

HORRORS OF FORT DELAWARE VIVIDLY RECALLED BY ONE PRISONER OF WAR

BY WILLIAM H. TRIMMER

At last, after 45 years, the United States government through the congress has appropriated about \$19,999 to be used to build a monument to mark and honor the dead Confederate prisoners of war who died at Fort Delaware from 1863 to 1865, about two years.

Its sense of justice is shown by obliterating sectionalism and animosity. Fort Delaware is situated on an island in the Delaware river, about 50 miles below Philadelphia and about a mile to the eastward in New Jersey and about the same distance to the Maryland shore. Over on the New Jersey shore the Confederate dead were carried, and here the United States government intends putting up a monument. This is quite an honor to these poor fellows who died of starvation and disease—at least we, the comrades and sufferers with those who left their bones there, think so.

The deaths became so numerous in the fall of 1864, after the smallpox broke out among us, that details from the prisoners were made and large squads of us were carried by boat over to the Jersey shore and put to work digging a ditch in which the dead could be put. This ditch was made over 50 yards long and some six feet deep. From my diary I copy:

Nov. 18, 1864—At daylight the Yankee sergeant came into the pen and detailed a lot of us, turning us over to the guard, who carried us up to the dead house near the hospital. "Pitch in, you damned Johnnies, and get your dead out from here."

Litters were laid on the ground and on each tied up in his blanket we laid a festering body that had died from smallpox. Two of us toted this putrid mass of former comrades some 300 yards to the boat laying alongside until we had 14. The trip over took about half an hour, and arriving on the Jersey shore we were made to unload our dead, each being toted to the ditch edge and put aside, the carcass dumped into the ditch. The blanket was thrown aside in a pile, to be returned for another.

Some Horrible Experiences.
Have any of you, my readers, seen or had to handle a rotten, putrid body that had died from smallpox or yellow fever? If you have not, you can realize what disagreeable things we have to do sometimes. Now I moralize:

"Their precious blood, though vainly shed,
Long as thy shore old ocean laves;
We'll bow with reverence o'er our dead
And bless the turf that wraps their graves."

Nov. 22—Last night I slipped by the Yankee sentinel and got into the

Alabama quarters here. Up on the top tier, about nine feet from the floor, I found my friend, John Wiley, of Mobile, formerly in the firm of H. & John Wiley, cotton brokers, now orderly sergeant of company B, 15th Alabama regiment. The sergeant, with lots of his regiment, had been captured at Gettysburg on July 3, 1863, so had been a prisoner in this hell over a year. A pure cold night, but by sleeping close, "spooning it," I shivered out the night. In the morning at day my next neighbor on the bunk was dead. The poor fellow had been lying there sick for a week with smallpox. The hospital was crowded and the doctor got round to the sick lying upon the bunks once a day; his eyes wide open and glazed, the poor fellow in his agony and suffering died among his comrades, who rendered him no assistance, so caloused were our hearts that suffering did not trouble us.

One Agonizing Case.
The poor fellow begged and moaned for water, but we lay there helpless to aid him. At 9 a. m. the Yankee sergeant, Hickout, came on his morning round, he and his guard.

"Throw down your damned dead, you 'rebs; up there," he sung out to us on top tier. Thud after thud of dead were thrown down onto the floor. Afterwards we were made to pick up and tie in blanket. Long stout poles were run through and each load carried to the dead house to wait their turn to be toted to the dead boat.

These are, then, some of the dead that are at last honored—not by name, for we did not know one from the other. The big ditch I helped to dig accommodated over 2,000 rebel dead, and 100 barrels of lime were thrown in.

Delaware Like the Others.
Here I might finish. The readers of this paper have little interest in following up the horrible life prisoners of war were made to endure so long ago. Fort Delaware was no worse than Elmira or Camp Chase or Johnson's Island or Point Lookout. The Yankees had the prison business down fine, as I will show.

I was captured in February, 1864, and taken to Jacksonville and turned over to the 5th Massachusetts regiment, and thence taken to Hilton Head. Here we suffered very much from cold, as none of us had either blankets or overcoats.

From Hilton Head we were put aboard a steamship and taken to New York harbor and put in the old "Yellow fort" on Governors island. Here 69 of us from Florida were put into a casemate, which is a bomb-proof from which cannon are fired through embrasures. The embrasure was closed by iron railings; that and the iron-barred entrance was the only

ventilation we could get. This casemate was 20 feet by 20 feet and here for one month, laying on the cement floor, 69 of us were fed twice daily and not allowed outside for any purpose, not even for sanitary purposes. True, it was cold weather and the natural warmth of our bodies kept each of us alive at night.

If this is not hell, what is it? Treated Worse Than Convicts.

We had committed no crime, but were treated far worse than convicted prisoners. In the early part of March orders came to remove us from the fort and island were so crowded with their own deserters and "bounty jumpers" that we had to vacate. A tug boat carried us to the steamship Baltic, one of the old Collins liners that ran to Liverpool in opposition to the Cunarders. The Baltic and Atlantic propeller steamships had been chartered by the government. The Cunarders then were all paddle wheelers. The Baltic carried us up to the Delaware river, transferring us to a flat that put us ashore on the island known as Fort Delaware.

Arriving there, we were examined and passed through the gates that closed on us for 15 long months. The stockade or "bull pen" covered about five acres. A number of large frame buildings, about 25, had been built, each capable of holding 400 men. At the Florida quarters I found several old comrades—Rice Love and Archie Love, of Quincy, who belonged to the 8th Florida infantry. I also found John Cromartye and others from Miccosukee, Leon county, boys. These were captured at Gettysburg, hence they had been in this pen over nine months. Separating us by a high board fence, some 1500 officers of all grades were also held.

To Feed 10,000 Men.
To feed twice a day 10,000 prisoners, besides the officers, was quite a task by 7 a. m. The men by states were formed in long lines. Today Florida, with her 150, is first in line, waiting for the eating room door to open. Entering in line, we file down the long aisle of the building, 200 feet long, four feet apart and on either side are tables three feet wide, upon which rations of four crackers and tiny pieces of beef are laid. One hundred rations are laid in a row and 100 prisoners march down, each to his place, takes it and marches out. This system is kept up till all are fed twice a day.

Now fancy, you readers, to yourselves what a sight you'd see of 10,000 hungry, dirty, ragged men twice a day, rain, snow or sleet, standing in the open weather to receive this pittance. Still, we did not starve.

During the long and terribly severe winter of 1864-5, to keep from freezing every man wrapped the blanket

he had round him and laid down in it at night. Dec. 24, 1864, my diary reads, was an intensely cold night. Sleeping was out of the question. Many froze to death on their bunks. The allowance of coal for each stove was only one wheelbarrow full to each man for 24 hours. The stronger ones controlled the stove and the weak ones stood no show. No milk of human kindness here! We all acted like beasts. Hunger and cold made each of us perfectly indifferent to his fellow comrade.

Sick and In Prison.
Large numbers of men were sick with chronic diarrhoea. Others had their bones and gums rotting from scurvy. The sinks were situated over the river, fully 200 yards from the nearest quarters. The orders to the Yankee sentries were very rigid and strict on any or night, rain or shine, our orders were imperative to go to the sinks, or the sentry "will kill you if you stop," they said.

I have made as plain as I can why so many unfortunates were killed in their tracks almost nightly. The sentries on top of the buildings at the corners were furnished each with big reflector lanterns that worked on a pivot, so that light could be thrown all over the pen at any time. Numbers of these poor humans were killed this way, and this class also were honored by laying on the big ditch the monument will cover.

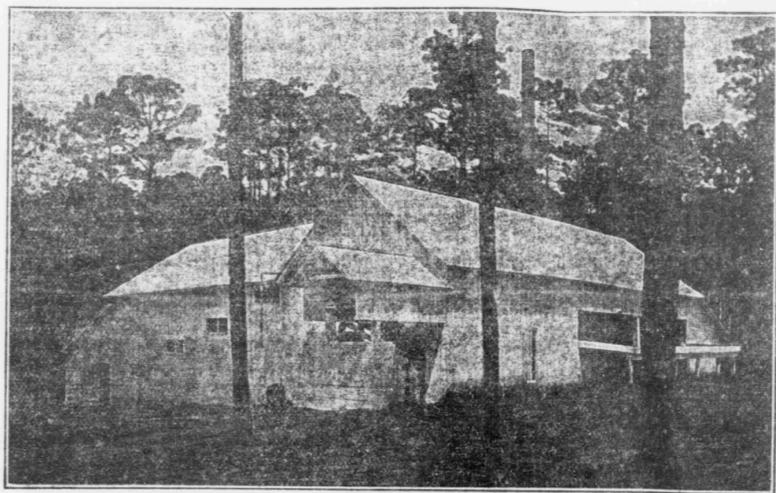
Full Regiment on Guard.
The prison and fort as a garrison required a full regiment to guard us. It was in command of Gen. Schopf, a Hungarian and a brigadier. He could not speak English, nor could his staff. They were all German, and only the adjutant, Capt. Aul, spoke so that we could understand. I have previously mentioned Sergeant Hickout, a German. A human brute he was, in full charge of the prisoners in the pen. An escort of four armed men always attended him to carry out his orders. Outside, on "Hell's half acre," which held us after leaving the dining room, Hickout had constructed a dozen wooden houses some seven feet high cone-shaped at the top and sharp. Upon these daily he had men who had taken some one's ration besides their own made to mount and straddle the horse. Weights were attached to the foot and there for one hour he suffered, often after a severe clubbing from Hickout.

Some Cruel Punishments.
Another favorite punishment was to make the man tog a log of wood on his shoulder and march up and down. If he stopped the sentry jogged his bayonet into him. Tying up by the thumbs and hoisting till the toes just touched the ground was common.

I never experienced any of these punishments myself. I took no

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chances. Fortunately, I had some friends in Maryland who kept me with a little greenback and I fared a little better, being able to buy from the Yankee sutler. The sutler did a good business with those who had greenbacks and, though we paid double prices, we got something extra to eat and those who wanted something stronger could buy by calling for Jamaica ginger and paying 75 cents for it get whiskey in very small doses.

Water for this large body of men was quite an important necessity, and to obtain it two large steam water-boats were employed to bring water from some of the fresh water creeks away off. The Delaware river was salt. High cisterns were located at joints and kept full the water boats. Using hose and pumping daily, often from laziness or meanness, the water would be brackish and unfit to drink. Complaints would be sent to Gen. Schopf, but they rarely were attended to.

Even Water Was Guarded.
At the faucet of the tank stood an armed sentry, who did not allow any of us to carry water away. You will wonder how we washed. That we did not do, for the ditches were slimy from filth and the water let into them was salt. Washing? Why, I had the same rags on when released as I went in with.

For those of us who had a dime, Hickout always of an evening would have brought in to the pen big strings of rats, big fat fellows caught by his ferris round on the levee. To cook the rat after getting him was a hard job, and often he was eaten half raw. I have eaten rat and I cannot tell any difference between that and squirrel. I have seen men sit for hours at a table with a sharp stick to jab him when he put his head out. This was sheer hunger that caused this.

I have often seen men's blankets taken from off their shoulders and laid on the ground when masses of worms. How could it be otherwise? Some were worse than others, but all suffered from the same cause.

In the latter part of 1864 a regiment of three Massachusetts and Ohio men were brought to guard us to relieve the veterans to go to the front. These Ohio boys had never smelled powder and they were the most crust guard we had.

We occasionally got a newspaper from the sutler. The Philadelphia Tropic, a bitter, black Republican paper, gave us the condensed news, and we heard of the disasters that were occurring in Dixie. At last, in April, we got news of the surrender of Lee and at night the fort was lit up and we could see over on the Jersey shore big illuminations in the sky.

About day, a sentry came in to

quarters and told me that they had killed the president (Lincoln) at the theatre last night. We noticed the flag half-masted on the fort at day, and the news spread in the pen. People attempts to cheer were made in some of the quarters.

Cheering Was Cut Off.
The adjutant, Capt. Aul, hearing this cheering, immediately had the guard doubled, with orders to snoot if any laughing was indulged in. Four brass guns were hurried into the pen and loaded with canister shot. Capt. Aul now had us massed and he gave out his orders. Our rations were reduced to one a day and all letters and communications from either way were stopped. For the next 30 days they sure made us suffer.

The Ohio regiment was removed and a negro regiment put on guard in its place, who treated us enough better than the white troops.

On May 20 I, with over 10,000 others, was paroled. Among those I take from my diary were one from the First Florida, 26 from the Second Florida, four from the Third Florida, two from the Fourth Florida, 36 from the Fifth Florida, three from the Sixth Florida, one from the Seventh Florida, 40 from the Eighth Florida, 11 from the Tenth Florida, 13 from the Second Florida cavalry, three from artillery companies—110 men from Florida. The men in the Second, Fifth and Eighth Florida were captured at Gettysburg.

"They Died Like Sheep."

I cannot finish this article more appropriately than by adding the words spoken to us on April 26, this year at the memorial exercises. "Harrassed by guards, kept on insufficient rations and many discomforts and often beset to abandon our cause, with offers of liberty, money, employment and almost anything they might ask, yet they preferred to remain prisoners. Their graves should never be forgotten, though they died in prison and were buried in potter's fields."

Why He Was Sad.

Seymour—Did Grimmer seem to be very sad after his auto had run down those two men?

Ashley—Not at first, but when I met him a few days after the accident he was the saddest man I had ever seen. He told me he would have to pay \$2,600 in damages.

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THE DEAR OLD TREE.

By FRANK H. SWEET.

There's a dear old tree, an evergreen tree,
And it blossoms once a year,
'Tis loaded with fruit from top to root,
And it brings to all good cheer.



For its blossoms bright are small candles white,
And its fruit is dolls and toys,
And they all are free for both you and me
If we're good little girls and boys.

The Christmas Manger.

In France may be almost universally seen representations of the manger in which Christ was born, with figures of Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus, and cattle feeding near by.

His Natural Wish.

"He's certainly a big one," exclaimed Piker, who was gazing with admiration on the mounted remains of an immense trout which Basse had caught in Canada.

"He is big," admitted Basse, "but whenever I look at him I can't help wishing he had gotten away."

"Gotten away?" repeated Piker, with surprise.

"Yes," explained Basse, "if he had gotten away I could swear he was at least five times bigger."