



Surfing U.S. Stamp Subjects:

Harper's Weekly, March 14, 1863

by John F. Dunn

While surfing the web for a Black Troops image for Tony Fandino's article—pages 12-13, I found the illustration of the 54th Regiment in battle on multiple sites, including <history.howstuffworks.com> and <wikimedia>.

In addition, I came across a wealth of other resources—no surprise when it comes to a subject such as the Civil War.

One of the most fascination was found at <www.sonofthesouth.net>—Harper's Weekly of March 14, 1863, which included a feature on "Negroes as Soldiers," including this



*The first use of Black Troops in the Civil War;
from Harper's Weekly, March 14, 1863*

illustration by Thomas Nast, and the following report:

NEGROES AS SOLDIERS

WE devote pages 161, 168, and 169 to illustrations of the negroes as soldiers. So much ignorant prejudice is still entertained in many parts of the North to the employment of colored troops that it is due to the country that the capacity of the negro to drill and fight can not be too strongly insisted upon.

The picture on page 161 (not shown here) represents the negro learning the use of the Minie rifle. The drill masters in the Department of the South report that the negroes in the South Carolina regiments evince great aptitude at learning the manual of arms. They are more docile than white recruits, and when once they have mastered a movement they retain the knowledge perfectly. Similar testimony is borne by officers in the West. One of them predicts that with proper drill and training the negroes will be the steadiest rank and file in the world.

With regard to their fighting qualities we can not do better than reproduce the following extracts. The first is from a letter to the *New York Times*, describing the battle, or rather the skirmish of Island Mounds, where a detachment of the First Kansas Colored Volunteers attacked and routed a band of rebels. He says:

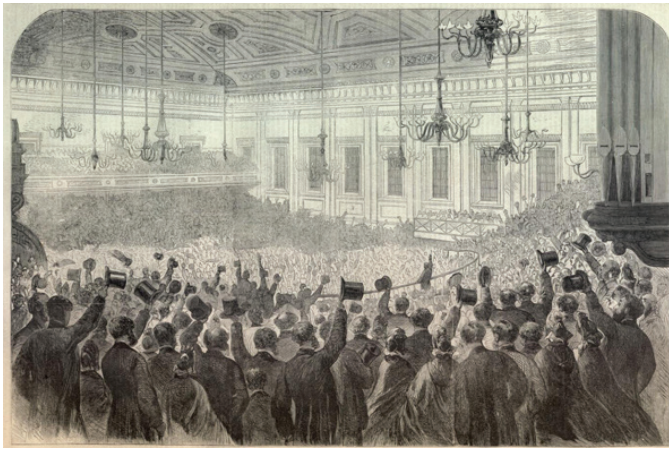
"The detachment under Gardner was attacked by the foe, who swept down like a whirlwind upon it. One volley was fired in concert, which emptied several saddles, and then this devoted body was separated by the force of that sweeping charge. The fight thus became a hand to hand encounter of one man to six. The rebels were mostly armed with shot-guns, revolvers, and sabres, our men with the Austrian rifle and sabre-bayonet. The latter is a fearful weapon, and did terrible execution in the hands of the muscular blacks. Six-Killer, the leader of the Cherokee negroes, fell with six wounds after shooting two men, bayoneting a third, and laying a fourth hors du combat with the butt of his gun. Another one, badly wounded, Sergeant Ed. Lowrey, was attacked by three men; he had discharged his rifle, and had no time to load again, when they fell upon him with revolver and sabre. He was then badly hurt with a shot-gun wound. One man demanded his surrender, to which the reply was a stunning blow from the butt of the rifle, knocking him off his horse. The negro, when approached, had his sabre-bayonet in hand, about to fix it on his gun. The prostrate man got a crashing blow from it on the skull as he fell, and then, as the other charged, the bayonet was used with effect on the nearest horse, and the butt of the gun on the next man.

"Captain Crew, retaining his position at the head of the few men who kept together, retreated with his face to the enemy, firing his revolver as he did so. He fell with a terrible wound in the groin, but again rose and retreated. Surrounded by half a dozen of the foe, he was ordered to surrender. 'Never!' he shouted, at the same time calling to the half dozen negroes around him to die rather than give up. He then fell dead with a bullet in his heart. His body was instantly rifled of revolver and watch, though his purse was not found. Five minutes afterward the rebel who took the watch was killed by one of the negroes, who again took the watch from him and brought it into camp.

"So ended the battle of Island Mounds, which, though commenced through the rash and impetuous daring of the officers, yet, under most unfavorable circumstances, resulted in a complete victory to the negro regiment...."

Also in that same edition of *Harper's*, we find the illustration on page 15 that I thought might be of interest to readers in general and to our UK correspondent, Tony Fandino, in particular, along with excerpts from the following report:

WE publish...an illustration of the GREAT UNION AND



Great Union and Emancipation Meeting Held at Exeter Hall, London

EMANCIPATION MEETING which was held at Exeter Hall, London, England, on 29th January last. It was one of the largest and most enthusiastic meetings ever held in London. The reporter of the *Illustrated News* is enthusiastic about the immense crowds that assembled. No less than three open-air meetings were formed of people who could not get into the building. He goes on to say:

If it had been possible, after watching the reception given to the first sentences from the chairman, the Rev. Mr. Evans, to doubt the tone and temper of the assembled multitude, it was clearly impossible to do so when he referred in a perfectly dispassionate manner to those who wished to see America divided into two confederacies. He was interrupted by a single voice that cried out "Emancipation and Union!" and then, as if that phrase had been a kind of electric shock that went to every heart, there broke forth the most tremendous outburst of popular enthusiasm it has ever been our fortune to witness. It could not stop, but went on and on, the whole audience having leaped to their feet with hats and handkerchiefs waving....

Decidedly the crowning speech of the evening was Mr. Newman Hall's. His voice alone of all the speakers' voices filled easily and perfectly the enormous space. And as his was perhaps the most highly-finished and certainly the most successful oratorical display of the evening, we quote the peroration of his speech, with its magnificent invective against slavery, where he asserts:

"God has made of one blood all nations to dwell upon the face of all the earth' [Cheers]; that there is no right so sacred as that which a man has to himself, no wrong so flagrant as that of robbing a man of himself [Cheers]; that it is an abomination to steal a man and to sell him [Loud cheers];...that it is an abomination to deny to a woman the rights of chastity and maternity [Hear]; that it is an abomination judicially to declare that a colored man has no rights which a white man need respect [Hear, hear];...that it is an abomination to fine, imprison, flog, and, on a repetition of the act, hang a man for teaching another man to read the Bible [Hear, hear];... that a confederacy of men fighting in order to commit these abominations should be regarded as engaged in a portentous piracy rather than in legitimate warfare [Cheers]; that the conscience and heart of Free England can never wish to recognize

an empire avowing as its corner-stone the right to maintain and extend these abominations [Cheers]; and, lastly, as the recognition of an empire involves reception of its ambassador, that the loyalty of Great Britain loathes the very idea of such an indignity being offered to the Royal Lady we delight to venerate as that her pure, matronly, and widowed hand, which wields only the sceptre of love over the free, should ever be contaminated by the kiss of any representative of so foul a conspiracy against civilization, humanity, and God!"

* * * * *

But not everyone in England agreed with those assembled at Exeter Hall. Also from the same *Harper's* edition, we find this cartoon:

Among those iron-clads was the CSS *Florida*. From



A lesson for the (London) Times.

Young John Bull—"What is the Capital of China, papa?"
Old John Bull—"Richmond, my boy—which the Hemperor's name is Jeff Davis, and I build his hiron-clads!"

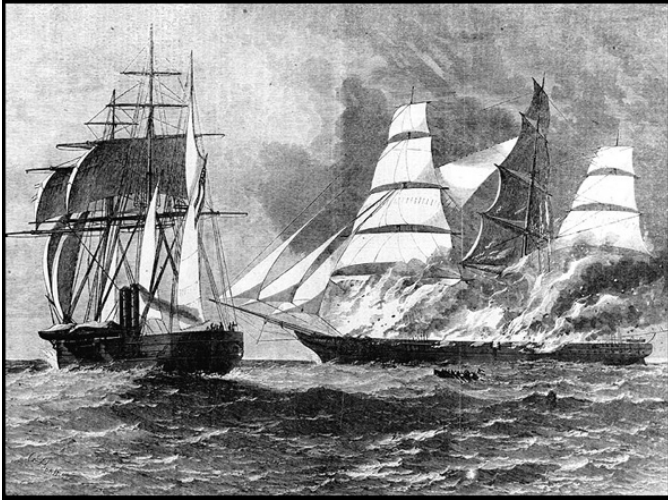
www.americancivilwar.com> we learn, that the *Florida* was "a steam screw cruiser of about 700 tons, built in England in 1862 under the name *Oreto*. Secretly purchased by the Confederate States Navy, she sailed in March 1862 for the Bahamas in the guise of a merchant ship....fitted as a naval vessel and commissioned in August 1862....went to Cuba and, on 4 September 1862, ran the Federal blockade into Mobile, Alabama. After completing her outfitting, Maffitt [her commander] took his ship back out through the blockade on 16 January 1863.

Operating in the Atlantic and West Indies over the next eight months, *Florida* captured twenty-two prizes....In August 1863, she went to Brest, France, remaining there until the following February, when she again got to sea past watching Federal forces. Under the command of First Lieutenant Charles M. Morris, *Florida* took another eleven prizes between then and October 1864, when she arrived at Bahia, Brazil.

While anchored in that port on 7 October, *Florida* was attacked, captured and towed to sea by USS *Wachusett*, in violation of Brazilian neutrality. After being taken to the U.S.,

her return to Brazil was ordered by the courts. However, before this could be done, on 28 November 1864 *Florida* was accidentally sunk off Newport News, Virginia. (At that website you can also read the Report of Commander Napoleon Collins, U.S. Navy, commanding U.S.S. *Wachusett*, of the seizure by that vessel of C.S.S. *Florida*.)

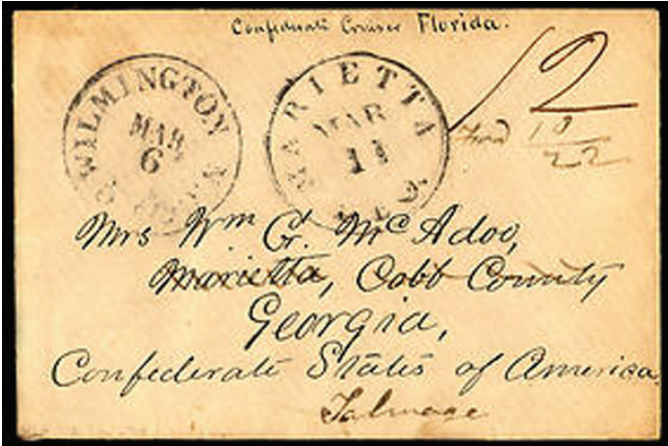
Continuing our surfing, a Google images search for CSS *Florida* brought us to <www.history.navy.mil/photos>, and this illustration of the *Florida* destroying the merchant ship *Jacob Bell* in February 1863, and this report from the March 14, 1863 *Harper's*:



CAPTURE OF THE "JACOB BELL."

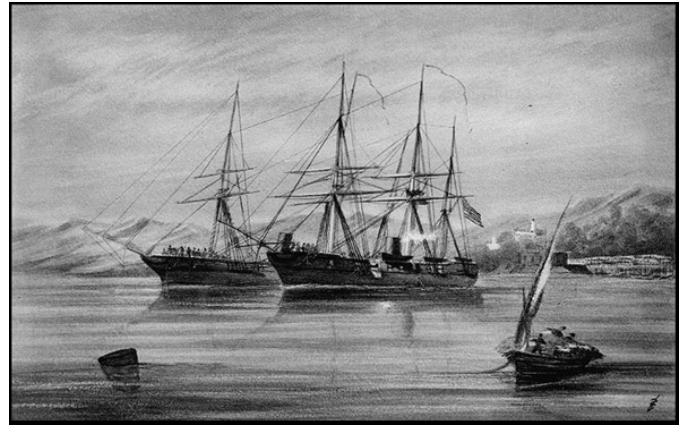
The *Florida* captured the ship *Jacob Bell* on the 12th ult., in latitude 24°, longitude 65°, bound from China to the port of New York. The *Jacob Bell* had a cargo of 22,000 packages of tea, 2500 rolls of matting, 5000 boxes of fire-crackers, 400 boxes of fans, 8000 mats of cassia, and 210 boxes of camphor, the whole being valued at about a million of dollars, upon which the United States Government lost over \$175,000 or \$200,000 in revenue, as that would be about the duty on the goods aboard. The rebel privateer burned the vessel, and transferred her passengers and crew to a Danish vessel, which conveyed them to St. Thomas....

We also find a philatelic connection, in the form of this blockade-run cover, carried on the "Confederate Cruiser *Florida*" (manuscript notation, top center, also with "Wilmington,



Georgia" and "Marietta Geo." March 6 and March 11 [1863] circular date stamps. This cover was found at the National Postal Museum's Arago site, <www.arago.si.edu>, along with an article by Patricia Kaufmann a *USSN* advertiser (not in this issue) who can be reached at <csadealer.com> or <trishkauf@comcast.net>.

We conclude our 'surfing' with this illustration of the capture of the *Florida* (left) by the *Wachusett*, and this report from the November 26, 1864 *Harper's*:



[*Florida*] was immediately invited by the Brazilian admiral to come into the harbor, where she lay on the 6th [of November] under the guns of the Brazilian forts and the Brazilian fleet. It is stated that during the day efforts were made by some of the citizens of Bahia to induce Captain Morris to take the *Florida* outside to fight the *Wachusett*, but that the Captain declined the engagement. There is nothing to indicate that the *Florida* came into port for any other purpose than to take in coals and provisions. On the night of the 6th Captain Morris and a good portion of his crew were on shore. The *Wachusett* was lying just outside the harbor.

This port is a favorite resort for Confederate privateers, because it has three separate channels of exit. This, of course, was an unfavorable feature in [*Wachusett*] Captain Collins's view of the situation, since the *Florida* might easily escape by one of these channels under cover of the darkness. He called a council of his officers, and in the debate which followed one thing was especially considered, namely, that the *Florida* had repeatedly seized and burned American vessels within three miles of the Brazilian coast. With but one dissenting vote it was determined to seize the *Florida* at her anchorage....at 3 A.M. on the morning of the 7th the cables were slipped, and the *Wachusett* approached the *Florida* with the intention of striking her amidships and send her at once to the bottom. This might have passed for an accidental collision, and thus the international question have been evaded. But the collision did not produce the intended effect. Captain Collins thereupon demanded the surrender of the *Florida*.

The officer in charge of the latter replied that, under the circumstances he surrendered, and the captured vessel, her guns having been removed to the *Wachusett*, was tied to that vessel, and was carried out to sea....