

QUEST FOR FREEDOM

My memories of Robert Smalls

By John Scimeca

FADE IN:

MULTIPLE SCENES

EXT. - LOW COUNTRY, SOUTH CAROLINA - 1856

Birds eye view of the waterfront.

Coastal marshes, sandbars and tide pools.

Young white boys are rafting on the Ashley River.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

Good day to y'all. My name is John Simmons, I am a rigger and ship builder from Charleston. I would like to share the story of a remarkable man who I had the pleasure of encountering, ROBERT SMALLS.

We hear a Bull Whip snap, CRACK.

Dozens of Slave men digging an irrigation canal, watched over by white BOSSES.

The Canal connects to a Dam being built by three young slaves.

Laboring since dawn, stopping once for food, water, salt.

Their shirts off, their brown skin gleaming with sweat as they toil in the hot Sun.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.) (cont'd)

It's the culmination of a month's struggle for the twenty four men. They have cleared away a swamp filled forest, uprooted trees, preparing the earth for the planting of Rice. So far, two slaves have died from pestilence and disease, one from snakebite, another shot trying to escape.

ROBERT SMALLS, (16), is joined by GABRIEL TURNER(14), and ABRAHAM JACKSON, (15), constructing the Dam.

The boys manhandle six foot long, tar covered logs into place, standing on end.

They take turns swinging an eight pound sledge over their heads and hitting the logs, driving them slowly into the Carolina clay.

With each strike, they sink deeper.

Robert holds the sledge, swings.

He wipes his brow.

He cracks his neck, ready to swing again.

ABRAHAM

It's my turn. You done looking to get yourselves hurt?

Robert hands over the sledge.

ROBERT SMALLS

Here ya are. Strike away, boy.

Gabriel drags over another log.

He places it next to the one they just set.

Abraham swings four times in succession.

Robert steps in, takes two more swings. It now aligns with the previous embedded ones.

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)

Soon my muscles are gonna get muscles.

One by one, the logs are set in place.

Gabriel gets 12 inch metal stakes from the cart.

The men hammers them into the logs.

Abraham bolts a 2 meter long, iron lever to a fulcrum affixed to the Cast Iron Sluice Gate which they have fastened to the dam.

Robert tightens metal cables he fastened to the front of the dam, to keep it from separating.

Smalls walks along the Dam, reaches shore, grabs the lever.

He puts his weight on it, the lever moves down, the Dam's gate lifts into the air.

ABRAHAM

Bloody good! Works!

ROBERT SMALLS

Are the trunk's clear?

GABRIEL

A few meters to go.

Robert sits back on top of the dam and pulls out a corn cob pipe. He stuffs it with tobacco. He searches for a match. Doesn't have one. Looks to the BOSS who is smoking.

ROBERT SMALLS

Boss man, Sir, can I please have a match?

The White man, looks down at Robert, nods and tosses him a match.

Robert lights and smokes his pipe while waiting for the other men to complete the irrigation line.

The slaves digging has slowed.

Tired from the day's work. The Boss cracks his whip in the air, but, he knows its not smart to push men nearing exhaustion.

Twenty minutes later, they are complete.

They have worked for hours, the sun remains high in the sky.

BOSS

Open it.

A steam powered excavator removes the last few feet of soil blocking the river's waters.

Water rushes in, strikes the Dam.

The wood logs bend slightly from the force of the water.

The Dam fills quickly. In five minutes it has reached the level of the sluice.

Smalls pushes down on the lever firmly, his full weight resting on it.

The water's force on the Dam makes lifting the gate difficult.

Robert tries again, pushing down hard on the lever.

The sluice breaks free from its impediment and lifts. The river water begins to flow, down the irrigation trunks and onto the fields.

Across the river, at another Plantation.

Slaves work the earth.

Robert takes a drink of water from a one armed slave.

ROBERT SMALLS

Boss, am I finished here?

BOSS

Go ahead, boy, they be lookin for you at the Inn bout now.

Robert runs into town.

A Sign - **PLANTER'S INN**

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

PLANTER'S INN, a fine Charleston establishment first established in 1803 on North Market Street.

Smalls enters through the service door, walks through the kitchen, stealing a piece of bread and a hard boiled egg as he walks through.

The black cooks see it and ignore him. He continues on his journey to the stables.

He passes the bar. In attendance, the power brokers of Charleston; WILLIAM BLEECHER, (55), plantation owner, JOSHUA ANCRURN, (50) owner of the hotel and COLONEL ROBERT CHESTNUT, (43), Confederate States of America.

Joshua nods as Robert rushes past.

INT. STABLES - CONTINUOUS

Robert enters, picks up a broom, starts to sweep.

A WHITE MAN races up on a horse.

MAN

There's been an accident! JOHN
SIMMONS has been crushed! A boat
broke from its cradle! Get help! We
need help!

Smalls rushes inside to notify his master.

INT. - PLANTER'S INN - BAR

ROBERT SMALLS

Sorry, Sir, Mister Simmons has had an
accident. A ship rolled on him.

JOSHUA

Take two boys and go help.

Smalls goes to the laundry room and stops GABRIEL TURNER,
(15) and ABRAHAM JACKSON, (12) from working.

The three slaves take a horse and buggy to the accident
site. Smalls tosses a block and tackle and some ropes in the
back before they leave.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

I'm working under a forty foot
transport ship when one of the cradle
supports collapses. The ship comes
down on one end, trapping me
underneath. Three slaves boys arrive.
One of them, a mulatto boy, Robert
Smalls, checks on me and places some
burlap sacks under my neck.

The ship leans precariously against an old oak.

The boys build an A-frame out of beams lying about.

They lash it together, pounding in spikes to secure them.

Robert attaches a block and tackle.

Threads it with a rope.

Smalls sets down a large winch and secures it with a long chain to a large ship's mooring .

ROBERT SMALLS

Abraham, climb dat tree, catch this.

ABRAHAM

Yah, Boss.

Abraham climbs the tree.

Smalls throws one end of the rope.

Abraham misses.

Smalls recoils the rope.

Throws again.

Abraham catches it.

ROBERT SMALLS

Wrap it around tree. Throw it back.

He does as instructed. Robert catches the rope.

Smalls laces it into the winch.

He cranks, slowly tightening the rope.

Smalls tightens the ratchet, moving the handle forward, catching more rope and pulling it tighter.

He keeps turning the crank, he is perspiring and deeply breathing.

Still, no movement from the ship.

Suddenly, there is a loud creaking noise as the ship begins tilting in a more precarious position.

I shout.

JOHN SIMMONS

Stop, you can't lift it!

ROBERT SMALLS

It's okay, Sir, know what I'm doin'.
Just gonna raise her a few inches,
and drive these wedges under her,
Sir.. The tree'll hold.

JOHN SIMMONS

The ship is gonna slide from it's
perch. You have to block it.

Smalls and the other men wedge logs against the hull to
prevent it from shifting.

JOHN SIMMONS (cont'd)

Okay, better. Take it slow, boys.

Robert cranks again, the part of the ship's bow which had
rested on my leg moves an inch.

Smalls engages the lock.

He comes over to the ship. The slaves now joined by two
young white men.

The white men lift a large wooden wedge, carry it over,
shove it under the ship.

They pound it's end with a sledge.

Smalls returns to the crank. Turns it once, stops to check.

Resumes cranking, slowly lifting the end of the ship.

The men drive more wedges under the ship.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

I can feel the pressure on my leg
easing. My circulation return.

The men carefully excavate the soil around Simmon's leg.

They pull him out slowly.

A doctor arrives.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.) (cont'd)

An hour after it began, I was pulled
free.

(MORE)

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.) (cont'd)
 A doctor arrives and checks my leg, I
 have a fracture, but, it will heal! I
 honestly thought I was gonna loose
 it! What a happy man I became.

JOHN SIMMONS

Thank you! I am forever indebted. I
 am giving you boys five dollars each.
 Lemme know if you need any work. I
 could use some smart boys at my
 shipyard.

Smalls returns to the stables. He tends after half a dozen
 horses and a goat.

An old Basset Hound stops by. It spends the day resting on
 the warm straw floor.

EXT. CHARLESTON CITY MARKET - MORNING

Smalls drives the horse and buggy to bring the Hotel's two
 lady cooks shopping.

One of them, HANNAH JONES, (23), catches his eye. He
 attempts to speak with her on the ride to the market;

ROBERT SMALLS

Why won't you talk to me?

HANNAH

There is a time and a place for
 everything, Sir.

ROBERT SMALLS

What time is that be? You know, I'm
 sweet on you.

HANNAH

When I choose, y'all. If I choose.

They arrive at the market.

Robert assists the women climb down. He pays careful
 attention to holding Hannah just right as she steps down.

Smalls remains with the buggy, smoking his pipe, talking to
 other slaves.

Hannah and the Older Cook walk inside to shop.

INT. MARKET - CONTINUOUS

Hannah turns to the OLDER COOK

HANNAH

He's a good looking boy.

OLDER COOK

He's a B'hoy, girl. Half white.
Thinks he's a privileged. Dat boy is
trouble.

HANNAH

Eh Heh, is that so? I like him.

OLDER COOK

Look where that got you. Two
'Chirren' and no man to provide.

HANNAH

God provides to those who need.

OLDER COOK

You gone galoot girl.

INT. STABLES - EVENING

Hannah smuggles Smalls a plate of food from the kitchen;
chicken, rice, collard greens with peas.

HANNAH

I see how you look at me, but you
never say anything.

ROBERT SMALLS

I've never known a woman so beautiful
as you. You remind me of my mother in
some way.

HANNAH

That's quite sweet. I pray that you have fond memories of yer mother.

ROBERT SMALLS

I was sent away to work when I was twelve. Sent here to Palmetto City to find work.

HANNAH

Slaves have no future. Sold off at any time. It may have been good for you to be so far away from your Master.

ROBERT SMALLS

One day, I'm going to buy my freedom.

HANNAH

I'd do anything to be free. Perhaps one day, you can buy mine freedom as well.

She kisses him.

They embrace.

Someone Rings the bell down in the stable.

Smalls climbs down the ladder to assist a guest.

Hannah comes down the ladder when the man has gone.

She approaches Robert, kisses him, then returns to the Inn.

Later at night, Hannah returns to the room above the stable.

She spends the night, leaving before dawn.

When free from her Hotel work, Hannah cleans the room above the stable.

ROBERT SMALLS

It feels real good having someone take care of me like that. Been a while time.

HANNAH

You a hard workin' man, there Robert Smalls. All you need is a good woman.

ROBERT SMALLS

It was hard leaving my Mother so young. I was scared. I never want to feel like that again.

HANNAH

You stop worrying there. We're always gonna be together.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

Robert and Hannah have a simple 'wedding', as slaves are not permitted to marry. The 'bride' as customary, wears a ring of fabric around her wedding finger. But in reality, should he so desire, the Master maintains bedding rights for the new bride. Luckily, McKee is too old for such shenanigans and Joshua's wife keeps a watchful eye on her man when he's around women slaves.

Hannah and Robert are permitted to live together.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.) (cont'd)

I took a liking to the three young slave boys who helped me. I hired them to work at my boat yard. I am especially fond of the Mulatto boy, Robert Smalls, he appeared fiercely determined to succeed. I believe this came from his mother, a Gullah Low Country woman who was elevated to the Big House. There are rumors that Henry McKee is Robert's true father. Robert supposed grew up in the Big House and was shown favoritism by his Masters. This frightened his mother. She asked McKee to have Robert work in the fields when he was nine years old. His mother wanted him to experience the cruelty of slavery, to witness the beatings, to experience what it truly was like to be a slave.

By this time, my leg had mostly healed. I began taking Smalls out on boats I own, or was repairing.

EXT. - ON BOAT - 1857

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

Smalls spent years working the docks and acted as a guide for many of the commercial ships which transported cotton and rice around Charleston. He became intimately familiar with the currents, tides and sandbars of the Harbor. Pilots were needed to safely guide the big, cotton and rice carrying ships to and from the piers. Blacks could not be hired as pilots, but, Smalls was well qualified to be one. His knowledge and navigational skill made him trusted by the white ship owners on Bay Street.

JOHN SIMMONS

My leg is finally healed, I owe you my indebtedness.

ROBERT SMALLS

Don't mention it. Sir, it's not honest! You pay me to work and I to pay most to McKee.

JOHN SIMMONS

That's how it works. I hear you married the Hannah gal from the Hotel?

ROBERT SMALLS

Yes, Sir, I want family. She has 2 chirren.

JOHN SIMMONS

Good for you, where do y'all living, at the Inn?

ROBERT SMALLS

We have rooms over the stable behind the Inn.

JOHN SIMMONS

I am partnering with John Ferguson.
We are purchasing a new cotton
steamer. I want you to pilot my ship.

ROBERT SMALLS

They don't allow slaves to be pilots.

JOHN SIMMONS

We'll just call you a wheelman. Who
is going ta know? I'll teach you
everything about the harbor that you
don't already know.

Robert stands and shakes John's hand.

ROBERT SMALLS

Very good, Sir. I need to tell my
owner that you wish to hire me.

JOHN SIMMONS

I already have. Your pay is eighteen
dollars a week, Welcome aboard.

EXT. - ANCRURN ESTATE - FEBRUARY 1858

Joshua Ancrurn allows the slaves to celebrate the birth of
Elizabeth Lydia Smalls, to Hannah and Robert Smalls.

He allows the cooks to purchase extra food and even provided
a few bottles of Jamaican Rum from the Inn.

Many join the party, and a good time is had by all.

But, Alfred Gourdine drinks too much rum.

Alfred is French Creole from the panhandle. He has escaped
and been recaptured twice.

He begins to get aggressive with some women at the
celebration.

He tries to kiss one...

He grabs another girl's body...

Alfred corners Hannah against a fence...

She pushes his hands away...

He attempts to kiss her...

Hannah turns her face away from him...

He tries harder...

Hannah slaps him...

Robert sees this...

He runs over and SHOVES Alfred...

Alfred takes a swing at Robert, and misses...

Robert punches Alfred...

Alfred swings again, punching Smalls in the belly...

Smalls throws a combination of left, left, right, punches...

Alfred stumbles back but remains standing...

He pulls out a large kitchen knife, starts slashing...

He slices Robert's finest shirt...

Smalls pulls a coiled rope off the fence...

Throws it at Alfred...

The knife gets tangled in it...

Robert grabs a pitchfork leaning against the fence...

He pins Alfred to the fence by this clothing...

Alfred struggles to get free...

He realizes he is trapped. Drops the knife...

Robert keeps him pinned for a while, until Alfred calms down. He releases him.

ROBERT SMALLS

How came you so?

ALFRED

(MORE)

ALFRED (cont'd)
I was turnin' about until I didn't
know where or who I was.

ROBERT SMALLS

Do not buffalo me. I'm not a fool.

ALFRED

Sorry, I know not my actions,
brother.

ROBERT SMALLS

I am not your brother, Sir.

INT./EXT. BOATYARD

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

For you to have a better
understanding of the lives we all
lived, I need to tell y'all about
Charleston. Charleston is a River
City, in fact, it's a two river city.

Overhead view of a black water river.

The Ashley River and the Cooper
River join on the peninsula where
Charleston exists. Various smaller
rivers criss-cross the landscape.
Life in Charleston is centered on its
waterways. Ships are most important
for transport to and from the
plantations. In the Lowlands, land is
given and taken with changing tides,
and always at the mercy of Mother
Nature.

INT./EXT. CHARLESTON DOCKS - BEFORE DAWN

On his one day off, Robert rises before the sun and makes
his way to the piers. He finds a group of slaves seeking
work waiting. He squeezes to a spot at the front of the
pack.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

It is common for enslaved men to hold jobs outside the household and help provide their keep. In the years Robert Smalls lives in Charleston, he has had over ten jobs. He repaired sails, worked as a stevedore, worked at the Inn, he was a Hostler at the Inn. His skill however, was being a gifted pilot who knew the rivers and tight waterways around Charleston's harbor.

Robert is picked to offload a British merchant ship.

Down in the ship's cargo hold, Smalls is assigned to work with four other slaves and a white, homeless, guttersnipe to load wood crates onto cargo nets.

Robert is teamed with the white boy by the Dock Boss.

The boy turns out to be a hard worker.

They combine lift and carry weapon and ammo boxes and lower them onto the net. Once the net is filled to the Boss's liking, they stop and watch the net get lifted with the pier's crane.

ROBERT SMALLS

What's ya story, dear boy?

HOMELESS BOY

Jus' trying to survive.

ROBERT SMALLS

Same as me. Where ya staying?

HOMELESS BOY

Around.

ROBERT SMALLS

How old are You?

HOMELESS BOY

(MORE)

HOMELESS BOY (cont'd)

Nine

ROBERT SMALLS

I can't put you up, but if you ride
my tail, boy, you may find work. The
best I can do for y'all.

The white boy stands there, looking at Robert.

Suddenly, he throws his arms around Smalls, hugging him.

They stand there for a second. Robert smacks the boys atop
his head twice and pushes him away.

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)

I don't need no puppy. You're a man,
act it.

HOMELESS BOY

Yes, Massa

ROBERT SMALLS

Shut your pan, there boy. I am
nobodies master.
You got a name, boy?

HOMELESS BOY

JEREMIAH, Sir

ROBERT SMALLS

What your folks go and done?

HOMELESS BOY

My mother, she dead, Consumption.

ROBERT SMALLS

Got a father?

JEREMIAH

Daddy he no don't do nothin'. Got
disposed, now I'm alone.

ROBERT SMALLS

(MORE)

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)
 You better off being a slave, boy.
 You get food and shelter. That's all
 you really need.

The ship is unloaded in 3 hours. The boys are paid for their work and sent on their way.

EXT. WATERFRONT - CONTINUOUS

Robert walks the waterfront, Jeremiah follows at a distance.

Robert is shouted to from men on a ship sitting at dock.

MAN ON SHIP

Looking for a deck man. Three weeks,
 pay is sixty bucks. Leavin now.

By this time, Jeremiah has caught up.

JEREMIAH

I can do it.

MAN ON SHIP

Only need one.

Robert looks at Jeremiah, begins laughing as he picks up his canvas workbag and proceeds on his way.

ROBERT SMALLS

You take care, young Jeremiah.
 Godspeed.

Jeremiah runs up the gangplank onto the ship.

EXT. ABOARD THE PLANTER - 1860

I stand with Robert in the Pilot Deck explaining the workings of our new ship.

JOHN SIMMONS

She's a side paddle steamer. 147 feet
 long, with a 30 foot beam Has a
 draft of only 3.8 feet. Perfect for
 the waters around here.

ROBERT SMALLS

(MORE)

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)
What makes it go?

JOHN SIMMONS

Two coal fired, steam engines. They
drive side paddle wheels.

ROBERT SMALLS

Can it burn wood instead of coal?

JOHN SIMMONS

Yes, she can. But, she'll run better
on coal.

INT./EXT. ENGINE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

John stokes the coal fired boiler.

He then checks one of the a half dozen gauges attached to
the boiler and red painted pipes.

He turns one circular valve, then another.

John another gauge.

Part of John's face is covered in soot.

Alfred lubricates the moving parts of the steam engine. Each
of the ship's crankshafts are six feet long.

JOHN SIMMONS

Keep an eye on the paddle wheels in
shallows and around rocks. Last thing
you want is a broken bucket. You're
gettin towed home.

Shows Smalls a lever.

You can raise the paddles for shallow
water by pulling this lever, here.
Normally, you want your paddles to
extend two feet into the water. There
are measurement lines on them, so you
can check on this. If you go deeper
the paddles will cavitate, cause
bubbles and the ship may become
unbalanced.

They approach open waters.

JOHN SIMMONS (cont'd)

Okay, clear now, let's go full
chisel.

ROBERT SMALLS

Aye, aye, Sir.

Smalls pushes the control lever into the FULL SPEED - AHEAD
position.

He shouts into the copper tube, alerting the engineers he
made a change.

INT./EXT. ENGINE ROOM

John Small replies with a whistle.

John slides the engine's propulsion lever forward - FULL
SPEED AHEAD.

INT./EXT. PILOT ROOM

A white line moves inside the dial, confirming his order was
followed.

JOHN SIMMONS

Excellent piloting.

ROBERT SMALLS

Thank you, Sir.

JOHN SIMMONS

Remember, side paddles were designed
for shallow coastal water. They are
inherently unstable in open or rough
waters.

ROBERT SMALLS

Yes, Sir, Massa, John

JOHN SIMMONS

I'm not your master.

ROBERT SMALLS

Sorry, Sir, I meant no disrespect.

JOHN SIMMONS
None taken son.

INT./EXT. BOILER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The sound inside the engine room is deafening.

Alfred is fighting a leak after being sprayed with boiling hot steam.

He wraps the leaking pipe with a rag.

Turns a valve. Turns another. Pulls a lever.

Grabs a wrench, tightens a connection.

INT. ROOMS ABOVE STABLE - NIGHT

Robert gets one night off after spending two weeks on the ship.

He plays with Hannah's children for a while.

Hannah serves him his favorite meal; chicken with rice.

She puts the kids to bed.

And returns to make love to her man.

Smalls falls asleep soon after.

INT. - BED - CONTINUOUS - FLASHBACK

Robert Smalls is nine years old, standing in ankle deep water, hoeing the soil. His hands getting blisters. He hears the mumbling of the other slaves, the rumors.

SLAVES

His Daddy's the Massa, McKEE.

Living in the Big House. He remembers the food, the smells, the clothes. Then it changes. His Mamma sends him to work the fields. Tells him it's for his own good. Nine years old, digging the clay soil, swatting biting flies, pulling shrubs by hand, fighting the bigger boys. He remembers the Whip. Now, he knows, his mother was right. His skin still flinches at the thought.

Robert wakes up sweating.

NEWSPAPER - SOUTH CAROLINA SUCCEEDS DEC 20, 1860.

INT. PLANTER'S HOTEL BAR - NEXT AFTERNOON

William Bleecher, is joined by Joshua Ancrurn and myself in the lounge. JARRELL PINCKNEY, (28), A Good Ole boy from Nashville, tends bar.

WILLIAM

We need to be heard. Lincoln will try to take our slaves away if we do nothing!

JOSHUA

The North can survive a long war. They are industrial driven. South Carolina cannot take on this alone.

JOHN SIMMONS

Let's see if any of the other states join us.

WILLIAM

Virginia, Alabama and Louisiana will. You'll see. Florida too.

JOHN SIMMONS

How many Slave States are there now? Fourteen, is it?

WILLIAM

I believe it's 15 States now, including Texas.

JOHN SIMMONS

And Texas is a Slave state? When I think of Texas I see cattle ranches. They have black cowboys down there?

WILLIAM

(MORE)

WILLIAM (cont'd)

I believe they have negro cowboys. In the Eastern parts of Texas they grow Cotton, so clearly they are a slave state.

JOHN SIMMONS

I hear that there are Federal troops moving into Fort Sumter now. They're close.

JARRELL

They do not have a enough men. To hold Sumter they need twice as many. They think it's easy to defend because it's on an island. A grave mistake.

JOHN SIMMONS

What is your plan? Do tell. Are you suggesting that its prudent for South Carolina to attack a Union Garrison?

WILLIAM

It's more than Prudent, it's a moment which will be heard around the World. The momentum in South Carolina is alive and well. I just returned from Bluffton where I heard them speak of our vision for a strong and powerful Confederate State.

JOHN SIMMONS

Why is it that wealthy old men get to plan death and destruction?

JARRELL

That is how it is, how it always was.

EXT. CHARLESTOWN HARBOR - JANUARY 1861

The Star of the West, a side paddle steamer, that is delivering supplies to Fort Sumter is fired upon from the Citadel.

Cannon and mortar shells burst overhead.

The Ship returns fire using it's deck mounted cannon.

It also fires it's stern howitzer.

The shelling from the Rebel base intensifies.

The Captain Orders the Star of the West to REVERSE.

They RETREAT.

NEWSPAPER - MISSISSIPPI, FLORIDA, ALABAMA, GEORGIA, LOUISIANA,
AND TEXAS- DECLARE THEIR SECESSION- FEBRUARY 1861.

INT. ACRURN PLANTATION - FEBRUARY 1861

People attend the Annual Camellia Flower Ball.

Fancy dressed couples dance in the Grand Ballroom, mingle
with dignitaries and gossip.

Slaves, dressed in their Sunday best, serve food and clean
after the guests.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

This year there are over two hundred
people enjoying their hospitality.

I was graciously invited to attend
and was accompanied by my lovely
wife, JOCELYN, (32), herself a sworn
and determined suffragette.

We climb the circular staircase. To the right, is lady's
changing room.

On the left, we see men entering the Smoking Room.

INT. SMOKING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The men are gathered, talking politics, and listening to the
newly appointed Delegate to the State of South Carolina.

DELEGATE

We have declared the formation of an
independent government, the
Confederate States of America.

MEN

Whoot, Whoot!

DELEGATE

We just returned from Washington, DC. where we demanded that all federal military installations in the state be surrendered.

NATHANIEL RUSSEL

I understand President Buchanan refused your demands.

DELEGATE

That is correct, Sir. There is outright Shecoonery going on. Our demands do include states' rights to maintain slavery, but more importantly, focus on property rights due to the lack of enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act.

NATHANIEL RUSSEL

My dear esteemed colleague, in a month's time, Lincoln will take office. He has made it clear that he does not support succession of the Southern States. He calls it illegitimate.

DELEGATE

Indeed, Sir. There are dark clouds forming. I assure you, South Carolina does not stand alone in this.

NATHANIEL RUSSEL

Correct me if I am wrong, Sir, but does not Lincoln believe that there will be no War?

DELEGATE

Trust me, Nathaniel, Sir, There will be War. That I assure you.

JOHN SIMMONS

Then, may God be with us.

DELEGATE

In the words of General ROBERT E.
LEE:

-The loss of Charleston would cut us off almost entirely from communications with the rest of the world and close the only channel through which we can expect to get supplies from abroad, now almost our only dependence.

JOHN SIMMONS

Indeed, it would.

EXT. JAMES ISLAND - APRIL 1861

The Planter, transporting men and supplies, docks at one of the Forts being built.

While being unloaded and restocked with coal, the Captain instructs Robert to carry a wooden box and accompanying him.

They walk on a wooden platform towards an observation tower.

Small notices cannons hidden by netting, their large barrels aimed out to sea. Sandbags stacked against wood beams providing protection.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

War came to Charleston in April of 1861.

The defenders of the city built an elaborate series of forts and batteries to defend the harbor. Many of them were placed on low-lying islands only reachable by boat. Keeping the men around the harbor fed and equipped was a important requirement. Military commanders therefore relied on continuous boat traffic to supply their needs.

The Captain leads them into a Sibley Tent.

INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

Inside, Colonel James Chestnut Jr., stands over a map of the Harbor's fortifications.

He notices the men.

COLONEL CHESTNUT

This is unexpected. To what do I owe
the pleasure?

CAPTAIN CHARLES

My Mamma forced me to bring you this.

The Captain takes the crate from Smalls. He presents it.

COLONEL CHESTNUT

What have we got here?

CAPTAIN CHARLES

She wanted me to be here when you
opened it.

The colonel unties the string securing it. He lifts the lid,
revealing, a smoked ham.

COLONEL CHESTNUT

Your Mamma has gone and outdid
herself. I'm going to share this with
the men here. It's too good to keep
for myself. I want you to give your
Mamma my deepest gratitude.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

I will certainly share with her your
appreciation.

INT. ON BOARD THE PLANTER - NIGHT

Gibbes shows the others a crumpled newspaper, showing a
photo of slaves entering Fortress Monroe, being freed by
General Butler.

ABRAHAM

We go to Fort Monroe.

ALFRED

Never make it. I done been caught twice. Next time, they gonna hang me.

ABRAHAM

We'll take a fast fishing boat.

ROBERT SMALLS

There are too many checkpoints.

ABRAHAM

Only time before we all die on this ship.

ROBERT SMALLS

I want to be free as much as you. We'll find a way.

GIBBES

The tide is shifting. Our time's coming.

ROBERT SMALLS

I want to believe.

INT. PLANTER'S HOTEL BAR - MORNING

NEWSPAPER - APRIL 4, 1861 -- LINCOLN INFORMS SOUTH CAROLINA THAT HE INTENDS TO RESUPPLY THE FEDERAL TROOPS STATIONED IN FORT SUMTER.

COLONEL CHESTNUT

We approached Major Anderson and asked him to surrender Fort Sumter. As expected, he refused.

His response was:

COLONEL CHESTNUT (cont'd)
I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your communication demanding the evacuation of this fort, and to say, in reply thereto, that it is a demand with which I regret that my sense of honor, and of my obligations to my Government, prevent my compliance.

WILLIAM

Tarnation, it's insane. He can't defend the Fort with the troops he has! It is suicide, I tell you. Sheer suicide.

COLONEL CHESTNUT

The Fort is surrounded on all sides. They cannot hold it.

JOSHUA

South Carolina is prepared to defend our way of life.

JOHN SIMMONS

I understand freed slaves up North have formed into Militias. Why can't we get our boys to fight?

COLONEL CHESTNUT

Negroes cannot be trained to be soldiers. They don't have the intelligence or the discipline.

JOHN SIMMONS

The Union may think otherwise.

COLONEL CHESTNUT

We haven't encountered any negro soldiers so far. And we ourselves have over a hundred thousand men already, our ranks are growing.

NEWSPAPER - APRIL 12, 1861 -- BEAUREGARD'S MEN OPENED FIRE.
THE FIRST SHOTS OF THE CIVIL WAR EXPLODED IN THE AIR ABOVE
FORT SUMTER.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

These shots were the signal for all other Confederate garrisons along the harbor to commence firing upon the fort. For reasons unknown, Anderson does not fire back for nearly two hours. Outnumbered nearly three to one, the Union troops hold out for another thirty six hours before finally surrendering.

NEWSPAPER - 14, APRIL, 1861, THE LAST REMAINING FEDERAL
TROOPS IN CHARLESTON EVACUATE FORT SUMTER.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

A Confederate flag is raised over Fort Sumter.

The Civil War has officially begun.

INT. JOSHUA'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

John Simmons accompanies Robert to a meeting he requested with Henry Mckee, his and Hannah's master, Joshua's brother in law.

ROBERT SMALLS

Good day, Massa. Thank you for allowing my visit.

MCKEE

My pleasure, boy, my, you've grown into a strong young man. So, may I ask, what is the reason for your visit?

ROBERT SMALLS

I would like to purchase our freedom. My family's freedom.

MCKEE

(MORE)

MCKEE (cont'd)

Do tell. You want to buy your own freedom plus that of your wife, her children and your own?

ROBERT

Yes, Sir, thats what I want.

MCKEE

You know, I take a cotton to you, Robert Smalls. I'll let you purchase your family's freedom for eight hundred dollars. You saved that much?

ROBERT

I have one hundred dollars.

MCKEE

Then I'm afraid we can't do business at this time. Please do come see me when you have the money.

ROBERT SMALLS

Thank you, Sir. I will.

MCKEE

And what is your involvement here, Mister Simmons?

JOHN SIMMONS

I'm here as a witness at Robert Small's request.

MCKEE

You are a man of means, John, perhaps you can lend Robert here some cabbage so he can complete our transaction.

JOHN SIMMONS

I swore I would never buy a human being, even though in this case, I expect, it might be well deserved.

JOSHUA

But you do hire our slaves for manual labor, do you not?

JOHN SIMMONS

Indeed, Sir, I do. But that is fundamentally different, you see, they work for me of their own free will, they do a service, are paid fairly and are free to leave. I would not ever dream of owning a man.

MCKEE

I'll tell you what, Robert Smalls, would you like to leave me you hundred dollars as a deposit?

ROBERT SMALLS

Yes, Sir, I would.

MCKEE

Excellent, I respect your decision. It's a wise choice.

Smalls hands over the money.

McKee counts it and puts it in his desk drawer.

He writes a receipt on paper and hands it to Smalls.

MCKEE (cont'd)

It looks like our business here is complete for now. Good day to you both.

JOHN SIMMONS

Good day, Joshua.

ROBERT SMALLS

Good day, Sir.

They leave.

Outside:

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)

I can never get so much dough.

JOHN SIMMONS

It is a great amount. He likely calculated how much your family will earn him over the years.

ROBERT SMALLS

I'll find another way.

JOHN SIMMONS

You will, that I am sure. I noticed you didn't call him master.

ROBERT SMALLS

I only have one master, that's God.

JOHN SIMMONS

Amen, well said, young Robert.

INT. ROOMS ABOVE STABLE - LATER

ROBERT SMALLS

I paid McKee a hundred dollar deposit for our freedom.

HANNAH

A deposit? How much is he asking?

ROBERT SMALLS

Eight hundred dollars.

HANNAH

Where are you ever going to get that kind of money?

ROBERT SMALLS

(MORE)

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)
Maybe, I shouldn't have given him the
hundred dollars. We could use it more
than him.

HANNAH
Don't matter much, we'll get by.

ROBERT SMALLS
I feel like a failure some times. I
can't read nor write.

HANNAH
I declare, Mister Smalls that you are
the smartest, hardest workin man I
know. You'll learn how to read when
the time is right.

ROBERT SMALLS
I swear, I'll find a way. To remain,
is to fail.

HANNAH
There is no failure in you, Sir.

INT. - PLANTER'S HOTEL BAR

JOHN SIMMONS
The Union is sinking old whaling
vessels in the shipping channels
outside Charleston. They are going to
blockade us in.

WILLIAM
We don't have the naval strength to
go against the Union. What does
confederate have, something like 30
ships in total?

JOHN SIMMONS
The Planter is being commissioned by
the Confederate States. They want to
maintain the same crew.

JOSHUA
As long as I'm paid for my slaves.

WILLIAM

It's WAR, Joshua. No telling how long
it or your boys will last.

JOSHUA

Nothing is without risk. I have
insurance.

JOHN SIMMONS

Smalls is one of the best pilots in
the area. They gonna pay more for
him. Twenty dollars a week.

WILLIAM

Already profiting from War.

JOSHUA

Who knows for how long.

JOHN SIMMONS

Batten Down the hatches, gentlemen,
If I am correct, the fighting is only
going to get more severe.

INT. ROOMS ABOVE STABLE - 2 WEEKS LATER

HANNAH

I am expecting a baby.

ROBERT SMALLS

How'd that happen?

HANNAH

I believe you know how. Are you
unhappy? You do not look happy.

ROBERT SMALLS

I am happy. I just neva' wished to
bring another slave into the World.

HANNAH

Perhaps our child will be born free.

ROBERT SMALLS

I am trying, Lord, I try.

HANNAH

I know you are. I am proud of you.

ROBERT SMALLS

There is so much more I need to do,
for you, our family.

HANNAH

You will, I have faith in you.

ROBERT SMALLS

I do very much love you.

They embrace.

INT./EXT. ON BOARD PLANTER - FALL OF 1861

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

Robert Smalls is assigned to steer
the CSS Planter, a lightly armed
Confederate military transport under
the command of Charleston's District
Commander Brigadier General Roswell
S. Ripley.

INT./EXT. BOATYARD - CONTINUOUS

The Planter is refitted.

Robert helps mount a 32 pound long range gun.

Other workers attach a 24 pound howitzer.

INT./EXT. - COOPER RIVER - DAY

Smalls mans the wheel, CAPTAIN CHARLES J. RELYEA, (29), stands alongside.

First Mate, SAMUEL SMITH HANDCOCK, (25), thick glasses, frail, stands On DECK, instructing the deckhands, Jones, Gibbes, Gabriel and Abraham Jackson.

THOMAS Z. PITCHER, (33) short, bearlike is responsible for the 2 enslaved engineers, John Small and Alfred Gourdine who work in the hot and dangerous engine room.

MULTIPLE SCENES

EXT. - CHARLESTON - DECEMBER 11, 1861

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

The Union Army has accumulated on the West side of the River. The Confederate Army is clustered on the Eastern side.

The Union sends up an Observation Balloon to spy. Winds are strong and the balloon breaks away.

It crashes in the woods on the Confederate side and catches fire.

The fire spreads rapidly due to dry conditions and high winds. It spreads to the Southwestern part of Charleston.

164 acres of the city burns. Over a thousand stores including the Cathedral of Saint John, the Circular Congregational Church and the South Carolina Institute's Hall are destroyed. Amazingly, no one is killed despite the devastation.

EXT. - FIRE ZONE - CONTINUOUS

Slaves are dispatched by their masters to fight the fires which burn for an entire day and into the night.

Robert and 5 other slaves locate a damaged mobile water pump on a cart with only 3 wheels.

Abraham repairs its leaking connections.

The men run a hose to the nearest levy, move the 2 side mounted levers up and down by hand, pumping water into the pressurized water tank.

Once filled, two men lift the cart by its axle and support it's weight as they move along.

The cart, filled with water is heavy, the men struggle to keep it upright. Another slave rushes up and lends his shoulder. It becomes manageable.

They move along slowly, stopping to catch their breaths and spray water on the fires they encounter.

INT. PLANTER'S INN BAR - CONTINUOUS

The lounge is filled with distraught men, drinking to what they have lost.

WILLIAM

I'm moving my family south. It's not safe here anymore.

JOHN SIMMONS

We were all very fortunate. I hear no one died from the fires.

JOSHUA

I believe you are correct in that regard. This isn't our first fire. We'll rebuild.

WILLIAM

They are saying rebellious slaves caused the fire?

JOHN SIMMONS

I believe it was the Yanks who started it. An observation balloon.

WILLIAM

(MORE)

WILLIAM (cont'd)
The entire city would've been
destroyed if the fires weren't
extinguished at the river's edge.

COLONEL CHESTNUT

We've had fires before. Just twenty
something years ago, in fact.
Charleston isn't going to be
destroyed.

WILLIAM

I also heard free blacks are fighting
for the Union now.

COLONEL CHESTNUT

You can't make an army of Negroes,
they cannot think for themselves.

JOHN SIMMONS

Your boy, Smalls has turned out to be
a quick learner.

COLONEL CHESTNUT

He's a smart boy. Making a name for
himself as a blockade runner.
The Planter is perfect for our
coastline with its shallow draft.
It's important to the South that they
succeed.

EXT. - ON-BOARD THE C.S.S PLANTER - NIGHT

The crew is weary. Returning from a three week journey down
the Georgia and Florida coasts and river ways, laying
torpedoes, delivering dispatches, transporting cargo and
men.

Captain Charles stands beside Robert in the Pilot Room,
observing how he skillfully pilots the ship through
shallows.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Very good. You have skill.

ROBERT SMALLS

Thank you, Sir.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Have you ever used a sexton? Or a compass?

ROBERT SMALLS

Never, Sir. What does it do.

He shows him.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Sextants are used for celestial navigation. You can use it to measure the angle between the horizon and another object, or for two objects at sea. Here, hold it vertically and point it in the direction of the star body. Do you see the horizon through the unsilvered part of the mirror?

Robert looks.

ROBERT SMALLS

Sir, yes, I can see the horizon, Sir. That is amazing.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Good, now let me show you how to calculate distance using the stars...

They approach Fort Johnson.

The Captain toots the ships steam whistle one long burst followed by 2 short ones.

CAPTAIN CHARLES (cont'd)

The codes change by week. Sometimes more often.

ROBERT SMALLS

What if we give the wrong codes, Sir?

CAPTAIN CHARLES

You'll be Challenged.

ROBERT SMALLS

(MORE)

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)
And if we don't know it?

CAPTAIN CHARLES
We'd be blown out of the water before
we get a hundred yards.

ROBERT SMALLS
Sir, understand.

The Captain whistles into the copper tube to communicate to the engineer to increase speed.

He moves the control lever, confirming his order.

INT. BOILER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The engineer replies with a whistle.

He moves the control lever to increase the speed.

His action changes a dial register displaying to the captain that the speed has been adjusted to match his order.

INT. PILOT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CAPTAIN CHARLES
You do not control the speed with
this dial. The engineer controls the
ships' speed.

ROBERT SMALLS
What does the Captain control?

CAPTAIN CHARLES
The rudder and the codes.

ROBERT SMALLS
What of the crew, Sir?

CAPTAIN CHARLES
Samuel, our first mate is responsible
for the crew. You're all able bodied,
don't give any trouble. I wouldn't
worry about him. Here, take the
rudder.

The ship is now moving at a descent rate of speed.

The engineer, Thomas, enters the pilot room.

THOMAS

We have a leak in a pressure line,
engine two. I need to shut down the
engine to to repair it.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

How long will it take?

THOMAS

Twenty minutes.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Alright, move to the shallows near
that cove ahead.

ROBERT SMALLS

Aye, aye, Sir.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Once the repairs are made, we will be
surveying and laying mines in the
waters above Fort Johnson, but we
must first deliver a dispatch to Fort
Sumter.

They motor along, close to shore, the deckhands ready the
ship's cannon and howitzer.

Bullets strike the ship from the shoreline.

The assault intensifies as they move further.

John Small fires the cannon towards an encampment in the
woods.

The shooting from the shore ceases.

They continue their expedition.

It takes nearly an hour for the Planter to reach Fort
Sumter.

EXT. FORT SUMTER - CONTINUOUS

The Captain brings Robert with him as he goes ashore.

Other slaves working at the Fort assist those on the ship offloading supplies and ammunition.

Captain Charles and Smalls are escorted to the commander's office, General P. G. T. Beauregard.

Captain Charles sits.

Robert stands in attention behind him.

The commanding officer arrives.

He sits.

Offers them a sweet tea.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

No, thank you, Sir.

GENERAL BEAUREGARD

And what about you, boy?

ROBERT SMALLS

No thank you, Sir.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

I have a dispatch for you, sir.

GENERAL BEAUREGARD

Let me see that.

He reads.

GENERAL BEAUREGARD (cont'd)

It says the Union has increased the size of its blockade.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

We can see the ships from Charleston Harbor, they are grouped seven or eight miles away.

GENERAL BEAUREGARD

The Union would love to capture Charleston again.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Sir, is there anything you need to communicate?

GENERAL BEAUREGARD

No, I have everything I need now. The two of you are dismissed. Good evening.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Good evening, Sir.

EXT. ON BOARD PLANTER - CONTINUOUS

Course set -

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

Charleston became incredibly important to the Confederate cause, after the Union implemented their Anaconda Plan which was to blockade the entire Southern Waters from Virginia to the Gulf.

The Planter continues onward.

The Captain gives the order:

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Slow, Steady

Robert pushes the control level to SLOW - AHEAD STEADY.

He blows into the tube. Shouts orders through it.

The engineer responds with a whistle. He engages SLOW AHEAD.

They slow.

Around a bend.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

(MORE)

CAPTAIN CHARLES (cont'd)
Full STOP

ROBERT SMALLS

Aye, aye, Sir.

He pushes the control lever.

FULL STOP - READY TO REVERSE.

Whistles.

The engineer replies.

The Paddles stop rotating inside their wheelhouses.

Abraham tosses an anchor.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

We'll lay the torpedoes here.

ROBERT SMALLS

Is these dangerous to be on ship?

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Yes, extremely so. Don't worry, I haven't lost a ship yet.

ROBERT SMALLS

How long have you been captain?

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Six months. Before that I worked at the Citadel teaching.

ROBERT SMALLS

What did you teach?

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Political Science.

ROBERT SMALLS

What is that?

CAPTAIN CHARLES

(MORE)

CAPTAIN CHARLES (cont'd)
It's the study of politics and
governance.

ROBERT SMALLS

I like politics.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

I can teach you about this subject if
it interests you.

ROBERT SMALLS

I don't know how to read.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Doesn't matter, I don't have any
books, I can still teach you...

The Deckhands carefully carry each twenty pound floating
ship mine up from the lower hold. Each mine sits in a wooden
crate with an open top, filled with straw.

CAPTAIN CHARLES (cont'd)

Check the depth here, please.

Abraham throws one end of a knotted, weighed rope overboard.

He waits for the weight to strike the bottom.

Abraham counts each Knot as he retrieves the rope.

ABRAHAM

12 meters, Sir.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Good, measure the chains attached to
the mines, Make them 11 meters long.

ABRAHAM

Twelve meters, Yes, Sir.

They adjust the chains to the required length and reattach
the anchors.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

You need to remove the caps covering the triggers before you lower them overboard.

Gibbes slowly removes the trigger guards from a Mine.

CAPTAIN CHARLES (cont'd)

Smalls, mark the location on the map. Lower the torpedoes off the stern.

ROBERT SMALLS

Aye, aye, Sir.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

I'm going to make a first rate sailor out of you, boy.

ROBERT SMALLS

Yes, Sir, thank you, sir.

The mine laying lasts two hours.

They steam further, stopping to pick up thirty Confederate soldiers to transport near Fort Moultrie.

Robert observes that many of the soldiers are younger than himself.

John Small brings the soldiers food and water from below. A few of the soldiers begin hassling John. They grab a rope from starboard side and begin to tie him up.

Robert notices what they are doing from the Command Deck, he says nothing, thinks again, he then coughs.

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)

Sir, I think you should see this.

Captain Charles notices, he blows the ships whistle hard.

The men stop, their commanding officer realizing what is happening and is now shouting at his men.

They release John Small.

EXT. JAMES ISLAND - 16 JUNE 1862.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

The Union Army attacks Fort Lamar with three divisions, over six thousand men. The Confederates have less than two thousand men and are greatly outnumbered. But, the terrain in front of the Fort is poorly suited for the Union soldiers attacking and leaves them exposed. Three times they are repulsed. They are assailed by Confederate reinforcements and withdraw. The Union fails to drive the Confederates from the Fort.

INT. PLANTER'S HOTEL BAR - NEXT DAY

Joshua is reading a NEWSPAPER article on the Battle.

He is joined by; NATHANIEL RUSSEL, (45), plantation owner, GABRIEL MANIGAULT, (39), architect and myself.

JOSHUA

Brilliant, That is what we need, a more victories like yesterday.

NATHANIEL RUSSEL

The British are now providing ships and weapons to the Confederacy.

JOHN SIMMONS

It's not enough. They are sinking one of our ships every week.

NATHANIEL RUSSEL

We'll get more. Can't stop trade and commerce.

JOHN SIMMONS

At what price, Nathan?

NATHANIEL RUSSEL

(MORE)

NATHANIEL RUSSEL (cont'd)
 Pshaw, dear John, you don't have any skin in the game. You never owned slaves. If the Yankees win our entire World will come crashing down.

JOHN SIMMONS

I dislike the thought of one human owning another. What would you say if it was reversed, and you were a slave?

NATHANIEL RUSSEL

Sir, I've never been cruel to any of my Negroes. And, why are you living in South Carolina if you are anti slavery?

JOSHUA

I treat my slaves with respect and dignity.

JOHN SIMMONS

Gentlemen, I can attest to the fact that the two of you are concerned and caring slave owners, but, there are others who take pride in abusing their privilege. In the last year, I have seen four black men strung up on trees and lamp posts around the city. And I live here, because it is my home. We do not have to agree on everything.

JOSHUA

That may be true, John, but at the same time, free Negroes are dyeing right now in factories and slums all over the North. I've seen it.

NATHANIEL RUSSEL

So have I, dear Sir.

JOHN SIMMONS

And how many men are going to die to preserve the World you gentlemen created?

NATHANIEL RUSSEL

War is eternal, Sir. I suppose it is inevitable given the state of humanity.

JOSHUA

Gentlemen, Let's toast, to the Confederacy.

Six men stand and raise their glasses.

ALL SIX

To The Confederacy.

INT. - SHIPS CONTROL CABIN

Robert blows the whistle -

Pushes the control lever to FULL STOP.

The engineer whistles back -

Engages FULL STOP, READY TO REVERSE.

The ship drifts towards a makeshift Wharf.

The deckhands secure the ship.

They move quickly; a loading ramp is slid from onto the dock from the ship.

Confederate soldiers embark onto the marshy soil.

The deck hands assist in retrieving weapons and supplies from the cargo hold.

Soldiers roll a small cannon down the ramp.

Other men carry crates of ammo and supplies.

Once all of the gear and men have been offloaded, the ramp is dragged back onto the ship.

The ropes are unsecured.

Robert signals AHEAD.

The engineer whistles, moves the lever.

Robert's gauge alerts him.

The ship's buckets begin to turn as it propels itself forward.

The clacking sound of the engine's crank rods moving reverberate around them.

In minutes, they are back in deeper waters.

Abraham enters the Cabin. In his arms is a puppy.

ABRAHAM

They left this behind.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

We can't have that on the ship.

ROBERT SMALLS

I'll take him. Going to call him Lincoln.

CAPTAIN CHARLES

Not a good idea. You want to get your puppy shot?

ROBERT SMALLS

No one is touching him, he's mine.

INT. ROOMS ABOVE STABLE - NIGHT

Robert's gets a night off.

HANNAH

You bring home another mouth for me to feed?

ROBERT SMALLS

It is a puppy. Don't eat much. What should I have done with it? The Captain wanted to throw him off the boat.

HANNAH

I suppose you had no choice in the matter.

ROBERT SMALLS

I have been thinking. I can commandeer the ship and we can escape.

HANNAH

What do you mean? How?

ROBERT SMALLS

We can take the Planter out to the Union Blockade and surrender it to them. They will free us.

HANNAH

That is very dangerous talk.

ROBERT SMALLS

They trust us. Leave us nights to go ashore. I can take the Planter near the North Wharf. Pick you and the children up.

HANNAH

It is a risk, dear, but you and I, and our little ones must be free. I will go, for where you die, I will die.

ROBERT SMALLS

If we are caught the punishment can be death. If it happens I plan on blowing the ship up with everyone on board.

HANNAH

Freedom is all we've ever wanted. What about the crew? Are they as eager to risk their lives?

ROBERT SMALLS

I need to tell them my plan, have each man decide for himself.

HANNAH

(MORE)

HANNAH (cont'd)
Can you trust them?

ROBERT SMALLS

I trust most of them. Not Alfred, I do not know if I can trust him.

INT./EXT. ON BOARD PLANTER - AT DOCK

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

Smalls pilots the Planter throughout Charleston harbor, on area rivers and along the South Carolina, Georgia and Florida coasts.

As the military fortifications grow, Smalls and the Planter ferry men, dispatches, supplies, and guns from the city to the forts. Smalls observes how the Confederates maintain their harbor defenses. He also takes note of the increasing number of Union warships outside the harbor enforcing the blockade of Charleston.

From Charleston harbor, Smalls and the Planter's crew can see the line of federal blockade ships in the outer harbor, seven miles away. Smalls appears content and has the confidence of the Planter's crew and owners, but, at some time in April 1862, he begins to plan an escape.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS BELOW DECK - NIGHT

The slaves sleep below deck, in a section of the cargo hold.

This night, the White crew leave for the city. The enslaved crew stay behind and guard ship.

They share a communal dinner of rice, chicken and beans.

ROBERT SMALLS

We can Commandeer the Planter the next time the officers leave us alone. Sail her to the Union Blockade and surrender. We can be freemen.

ABRAHAM

Kick, Man, Dat's crazy, It's eight miles away! You gotta pass three forts and checkpoints. No way it'll work.

ALFRED

They catch me again it's a hangin' for me.

JOHN SMALL

It's a hanging for all of us, or worse, labor camp.

ROBERT SMALLS

If we get caught we blow up the ship and any ship that comes alongside.

GIBBES

Who gonna be captain, you?

ROBERT SMALLS

I know what to do. I can imitate the captains, how he stands.

JOHN SMALL

You do look like the Captain. Said it before. I'm not the only one said it.

GABRIEL

In my opine, you're mad.

ROBERT SMALLS

I know the pass codes, the routes. Been watching all the captain does. I can get us to the Union ships.

GABRIEL

If we run up on a patrol boat?

DAVID JONES

We be hung if caught.

ROBERT SMALLS

Is that so bad? Dying? We aren't free and never will be unless we fight for it. We be out sometimes an entire night and see no one.

JOHN SMALL

Robert Smalls is right. We must fight to gain our freedom. I'm in.

ROBERT SMALLS

We all agree or we don't try. What about you, John Small, or you, Alfred and you, Jack? Will you fight for your freedom? We can't make it without engineers.

ALFRED

With you to the end of the days, Robert Smalls.

JOHN SMALL

What of our families? They will be tortured maybe killed we leave them behind. I'm not going and leave my family here.

ROBERT SMALLS

We take them with us. Dat's what men do. Free our families.

JACK

Take women and children out past Fort Sumter in a side paddle, that's crazy talk, boy. Them sentries are trigger happy. They're damned near crazy!

ROBERT SMALLS

We'll keep them quiet.

JOHN SMALL

How we gonna get our families on board? Y'all have a checkpoint a hundred yards away. Won't nobody gonna get passed them.

ROBERT SMALLS

We can have them meet us out on the water someplace?

JOHN SMALL

How you gonna find them adrift out there?

ALFRED

Pick em up at the North Wharf. Since the fire, it's not being used for nothing.

ROBERT SMALLS

The Wharf still standing?

ALFRED

I believe so.

ROBERT SMALLS

We'll check when we pass on patrol.

JOHN SMALL

I'll join you if my family comes.

ROBERT SMALLS

Thay comin'. Who's with me?

All of the men agree. They stand.

ALL SIX

Aye, Captain.

EXT. COLES ISLAND GARRISON - MAY 12, 1862

The Planter travels ten miles southwest of Charleston to stop at Coles Island.

The Island is small, only 50 acres of highland shielded by old Oaks and surrounded by 250 acres of mud and marsh.

They dock at the wharf.

Lots of activity about, soldiers going this way and that.

Fort Palmetto, on the Stono River, is being dismantled.

The Planter's orders are to deliver supplies for the garrison and retrieve four artillery cannons for Fort Sumter.

They tie in, deck hands swing over a suspended winch and begin bringing up nets of supplies from the hold.

Soon, the Artillery Weapons arrive.

Gibbes secures the first cannon with rope and chains.

He connects it to a suspended chain and lifts it with the overhead winch.

They lower the Big Gun down, into the hold.

Crates of ammunition for the Big Guns arrive next along with dynamite.

All are loaded and secured below.

The ship departs for Charleston.

INT./EXT. CHARLESTON DOCKS - GROWING DARK

Once secured, the deckhands load 200 lb of ammunition onto the Planter.

They retrieve and load 20 cord of firewood also.

The Planter is docked at the wharf below General Ripley's headquarters.

ROBERT SMALLS

Wondering, Sir if the crews families
could visit for a short while
tonight?

CAPTAIN CHARLES

I approve on the condition that they
depart before curfew.

ROBERT SMALLS

Understood, Sir. Thank you, Sir.

The three officers go ashore for the night, leaving Smalls and the crew on board.

A short while later Hannah, her children and four other women arrive.

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)

We plan to take this ship tonight and
surrender it to the Union.

The women are aghast! Frightened.

They cry and scream, their men trying to calm them.

Except Hannah.

Hannah knew of Smalls longing to escape. She knew that the fires of freedom burned inside of him.

HANNAH

I too long for freedom, I will live
with you or die with you.

WOMAN 1

I would risk all for the chance at
freedom.

WOMAN 2

And if we die?

HANNAH

We die free.

WOMAN 2

Free?

HANNAH

Yes, Free.

WOMAN 2

I'm happy to get a chance to be free
from slavery.

EXT. WHARF - LATER

Three of the crew escort the family members from the ship.

They all circle around and hide aboard another steamer
docked at the North Atlantic Wharf.

Abraham and another man lay dynamite on the ships bottom.

They agreed to blow up the ship if caught by the Confederates. The crime of stealing a Military vessel would be harshly punished, including torture and death.

INT. PILOT ROOM - 0300 HRS, 13 MAY 1862

Robert Smalls puts on the captain's uniform coat.

He places a straw hat, similar to the captain's, his head.

Jones is at the Pilot position. He's spent fifteen years on these waters.

ROBERT SMALLS

Start the engines.

Blows into whistle.

Pushes lever - Ignition.

INT./EXT. BOILER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

John Small replies with a whistle.

He and Alfred Gourdine increase the pressure of the boilers.

Steam pressure builds on a dial.

The ship's massive, six foot long piston rods slide forward and back in their cradles under pressure, driving the gears, turning the ship's paddle wheels.

It is deafening and sauna like inside, the engineers keep all of the ports and doors open.

2 whistles respond - READY

EXT. - ON DECK - CONTINUOUS

Abraham Jackson casts the lines.

Smalls stands in the Captain's spot.

They pull away from their dock...

He sails the Planter past the Southern Wharf, approaching the manned checkpoint a hundred yards away...

They slowly cruise past the Confederate checkpoint...

Smalls, wearing a straw hat, tilts his head as they pass.

They continue along the shoreline, proceeding as he normally would, staying near the banks.

David Jones steers the Planter away from Confederate mines.

EXT. NORTH ATLANTIC WHARF - CONTINUOUS

The Planter ties up at the Wharf. The remaining crew, Hannah, the children and other families get on board.

The Ship Planter continues , Robert Smalls at the wheel, in long coat and hat.

At 0325 Hours, they approach Fort Johnson.

The Planter is much too large and noisy a ship to quietly pass undetected in the night, there is the sound of the long push rods chattering, steam escaping, paddle wheels churning water, echoing far and wide.

Spot lights target the ship.

Smalls toots the air horn one long burst, followed by two short.

Then, he displays the current hand signal.

They wait. Every man weak kneed, except Smalls.

A SIGNAL from the Fort:

ALLOWED TO PROCEED

They continue. As the ship passes the Fort, they are within earshot of the Sentries ashore.

The Sentries shout to the Planter:

UNKNOWN SENTRY

Go get them damned Yankees...!

UNKNOWN SENTRY 2

Blow the damned Yankees to hell, or bring one of them in.

Once passed Cannon range, everyone on the Planter gives a sigh of relief.

ROBERT SMALLS

Almost an hour to go. You ladies, try and get some sleep.

HANNAH

We ain't tired. Only a few hours more. I feel it's gonna be a long night for you, Sir.

ROBERT SMALLS

I wouldn't do it any other way. Told ya a long time ago that I was sweet on ya.

EXT. - NEARING FORT SUMTER - 0415 HRS

Up ahead, the Rebel's Garrison at Fort Sumter.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

Fort Sumter is the most well fortified and defended Garrison of the Confederate States. The men stationed there are highly trained and as one would expect in times of war, highly suspicious.

The Planter slows to QUARTER SPEED - AHEAD

Smalls is calm looking but you sense imagine his fear. Perspiration covers his skin. He feels cold.

The women crying and praying again.

The men call to Robert.

DAVID JONES

Take a wide berth. Don't get too close.

ROBERT SMALLS

No, that would attract suspicion. We go in just like we always do, slow and steady.

They continued onward, towards the Fort.

Spot lights begin targeting the ship from the Fort.

STEADY AHEAD - SLOW

The ship slows to a crawl. Clouds of smoke billow from the stack.

Robert waits until the very last minute to give the ship's WHISTLE SIGNAL of one long toot followed by two short ones.

Robert holds his hand high out in front of him and gives the secret hand signal.

A pause.

The Fort Flashes a CHALLENGE SIGNAL.

Robert again holds his hand in front and gives the current hand signal.

Smalls repeats the ship's WHISTLE SIGNAL.

No response.

They very slowly thread water in place.

DAVID JONES

What are they doing?

ROBERT SMALLS

I don't know. If they begin shelling
turn up the throttle full speed ahead

They wait another minute but it feels like hours.

Perspiration drips down Smalls face and neck.

The Fort Signals:

ALL IS WELL

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)

Ahead Full

DAVID JONES

Aye, aye, Sir

Blow Whistle -

- Push lever -
- whistle reply -
- gauge aligns.

The ship distances itself from the Fort.

Smalls does not head east as was normal.

Instead, he steers the Planter straight towards the Union Navy Fleet.

EXT. FORT SUMTER - CONTINUOUS

Sentries notice the direction heading of the ship.

Just as the Planter passes out of gun range, they sound an alarm at the Fort.

INT. - PILOT ROOM OF PLANTER - 0430 HRS

Robert gazes forward towards the next checkpoint, Fort Moultrie.

ROBERT SMALLS

COURSE SET -

FULL SPEED AHEAD

DAVID JONES

Aye, Captain

It is still dark out.

A fog rolls in.

They approach Fort Moultrie.

The Fort's sentries are alerted.

Flares are shot into the night sky.

Robert toots the ship's whistle, one long and two short times.

Nothing happens.

DAVID JONES (cont'd)

Sumter could have sent a morse code message

ROBERT SMALLS

Could have

DAVID JONES

We can make a break for it, the Union is only a mile off

ROBERT SMALLS

Steady

A whistle responds from the Fort.

All is Clear Signal is given.

As if the night isn't already stressful enough, they now head straight to a Union blockade in a ship flying both the Confederate Stars and Bars as well as the South Carolina Palmetto State Flag.

A new dawn is beginning to emerge. It is still too dark to clearly see and the morning fog came in thick.

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)

Lower the Flags. Raise the White Flag

ABRAHAM

We don't have a White Flag on board, Sir!

HANNAH

Take this. I sewed it.

She hands over a handmade white flag made from a bedsheet.

Abraham attaches the white flag.

INT./EXT. THE BLOCKADE - CONTINUOUS

The Planter heads toward the USS Onward, which has taken sight of the ship.

They assume it is intending to attack them Blockade.
 The Onward prepares its guns to sink the Planter.
 They shout warnings to her.

ONWARD

Halt, or you will be destroyed.

The sunrise arrives and the White Flag is now visible.
 One WITNESS recounts his recollection:

WITNESS

Just as No. 3 port gun was being elevated, someone cried out, "I see something that looks like a white flag"; and true enough there was something flying on the steamer that would have been white by application of soap and water. As she neared us, we looked in vain for the face of a white man. There was none.

EXT. USS ONWARD - CONTINUOUS

The Onward pulls alongside the Planter.

The Union sentries notice the Planter's occupants celebrating on the deck and gesturing and cursing at Ft. Moultrie.

The Union captain, JOHN FREDERICK NICKELS, [30] boards the Planter.

He searches for the Confederate captain.

A man in a Confederate captain uniform comes forward, takes off his hat, and proclaims;

ROBERT SMALLS

Good morning, sir! I've brought you some of the old United States guns, sir! -I am delivering this war material including these cannons that were for Fort Sumter, sir.

(MORE)

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)
I think Uncle Abraham Lincoln can put
them to good use.

Shock registers across the Union sailors' faces as they
finally cast eyes on the Planters "captain."

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)
Sir, may I have a United States flag
to display?

Smalls, the crew and passengers of the Planter are brought
on board the Onward.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

The ship's treasure of guns,
ammunition, and important documents
proves to be a wealth of information,
telling the Union commanders of
shipping routes, mine locations and
the times that Confederate ships dock
and depart.

INT. PLANTER'S INN BAR - NEXT DAY

JOHN SIMMONS

imagine that, your boy has absconded
a steamship and sailed himself to
freedom. Crazy mulatto bastard went
and did it!

COLONEL CHESTNUT

We gonna put a \$4,000 price on his
head! The ship and cannons are a
major loss to the Confederacy.

JOHN SIMMONS

You ain't going to catchen him so
easy. That boy's smart. Can't read or
write, but smart.

JOSHUA

I hear Captain Relyea and the two
other officers are to be court
martialed.

JOHN SIMMONS

(MORE)

JOHN SIMMONS (cont'd)
Serves em right. Dereliction of duty,
I say. Abandoning their Post. Leaven
them boys alone on the Planter. They
was inviting trouble.

JOSHUA

Most boys know their place, Smalls
never did. Been rebellious since a
young one.

COLONEL CHESTNUT

Smalls don't know it yet, but blacks
are not without conflict up north.
There's gonna be people hunting him
for the bounty money.

JOHN SIMMONS

If I were you, I'd be worried that he
come hunting after you. He knows
these waters better than anyone I
know.

COLONEL CHESTNUT

It's worse that that. Smalls has our
code books. He knows our defenses.
Our ship routes. Son of a bitch even
knows the schedules of our ships.

JOHN SIMMONS

McKee should have allowed Smalls to
go free when he asked.

JOSHUA

I told him that, myself. I said, the
boy has got a fire inside him and
nothin's gonna quench it.

JOHN SIMMONS

Well, I am gonna raise my glass and
toast that crazy brave half breed,
Robert Smalls.

He drinks alone.

INT. USS ONWARD - CAPTAINS OFFICE - FOLLOWING

CAPTAIN NICKELS (V.O.)

Pens a letter.

13 May, 1862

Dear Capt Parrott, This morning, a steamship named the Planter, flying Rebel flags was spotted heading directly for the Onward. We prepared for an attack, guns ready. We spotted a white flag. Fearing a trap, we cautiously approached. Once alongside the now motionless side wheel we observed people dancing and shouting on the deck. Their 'Captain' turned out to be a slave named Robert Smalls and the entire crew were slaves and their families. Smalls surrendered the Planter to the Union. On board were 4 large guns meant for Fort Sumpter.

Parrott forwarded the Planter story to Admiral Samuel Francis Du Pont, commander of the blockading fleet at Port Royal, describing Smalls as very intelligent.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

In addition to its own light guns, Planter carries the four main artillery pieces from Coles Island and 200 pounds of ammunition. Most valuable, however, are the captain's code book containing the Confederate signals and a map of the mines and torpedoes that had been laid in Charleston's harbor.

Du Pont holds several meetings with Smalls. These soon become formal inquiries. Smalls' extensive knowledge of the Charleston region's waterways and military configurations are found to be highly valuable.

Smalls gives detailed information about Charleston's defenses to Du Pont and his federal officers.

They are surprised to learn from Smalls that contrary to their calculations, only a few thousand troops remain to protect the area, the rest had been sent to Tennessee and Virginia.

They also learn that the Coles Island fortifications on Charleston's southern flank were being abandoned and are without protection.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.) (cont'd)

This intelligence allows Union forces to capture Coles Island and its string of batteries without a fight on May 20, a week after Smalls' escape.

The Union holds the Stono inlet as a base for the remaining three years of the war.

I lost contact with Robert the night he escaped from captivity. However, I kept abreast of his activities in the days ahead.

After capture, the Planter is repaired and goes into Union service. The boat is valued for its shallow draft, compared to other boats in the Union fleet.

INT. - ADMIRAL DU PONT'S OFFICE

At the end of Smalls interview, Du Pont is impressed, and writes the following to the Navy secretary in Washington:

DU PONT (V.O.)

Robert, the intelligent slave and pilot of the boat, who performed this bold feat so skillfully, informed me of the capture of the Sumter gun, presuming it would be a matter of interest. He "is superior to any who have come into our lines - intelligent as many of them have been.

INT. NAVY SECRETARY'S OFFICE.

The Navy Secretary forwards Du Pont's letter to President Abraham Lincoln.

ACT 2

INT. - SMALL'S QUARTERS ON BOARD SHIP - DAY

Upon their return to Charleston, Smalls receives a telegram from the White House.

He opens it.

Inside, is an invitation to meet with President Abraham Lincoln.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

In the aftermath of his brave escape to freedom, Smalls is awarded half the value of the Planter, a sum of \$1,500.

The Battle of Secessionville is fought on June 16, 1862. Confederate forces defeat the Union's attempt to capture Charleston, by land.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.) (cont'd)

Union Brig. Gen. Henry Benham was court-martialed for trying to take James Island, which was against the orders he had been given.

INT. PLANTER'S INN BAR - NEXT DAY

JOHN SIMMONS

Imagine that, your boy has absconded a steamship and sailed to freedom. Crazy mulatto bastard went and did it!

COLONEL CHESTNUT

We gonna put a \$4,000 price on his head!

JOHN SIMMONS

You ain't catchen him so easy. That boy's smart. Can't read or write, but smart.

JOSHUA

The Captain, First Mate and Engineer will court-martialed over this.

COLONEL CHESTNUT

Indeed, that's dereliction of duty, Sir. It's a major loss for our side.

INT. - LINCOLN'S WHITE HOUSE

FREDERICK DOUGLAS, the noted Abolitionist joins Smalls in his meeting with Lincoln. Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton also participates.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN

I have been reading of your daring escape on board the Planter. Bravo, Sir. Well done.

DOUGLAS

My dear, President Lincoln, Robert Smalls' actions can help provide an opportunity to bring African-Americans to join our military. I strongly urge you to allow him to speak to the millions of blacks who support him, in the end, you will have thousands of recruits.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN

It would be incredibly beneficial to the War effort to successfully recruit black men. I will agree to allow the integration of African-Americans in the military if Mister Smalls agrees to lead the cause.

FREDERICK DOUGLAS

...It is a contest between North and South, as to what shall be the principles of the Government in respect to the slave system of the fifteen Southern States.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN

I've said it before, Sir, and I'll say it again; A house divided against itself cannot stand.

ROBERT SMALLS

President, I will gladly assist anyway I can, Sir. I believe it will be beneficial to have black men fight for their freedom.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN

As clearly you have done, Sir.

INT./EXT. NEW YORK CITY - CONTINUOUS

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

By this time, Robert Smalls was becoming a Celebrity in the North and a Traitor to the whites in the South. I have taken the liberty of encapsulating an article written by the New York Times on 3 October 1862 due to it's preponderance of virtue.

"The Hero of the Planter," New York Times, October 3, 1862

This account of Small's triumphant appearance before an all-black audience in New York City reveals as much about the political engagement of New York's African-American community as it does about Robert Smalls.

(MORE)

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.) (cont'd)

The reporter describes the speeches, sermons, and songs that urged immediate emancipation, challenged colonization plans, and extolled the importance of African Americans' military contributions to the Union war effort.

INT. - SHILOH CHURCH, NYC - 8 PM

The Sentiment Against Colonization

A large gathering of African-Americans gather to do public honor to Captain Robert Smalls, their gallant brother.

PASTOR ROBERT T RAYMOND

...seized a rebel gunboat, rescued his family and those of his crew from Slavery, passing six forts, reaching the Union squadron, and presenting the Government with the trophies of his achievement.

And that is why I believe God has led Robert Smalls here today, as a token of his grand plan. For it is a time for us to demand radical change in the condition of the colored race of America. And here me, Lord, we must be as courageous as Robert Smalls was on board that ship, being guided by the North Star to freedom. Hallelujah brothers and sisters, Robert Smalls has come home...

The Choir signs: John Brown's Hymn,

There's a Better Time a-Coming

Robert Smalls enters the house, receives deafening cheers.

Smalls is presented, on behalf of the colored community, a GOLD MEDAL.

The Medal displays Charleston harbor, with the Planter and Fort Sumpter in the foreground, and the Union Blockade in the distance.

PASTOR ROBERT T RAYMOND

It is inscribed - Presented to Robert Smalls by the colored citizens of New-York, Oct. 2, 1862, as a token of their regard for his heroism, his love of liberty, and his patriotism.

NEWSPAPER - NEW YORK TIMES , 3 October, 1862 --
 ** Admiral Samuel F. DuPont commands the Union naval blockade against the Confederacy. pg 8.

EXT. USS CRUSADER - DAY

Smalls joins the US Navy and is assigned the position of Pilot for the Union vessel, CRUSADER, a converted Screw Steamer, larger than the Planter and heavily armed.

Abraham Jackson and John Small enlist as well and are assigned to the Crusader.

Their first assignments are decommissioning floating Confederate mines.

It's a difficult and dangerous undertaking.

Currents and storms often blow mines to uncharted locations. A low draft vessel is essential for this job.

Smalls follows the coordinates on his maps.

ROBERT SMALLS

FULL STOP.

He whistles to alert the engineer.

The response whistle is heard.

The Planter's paddles stop revolving. The ship stops.

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)

Ahead slow.

The Planter move slowly through dense aquatic vegetation floating on the surface.

Abraham, grabs a long bamboo pole with a hook attached.

He stands on the Port side of the ship.

Another deckhand, FRANKLIN, (24) equally equipped, stands on the Starboard side.

Floating Water lettuce impairs their visibility.

The men push the long poles deep into the water and watch carefully as the ship proceeds forward - ALL AHEAD SLOW.

Abraham's pole catches a chain for a mine.

ABRAHAM

Here, here. Snagged one!

ROBERT SMALLS

Full Stop.

Moments later, they stop.

Franklin now stands next to Abraham, ready to assist.

ABRAHAM

Gonna try and pull it on board.

ROBERT SMALLS

Careful. No hurry.

Abraham turns the bamboo pole, directing his eye down a white painted line on the length of the pole, showing the location of the hook at the end.

ABRAHAM

Hooked it! Franklin, help me pull it in. Slow! - Lift it higher, don't let it touch - okay, here we are, got it on board - lower her slowly.

Abraham carefully unscrews the mine's trigger mechanism, removes the cap charge.

He lifts the trigger out of the mine casing, still connected by two wires, a red and a green wire.

Abraham pulls a pair of wire snips from his pocket and cuts the red wire.

The deactivated mine is crated and lowered into the hold where it is safely stored.

The Crusader continues slowly onward, stopping when another mine is encountered

One by one, they retrieve and deactivate dozens of undersea mines.

EXT. - SPRUCE STREET HARBOR, PHILADELPHIA - 1863

Smalls is asked to speak at a colored Military Recruitment Event sponsored by both the UNION LEAGUE' and the U.S. Military.

ROBERT SMALLS

One year ago, I was a slave working for the Confederates. All I could keep of my weekly stipend was one dollar. Today, I am a free man because I chose to stand up against oppression. History will look upon our movement and applaud our courage. For, it was the party of Lincoln which will unshackle the necks of four million human beings. For thank, I owe my deepest gratitude.

Smalls is applauded by the Press and by African-Americans from the North. He personally recruits about 5000 African-American soldiers.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

One of the first things Smalls does, is to learn how to read and write.

Intelligence had already been seen in Smalls, but he knew he could do more.

EXT. USS PLANTER -

Smalls rejoins the Planter, as its Pilot.

The ship is assigned river and coastal journeys.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

After his escape, Smalls becomes a pilot for Union ships in the Charleston area. The Rebel network of spies are tasked with identifying the ships on which he serves. The bounty on his head has grown to ten thousand dollars. The Congress bestows a \$1,500 cash prize to Smalls.

EXT. - SESESSIONVILLE GARRISON - 01 DECEMBER 1863

The Planter sails down FOLLY ISLAND CREEK, adjacent to James Island on a supply run.

From the Pilot Deck, Smalls can see a small boat heading towards the Planter.

ROBERT SMALLS

There's a boat heading our way.

JOHN SMALL

Looks like a Duck boat. I don't see anyone on board. It may have gone adrift.

ROBERT SMALLS

It could be a trap.

ABRAHAM

It's just drifting with the currents.

ROBERT SMALLS

Keep an eye on it.

Abraham readies the Agar Machine Gun, a new addition to the ship.

Suddenly, Cannons fire from a distance, shells burst and impact near the ship.

Bullets strike the command deck, shattering one window. Glass covers the deck.

CAPTAIN NICKERSON

I think we are caught in a crossfire between the Rebels and our own battalion.

More artillery bursts near the ship.

Sprays of water, more broken glass.

ROBERT SMALLS

Suggest we reverse course, Sir. If we continue we will fall into the hands of the enemy.

Just then, men stand in the duck boat, and begin firing on the Planter.

Another explosion.

Abraham turns the crank on the Machine gun and sprays the duck boat with fifty eight caliber shells.

The duck boat catches fire.

Confederate's on the shoreline begin shooting at the Planter.

CAPTAIN NICKERSON

We can't survive this. We have to surrender.

ROBERT SMALLS

It's alright, Sir, we'll get through this.

CAPTAIN NICKERSON

No, Surrender the ship, Smalls.
That's an Order! Surrender the ship.

ROBERT SMALLS

Sorry, Sir, I am unable to comply. I fear the black crewmen will not be treated as prisoners of war. They might be summarily killed.

CAPTAIN NICKERSON

You're absolutely crazy! You are a mad man. I'm not going to stand here and put up with such negligence and defiance.

Nickerson flees the pilot house.

He finds shelter in the coal-bunker.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

Smalls enters the pilothouse and takes command of the ship.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.) (cont'd)
 Smalls pilots the Planter out of
 range of the Confederate guns.

As a reward for his bravery, Smalls
 is appointed pilot of the Planter,
 becoming the first black man to
 command a United States ship.

EXT. SOUTH EDISTO RIVER - 18 APRIL

Smalls and the Planter conduct an expedition up the South
 Edisto River. The heavily armed screw steamer, E.B. Hale
 piloted by W. J. Foster joins them.

ROBERT SMALLS

Two hundred and fifty miles of
 twisting, turning black-water. Feels
 like a thousand.

GIBBES

Damned mosquitoes. I have bites
 everywhere.

ROBERT SMALLS

Cover yourself with turpentine. Keeps
 em away.

ABRAHAM

Half a mile, we pick up the soldiers.

ROBERT SMALLS

Half a mile.

They paddle onward. The E.B Hale a half mile behind.

ABRAHAM

I see them. Port side, 400 yards.

Thirty men climb the gangplank onto the ship. One makes his
 way to the Pilot Deck.

UNION SOLDIER

There is a floating battalion four
 miles ahead. Six cannons.

ROBERT SMALLS

Signal the Hale.

JOHN SMALL

Aye, sir.

Foster takes a skiff to the Planter.

ROBERT SMALLS

There's a floating battalion four miles up river.

FOSTER

I have fifty men on board. I'll send them out in shore boats a mile before. We hold back till we hear an explosion, then we charge in with guns blazin.

ROBERT SMALLS

Alright, sounds like a plan.

Both ships locate suitable landing locations. The troops are offloaded and they proceed on foot.

The ships linger back, waiting for an explosion.

Thirty five minutes later, they hear the sound of a grenade exploding.

They move forward, Half Speed, Steady - Ahead.

ABRAHAM

Something up ahead.

ROBERT SMALLS

Full Stop, ready to reverse. - What is it?

ABRAHAM

Looks like a floating dock.

Through his looking glass, Robert confirms the hundred foot long, floating dock making up the Confederate battery.

ROBERT SMALLS

(MORE)

ROBERT SMALLS (cont'd)
Six Guns. Where are the people?

Then he sees them, nearly forty captured confederate troops on their knees, being watched over by the Union soldiers.

The E.B. Hale's crew loads the prisoners on board.

The Planter and the Hale load the six artillery guns from the battery. Three are loaded on each ship.

Before they depart, they pour kerosene on the floating dock and light it on fire.

Smoke is still visible a half hour later as they continue their journey.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

The officers and men of both ships earn a commendation from the Secretary of the Navy for their courageous conduct.

Congress bestows a \$1,500 cash prize on Smalls.

MULTIPLE SCENES

EXT. CHARLESTOWN HARBOR - 07 APRIL, 1863

Smalls joins the naval assault against the harbor defenses with eight other ironclad ships.

He is made pilot of the ironclad USS Keokuk, and takes part in the attack on Fort Sumter.

The Keokuk takes 96 hits during the battle and retires for the night.

It sinks the next morning.

Smalls and the crew move to the Ironside and the fleet returns to Hilton Head.

NEWSPAPER - January 1, 1864 -President Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

The Emancipation Proclamation freed the enslaved people in the Confederate states. The proclamation also announced that Black men would be allowed to enlist in the Union Army. African-American men began enlisting in the Union Army in great numbers.

INT./EXT. - PHILADELPHIA - SPRING 1864

Smalls pilots the Planter to Philadelphia for an overhaul. In Philadelphia, he supports the Port Royal Experiment, an effort to raise money to support the education and development of formerly enslaved people. Their leader, a black woman, named LUCY THOMAS helps Smalls achieve literacy, by teaching him how to read and write.

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

In December 1864, Smalls and the Planter support William T. Sherman's army in Savannah, Georgia at the destination point of his March to the Sea.

WILLIAM T. SHERMAN

24 Dec. 24, 1864,
Dear Gen. Ulysses S. Grant,
My strategy for South Carolina, is to keep the Confederates in doubt as to our real objective. Once we cross the Savannah River, the Confederates will divide their forces to protect Augusta and Charleston. However, I will then ignore both Charleston and Augusta and occupy Columbia. Charleston, is now a mere desolated wreck and is hardly worth the time it would take to starve it out.

The naval and artillery siege of Charleston begins in 1863. It is the longest campaign of the Civil War.

Charleston waits in anticipation for Sherman's Army.

INT. PLANTER'S INN BAR - DECEMBER 1864

JOSHUA

Sherman's Army is close by.

WILLIAM

Our affairs are gloomy, Sherman's army has passed through Georgia and is now moving through South Carolina. Conditions are poor. Crime is rampant. Houses in the lower parts are constantly broken open and plundered.

Half of the city is now totally uninhabited. It seems like a city of the dead.

JOHN SIMMONS

Many of the outlying Plantations have been destroyed also. Saw it myself the other day when I took a boat to James Island.

NEWSPAPER - 07 February, 1865 - Charleston abandoned by the Confederates following Sherman's capture of Atlanta and Savannah.

EXT. CHARLESTON HARBOR - 14 APRIL 1865

Smalls returns with the Planter to Charleston harbor for the ceremonial raising of the American flag again at Fort Sumter exactly four years to the day after it was evacuated. .

JOHN SIMMONS (V.O.)

I took great pride when I received the written invitation to join Smalls on board the Planter once again for this momentous occasion. I stood with him in the Pilot room as we passed Fort Sumter. He allowed me to man the wheel on our return. It was an inspiring day and the high point of our over ten year friendship.

EXT. - ON BOARD THE PLANTER - CONTINUOUS

John Simmons stands next to Robert Smalls in the Pilot Room as they float in front of Fort Sumter.

They hug as the American Flag is raised from the Fort and fireworks explode in the blue skies overhead.

EXT. USS PLANTER - 11 JUNE, 1865

Robert Smalls is discharged from the Military.

He continues to pilot the Planter on humanitarian missions, taking supplies to freedmen who lost nearly everything during the war.

FINI

FADE TO BLACK

JOHN SIMMONS

My story of Robert Smalls ends here, however, Mister Smalls continued in his journey for justice many years afterwards;

Following the Civil War, Smalls serves in both the South Carolina State Assembly and Senate -

He then serves in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1874 to 1886-

In an impassioned address to the South Carolina state legislature Smalls said:

ROBERT SMALLS

My race needs no special defense, for the past history of them in this country proves them to be the equal of any people anywhere. All they need is an equal chance in the battle of life

NEWSPAPER March 2023 -

The San Diego Union-Tribune will leave a big wake this week after the U.S. Navy decided to rename its guided-missile cruiser Chancellorsville, which was home ported in San Diego for many years, after a Civil War-era maritime pilot.

The cruiser's new name is MG ROBERT SMALLS

It is the first Army ship named for an African American.