

After my capture at the battle of Gettysburg on the 1st of July 1863. I was taken to the rear, and nothing happened while held and guarded by the soldiers of the rebel army who had seen service, worthy of note. True we were given short fare but so were they. we were subjected to a hard march until we reached the Potomac but no harder than the men who guarded us and no harder than men in our circumstances might reasonably expect. On the morning of the 18th of July we reached Staunton and there were placed in passenger cars and taken to Richmond. Thus ended our riding in passenger cars during our stay in rebel hands. We reached the building known as "Libby Prison" at about dark. this was formerly a ware house. being about 146 feet long by 122 wide. 120 inside. On the south east side next the canal, the building is four stories high and on the opposite side, fronting Cary Street, three stories. Two partitioned walls divided the building into three sets of rooms making them about 120 feet long by 47 wide. When we reached the prison, the upper west room was occupied by Col. Straight's command, while the room next below them was occupied by Gen Milroy's officers.

Captured at Winchester. During our stay there, only the two upper stories of the building were occupied by the prisoners. That night we were turned into the upper middle rooms, and the next morning a lot of sailors were moved out of the upper east room, and the Potomac officers were turned in there, and this room was used by us, with the exception of a few days, during our entire stay there. Little pains had been taken with the room while the sailors had used it, and they had taken, I should judge, as little pains with themselves, for every seam and crevice in the floor and wall, seemed to be alive with vermin. And during the nine months and twenty days that we occupied that room and the room immediately below it, it was next to impossible to keep clear of vermin.

On reaching the prison on the evening of the 18th we had been searched, one by one, and every article of value, including blankets, knapsacks, haversacks &c. were taken from us, and were never returned. On the 19th the officer in charge gave to each prisoner (about 188 in all, of us, there being no enlisted men with us) one blanket each, they all being blankets taken from our own men, and mostly old and badly worn, beside being very dirty and many of them full of vermin. In the part of the building

occupied by us. (Potomac officers) there was not a chair, bench, box, board or any thing on which a man could sit down to rest him. No way of rest from standing, save to lie down on the bare floor or sit on the floor and lean against the brick wall. An order was issued on that day, that during the day all blankets must be folded and hung up, and if any prisoner took his blanket to lie on at any time during the day, it would be taken from him, and he would not be furnished with another during his imprisonment. The march down the valley had been hard, the fare had been short and as it had rained very much of the time, there were many of the officers nearly worn out from fatigue, hunger and exposure, and on reaching Richmond they were unable to stand up all day, the rations there, as I will explain to you soon, were calculated to add but little to their condition. They must have rest in some way, and no way was left them during the day, but to lie down upon the bare floor, with their shoes for a pillow. Capt. Baldwin, of the 2^d Wis. was with me. At this time he was too ill to sit up all day, much less to stand up, not knowing how rigid the rules were, he ventured to take his blanket and lie down on it in the day time, trusting to a statement of his illness in case of detection.

He had fallen asleep, when Dick Turner, the man of all (dirty) work, came into the room. He caught hold of the blanket, drawing it out with a violent jerk, rolling the sick and sleeping man onto the floor. He carried the blanket away, and from that time until some time in October Capt B. and myself had but one blanket between us, and that one worn full of holes, affording but little protection when either under or over us. Neither of us (and this was the case with all the Potomac officers so far as I knew) had any clothes save what we had worn during the march and the battle.

For some length of time after reaching Libby Prison, the authorities had our rations prepared for us by some negro cooks. At this time a ration for one man consisted of one half loaf of wheat bread, being in the neighborhood of ^{half} a pound. This was issued early in the morning, then for dinner there was served out about two thirds of a pint of rice soup. This soup was made by boiling either fresh beef or bacon, and when nearly cooked, putting in some rice. Either from ignorance of the proper method of cooking, or from design, neither the meat or the rice were washed. When bacon was used, it was old and having been badly cured or kept, was very moggoty. The

rice was also dirty and warm. All these entered into the Compound. And it was by no means an unusual thing to find from ten to twenty maggots and worms in a tin cup of soup. The quantity of meat given to each man was generally about four or five ounces. When beef was used for the soup, the weather being hot, it was frequently injured before cooking.

This much food was not enough to satisfy the wants of any man, unless he was too sick to eat. Capt. B. and I used to divide our ration of bread into three pieces for three meals. And never did we use to take to the table more than the allotted piece, least when we once got to eating, we might not stop until it was all gone, when there would be nothing left for the next meal. And not once, during the first three months of my imprisonment, did I leave the table without feeling as hungry or hungrier than when going to my meals, except when sick, the little we got seeming to serve to sharpen the appetite.

After living in this way a while, Col. Straight sent a remonstrance to the rebel authorities, against such treatment, when the ration of meat and bread were increased a little. After being there a few weeks, we obtained permission to cook

for ourselves. Lieut. Col. Sanderson, kindly offering to superintend the cooking. After this we had the satisfaction of believing what we ate was clean, even if the quantity was small. During the months of July, August and September the weather was extremely hot. Shut in a close building, badly ventilated, we suffered much from the heat. At this time there were nearly 200 men in one room. The water for the use of the prisoners was carried to the different rooms in pipes, but from some cause the water works were out of order; the water was taken from the James River, above the city. That which came to us in addition to being so muddy that a third of an inch of mud would settle at the bottom of a quart cup of water, in a night. It was so warm, that to the persons of men shut up in a close building, during the hot days of August, this water was more than blood warm. Drinking it gave no relief to a thirsty man. In fact the most refreshing and delicious draught of water that I ever drank was caught during a shower, from the roof of the prison. The contrast between that and the water furnished us, being greater than between ordinary brook water and ice water. When this gave out, as it sometimes did, they gave us water from the Canal, and into this canal emptied all the sewers of the

city. Under this treatment, the prisoners grew poor. The long hot days, the sultry nights, bad water, insufficient food and want of health, exercise reduced their strength. From the lack of clothes on which to lie, the bones either wore through the skin in search of something more solid on which to rest, or the flesh became calloused over the sharp points. Sicknes increased; cases of diarrhea became more and more frequent the loathsome, sickening indications of scurvy crept in upon us, and no help could be had from the rebel surgeons. We had physicians with us, but they could get no medicines. A few vegetables would have dispelled the scurvy, but none could be had. Every valuable, watches, pins, rings, little keepsakes from friends at home, such articles of clothing as could be spared were sold, one after another to get a little money, with which to buy something to increase the scanty ration of food. Flour became scarce. At first corn meal was mixed with the flour, then the flour disappeared entirely and the loaf consisted of all corn meal. From sleeping in our day clothes, constantly wearing them save when it became necessary to take off the only shirt to wash it, was fast wearing them out. Rags began to become the general rule and a whole garment the exception. A "fresh fish," as new

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comers were called, attracted universal attention by his suit of whole, bright looking clothes. by his fresh, healthy face. by his free, elastic step. Men resorted to every kind of invention to kill time. cards, chess, carving bones, books &c. each came in for a part.

About the latter part of Sept prisoners began to receive a few boxes of provisions and clothes from home. At first they exercised but little judgment, and allowed themselves to eat a full meal from the good things so received. As a consequence, nearly every one who got a box of provisions among the first received, were sent to hospital after eating the first meal, where some were obliged to remain four or five weeks, before they were again able to get back.

Soon boxes came more frequently, so that by the month of November, there were but few who were dependent on rebel rations. but here came another trouble, friends in the north had got in the way of secreting money in the boxes or in the packages of food, and from some source the rebel authorities found this out, when every package, can, box or bottle

was subjected to the closest inspection. and all moneys so found. Confiscated. Shortly this precaution was carried still farther. and they refused to allow the boxes to be taken up stairs at all. but required the claimant of the box to go to the lower floor and there acknowledge the receipt of the "box and contents in good condition". which receipt was taken in triplicate. then taking a blanket he went out to the side walk and received what there might be remaining of his long looked for box. This afforded the rebels an opportunity for fraud and cheating & nearly all the boxes so issued. were more or less pilfered. One case I remember of a Lieut. Moran. who got an invoice of a box which must have weighed 150 lbs. And after so acknowledging its receipt in "good condition" he went out with his blanket to get the contents. and all that was left for him was one tin plate and a piece of brown paper. And such cases were not exceptions to the general rule.

The insolence and vindictiveness of the home guard soldiers. made it dangerous to look out at the windows or to speak to one of them. They had received orders to shoot any prisoner

whom they should see looking out at the windows, and most of them watched constantly for a chance to obey this order. Money which was taken from prisoners, under a promise on the part of the rebel officers to return it as needed, was in nearly every case kept by them. And when I was released, Dec. 18th 1864, every effort to get either the money or any satisfactory answer respecting it, had been in vain. In a very few cases, they gave to prisoners an equivalent in their money for that taken either from their persons or from letters, &c. but in a very great majority of cases they had the money when I left, with more than a fair prospect of keeping it.

When Genl Grant moved on Lee, in May '64, the rebels saw the necessity of removing us farther South. At midnight on the 7th of May, an order came up, to be ready to march to Petersburg, in one hour. And that prisoners would be allowed to take no more than two blankets each, and no more cooking utensils and rations than they could carry with ease to Petersburg, (25 miles) (bear in mind that everything, blankets and other comforts we had at this time had been sent from the north) So we packed up, leaving such things as we could not carry 25 miles, when

At day light we were marched out, went as far as the depot of the Danville R.R. about half a mile, where we were stowed into box cars and taken to Danville, and not to Petersburg. By this trick Turner got a large quantity of blankets, provisions, &c. &c., which would have been taken with us, had we known that we were to march no farther than we did.

After remaining at Danville a few days, we were again started South. On the afternoon of the 2nd day out, we reached Charlotte, N.C. After a long delay and much trouble, some hard bread was procured for us. And after dark, we were ordered into another train of cars. Expecting that we were going on that night, we hurried in, when it appeared that most of the train, and among others, the car in which I was placed, had been used for some time past for transporting horses and cattle. That since such use, they had not been cleaned in any respect. That the tin from the roof had been all torn off. And to fully develop this state of things, at about dark it came on to rain, which continued heavy all night. And instead of going on as we had expected, after putting sixty two men into the car in which I was, and about the same number into each of the others, the doors were shut and fastened, the guard placed on the

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outside of the train. the whole was left standing on the track until midnight the next morning; then, in that condition, we were compelled to ride all day. We had left Danville on the 12th of May, and on the morning of the 17th we reached Macon, Ga. Here we found the only preparation to receive us that we ever found at any place after leaving Richmond. and this preparation consisted in having a fence partly done on two sides of the ground on which we were to be kept. In the centre of these grounds there was a building, large enough to convene the Generals and a part of the field officers and a few invalids. the rest of us were left to lie out of doors, on the bare ground, without even a tree to shelter us from the dew and the sun. This state of things continued about four weeks, when the rebels sent in some boards and some poles and permitted us to make roofs, under these we could get by crowding very close together, but it was not until about the time we left that all had even that kind of shelter. Here our rations consisted of corn meal and bacon, and in such quantities that it was very sure to be eaten up.

In this prison there were a few more than 1500 officers. The enclosure contained about three and a half acres of ground. Sometime about the last of June, the five Generals together with forty five field officers were sent to Charleston S.C. and on the 28th of July 600 officers (myself & Capt. B. included) were taken from the Macon prison, and sent to Charleston, where we arrived on the morning of the 29th. As seems to be characteristic of Southern men, not the least preparation for us had been made. In fact, the authorities at Charleston disclaimed all knowledge of our coming. After some delay we were marched through the city to the jail. We must be kept somewhere. We must be fed, and we must be guarded. The jail was full of their own convicts and rebel deserters. There was no room there, so in the absence of a better place, as they said, they turned the six hundred into the jail-yard. This consisted of the space around the jail, and within the wall. Perhaps a third of an acre in all. The ground was partly paved with broken brick. a few vegetables were growing next the wall, which disappeared that day (i.e. the vegetables). The jail is a large stone building. The wall is about twenty feet high, the breath of wind ever

strayed down into this uninhabited place. The scalding rays of an August sun, poured in here, with a sickening glare, from morning until late in the afternoon. During the morning a few officers would huddle close under the wall, seeking the protection of its narrow shadow. but as the day advanced, no nook or corner escaped the searching heat. At night we laid down on the bare ground, with a single blanket (provided one possessed so much) without shelter. The sea-breeze swept over us, chilling and damp. The heavy dews drenched us almost as a shower, while not unfrequently the night brought with it, a most fearful thunder storm, when those six hundred poorly clad, scantily fed wretches either stood up, crowded close to the wall, to avoid the driving rain, or laid quietly upon the ground with their blanket drawn over them, and slept as best they could, disregarding the rain that fell on them as well as the stream of water that trickled under them. The rations were even less than ever before. Mouldy rice, wormy meat and still worse bacon. A little pine wood was furnished us, with which to cook our food. The smoke from a hundred fires in this narrow space poisoned and blinded our eyes. The wall closely guarded inside

and outside precluded the possibility of escape. Application was made to the rebel authorities to know what was to be done with us. Were we to remain in this place an indefinite time? If so, they would be safe in making a coffin contract for six hundred men.

We remained in this yard sixteen days. Then the rebels told us if we would give our parole not to try to escape, we might be removed to the Roper Hospital, situated on the same block. There we should be allowed to purchase food from hucksters, might have the letters sent to us. In short, that by so doing, we should be treated in several respects, as was due to prisoners of war. It was determined to give the parole, and we were moved into the hospital building. This was in that part of the city, subject to the fire of our forces on Morris Island. And I assure you, Sir, it was a gratifying sound. It brought up a thousand happy recollections. It seemed like hearing from a Christian, civilized land, to listen to the songs of those honest, patriotic shells. The rebels had hoped that when Genl Foster came to know that six hundred of his friends were within range of his guns, he would refrain from shelling the city. Poor, wicked fools. It never had occurred to one of them, during all their treasonable lives, what, under any given circumstances, would be

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the natural course of an honest man. The shell came just as they had come before. Every federal officer there felt glad as he heard them go howling up town. He felt that each one screamed in the ears of every rebel "There's no rest for the wicked" And as they shouted close to the sleeping rebel at midnight, they spoke of "retribution," of a "judgment to come."

While we occupied the Roper Hospital we had no cause to complain. We were guarded by the 3rd La. An old regiment, one that seen service, had met our soldiers in battle and knew what war was aside from what the rebel papers had told them. But the exchange project had failed. Genl Foster would not entertain any proposition upon the subject, so long as we were under fire. About an equal number of rebel officers had been placed on Morris Island near Battery Gregg. The rebel authorities finding that they could not drive Genl Foster into compliance with their plans, became desirous of some excuse for removing us into the country, in order to get their own officers off Morris Island. And early in October the long looked for excuse came in the shape of yellow fever. And on the 5th of Oct. we were moved to Columbia S. C.

At Columbia, as at Charleston the rebel authorities were taken entirely by surprise by our coming. They kept us (then all the officers, 1600) at the depot a day and a night, trying to determine what should be done with so many Yankees, finally they marched us two miles out of town, onto a high piece of waste land, grown up to scattering scrub pines. Placed a guard line around us, and turned us out as they would so many cattle. A few broke down pine boughs and made temporary shelters to protect them from the heavy dew. Those who could spare a blanket, fixed it up on stakes for a home and others laid down on the bare ground at night, taking the dew, the sun and the rain as they came. When men can't do as they would, they are very apt to do as they can.

The nights here were cold, but during the middle of the day it was as hot as August. As the cold weather was coming on, we felt the need of meat diet, but during the time I was there, from Oct. 6th until Dec. 9th not a ration of meat was issued. Our rations there were issued once in five days, unless they omitted a few days, which they not unfrequently did. And five days rations for one man consisted

of about two quarts of corn meal, usually a little less, one table spoon full of salt, from a pint to a quart of sorghum molasses and sometimes a gill of rice and still more seldom a gill of flour. The corn meal was very coarse, and if the hulls were sifted out, it diminished the quantity nearly one fourth. The molasses was soured and frequently burnt in making. Many could not use it at all, and most of those who did, could only do so by clarifying it with soda. Notwithstanding the rebels here pretended they could not get meat for us, still they issued meat to the guard, and the sutler appointed by the officer in charge. Kept meat constantly at \$3.50 per pound for fresh beef and \$7.00 per pound for bacon, for those who were so fortunate as to have money to buy. After being in this camp (if it can be called such) about three or four weeks, the officer in charge began to give a very few permits to go out under guard, and cut pine trees, bring them in on our shoulders and so construct log cabins. but it was so much labor to get such permission as well as to get an axe. That houses went up very slowly. While here, nearly every officer who had shot, walked away. The guard consisted of old men and little boys, none of them seeming to have either knowledge of or

sympathy with their cause. Two dollars in greenbacks or a set of brass buttons would buy any of them. Six hundred out of the sixteen hundred taken there, had escaped before I left. A pack of blood hounds was kept at the Camp to pursue fugitives. Without these dogs, they would have had poor success in following either escaped prisoners or deserters from their own ranks.

But the day of my deliverance draweth nigh. I have made this letter so long, that you will tire of reading it, long before you get this far. The brutal, unprovoked murders, committed by the guard at different times, by firing into the prison, sometimes by accident, but oftener from design, I must pass by. I have endeavored to give you an account of some of the most prominent events, to enable you to get some idea of a life in rebel prisons. leaving, as you must know, a thousand assurances, which to us, were of the utmost importance as shaping or influencing our condition. To write the whole would make a volume, and not a letter.

On the morning of the 9th of Dec, one hundred and eighty five officers of the Union Army, left the prison at Columbus, for home.

More than seventeen months of prison life, had made such words as "going home" sound

strange. Officers had started before
 us, at Richmond and at Charleston,
 and even got on board our boat, then been
 sent back to prison. Perhaps that might
 be our fate. We promised ourselves nothing,
 but hoped anxiously, fearfully for the future.
 On the morning of the 10th of Dec. we reached the
 City of Charleston. marched through its streets
 and saw its battered buildings again. After
 some delay, by reason of fog in the harbor, we
 embarked and steamed down toward Fort
 Sumter, near which lay our Flag of Truce
 Fleet. As we past Fort Sumter, the heavy mist
 lifted from the water, and for the first time
 for so many months, we saw our flag
 floating from the mast of the New York.
 Immediately our song, the "Star Spangled Banner"
 rang out from a hundred voices, till that rebel
 steamer seemed almost to have become loyal.
 The few of the rebel crew were forgotten. And the
 host of happy men forgot their rage, their hunger,
 their troubles, and knew and thought of nothing
 but their flag, their Country and their homes.
 That body of men may see other happy days, but
 that day stands in no danger of a rival. Only
 one regret was felt, and that was for the men we

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had left behind.

"The good time coming is almost here.
"I was long, long, long on the way"

That night we slept under our own
flag, and we felt that we were ^a mighty nation.

From what I have seen both inside and outside
the rebel lines, I am fully convinced that before
many months, loyal, honest men can go where
I have been with no one to molest them or
make them afraid.

I have the honor to remain

Very respectfully and

Truly your obt. Servt

Pat. Rollins

Jan'y 26th 1865

To Hon. Jim. O. Howe,
Washington, D.C.