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# General Edward A. Wild And Civil War Discrimination

Richard Reid

In early December 1863, Brigadier General Edward A. Wild of Massachusetts led his two newly recruited black regiments in a major raid, the first using only black troops, through eastern North Carolina. The success of his attempts to free black families and raise new recruits was threatened by cavalry outriders who had been sent in advance of Wild's soldiers to warn the inhabitants that his "nigger-stealers were coming to plunder them of everything."<sup>1</sup> The Confederate planters may have been grateful for the warning, but they must have been perplexed by the fact that the warning had been sent by a Union officer, Colonel John Ward of the 8th Connecticut Regiment.<sup>2</sup> It was not the first time, nor would it be the last, that the General's attempts to raise and lead black troops were hamstrung by racist white soldiers prejudiced against blacks in general, and against any white officer who would consider leading them.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, from the time he volunteered to raise black troops for the Governor of Massachusetts until he was removed from the Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia in September of 1865 for his supposed "prejudice in favor of color," Wild's military career provides a glimpse of the difficulties faced by officers who led black units.<sup>4</sup> Not only would they face far greater dangers if captured by Confederates, but also their military efficiency would be undermined by the action of some Union officers.<sup>5</sup> The career of Wild is particularly useful to study because he was among the first to raise and lead black troops, and because he had already won impressive credentials as a fighting officer while leading white Massachusetts units. He could not be viewed by regular army officers as more of a missionary than a soldier.<sup>6</sup> If Wild's name is not as well known today as an officer such as Robert Shaw, Wild's role in organizing and leading black soldiers and in aiding their dependents was more significant. He was in the forefront of recruiting ex-slaves into the army and was the first Massachusetts officer to lead a black brigade. In addition, his brief career in the Freedmen's Bureau underscored a central change in the early philosophy of the Bureau.

Edward Wild was born in Brookline on November 25, 1825, the second son of a prominent physician. After graduating in 1844 from Harvard, in a class which included Francis Parkman, John Call Dalton, and Benjamin Apthorp Gould, Wild attended Jefferson Medical College and began practising medicine in Brookline in 1847. One year later he travelled to France to attend lectures in surgery and hospital practices.<sup>7</sup> While in Europe he travelled extensively and

obtained a close and personal view of the struggle then going on in Northern Italy when he was arrested briefly as a spy first by the Austrians and then by the Italian nationalists. His last release came after he was interrogated by Garibaldi. Wild married after his return to Brookline, but upon the outbreak of the Crimean War he sailed with his bride to Constantinople to offer his service to the Pasha. For a brief period after the war, he remained in Turkey in charge of hospitals, and then he returned to Brookline to continue his successful practice. As an active member of the Independent Corps of Cadets in Boston, Wild began to raise a company of volunteers in Brookline and Jamaica Plain at the outbreak of the Civil War. On May 21, 1861, he was mustered in as Captain of Company A, 1st Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers. During the next year and a half he fought in six major engagements and gained a reputation as a courageous and capable officer. In June of 1862, at the Battle of Seven Pines [White Oaks] Wild's right hand was badly shattered by a bullet, permanently disabling two fingers. While recuperating in Boston he was promoted first to major, then lieutenant-colonel of the 32nd Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers, but then was mustered out at the specific request of Governor Andrew so that Wild could lead a new regiment. The Governor, described as a "warm personal friend," had great confidence in Wild who was promoted to colonel of the Thirty-Fifth Massachusetts Regiment on August 20, 1862. "We have sent no better material to the war than our Thirty-Fifth Regiment, Colonel Wild, just raised, which marched this p.m. filled to maximum." Only three weeks later, on September 14, while repulsing a dusk attack at the Battle of South Mountain, Wild was struck in the left arm by "an exploding bullet." After a series of operations the arm was removed at the shoulder joint "under his own directions."<sup>8</sup>

Two and a half months later he was able to return to Boston. From February to March, 1863, at a time when his wound was not yet fully healed, he assisted Governor Andrew in raising and organizing black troops. The Governor had been peppering the War Department since 1862 for permission to raise black regiments as part of the state's volunteer organization, and in early 1863 Secretary of War Edwin Stanton authorized Andrew and the governors of Rhode Island and Connecticut to begin recruiting black regiments. The 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was the first of such regiments. Northern black manpower was limited, however, and as a result in April 1863, at the urging of Andrew, the Secretary of War made Wild a Brigadier General and ordered him to raise a brigade of black troops in North Carolina "from the freedmen of that state."<sup>9</sup> After an informal visit with the 54th Regiment, Wild left for North Carolina.<sup>10</sup> Wild's major concern was that his "broken constitution" would force him "to back out prematurely." "I feel the difference—I am not the man I was a year ago—Still I mean to work for my country so long as I can, and wherever I may be placed, do what is set before me."<sup>11</sup> Despite his wounds, Andrew knew of "no brigadier better fitted to take charge" of the black soldiers.

Governor Andrew gave Major General John Foster a description of Wild upon his departure for New Bern, North Carolina.

He is one of the bravest men and one of the best, most accomplished and experienced officers in the Mass. Volunteer Service . . . I know

that Gen. Wild is peculiarly adapted—by reason of his cosmopolitan experiences as a Surgeon, a soldier and a traveller and as a man of ideas and not simply of routine, while he is at the same time a person of the most exemplary patience and quiet though not unenthusiastic perseverance—to accomplish with success and ability the duty he has undertaken.<sup>12</sup>

Andrew went on to allude to the difficulties which any officer in Wild's position must face.<sup>13</sup> He knew that Foster would realize the necessity of using all the physical and material resources available to bring a quick end to the war. Andrew continued, "I am not unaware, however,"

that gentlemen do exist who in the presence of new facts and novel experiences are nevertheless slow to discriminate between the opinions they had adopted at a former time . . . and those conclusions to which present duties, passing events and actual experiences under relations substantially different, deemed to conduct the minds of the most practical, dispassionate and thoughtful men.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, many officers had not yet accepted the need to raise black troops. Given the problems which Wild would face, and his probable reluctance to ask for help, the Governor requested all possible support and sympathy from Foster. Andrew may have known that Foster was pessimistic about the possibility and even the necessity of recruiting black soldiers. In May of 1863 Foster had written the Secretary of War that if Stanton wanted to recruit black soldiers, Foster would assist, but he warned Stanton that it was his "opinion based on experience that, not more than one Regiment, if even that, could be raised in this Department by voluntary enlistment."<sup>15</sup>

Wild clearly would need all the help that he could get, for compounding his difficult task of raising a brigade, were the conditions in New Bern and the skepticism or outright hostility among his fellow officers including General Foster. When the General arrived at New Bern the city had already become the black refugee center for North Carolina. Well over 7,500 contrabands had flocked to the city by 1863, and the number of slaves seeking freedom rose rapidly as Federal troops pushed into the Tidewater.<sup>16</sup> Wild's first concern was to recruit, staff, and train a brigade of black soldiers but it was only one of many responsibilities.

I have much more on my hands now, than I can do well, between the military general business, the military recruiting business, the colonization scheme, and the endless appeals of the oppressed for protection. All seem to look to me—At times when I see the weak, or the false and rotten course pursued by different provost marshals, it exasperates me so.<sup>17</sup>

A superintendent of the poor for Federally occupied North Carolina, Vincent Colyer, had been appointed and began work in March of 1862, but he spent most of his time caring for the needs of the white soldiers and destitute white civilians. His successor, Reverend James Means, soon died of yellow fever. As

a result, much of Wild's time was spent on non-military efforts to aid the blacks. He began a colonization program to settle refugees upon unoccupied land. Only in July 1863 did an officer specifically appointed as superintendent of Negro affairs take over some of Wild's responsibilities for the black refugees.<sup>18</sup>

Stimulated by Wild's personality and energy, and by the aid which he was able to give to families of black recruits, blacks flocked to enlist. The blacks received neither the normal bounty money nor white soldiers' wages, but Wild used his own funds to help recruit the brigade.<sup>19</sup> Despite the threats by Confederates that captured black soldiers would be treated as insurrectionists and that their white officers would be executed, Wild was able to announce by June 25, 1863 that the 1st Regiment North Carolina Colored Volunteers (N.C.C.V.) had been completed and that he had begun on the second regiment.<sup>20</sup> He had been handicapped by the fact that he was not allowed to draw soldiers or officers from the Army of the Potomac. Fortunately for Wild, and for the efficiency of his black regiments, the First Massachusetts Regiment had been detached from the Army and sent north to guard various cities. Wild drew heavily from this regiment because, as he wrote, "I know personally the worth of very many of its members, and how richly they deserve promotion."<sup>21</sup> The majority of his new junior officers had previously served as non-commissioned officers in either the First, Twenty-Fifth, or Thirteenth Massachusetts Regiments but some were carefully selected from a wide range of regiments. One man was even drawn from Canada. In addition, Wild commissioned two northern blacks as officers, considered a radical act in the summer of 1863.<sup>22</sup> "Recruiting for the African Brigade is progressing lively," wrote Corporal Z. T. Haines. "Quite a recruiting fever has seized the freedmen of New Bern."<sup>23</sup> By early September, Wild was able to announce that he was organizing a third regiment. Despite his protest, he and his regiments had been transferred by this time to Folly Island, South Carolina to help defend Charleston, but his repeated requests led to his being reassigned to New Bern in October of 1863.<sup>24</sup>

After Wild's return to North Carolina, his efforts were systematically undermined by his fellow officers. Just before he led his expedition into the north-eastern part of the State, he clashed with Brigadier General George Getty, division commander in the Eighteenth Army Corps, over the passage of black refugees through Union lines. In a short note Wild warned that, by order of General Benjamin Butler, "all colored men, women, and children coming into our lines from the enemy's country are to be welcomed whenever met, and are to be assisted on their way as much as possible." Many would come as a result of the impending raid, and Wild worried that Getty or one of his officers might try to block them. If the refugees were "obstructed in any way, it will be very certainly followed by severe punishment to the offenders." Getty was offended and complained that the tone of the note was "manifestly improper." Nevertheless the actions of Getty's officers made it clear that Wild's fears were justified, for it was not only Colonel Ward who interfered with the activities of the black soldiers.<sup>25</sup>

Wild had divided his forces during the raid and at one point was threatened by a strong force of Confederate soldiers. Colonel Alonzo Draper, leading the 2nd NCCV to his assistance, was stopped at Pongo Bridge by Colonel Frederick

Wead of the 98th New York Regiment who attempted to take a prisoner from him by force.<sup>26</sup> Both Draper and his lieutenant suffered injury and for a moment there was real danger of a skirmish between black and white soldiers.<sup>27</sup> In his report to Secretary of War Stanton concerning the expedition, General Butler referred to the problems facing Wild. Butler was pleased with the conduct of the black soldiers, and had qualified praise for Wild, but he found

between some of the officers in this department in command of white soldiers, a considerable degree of prejudice against the colored troops and, in some cases impediments have been thrown in the way of their recruiting, and they [were] interfered with on their expeditions. This I am investigating and will punish with the most stringent measures, trusting and believing my actions will be sustained by the Department.<sup>28</sup>

Typical of the type of officer referred to by Butler was one Massachusetts soldier serving in North Carolina, Captain William Walker. "The 'nigger' in this dept" he wrote home shortly after Wild's expedition returned "is supreme & it is policy for those who desire to bask in the smiles of official favor to be its very devout worshippers . . . ." He believed that "The attempt to mix [the black] up with white soldiers & people is productive of mischief, they are very arrogant & insolent presuming altogether too much on their social position."<sup>29</sup>

On January 18, 1864 Wild was removed from North Carolina and placed in command of the District of Norfolk and Portsmouth.<sup>30</sup> Three months later he was assigned to the Army of the James to command the 1st Brigade, 3rd Division, Eighteenth Army Corps under Brigadier General Edward W. Hinks.<sup>31</sup> The Army of the James was perhaps the most politicized in American history and it was under Hinks that Wild would achieve his greatest military success and face his most humiliating rebuke.

During the Bermuda Hundred campaign in the spring of 1864, when the Army of the James moved on Richmond, troops under Wild won considerable praise. At Wilson's Wharf, on May 25, Wild was attacked by approximately three thousand Confederates under Major General Fitz Lee. Although the black soldiers were outnumbered almost two to one, and despite Fitz Lee's warning that unless they surrendered immediately he could not be responsible for the consequences, Wild would not move. His terse reply was "We will try it." For six hours the black soldiers, led personally by Wild, fought off repeated attacks by Fitz Lee's cavalry and artillery.<sup>32</sup> Finally the Confederates pulled back leaving the ground strewn with casualties.<sup>33</sup> Wilson's Wharf was the first real test of the black soldiers in the Army of the James and, given the overall failure of the campaign, that victory was of considerable importance. Only a few weeks later Wild's 1st U. S. Colored Troops fought at Petersburg. Despite heavy casualties, the regiment fought very well during an assault on the enemy trenches.<sup>34</sup> Clearly Wild's recruits were capable soldiers.

Yet less than a month after the engagement at Wilson's Wharf General Wild was under arrest awaiting a court martial on charges of disobeying orders of General Hinks. The court martial had its roots in a growing dispute between the

two generals. Just prior to the battle at Wilson's Wharf, Wild had clashed with his divisional commander. He had strongly objected to a letter from Hinks demanding that he report "all the circumstances attending the killing of a citizen by an armed party of your Brigade, and the whipping of a Citizen Prisoner of War within your camp."<sup>35</sup> Wild was incensed. He protested to the Major General commanding the Department

Not being in the habit of accepting rebukes for acts not committed, —and feeling that I can judge the 'qualities becoming to a man or a soldier' quite as well as I can be informed by Brig. Gen. Edwd W. Hinks in *such a letter* as the *above* . . . I protest against the whole tone of the above letter.<sup>36</sup>

The citizen, a district enrolling officer and a member of a Rebel signal party, was killed in a skirmish before the Confederates surrendered to Wild's soldiers. The whipped prisoner, William H. Clopton, had been arrested by Wild for disloyal activities. He apparently had gained notoriety as the cruelest slave owner in the region, and Wild allowed several women whose backs were scarred from the lash to return the very same treatment. Clopton was stripped naked and whipped by the women. In closing his letter Wild revealed one of the key issues which exacerbated the relations between officers of white and black troops. Hinks, Wild wrote, had once again evoked the rules of civilized warfare, calling for the "exercise of magnanimity and forbearance." But, Wild continued

I would respectfully inquire for my own information and guidance whether it has been definitely arranged that black troops shall exchange courtesies with Rebel soldiers? And if so, on which side such courtesies are expected to commence? And whether any guaranties have been offered on the part of the Rebels calculated to prove satisfactory and reassuring to the African mind.<sup>37</sup>

More than a month later, the Clopton episode became part of the charges brought against Wild in a court martial. The trial was precipitated by Wild's refusal to obey an order by General Hinks to remove Lieutenant Birdsall from duty as Wild's acting quartermaster of the 1st Brigade and to replace him with a "competent officer." Wild replied that he was perfectly satisfied with Birdsall and that given no reason to remove him, the General "must respectfully decline to comply with the said orders; against which I protest as a *unlawful order*."<sup>38</sup> After another verbal message was ignored, Hinks placed Wild under arrest. Two letters from Wild to General Smith, Commander of the Corps, went unanswered. Wild was notified officially of his court martial at about ten p.m. June 28, summoning him to appear in court at ten a.m. June 29, only twelve hours later.<sup>39</sup>

Wild's defense was limited by his lack of notice. On the first day of the proceedings, he objected to two aspects of the court. With only one exception, all members of the Court were his junior. Of great importance, none of the officers commanded black troops, despite General Order No. 46. That order, requiring that a majority of such officers make up any court trying commanders of black soldiers, was issued by General Butler, specifically to counter the

prejudice facing officers of black regiments. That prejudice clearly existed because the court chose to ignore the standing order referred to by Wild, and to reject both of the General's objections. As a result, Wild objected the following day to a number of members of the court "as being prejudiced against my past course and present position, raising and commanding negro troops."<sup>40</sup>

Once again Wild's objections were ignored and he was read the charges. Two of the charges—conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman and conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline—were linked to the Clopton case.<sup>41</sup> The third charge was disobedience of an order, and referred to his refusal to replace Birdsall. The first two charges were dropped since the Clopton incident had been referred to the Judge Advocate of the Army. Wild, therefore, had to defend himself on only one charge. He argued that the order which he had disobeyed had been an unlawful one which he should not have obeyed. General officers, he claimed, had the right to select their staff, and they could not be ordered removed unless some clear reason was given. The court was unconvinced and Wild was found guilty of the charge and the specifications. The court sentenced him "To be suspended from rank and pay for six (6) months, and to be reprimanded in General Orders by the General commanding the 18th Army Corps."<sup>42</sup> The verdict, and the irregularities of the court, left Wild with little doubt as to the real reason that he had been tried. It had little to do with his actual behavior: "The above trouble all grew out of the odium on the part of most of our Army officers, which I had incurred in consequence of my being early, active, and somewhat prominent in raising and leading Colored Troops—being in fact a pioneer therein."<sup>43</sup>

Within a short time, however, the actions of the court were overruled and Wild was released. General Butler, the Commander of the Department, set aside the proceedings because of the court's refusal to recognize the importance of General Order No. 46. The necessity for that order, Butler repeated, had been "a prejudice among some officers—now happily dying out—so strong, inveterate, and deep-rooted, that, in his judgement . . . such officers would not form an impartial tribunal for the trial of an officer in command of colored troops." There were in addition, Butler noted, "other and grave objections to the course of this trial." Moreover, Wild had been sufficiently punished for an erroneous and imprudent assertion of his rights. The Judge Advocate General's Office subsequently confirmed and approved Butler's action.<sup>44</sup>

The bitterness of the case then led Butler to reassign Wild to establish a "recruiting rendezvous" at Fortress Monroe, a position to which, Butler claimed, he was "admirably fitted."<sup>45</sup> Wild established his headquarters at Newport News, a healthy location where his recruits would "be exposed to no temptations or interference." One incident occurred at Newport News which illustrated just how different the war was for black troops and their white officers, how little room there was for a code of civilized warfare. At the request of black government employees, hospital workers at Fort Monroe and Hampton, Wild sent out sixteen soldiers to rescue their families still in Confederate occupied territory. The expedition, under strict orders not to plunder or to injure anyone, was slowed down by the large number of women and children. Before they could reach the security of the Federal lines, they were ambushed "by a force



of irregular appearances numbering about 100 having horses and dogs with them, armed variously with shotguns, rifles, &c." The first volley killed a man and a woman and wounded others before the blacks could scatter into the swamp. "How many more have been slaughtered we know not," Wild reported. He then asked that some houses of known Confederate supporters be burned in retaliation.<sup>46</sup>

It was not until the end of October of 1864, that Wild was relieved from recruiting duty and sent back to Butler's command, first as a special adviser to an expedition in North Carolina, then as a commander of the First (previously Third) Division of the Twenty-Fifth Army Corps. Yet only a few months later, after Major-General Edward Ord replaced Butler as commander of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina, and of the Army of the James, Wild was reduced to a Brigade leader. Significantly, the officer who took command of the First Division, Brigadier General August Kautz, held a view very different from Wild's towards his black soldiers. "I shall feel less regret," Kautz wrote, "over the slain than if my troops were white . . . . If I must fall myself I should prefer to die with my own [kind]."<sup>47</sup>

In April 1865 Wild was relieved of duties in the Department of Virginia and was sent home.<sup>48</sup> Only after he had left was he able to learn the reasons for his demotion. While in Washington, he discovered that General Weitzel, commander of the 25th Army Corps, had written to Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson, Chairman of the Senate Military Affairs Committee, to the effect that Wild was incompetent to handle a division. Wild was surprised, since Weitzel's letter conflicted with their personal conversations. Since Wild was now without a command, and stigmatized as incompetent at a time when the number of general officers was being reduced, he expected to be dropped. While he claimed never to have wanted a long army career he did not want the freedmen to lose "their truest friend, exactly at the time when they will have the greatest need of friends to elevate them to their new political status, and establish them therein." Wild had been one of the very first to raise black troops and for two years had been identified with their cause. For this he believed he had paid a high price:

On this account I have had nothing but prejudice, jealousy, misrepresentation, persecution and treachery to contend against, throughout this period, and from every quarter—even from General Butler himself, who aimed to be considered the most prominent friend of the Negro in the whole country.<sup>49</sup>

Only a statement from Weitzel could clear his record and allow him to continue to aid the black. Then Senator Wilson could help get Wild assigned "to some service where I may govern its Rebels, and crush out guerillas." The times demanded that both civilian and military Federal officials in the South be watchful, firm, uncompromising and "Phil-African." It was crucial to counter what Wild saw as "an evident and growing tendency to throw everything back into the hands of West-Pointers—just the worst possible hands in which to trust the interests of the Negro, whether as soldier or civilian."<sup>50</sup>

General Weitzel replied that his letter to Wilson was only meant to convey a preference for General Theodore Read. While his view of discipline differed from Wild's, Weitzel considered the General an honest, sincere, patriotic, and brave man. The letter to Wilson ended with two significant points. It had been written immediately after Weitzel joined the Corps and it was "at a time when I had received unfavorable reports about your management from several sources; all of which subsequent experience proved to have been exaggerated." Moreover Wild's removal had been entirely without his knowledge.<sup>51</sup>

The man who had been responsible for Wild's removal was, in fact, the new commander of the Army of the James, Major General Ord, a vacillating and easily-swayed officer, and an arch-rival of Butler. Shortly after he took over the Army of the James he asked for "a good brigadier-general in place of Wild who has charges against him" and claimed that this reflected General Weitzel's view.<sup>52</sup> Wild believed that not only was it Ord's personal hostility towards him, but also that the commander's animosity stemmed from "his mistaken idea that I was a pet of Butler's, and that he must therefore displace me. This grievous error was fostered by his Staff of Nigger-haters." Indeed Ord's attitude towards both black troops and their officers was revealed by his limited use of them and by his opening remark to Weitzel after the Army of the James had entered the Confederate capital: "Now you must get these damned niggers of yours out of Richmond as fast as you can."<sup>53</sup>

Significantly, when Ord took over the Army of the James, the all-black Twenty-Fifth Army Corps had three divisional commanders—Charles J. Paine, William Birney, and Wild—with very similar backgrounds. All the men were civilians in 1861, two of them lawyers and one a physician, had led white units capably at the start of the war, and had volunteered by early 1863 to raise and lead black troops. They had been successful recruiting black soldiers and were removed from their commands or transferred from Virginia within two months of Ord's assuming command. Like Wild, General Birney believed that he was being removed because of his support for black soldiers. Birney told Butler that Ord's "discrimination against the colored troops has been so marked as to attract attention." Moreover Birney linked his removal to the fate of other officers leading black units.<sup>54</sup>

My removal was due to the same cause that had led to the removal of Foster, Heckman, Shepley, Harris, and Wild, to the sequestering of Ludlow . . . and the attempt to displace Maj. Gen. Weitzel . . . [I]t was understood that to be a "Butler man" was to be doomed.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike many of these officers, Wild was able, through the efforts of friends, to continue his efforts on behalf of the freedmen. On May 31, 1865 he was ordered to report to Major General Saxton for duty in the Freedmen's Bureau.<sup>56</sup> When he arrived at Beaufort, South Carolina, Saxton appointed him assistant commissioner to supervise the operations of the Bureau in Georgia.<sup>57</sup> Wild had previously prophesied that the South would not accept defeat and emancipation quietly, and he was prepared to act firmly to protect blacks. On August 2, 1865 he reported from Savannah that "The rebels are beaten but not subdued. There is danger enough here from secret attacks," he said, and he was "to go to Macon

and other places in the interior where it is still more."<sup>58</sup> The danger did not diminish. In early September there was an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Wild. Another Bureau agent, Captain Healey was killed.<sup>59</sup> Yet if Wild had outraged some white Southerners, he had satisfied his immediate superior, General Saxton. In late summer Saxton wrote to Wild: "I fully approve of your action and wish to express my entire satisfaction with the energy and discretion you have displayed in the discharge of your varied duties."<sup>60</sup>

In Washington, however, there were many who were not as pleased with the actions of Wild or the Bureau. In August Saxton had been unable to get a precise definition as to what was expected of the Bureau, or exactly what his duties were.<sup>61</sup> In early September Saxton was given precise orders. He was to remove Wild as soon as possible. Ulysses S. Grant had made the request because "men should be appointed who can act from facts, and not always guided by prejudice in favor of color."<sup>62</sup> The *Commonwealth* suspected that it would be much less offensive if the prejudice was in favour of the whites.<sup>63</sup> Saxton was startled and wrote Wild to assure his subordinate that he had nothing to do with it. "No one could have regretted such a thing more than I did," he wrote, "and I am totally at a loss to understand this order."<sup>64</sup> What had happened, General Howard made clear the next month, was that a new conciliatory policy had been adopted. Wild had been removed

simply because he persisted in pursuing hostile measures, when conciliatory ones were necessary; or at least adequate . . . . The Bureau is of short duration, and its work will probably soon be over; therefore it behooves to now make, if possible, by conciliatory measures, the former owners of the freed people, their friends. This cannot be done by hostile measures, but may by those of a more friendly nature.<sup>65</sup>

Anyone who was too closely connected with assistance to the black or who saw himself as their advocate would, of course, be unsuitable to implement the new policy. Wild's removal from the Bureau, probably a result of his active implementation of the Bureau's Circular Order Thirteen, was not an isolated incident. Circular Order Thirteen of July 28, 1865, laid out procedures for the distribution of confiscated land to ex-slaves. It was replaced by Circular Order Fifteen, ordered by Andrew Johnson, directing agents to return confiscated land to pardoned rebels. James Fullerton had begun his campaign of vilification in order to remove those men to whom President Johnson objected. The men removed ranged from major figures such as Thomas Conway to minor officials such as Rodney Churchill in Virginia. One man, C. B. Wilder, faced an experience similar to Wild. He was court martialled on specious charges and acquitted but the very trial led to his dismissal.<sup>66</sup> The removal of Wild and other white officers who tried to work with the freedmen, and to protect them from Southern whites seriously weakened the Bureau. It also revealed, once again, the prejudice directed against anyone working for racial equality. When Wild's removal is mentioned in secondary accounts, he is portrayed as negligent, corrupt, unconcerned with the conditions facing the freedmen, and brutal to the point that he personally generated great bitterness among white Georgians which took a long time to allay. These charges stem solely from claims of

Fullerton and, given Wild's previous conduct and Saxton's praise for his efforts, they are, to say the least, suspect.<sup>67</sup>

When Wild offered his services to Governor Andrew in early 1863 he was a respected and admired military leader. Over the next two and a half years he was harassed, vilified, court martialed, demoted, and relieved of his last important command position. He may have been the architect of some of his misfortunes, but most of his problems were the result of persons hostile to his cooperation with blacks and his willingness to place their interests ahead of the interests of the white Southerners.

His career represents more than a personal tragedy, although it was that. The evidence shows that he was not the only officer to suffer because of his desire to lead black soldiers or to aid the freedman. During the war, the Union army was weaker as a result. After the war it was the nation as a whole that paid an even greater price.

#### NOTES

1. R. N. Scott, et al., eds. *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880-1901) [hereinafter cited as *O.R.*], Series I, vol. XXIX, Part II, p. 562.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 142; Series I, vol. XXXIII, p. 485. In the month following Wild's complaints that the colonel had hindered the expedition in other ways as well, Ward was not listed in command of his regiment. However, by January 1864, he was again listed as leading his regiment.
3. There is considerable work published which outlines the prejudice and discrimination faced by black soldiers during the Civil War. These works range from regimental studies to analyses of Federal policy towards the blacks. Some of the books include Luis F. Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment: History of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863-1865* (New York, 1969); Peter H. Clark, *The Black Brigade of Cincinnati* (New York, 1969); William Wells Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion* (Boston, 1867); James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War* (New York, 1965); Robert W. Mullen, *Blacks in America's Wars* (New York, 1973); Mary Frances Berry, *Military Necessity and Civil Rights Policy* (Port Washington, 1977). There are considerably fewer studies outlining the discrimination and career sacrifices which faced those white officers who wished to work with the blacks.
4. U.S. Grant to Secretary of War Stanton (undated telegram) Papers of E. A. Wild, Military History Institute (hereafter M.H.I.), Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pa.

5. For a study of the changing Confederate policy towards captured black soldiers who were initially treated as slave insurrectionists see Howard C. Westwood, "Captive Black Soldiers in Charleston—What to Do?" *Civil War History* (March, 1982). There were enough atrocity incidents to make clear the risks which white and black volunteers faced. For example, in 1863 Lieutenant Oscar Ocillian and a group of twenty Louisiana Native Guard soldiers were "captured by the Confederates and hanged and cut to pieces," Mary F. Berry, *Military Necessity and Civil Rights Policy*, p. 62.
6. Often officers appointed in charge of blacks had better credentials as abolitionists than as soldiers. These officers were often harried by their brother officers. Robert F. Engs, *Freedom's First Generation* (Philadelphia, 1979), p. 32-3.
7. Bradford Kingman, "General Edward Augustus Wild" *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (Oct. 1895), pp. 405-6.
8. Address of Martin P. Kennard (Brookline, 1894), pp. 7-8, 13; "The Military Life of Edward A. Wild," *Wild Papers*, M.H.I.; Brookline Cadets Records, Papers in Regards to Brookline in the Civil War, 1861-65. Gen. E. A. Wild Civil War Papers, Brookline Public Library; Assistant Adjutant General to War Department, July 6, 1878. Personal file, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, Letters Received by the Commision Branch, National Archives, Washington [hereafter Personnel File]; *O. R.*, Series III, vol. II, pp. 363, 438; Kingman, *General Wild*, pp. 8, 406-8.
9. Governor Andrew to Major General Foster, May 14, 1863, Wild Papers, M.H.I.; *O.R.*, series I, vol. XXVI, Part II, p. 294; Series III, vol. III, p. 122.
10. Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment*, pp. 23-4.
11. Wild to Edward W. Kinsley, July 28, 1863, Edward Kinsley Papers, Duke Manuscript Collection [hereafter D.M.C.] Duke University.
12. Governor Andrew to Major General Foster, May 14, 1863, Wild Papers, M.H.I.
13. Andrew knew from the experience of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, a black unit, what to expect. "At the time [Feb. 1863] a strange prejudice existed against arming the blacks and those who dared command them." Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment*, p. 6. Andrew rated Wild above Colonels Shaw, Higginson and Montgomery, or even Brigadier General Francis Barlow. *O.R.* Series III, vol. III, p. 423-4.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Foster to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, May 5, 1863 cited in Ira Berlin (ed.) *The Black Military Experience* (New York 1982), p. 132.
16. Joe A. Mobley, *James City: A Black Community in North Carolina* (Research Reports from the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, No. 1, 1981) p. 5.
17. Wild to Kinsley, July 28, 1863, Kinsley Papers, D.M.C.

18. James was ordered to assume charge of the colonization of Roanoke Island. He was to "take possession of all unoccupied lands on the island, and lay them out and assign them, according to his own discretion, to the families of colored soldiers, to invalid, and other blacks in the employment of the Government or by due process of United States law." *O.R.*, Series I, vol. XXIX, Part II, p. 166; and Mobley, *James City*, pp. 4, 21.
19. *O.R.*, Series III, vol. III, p. 684; Major Stearns to Hon. Edwin Stanton, 17 August, 1863, Berlin, *Freedom*, Series II, p. 100. White soldiers received \$13 a month plus a \$3.50 clothes allowance. Black soldiers received \$10 a month minus \$3 for clothes.
20. *O.R.*, Series I, vol. XXVIII, Part II, p. 73. Dudley T. Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York, 1956), pp. 95-96; Wild to Major T. M. Vincent, Assistant Adjutant General, June 25, 1863, Records of the Adjutant-General's Office, Letters Received, Colored Troops Branch [hereafter C.T.B.] National Archives, Washington.
21. Wild to Vincent, May 25, 1863; Vincent to Wild, June 3, 1863; Wild to Vincent, September 4, 1863, C.T.B.
22. Captain Constantine Nitzsche was from Ross, Canada West, John V. De Grasse, Assistant Surgeon of the 1st N.C.C.T. and William A. Green, Chaplain of the 3rd N.C.C.T. were both blacks from Massachusetts. Proposed Roster of 1st Regiment, April 27, 1863; 3rd Reg't N.C. Colored Vols, Proposed Roster, September 4, 1863, C.T.B. De Grasse held the rank of major. A measure of how advanced Wild's attitudes were is the fact that throughout the whole war only seven other blacks achieved that position. McPherson, *Negro's Civil War*, p. 239. Excluding the complex case of the Louisiana Native Guard, no line commissions were allowed until Gov. Andrew forced the War Department to promote Stephen Swails a lieutenant in the 54th Massachusetts.
23. "Corporal" [Z. T. Haines], *Letters from the Forty-Fifth Regiment M.V.M.: A Record of the Experiences of a Nine Months' Regiment in the Department of North Carolina in 1862-3* (Boston), p. 95.
24. Wild to Vincent, Sept. 4, 1863, C.T.B.; *O.R.*, Series I, vol. XXIX, Part II, p. 290.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 542-43, 562.
26. *O.R.* Series I, vol. XXIX, Part I, p. 483. The incident, which revolved around a female prisoner, reflected the different concerns of the officers involved. Wead was concerned about civilized warfare and using female hostages. Wild, who had had one of his black soldiers executed by the Confederates, was more concerned with the lives of his soldiers.
27. *O.R.* Series I, vol. XXIX, Part I, p. 913. See also Wild to Lieutenant George H. Willis, Jan. 14, 1864, in George H. Willis Papers, Mugar Memorial Library, Boston University.

28. Wild, he wrote, did "his work with great thoroughness, but perhaps with too much stringency." and he referred to complaints made by the inhabitants to certain actions of Wild. See *O.R.* Series I, vol. XXIX, Part II, p. 595-6.
29. Capt. William A. Walker to "Dear Jos," Jan. 16, 1864, in James Perkins Walker Papers, Firestone Library, Princeton University.
30. Military Life of Edward A. Wild, March 12, 1864, Wild Papers, M.H.I.
31. Report of the Military Services of Edward A. Wild, July, 1873, Wild Papers, M.H.I. He had in his brigade the 10th, 22nd, and 37th U.S. Colored Troops, *O.R.* Series I, vol. XXXIII, p. 957. The 1st Colored Troops was soon added. *O.R.* Series I, vol. XXXVI, Part I, p. 118.
32. Report of the Military Services of Edward A. Wild, Wild Papers, M.H.I.; *O.R.*, Series I, vol. XXXVI, Part II, pp. 20, 24, 30-31, 209-72; Part III, p. 321. Fitz Lee's threat was more ominous coming as it did less than a month after the Fort Pillow massacre.
33. *O.R.*, Series I, vol. XL, Part II, p. 202-3.
34. The regiment lost 153 soldiers. *O.R.*, Series I, [Vol. XXXVI, Part I, p. 1018;] vol. XL, Part I, p. 215, 236.
35. Hinks to Wild, May 11, 1864, Wild Papers, M.H.I.
36. Wild to Major Davis, May 12, 1865, Wild Papers, M.H.I.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Captain Solon A. Carter to Wild, June 22, 1864, and Wild to Carter, June 23, 1864, Records of the Judge Advocate General's Office, Court Martial Case Files, Court Marshall of Edward A. Wild, National Archives, Washington [hereafter referred to as J.A.G.O.].
39. Wild to Major Robert B. Davis, June 29, 1864, Wild Papers, M.H.I.
40. General Order No. 86, July 30th, 1864, Hinks Papers, Boston University Library; and Records of Edward A. Wild's Court Martial, J.A.G.O.
41. The specifications included the accusation that he had whipped Clopton, that he claimed that he would do the same in a similar situation, and that his letter to Davis protesting Hinks' order was "unbecoming, defiant, and disrespectful." Records of Edward A. Wild's Court Martial, J.A.G.O.
42. General Order No. 86, Hinks Papers, Boston University Library.
43. Report of the Military Services of Edward A. Wild, Wild Papers, M.H.I.
44. *O.R.*, Series I, vol. XL, Part III, p. 435; *New York Times*, Aug. 1864; and General Order No. 86, Hinks Papers, Boston University Library.
45. *O.R.*, Series I, vol. XL, Part III, p. 339.

46. *O.R.*, Series I, vol. XLII, Part II, p. 50, 623, 652-4. Incidents such as this partially explain the depth of Wild's hostility towards "Rebels."
47. Report of Assistant Adjutant General, July 6, 1878, Wild's Personnel File, Letters Received by the Commission Branch, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, National Archives, Washington. *O.R.*, Series I, vol. XLII, Part I, p. 3, 579; Part III, p. 1126; vol. XLVI, Part II, pp. 212, 336; and Kautz to Mrs. Savage, February 12, 1865, Kautz Papers, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield.
48. *O.R.*, Series I, vol. XLVI, Part III, p. 847.
49. Wild to Weitzel, May 8, 1865, Wild Papers, M.H.I. Wild no longer expected promotion despite the activities of his friends in Massachusetts. He was not sure that he deserved it, and he firmly believed that Butler had blocked, in the past, to curtail a possible rival. Wild to Wilson, May 10, 1865, Wild Papers M.H.I.; Wild to Kinsley, July 28, 1863; Mrs. Wild to Kinsley, June 28, 1864, Kinsley Papers, D.M.C.
50. Wild to Wilson, May 10, 1865, Wild Papers, M.H.I.; a study of the Bureau in South Carolina concluded that the "most damaging of all the handicaps under which Saxton had to labor was the manner in which army officials actively opposed Bureau work." Martin L. Abbott, "The Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina" (Ph.D., Emory University, 1954), p. 15.
51. Weitzel to Wild, May 13, 1865.
52. Ord was a self-proclaimed friend of the blacks but his actions revealed a very different attitude. *O.R.* Series I, vol. XLVI, Part II, p. 679.
53. Wild to Wilson, May 10, 1864, Wild Papers, M.H.I.
54. Birney described his treatment in Birney to Butler, April 23, 1865, *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler During the Period of the Civil War* (Plimpton Press, 1917) vol. 5, pp. 600-601; *O.R.*, Series I, vol. XLVI, Part III, p. 1063; vol. XLVII, Part I, p. 57.
55. Correspondence of Butler, p. 600.
56. *O.R.*, Series I, vol. XLVII, Part III, p. 604.
57. Report of the Military Services of Edward A. Wild, Wild Papers, M.H.I.
58. John W. Sullivan to Edward Kinsley, Kinsley Papers, D.M.C.
59. *The Commonwealth*, September 30, 1865.
60. Saxton to Wild, August 17, 1865, Wild Papers, M.H.I.
61. *Ibid.* Howard was vacationing and James Fullerton had not yet molded Bureau policy to his President's image.
62. Assistant Adj. Gen. J. S. Fullerton to Saxton, September 2, 1865, and Grant to Sec. of War Edwin Stanton (undated), Wild Papers, M.H.I.



63. *The Commonwealth*, September 30, 1865.
64. Saxton to Wild (no date), Wild Papers, M.H.I.
65. Joseph A. Staden, private secretary to Gen. Howard, October 24, 1865, Wild Papers, M.H.I.
66. William McFeely, *Yankee Stepfather: General O. O. Howard and the Freedmen* (New Haven, 1968) p. 116, 119-20; Robert F. Engs, *Freedom's First Generation* (Philadelphia, 1979), p. 108-9, 110-11.
67. George R. Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau* (New York, 1955) p. 68-70; Alan Conway, *The Reconstruction of Georgia* (Minneapolis, 1966) p. 76-77; Paul A. Ambala "The Talisman Power: David Tillson, The Freedmen's Bureau, and Free Labor in Reconstruction Georgia, 1865-1866," *Civil War History* (June 1982), p. 157; Todd L. Savitt, "Politics in Medicine: The Georgia Freedmen's Bureau and the Organization of Health Care, 1865-1866," *Civil War History* (March 1982), pp. 47-48.