CAPTURE AND PRISON LIFE
OF THE
19th. IOWA VOLUNTEER INFANTRY
BY
W. I. BRAGG.

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On the 5th of September,1863, we went on board the steamer Sallie Robinson, with the 94th Illinois, and 125 horses. Our destination was Morganzia, La., at which point we landed the 7th or 8th of September; the 19th Iowa, under Major Bruce, and the 26th Indiana, under Lieut. Col. Rose, a section of the 1st Missouri Light Artillery, and a battalion of the 6th Missouri Cavalry, under Major Montgomery. A company of mounted Infantry, composed of details from every regiment in the division was also with us. This latter was under Lieut. Walton, of the 34th Iowa. Our whole force numbered but 500 men, commanded by Col. Leake, of the 20th Iowa.

We were sent out to Sterling farm, seven miles from our division. Col. Leake's orders were to stop at the farm and attract the notice of Gen.Green, who was in command of the rebel forces. Here we remained doing picket duty, and skirmishing with the "Johnnies",day after day.

The morning of the 29th of September was rainy and disagreeable. Near noon, as we were preparing our dinner, a shot was heard at the picket post north of camp, then three or more shots, in quick succession, all from one post, the bullets whistling through our quarters. Col. Leake ordered his Adjutant General to have the Artillery placed inside the gap, and to open fire across the cane-field, then ran out to where the 19th was in line awaiting orders, and himself commanded them to advance to the fence and commence firing at once. Our regiment fired the first volley at the advancing line of the enemy, causing them to fall back in disorder, but being reinforced they rallied and drove us from our first position. We then retreated behind the levee, where we re-formed, fronting east, being at a right angle with our former line. Discovering an attempt to flank us, the 26th Indiana was moved behind us and took position on our right; which the rebels seeing through a gap in the levee, they changed at once and endeavored to flank our left but failed. Col. Leake had tried to regain our lost ground by two advances, but both had been driven back with loss, and after fighting and holding at bay five thousand men for two hours and ten minutes by the watch; we were compelled to surrender, and started

on what proved to be ten months of southern hospitality in the prison pen of Tyler, Texas. Our loss in this engagement was forty-seven killed and wounded. The rebels lost nearly as many as there were in our whole command. Although they captured our whole command they did not claim any victory. We heard Gen.Green say that had there been five hundred more of us, he could not have taken us, and we wished many times after when chewing "Johnny Cake", that there had been a million of us instead of five hundred.

II.

After our capture we were rushed off through the mud and rain by our captors, who seemed to be proud of their prize, and were fearful that some unforeseen circumstance might deprive them of our company. For our part we were willing and ready to leave them on short notice, without ceremony, and would have done so had it not been that they stuck to us closer than a brother, but with less love. After a hard tramp of seven miles, through mud nearly knee deep, we reached the

Atchafalaya river about dark, and were ferried over on a small steamer, and placed in camp for the night, as crest-fallen and forlorn set of men as could well be imagined.

We stood huddled together in the rain which continued to fall for the next forty-eight hours-no shelter or even fire was provided for us. We went to bed standing, without supper and no surety of breakfast. The long hours of the night passes by on leaden feet, and morning found us wet, gloomy and hungry, and in no mood to give or take a joke- we did not even see a chance to take breakfast. At that time we had not heard anything of the Dr.Tanner system of diet, but were destined to learn something of it in the next ten months. About ten o'clock the "Johnnies" gave out three small sweet potatoes to each man, and told us we could build fires and cook them, or take them raw on the half-shell. This was all we got to eat until dark; then they issued a pint of corn meal to each man, but failed to furnish anything to cook in, which left us in the position of the Egyptians who were compelled to make bricks without straw. But Yankee ingenuity soon finds a way. Some made a dough and baked it in corn husks; some laid it on chips and held

it to the fire; so in one way and another we managed to get supper enough to keep our stomachs from rebelling, and were ready for another night of weary watching and waiting, as sleep was almost out of the question. Although we had fires that night, the rain still fell in torrents and the ground was a perfect hog-wallow, making our second night in Rebeldom more gloomy, if possible, than the first. Tired nature would at times demand her rest, and we would fall into a doze, to be tantalized by dreams of soft, downy beds and tables loaded with everything that could tempt the appetite, but would be soon awakened to the full sense of our helpless condition. We would then get up out of the mud, stretch our weary, aching limbs, and wonder if we would ever live to see home, friends and the dear old flag

III.

Our first day's march was begun, but when and where it was to end, none of us knew; but we supposed, and rightly, that it would end, after many weary days, in Texas. The first day was not very fatigueing, our

route being through rich bottom lands that were yielding immense crops of corn, and as our guards gave us permission we gathered some to parch when we camped at night. One of our company found a quart tin cup that day, which was destined to become a very God send to our little squad, as we had no cooking utensils of our own, and the "Johnnies" did not seem inclined to give or lend us theirs; so when we camped at night after a short march, and we had received our pint of meal, the quart cup was brought into requisition to cook supper for twenty men. The owner had the first use of it, and when he had made his mush he emptied it on a chip, and passed the cup to the next man and so on until all had "mushed". It was slow work, and by the time my turn came it was frequently breakfast time instead of supper time.Often I made my supper (like a great many others did) of burnt corn, parched on the cob,washed down with old government creek water. Dear reader, if you have never fared and feasted on such rich food as that, just try it for a few meals, and if you can do a days work or make a long tramp on that diet just drop us a card and you can have our yaller dorg and a chromo. This was our living for days and weeks, unsalted mush or corn dodger, you pay your money and take your choice. This was our supper and

breakfast; for dinner we had "hopes" and"wind pudding". Thus we marched for days through sunshine and shower and at night lay down on the bosom of Mother Earth, with the canopy of heaven for a covering, scorpions and lizards for bed fellows, and an armed sentinel at our chamber door so that no one might disturb the sanctity of our chamber and steal our jewels and precious stones. Our guard had thus far treated us kindly, and we began to think that the stories of Rebel cruelty had no foundation. We were to drink the cup of our captivity to the bitter dregs, and learn the inhumanity of man to man.We soon found that every time we changed guards the last ones were just a shade meaner than their predecessors, and ignorant in the same ratio. Twenty-one miles from Alexandria,La., we changed guards and were put aboard flat cars drawn by a leaky, wheezy old locomotive on what was called the Molasses railroad. owned by three planters, and built by them to transport sugar, cotton and molasses to Alexandria for shipment down the Red River. It was the slowest traveling we ever experienced, but we were in no hurry, and were traveling through the most delightful country we had ever seen, we tried to be reconciled; although we were

in danger of being wrecked by a two year old steer that came running up behind us. We knew our engine was doing its level best to keep out of the way, yet if that steer had made a"spurt" it would have run over us and hurt somebody, for there was no " steer-catcher" on the rear end of the train to prevent such accidents. But a kind Providence was watching over us, so we steer-ed clear and reached Alexandria in safety. Upon our arrival we were marched to the Court House, where we were shut up in one room about 25 by 40 feet, and as there were a few prisoners already there, so that we were huddled together like sheep, locomotion was next to impossible. We had some hopes that this would be the end of our journey, and that we would be exchanged for some of the Vicksburg prisoners; but next morning we heard the old command"fall in"! and we were soon on our way to Shreveport.

IV.

On leaving Alexandria,La., we left behind us plantations of cane and cotton, with their neat negro quarters and large, well arranged

sugar houses and cotton gins, and the elegant mansions of the then wealthy planters, and were soon traveling over heavily pine timbered ridges, our feet pressing the dry, velvet like pine needles, and inflating our lungs with the pure air that came soughing through the forest like the northwest wind whistling through the cracks of a rail corn-crib. If we had been traveling through that country as a tourist, at our own leisure, we should have enjoyed it immensely; but as we were the guests of the "Johnnies",and they seemed to be in a hurry, our modesty-and the bayonets at our side-forbade us lingering by the wayside, so we trudged along in silence, as our hosts were not inclined to talk much; in fact they were about as stolid as a wooden Indian,and joke would penetrate their skulls about as quickly as a fish ball would plate armor. Their whole minds appeared to be concentrated upon us, for fear that we might get lost or spirited away. We would hear the order every few minutes during the day,"youns close up thar". The day passed, and we went into camp at night and partook of our mush and creek water. We then prepared for our night's rest, or unrest whichever it should prove to be; but as the weather at this time was warm and

pleasant, and we had become somewhat case-hardened we usually slept soundly, and awoke with appetites keen as a cross-cut saw, yet as our breakfast was smaller than our appetites, we always felt like one or the other of these were not mates. If we could have got them both of the same size, or could have had a change of diet once in a while, we would have been more reconciled to our lot; but it was corn meal and little of that until we reached Natchitoches, where laying over Sunday for one good day's rest, we received corn meal and beef. The beef was good, and a surprise to our stomachs. After leaving Natchitoches our rations were a little better in quality and quantity. Our road still lay through the pine timber,- houses were scarce, and towns more so.

We passed through Pleasant Hill, the place that was soon to witness the defeat of Gen. Banks in his Red River campaign and which meant defeat for Gen. Steel who was marching on Shreveport, from Arkansas, and added thousands more to the prison pen at Tyler, Texas.

The next point passed by us was Carroll's Mills' then on to Mansfield, where we were treated to sweet potatoes by a Union Planter, and visited by all the young ladies attending the high school at that place.

Here also, we received our first challenge for a fight, by a little shaver some twelve years old. He came struting up and wanted to know if we had any little yankee boy with us that would fight him. We had one, Tow Langford, of Company H. He stood six feet seven inches in his stockings, and when he stepped out the little Secesh took one look, said"good God";and struck a bee line for home the worst scared boy you ever saw. We regretted to leave Mansfield, for we had found there hearts that beat true for the union, and friends that would have aided us to escape from our captors had they been given the chance to have done so; but next morning we started on our weary way towards Shreveport, at at which place we were placed on the side of a hill overlooking the town and had nothing to eat for nearly twenty-four hours after getting there, although we had made a hard days march before reaching there; cake and pie butchers, and pedlers of eatables of all kinds swarmed around us, eager to trade for trinkets or sell for cash; and we parted with anything that would secure food to satisfy the cravings of our stomachs. This we were compelled to do though we were within a stone's throw of ton's of army stores, that we, as prisoners of war, had a

right to expect a part would be given us to satisfy our present wants; but it was withheld from us for a whole day.

V.

We left our camp on the hill at Shreveport late in the afternoon, and were marched out on the Tyler road a short distance, halted, came to a front face, and received our orders from the worst specimen of humanity it was ever our luck to encounter. He was a Captain in the batallion of Red River steamboatmen, and could outswear Satan. We have never seen a man since that we thought was as repulsive looking as this man was. He was not cross-eyed or cock-eyed. He never looked the same way with both eyes. I cant say what was the matter, but think his Mother put him too near the fire when he was young and his eyes warped; not only his eyes bent but his whole anatomy and nature must have received an undue seasoning, from the way he talked and glard at us. After easing his safety valve of its superfluous gas, he ordered us into camp, and we were soon wrestling with the old problem of making

one feed take the place of two hungers; but it can't be done with any degree of satisfaction; if you dont believe it, try it, as we did. After death, the judgment; so with us, after supper then the discussion as to our future destination and prospects. We no longer had any doubts of our future home, as we had learned that evening, from our host of the handsome eyes, that "weuns was goin to Tyler, and was goin to stay thar"; and as we had already heard and read of southern prison pens we of course exchanged opinions of and speculated on our chances of escape or exchange by our government- or by that King of Terrors,Death. Thus we whiled away the hours until tired nature demanded rest, and as our bed was always ready, we tumbled back, with feet to the fire, and were soon in the land of dreams. Morning found us as usual, ready for any fare that our hosts might, in the kindness or unkindness of their hearts, be pleased to set before us, after which we fell into line, and were soon leaving the dust of the city behind us, and every step bringing us nearer our final home in rebeldom. Our marches from Shreveport to Tyler,Texas, averaged twenty-eight miles a day. We passed through but three towns on the march of 128 miles. Greenwood, the first town,

was a mere collection of huts; Marshall, Texas, the next point, was quite a handsome town, and is now a place of some importance. Our next place" took the cake", both for appearance and cognomen, it bearing the high-sounding name of "Steal Easy". You may know by the name that it is in Texas and the name may be the reason for the scarcity of inhabitants, as we only saw one family as we silently stole through it, the rest of the population like the Arab, had silently stole away- and stole every thing else they could carry. We have never heard from it since we last saw it, but we are sure it has never achieved greatness, nor is there any probability that there is any vast business carried on there: if the town is still carrying its name, it has load enough, and also has our sympathies.

Once more in camp, and the morrow finds us on our last day's march. A few more miles and our eyes will rest on what is to be our home for weary months, and where we are to witness scenes that will make us heart sick, and wonder if there is a hell any worse than the one we are in, and if so will all rebels get there and be given good front seats next to the fire, where all things are lovely and the goose hangs high.

VI.

On our arrival at Tyler, Texas, or more properly speaking at Camp Ford, which is four miles east of Tyler, we found instead of a gloomy prison house, a few acres of cleared ground on the hill side, a good-sized log house, good spring of water, and about fifty prisoners. This was to be our home, and we were already assured of one thing, that we were to have plenty of fresh air, as the prospects were that we would be out of doors; consequently would have a well ventilated bed-room. There was nothing there to remind one of a prison, or a bar to liberty, except the guard line that surround-d us. The quarters of the guards, and the headquarters of Col,Allen, the commander of the camp, were situated on the hill south of the camp. The camp was surrounded by dense forests, principally pine, which gave promise of warm fires through the winter months. It was now the middle of October, and cool for that latitude, and as we had no blankets or shelter of any kind and were thinly clad, we knew that we would need rousing fires to keep our blood in circulation. The first three days of our prison life in Camp Ford will

always be remembered as the dark days of our life. For seventy-two hours we watched and waited on that hillside for food to satisfy the cravings of our stomachs. At last we heard the glad shout," here comes the rations!"

Now, dear reader, don't imagine that they were preparing a barbecue for us. No, it was ten day's rations of raw meat and corn meal; no place to put it, or any utensils in which to cook in, excepting our old friend the quart cup; and as we had not tasted food for three days, we went to work with such good will to make up for lost time that our ten days' rations only lasted seven, and we were compelled to wait and live on wind pudding three days more. After that our rations were issued to us every day. They consisted of one pint of raw meal and two ounces of beef for each man.

McElroy, in his history of Andersonville prison life, says he never saw a pint of bolted meal in the southern Confederacy. Well we must have fared better than other prisoners, as our meal was bolted. It was ground up corn,cob,husk and silk, and then bolted through a staked and ridered fence. We know that the splinters on the rails caught some

of the husk, for we had seen it sticking to them, on our march, but did not know the reason for it until we got to Tyler-"give the Devil his due," even in such small matters.

If we could have been sheltered from the cold our meal and beef would have been some nourishment to us; but we were compelled to lie upon the bare ground without covering, or stand shivering around the fire warming one side at a time. I tried sleeping in a standing position once, but the experiment was not a success. I fell in the fire and burnt the frontispiece out of my shirt; after saving the balance of it I turned my back to the fire and went to sleep again; fell into the fire backwards, burnt the back out of my shirt and two area windows in the basement of my breeches, and did not wake any too soon, for there was a splendid prospect of a Yankee illumination. I guess the "Johnnies" thought I was a torch light procession with a full band attachment. Next morning when I took an inventory of my wearing apparel, I wondered when we three would meet again-myself, my shirt, and my breeches. I was in a worse fix than old Father Adam when the fig harvest was past and the leaves lay withered and dead, and there was nothing to do but grin

and bare it. I done the baring and the other boys done the grinning. The most of my promenading after that was done in the still and silent watches of the night, until the novelty of my costume had worn off and I had outgrown my native modesty. We had nothing with which to patch clothes, and as we did not know how long we would be prisoners, the loss of clothes was serious matter with us- as we learned to our cost some months later when we were turned loose, with hardly clothing enough on us to hide our nakedness. But as we have more to write of our prison life we will speak further of this in our next.

VII.

While we were studying on the chance of the clothes business, Col. Allen, the commander of the camp, came in and told us that we might build log cabins for shelter if we would carry the logs from a certain portion of the forrest, which was about one-half or three-quatters of

a mile distant. This news was received with joy, and we immediately commenced to put the order into execution. We were allowed to go out, giving our parole of honor that we would not try to escape while at work in the timber, and soon-under willing hands- the young pine trees were transformed into comfortable cabins of a primitive style of architecture, roofed with the old fashioned clapboard held on by weight poles. The mud and stick chimney and fire place occupied its accustomed position, and smoked with its old time persistency. Still when we moved into them we felt as proud as a real estate agent, despite the smoke and many other draw backs, and after we were forced to leave them we wished many times for our cabin under the hill. While building our cabins the rebel authorities seemed to get it through their wool, that as we were energetic it would be easier to keep us if we were penned; so one morning we awoke to find 100 or more negroes busy at work digging a trench around us, and cutting down large pine trees that grew around the camp.The trees were cut off in lengths of twelve feet or more, split in halves and placed on end in the trench, side by side, leaving eight or nine feet above ground. The guards paced around on the

outside upon an embankment high enough for them to see all on the inside of the pen. While this work was going on Col.Allen thought he would need an extra guard, as we might conclude to make a break for liberty before it was completed, and at his request the men at work in the Tyler Arsenal, to the number of seventy-five were sent out to help guard us. Among them was a fellow named Smith. He made his boast when he loaded his gun at Tyler that he would kill a Yankee with that bullet before night, and he kept his promise. He killed Thomas Morehead, of the 26th Indiana and wounded one of the 19th Iowa. This was a wanton and cold-blooded murder, for the man was more than ten paces from the dead line when ordered back. He turned and was walking away when this cowardly devil shot him through the back. Col.Allen ordered him under arrest and sent back to Tyler, but there was never anything done with him except to give him a Captain's Commision for his bravery. This was the first death among us, and the brutality of it was not calculated to inspire us with any great amount of love or respect for the man who committed the act, or for the government that would uphold such anact.

After the stockade was finished Col.Allen came inside and staked

off a dead line ten feet from the fence, and told us that if we stepped over that the guard would fire on us. He stated that the order came from Kirby Smith, the department commander, and he must obey them, although it went against his humanity to do so; and we think he was sincere for he had seen service at the front, and knew something of the horrors of war. Thus far his treatment of us seemed to be prompted by a desire to make our sufferings as light as possible; and compared to the treatmant we received after he left us, and we fell into the hands of the gold-laced home guards, his was humane in comparison. After our cabins and the stockade was finished, time began to drag heavily with us as there was nothing to do but pace the ground from morning until night and listen to the stories of exchange that the Rebels seemed to take delight in manufacturing for our benefit. One morning seeing a squad of prisoners collected on the hill above our cabin, we wandered that way and found that one of the 26th Indiana had been bitten the night before by a tarantula. While they were discussing what would be best to do, some of the guards came in to see the cause of such a commotion. When they saw the man they told him his hours were numbered, as there was

nothing that could save him. Before night he was a blackened corpse, and was No.2 on our death list. We had not as yet become the hardened and unfeeling men that a few month's imprisonment is sure to make, so we looked on the face of our dead comrade with that feeling that death, under all circumstances creates in the breast of humanity; but we soon became accustomed to such sights, and if we gave it a thought it was to wonder if our turn would come next. We thought we stood a good chance, as that scourge of the prison-pen-chronic diarrhoea-had taken a pretty firm hold, and was fast reducing an not over robust frame; and added to this a severe cold(caused by lack of clothing), we believed our chance for crossing the dark river was first class. We think our disposition to do or say something to raise a laugh was all that pulled me through. If we had lain down and given up, we could have grunted ourself into the sweet subsequently in a very short time; but like our flag, we still wave.

One cold day in November, Col Leake gave us a pair of pants that some rebel had sent in. They had already seen and done good service. Originally they were built for some boy of fifteen summers, and were plentifully patched. We proceeded to climb into them, which was not an

easy job but was finally accomplished, and in this day would have passed for a first class dude, as far as a tight fit was concerned. It took two comrades to lay me down and take me up, to prevent a rupture of my costume. When we wanted to sit down we leaned up against something and slid down, easy like. They were knee-breeches. At least that is as far as they would go, and they were cut too low in the neck; but as half a loaf is better than no bread, we felt as proud as if we had found a ripe egg in our pocket. But we were still bare foot, and no prospect for shoes. Snow and sleet began to fall, and with it came an order for the 19th and 26th to go to headquarters and sign paroles for exchange. This was good news for us. We thought we would soon bid farewell to prison life, and return once more to God's country, where flowed coffee and hard tack.

VIII.

After signing the parole we were ordered to be ready to march by ten o'clock next morning. There was little sleeping done that night,

each one was busy with his thoughts, and was not inclined to talk much. We all felt too full for utterance: not full of grub, but of joy that we were going to leave the stockade behind us, as we thought, forever. Morning found us up bright an early, anxious to be on the road. At eleven o'clock we marched out of the prison pen, bidding the other prisoners good-bye. The sky was overcast with clouds, and the ground covered with snow and sleet that cut our bare feet at every step, and left a trail of blood to mark our day's march. We thought we had already seen hard times and hard treatment; but that day's march taught us that we were just learning the first rudiments of rebel cruelty, from one who seemed to be a graduate of the Devil's own school-a fit tool of Gen. Winders, and a companion piece to Wuz the terror of Andersonville. The name of Capt.Alford will never be forgotten by the prisoners of Tyler, Texas,- never at least by the 19th Iowa. He was a young man, and his holding a captain's commision in the rebel army gave him, in his own estimation, unbounded authority to practise the cruelties that are the inherent qualities of such little natures as his. He was an arrant coward, as well as cruel, which made him more contempt-

ible in our sight than he would otherwise have been.

Our first day's march, or rather our first days run, ended at the Sabine river, a distance of twenty-five miles, made between eleven o' clock A.M. and five P.M. No rest or straggling was allowed on the march. Our guard were mounted men, and most of the time they went in a slow trot, and we were expected and compelled to keep up, or failing to do so we were helped by a lariat looped around the neck and the other end fast to the pommel of Alford's saddle- it was keep up or choke to death. Nothing but the hope of soon seeing the starry banner kept the life in hundreds of men that day. We believe that if we could have known what was set in store for us in the months to come we would have given up and let the tyrant done his worst. It would only have been death, and that would be a rest and relief to us, and furnish a few more silent witnesses against the cause that allowed its soldiers to maltreat unarmed men. Our camp that night was in the woods bordering on the Sabine river. We were allowed to build good big fires to keep us warm, which was more than we expected, from what we had learned of our commander that day. We sat around our fires the most woe-be-gone set of men it

has ever been our misfortune to look upon. After being cooped up in camp for weeks and then make a march of twenty-five miles in six hours, barefooted over snow and ice was enough to kill hearty, well-fed men; yet we, a sickly,half-starved body of men, did it, and there is not one of that number living today but what still feels the effect of that march, and the subsequent we received while in rebel prison. We knew men that contracted disease from over exertion on that march that are today lying in southern graves, far from home and friends, who might now be in the land of the living were it not for the fact that they were once under the control of the black hearted Alford, and were compelled to endure fatigue and indignities such as no other civilized people ever experienced.

It was a sight to see the command getting ready for the second day's march. It was truly a mustering of cripples; not one man of the number could stand erect, but all went bent and hobbling into ranks,and when the command "forward march!" was given, we went re-ling and stumbling forward like an army of drunkards. Every step was one of pain to us and a seeming pleasure to our cruel commander. This day's march was

a repetition of the first with this difference, that it was a few miles shorter, giving us a few more hours to rest in camp and prepare for the night's comfort. Morning found us in better condition for the march, and as we became limbered up it was evident that Alford had found some Yankees that could march as well as fight. This day's march was an uneventful one, and was ended without any fresh display of temper on the part of Alford or his men. We thought the morrow's march would end in Shreveport, and then we would be rid of his hateful presence forever. But,alas, "there is many a slip betwixt cup and lip." Instead of going through Shreveport we turned off near Greenwood, and marched ten miles south-east of the city, and went into"Camp Paole", which looked to us like a continuation of our prison life, instead of exchange. There were two long open barracks there, one of them occupied by rebel troops. As we passed in some"Johnnie" asked "what regiment is that?" The answer went back, the 19th Iowa. The shout came back from the "Johnnies","You are bully boys. You fed us at Vicksburg." And so it was. We found the regiment of rebels there that we had fed at Vicksburg."Cast thy bread upon the waters, and after many days it shall be returned unto you". We

found this to be true, for while with this regiment for two weeks at "Camp Parole" we lived on the fat of the land. What they had was divided with us, and we were sorry when they left us, for then our misery began anew. We had learned by this time that our exchange was all a myth, and the day of deliverance an unknown quantity.

IX.

It was dark when we entered the barracks at Camp Parole, and having no light nor any fire, we could not tell how our future home looked; in fact we were so nearly worn out by disease and fatigue that we cared very little for our surroundings. Our experience, thus far, had taught us that we must be content with what-so-ever should fall to our lot, knowing that we were not likely to become pampered children of luxury while inmates of southern prison pens; so stretching out on the bare floor, tired and hungry, we tried to forget our condition by wooing the

drowsy god Morpheus, and were soon wrapped in his embrace free from present care. In that dreamland we were once more free and under the starry banner, surrounded by all that could please the eye or tempt the apepetite; but while the brain was thus busy telegraphing these pleasant sensations, the biting December winds were whistling around and over us, sending counter currents that chilled the life blood within us, soon brought us back to a realization of our condition, and banished sleep for the rest of that long night. When morning at length came, we were glad to get up and take an inventory of our quarters. We found the building or rather shed, to be eighty feet in length by twenty in width. The cracks in it were all stopped up, except those we could crawl through; we suppose they were left to filter the air, or possibly sift our corn meal through. Over five hundred men had found a night's lodging in it. Crowded? Oh,no! It was like an omnibus, always room for one more. As we thought of our first night there, and the prospects of many more such, our hearts failed us, and the grim specter death loomed up before us, and seemed beckoning us to join his ever swelling ranks. But the coming of our Vicksburg friends with something to satisfy the inner man

dispelled our gloomy forebodings, and as we swallowed the breakfast they prepared for us we thought we would "bluff" old death for a time, and try and "rake in the pot on a bobtail flush."

After breakfast Col.Theord, a Frenchman,commander of the camp, came in and gave the order for us to fall into line, as he wished to say a few words to us. He informed us that as there was some difficulty in regard to the exchange, we would probably have to remain in our present quarters for a week and perhaps longer; but he assured us that we would soon be exchanged, and in order to make our stay with him as pleasant as possible, he said we would be allowed to go any place within a radius of three miles from camp, on our parole of honor. He also promised us that he would try and get clothing and shoes issued to us. He made the requisition, but only succeeded in getting a few pairs of shoes. Kirby Smith, the commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, informed him that the clothing was all needed for his own troops,and had nothing for the Yankees; if he fed us that was all we must expect. Be it said to the honor of Col.Theord, while in command of the camp, that we received more and better rations, and humane treatment. He was

a man, and a gentleman, and recognized us as such, and left nothing undone that would conduce to our comfort. We have no doubt that many now living of that prison band owe their lives to his kindness, and forethought of that French colonel.

As we said before the barracks was a very shabby affair- no place to build fires except by tearing up the floor and building them on the ground, which we did, and thus secured a little warmth for our bodies, at the expense of our eyes and lungs. Coughs and sore eyes soon made their appearance to such an extent that our ranks soon gave proof that unless relief was soon afforded, there would be none left to exchange. Col. Theord said he could not sleep at night when he knew that brave men were suffering as we were, and if there was any justice for us he would get it. He represented our condition to Kirby Smith, and got permission to build us comfortable quarters. The Colonel furnished us with axes, and we were soon at work at our old trade of cabin building. The old barracks were torn down and the boards divided among us for floors, roofs and bunks, of our cabins- which we made better than the old ones we had left at Tyler, as we had become more experienced builders, and

had better learned to provide for our comfort. Our fireplaces and chimneys were built on more scientific principles, and as we had an abundance of white ash timber, we made roaring fires and were once more to satisfy our hunger; but this latter was at the expense of the "Johnnies." Our extra rations consisted of parched corn. We would go out after wood just before dark, and as we came back through the corral, we would steal the corn from the feed boxes. In this way Company"I" managed to get six or eight bushels of corn which we hid under the floor of our cabin. We are sorry to say that many a night several poor horses went supperless; but we thought the end justified the means. Like all pilferers we became too bold, were caught, and our parched corn evenings came to a sudden ending.

Soon after this Col. Theord was ordered to his command east of the Mississippi. He came in and requested as many of the prisoners as felt disposed to sign a petition to our authorities, in his favor, stating that he had treated us as men. His object was to leave the confederate service and settle down in New Orleans, swear allegiance to the flag of the Union, and become to all intents and purposes a loyal citizen.

We were both sorry and glad to see him leave; sorry that we were losing a friend, but glad that he would leave the rebel service and become a loyal citizen. On leaving us he introduced his successor, a portly, pompous rebel of the fire-eating type, who informed us that we would be treated well and given all the privileges that we had enjoyed under his predecessor: yet in less than twenty-four hours he revoked our paroles and reduced our rations.

X.

The cancelling of our paroles by "Old Pussy" was only a foretaste of what he could and would do to show us that we were still prisoners in rebel hands, and in a manner helpless. But as the chains of our confinement were tightened, our longing for freedom increased; and there being no stockade to bar our liberty, plans for escape were daily and hourly discussed, and nearly every dark night some one, or more tried

running the guard line,striking out for liberty and the Union lines; but before noon of the next day the ever ready bloodhounds would be yelping along the trail, and in forty-eight hours from the time of leaving, the runaways would be back in the old quarters, ready after a few days rest to try the same plan again. On such occasions,"Old Pussy", our commander, would compel the remaining prisoners to stand in line for hours without food or drink, simply because some of our comrades chose to attempt to make their escape. His excuse for punishing us was that we were all concerned in hatching the plots, and must suffer with the real culprits. As a natural consequence the more vigorous the punishment, the more frequent and daring the plans for escape; but of the hundreds that made the attempt, only six men succedded in reaching the Union lines, after a perilous tramp of over six weeks duration. We stood in line a good while awaiting those six men to be brought back. As the hours lengthened it finally dawned upon the muddled brain of "Old Pussy" that they were gone for good, and we were ordered to quarters. The hunters and hounds came in next day, jaded and baffled, and we knew

that the six were safe for the present, and we though their escape would be an excuse for some new torture, on the slightest pretence.

Nor were we deceived. Bucking and gagging,hanging by the thumbs and shooting through the camp were some of the new devices; but all failed to outwit Yankee ingenuity or curb the longing for liberty. We had been regaled day after day, for weeks, with tales of exchange until they had become stale and commonplace. Our confidence in rebel promises had sunk to a very low ebb, and our health, stomach and clothing had kept pace with our confidence.

It seemed that our rations could get no less, or poorer, than they were at this time. Our beef was as poor as a contribution box. The meal contained less corn and more husk, and as the winter months neared their end, our bones began to show more plainly under our skin. The only fat thing about us was the body lice. They managed to keep fat, be lively and multiply at an astonishingly low rate; often as we gazed on their ample proportions we thought that they must belong to the bloated aristocracy. How we envied them their plumpness, and at the same time

detested their loathsome presence. Like misery, they loved company, and as we had no means of extermination, we were forced to put up with them until we reached God's country- if that time was ever to come, which we then thought doubtful, although the rumors were then flying thick and fast in regard to exchange. As there seemed to be an unusual stir among the "Johnnies" at this time, we thought there might be something in it. Seeing a crowd around one of the guards that had come inside the lines, we went to hear the news; but instead of news he was peddling lard by the gourd full. Having three gourds he could only hold two at a time, and while dickering for a sale he placed one gourd between his feet, and being a fleshy man he could not see it except by stooping over. Taking advantage of this fact, Geo.P.Stevens quietly relieved him of it and made good his escape. We were not slow to inform the "Johnnie" of his loss, after we knew the lard was in a safe place. There was where our fun came in. Did he swear? Well we rather think he is cussing yet. He got so mad he would not sell the lard he had left. He would not let his lard limber up any cussed Yankee. He was going to take it back home for the old woman to sleek up johnny-cakes. Yum,yum! Didn't that lard

make our corn dodger slip down easy. If we could have had another gourdful we believe we could have slipped out of the confederacy.

A few days after this we were ordered to be ready to march. We knew that it meant Tyler again, as Banks was getting ready for his Red River campaign; so we were again on the old road under our old enemy Capt. Alford, of lariat fame. It was now the month of March and warm weather- in fact as hot as June at the north, with water scarce and dust deep. We knew that our sufferings would be as great or greater than our Northern tramp. On this march Alford ordered his men to ride up the brooks we crossed in order to give us muddy water to drink. On one day's march, after crossing a stream of clear water, instead of halting for a drink, he marched us three miles further to a stagnant pool covered with green scum, and full of snakes, frogs and tad-poles. We were famishing for water and were compelled to drink that filthy stuff. Some of the men drank so much that they were unable to march. One man fainted and the brute Alford dragged him by the neck and then shot him; but failing to kill him, he compelled his negro servant to beat the man's brains out with a club. Should any of the readers doubt

this we will say here that we can prove the circumstance, although twenty-one years have elapsed since the occurance. Two day's march found us back in the old pen, with our old miseries increased and new ones creeping on.

XI.

On our second entrance to Tyler, we found some changes. Col.Allen, the old commander of the prison had been superceded by Col.Borden, another fire-eating rebel. We also found our cabins occupied by other prisoners, and we were again compelled for a time, to go wothout shelter but as the weather was warm we did not suffer as we had done on a former introduction to the pen, but we soon found that we were required shelter to protect us from heat as well as cold: so with brush, sticks or anything that could be utilized, we managed to get shelter from the sun and were contented until the rain came,and then we were about as miserable, low-spirited and discontented as we could well be. Our condition did not seem to have any effect on Col. Borden. He did not care

for our welfare. If we died, we would not require any food or be any trouble to guard, and as the whole system of rebel prisons were based on the one object of reducing Union prisoners by ill-treatment and disease to a condition that would unfit them for service when exchanged. Boden was only carrying out the programme laid down by his superiors, and he was by nature fitted for any cruel or contemptible task set for him to acoomplish. He was ably seconded,by his adjutant,Lieut,McCann. We say seconded, but we would be nearer the truth to say that McCann excelled his chief in expedients, but lacked the nerve to carry them out single-handed. He always came inside the stockade with a cocked revolver in his hand, and a body guard of "Johnnies" with fixed bayonets. He always seemed to be in a hurry to get back to Headquarters; and in truth that was the safest place for him. The prisoners, to a man hated him, and would have put him out of the way if it could have been done with any degree of safety, but we knew that his death would be fearfully revenged- the innocent would suffer with the guilty, and there would be nothing gained. We suffered in patience as the weeks rolled by, waiting for the exchange that was always promised, but which seemed never to come; and as we looked at the mounds that were constantly growing on

the western hillside, we thought that would be the final exchange of all if we were compelled to endure our hardships much longer.

Every cloud has its silver lining and so we found when we were ready to give up we were cheered by the order to march out for exchange. When we see that our officers are going with us this time, we begin to think that the day of jubilee has indeed come; and when we find that Alford is not to be in command, we feel like shouting glory, glory, as we bid goodbye to the stockade for the second time. Our march has commenced, and we find that Col.Leake is giving us many favors, and making our march light and easy. Night finds us in a pleasant camp and not much fatigued, but ready for a good night's sleep. Up in the morning and away on another day's march towards"God's country", as we supposed, but on reaching Marshall,Texas, we are ordered into camp for two or three day's rest, which lengthened into weeks, and still no move or reason given for the delay. While here we saw prisoners passing on their way to Tyler, and knew that Banks and Steel had both been defeated, and were contributing their quota to swell the ranks at the Stockade, and furnish material for fresh mounds on the hillside. When the last Regiment of Banks and Steel had been driven back, and the Red River exped-

ition was a thing of the past , we were again faced toward Tyler, and took up our weary march once more to what seemed to us a certain death.

The weather was now fearfully hot, and we knew that the prison pen would be crowded by the accessions it had received in the past few weeks, and as we were hearly naked and run down with disease, we had reasons to dread another confinement in that pest-hole. On our arrival at the stockade our worst fears were realized. At the gate we found a constantly diminishing pile of rough pine coffins constantly replenished; inside we found about six thousand men of all ages- from well dressed to ragged. We were marched to the north-east corner of the stockade- the only vacant ground in the enclosure and so near the sinks that the stench was stifling- the ground was covered with maggots, and lice, and these were to be our neighbors, and this place our home perhaps for months to come. God knows that it required a strong heart to live and endure through all those months of pain and suffering. Yet while many did live to be restored to home, there were hundreds more, brave, stout-hearted men, breathed their last in the fetid atmosphere of Camp Ford, and now lay buried in unknown graves. Peace be to their ashes.

XII.

We found many changes had taken place at the prison pen during our stay at Marshall, and all for the worse. We had long since ceased to expect any good of our captors, so we were not greatly disappointed on our third introduction to the pen, to find matters worse. We occupied the space alloted to us, and awaited future developments, the experiences of the past having taught us not to expect food for at least thirty-six hours, and we were not disappointed. "Borden" had no intention of fattening the prisoners placed in his charge. Perhaps he did not like the idea of seeing us" fat, ragged and saucy." We were ragged enough, and if we could have procured food by being saucy we would not have hesitaited picking a fight with a two horse wagon.

After fasting our alloted time we drew our ration of meal and raw beef, but had no wood given us to cook with; and had not the other prisoners kindly divided with us, we would have been in a sorry plight. This was a new experience to us; we had heretofore been well supplied with wood, and could see no just cause for it being withheld, as there

were hundreds of acres of timber all around us, and we were willing to cut and carry it, but "Borden" refused to let us go out under guard, or on parole. For two weeks we lay on the hot sand under a burning sun,not even a bush left to shade us, and no wood with which to cook our miserable ration except roots and chips that we picked up in camp. Our squad finally succeeded in getting out for half an hour, and secured a supply of wood, and brush enough to make a shelter to shield us from the sun. This was some comfort, but it did not lessen the plague of lice and maggots, or subdue the horrible stench of the sinks.Is it any wonder that men under such conditions acted like wild beasts, and became imbued with beastly instincts. We have seen men that would wallow in the dirt, howl and snap at their comrades like a mad dog, until death, either natural or by a rebel bullet, ended their sufferings. McCann came in one day and ordered the prisoners to be inoculated. He said small-pox was making its appearance among the guards, and they wished to prevent its spreading in the stockade. A great many of the prisoners submitted, but instead of healthy virus the foul leprosy of sin, which soon became putrid, cankerous sores, filled with maggots that slowly

but surely sapped their life blood. If this had been done through ignorance we could forgive our tormentors; but as McCann and his satellites boasted of the misery they caused we would be more than human did we forget or forgive. Many of the cruelties that we endured we can forgive, and would like to forget; but that one act never will be forgotten, or forgiven.

McCann's next move was to post up notices inside the stockade, warning the prisoners that any one making his escape from the pen, and being recaptured, would be publicly shot, or torn to pieces by the blood hounds. Col.Leake went over to headquarters and notified "Borden" that unless those notices were torn down and the order revoked he would notify our government, as he had means of communication and could get word through inside of two weeks. This weakened the rebel backbone to such a degree, than in less than half an hour McCann came sneaking in and tore off the notices. He took the jeers and yells of the prisoners with a very bad grace, and was for once thoroughly cowed. He and Borden thought we were committing a crime in trying to regain our liberty. It was their place to prevent our escape by military and humane means, and our privelege to escape, if we could; but escape was almost

impossible, and very few ever succeeded, although the attempt was constantly being made in some form- if one plan failed another was tried. Some of the plans adopted were novel and amusing as well as hazardous. We call to mind the escape of two men that was successfully executed. At Col.Leake's request, "Boden" furnished mules and carts to haul the dirt and filth out of the stockade; which was accumulating at a fearful rate. We prisoners would pile up the dirt and throw it into the carts until full, then dive out, empty, and return for another load. In this manner we succeeded in keeping the filth down to a minimum, until those two men conceived the plan of laying in the bottom of the carts, and were covered over with the filth until the carts,heaping full, were driven out and dumped in the hollow, men and filth together. They succeeded in making their escape, but as the means was discovered it put an end to cleaning in the camp. Another man played dead and the boys buried him just at sundown. That night he arose and departed leaving behind an empty coffin in a very shallow grave. There were no more hasty funerals after that; we were compelled to devise new ways of escape or wait for exchange.

XIII.

The month of June came in hot, and found us in poor health, clothes and pocket. We had disposed of all our money, trinkets, pocket-knives and in fact all that we possessed, in order to get extra and better food than the prison commisary issued us. Our clothes had slowly frayed away until they were mere rags, and it was only a question of time, and short at that, when we would be called upon to part with them, and make our appearance clothed as our first parents, barring the "fig leaves". But this troubled us very little. We had been verging on nakedness so long that we had in a manner become "case-hardened". Our only desire was to keep the breath of life in our bodies; we did not relish the idea of occupying any space under "Texas soil". We had felt and seen enough of the top side to satisfy our curiosity for the term of our natural lives. It is said that necessity is the mother of invention. If so, the prisoners at Camp Ford must have been old invention's father, judging by the number of schemes invented by them for obtaining food, tobacco, or any article of merchandise that the "Johnnies" offered for

trade. One staple article of Yankee manufacture in the prison pen was gutta percha rings. The raw material was found in abundance at the slaughter pen, a few hundred yards outside the stockade. The detail of prisoners that was sent out every day to help bring in the beef would bring in as many black tipped horns as they could carry, and from these were manufactured rings of different sizes and designs, and when well polished, sold for prices ranging from $5 to $25 in confederate money. The "Johnnies" bought them, thinking they were the genuine article, and did not learn any better until they had invested a few thousand dollars buying them. Then rings became a drug in the confederate market, which forced us to the wall again until we could rally on some new scheme to dupe our guards. While our financial plans were maturing, the "Johnnies" thought they would try a hand at Yankee tricks. They had been selling twist tobacco to us at the rate of $1 per twist, and in order to get even on the ring game they wrapped up a whisp of hay in a tobacco leaf and sold it at the same old price. This was the only time we ever chewed high priced tobacco- one dollar a chew. It was too rich for our blood, and we never invested any more confederate bonds in the tobacco

market, but we had the satisfaction of getting even on Yankee tricks in this wise: Among the gun boatmen in the prison, there was a baker who had a supply of flour,ginger and molasses, that he bought of the rebel sutler. He first collected a quantity of thin pine chips, encased a chip in each layer of ginger dough, baked them nicely, went up to the north gate and sold the whole lot to a "Johnnie" who was in the peddling business among the guards. The first rebel that tried the cakes thought he had struck hard pan; but when he found he had lost no teeth he said 'by gosh, boys, that beats the hay trick'. They never had a desire after that to try any other games, so we had it all our own way, and swindled them upon all occasions. This was all the bright side there was in our prison life, if bright it can be called; all such little incidents diverted our minds from the misery that surrounded us, and gave us new hope that we would live through our imprisonment. We needed and longed for excitement. Anything, however trivial it might be that would divert us from or cause us to forget our own or others' suffering, we endeavored to make most of it. We were indeed a selfish set, but not from choice. Our manner of living, the treatment we received, our general

surroundings, and the hopes long deferred were enough to almost make one forget country and kindred. Truly, man's inhumanity to man has made countless thousands mourn.

In imagination we often stand on the old prison ground, and see living skeletons covered with rags and vermin, and hear them cry,"Oh God! How long must we yet endure this terrible captivity, will this inhumanity never cease, are we to be starved and killed by inches to satisfy the malice of men worse than devils?" This picture could be seen every day at Camp Ford, in ten times more vivid colors than the liveliest imagination could ever conceive of. It is a phase of life that must be seen, as it cannot be properly described and no pen can record all the woes and misery that men were called upon to endure in the prison pens of the confederacy.

June was drawing to a close, and the inmates of Camp Ford, especially we older prisoners were being rapidly reduced by disease. We had heard no rumors of exchange for some time. Black despair had settled over our hearts, and we were waiting for the grim specter to give us our final discharge. We had come to look upon death in any form as being

more humane than our jailors. We were convinced, in our own minds, that in that undiscovered country we could not strike a worse hell than the one we had occupied in Texas.

XIV.

July came in hot, dry and dusty, increasing disease and the number of deaths to an alarming extent. This, combined with poor shelter, food and the inhuman indifference of our jailers had a depressing influence upon those of the prisoners that were still able to swallow the morsel of corn that constituted the day's rations. The sick, though nearly starving, loathed the miserable food issued to them- the stomach would reject it almost as soon as received, leaving the body in a more feeble condition, and less able to withstand future inroads of disease. We were all more low-spirited now than usual. We had heard no reliable news of exchange for some time, or in fact any news of what was going on in the outside world. We were to all intents and purposes dead to all mankind, except those immediately surrounding us; like a caged bird

we would look a short distance beyond our prison and see the little world of freedom around us, but we were not permitted to enter that world, nor enjoy the freedom of it. "Liberty!" How that one word sends a thrill of joy through every fiber of the body and awakes a patriotism in the breast of every American citizen. Rob us of our liberty and life is not worth the living. There is no punishment that can be inflicted that is worse than captivity. The wearing away of the body is nothing compared to the mental strain. Every sense becomes blunted, and man is reduced to the level of the brute creation. This was the case with hundreds and thousands of prisoners during the rebellion at Camp Ford that can call to mind cases of this kind that have come under their observation.

The first of July at Camp Ford found the prisoners on tip-toe with excitement from two causes. The first, and most important to us, were rumors of a general exchange; the other was the near approach of our national holiday; and, although prisoners we intended to celebrate to the best of our ability with the meager means at our disposal. We had no firearms, but we were not so poor but what we could yell and sing

patriotic songs. The morning of the fourth found us ready to carry out our Programme, which opened with a grand chorus of yells at sunrise, followed by a display of miniture flags of red, white and blue, made from stripes of a garrison flag that the gunboatmen had smuggled through when they were captured. The "Johnnies" did not see them until near noon, and McCann came blustering in and ordered them taken down. Armed as he was he dared not lay hands on the flags himself and we would not haul them down. Our flag waved for the remainder of that day. Our programme was carried out to the letter, and we lay down at night feeling that the flame of patriotism and love of country was still burning, nerving us to new life and resolutions.

The morrow brought fresh news of exchange. The 19th Iowa, 26th Indiana and squads of other commands, altogether numbering 1,500 men, were ordered to prepare for exchange. The 9th of July found us in line on the march to "God's Country" once more. We started this time very quietly; there was not much enthusiasm. We had been fooled so often that we put no confidence in what the "Johnnies" told us. Our march this time was an uneventful one. On this trip the guards treated us well.

On our arrival at Shreveport we were detained several hours, but at last we marched aboard the boats and were soon steaming down Red River, and although the boats were fearfully crowded, we are contented, for this looks like exchange this time in earnest. At the falls above Alexandria we disembark and are ordered into camp. This we thought would be a repetition of our former experience, but after a two days delay we march below the falls and reembark, and soon are steaming on our homeward way. One more night, and the morrow finds us approaching the father of waters. As we run out of the mouth of Red River we are gladdened by a sight of the old flag floating at the mast head of "Uncle Sam's" gunboats that lay above and below the mouth of Red River. We lay there all day waiting for our boat which did not come, until four o'clock that evening, when the cartel of exchange was completed and we went aboard of our transport and felt that we were indeed free men once more. We remained at anchor on the bosom of the Mississippi that night- the happiest night of our lives; we sat up all night whistling. We tried to sing, but found the corn meal had worn our voices, as well as our stomaches. Sunday, the 24th of July, we landed at New Orleans, and marched

to Gen.Canby's headquarters where the general received us, shook hands with each one and gave us a kind word of welcome, after which we were sent to the quarters prepared for us, partook of a good wholesome dinner bathed,shaved,and donned a suit of Uncle Sam's blue, drew two months pay, and were once more men among men, under the protection of the stars and stripes, and ready once more to battle for our country and our country's flag.

(The End.)

W.I.Bragg.