

Daring and Tenacity

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected president. The slaveholding South viewed him as an abolitionist, though he did not think of himself that way. He opposed slavery, but his main goal was to stop the spread of slavery into new American territories. Beginning with South Carolina on December 20, 1860, Southern states began to secede from the Union and in 1861 formed the rebellious Confederate States of America. In April, the Confederate Army's attack on Fort Sumter in South Carolina began the Civil War.

While Lincoln's primary aim was to keep the country from splitting apart, Tubman and other activists were convinced the war should put an end to slavery. "God won't let Master Lincoln beat the South," she was quoted while fundraising in Massachusetts, "till he does the right thing." The right thing was to abolish slavery.

Tubman used her detailed knowledge of routes through swamps, rivers, and wetlands to help Union troops in Maryland. Later, she sailed to South Carolina, extending her liberty lines into the Deep South as the war raged. She spent much of her time caring for fugitives and guiding them back north.

Tubman wanted to join the military. Through influential abolitionist friends, Tubman met the abolitionist governor of Massachusetts, John Albion Andrew. In response to a Union general's request for volunteers, Andrew said that Tubman would be "a valuable person to operate within enemy lines in procuring information and scouts." At first, however, Tubman worked as a cook and a nurse in Union camps. She also taught slaves freed by the Army.

Early on, Lincoln opposed arming freed slaves, but Tubman enthusiastically supported bringing

them into the U.S. Army. With the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the first black troops of the Army appeared ready for battle. Tubman then joined, too. She became the leader of a team of spies, sending valuable information to commanders and recruiting restless slaves in the South to join Union forces.

On June 1, 1863, Tubman aided a mission of black soldiers up the Combahee River in South Carolina to take supplies and free slaves from plantations controlled by rebels. Serving as navigator on the

lead gunboat, Tubman took charge. The raid on the plantations freed at least 750 slaves. Tubman was the only woman in the Civil War to plan and lead an armed assault.

The *Wisconsin State Journal* soon published an article about her titled "A Black She 'Moses' — Her Wonderful Daring and Tenacity." But the article did not use her name. The Boston *Commonwealth* newspaper reprinted the article. The editor let his readers know that the "black heroine" of the story was Harriet Tubman.



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In the Civil War, Tubman worked tirelessly, leading a team of spies and even raiding plantations.