

# Mississippi

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.

## Corinth

This has been described as one of the best run camps before its closing. In May of 1863, when Coffin visited it, the camp was under the superintendence of Col. Alexander. According to Eaton, there were 6,000 contraband within the picket line, and 300 children were attending school. Cabins and tents, in Coffin's opinion, were kept clean. With Alexander, Coffin toured the farm and gardens; over one thousand acres were under cultivation. This activity provided food for soldiers and all.<sup>1</sup> Despite the camp's overall success, it was closed in January of 1865 (as a result of Van Dorn's Raid on Holly Springs) and blacks were transferred to Memphis. Masses of blacks were transferred by rail. According to Eaton, at least the first transferees were provided housing and employment. A black regiment, composed of men mostly from Alabama, was organized here. A second regiment was also organized. In 2004, the community of Corinth officially recognized the grounds as an historic site.

## Meridian

## Natchez

According to one Elizabeth Brown, a camp was quickly erected "in the swamp, mosquito-infested area just north of the steamboat landing known as Under-the-Hill-Natchez."<sup>2</sup> Haviland visited this camp. She wrote of the miserable conditions. She referred specifically to delivering supplies to a store, "passing down the 'Paradise Road' to the camp in Natchez-under-the-Hill."<sup>3</sup> Haviland also referred to a new camp opening on the Ralston Plantation. She reported that 4,000 were at the Under-the-Hill-Natchez. Writing of conditions

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<sup>1</sup> Coffin, 636.

<sup>2</sup> Diary of Elizabeth Brown, 1853-1863, cited in *Occupied Natchez, Elite Women, and the Feminization of the War*. (<http://74.125.113.132/search?q=cache:N6iiPgZFmDCJ:mdah.state.ms.us/pubs/natchez.pdf+fort+defiance+illinois,+contraband+camp&cd=16&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>)

<sup>3</sup> Haviland, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext05/wlwrk10.txt>.

at Natchez, she criticized an order that mandated that every colored person not gainfully employed be sent to the "corral." They gathered two hundred and fifty, mostly women and children, and drove them through the streets of Natchez on a chilly, rainy day, and marched them into the camp of four thousand in condemned tents.<sup>4</sup>

### **Vicksburg**

J.M. Anderson was the Supt. at Vicksburg.

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<sup>4</sup> Haviland.