Resource #12. A Letter from Union Soldiers

Two Union soldiers who had been taken as prisoner by the Confederate army describe their escape, which was helped by “negroes” in Charleston.

Hilton Head S.C. December 7th 1864

Sir

Agreably to your request the undersigned have the honor to present to you the following brief summary of their observations in and escape from the Southern States

On the 5th October, the officers confined in Roper Hospital Charleston S.C. received orders to prepare for a removal, we, together with Lieut Millward A.D.C to Genl Scammon, having provided ourselves with rebel uniforms (while in route to the dep’t) walked deliberately out of the ranks. Knowing no one in the city we relied upon the negroes & the same day, we related to one Thos Brown (Colored Barber) who we were, & asked assistance —

Said Brown, who seemed proud of speaking of his being a Black Republican — placed us in charge of his son who the same night procured for us a hiding place among some friends of his (colored) where we remained at least one month. We, a short time after our escape, heard of one Mr. Riels (German) who was hiding away the other officers — This gentleman provided us with money & used all endeavors to get us away. Having procured 5 negroes and about on the 2[7th] Oct. we made the attempt to run out of the harbor, from the foot of Hazel St. As we were about starting, a Lieut[enant] with 7 men — suddenly appeared and without speaking fired at the men collected on the wharf wounding the Lieut. in charge and capturing the negroes — We, in the obscurity of the night, crawled away and hid in an empty building — Being compelled to leave our quarters we got separated from Lt. Milward who we have since learned was recaptured on Sullivans Island.

Being introduced to a Mr. Christmen (German) we in conjunction with Capt. Telford & a private made an attempt together with a Mr O'Conner (Citizen) to leave by the route by which we subsequently escaped. …

Resource #12. A Letter from Union Soldiers (cont'd)

> *We stayed in Charleston two months, relying all that time on the negroes for safety — who we found remarkably intelligent, thoroughly comprehending their own Status in the Rebellion….*
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> *We have the honor to be sir, in haste Very Respectfully Your Obdt. Servant*
>
> *(Signed) Alured Larke*
>
> *(Signed) R. H. Day*

Questions for Students:

- What risks did the African Americans who helped these soldiers take?
- What benefits might they have thought they would receive?
- What do you think the soldiers mean when they say that the African Americans understood "their own status in the rebellion?"