



PERSONAL NARRATIVES  
OF EVENTS IN THE  
WAR OF THE REBELLION,

BEING PAPERS READ BEFORE THE  
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

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# ASSAULT ON FORT GILMER

AND

# Reminiscences of Prison Life.

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BY

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## ASSAULT ON FORT GILMER AND REMINISCENCES OF PRISON LIFE.

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SEPT. 28, 1864, I was transferred from Company F, to command Company C, Seventh United States Colored Troops, attached to the Third Brigade, Third Division, Tenth Army Corps. At 5 P. M. we broke camp from in front of Petersburg, and were soon on the move toward the James River. Lieutenant Califf, in his history of the regiment, says: "A tedious night-march followed, during which the north side of the James was reached via the pontoon bridges at Broadway and Jones Landings. After a few hours' rest in a cornfield on the morning of the 29th, the brigade moved forward as a support to the First Division, the First Brigade of which, under Colonel Duncan, charged and captured the enemy's works on Signal Hill, on the New Market Road. The Eighteenth Corps about the

same time charged and captured Fort Harrison. Soon after noon, while the brigade which had been moving by the flank up the New Market Road, halted, an order was received to form column of regiments, faced to the left. Scarcely had this been done, when Gen. William Birney, commanding the brigade, rode to the right of the column and directed our regiment to move off by the right flank. As we were crossing the Mill Road, Colonel Shaw\* received from him the order, "Form on the right by file into line, and charge and take the work that is firing!"

Before our line was completed, the Ninth Regiment Colored Troops charged the redoubt to our left, and was repulsed (See Appendix No. 1), and the commanding officer of the Eighth Colored Troops was ordered to send four companies deployed as skirmishers to take the same work. While our regiment was forming for the charge, the assistant adjutant-general of the brigade came to Colonel Shaw with the order, "Send four companies deployed as skirmishers to attack and take the fort that is firing."

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\* Col. James Shaw, since brevetted Brigadier-General of United States Volunteers, is a native of Providence, and still resides here.

Colonel Shaw replied that he had just received orders to charge with his regiment, to which Captain Bailey answered, "Well, now the General directs you to send four companies deployed as skirmishers to take the fort." Our lieutenant-colonel and major being absent, the four right companies, C, D, G, and K, were placed under command of Captain Weiss, who, when he received the order to charge, replied, "What! take a fort with a skirmish line; who ever heard of such a thing? I'll try, but it can't be done." What followed can best be described by quoting from his (Captain Weiss's) report. He says:

"I at once, about 1 P. M., ordered the four companies on the right of the regiment, C, D, G, and K, twenty-five or thirty paces to the front, where a slight depression in the ground screened them from the eyes, if not the projectiles of the enemy. After being deployed by the flank on the right of the second company, the command advanced in ordinary quick-step against the objective point. Emerging from the swale into view, it became at once the target for a seemingly redoubled fire, not only from the fort in front, but also from the one on its right. The fire of

the latter had been reported silenced, but, instead, from its position to the left oblique it proved even more destructive than that of the one in front.

“Both forts were most advantageously situated for defense, at the extremity of a plain, variously estimated at from five hundred to seven hundred yards wide, which level surface afforded at no point shelter from view or shot to an assailing party. The forts were connected by a curtain of rifle-pits containing a re-entrant angle, thus providing for a reciprocal enfilading fire in case either was attacked. The nature of the ground and the small altitude of the ordnance above the level of the plain also made the fire in the nature of a ricochet.

“As the party advanced, the enemy’s shell and shrapnel were exchanged for grape and canister, followed soon by a lively rattle of musketry. When within range of the latter, and after having traversed about three-fourths of the distance, the order to charge was given and obeyed with an alacrity that seemed to make the execution almost precede the order. For a moment, judging from the slacking of their fire, the enemy seemed to be affected by a panic-

like astonishment, but soon recovering, they opened again with canister and musketry, which, at the shorter range, tore through the ranks with deadlier effect. Captain Smith and Lieutenant Prime, both of Company C, here fell, grievously wounded, while forty or fifty enlisted men dotted the plain with their prostrate forms.

“In a few minutes the ditch of the fort was reached. It was some six or seven feet deep and ten or twelve wide, the excavated material sufficing for the embankments of the fort. Some one hundred and twenty men and officers precipitated themselves into it, many losing their lives at its very edge. After a short breathing spell, men were helped up the exterior slope of the parapet on the shoulders of others, and fifty or sixty being thus disposed, an attempt was made to storm the fort. At the signal nearly all arose, but the enemy, lying securely sheltered behind the interior slope, the muzzles of their guns almost touching the storming party, received the latter with a crushing fire, sending many into the ditch below, shot through the brain or breast. Several other attempts were made with like result, till at last forty or more

of the assailants were writhing in the ditch or silenced forever.

“The defense having been obviously reinforced, it was decided to surrender, especially as the rebels had commenced to roll lighted shells among the stormers, against which there was no defence. Seven officers and seventy-nine enlisted men delivered up their arms. Many in mounting the parapet could not help taking a last mournful look on their dead comrades in the ditch, whose soldierly qualities had endeared them to their best affections, and many, without for a moment selfishly looking at their own dark future, were oppressed with inexpressible sadness when reflecting on the immensity of the sacrifice and the deplorableness of the result. It was a time for manly tears.”

The muster-out rolls show that of nine officers and one hundred and fifty men in that charge, at least fifty-one men, or thirty-two per cent., were killed or mortally wounded. This number does not include any of the eleven men of Company K, who, when the regiment was mustered out, two years later, were still reported missing in action since Sept.

29, 1864, because it was not definitely known whether they were killed, or died in prison. It is probable, most if not all of the eleven were killed in the ditch that day, and may reasonably be added to the fifty-one ; in that case the percentage of killed would be thirty-nine and one-half per cent. All engaged in the assault, except one, were either killed, wounded, or captured. One man escaped from the ditch and ran back to the regiment during the excitement, while the remaining survivors surrendered.

Of the nine officers, two were severely wounded before reaching the ditch, and two were wounded while on the outer slope of the parapet. It is certainly a remarkable circumstance that not an officer was killed, notwithstanding all were as much exposed as any of the men. Seventeen men were wounded before reaching the ditch, but were able to crawl back, and, after recovering from their wounds were returned to duty with their regiment, and many of the seventy-nine captured were also wounded. Those who were able were set to work on the rebel fortifications. One was claimed as a slave. Advertisements were inserted in Confederate papers calling

upon masters to come forward and claim negroes captured in arms from the enemy. This was done by authority of an Act of the Confederate Congress, and by proclamation of Jeff Davis. It was known as the proclamation of outlawry of negro soldiers and their officers. (See Appendix No. 2.)

Fifty-five of the seventy-nine men captured died in prison within six months, either from wounds or privations, which number includes the eleven of Company K reported missing in action, while only twenty-three survived. Taking the fifty-one known to have been killed, and the fifty-five who died in prison, we have a death list resulting from that charge of sixty-seven per cent. On behalf of these companies of negro soldiers, I challenge the world's history for a parallel case.

The following table shows the detailed loss of each company's men :

ENLISTED MEN.

Company.	Killed or mortally wounded.	Captured and died in prison.	Total deaths.	Returned from prison.	Wounded before reaching trenches, and re-covered.	Escaped from the ditch.	Sold as a slave.	Total number of men engaged.
C. ....	15	10	25	6	6	.. .	1	38
D. ....	11	20	31	9	3	1 ....		44
G. ....	22	13	35	5	3	.....		43
K. .	3	12	15	3	7	.. .		25
	51	55	106	23	19	1	1	150

The final record, as per muster-out rolls, differs from reports made immediately after the action, because it was not then known how many of the missing had been killed.

This day proved to be the most disastrous of any in the history of our regiment. The storming of a strong field work by a thin line of skirmishers, when

the reinforced garrison was amply sufficient to defend it against twenty times the number of the assaulting party, resulted as might easily have been foreseen.

First the Ninth Regiment was sent, unsupported, to charge a work on the left of Gilmer, across an open field, where its line was enfiladed by the enemy's fire, and was repulsed; then four companies of the Eighth were sent against the same work, with no better result, and after this bitter experience four companies of the Seventh were sent to their destruction on an errand equally hopeless.

Had Gen. William Birney massed his brigade, consisting of five regiments, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Forty-fifth United States Colored Troops, and Twenty-ninth Connecticut Colored Volunteers, and launched it at Fort Gilmer, it would have fallen into our hands, and probably Richmond, too; for General Lee had all he could do to resist General Meade, who was hard at work on the extreme left, and had left Richmond not very strongly guarded as to numbers. As it was, General Birney had his own ideas, and very peculiar ones, on the subject of handling troops, the prevailing thought being to fight in detail.

After our capture he endeavored to throw upon Colonel Shaw, who commanded the regiment, the responsibility for the loss of the four companies, and in 1878 made a very bitter and libelous attack upon him, which he caused to be scattered broadcast throughout the city of Providence, and wherever General Shaw was most known.

Before publishing those charges he wrote me, making sundry inquiries, to which I replied: "We frequently talked about this matter (the loss of the four companies) while in prison, and concluded it must have been Captain Bailey's mistake, notwithstanding one of our party had, on a former occasion, heard from yourself an order very much like it. Probably most of the captured officers would always have thought it Captain Bailey's mistake, had not the Eighth and Ninth Regiments received a similar order. Had the brigade, led by yourself, charged the fort with as much courage and determination as shown by Companies C, D, G, and K, of the Seventh, we would have captured it."

The charges were false, and a letter from him under date of Jan. 24, 1865, *four months after the*

*assault upon Fort Gilmer*, to Governor Sprague, then a member of the Committee on Military Affairs in the United States Senate, and found four or five years ago in the Governor's papers, strongly recommending Colonel Shaw for promotion, shows beyond any possibility of doubt that *he knew* them to be so. (See Appendix No. 3 for copy of Birney's letter.)

From Richmond *Examiner*, Oct. 4, 1864: "The following list of casualties is reported in the Powhatan Artillery, Capt. W J. Dance, commanding, in the fight at Fort Gilmer, near Chaffin's Bluff, on the 29th of September: Killed, one corporal, three privates. Wounded: Captain Dance, severely; one sergeant, three corporals, thirteen privates."

The Richmond *Whig*, of Oct. 2, 1864, said: "The commands of Colonel Dubois and Colonel Eliot reached Fort Gilmer just in time to prevent its capture by the enemy. Both commands were highly complimented by the General commanding, for their bearing and gallantry during the assault."

General Butler, in his Autobiography, page 736, referring to this assault, says: "Fort Gilmer was the salient point in the line, and its occupation would

have caused the evacuation of the whole line. The men rushed up to the breastworks in spite of a heavy fire; they found that the works were very high, and the ditch very deep, from the bottom of the ditch to the parapet being fifteen feet. The colored soldiers, undaunted, attempted to assault the parapet, and climbed upon each other's shoulders for the purpose of getting at the enemy, but after a prolonged struggle and the death of many, they were obliged to surrender; but the manner of the attack more than compensated for their loss, for it was another demonstration that the negro would fight."

Oct. 11, 1864, General Butler issued an order in which he expressed his opinion of colored soldiers, as follows: "Of the colored soldiers of the Third divisions of the Tenth and Eighteenth Corps, and the officers who led them, the Commanding General desires to make mention.

"In the charge on the enemy's works by the colored divisions, better men were never better led; better officers never led better men. With hardly an exception officers of colored troops have justified the care with which they have been selected. A few

more such gallant charges, and to command colored troops will be the post of honor in the American armies.

“ The colored soldiers, by coolness, steadiness, and dash, have silenced every cavil of the doubters of their soldierly capacity, and drawn tokens of admiration from their enemies—have brought their late masters, even, to the consideration of the question whether they will not employ as soldiers the hitherto despised race.\*

“ In the late movement where all have deserved so well it is almost invidious to name, yet justice requires special gallant acts noticed.”

Among other instances of meritorious conduct, he mentions the seven officers whose capture has just been narrated, viz. : “ Captains Julius A. Weiss and Thomas McCarthy; First Lieutenants George R. Sherman and David S. Mack; Second Lieutenants Sylvester Eler, Joseph Ferguson, and Robert M. Spinney, of the Seventh United States Colored Troops, are all entitled to the highest praise and commendation for their gallantry and good conduct

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\* See Appendix No, 4 for extracts from Confederate newspapers.

in the assault upon Fort Gilmer, for which they are not now promoted, being either killed or in the hands of the enemy.”

Scarcely any mention has been made or credit given the participants in this assault, by the newspapers or historians of the North. *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War*, page 702, refers to it as follows: “On the 28th of September, Ord and Birney, (David B), with two divisions of the Army of the James, crossed the river and fell fiercely upon the strong works near Chapin's Bluff. One of these, Fort Harrison, was captured, but an assault was made upon Fort Gilmer, which was repulsed with heavy loss.” The Confederate papers and Southern Historical Society have given the assault special notice; we cannot, therefore, forbear quoting the following accounts of the affair:

The Richmond *Whig*, under date of Oct. 6, 1864, says: “When the writer hereof turns to look upon the traces of the carnage of the 29th ultimo, standing upon Fort Gilmer's parapet, he looks into the wide, deep ditch that yawns in its front, and his eyes fall upon thirty odd stark figures that are lying

below, shot in the head, the heart, and wherever it is fatal to be struck. These were the forms of Butler's slain black soldiers.

“A sturdy artilleryman, near by, volunteers the information : ‘ Those fellows fought well, sir. They came up at a double-quick, with their guns at right-shoulder-shift, and leaped into the ditch. Then they began to assist one another up the parapet, and here, (pointing to the spot), many of them were shot down upon the edge. Our men threw hand-grenades among them, and these assisted us in killing many. We heard them cry out in the ditch, “ Look out for the hand-bombs,” and that fellow you see lying there was bending over one of them to pick it up and throw it back at us, as others had done, when it exploded and blew the top of his head off.’ ”

In Volume I, page 441, Southern Historical Society Papers, may be found an account of this charge, by Charles Johnson, of Salem, Va. :

“Fort Gilmer was on a hill, with quite an extensive flat in front. The Louisiana Guard Artillery on the left, and Salem Artillery on the right of the fort, occupied redoubts so constructed that each had an

enfilade fire upon the Yankees as they advanced. The enemy came rather cautiously at first; finally they came with a rush, our artillery firing shrapnel at first, but they soon began to load with canister, and the way those negroes fell before it was gratifying to the people on our side of the works. But the Yankees came on until they got to the ditch in front of Fort Gilmer, a dry ditch, about ten feet wide and twelve feet deep. Into this a great many of the negroes jumped and endeavored to climb up on each other's shoulders, but were beaten back by our infantry and almost all of them killed. One negro, who was either drunk or crazy, crawled through a culvert which ran from the inside of the fort into the ditch, and was shot on the inside.

“Thus ended the battle of Fort Gilmer, and there was no more fighting done on this part of the line where we were on that day, though I think the part of the line occupied by Gray's Cavalry was attacked, but I never knew anything about that fight.

“Had our troops given way that day (and I think if the Yankees had known how near they were to Richmond we must have been beaten), there was

nothing between us and the city, and instead of being burned by our men, as it afterwards was, Richmond must have fallen into the hands of Beast Butler and his negro soldiers.”

On page 438, he says: “The truth is that upon that same September 29th, Richmond came nearer being captured, and that, too, by negro soldiers, than it ever did during the war, and but for the devotion and bravery of Bushrod Johnson’s old Tennessee brigade and the Texas brigade, consisting of about three hundred men each, the Yankees must have carried everything before them and captured Richmond.”

Major Fox, in his book of *Regimental Losses*, says: “In proportion to the number engaged, the greatest loss sustained in one engagement by any regiment during the war, was by the First Minnesota, at Gettysburg, which lost 75 killed, or mortally wounded, out of a total of 262, or 28 per cent. of those engaged, — a percentage of killed unequalled in military statistics.”

Now that statement cannot be true, for to Companies C, D, G, and K, of the Seventh United States

Colored Infantry, belongs the honor of having made as sanguinary a charge, under as trying circumstances, and of having lost a much larger percentage of the number engaged; and to these four companies must henceforth be accorded the honor of "a percentage of killed unequalled in military statistics."

If we stop for a moment to consider what this extraordinary loss of life signifies, perhaps it may be better understood if we compare it with remarkable losses of other battles.

The Light Brigade's charge at the battle of Balaclava appears in the history of European wars as the most disastrous ever sustained by any command in a single battle, in modern times, prior to the War of the Rebellion. It has been made famous the world over by Tennyson's inspiring poem, painted in pictures, and made the subject of many pieces of scholarly word painting, until the whole world has heard of the gallant Six Hundred and its charge into the valley of death. Its exact loss was 113 killed and 134 wounded, in a total of 673 engaged, a trifle less than 16.8 per cent. killed, and 36.7 per cent. killed and wounded. It may be a surprise to some of you

to learn that there were more than fifty commands in the Federal, and many in the Confederate army, during the late war, which lost much larger proportions of killed in a single engagement, than did the Light Brigade. For further comparison of losses see Appendix No. 5 for a list of Union regiments that lost in a single engagement more than 16.8 per cent. of their numbers killed.

To return to my narrative: Having decided to surrender, Lieutenant Spinney raised a handkerchief on the point of his sword. The rebels ceased firing and bade us come in. Inside the fort we found bustle and confusion; reinforcements were arriving; a gun which had been removed to prevent capture was being returned to its position, and as there was no indication of another assault, officers and men crowded around us.

Stepping down from the parapet, I was approached by one of the so-called F. F. V's, whose smiling countenance and extended hand led me to think he recognized an acquaintance. In this I was mistaken, for the next instant he snatched my watch from its pocket, with the question, "What have you there?"

I immediately seized and recovered the watch, while he held only a fragment of the chain ; putting it in my inside pocket, I buttoned my coat, and replied, "It's my watch and *you* cannot have it."

Just then I noticed Lieutenant Ferguson was the recipient of much attention, several having gathered about him, and the next instant his new hat had been appropriated by one of the soldiers. Seeing an officer with a Masonic badge, Lieutenant Ferguson made himself known as a brother Mason, and appealed to him for redress. The officer quickly responded, and caused the hat to be restored to its owner, only to be again stolen a few minutes later, and the thief made to restore it as before.

An escort was soon detailed ; the prisoners formed in four ranks, and the "March on to Richmond" was continued, but under quite different circumstances from what we had flattered ourselves would be the case, when, only a few hours before, our brigade commander remarked, as he rode by the regiment, "We will certainly be in Richmond to-night."

When it became known in Richmond that a large force had crossed the James and captured Fort Har-

risson, great excitement prevailed in the capital. No one could tell how soon our army might be at their doors. There was certainly cause for alarm. We met a great many armed civilians of all ages and conditions on the way to the front. A general alarm had been sounded by the ringing of the bell in the old bell tower in Capitol Square.

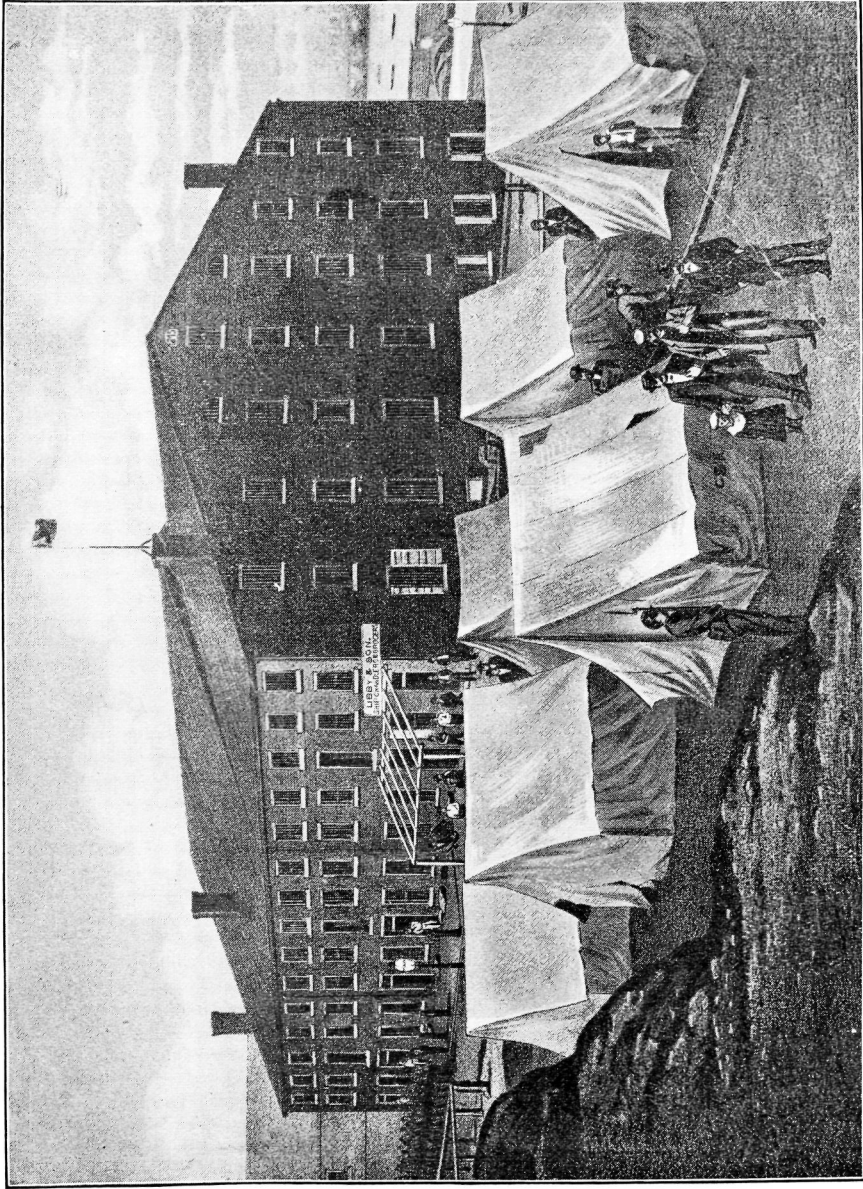
This bell was in "ye olden tyme" used for fire alarms, and to summon the members of the Legislature, but during the war was struck only to call out for defence every man and boy who could carry a musket. On this occasion it was rung as never before. Messengers were also sent out by the provost marshal to spread the alarm through the suburbs. I have since been told by residents that nothing but a physician's certificate of illness was accepted as an excuse. Only one newspaper was published in the city on the next day, because editorial staff, compositors, and pressmen were at the front; neither doctors, teachers, nor preachers were excused.

After about three miles march we halted for a rest, but were not allowed to sit down. Here a squad of the Richmond Blues came up and accosted us with

all the vile epithets they could think of. One of the more drunken and boisterous brought his rifle to an aim, the muzzle within two feet of my face, and, aiming directly at my head, swore he would shoot. Stung to the quick by their taunts and jeers, and feeling that immediate death could not be worse than slow torture by starvation and exposure, to which we knew so many of our brave comrades had been subjected, and remembering the Confederate Congress had declared officers of colored troops outlaws, I replied, as my eye, glancing along the barrel of his rifle, met his, "Shoot, if you dare!" Instead of executing his threat, he withdrew his aim and staggered on. Here, Lieutenant Ferguson, whose hat had twice been stolen and restored, lost it beyond recovery. One of the rebs came up behind, snatched it from his head, and, substituting his own, ran off. The lieutenant consoled himself with the reflection that at last he had a hat that not even a rebel would steal.

About 7 o'clock we reached the notorious Libby, where officers took leave of their enlisted comrades. This prison was named after its proprietors, Libby &

Son, who, before the war, carried on the ship chandlery business. It was a block, or building, three stories high, in three sections, separated by a solid wall, or partition, from foundation to roof, each section having one room, one hundred feet long by forty-five feet wide on each floor. The street front, or north side and west end, is shown in the engraving. The officers connected with the prison, and the quarters of the commandant and other officers in charge were on the first floor of the west end. It is in this lower west room the prisoner first enters, and from it he is ushered to his future dreary abode. The appropriate legend, "All hope abandon ye, who enter here," might well have been inscribed in letters of blood over its gloomy portals. After some little delay we were conducted inside, searched, and the little money we possessed taken from us, with the assurance from Major Turner that it would be placed to our credit, and returned when we were exchanged. (The Confederate authorities, or more likely Major Turner, still owe me \$15 on that account.) I was permitted to retain the empty pocket-book, my knife, and watch.



LIBBY PRISON, AUGUST 23, 1863.



Our names being recorded, we, the seven officers of my regiment, were told to follow the sergeant, while other prisoners who had joined us on the road remained behind. Now, thought I, the question whether we are to be treated as officers of white men, or otherwise, will soon be decided. As we were led toward the stairs, and saw the sergeant directing his steps toward the flight leading down, instead of up, to the room above, where we had seen crowds of prisoners at the windows, my heart sank within me, and I thought it would have been better had we fallen on the battle-field. He led the way to a small, close room in the cellar, and, as we passed in, barred and bolted the door, and left us in darkness. Here, without food, the bare floor for a bed, the dampness trickling down the walls on two sides, seven of us were confined in a cell about 8 x 10 feet. It was a long night, but finally morning dawned, and as the first ray of light shone through the little barred window above our heads, we thanked God we were not in total darkness. About 9 o'clock rations of bread and meat were handed in through a hole in the door, and, being divided into seven parts, were drawn by

lot. At noon, after being again searched, we were conducted to the officers' quarters on the second floor, at the west end of the building, where we found about two hundred unfortunates, and were greeted by them as "fresh fish," a term applied to all newcomers. The arrival of "fresh fish" was a great event in prison life, as we soon learned. Old comrades are eager to greet them and learn the news. They are the only means of obtaining correct news from "God's Country," and were at once besieged with questions, and almost suffocated by the impatient crowd. The initiation into all the rights and privileges of prison life soon followed.

We were now in a large room, perhaps 100 x 45 feet, windows at both ends and one side, but all destitute of glass, without blankets, or anything to sit or lie upon, except the floor, and all thinly clad. After a two days' sojourn in Libby, the authorities prescribed a change of air, and about the middle of the third night we were hurriedly marched out and packed in box-cars like sardines. The fatigue and discomforts of the two days' ride, relieved only by a night's bivouac by the roadside, will long be remembered.

We were without rations for forty-eight hours, except only a small quantity of crackers given to some, and to others half a pint of corn meal was issued as we alighted from the train for bivouac. The corn meal was almost useless for food, because none had any suitable means of cooking. Only a few had tin cups, in which they boiled mush. Some mixed the meal into pones, on flat stones, and baked the hoe cakes as best they could, on flat stones, previously heated in the camp-fires. We were not only watched through the night, as we lay in the woods, by a special detail of home guards, but warned by the continual baying of a pack of hounds, that an attempt to escape would be hazardous. In the evening of the second day we arrived at Salisbury, and that night were quartered in the third story of an old factory, occupied on the lower floor by political prisoners, deserters, thieves, and spies, who, during the night, made a raid upon the newcomers with intent to steal whatever they could; but were repulsed without serious loss. In the morning we were removed to several log cabins, formerly negro quarters, in another part of the grounds. In that to which our party was assigned,

we found an old-fashioned wooden churn, which, after much perseverance, having only a very dull pocket-knife to work with, I succeeded in transforming into two pails, making a bottom to one from a barrel head, and making handles to both from a hoop found under the hut. These pails were highly prized by our mess and were kept in constant use until our release. One was used for drinking water and the other to bathe in.

Separating the officers from enlisted men was a line of sentries, whose orders were to shoot any one approaching within six paces on either side, the distance being marked by a furrow or narrow ditch, and called the dead-line. This dead-line also extended around the enclosure the same distance from the stockade. The second Sunday after our arrival, as we were assembling to hear preaching by one of our number, a chaplain, I believe, of a Maine regiment, a prisoner, stepped to a tree on the dead-line and was at once shot through the breast by the sentry outside the fence, who was on an elevated platform, and not more than two rods distant. This, in broad daylight, without any attempt to escape being made, without

disobeying any rule of the prison, and without notice. The guards were not always so over-vigilant. Another instance, I remember, shows the lack of watchfulness of one. Harry Kitchum, a good-natured Dutchman, sold his blanket to a sentry on duty inside the enclosure, and, watching a favorable opportunity, stole it from him in less than an hour. The chagrin and indignation of the guard may be imagined. The Yankee trick was denounced in language unsuited to this occasion.

Additions were being made to our number almost daily, and were corralled in the open space, so that in less than two weeks, probably five thousand or more were there. A pretence of shelter was furnished by the issue of a few Sibley tents, but not more than sufficient to protect a third of the prisoners from the elements. The guard was increased, a portion of the fence at the corners taken away, and artillery stationed at the openings to sweep down the crowd if an outbreak should occur.

This we had in contemplation for some days, and a plan of escape was decided upon. At a given signal all within the enclosure were to make a charge on

that portion of the fence or stockade nearest them, and if successful in getting outside, to separate as much as possible. It was expected some might be killed, or wounded, or recaptured before reaching our lines and protection of the old flag, but we hoped most, if not all, would escape before the guards could reload and fire the second time. The possibility of gaining our liberty was worth making a desperate effort to accomplish.

The execution of this plot was to have been attempted at midnight, but was discovered the preceding afternoon by the failure of a leader to communicate with those separated from us by the chain of sentinels. We had often done this by throwing a stone, with note attached, from one dead-line to the other; but in this case the note fell short; the sentry picked it up, called the corporal, and in less than five minutes the whole scheme was made known to the prison officials. Within an hour orders came to fall in line; we supposed for the purpose of ascertaining who the instigators of the plot were, or to intimidate us by threats of less rations or solitary confinement if caught attempting to escape. Noth-

ing was said, however, about the discovery of our plan, but it was whispered about we were to change quarters again, no intimation being given us as to our destination.

After an hour's waiting in the ranks, we were marched to a train, and again packed in box-cars and started North.

We hoped the journey was to continue to Richmond to be exchanged. Had we known just where we were going, and that our exchange was not to be in the near future, many would have escaped (a few did) by jumping from the train which ran slowly, less than ten miles an hour, and with only a few guards to watch us. After a slow and tedious ride of ten or twelve hours, we arrived at Danville, which proved to be our destination. Here we were assigned to the two upper floors of a tobacco warehouse, which formed one side of an open square, and standing apart from the other buildings was lighted and ventilated from all sides. The windows of the two upper stories, unlike those of Libby, were provided with glass, but in the lower story the windows were without sash, and only partly boarded up, having

openings of four or five inches between the boards allowing free circulation of the cool breezes, which, drawing up through cracks of the floor upon which we lay, rendered the nights very uncomfortable.

A new organization into messes was arranged, from eight to ten in each, to facilitate the issue of rations. These were first drawn by the commissary of each mess, and by him divided into equal parts and drawn for by lot. When we first entered this prison the rations consisted of corn bread made from unbolted meal, about six to eight ounces, say three by four inches square, and varying in thickness from an inch to an inch and a half; a cup of pea soup, or, in lieu of soup, a small piece of fresh beef; never soup and meat the same day. Gradually the issue of beef became like angels' visits, and, about December 1st, ceased altogether. A few times during the first month they gave us sorghum molasses, not exceeding a pint to our mess of eight, and it always came in the afternoon when there was nothing to eat with it; and as few had anything to keep it in, it had to be eaten at once if at all. Now, one-eighth of a pint of sorghum, when it constitutes a man's dinner, is

an item of considerable consequence, and each wanted the benefit from that which was his due. All had wooden spoons, and there was one tin cup in the mess into which the ration was drawn, from which each in turn would take a spoonful. Later most of us obtained cups or empty fruit-cans.

When soup was issued it was received in the wooden bucket which we ordinarily used for drinking water, and eaten from the bucket. The soup often had worms from the peas floating around, but these we would skim off with the wooden spoons, and, trying to forget we had seen them, eat it because we were forced to by hunger. The ration of soup was soon discontinued also, and we had only the corn-bread, and that growing less and less. It was the art of feeding as practised by the Hibernian on his horse — the exchange preventing my testing the one straw per day. The bread came into prison in squares sixteen by twenty-four inches ; these were marked off before baking into sixteen squares of four by six inches, one square or loaf being allowed for two men ; the loaves were carefully divided by the mess commissary, and while one turned his back

to the bread as it lay on the floor, the commissary pointing to a portion would ask, "Whose is this? and this?" The one whose back was turned would make the allotment, from which there was no appeal. Many have claimed that the bread was made from corn and cobs ground together, and might honestly have come to that conclusion, as at times it was more dry and saw-dust-like than usual; but being made from unbolted meal, careless mixing may account for that. Generally, I would eat the whole ration at once, being careful not to waste a crumb, and then go without a morsel for the next twenty-four hours. Sometimes, remembering how hungry I was the night before, I would divide my ration into three parts and resolve to make three meals of it, but invariably all would be eaten before noon. Hunger will drive one to almost any extremity, and to illustrate how inadequate was the ration, I can say I have seen officers take potato parings from spittoons, wash and eat them.

In the early days of imprisonment when we were served with beef occasionally, I have seen officers savagely fighting in their eagerness to get their hands

into the barrel in which the meat was brought, hoping to scrape off a little grease from its sides. There was a striking contrast between the rations furnished us and the rations served to rebel prisoners by our government. (See Appendix No. 6.)

Officers of all grades, from second lieutenants to brigadier generals were here, and some whose family or Masonic connections in the South procured them special privileges. The social equilibrium was, however, daily restored by a common pursuit, a general warfare under the black flag against a common enemy, the *pediculus corporis*, or grayback, an insignificant little pest, individually, but collectively formidable indeed. This operation, technically called skirmishing, happened twice a day, according as the sun illumined the east or west sides of the apartments along which the line was deployed in its beams. They had no respect for persons, but preyed alike on the just and the unjust, and presented their bills as confidently into the body of the major-general as into that of the humblest private. In this wretched place, if nowhere else, every soldier shed blood for his country; it was the battle for human rights

against brute force. I remember one man who had a little wooden box into which he put all the vermin he caught, and when the officer of the day and the officer of the guard came in to count us, would watch a favorable opportunity and throw the contents of the box over their backs. While there were all grades of military rank here confined, and all grades of character, it does not follow that the highest in rank were the most gentlemanly in deportment. This was indeed a time and place to try men, and develop character. If there be any meanness or selfishness in a man, I know of no better place than a Confederate prison to bring it to the surface.

Fortunately we had an abundance of good water, which we brought from the Dan River, a distance of about two hundred and fifty yards. Pails were furnished, and when four or five were ready, the inside sentry would call the corporal of the guard, who would send a number of guards to the river with us. Occasionally a prisoner succeeded in evading their vigilance, and there were several escapes, but in most cases only to be recaptured and returned to their old quarters.

Twice a day the officers came in to call the roll ; that is, form us in four ranks, in close order, faced to the front, and count the files. If any had escaped, it was essential the number should be kept good for some days, and for that purpose various schemes were resorted to. Sometimes one of the rear rank, after being counted, would glide along unseen, to the left of the line, and be counted again. A hole was cut through the floor above us, and, while the officers were going up stairs, some would climb through and be counted with those in the third story. In more than one instance, prisoners who escaped from the guard while going for water, were recaptured, and returned to their old quarters before their escape had been discovered by the prison officials.

As the season advanced, we suffered more and more from the cold, for being captured in September, our clothing was not sufficient for December and January weather. Very few had blankets, and the rebel authorities never issued blankets or clothing of any kind. As already mentioned, the windows of the lower room were without glass, and only the lower half boarded up ; the wind whistled through

the large openings, and, drawing up through the cracks in the floor upon which we had to lie at night, would almost freeze us. I finally succeeded in trading off my watch with one of the guard, for an old bed-quilt and twenty dollars Confederate money. The money came when much needed, for I then had the scurvy so badly from eating salt on the bread, that my tongue, lips, and gums were much swollen, and by night I could scarcely speak. In the morning the swelling would be somewhat reduced, and by soaking the corn-bread I could swallow a little. Sometimes I would sell the ration of bread for a dollar, which with the twenty obtained for the watch, saved me from starving. I bought rice of the guard for two dollars a half-pint, and good sized potatoes for a dollar each, while onions were worth two dollars apiece. The cooking was done in tin cups; if the weather was pleasant, in the yard over a little fire with wood or chips picked up while going for water, or, if stormy, upon the rickety stove in our quarters. About this stove clustered, four or five deep, poor fellows, some scarcely able to stand, watching their cups, or seeking a little warmth, while those in the outer

circle presented an elbow patiently toward the fire, and probably after long waiting might succeed in worming in sideways near enough to feel the heat. On this stove we burned corn-bread crusts for coffee. Against this stove, by means of notched sticks or a bit of wire, we suspended the same tin cups or pails, containing messes, disgusting enough as I think of them now, but in reality tasting good then. We had corn-bread coffee, corn-bread soup, or rice and water, flavored perhaps by a bit of onion or salt-fish; or a few beans and bits of bones if we were fortunate enough to find one thrown out by the guards.

Before we left Salisbury, one of our mess obtained possession of a bound volume of *Harper's Magazine*, and, as there were but eight in the mess, each could read an hour or more daily. When we had all read it, we traded for a volume of *The Portland Transcript*.

It was useless for an outsider to think of borrowing these books, for they were in use by the mess from daylight to dark; a few games of checkers or cribbage, played sitting on the floor tailor fashion, were always in order; a trip to the river for water

and the skirmishing already mentioned constituted the regular routine. Some amused themselves by carving wooden spoons, bone finger-rings, napkin-rings, miniature books, crosses, etc. The more expert in that line made very creditable sets of these considering the scarcity of tools. A pocket-knife and saw made from a table-knife, by carefully striking the edge with another knife, constituted the full equipment; a whole day might be spent sawing off a bone for a finger-ring. Evenings we would be in darkness, except only the flicker of a single tallow candle in each room, and as moving about without frequent collisions was impossible, we gathered in little groups and talked of home, friends, and the good time coming when we would have one good square meal; arrange the bill of fare comprising all a morbid mind prompted by a starving stomach could conceive, lay plans for escape, and discuss the route to be traveled, sing a few hymns and national airs, usually closing with "We'll hang Jeff Davis on a sour apple tree," or "Down with the traitors, up with the stars."

The bed-quilt received in exchange for my watch, was long and very narrow, scarcely wide enough to

cover two persons. I folded the end over about three feet, tied the edges together, making sort of a bag, into which Captain Weiss and I thrust our lower extremities ; spread our flannel blouses on the floor, used our shoes for pillows, pulled the quilt over our shoulders, and, with barely space sufficient to turn over, retired for the night.

We had skirmished, cut bones, read a little, hear contradicting reports of exchange, perhaps witnessed an arrival of "fresh fish," or the return of one who had escaped, and, as one after another dropped off into the arms of Morpheus, and the rooms became less noisy, the weightier thoughts which lay deepest during the day came to mind. It was then imagination painted the loveliest pictures of the friends we cherished, though far away ; and later if the night was not too cold, we would drop to sleep, frequently to dream of home and loved ones ; of Christmas festivities ; of trains of army wagons so overloaded with delicacies that they were falling into the road ; of a general exchange of prisoners ; a thirty days' leave of absence, and a thousand other things altogether unlike that which we were experiencing ; and would

wake only to find ourselves prisoners, cold and hungry : quite different from waking scenes of other days. Every bone aching from lying on the floor, and our hearts aching, too, in full realization of the fact that the imprisonment might and probably would continue until the collapse of the Confederacy, for which we were all earnestly praying.

We became very intimate with our neighbors ; a fellow-feeling must necessarily exist, when as was the case with us, we had to lie so close that turning was impossible unless they too consented to turn over at the same time.

During the night each guard was required to call the number of his post half-hourly, in succession, as follows : “Corporal of the Guard, Post No. 1, half-past twelve o’clock and all is well,” and by the time this had been repeated by the many sentinels around the four prisons in the immediate neighborhood, it would be almost time for Post No. 1 to commence again.

Sometimes the call would be varied to suit the exigencies of the occasion. I remember one night, the cry “three o’clock and cold as ——,” was re-

peated by many of the guards. On another night, one, after making the customary call added, "I wish I was in Griddle Creek." A neighboring guard asked, "What good would that do you." He replied, "I'd go home to see my maw mighty quick." Cat calls, barking like a dog, or crowing like a rooster, would often start a midnight concert.

The rebel officers claimed their government was ready and anxious to exchange prisoners man for man, but we would not, could not believe it possible that our officers in authority would allow so much suffering if it could be alleviated.

Little did we then think, as is now known to be the case, that we were victims of the "best policy," a sacrifice for the good of the country. (See Appendix No. 7 ) We seldom saw a newspaper, therefore could only judge of the situation by the value of their money, as estimated by the Jews and speculators who were frequently allowed inside for purpose of trade. As the offers of five dollars for one in November advanced to ten in December, and twenty Confederate for one in greenbacks in January, we concluded the end could not be far distant.

It may seem strange that after being searched, some of us two or three times, and robbed of every thing they could find of value, there would be anything left worth trading for; but everything had a price; brass buttons, needles, pins, pencils were all in demand; a pocket-knife was worth a fabulous price, very few being put upon the market. Some traded a cloth coat or trousers for a homespun button, with horn or wooden buttons, getting Confederate money or provisions to boot. Many sold all the buttons from coat and vest and substituted little sticks.

The guards were mostly men too old, or boys too young for field duty; were always ready for a trade when they could do it without being discovered by their officers, and often came on duty with tobacco, potatoes, rice, etc., in their pockets for trade.

They didn't seem to care so much for the buttons having U. S. on, as they did for the State buttons. A North Carolinian (tar heel) who was posted at the door opening into the yard, was very anxious to obtain two New York buttons to complete the requisite number and to match those he already had on the

skirt of his new homespun coat ; a party of the boys gathered around and engaged him in earnest conversation while one of them cut the two buttons from the skirt of his coat, and immediately sold them to him at a good price. The theft was not detected, until an hour or more later, when having been relieved from duty he was about to sew the buttons on his coat he discovered they had been stolen from him.

All accustomed to smoking (and there were but few exceptions), would manage to secure tobacco for at least one smoke daily, and, if in no other way, would sell half their scanty rations. The few who did not use tobacco found it impossible to escape the offensive odor, for from the earliest dawn until long after we sought "Nature's sweet repose" on the vermin infested floor, and, especially on cold days, the air would be loaded with tobacco smoke from more than a hundred pipes. I often saw gentlemen refuse another a light from their pipes for fear a little tobacco would go with it.

There were with us two officers, who, when we arrived at Salisbury were in solitary confinement, and

had been for several months, whom the rebels were holding as hostages for guerillas, captured and condemned to be shot by one of our generals. When the removal to Danville occurred, they were released from close confinement and sent with us. These two planned an escape and nearly succeeded in accomplishing their object. They dug a hole through the brick wall into an adjoining unoccupied building, cut through the floor into the cellar, dug under the foundation, and were just coming through on the other side, when some one in passing stepped on the thin crust and fell in; next morning the two who had worked so hard for their liberty were placed in close confinement again; and the authorities made another but quite unsuccessful attempt to rob us of everything that could in any way assist an escape, particularly pocket knives and watches. They made all go to one end of the room, placed guards across the middle and searched us one by one. The few who had articles of value had only to toss them over the guards' heads to some one already searched, and when his turn came had nothing to be confiscated.

After this the sentries would not let us stand near

the windows, and, on one occasion, without warning, fired through a second story window, missing the one aimed at, and badly wounded a man on the floor above.

Early in December an unsuccessful attempt to escape from our prison (the No. 2) was made in broad daylight. The scheme was hastily arranged after being suggested by the sight of about one hundred stand of arms stacked in the open square near by, and, as I looked at it, it had but little prospect of success. The two inside sentinels on the lower floor were to be overpowered and gagged, the corporal was to be called, under pretense of going for water, and, when he opened the door, he too was to be seized and a rush made by the waiting crowd inside for the stacked arms, while some were to overpower the guards on the outside by a hand-to-hand encounter, after which those in the neighboring prisons could be released ; then we were to seize the arsenal near by, where a sufficient quantity of arms and ammunition for a complete outfit could be obtained for the thousand or more prisoners, and we could then march through to the Union lines.

Many of the officers thought the scheme ill-advised, but Brigadier-General Duffié, formerly colonel of the First Rhode Island Cavalry, and Col. William Raulston of the Twenty-fourth New York Cavalry, felt confident of success. The inside sentinels were easily disarmed and gagged, but when the corporal of the guard came in response to the water-call, he caught sight of the crowd ready to pounce on him, while the door was still ajar, and before he could be seized, he slammed the door to, and swung the bar into place. The slamming of the door and unusual noise inside, had by this time attracted the attention of the outside guards, who thrust their guns between the boards of the windows, and, firing into the crowd, mortally wounded Colonel Raulston; two others were also mortally wounded; the rest hurried back to the room above.

It is a well attested fact that the Southern people told the negroes and their own children, too, that Yankees had horns like cattle, ears like elephants, and feathers like birds, as also many other frightful and ridiculous stories. One day a visitor came in accompanied by his boy about seven years of age. After

looking us over carefully, the boy turned to his father with a disappointed look, and said, "Why, papa, these Yankees ain't got no horns!"

"No," said one of our number, "we have neither horns nor feathers, but look here," and as he forced his loose fitting set of false teeth on the end of his tongue, beyond his mustache added, "just see the hair on my teeth." The little fellow hid his face in the skirts of his father's coat, cried like a baby, and begged to be taken home.

About the middle of January, Captain Cook, one of our mess, was informed that a special exchange was effected in his case, and he was to start for the North next morning. He had a pair of almost new hand-sewed shoes, which had been furnished him by friends in the South, and which out of sympathy to me he kindly offered to exchange for mine. This I felt ashamed to do, for what remained of mine would have been worthless under other circumstances. They were nearly worn out when I was captured, and soon became so badly ripped that the unity of sole and body was preserved by cutting narrow strips or strings from the uppers, and by making holes

through soles and vamps I tied them together. These strings would wear but a little while, and the frequent cuttings had made the shoes very low, but Cook expected to be in "God's land," and under the old flag where shoes were plenty, in a few days, and insisted upon the trade, to which I agreed. He left us with a light heart, taking with him the addresses of our friends to whom he was to report by letter. His fond hopes were doomed to disappointment, for instead of going directly North, he was detained in Libby Prison, until a few days before the rest of us arrived, and when we reached Annapolis, he was there waiting leave of absence, and had worn the old shoes until within a few days.

Early in February, rumors of a general exchange began to circulate, and boxes of provisions and clothing from the North were delivered.

Some of these boxes had been held in storage for months until in many cases the contents had become spoiled and almost worthless, and others made so by being searched and the contents, butter, tobacco, sugar, etc., dumped promiscuously into the box before delivery. Our mess was among the fortunate ones,

and received a well filled box of provisions and \$1,200 Confederate money, the equivalent of \$60 greenbacks, which the officers of our regiment had kindly contributed, and which the adjutant had exchanged for Confederate money on the picket line. Had it been sent to us in greenbacks we never would have seen it, but their money, like Lieutenant Ferguson's hat, was not worth stealing. Had we received this donation in November, we would have subsisted comfortably all winter; as it was we lived sumptuously as long as the contents of the box lasted, and when about a week later we started for Richmond, had drawn considerably on the \$1,200.

No one of the four hundred prisoners will ever forget, while they remember anything, the excitement that prevailed when Colonel Smith, commander of the prison came in one evening, after many of us had lain down, and told us he had received an order for our exchange, and as soon as transportation could be furnished we would be sent to Richmond. We had, repeatedly heard rumors of exchange only to be disappointed, but this time the news was official and could be relied on. Cheer upon cheer shook the old tobacco

warehouse, and I think might have been heard all over Danville. "Home, Sweet Home," "America," "Rally Round the Flag," and other patriotic songs sung by the full chorus of four hundred voices followed long into the night, for every one could sing then if never before.

February 17th, we left Danville for Richmond, and were again quartered in Libby. On the 19th we signed the parole papers, pledging ourselves not to take arms against the Confederacy until duly exchanged. The second morning after signing the parole, an officer came in and stated that for want of transportation only one hundred would be sent down the river that day, and the others would follow soon; that those whose names he called should "fall in" on the lower floor ready to start. As he proceeded to call the roll, each listened attentively to hear his own name. Of our mess only one had been called.

As he stopped reading and turned to leave, I thought what if our army should commence active operations and put a stop to the exchange; our imprisonment might be prolonged indefinitely; and although my name had not been called, I resolved to

go with the party if possible. I therefore hurried down stairs and fell in line with the lucky ones, all the time thinking of the possibility of detection, and the consequent solitary confinement, and did not breathe freely until we disembarked at Varina Landing. We then had about a mile to march before reaching Aiken's Landing. On the way we met a great many returning Confederate prisoners, stout, hearty men clothed in army blue, many with overcoats and several blankets, while nearly all our party were in rags, and barely able to march from one landing to the other. I had been in prison from September 29th to February 21st, 146 days, with only summer clothing and without a particle of soap. Once I made an attempt to wash my shirt, and having no change caught a severe cold, either by being without for a while, or by putting it on before it was dry. After that a dry scrubbing had to suffice.

At Aiken's Landing we found a flag of truce boat in waiting, and boiled ham, coffee, crackers, and soup in abundance.

It would be useless for me to attempt a description of our feelings as we passed through our picket line

into "God's Country," and beheld in the distance "Old Glory" as we had become accustomed to call it.

"Our flag of stripes and stars,  
Forever may it be as it was to us that day,  
Emblem of freedom pure and grand,  
Symbol of liberty."

Our privations and suffering had been trivial in comparison with the enlisted men captured with us, all of whom suffered untold hardships to which most of them succumbed. Denied not only clothing, but fuel and shelter through the winter, and sometimes for days without rations or water to quench their thirst; the sick and dying not only neglected, but maltreated and even murdered by incompetent surgeons; shot at without provocation or only to satisfy the caprice of the guards; scourged as slaves; kicked as dogs; hung up by the thumbs; forced to drag cannon-balls; obliged to "mark time," hours upon a stretch; immured in underground dungeons; harried and mangled by blood-hounds; all of which harrowing details were fully corroborated by the few emaciated wrecks who returned.

What wonder that men lost their strength, spirits, and reason ; the story of exposure and cruelties at Salisbury where our men were confined during the winter, rivals that of Andersonville, as the consummate infamy of Wirtz is shared by his confederate, McGee.

After all the horrors of the stockade and barrack incarceration, under rebel rule ; the unmitigated rigors of forced marches ; the robbery and insult of officers and privates ; the systematized starvation ; the denial of fuel in winter, in a wooded country where an abundant supply might easily have been obtained ; and obliged to burrow in the ground for protection from the elements, the record of prison treatment is made blacker by the account of contumely inflicted on the poor dust of humanity ; the desecration of the inanimate remains of our soldiers who died victims of neglect and cruelty.

We might find some palliation for scanty rations, and scantier clothing supplied to its prisoners of war, by a government taxed to its utmost to supply the needs of its own army ; or, if they simply hurried the burial of dead prisoners, omitting marks of outward

respect to enemies of their cause ; but when we know they added insult and ignominy to indifference and carelessness ; that they suffered the dead bodies of our soldiers to lie for days festering in the sun, or piled them naked in heaps, as wood is corded upon carts, and flung them like brutes into ditches ; and when we remember that the remains thus dealt with were our brothers, who had fallen into captivity by the fortune of battle, and had perished through the barbarity of the captors, their only crime that they wore the blue, defending the flag of our country for freedom, equal rights and national unity, we cannot dwell with calmness upon the story of outrage on the civilization of our age and nation.

These dreadful facts have become matters of historic record, and will be transmitted to posterity as the deeds which only treason and rebellion could perpetrate, when inspired by the spirit of human slavery.

“ O God, what a horror was this for man to endure,  
With an ocean of free air above and a sky stretching pure ;  
All herded and huddled together like swine in a pen,  
So much like brutes we almost forgot we were men.”

APPENDIX NO. 1.  

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From Col. George E. Wagner, who, on the 29th of September, 1864, commanded the 8th U. S. C. T.:

PHILADELPHIA, August 10th, 1878.

DEAR GENERAL: I have been looking over the record of the 7th Regiment, particularly that portion relating to the attack on Fort Gilmer; of course I do not know what orders *you* received from Gen. Birney, but have a very vivid recollection of the affair as far as it relates to the 8th Regiment. In the march up the New Market road, the 8th led the Brigade. Just as the order was received to march to the left in the woods, the 9th Regiment was put ahead of the 8th, formed in the woods, and charged across the Mill road, and *diagonally* across an open field in front of Fort Gilmer. They were pretty badly cut up, and fell back without accomplishing anything. During this charge the other regiments formed into line on the Mill road, the 8th being on the left. It was about this time, I presume, that Capt. Weiss started on his disastrous expedition.

Gen. Birney then ordered me to send four companies, deployed as skirmishers, to capture the work. Capt. Cooper, who commanded these companies, charged across the open field with his command, until within a short distance of the enemy's line, where he had a good view, and seeing their works fully manned, and having not over one hundred men himself, like a prudent officer he halted his men, made them lie down, kept up his fire, sent word to the rear concerning the situation, and asked for orders. In the meantime, Gen. Birney, seeing Capt. Cooper halt, ordered me to take our four addi-

tional companies and go into the works. I rapidly deployed my men and advanced, halted the second line of skirmishers, went to the front line to see what the trouble was, and finding that the enemy had at least ten men behind the works to my one in front, I sent Capt. Brooks to Gen. Birney to fully explain the matter, and ask if it should advance. Orders came to remain where I was, to keep up the fire to keep the gunners down, which I did; in fact I could do nothing else. To advance would have been annihilation, and to fall back nearly as bad. All told we had not over 200 men in the fight, and this number had been largely reduced under the heavy fire to which we had been subjected while forming and while advancing across that open field, my loss being 12 killed and 61 wounded, about 35 per cent. of those engaged, among the wounded being 5 officers out of 12 that went into the fight. After Gen. Birney had been advised of our position by Capt. Brooks he came out some distance towards our skirmish line and looked the field over for himself. Our most trying time was yet to come. Before leaving with the additional four companies I had particularly enquired of the General as to our flanks. He told me that both flanks were well covered; that such and such troops, naming them, were on our right, and such and such on our left. Relying upon this I gave myself no uneasiness upon that score, but steadily kept up our fire. My ammunition commencing to run low, I sent word to the General asking for a new supply or to be relieved. My wants were partially supplied, and the fire kept up. Suddenly, just before sunset, my left company, which was commanded by Lieut. Mayer, ( ) was doubled up, the enemy having, from somewhere to the left, been sent upon my left flank, which was swinging in the air without support. They made a terrific charge, doubled up the flank, got partially in our rear, and to all appearances the Eighth was bound for Richmond. That was one of the tightest pinches I was ever in during the war. Gathering up a couple of companies from my right, including my old Co. "A," we went for

them, screeching like ten thousand fiends. It was at this time that we had the hardest work of the day, and that I got to closer quarters than in any of my previous experience in the war. The counter charge was a success, the line was straightened, and the enemy repulsed. We were aided to a considerable extent by Capt. Spaulding, and somewhat startled too when we had got the "Rebs" started, a fire suddenly opened in our rear; it was commencing to get dark; we could not at first tell what was up, and Libby again appeared in our mind's eye. The enemy seemed quite as much startled, and hastened their flight. This was Capt. Spaulding, with four companies, of the Seventh, coming to our relief. We then fell back to the "Mill" Road, joined and moved with the rest of the brigade.

Yours very truly,

(Signed)

GEO. E. WAGNER.

Gen. JAMES SHAW, JR.

APPENDIX NO. 2.

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I have said, those of our captured men who were able, were set to work upon the rebel fortifications. In retaliation, General Butler issued the following General Order, No. 126, Oct. 13, 1864: "It being testified to the commanding general by a number of refugees and deserters from the enemy, that from 100 to 150 soldiers of the United States, captured in arms by the Confederates near Chaffin's Farm, have been taken from Libby prison and other places, and placed to labor on the fortifications of the enemy's lines in front of their troops, the commanding general orders that an equal number of prisoners of war, principally members of the Virginia reserves, by and under whose charge this outrage is being carried on, be set to work in the excavation at Dutch Gap, and elsewhere along the trenches, as may hereafter seem best, in retaliation for the unjust treatment of the soldiers of the United States so kept at labor and service by the Confederate authorities.

"It being also testified to by the same witnesses that the rations served to the soldiers of the United States so at labor, is one pound of flour, and one-third of a pound of bacon daily, it is ordered that the same rations precisely be served to these Confederate prisoners so kept at work daily, and no other or different."

Commenting on the outrageous proceedings of Butler in putting Confederates to work in Dutch Gap, the *Richmond Examiner* said: "We must not admit it as an act of retaliation, for if it be so admitted, it gives up the ground of argument, and recognizes the slaves as free men." Whether they were willing to admit it as an act of retaliation or not, they

were certainly forced to submit, for the prompt action of General Butler soon caused the Confederates to release our men from work; and on October 20th, General Butler published General Order No. 134: "It having been officially certified by General Lee, commanding Confederate forces, that the prisoners of war put to work in the trenches near Fort Gilmer, have been withdrawn, to be treated as prisoners of war, it is ordered that the prisoners of war of the Confederate forces put to work in the canal at Dutch Gap in retaliation, shall be at once withdrawn, to be held and treated hereafter as prisoners of war."

The proclamation of outlawry of colored soldiers and officers, was as follows: "Now, therefore, I, Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America, and acting by their authority, and by virtue of my authority as commander-in-chief of the armies of the Confederate States, do order — That all commissioned officers in the command of said Benjamin Butler, be declared not entitled to be considered as soldiers engaged in honorable warfare, but as robbers and criminals, deserving death; and that they and each of them be, whenever captured, reserved for execution.

"That all negro slaves captured in arms be at once delivered over to the executive authorities of the respective States to which they belong, to be dealt with according to the laws of said States.

"That the like orders be executed in all cases, with respect to all commissioned officers of the United States, when found in company with armed slaves in insurrection against the authorities of the different States of the Confederacy. Dated December 23rd, 1862."

HEAD-QUARTERS

Second Division, Twenty-Fifth Army Corps.

ARMY OF THE JAMES

In the Field, Va, January 2<sup>d</sup>, 1865.

Hon. Wm Sprague,  
U S Senator

Sir,

Enclosed please find a draught of a bill to encourage volunteer officers of experience to remain in the military service. If it should meet your approbation, I think it might do something to check the loss of such officers which is now very rapid.

I avail myself of the occasion to say a few words in behalf of your fellow townsman and constituent, Colonel James Shaw, 7<sup>th</sup> U S. Colored Troops. He has never asked me to do so, but his modesty should not cause him to lose what is too often accorded to importunateness of demand.

The Colonel has been serving under me, almost without interruption, since November, 1863. He has been a most faithful and conscien-

tion officer, laboring indefatigably to make his command worthy of the service. It is chiefly owing to his efforts that his regiment, the 7<sup>th</sup> U. S. C. I. has a very high reputation indeed for drill, discipline and efficiency. For some months past, Colonel Shaw has commanded the first brigade of my division, manifesting the same valuable qualities as when in charge of his regiment.

His habitual self control, temperance in all things and uniform kindness to the men, his interest in their moral and mental, as well as military improvement, has exercised the most salutary influence in his command.

I trust that, in the coming campaign, his success on the battle field will reflect honor upon his state. He is a good officer and you will not regret action in order to prevent his being ranked, through ill considered promotions, by his inferiors in merit.

Very truly,

Your obedient servant,  
William Birney,  
Brig. General U. S. A.

## APPENDIX NO. 4.

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That the Confederates were brought to consider the propriety of using the "hitherto despised race" as soldiers, the following extracts are submitted in proof:

An article in the New York *Herald* of Nov. 4, 1864, copied from a Richmond paper, arguing for the arming of slaves, contained the following passage:

"But A. B. says the negroes will not fight; we have before us a letter from a distinguished general (we wish we were permitted to use his name and influence), who says 'Fort Gilmer proved the other day that they would fight; they raised each other on the parapet to be shot at as they appeared above.'"

The Richmond *Whig* of Oct. 7, 1864, said: "The *Enquirer* believes that the slaves of the South may be made—should the exigency ever occur—steady and reliable soldiers. It says, "It is not necessary now to discuss this matter, and may never become so, but neither negroes nor slaves will be permitted to stand in the way of our cause. This war is for national independence on our side, and for the subjugation of the whites and the emancipation of the slaves on the side of the enemy. If it fail, the negroes are nominally free, and their masters really slaves, therefore we must succeed."

"Other States may decide for themselves, but Virginia after exhausting her whites, will fight the blacks through to the last man. She will be free at any cost."

The Richmond *Examiner* of December 9th, 1864, published the following extract from the Governor's message: "All

agree that when the question becomes one of liberty and independence on the one hand, or subjugation on the other, that every means within our reach should be used to aid in our struggle and to baffle and thwart our enemy. I say every man will agree to this. No man should hesitate, even if the result were to emancipate our slaves; there is not a man who would not cheerfully put the negro in the army rather than become a slave himself to our hated and vindictive foe."

The Richmond *Examiner* said editorially December 20th, 1864: "The bill for the impressment of slaves which passed one branch of Congress, might be very properly amended and enlarged in the other — namely, by placing at the disposal of the military authorities, not only 40,000 negroes, but 80 or 100,000 and leaving it to General Lee, at his discretion and according to the exigencies of the service, to use them in any way he may think needful."

A correspondent of the Richmond *Times* in a recent issue (1892), says: "Just before the surrender of Richmond, the soldiers in Winder and Jackson hospitals, who were able for field duty, were organized — forming a company from each hospital, and there was also a negro company (attendants in the hospital) organized in each: the former companies forming a battalion for the purpose of protecting the city against Federal cavalry.

"This battalion had been called out several times when the Federal scouts were near the city. We were at Seven Pines the day before the surrender of Richmond, and were called in that night.

"What I want is the article that eulogized our battalion, especially the negro companies that drilled so nicely on one occasion when we were on dress-parade in front of the state house, a few weeks before the surrender of the city."

This communication was signed by A. R. Tomlinson, formerly Company H, Fourth North Carolina Regiment.

The old saying "one may lead a horse to water but a hundred cannot make him drink," would have been forcibly impressed upon the Confederate authorities, if they had put the colored hospital companies or any organization of colored troops into an engagement. Sergeant Henry Jordan of my company, was badly wounded when captured, and remained in the hospital while those who were able were sent to Salisbury. When sufficiently recovered he became an attendant in the hospital, and later served as drill-master of one of the colored companies. I have been assured by him that they had planned and fully arranged to desert in a body, as soon as a favorable opportunity presented.

## APPENDIX NO. 5.

Union Regiments, which lost 17 per cent. or more, of their number killed in a single engagement:

Regiment.	Battle.	Per cent. killed.
7th U. S. C. T., 4 companies...	Fort Gilmer.....	32.
27th Connecticut.....	Gettysburg .....	17.
9th Illinois.....	Shiloh.....	17.
11th Illinois.....	Fort Donelson.....	20.
22d Indiana.....	Chaplin Hills .....	18.
7th Iowa.....	Belmont .....	18.
32d Iowa .....	Pleasant Hill.....	20
1st Maine Heavy Artillery.....	Petersburg.....	22.
6th Maine .....	Rappahannock Station....	17.
9th Maine.....	Petersburg .....	19.
16th Maine.....	Fredericksburg .....	17.
12th Massachusetts.. . . . .	Antietam .....	22.
15th Massachusetts.....	Antietam.....	17.
20th Massachusetts.....	Fredericksburg.....	20.
25th Massachusetts.....	Cold Harbor.....	23.
57th Massachusetts.....	Wilderness .....	17.
2d Michigan.....	Knoxville.....	18.
24th Michigan .....	Gettysburg....	18.2
1st Minnesota, 8 companies...	Gettysburg.....	28.
5th New Hampshire.....	Gettysburg.....	19.
12th New Hampshire.....	Cold Harbor.....	21.
15th New Jersey .....	Spottsylvania.....	26.
5th New York.....	Manassas.....	23.
30th New York .....	Manassas .....	19.
49th New York.....	Spottsylvania.....	18.

Regiment.	Battle.	Per cent. killed.
59th New York.....	Antietam.....	18.
63d New York.....	Antietam.....	17.
69th New York.....	Antietam.....	22.
111th New York.....	Gettysburg.....	22.
121st New York.....	Salem Hights.....	17.
141st New York.....	Peach Tree Creek.....	21.
147th New York.....	Gettysburg.....	20.
7th Ohio.....	Cedar Creek.....	17.
14th Ohio.....	Chickamauga.....	18.
38th Ohio.....	Jonesboro.....	20.
63d Ohio.....	Pickett's Mills.....	17.
11th Ohio Battery..	Iuka.....	18.
26th Pennsylvania.....	Gettysburg.....	17.
49th Pennsylvania.....	Spottsylvania.....	22.
69th Pennsylvania.....	Gettysburg.....	21.
83d Pennsylvania.....	Peninsula.....	20.
141st Pennsylvania.....	Gettysburg.....	24.
145th Pennsylvania.....	Fredericksburg.....	18.
3d Vermont.....	Lee's Mills.....	18.
5th Vermont.....	Savage Station.....	18.
1st Wisconsin.....	Chaplin Hills.....	18.
2d Wisconsin.....	Manassas.....	17.
4th Wisconsin.....	Port Hudson.....	20.
36th Wisconsin.....	Bethesda Church.....	20.
37th Wisconsin.....	Petersburg Mine.....	21.
10th United States.....	Gettysburg.....	23.
79th United States Colored...	Poison Springs.....	23.

APPENDIX NO. 6.  

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The Southern Historical Society has published many narratives relating to prison experience in the North; Vol. 1, Page 247, Rev. George W. Nelson says: "At Camp Chase my rations were of good quality and sufficient. At Johnson's Island they were not so good or so plentiful, though sufficient to keep a man in good health. At Point Lookout in May and June he says: "About this time rations were reduced; we were cut down to two meals a day; coffee and sugar were stopped; the ration was a small loaf of bread per day, a small piece of meat for breakfast, and a piece of meat and what was called soup for dinner."

Mr. Keiley, at one time Mayor of Richmond, was at Elmira prison during the summer of '64. Page 269, Vol. 1, he says: "The ration of bread was usually a full pound per day, while the meat ration was invariably scanty."

T. D. Henry, a prisoner at Camp Douglas, says: (Page 276.) "Rations were of very good quality and quantity."

APPENDIX NO. 7.

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I have said, we were the victims of the "best policy." While the rebel Congress did not formally revoke the bill of outlawry of negro soldiers and their officers, it was never enforced so far as the officers were concerned, for we were treated by the prison authorities in all respects as well as others, but the colored soldiers were undoubtedly subjected to more privations and hardships than the white; and the exchange of prisoners was stopped because of the proclamation, and their refusal to exchange the blacks; and, notwithstanding the fact, that the Confederate authorities subsequently repeatedly offered to exchange prisoners, man for man, which in all probability would have included the blacks, since we then held nearly twice as many prisoners as they; but as they had not said they would exchange the blacks, the original refusal was made a pretext for stopping all exchanges, and their overtures were not accepted.

That it was only a pretext, I quote from General Butler's book in substantiation. He says on page 590 that he met Mr. Ould, the Confederate Commissioner of Exchange, by appointment, March 10, 1864: "All points of difference were substantially agreed upon so that the exchange might go on readily and smoothly, man for man, and officer for officer of equal rank, and officers for their equivalent in privates as settled by the cartel."

Again on page 592, he says:

"General Grant visited Fortress Monroe on the first of April. To him the state of the negotiations as to exchange was communicated, and most emphatic verbal directions were received

from the Lieutenant-General not to take any further steps by which another able-bodied man should be exchanged until further orders from him."

Under date of April 20, 1864, the following telegram was sent to General Butler: "Receive all the sick and wounded the Confederate authorities will send you, but send no more in exchange.

(Signed) U. S. GRANT,  
*Lieutenant-General.*"

This, of course, put an end to all exchange, since, to obtain the delivery of sick and wounded without any return, would be a difficult operation. Continuing, General Butler says:

"Nothing further was done with the exchange save to receive such sick and wounded as they delivered to us, till the 15th of August, when a note was received from Major Mulford, Assistant Commissioner of Exchange, enclosing the following letter from Mr. Ould:

RICHMOND, VA., Aug. 10, 1864.

*Major John E. Mulford, Assistant Agent of Exchange:*

SIR: You have several times proposed to me to exchange the prisoners respectively held by the two belligerents, officer for officer, and man for man. The same offer has also been made by other officials having charge of matters connected with the exchange of prisoners. This proposal has heretofore been declined by the Confederate authorities, they insisting upon the terms of the cartel, which required the delivery of the excess on either side on parole. In view, however, of the very large number of prisoners now held by each party, and the suffering consequent upon the continued confinement, I now consent to the above proposal, and agree to deliver to you the prisoners held in captivity by the Confederate authorities, providing you agree to deliver an equal number of officers and men.

As equal numbers are delivered from time to time, they will be declared exchanged. This proposal is made with the understanding that the officers and men on both sides who have been longest in captivity will be first delivered where it is practicable.

I shall be happy to hear from you as speedily as possible whether this arrangement can be carried out.

Respectfully, your obedient servant,

(Signed)

ROBERT OULD,

*Agent of Exchange."*

Mr. Ould has since said, "This offer, which would have restored to freedom thousands of suffering captives, which would have released every Federal soldier in Confederate prisons, was not even noticed, that is, no reply was made to it. As the Federal authorities at that time held a large excess of prisoners, the effect of the proposal which I had made, if carried out, would have been to release all the Union prisoners, while a large number of Confederates would have remained in prison, awaiting the chances of the capture of their equivalents."

General Butler evidently did all he could to have the arrangement carried out. He proposed to go on with the exchange, man for man, until he got all our men, and if the colored soldiers were not delivered for exchange, then to retaliate on the 20,000 or more Confederates remaining in our hands.

I understand General Grant objected to the exchange for fear the reinforcements to the Confederate army would endanger his position before Petersburg, and that of General Sherman in Georgia.

General Butler says: "I offer no criticism of this policy, it was not mine, and my part in it was wholly in obedience to orders from my commanding officer, the Lieutenant-General."

APPENDIX NO. 8.

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I have been asked by people of the South, as also by friends at home, if it be possible to make good soldiers of the negroes. If I thought they would fight. My reply to the first question has always been, as emphatically as I could make it, YES. I ask for no better material than such men as formed our regiment; men who had been slaves, knowing little or nothing except immediate obedience to commands; most of them unable to read a word, but all anxious to learn, and being very attentive to instruction soon did learn, not only the school of the soldier, but to read and write. They learned to handle muskets properly, and to march well, more quickly than the white regiment I served in.

Show them how to handle a musket, and they would imitate the movement at once; having an ear for time and tune, it was surprising to note the steadiness and accuracy of their marching after a few days drilling. The drum-corps of our regiment excelled that of any white regiment I ever heard. We marched thirty miles in Florida, July 22, 1864, and when halted for bivouac, every man of my company answered to his name at roll-call. We were never troubled by either straggling or desertion; out of 145 belonging to C company, only one, a recruit, and substitute from the North, deserted, but not until the fighting was all done. Their camp was always neat, in as good if not in better condition than those of white regiments.

During a most trying and tedious tour of duty at Deep Bottom, in August, 1864, the Seventh Regiment carried with fixed bayonets, a line of rifle-pits, and carried it without firing a shot, but with a loss of thirty wounded, some of whom died.

A correspondent of the *New York Tribune* said: "It was one of the most stirring and gallant affairs we have ever seen." A very flattering order was received from headquarters, from which I extract the following:

"To the colored troops recently added to us, and fighting with us, the Major-General commanding tenders his thanks for their uniform conduct and soldierly bearing.

"They have set a good example to our veterans by the entire absence of straggling from their ranks on the march." By order of Major-General D. B. Birney.

In reply to the second question, "Will they fight?" I would, if it were possible, answer still more forcibly, I KNOW they will fight for liberty as well as any men who ever carried muskets. I think I have shown conclusively from the testimony of both sides, that the Seventh Regiment of Colored Infantry was composed of fighting men.

I can fully agree with General Butler, when in his final address he pays this tribute to the colored soldiers of his command:

"In this army you have been treated as soldiers, not as laborers.

"You have shown yourselves worthy of the uniform you wear.

"The best officers of the Union seek to command you.

"Your bravery has won the admiration even of those who would be your masters.

"Your patriotism, fidelity and courage have illustrated the best qualities of manhood.

"With the bayonet you have unlocked the iron-barred gates of prejudice, opened new fields of freedom, liberty, and equality of right to yourselves, and to your race."

I have written only of what I know to be true, and in many instances used the language of others who were participants with me in the engagements mentioned, because they have written better than I could possibly have done.

It was not my purpose in preparing this paper to prove that colored soldiers would fight well. The enlistment of over 186,000 when in view of the fact that they could not, if captured, expect the same treatment as white men, required more nerve than for whites to enlist earlier in the war.

It shows they were willing to put themselves in a position to serve their country in time of its greatest need. With the 36,847 who gave up their lives in the struggle for national existence; with Deep Bottom, New Market, Fort Gilmer, Port Hudson, Fort Wagner, Olustee, and over four hundred other engagements with the enemy participated in by them; in all of which they acquitted themselves with credit, as testified to by every officer in whose command they served, and by a multitude of unwilling witnesses, whose prejudices were overcome by the numerous instances of unexampled gallantry coming within their personal observation, the evidence is conclusive; it may indeed be said, "The negro was a soldier in every sense of the word."

It does not become me to say much about the officers of colored troops. I believe in almost every instance they were selected from among the officers, non-commissioned officers and privates of our army who had seen active service. No outside influence, either social, political or military had any undue weight with the examining board. Each had to stand on his own merit. In some cases officers above the line failed to pass as second lieutenants.

Up to Feb. 2, 1864, out of 740 candidates 333 had been rejected, and out of the 407 who passed, 202 were recommended for second lieutenants, 101 for first lieutenants, 72 for captains, 18 majors, 8 lieutenant-colonels, and only 6 were found equal to the responsibility of a colonelcy.



