

Kentucky

Contraband camps took different forms in different places. For instance, while in Memphis camps were created, often from the ground up, along or in the Mississippi River, in South Carolina many camps existed on the same plantations where blacks had been slaves. Still other camps simply consisted of a number of blacks resident at Union encampments. Especially in the case of newly-built camps, the populations were ever-changing since fugitives arrived daily, men were recruited into service, and women were often sent to work on abandoned farms or plantations. Some of what is known about these makeshift communities comes from official record while important details have been provided through the writings of various people—often associated with religious groups or benevolent organizations—who visited them. The most remarkable of these first-hand accounts is provided by Quaker Levi Coffin, who transitioned from his work on the Underground Railroad directly to fundraising for the contraband. Two other witnesses to camp life were Michigan Quaker and Underground Railroad operative Laura Haviland, and John Eaton, Jr. General Superintendent of Freedmen.

Columbus

This camp was located twenty miles below Cairo according to Coffin, who visited it in May of 1863. The area had been occupied by Union troops since March of 1862. According to one source, at one point, some 10,000 blacks were present at Columbus before the Union gained its foothold. These blacks were body servants of Confederate soldiers and officers. If this is so, then the eventual designation of blacks as contraband is all the more meaningful. There were two camps (also forts), Halleck and Quimby. When the Union took over these forts, many more blacks arrived, but, unfortunately, the policy concerning them at the time encouraged their return to their masters. Not all officers wanted to comply. However, an officer could be arrested for not doing so. Before long, the official policy was to employ blacks. A Rev. S.G. Wright wrote of the contraband at Columbus that there were 2,000 and more arriving. Housing and food were inadequate and many died daily. The Fourth United States Colored Heavy Artillery was recruited largely in Columbus.¹

☛ **Fort Donelson:** Prior to the freedmen inhabiting this fort, which was completed in 1863, slaves lived in or near the city of Dover. As in many other cases, this camp became a community, which survived through the remainder of the nineteenth century.

☛ **Fort Henry:**

☛ **Fort Heiman:** This fort and camp is located in Calloway County. Fort Heiman is believed to have been built entirely by slaves. The fort was captured in the winter of 1862.

Smithland

This city is located north of Fort Donelson on the Ohio River.

¹ William H. Mulligan, Jr., "History Articles: African Americans in West Kentucky and West Tennessee during the Civil War: The Fourth U.S. Heavy Artillery Colored," (<http://www.southernhistory.net/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=8500&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0>)

Coffin visited this camp in the spring of 1863 on his return from Tennessee and Mississippi.

Paducah

Coffin also visited this camp on his return to Cincinnati.