convince President Abraham Lincoln that African Americans should be allowed to fight for their own freedom. He served five terms in Congress. He ran a newspaper and helped found a state Republican Party.

But first, he had to win his freedom.

To do that, he conceived a plan that struck a blow against the Confederacy so significant that he was heralded across the nation. Carrying out his mission required bravery, intelligence and precision timing — attributes that many whites at that time thought blacks didn't possess.

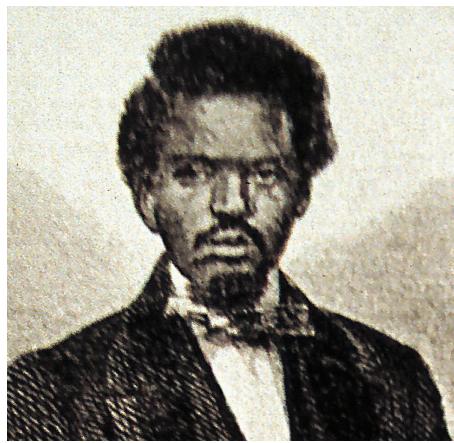
Robert Smalls proved them wrong and changed history in the doing.

* * *

Smalls was born in Beaufort, S.C., on April 5, 1839, the son of Lydia Polite, a slave who was a housekeeper in the city home of John McKee, owner of the Ashdale Plantation on Lady's Island, one of the Sea Islands. Though he never knew the identity of his father, it was widely believed that Smalls was the progeny of McKee's son, Henry.

"There was a distinctly fatherly relationship between [Henry McKee] and my great-grandfather," said Helen Boulware Moore of Lakewood Ranch, Fla., who grew up hearing stories about Smalls from her grandmother, Elizabeth Lydia Smalls Bampfield, his daughter.

Growing up at the McKees' place, Smalls played with both black and white



HARPERS WEEKLY

children, ate food cooked in the kitchen where his mother worked and slept in a bed in a small house that was provided for her. Polite had been taken from her family on the island plantation at age 9 to work as a companion to the McKee children in Beaufort.

Because of his connection to Henry McKee, Smalls was allowed "to go places and do things others couldn't do. That could cause problems with blacks ... and could be a dangerous thing with whites, as well," said Michael Allen of the National Park Service's Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, which runs through South Carolina.

The town of Beaufort maintained a 7 p.m. daily curfew for blacks, but on many occasions young Smalls ignored the bell and continued to play with white children. Several times, he was taken into custody. Henry McKee paid a fine to retrieve him, Moore said.

When he was 10, his mother sent him to the plantation to learn the reality of slave life. He came back defiant, not willing to comply, as she had hoped.

"He acted as if he could do what the white children did, and that frightened her," Moore said. "She wanted to educate

him about the whole issue of slavery to save his life."

Worried that her son would suffer consequences for his bold behavior, Polite asked McKee to rent out Smalls at age 12 to work in nearby Charleston. Each week, he was given \$1 of his wages; the rest went to the McKees. He supplemented his income by purchasing cheap candy and tobacco and reselling them.

At age 18, Smalls met Hannah Jones, an enslaved hotel worker who had two daughters. He sought permission to marry and live with her in an apartment in Charleston, Moore said.

"He was smart enough to know that at any moment, she and any children they had might be sold, so he asked her enslaver," who agreed, Moore said.

Smalls became skilled at working on ships, eventually advancing to the position of pilot. In 1861, he was hired to work on a steamer called the *Planter* (www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-civil/civsh-p/planter.htm) which was used to transport cotton to ships headed to Europe. But once the Civil War started, the Confederates seized it for use as an armed transport vessel.

Smalls knew how to navigate. He knew that the white crew trusted him. He had his eye on freedom, and all he needed was an opportunity.

* * *

"They were going to seize the ship," said Lawrence Guyot, a black-history expert in Washington. "It was dangerous. It was daring. It was unprecedented. And when they accomplished it, it was used to demonstrate that blacks could be brave and strategic in pulling off military

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the *Planter*, Abraham Lincoln decided to let African Americans join the fight in the Civil War."

Moore, a retired professor, pointed out that "a lot is said about [Smalls's] patriotism, but it was not simply patriotism that led him to act. His priority was his family."

Smalls had sought to purchase his wife, his two young children and his wife's daughters, but the price of \$800 was too steep.

In the early hours of May 13, 1862, the *Planter*'s crew took an unapproved furlough into town, leaving Smalls, 23, and several other black crew members aboard. Wearing a captain's coat and hat and taking care to hide his black face, Smalls steered the ship toward a rendezvous spot to pick up the men's families.

"It was really dangerous because they were flying the Confederate flag," Moore said. "They made a decision that they wouldn't be taken alive. ... If they had been caught, they were going to ignite the explosives and die on the ship."

Through Charleston Harbor and past several Confederate lookouts, the ship steamed. Smalls signaled at the appropriate points, as he'd seen the captain do.

By dawn, the *Planter* had reached the federal blockade of the harbor. The crew lowered the Confederate flag and hoisted a white sheet that Hannah had brought from the hotel where she worked, Moore said.

"One of the most heroic and daring adventures since the war commenced was undertaken and successfully accomplished by a party of negroes in Charleston," trumpeted the June 14, 1862, edition of *Harper's Weekly*.

Commodore S.F. DuPont, the commander of the federal fleet barricading Fort Sumter, in Charleston Harbor, wrote to the Department of the Army that Smalls provided information "of the

utmost importance" to the Union, such as the location of mines he had helped lay in the harbor while working for the Confederacy, news accounts show.

* * *

This May marks the 150th anniversary of the seizure of the *Planter*. A commemoration is scheduled for May 12-13 in Charleston.

"Somebody should make a movie about this guy," said Frank Smith, founding director of the District's African American Civil War Memorial Museum, which includes an exhibit about Smalls. "If you are looking for a heroic character, it would be hard to invent one with better qualifications than Robert Smalls."

Smalls became a ship pilot for the Union, serving as a volunteer until he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in Company B of the 33rd Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops. He fought in 17 battles and is credited with recruiting 5,000 blacks. He was later designated a major general in the South Carolina militia.

In April 1865, Smalls returned to Beaufort and the McKee house, which he had purchased in a tax sale, using part of a \$1,500 appropriation he received for taking the *Planter*. Back home, he was reunited with his mother — and one of his former owners.

"Mrs. McKee, after the war was over, came wandering to the house one day," Moore said. "Because of her dementia, she didn't realize the house was no longer hers. ... Given her illness, Robert allowed her to stay."

Smalls, who had learned to read and write while serving in the military, went into business and then politics. He served in both houses of the South Carolina Legislature and in 1874 was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, beating a white Democrat in a district that was almost 70 percent black. (The 15th Amendment had given African Americans the vote in 1870.)

But his later years were plagued by racism as white-supremacist Democrats stepped

up efforts to unseat Reconstruction legislators. He was accused of bribery but later cleared, historical accounts show.

In his personal life, Smalls lost a son in infancy and Hannah in 1883. Seven years later, at the age of 51, he married Annie Wigg, who bore him a second son, William Robert. Annie died a few years later.

Smalls himself died in 1915 at what is now called the the Robert Smalls House, at 511 Prince Street in Beaufort. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is currently for sale for \$1.2 million.

Other structures and streets have been named for Smalls. The African American Museum in Philadelphia is currently displaying "The Life and Times of Congressman Robert Smalls: A Traveling Exhibition." The highest honor, though, was the commissioning in 2007 of the *Maj. Gen. Robert Smalls*, an Army logistics support vessel, in a ceremony at Baltimore's Inner Harbor attended by several of his descendants. It is the only Army ship named for an African American.

Moore said Smalls's direct descendants number about 75, the youngest of whom is her 3-month-old granddaughter, Maya Helen Jenkins. Moore's son, Michael, 49, the chairman of Glory Foods, which sells Southern-style dishes, said his great-great-grandfather's story is an inspiration for his four young sons, as it was for him. As a child, he said, he would search bookstores for books about Smalls.

"I didn't think about Robert Smalls as history," he said. "I thought of him as family."

"The thing that I'm proudest of is his mind-set that he was going to be free, when he had no rational or logical reason to think that he would be. It was all or nothing. I'm proud and intrigued by his moxie and audacity not only to think about freedom, but to conceive and execute a plan to make it happen." ■

thomaslester@washpost.com