

A HISTORY OF LIBBY PRISON, 1862-1865,

by

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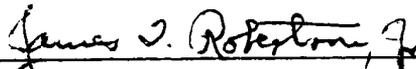
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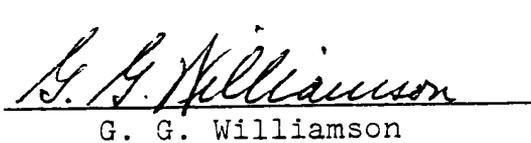
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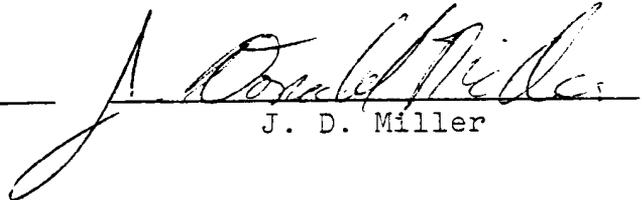
History

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Introduction

THE LIBBY FAMILY

The ultimate goal of war is the attainment of victory. Winning is achieved with little regard given to the loss of human life or property. Consequently, families suffer the loss of loved ones coupled in many instances with financial ruin. Innocent bystanders are just as likely to gain. The Libby family of Richmond is a prime example of what can happen to an ordinary family and its possessions during a war.

On August 21, 1806, Luther Libby was born in Bangor, Maine. He spent little more than the first decade of his life in Bangor. In 1819, Luther moved with his parents, Samuel March Libby and Eliza Myrick Libby, to Darbytown, Virginia. Shortly, thereafter, Luther set out to sea. At the end of seventeen years, he was a prosperous sea captain. He sought to expand his fortune by entering into partnership with Richard O. Haskins, who was a ship chandler, grocer and commission merchant. Together, they established a ship chandlers and merchants business in the Rocketts

section of Richmond.¹

In 1833, Luther Libby married Elizabeth Crump. They settled into a three-story red brick home on 29th Street in the then-fashionable Church Hill section of the city. The marriage produced a son, George Washington Libby, as well as a daughter, Josephine, by way of adoption. The household was completed with the presence of Luther's younger sister Sylva.²

As Richmond began to flourish, Libby believed that river trade would move upstream from the Rocketts to the city proper. Haskins was not convinced that the contemplated Richmond dock would greatly influence port trade. This basic difference in philosophy resulted in the dissolution of their partnership. Though most of their property was sold, they retained the ownership of their sailing vessels in common.³

¹Luther Libby, Jr., "Luther Libby: The Man and the Prison." The Richmond Literature and History Quarterly, I No. 4 (1979), 49; Louis H. Manarin (ed.), Richmond at War (Chapel Hill, 1966), 630.

²Libby, "The Man and the Prison," 50; Virginia Genealogical Society (comp.), Richmond City and Henrico County, 1850 U.S. Census (Richmond, 1977), 120.

³George W. Libby, "Richmond's Water Front in Bygone Days," in possession of Luther Libby, Jr., Richmond; Manarin, Richmond at War, 630.

In 1858, Libby rented the warehouse property of the late John Enders. As an early leader in Richmond's tobacco industry, Enders had foreseen the possibilities of a more profitable Richmond dock in the early 1850's. Unfortunately, he did not live to see his ideas become reality. While visiting the warehouse construction site, Enders suffered a fatal fall from a ladder during an examination of the building's second floor.⁴

The three adjoining warehouses, located at 21st and Cary streets, housed Libby's Ship Chandlers and Grocers business. A brief partnership with Abraham Burton was formed and promptly dissolved. In 1860, having reached his majority, George Libby joined his father's business.⁵ Libby and Son quickly began to show a profit in the lucrative import/export dealings.

With the advent of the Civil War and Richmond's role as the capital of the Confederacy, more people flocked to the city. Accommodations were not easily found for civilian and military personnel. The unexpected influx of prisoners

⁴Libby, "Richmond's Water Front;" Walls That Talk: Libby Prison (Richmond, 1884), 3.

⁵Libby, "Richmond's Water Front."

of war brought an additional burden to a city already bursting at the seams. Warehouses in the vicinity of the Main Street railroad depot were commandeered for use as makeshift prisons.

On March 26, 1862, Libby and Son, Ship Chandlers and Grocers joined the ranks of warehouse-prisons.⁶ The loss of his rental property was not the only misfortune that Luther Libby had to bear. Six shipping vessels which he still maintained in ownership with Richard O. Haskins were seized. Three of the ships were expropriated by the Confederate government. The Federal government confiscated the remaining vessels, which were docked in Philadelphia's port. The Confederate government later sank three ships in the James River above Drewey's Bluff in an attempt to impede a Federal advance up river toward Richmond.⁷

With his livelihood destroyed, Luther Libby still chose to remain in Richmond. He actively participated in Richmond's wartime government by serving as Jefferson Ward's representative on city council. From 1861 to 1863, he was elected to serve as one of Richmond's three port wardens.⁸

⁶Richmond Dispatch, March 17, 1862.

⁷Libby, "The Man and the Prison," 50; Manarin, Richmond at War, 630.

⁸Ibid., 71, 134, 349.

Meanwhile, George Libby joined the Richmond Grays and attained the rank of sargeant during his enlistment.⁹

In 1864, Luther Libby moved his family to a rented farm near Deep Bottom on the James River. Peace and tranquility were not to be the companions of the Libby family. Shortly after their arrival on the farm, Gen. Benjamin F. Butler's Federal forces crossed the river by night and captured Luther Libby and his womenfolk.

By then, the Libby name was synonymous with the Confederacy's infamous Libby Prison. Libby and his family were taken to Norfolk, but the ladies were promptly released from custody. Unfortunately, Luther Libby received far less kinder treatment at the hands of Union authorities. Events of the next six months destroyed his health. He was imprisoned successively at Bermuda Hundred, Fort Monroe, Old Capitol Prison in Washington and finally at Fort Warren in Boston harbor. Upon his release from captivity, he returned to Virginia. He purchased a 3000-acre farm at Lily Point on the Paumenkey River in New Kent County. In 1871, at the age of fifty-two, Luther Libby died and was buried on his farm.¹⁰

⁹Louis H. Manarin and Lee A. Wallace, Jr., Richmond Volunteers: The Volunteer Companies of the City of Richmond and Henrico County, Virginia, 1861-1865 (Richmond, 1969), 256.

¹⁰Libby, "The Man and the Prison," 50; Telephone conversation with Luther Libby, Jr., Mar. 18, 1980. Cited hereafter as: Libby Conversation.

Like the Libby family, the people of Richmond had no control of the reins governing their destiny. From 1861 to 1865, the city's occupants waged a constant battle for survival. Depravation and the substitution of goods was not limited to one segment of society. Civilians, military personnel, government officials and prisoners of war who dwelled in Richmond had to adjust to the hardships of hostilities. Therefore, a study of one segment of a society is not a realistic analysis without reaching out to include other vital participants. Libby Prison is not only a history of the captives who lived and died within the confines of its walls. The nameless thousands who lived within the shadow of the prison's existence, plus the actions of Union forces, determined the conditions under which the prisoners of war were to exist.

CHAPTER I

ON TO RICHMOND

Wagons rattled through the streets. The clatter of horses' hooves coincided with the steady cadence of marching soldiers. Richmond was alive with excitement and activity as the South prepared for war.

In early 1861, Richmond's population consisted of nearly 38,000 whites, free blacks and slaves.¹ Yet by July, the establishment of the Confederate States government in Richmond had drastically altered the composition of the city. The influx of civilian and military personnel, plus their families, saddled Richmond with instantaneous growing pains. Such uncontrolled expansion quickly caused crime to become a major problem. Murders and robberies increased at an alarming rate.²

Coupled with these problems, and as the aftermath of each battle, prisoners of war entered the capital, to be held there until an exchange took place. Prisoners found

¹C.G. Kennedy, Population of the U. S. in 1860
Compiled from the Original Returns of the 8th Census under
the Direction of the Secretary of Interior (Washington, D.C.,
1864), 519.

²Sallie A. Putnam, Richmond During the War; Four Years
of Personal Observation (New York, 1867), 76.

their treatment in the first few months of the war to be as hospitable as the circumstances of their presence in Richmond permitted. Pledging to remain a prisoner on their own recognizance within the city, their paroles were willingly accepted by the Confederate authorities. This permitted the Union soldiers to move about at their own discretion.³ However, not all prisoners kept their word, and the practice resulted in an increased number of escapes.

The growing disorder hindered the functions of the government and military in Richmond. The provost marshal of the Old Dominion's capital, Brig.-Gen. John H. Winder, took immediate action to rectify the situation. The policies that this old professional soldier enacted affected the private citizen as well as the Confederate and Union forces within the city. Throughout the war, civilians and prisoners in Richmond felt that Gen. Winder's orders were devoid of any concern for the people's personal hardships.⁴

By the middle of July, 1861, the wearer of the Confederate military dress was no longer totally at liberty

³Richmond Dispatch, July 3, 1861.

⁴Frank L. Byrne, "Libby: A study in Emotions," Journal of Southern History, XXIV (1958), 431. Hereafter cited as: JSH.

in the city. The number of idle soldiers gave testimony to their lack of valid business and pursuit of unlawful adventure. A careful checking of credentials soon brought about the hastened departure of many an errant soldier. Many soldiers scurried to their regiments. Invalid or forged papers resulted in a much shorter trip for the holders. Many Southern civilians and military offenders were quartered with Federal prisoners or placed in either Castle Thunder or Castle Godwin.⁵ Hence, the hospitality that Richmonders had once extended to the prisoners slowly disappeared because of the problems they were creating.

While waiting for the first exchange of prisoners to take place, the earlier Union captives were placed in Harwood's Tobacco Factory. As more captives arrived, they were locked in the depot on Main Street. Over 775 prisoners from the Battle of First Manassas caused these quarters to become inadequate and compelled Confederate authorities to seek additional shelters.⁶

⁵Putnam, Richmond During the War, 76; W.T. Merrell, Five Months in Rebelldom; or Notes From the Diary of a Bull Run Prisoner at Richmond (Rochester, N.Y., 1862), 51-52. The famous Castle Thunder on Cary Street was formerly Greaner's Factory. Emory Thomas, The Confederate State of Richmond (Austin, Tex., 1971), 106. McDaniel's Negro Jail on Franklin Street became Castle Godwin. Richmond Enquirer, Mar. 4, 1862.

⁶Richmond Dispatch, July 2, 16, 24 and 31, Aug. 2, 1861.

The Confederate Prison Department, under the direction of Gen. Winder, thereupon commandeered several factories and warehouses in the area of the Main Street depot. These buildings were altered hastily into makeshift prisons and hospitals. In most cases, this meant nothing more than moving the prisoners into rooms already occupied with tobacco machinery or else completely devoid of any furnishings. The buildings then in use would undergo a variety of changes. At a later date, warehouses and factories first used to house prisoners became Confederate hospitals. The lack of foresight in planning a prison system caused continual problems throughout the war for the Confederacy.

Ligon's Warehouse and Tobacco Factory, located on the corner of Main and 25th streets, was one of the first to open for the express purpose of housing Federal prisoners. These men came primarily from the fields of First Manassas and Ball's Bluff.⁷ Alfred Ely, a U. S. congressman from New York, was among their number. Representative Ely lost his bearings on the Federal lines and was captured by the Confederates as they advanced during the Federal retreat from Manassas.

⁷William H. Jeffrey, Richmond Prisons 1861-62 (St. Johnsbury, Vt., 1893) Ligon's Prison is sometimes misrepresented as Libby Prison, which was not in existence at this time. Another common error is placing Rep. Ely in Libby Prison. That compound opened three months after his departure from Richmond.

Subsequently, Representative Ely arrived in Richmond with other prisoners of war. His incarceration in Ligon's Prison made it the focal point of Richmond's spindly prison system. Excitement charged the atmosphere to an even higher pitch when Col. Michael Corcoran of the 69th New York, well-known for his fierce temper and flamboyant statements against the South, arrived and was quartered with Ely.⁸ Local citizenry stationed themselves outside the prison to view the oddity that existed in their midst. Southerners were proud of their battle trophies. Yet, their elation was to be short-lived.

As the number of prisoners increased daily, the Confederate government found itself confronted with maintaining a burdensome prize. The problems were too vast for a hastily constructed supervising staff and commissariat to handle efficiently.⁹ As a result, the prisoners themselves suffered many inconveniences.

Six hundred prisoners of varying ranks and professions crowded the confines of Ligon's Prison. The few blankets in evidence belonged to Federals who kept theirs at the

⁸Michael Corcoran, The Captivity of General Corcoran (Philadelphia, 1864), 27; Jeffrey, Richmond Prisons, 9.

⁹Southern Historical Society Papers, XI (1883), 83-84. Hereafter cited as SHSP.

time of capture. For the remainder of the inmates, nothing separated them from the bare floor which served as their bed. Eating accommodations were no better. Boxes and barrel tops served as tables. In many cases, fingers served as eating utensils.¹⁰ "Feeding a drove of swine" was Mr. Ely's observation of his companions as they breakfasted on "about a dray-load of bread, half that quantity of boiled beef and serveral large cauldrons of coffee."¹¹

Lieutenant David H. Todd, a half-brother of President Lincoln's wife, was the overseer of the prisons and did little to improve conditions. He rarely visited the prison without verbally or physically attacking one or more inmates. On one occasion. Lt. Todd allegedly struck a prisoner with the blunt edge of his sword because the soldier did not line up fast enough for roll call.¹²

Captured Federals had to find devices for improving their own conditions. With the assistance of relatives, friends and sympathetic civilians, prisoners scraped enough

¹⁰Charles Lanman (ed.), Journal of Alfred Ely, A Prisoner of War in Richmond (New York, 1862), 24. Hereafter cited as Lanman, Ely's Journal. SHSP, XI (1883), 83-84.

¹¹Lanman, Ely's Journal, 24.

¹²Elizabeth Van Lew Album 1845-1897, Virginia Historical Society; Merrell, Five Months in Rebelldom, 29; Richmond Dispatch, Oct. 16, 1861.

money together to buy such items as bedding, clothing and food.¹³ The lot of only a few benefited from such contrivances. An overwhelming majority of the prisoners had no financial resources and therefore had to endure their fate as best they could.

General Winder apologized after he surveyed the conditions of the overcrowded prison. Separate quarters were quickly readied for officers and important civilians. Quarters for officers with their men was not a common practice for a prolonged period of time. Such a mixing of the social and military classes caused far too much discord. By separating officers from soldiers, a void in leadership and hopefully a deterrent for escape would be created.

Within a day of Gen. Winder's visit, officers and civilians were transferred to an adjoining building. Their living conditions improved to a certain extent. To supplement the Confederate commissary's supply of beef, bread and coffee, the officers used private funds to purchase milk, vegetables and other articles. Private soldiers performed daily chores for the officers. They cleaned and filled the coal stoves which served for heating.

¹³Lanman, Ely's Journal, 64, 99.

Although meats were prepared outside by the Confederate cooks, the remainder of the rations were cooked by the privates over gas-burners inside the prison. Another marked improvement to these quarters was the addition of tables and benches. Each person received a tin cup and plate. Yet few had knives, forks or spoons.¹⁴ Such improvements aided physical comfort, but they did little to relieve mental agony and the long hours of prison existence.

Mail call highlighted any day's routine. Letters from home were considered a treasure. Prisoners themselves spent many hours composing letters to their families and to officials of the U. S. government. To see a system of exchange established was foremost in their thoughts. Unfortunately, the Federal government found this difficult to attain. Early in the war, the Confederacy was willing to engage in a man-for-man exchange. The major issue to be resolved by the Federal government involved the status of the Confederate States of America. An exchange system

¹⁴Jeffrey, Richmond Prisons, 10. Jeffrey notes that many prisoners were transferred to Atkinson's Warehouse. They were more than likely moved to Howard's Factory, which shared an adjoining wall with Ligon's Warehouse. Atkinson's Warehouse was located across the street from Ligon's and Howard's factories.

would recognize the South as a belligerent nation and not as a section in rebellion.¹⁵ While the United States government dealt with this issue, captives on both sides awaited the decision with impatience.

To relieve the tedium of the days, captured Federal officers created "The Richmond Prison Association." Meetings consisted of speeches, songs, boxing contests, card games and any other activity that could accelerate the long hours. The favorite pastime was singing. The prison resounded with martial choruses of "The Star Spangled Banner" and with the deep melancholy tones of "Home, Sweet Home."¹⁶

Prisoners habitually wondered if they would survive and live to see their loved ones again. Many of them, wounded on the field of battle, had been jostled over bumpy roads in flat wagonbeds or packed into filthy railroad cattle cars. The destination was Richmond and makeshift hospitals to be cared for by captured Federal surgeons and Confederate physicians under the direction of Dr. E. G. Higgenbotham. In quarters and medicine, captured Federal soldiers fared no better and no worse than did

¹⁵SHSP, XI (1883), 86.

¹⁶Lanman, Ely's Journal, 32-33; Corcoran, Captivity, 29-30.

their counterparts in the Confederate army. Extensive overcrowding of hospitals taxed the small number of physicians available. Fever rapidly spread from one patient to another. The fetid condition of the buildings did little to improve the situation.¹⁷

Wounded Confederates received gentle care from friendly and concerned hands. Contrary to having such peace of mind, Union captives worried over the mercy of their jailers. Union sympathizers like Mrs. John Van Lew and her daughter Elizabeth helped to alleviate the suffering to many wounded Union prisoners. Mrs. James Ricketts, who journeyed to Richmond upon receiving news of her husband's capture and wounded condition, won the love and admiration of all through her long hours of nursing to Federal prisoners.

The Unionist sympathies of the Van Lew women did not go unnoticed in the Southern capital. Neighbors rebuked them for their sentiments. Former relationships deteriorated. Yet such pressures did not deter the Van Lews. They continued to give help to Union prisoners. When Calvin Huson, Jr., a private citizen captured at the Battle of First Manassas, became ill, Elizabeth Van Lew arranged

¹⁷Charles Carroll Gray Diary, entry of Sept. 9, 1861, University of North Carolina.

to have him transferred from the medical prison to her home on Church Hill. Although he received the best of care, Huson's illness proved fatal. Mr. Ely, with the help of the Van Lews, made the funeral arrangements and Huson was buried in the Church Hill Cemetery.¹⁸ This act of humanity made the Van Lews social outcasts in their hometown. Nevertheless, and throughout the war, Elizabeth Van Lew brightened the days of many Union prisoners with small tokens of kindness and help.

The future soon began to look hopeful for captured Federals. Late in September, 1861, Federal and Confederate authorities arranged the first of what was to become an extensive exchange program. Several surgeons captured at First Manassas went home. Within two weeks, fifty-seven wounded prisoners (mainly amputees) received paroles and started home by way of a flag-of-truce ship.¹⁹ Even at this early stage of the war, an exchange of such paltry numbers did little to lessen the prisoner-of-war burden.

By mid-October, 1861, over 600 captives had been transferred to Charleston, S.C., and New Orleans. This

¹⁸Lanman, Ely's Journal, 158, 165, 167, 214-15.

¹⁹Richmond Dispatch, Sept. 21 and Oct. 7, 1861; William Crossley, Extracts from my Diary (Providence, R.I., 1903), 20.

left 1,185 Federal prisoners in Richmond. As the winter months approached, an atmosphere of tension encompassed the city. The prisoners, once received as welcomed trophies of conquest, now were a resented burden. Their presence hindered the daily functions of the city, for the food supply dwindled rapidly with the growing number of men who had to be fed. Additional temporary shelters were mandatory until prisoners could be shipped southward.

On October 25, Mayo's Factory (at the corner of 25th and Cary streets) opened its doors for 500 newly arrived prisoners. Taylor's Factory began operations three days later to handle the overflow from Mayo's Factory. Since the beginning of the war, Richmond had accommodated 2,685 prisoners. Even though several hundred captives had been removed to the interior of the Confederacy, nearly 2,000 prisoners were still in Richmond during the early winter months.²⁰

In November, two incidents occurred that changed the lives of Federal prisoners of war in the South. The first issue dealt with the status of prisoners. In Philadelphia, Walter W. Smith, master of the vessel Enchantress, was found guilty of piracy and received the death penalty.

²⁰Richmond Dispatch, Oct. 21, 25 and 28, Nov. 4, 1861.

Meanwhile, thirteen men from the Savannah were arrested in New York on the same charge and likewise sentenced to death. The men claimed to be Confederate seamen and demanded to be treated as prisoners of war. Proclaiming that their rights were being violated, they issued a plea to the Confederate government. The Southern government chose to espouse the cause of the seamen.

Judah P. Benjamin, the Confederate Secretary of War, directed Gen. John Winder to hold a lottery among the Union officers held as prisoners of war by the Confederacy. In retaliation for each sailor held in the North, a Federal prisoner would be chosen and retained as befitted a criminal while waiting for the Federal government to reverse its decision. The first lottery was restricted to colonels only. Colonel Michael Corcoran, who was imprisoned at Castle Pinckney, was held in lieu of Mr. Walter Smith. With the exceptions of Capts. James B. Ricketts and Hugh W. McQuade, who were ill and immobile, the remaining Union officers participated in the next lottery.²¹ Thirteen of their number were selected as hostages.

²¹Captain Ricketts recovered from his wounds, was paroled and served meritoriously throughout the war. On Jan. 3, 1867m he retired with the rank of Major General. On Dec. 26, 1861, Capt. Hugh W. McQuade died in Richmond of wounds received at the battle of First Manassas. William H. Powell (comp.), List of Officers of the United States from 1779 to 1900 (New York, 1900), 553, 475.

Colonel C. M. Wilcox and five other officers were confined in prisons located in the deep South. Colonels William R. Lee, Alfred M. Wood and Maj. Paul J. Revere were among seven prisoners in Richmond removed to the Henrico County Jail. The hostages found themselves placed in a lightless, dank cell that measured approximately eleven by seventeen feet.²² Within these cramped quarters, all functions of their daily lives were conducted. The men received two meals a day. Outside communications were restricted by the Confederates to an occasional letter to prison authorities. However, Elizabeth Van Lew was among the privileged who gained access to the Henrico County Jail. She had cunningly rented an apartment in her home to Capt. George C. Gibbs, who succeeded Lt. Todd as prison director in Richmond. She charmed her way into getting visitation rights with the prisoners. Among her many deeds of kindness to them, she made it possible for the prisoners to send and receive news from home. These were the circumstances under which the men managed to endure. When their counterparts in the North attained the prisoner-

²²Francis T. Miller, The Photographic History of the Civil War (New York, 1911), VII, 20; Lanman, Ely's Journal, 210-17, 225; Charles Pierson, Ball's Bluff: An Episode and Its Consequences to Some of Us (Salem, Mass., 1913), 30.

of-war status, the Confederate government permitted them to return to their fellow prisoners in the warehouse on Main Street.²³

The second event to affect the lives of the Union captives was a major decision handed down by Gen. Winder's office. Since the beginning of the hostilities, prisoners of war were concentrated in Richmond. The large number of captives and the proximity of the city to the battlefields jeopardized the safety of government and civilians. The strain was more than the Confederate capital felt that it should be expected to shoulder for the duration of the war. Therefore, officials decided that Richmond would become a transmitting point for captives. Henceforth, prisoners sent to the Old Dominion's capital were supposed to be either en route to other Confederate prisons or awaiting exchange.²⁴

Toward the end of 1861, some 1,000 prisoners were still in Richmond. However, this number steadily decreased with the continual exodus of 150-250 prisoners every two

²³Ibid.,; Civil War Times Illustrated, III (May, 1965), 30. Hereafter cited as CWTI. W. Raymond Lee to Elizabeth Van Lew, Jan. 29, 1862, John Albree Papers, College of William and Mary; A. M. Wood to Elizabeth Van Lew, Jan. 30, 1862, John Albree Papers, College of William and Mary.

²⁴Lanman, Ely's Journal, 225; Richmond Enquirer, Nov. 19, 1861.

or three weeks from the city. Since an exchange system existed at this time between the rival governments, blocks of prisoners were dispatched from Richmond to meet the flag-of-truce ship. Representative Ely was among their number. For others, Tuscaloosa, Ala., and Columbia, S. C., became their final destination after leaving Richmond.²⁵

In January, 1862, the reduced number of Federal prisoners in the Confederate capital enabled the government to revamp the network of converted warehouses. Removal of the Union captives made room for the growing influx of wounded being transported to the city from various battlefields. Momentarily devoid of its prison population, Taylor's Factory and Mayo's Factory were at once fumigated and converted into hospitals for Confederate wounded.

Meantime, Capt. Gibbs received promotion to major and left for new duties at Salisbury, N. C. He was to establish a new prison facility for the remaining prisoners who were not conveyed from Richmond to meet the flag-of-truce ship. Because of Gibbs' reassignment, the Richmond prisons were placed under the command of "Lt. Haughton of the 19th Miss."

²⁵ Richmond Dispatch, Nov. 4 and 30, 1861, and Jan. 2, 1862; Lanman, Ely's Journal, 231.

On January 30, 1862, only two weeks after leaving Richmond, Maj. Gibbs pronounced the Salisbury site as ready for the reception of the remaining 700 Federal prisoners in the Confederate capital. This extensive facility was also to accommodate all prisoners of war in New Orleans, Tuscaloosa, and the entirety of South Carolina.²⁶ Again, the railroad depots of these major cities were deluged with prisoners, supplies, Confederate troops and wounded seeking transportation in and out of the city.

As the citizens of Salisbury prepared to receive their new guests, Richmonders bade farewell to nearly 400 prisoners. Colonel W. R. Lee and Maj. P. J. Revere, who had been held as hostages for the captured pirates, were among those exchanged. Howard's Factory and part of Ross' Factory contained the remaining 138 prisoners of war in Richmond.²⁷ Not since the beginning of the war had so few captives been in the Confederate capital.

Within a week, Cols. C. M. Wilcox, Michael Corcoran and more than 100 Federal prisoners arrived from Columbia,

²⁶Richmond Dispatch, Jan. 9, 13 and 30, Feb. 10, 1862.

²⁷Ibid., Feb. 24, 1862.

S.C. The prison population quickly soared to 500 inmates. Two recent escapes from the Main Street prison angered prison authorities and brought immediate retaliation. Outside communications were strictly forbidden, and the prison guard was doubled to prevent future attempts.²⁸ This meant that Confederate soldiers were taken away from active duty in the field. Their presence on Main Street in front of the Confederate prisons was a constant reminder of the need for a less prominent and securer location for these jails. The Confederate government's search resulted in the opening of infamous Libby Prison.

²⁸ Ibid., Feb. 27, Mar. 3 and 6, 1862. Colonels Michael Corcoran and C. M. Wilcox, who had been the military governor of Alexandria when that city was under Federal occupation, were considered valuable pawns to the Confederate government and were not readily exchanged.

CHAPTER II
EARLY EXISTENCE

With less than forty-eight hours' notice, Libby and Son, Ship Chandlers and Grocers, was confiscated by Confederate authorities. Luther and George Libby tackled the arduous task of trying to salvage their investment by removing their goods by hauling them to their home on 29th Street. Meanwhile, Federal prisoners located throughout the city also engaged in packing their belongings. They hoped for an exchange, but they knew their chances were slim. As one Army surgeon mused, "I don't think anyone in the North need put off dinner on our account."¹

On March 26, 1862, over 500 Federal prisoners massed in formation lines outside makeshift prisons. Under the direction of Confederate guards, they glumly marched through narrow city streets lined with spectators. The prisoners' destination was "another and more dismal warehouse." When the procession came to a halt before a "cheerless and more funeral-like" structure that was soon

¹Libby Letter; Gray Diary, Mar. 7, 1862.

to house them, more than one heart shuddered at the prospect of entering the interior.²

Just a glance at the narrow-barred windows reinforced prisoners' feelings that once inside this prison, a gulf would exist between society and themselves. The proprietor's sign, unconsciously forgotten in the hast of packing, remained attached to the building as the last tangible record of its former dealings. Federal prisoners and Confederate authorities alike affixed the Libby name to the new prison.³

If Union soldiers were unhappy about moving into Libby Prison, Confederate authorities were more than pleased with their newest attempt to bolster the spindly prison system. For the present, the Libby Prison location complemented the needs of both prison authorities and Richmond's citizenry. Like Castle Godwin, the Libby buildings were more secluded from the public eye. Cary Street was not as congested as Main Street. Less traffic in front of the prison reduced the number of guards necessary to maintain adequate security. Prison officials calculated

²Richmond Dispatch, Mar. 27, 1862; Gray Diary, Mar. 26, 1862; Joseph Ferguson, Life Struggles in Rebel Prisons (Philadelphia, 1865), 33-34.

³Libby Letter.

that they would use only half the former guard force to patrol the prisoners.⁴

Advantages of this location continued to exceed those of the previous sites. Cary Street ran parallel to Main Street. This permitted traffic at the railroad depot to be diverted up two different routes. Federal prisoners and wounded soldiers arriving by train traveled down Cary Street to the prison and hospital facilities. Thus, Confederate troops and supplies moved with greater ease to and from the railroad depot on a less crowded Main Street.

An additional plus was the feasibility of river transportation. Both Kanawha Canal and the James River were directly across Dock Street in the rear of the Libby buildings. When necessary, the Confederate authorities could easily move prisoners and supplies by this waterway without having to enter the heart of Richmond.

Unlike the city's former prisons, Libby radiated an atmosphere more akin to that of a "real" prison. The red brick building stood on a lot isolated from other adjoining structures. Over 300 feet in length, Libby's warehouse appeared to be one building. In actuality, it consisted of three connecting warehouses with separate entrances

⁴Richmond Dispatch, Mar. 7, 1862.

and identical interior designs. For easy reference, the different sections were designated east, middle and west. Later in the war, the prison's individual rooms were designated either by the name of the battle in which the prisoners were captured or by their commander's name. Each building had three floors fronting on Cary Street. The hill sloping down to the river resulted in a basement floor accessible only by way of the Dock Street entrances.

In its entirety, the unit had three rooms on each floor. The rooms measured approximately 103 by 42 feet with a ceiling height of eight feet except for the third floor and the basement. The gabled roof added to, and the slant of the hill detracted from, their respective heights.⁵

⁵ Richmond Dispatch, Mar. 27, 1862; CWTI, IX (Oct., 1970), 29. See also U. S. War Dept. (comp.), War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1880-1901), Ser. II, Vol. VI, 544-45. Cited hereafter as O.R.; unless otherwise stated, all references will be to Ser. II. Statements as the actual size of the rooms in Libby vary from 60 by 40 feet to 110 by 44 feet. See Richard W. Surby, Grierson Raids (Chicago, 1865), n. p.; Walls That Talk, 3. The O.R.'s measurement of 103 by 42 feet is closer to the average stated by a majority of the prisoners.

Composed only of a brick and mortar shell, the existence of Libby Prison evoked a host of varying opinions. From the first to the last prisoner, each etched in this own mind a picture of existence inside Libby. Approximately 125,000 Federal soldiers passed through "Hotel" Libby. Of this number, an estimated 40-50,000 Federals were housed at the prison for appreciable lengths of time.⁶

As the first contingent of Federal prisoners assessed Libby's exterior, the order to march inside was heard. Philander A. Streator, a Massachusetts soldier, received the dubious honor of being the first prisoner of war in Libby. Directed to the west door, the prisoners entered the commandant's office. There, according to one captive, "the next proceeding was to take our names, rank, number of regiment to which we belonged, what state, etc."⁷

Erasmus W. Ross, the prison clerk, performed this administrative task. His job also required him to make daily visits to the prisoners' quarters to take roll call. During these inspections, he was arrayed with weapons usually a revolver and a bowie knife. To insure his safety

⁶Miller, Photographic History, VII, 57; Walls That Talk, 3.

⁷William S. Sclater, A Complete and Authentic History of Libby Prison (Richmond, 1897), 3; Surby, Grierson Raids, 174.

on these tours, two armed guards were his constant escorts. His continual taunts and attempts to degrade the prisoners made him one of the most detested of prison officials.⁸

General Winder placed Lt. Thomas P. Turner of Clarke County, Va., in command of the Libby Prison. The Richmond Dispatch described Lt. Turner as "a most polite and accommodating officer." A man of slight stature, Turner was an inexperienced twenty-year-old. He had been dismissed during his plebe year at West Point for refusing to take the oath of allegiance. He promptly applied for and received a commission in the Confederate Army. The command of Libby Prison was his first major assignment. Unaccustomed to commanding large numbers of men, especially those hostile toward him, Lt. Turner sought shelter behind a decisive tone and a determination to be a strict commander.⁹

To this end, Turner utilized the talents and abilities of his staff. Complementing Clerk Ross's personality

⁸Frank Rauscher, Music on the March, 1862-1865, with the Army of the Potomac (Philadelphia, 1892), 43.

⁹Richmond Dispatch, Mar. 31, 1862; Register of Cadet Applicants, 1859-60, 1860-61, pages for Virginia cadets, in Military Academy Records, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives; William Dandridge Turner, "The Libby Lion," The Black Swan, IV, No. 2 (Aug., 1929), 29; JSH, XXIV (1958), 431.

was that of the prison warden, Richard R. Turner. Referred to as "Dick," this Turner was also a Virginian; however, he was not related to the prison commander. Among the prisoners, Dick Turner was known for his ill temper and the physical abuse he gave them.¹⁰

Rounding out the prison staff were various other positions. The foremost of these were the posts of surgeon and quartermaster. Dr. Edward G. Higgenbotham was the prison's chief surgeon. His arduous task was to try and maintain an efficient medical operation. Always faced with limited staff and supplies, Higgenbotham was expected to service adequately the continuously fluctuating number of wounded and sick prisoners.

The job of feeding all prisoners fell on the shoulders of Jackson Warner. As quartermaster, his responsibility was to maintain the Federal prisoners with the equivalent amount of rations supplied to Confederate soldiers in the field. When the Confederate commissary had next to nothing in the way of supplies, Warner still had to find edibles for the Federal prisoners at the expense of the Confederate

¹⁰Ibid.

forces. These men and their successors were in charge of the daily lives of captives at Libby and other Richmond prisons.¹¹

Confederate guards also governed prison life, which could be arbitrarily harsh. Early in the war, some guards felt that their assignment offered them little chance for valor. Early in the war, such feelings contributed to the hostilities the sentinels felt toward prisoners and resulted in acts of brutality.

An unwritten law designated that a "dead-line" existed within the prison building. A prisoner made himself fair game for target practice if he stood in front of a window or door. Several prisoners were killed or wounded when they unintentionally committed an infraction of this rule. This problem became underscored when Dr. Higgenbotham's nurse, William Brown, was killed while walking in front of a window in the hospital ward. Evidence supported that the nurse was a victim of target practice.¹²

¹¹Richmond Dispatch, Apr. 11, 1862; R. Randolph Stevenson, The Southern Side (Baltimore, 1876), p. 255-56. Throughout the war, numerous officers filled various staff positions in Libby Prison. This study will mention only those who served for a prolonged period or gained notority during their tour of duty.

¹²U. S. Sanitary Commission, Narrative of Privations and Sufferings of U. S. Officers and Soldiers While Prisoners of War in the Hands of Rebel Authorities (Boston, 1864), 7; Richmond Dispatch, May 19, 1862.

Toward the end of the war, home guard units composed of old men and young boys policed the prisons. Tempered by weariness of the conflict and the increasing number of permanent prison residents, other methods were employed to keep prisoners in their place. The status of the conflict determined the nature of the guards and, to a great extent, the treatment of prisoners.

Having completed the registration process, the new prisoners at Libby climbed the stairs leading to their new quarters. On the second and third floors, Confederate authorities had cut doorways through the walls. Prisoners were able to travel the length of the prison on each of these floors. The rooms were strewn with debris caused by the hasty departure of the former tenants. The atmosphere was thick with the pungent odors of fish, hemp and tobacco. Coupled with these nauseating smells, prisoners lacked the comfort of any furnishings.¹³

The only humane touch in Libby's rooms was the luxury of washroom facilities. In 1829, the General Assembly approved a water system plan for Richmond whereby iron pipes were laid in areas where gravitational pull would assist in conducting water from the James River. The

¹³CWTI, IX (Oct., 1970), 29; Gray Diary, Mar. 26, 1862; Richmond Dispatch, Mar. 27, 1862.

clarity and taste of this liquid were of exceedingly low standards; however, it made water available. Moreover, Confederate authorities had provided wooden closets to house troughs in which the prisoners could relieve themselves. Such considerations were lacking in many other Confederate and Union prisons.¹⁴

Initially, Libby Prison was not home merely for Federal prisoners. The Confederacy's inability to organize and plan for prison needs forced them to implement successive makeshift plans. Attempting to centralize prisoners, the third floor of Libby was used for civilian and Southern military offenders. The warehouse-prison was also expected to house the prison guards, which consisted of two companies totaling sixty men. Half of this contingent was always on duty.¹⁵

Within three days of Libby's opening, the prison bulged with over 700 captives. Lack of ventilation in the rooms caused men to push and shove for window space. One such attempt to get near a window resulted in a man falling from the third story window on the building's dock side. The centralized prison could not accommodate all

¹⁴Dept. of Public Utilities, Time and the River: The Story of Richmond's Drinking Water (Richmond, 1972), 1; Surby, Grierson Raids, 175; JSH, XXIV (1958), 143; Stevenson, The Southern Side, 251.

¹⁵Gray Diary, Mar. 29, 1862; Richmond Dispatch, Mar. 31, 1862.

those who, in one way or another, defied the Southern cause. The civilian prisoners were promptly removed to Castle Godwin.¹⁶

Libby Prison thereupon housed only Federal prisoners. As the numbers increased daily, it became apparent that their stay in the Confederacy was going to be longer than expected. Federal captives began to settle into their quarters. Military or personal belongings were swapped or sold among each other and the guards. Individuals attempted to procure items to make prison life tolerable. One soldier realized a profit of over \$20 by selling a three-dollar rubber blanket for \$25 and a half-worn pair of shoes for \$6.¹⁷

Profits gained from such practices revealed the Confederacy's early need for military staples. These transactions also provided the prisoners with funds to buy additional food items from the market to supplement prison diet. Prison authorities permitted a "trusted" person to use the prisoners' money to buy items from the market. A popular commodity early in the war were slices of pie two square feet in size. The price was twenty-five cents a

¹⁶Ibid., Mar. 29 and Apr. 11, 1862.

¹⁷Richmond Dispatch, Mar. 27, Apr. 1, 9, 20-22, 25 and 26, 1862; Rauscher, Music on the March, 43.

piece. Such supplements made the standard fare of meat, beans and the like more tolerable.¹⁸

The limited shopping privileges obviously helped to make prisoners' everyday existence more bearable. In mid-April, 1862, an incident occurred that vividly reminded the prisoners of the futility of their lot. Within a few feet of the Dock Street entrances of the Libby, a small boy fell from the wharf into the river. As he struggled for his life, several prisoners pleaded with the guards to be allowed to go to the child's assistance. Their offers were refused. When rescuers finally reached the boy, it was too late. The child's drowning increased many prisoners' gloomy moods.¹⁹

Within a week, however, the prospect of women prisoners in Libby alleviated the dismal atmosphere. Along with merchants hawking wares outside the prison windows, two women took it upon themselves to display their goods. Daily, they paraded in front of the prison and drew attention to themselves by making various jests to the prisoners. When it appeared that a prisoner dropped a note to them, Lt. Turner decided to halt the activities. The

¹⁸O.R., VI, 544-45; Rauscher, Music on the March, 43.

¹⁹Richmond Dispatch, Apr. 19, 1862.

women were arrested and confined overnight in Libby. Apparently their conduct improved, for no repeated offense was recorded.²⁰

Incidents such as these angered Richmond's citizens. Months had passed since the last major exodus of prisoners from the city. At the beginning of April, Richmond's prisons housed 724 inmates, of which 435 were Federal prisoners of war. By May, increased activity on the peninsula taxed the city's weak prison system. On May 9, 319 of 600 prisoners arrived in Richmond. As they marched through the streets, they were permitted to purchase goods from the vendors.²¹

Citizens then made their feelings known. Unhappy with the way the ever-growing prison population taxed the city's resources, some townspeople suggested an end to the prisoners unproductive lifestyle. They wanted them put to work. Some felt that it would be just compensation for the precious salt that was expended by them. Throughout the war this idea was repeated, but it was never implemented.²²

On May 12, Richmond's prisons yielded 860 prisoners of war for exchange. (Not an officer was included in this interchange.) Yet such special exchanges did little to relieve the city's growing burden.

²⁰Ibid., Apr. 28, 1862.

²¹Ibid., Apr. 11 and May 9, 1862.

²²Ibid., Apr. 29, 1862; Richmond Enquirer, May 7, 1862.

By the end of May, the Confederate capital was faced with having to house even larger number of Federal captives from the Fair Oaks and Seven Pines campaign. Deluged with prisoners and the wounded of both armies, Richmond was bursting at its seams. The additional prospect of having to house Gen. "Stonewall" Jackson's captives from the Valley Campaign aggravated an already trying situation. Arrangements were quickly made to retain those prisoners in Lynchburg. Meanwhile, an already overcrowded Salisbury compound prepared to receive more of Richmond's prison population.²³

The city was given little respite in preparing for a new wave of prisoners and wounded. From June 25 to July 1, the Seven Days' Battles took place within walking distance of Richmond. By June 30, the city's prison population exceeded 2,100 prisoners. This number grew daily with the influx of hundreds of new and wounded captives. Hard pressed for space, the new mill of Warwick and Barksdale was pressed into service as a compound. Its interior reportedly could accommodate 4,000 prisoners.

With the large number of prisoners and incapacitated soldiers, Libby was retained as C.S. Military Prisons

²³Richmond Dispatch, May 12, 1862. O.R., IV, 777, 779, 788-89.

Headquarters. However, its interior was transformed into predominantly hospital facilities. The small contingent of Federal officers were removed to another warehouse prison on 18th Street. Two prize Federal captives, Gens. George McCall and John Reynolds (captured during the Seven Days' Battle) were guests of the Confederacy in these new quarters. Ironically, Gen. Reynolds was now a guest of his former pupil, Lt. Thomas Turner.²⁴

General John Winder, Provost Marshal and overall commander of Richmond's military prisons, realized the dire need to expand the city's prison facilities even further. He directed Lt. Thomas Turner to confiscate additional warehouse space; and as a result, Gleanor's, Palmer's and Barrett's factories were impressed to house prisoners.

The daily total of prisoners arriving in Richmond ran into the hundreds and occasionally topped 1,000 men. The temporary warehouse facilities quickly proved inadequate. Winder's next move was to establish an enlisted men's prison on Belle Isle in the James River. Under the

²⁴Richmond Dispatch, July 1, 2, 4, 5, 16 and 19, 1862; Mark M. Boatner III, The Civil War Dictionary (New York, 1959), 522-23, 694.

direction of Lt. Thomas Turner, Capt. Norris Montgomery, oversaw the Federals sent to Belle Isle. By July 14, a total of 3,000 prisoners were on the island prison. Five days later, their number had increased to 5,000 captives.²⁵

In the summer's heat, the prisoners on Belle Isle fared better than their compatriots in the city's warehouse-prisons. Sibley tents provided shelter for some of the prisoners. Fresh air and clean water were in abundant supply. The prisoners' daily diet was supplemented by the purchase of additional food from private vendors.²⁶

In comparison, prisoners in the city found little good to say about their environment. The summer's heat, coupled with overcrowded conditions in the prisons, magnified discomforts. Although the windows lacked panes, not enough fresh air circulated through prison rooms to dissipate the odors of sickness, privies and human togetherness.²⁷

²⁵Henry Putney Biers, Guide to the Archives of the Government of the Confederate States of America (Washington, 1968), 255; Richmond Dispatch, July 2, 8, 14 and 19, 1862; O.R., IV, 865.

²⁶Richmond Dispatch, July 26, 1862; Richmond Examiner, Sept. 24, 1862; O.R., IV, 871. On Sept. 5, 1862, the practice of allowing prisoners to purchase goods outside the island was discontinued by order of Capt. Henry Wirz.

²⁷CWTI, XV (June, 1976), 38.

As Gen. Winder and his staff dealt with the maintenance of prisoners, Federal Gen. John A. Dix and Confederate Gen. D. Harvey Hill began negotiations for an exchange of prisoners of war. Dix was instructed to follow the War of 1812's exchange plan and to refrain from any type of formal recognition of the Confederate States of America. On July 22, the parties signed a cartel for exchange.²⁸

The cartel established a man-for-man exchange. Such exchanges were to be executed within ten days of a prisoner's capture. When an excess of prisoners nullified a man-for-man exchange, those prisoners were to be paroled. The understanding was that these men could not return to active military duty until formally exchanged. Civilians held as prisoners were to be similarly exchanged.

The cartel also stipulated that each government would bear the expenses of transporting prisoners for exchange to either Aiken's Landing, Va., in the East or Vicksburg, Miss., in the West. Furthermore, each government would appoint an agent to carry out the articles of the exchange. Lorenzo Thomas, was the Federal representative; Robert Ould was the Confederate agent.²⁹

²⁸O.R., IV, 174, 189, 209, 865.

²⁹Ibid., 266-68, 274-75, 291-92.

Federal Gen. George B. McClellan then sent medical supplies and other stores to Gen. Robert E. Lee for use by the wounded of both armies. With prison officials preparing for a mass exodus of prisoners, the supplies were welcomed. Hundreds of prisoners were dispatched daily from the city. Although officers still remained in warehouses on 18th Street, the remaining warehouse-prisons rapidly emptied their Federal occupants.

Prisoners on Belle Isle, were routed through Libby on the next leg of their homeward journey. Sick and wounded received top priority, yet over 4,000 Federals still remained on their island prison.³⁰

Although the prisoner exchange process was underway, the agreement was not totally stable. Military policies announced by either side resulted in the differential treatment of prisoners. This was apparent with Confederate authorities issued orders separating Federal captives from the command of Gen. John Pope from other Union prisoners. In this manner, the Confederates retaliated against Pope's oppressive orders against helpless civilians. Southerners were infuriated with Pope's directives to his troops to live off the countryside in which they were fighting. Additionally, General Orders No. 7 and 11 placed

³⁰ Ibid., 261; Richmond Examiner, July 25, 1862; Richmond Dispatch, July 26 and 31, Aug. 4 and 6, 1862.

strict controls on civilians who came within Federal lines. According to Pope's orders, non-combatants were held responsible for any destruction of private or public property, and for any bodily harm inflicted on Federal soldiers by private citizens or guerrilla bands. For refusing to take the oath of allegiance to the United States, males within this territory held by Federal troops were subject to arrest, loss of property and imprisonment.³¹

Confederate retaliation to Pope's orders was to hold captured officers of his command in close confinement. They were not to be considered prisoners of war. Instead, their classification was more akin to that of spies or privateers. After one escape from the 18th Street warehouse prison, it was decided to reactivate Libby as primarily an officers' prison. Upon reentering Libby, officers of Pope's command were quartered separately and not permitted to converse with anyone outside their group.

After five months an overseer of Richmond's C.S. Military Prison, youthful Lt. Thomas P. Turner had gained experience at his work. His ability to organize prison sites, guard details, commissaries and prisoners' transportation did not go unnoticed. In August, the city of

³¹John C. Ropes, The Army Under Pope (New York, 1881), 174-77.

Lynchburg was teaming with masses of unregulated Federal prisoners and Confederate deserters. By order of Gen. Robert Lee, Turner temporarily left Richmond to establish Lynchburg's prison facilities to be that city's Provost Marshal.³²

In Turner's absence, Capt. Henry Wirz took command of the prison network in Richmond. Under Wirz's direction, the prisons continued to operate according to Turner's rules. During August-September, Wirz had the opportunity to deal with all phases of prison command. His duties ranged from overseeing the readiness of Belle Isle to receive 2,000 prisoners to the arrest of a Libby guard for accidentally killing a citizen prisoner. (The guard was aiming at a Federal captive who persisted after several warnings to venture too close to the window's deadline.) In less than two years, Wirz would be devoting his energies to developing the facilities and maintaining Federal prisoners at the infamous Andersonville prison site.³³

Throughout August and September, 1862, the influx of prisoners into Richmond caused a repeat of July's over

³²O.R., IV, 837, 865; Richmond Dispatch, Aug. 4, 20 and 25, 1862.

³³Ibid., Aug. 20 and Sept. 29, 1862; O.R., IV, 865 868; VII, 167-68.

crowding or prisons. To alleviate these wretched conditions, Confederate authorities took advantage of the cartel. Such prize captives as Gens. McCall, Reynolds and Ranken were exchanged. Large-scale exchanges were sought. Not only were prisoners glad to be going home, but the Confederate government saw the exodus as a relief to its commissary and pocketbooks. On September 15, the Richmond Dispatch announced the departure of 3,300 Federals and a savings of approximately \$4,000 a day for their maintenance.³⁴

From the Dock Street windows, prisoners in Libby could observe the last of their fellow Federals leaving Belle Isle and traveling down Cary Street in route for Varina and exchange. Meanwhile, officers who served under Gen. Pope remained in confinement in Libby Prison. As one of them remarked, he felt "entirely forgotten by our government."³⁵

On September 24, correspondence between Federal and Confederate agents for exchange resolved the issue of Pope's orders. These directives were to be considered

³⁴Richmond Dispatch, Aug. 12 and 18, Sept. 8, 13, 15, 18 and 22.

³⁵Richmond Examiner, Sept. 24 and Oct. 9, 1862; CWTI, XV (June, 1976), 39. Belle Isle underwent a thorough cleansing after the prisoners' departure.

no longer in force. With this understanding reached, Confederate authorities prepared the officers in Libby for exchange. On September 25, Pope's officers packed their belongings and prepared to take the long-awaited march from the Southern capitol to Aiken's Landing.³⁶

By the end of the month, Richmond's prisons were void of large numbers of captives. A majority of the rooms stood vacant while awaiting the arrival of captives from Winchester, Lynchburg and Charleston, S. C. To help further implement the removal of Federal prisoners in the South, Capt. Wirz was reassigned to travel through the Confederacy and direct the movement of Federal prisoners to Richmond for exchange. The government now recognized the need to relieve itself of feeding and guarding these unwanted guests.³⁷

With Capt. Wirz's absence, command of the C. S. Military Prison devolved on a succession of officers. In the beginning of October, Capt. Thomas D. Jeffress of the 56th Virginia commanded Libby. Later in the month, Assistant Provost Marshal G. Alexander added command of Libby to his duties at Castle Thunder. Captain Jeffress

³⁶O.R., IV, 552-53, 562; Richmond Dispatch, Sept. 25, 1862.

³⁷Richmond Dispatch, Sept. 27, 1862; O.R., IV, 901.

meanwhile was ordered to Lynchburg to relieve Lt. Thomas Turner, who was to return to Richmond and resume command of Richmond's prison system.³⁸

During Turner's absence, little had changed. The city was becoming accustomed on short notice to accommodating a varying number of prisoners and wounded soldiers. Richmond did not remain vacant of Federal prisoners for long. En route to the city from the South were 2,000-3,000 captives. Temporary facilities were established to house the prisoners until they could be exchanged at Aiken's Landing.³⁹

Within the confines of Libby Prison, prisoners again coped with overcrowded conditions. Glassless windows that provided much welcomed ventilation during the summer's heat allowed entrance to the winter's cold. Little fuel was supplied to combat low temperatures. What little coal there was served the dual purpose of heating the body and cooking daily rations. Meanwhile, illnesses such as smallpox and typhoid fever remained prevalent.⁴⁰

³⁸ Richmond Dispatch, Oct. 4, 1862; Richmond Examiner, Oct. 4, 22 and 23, 1862; O.R., IV, 928.

³⁹ Richmond Dispatch, Oct. 7 and 10, 1862.

⁴⁰ Neal Dow, The Reminiscences of Neal Dow: Recollections of Eighty Years (Portland, Maine, 1898), 719; U. S. Sanitary Commission, Narrative, 6.

Another problem faced by Federal prisoners was the mixing of several different military units within the same confines. Military discipline suffered. In an attempt to bring order to a chaotic situation, and to retain the ideals and self-respect due their rank, an organization was formed to promote more organized interaction among officers and to structure better discipline in their daily prison lives. The Prisoners Club, elected a president to preside over meetings and to appoint committee chairmen. Commissary and order committees were the most vital. The duty of the chief officer and assistants of the commissary was to insure that all officers received a proper ration of food. The duty of the order committee was to maintain haramony between inmates, to promote cleanliness, and assure gentlemenly conduct between members.

The remaining bylaws of the club restricted members in their associations with non-members. Conversations with non-prisoners was limited to pleasantries. Prisoners who through the lack of self discipline, secured more than their appropriate share of rations were ostricized from any contact with club members. Under these guidelines, the prisoners themselves sought to retain self-respect in a degrading situation. Even a limited police action

such as the Prisoner's Club helped to alleviate some of the problems the Confederate guards had in handling Federal prisoners.⁴¹

Despite the formation of the Prisoner's Club, life in Libby was far from uneventful. The Confederate government assured Richmonders that the Libby was an escape-proof compound. Therefore, an explanation was hard to find when four prisoners made their escape by using a blanket rope to scale the prison's wall. Escapes usually were the fore-runners of harsher times for those left behind. Yet in this instance Confederate guards were arrested for irresponsibility and sent to Castle Thunder.⁴²

Peace seemed not meant to reign in Libby. On the heels of the escape, a small fire broke out on the prison's second floor. Damage fortunately was minimal. A new outbreak of smallpox soon was on the rampage. Lastly, disrupting the prison's environment was the introduction of Richmond's Negro prisoner population into the Libby.⁴³

⁴¹J. Frederick Pierson, Prisoner's Club, Libby Prison, Richmond, Va.: Constitution, 1862, copy in possession of the Virginia Historical Society.

⁴²Richmond Dispatch, Nov. 22, 1862; Richmond Enquirer, Nov. 22, 1862.

⁴³Ibid., Nov. 28 and 29, 1862; O.R., IV, 953.

In the area of prisoner exchanges, traffic for the first part of December was moderate. As many prisoners were brought into the city as were readied for exchange. The official exchange point for prisoners was moved from Aiken's Landing (Varina) to City Point. Granted, the new site was farther downriver from Richmond; however, the location was more advantageous. Navigation up the James River past City Point was always unpredictable because of the varying currents. A lower port location with stable access permitted the establishment of a more routine exchange schedule.⁴⁴ Federal forces were also kept a farther distance from Richmond's defensive line.

By mid-December, newly promoted Capt. Thomas Turner requested a twenty-day leave of absence to visit Winchester. Lieutenant Virginus Bossieux took temporary command of the Libby. No sooner had Capt. Turner left than a reversal in the number of prisoners and wounded entering the capital city followed as a result of the Battle of Fredericksburg.

Richmond newspapers kept daily tabulations on the arrival and departure of Federal prisoners. On December 18 469 Federal prisoners were routed to Libby, with an additional 700-800 expected to arrive the next day. Four days

⁴⁴Richmond Dispatch, Nov. 29, Dec. 1, 5 and 8, 1862; O.R., Iv, 939; Michael B. Chesson, Richmond After The War, 1865-1890 (Richmond, 1981), 146.

later, the influx of captives raised the Libby population to an all-time maximum of 1,350 prisoners.

Libby Hospital accommodated 200 wounded men. Illnesses ranged from typhoid fever and minor battle injuries to one soldier who had both his eyes shot out. Limited supplies and staff, plus a need to care for Confederate wounded, hastened the desire of the Southern government to exchange prisoners. On December 22, 450 movable wounded were readied for exchange. All other Federal prisoners were paroled and only awaited a means of transportation from City Point.⁴⁵

For many prisoners, Christmas at home seemed a possibility. Unfortunately, their hopes were short-lived. President Jefferson Davis chose this time to complete his investigation of events in New Orleans after that city came under Federal control eight months earlier.

The military rule of Federal Gen. Benjamin F. Butler was the focus of the report. One of the first issues under scrutiny was the death of William B. Mumford, a Louisiana citizen. In April, 1862, after Admiral Daniel G. Farragut secured the surrender of New Orleans, Mumford

⁴⁵ Richmond Dispatch, Dec. 16, 18, 19 and 22, 1862; Richmond Enquirer, Dec. 4, 19 and 22, 1862.

proceeded to pull down the newly elevated U. S. flag. Mumford was hanged for the offense. Inquiries into the case by Confederate authorities met with no reply from U. S. authorities.

A Confederate proclamation denounced the execution of Mumford and chastised the Federal government for not reprimanding Gen. Butler for this action. The harsh military rule inflicted by Butler on the citizens of New Orleans was also closely examined. Pillaging of personal property, and the ungentlemanly treatment of women, inflamed the Confederate government.

Since Federal officials had done nothing to reprimand Butler, President Davis took it upon himself to rectify the situation. He declared Butler to be "an outlaw and common enemy of mankind." Until the Federal government properly punished Butler for his offenses. Davis ordered a halt to the exchange of Federal prisoners.⁴⁶

Such news was a bitter Christmas present for the overcrowded residents of Libby Prison. Inmates at Libby were not the only ones who regretted the breakdown in the exchange. Through no fault of their own, citizens of Richmond saw themselves being punished. Their own resources

⁴⁶Boatner, The Civil War Dictionary, 574; O.R., IV, 795-97.

dwindled each day that they maintained these unwanted guests. The year ended with disappointments on both sides and little hope that 1863 would bring a quick resolution to these problems.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Richmond Dispatch, Dec. 31, 1862.

CHAPTER III

WELCOME TO THE "HOTEL DE LIBBY"

The gas-lighted streets glowed with a hazy brightness. Elegantly arrayed couples alighted from their carriages to be met by a gracious host who ushered them from the cold into his warm home. The sweet mixing of music and laughter beckoned all within hearing distance to join the activities. Before the evening's end, this scene repeated itself many times. Wartime Richmond was heralding in the new year in the tradition of the Old South. For tonight, war did not exist.

Not everyone in Richmond participated in such festive activities. Reality was the cruel companion of Federal prisoners. Dreams of family and friends renewed the captives' longing for home. Delicate sounds of gaiety that drifted through their prison's bars tortured them mentally and physically. Huddled in a crowded room reeking of vile odors of human togetherness, coupled with disease and festering wounds, Federal prisoners felt little for which to be thankful.

Libby Prison bulged at its seams with 1,447 occupants. The daily death rate was two to three inmates. Prison officials clamored that more accommodations had to be found immediately. On the heels of this request, 300 Federal

captives came marching down Cary Street to swell an already unmanageable housing situation. Mayo's Factory and Castle Thunder again opened their doors to receive Libby's overflowing population.¹

Likened to a cattle drive, Richmond newspapers lamented the fact that the Yankee menace continued to be a growing force in the city. President Davis's Christmas proclamation had restricted the exchange of officers, but it did not impede a cartel of non-commissioned officers or privates. Consequently, Southerners viewed the willingness to parole or exchange prisoners as a problem created by the Federal government, which further clouded the issue by demanding the exchange of Negro soldiers.

Fortunately, relief was forthcoming to the city. By January 7, 300 Federal prisoners were on their way to City Point under a flag-of-truce. During the next three days, groups of 500 each followed in their comrades' footsteps. In less than a week, Richmond's prison population consisted of a handful of Federal officers, civilian prisoners, deserters from the Federal army and Negro prisoners.

¹Richmond Examiner, Jan. 1 and 2, 1863; Richmond Dispatch, Jan. 3 and 6, 1863.

Cumulatively, less than 500 prisoners remained on the Southern dole. A majority of these captives were in Libby Prison.²

With such a small prison population, events seemed to be playing into the Confederacy's hands. Approximately 150 Federal deserters decided to take the Confederate oath of allegiance. General Joseph R. Anderson found productive employment for several of them in Richmond's iron works. Since many of the remaining number were craftsmen, they went to work plying their trades for the Confederacy.

By mid-January, a reversal occurred in the exodus of Federal prisoners. Enroute to Richmond by trains via Danville and Lynchburg were large contingents of Federal prisoners captured by Gen. Braxton Bragg in Tennessee. Richmond's citizens again witnessed a nightmare developing in their presence. Groups of hundreds of captives flooded the city until the prisoner population soared to an excess of 3,000 men.

Captain Turner petitioned Gen. Winder to supply him with more guards. Confederate authorities rapidly pressed

²Ibid., Jan. 5, 7 and 10, 1863 For an excellent summary of the cartel, see James G. Randall and David H. Donald, The Civil War and Reconstruction (Lexington, Mass., 1969), 334-36; Richmond Examiner, Jan. 9 and 10, 1863.

all available quarters into use. Reinstitution of Belle Isle was mandatory. Hastily constructed huts and tents began to appear on the island prison; and in the bitter cold of winter before preparations were completed, captives from Ohio, Illinois and Indiana troops took up residence on Belle Isle.³

The Confederate capital faced quite a dilemma. The number of prisoners confined in the city were a danger to the civilian inhabitants. Unprepared to handle such a volume of prisoners, Confederate authorities immediately began paroling their captives. Daily, groups of 200-900 prisoners marched to City Point to return to the Union lives.⁴

The paroling process did not include officers. Morale among this group declined with the passing of each homeward-bound group of Federal soldiers. Throughout the war, prisoners' morale fluctuated with the status of the exchange process. The stress of being a captive and the depression that followed remaining behind adversely affected the prisoners' spirits and health.

³Ibid., Jan. 12, 16 and 17, 1863; Richmond Dispatch, Jan. 17 and 20, 1863.

⁴Richmond Examiner, Jan. 21 and 28, 1863; Richmond Dispatch, Jan. 24 and 27, 1863.

Attempting to find their own solutions to the exchange problem, Federal officers developed several risky escape methods. An age-old ploy was trading or buying clothes. Federal prisoners attempted to blend in with the prison guards, government officials or civilians who moved freely in and out of the prison. Once suitable garb was obtained, the escape depended on the prisoner's acting ability. A Federal who gambled on escape chose either a moment where he could slip out unnoticed or else he boldly cast his lot with the prison guards and marched out with them when the opportunity presented itself. Another manner which several Federal captives employed was to bribe guards. This method depended on the faithfulness of the Confederate guard in executing his portion of the escape plan. If unsuccessful, both parties faced physical punishment.

Since officers were ineligible for exchange, many sought to find eligible parolees willing to trade places with them for an agreed upon sum of money. Confederate authorities found the development of this illegal substitution system not only annoying but undermining their control of the exchange process. A substitution's discovery resulted in immediate corrective action. An attempt to halt the ineligible's exchange ensued. If

Confederate authorities proved unsuccessful, the party who remained behind was fortunate if his only punishment was the loss of his financial gains.⁵

Complicating matters were the sick and wounded prisoners. They depleted the Confederacy's resources even more. Like other prisoners, they required food and shelter. However, they also needed medicine and nursing. Many prisoners fell victim to the ever-present maladies of diarrhea and smallpox. The Richmond Examiner reported that Capt. Turner supposedly had discovered a way of arresting smallpox: the burning of leather strips produced a byproduct that "impeded" the disease's growth.⁶

During the month of February, Richmond's prison population stabilized. The heavy snows that blanketed Virginia's countryside aided in suspending military activity. For Federal captives, the cold weather further

⁵ Richmond Examiner, Jan. 16, 1863; James S. Anderson, Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War in the Hands of the Rebels (Milwaukee, 1865), 24; Ohio Commandry, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Sketches of War History (Cincinnati, 1888-1908), II, 353; O.R., V, 820-21; Roger Tusken (ed.), "In the Bastille of the Rebels," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, LVI (1963), 318.

⁶ Richmond Examiner, Jan. 29, 1863.

aggravated their living conditions. Glassless warehouse prisons afforded little respite from the elements. Worn and tattered clothing accentuated the misery. From time to time, the Confederate government issued clothing to the prisoners. The availability of such items was always limited and infrequent. In mid-February, the New York Sanitary Committee sent packages to the Libby Prison Hospital. Received and inventoried by Confederate authorities, Capt. Turner maintained a close guard of the distribution of such choice articles as cotton shirts, condensed milk, ink bottles, chocolate cakes, tin cups, slippers, pens, soup, scissors and the like.⁷

Inside Libby Prison was a veritable sampling of all types of captives being held in Richmond with the exceptions of civilian criminals and Southern deserters. Soon to be part of this conglomeration was Federal Gen. Edwin H. Stoughton and several of his command. Much to the general's discomfort, the news of his capture received a lengthy recounting in Richmond newspapers. Rudely awakened from a sound sleep by a slap on the rump, Gen. Stoughton discovered that he was the prisoner of Confederate Col.

⁷O.R., V, 830-34.

John S. Mosby. Ironically, at the time time of his capture, Stroughton was pursuing Mosby and his raiders.

Captain Turner accorded no special privileges to Stoughton or his staff. On hearing that the chivalrous Mosby had installed them in the Ballad House, Turner ordered their immediate transfer to Libby Prison even though they had retired for the evening. Apparently, fate did not dictate that the Federal general was to sleep well during his stay in the South.⁸

Toward the middle of March, Robert Ould, the Confederate Agent of Exchange, struck a bargain with his Northern counterpart whereby political prisoners would be exchanged along with the usual complement of non-commissioned officers and privates. This agreement permitted Capt. Turner to divest Castle Thunder of most of its civilian population. Top priority on the exchange roster were women. The emptying of Richmond's prisons occurred simultaneously with the awakening of battle action and the renewed influx of prisoners into the city.⁹

⁸Boatner, The Civil War Dictionary, 571; Richmond Dispatch, Mar. 3, 1863; Everette B. Long, The Civil War Day By Day (New York, 1971), 327.

⁹O.R., V, 853.

Within a few days, nearly 2,000 prisoners arrived in Richmond. As they disentrained, some 815 Federal captives left the city for City Point. Four hundred more were preparing for departure. The warehouse prisons emptied quickly. Some poor souls remained locked within the confines of Libby throughout the war. Confederate officials could claim that Libby Prison never remained vacant of Abolitionist prisoners.¹⁰

Though exchanges were made, the status of the cartel was controversial. Confederate Agent of Exchange, Robert Ould, and his Federal counterpart, Lt. Col. William H. Ludlow, maintained a barrage of correspondence stating their positions, making charges against each other's actions and countercharging the accusations. While these written and verbal battles transpired, prisoners on both sides languished in uncomfortable prisons far from home.

From December, 1862, to the spring of 1863, the status of the exchange headed on a downward course. General Benjamin Butler's controversial behavior, the treatment of Negro prisoners, plus actions by Federal Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside in Kentucky made the situation more stressful. Federal forces there captured two Confederate captains, William F. Corbin and T. G. McGraw,

¹⁰Richmond Dispatch, Mar. 24 and Apr. 1, 1863; O.R., V, 427.

while they were engaging in recruiting activities for the Confederate army inside Federal lines. Their trail for espionage and subsequent death by firing squad invoked the wrath of the Confederacy. Retaliatory action ensued against two Federal officers in Libby Prison. Held in close confinement for a brief period as punishment for the Confederate officers' deaths, the Federal officers rejoined their fellow captives when further retaliatory action against Confederate prisoners was threatened.¹¹

Prisoners on both sides became ploys in the exchange process. White officers and Negro soldiers received the worse treatment. They fell into a special category for their "offenses against the Confederacy." For the white officers in command of black troops, their actions resulted in confinement in prison dungeons or a return to the state in which they fought for civil trial and punishment. White officers commanding black troops were constantly threatened with being insurgents, for which they could receive the death penalty. For blacks who chose to don the Federal uniform, capture meant being

¹¹O.R., V, 556, 610-11, 962; C. E. Godfrey, Sketch of Maj. Henry W. Sawyer, 1st Reg. Cavalry, N.J. Vol.: A Union Soldier and Prisoner of War in Libby Prison under Sentence of Death (Trenton, N.J., 1907), 5.

subjected to hard and menial labor such as "scrubbing floors, carrying out slops and cutting wood." The possibility also existed that they could be relegated to slavery status.¹²

From time to time, large-scale exchanges did occur. On April 28, some 110 Federal officers marched through the commandant's office and out of the prison bound for City Point and exchange.¹³ As the small contingent of Federal officers trooped through the narrow and crowded streets, passersby barely acknowledged their existence. The city's inhabitants appeared quite apathetic to the Federal presence. How different had been their reception months earlier, when they were taunted, jeered and pelted with stones and spoiled vegetables.

At that time, little else entered the thoughts and prayers of the Southern people than the battle actions less than a day's ride from Richmond. The Federal Army of the Potomac, under Gen. Joseph Hooker, engaged Lee's Army of

¹²O.R., V, 940; Alva C. Roach, The Prisoner of War, and How Treated (Indianapolis, 1865), 98.

¹³Ibid., 608; Long, The Civil War Day By Day, 346; Richmond Dispatch, Apr. 28, 1863. Tusken, "In the Bastille", 318, note that "sporadic exchanges did occur during his confinement, the men selected often arranged their own releases through political favoritism or outright bribery." Such actions were especially true when the cartel broke down completely in the summer of 1863.

Northern Virginia in a series of seven battles at Chancellorsville, Second Fredericksburg and Salem Church. On these fields, the flower of Southern manhood poured out life's blood by the thousands in fighting for the Confederate cause. Added to the daily grief that accompanied every roster listing the wounded and dead from the previous day's action was the news of Lt. Gen. Thomas J. Jackson's wounding and subsequent death. Confederate morale dropped to a low ebb.

Into Richmond shortly came over 5,000 Federal prisoners (1,000 of whom were wounded), along with a large number of Confederate wounded. The condition of the wounds, and the massive numbers involved demanded immediate action to care for them. Accustomed to the overwhelming demands and regular unpreparedness, the Confederate government and the Richmond city council proceeded to enact temporary measures to deal with the situation. Again, every available depository for prisoners and Confederate wounded within the city was commandeered. Belle Isle absorbed the city's excess of prisoners.

Changes were already underway in Libby Prison. Before the expected influx of "guests" arrived, the building's interior received a complete cleansing. Prison laborers applied a fresh coat of whitewash to all interior floors; and for the first time the area between the ground and

the bottom of the second floor's exterior likewise received an application of whitewash. Unique to Libby Prison, the white walls coupled with the gas-lighted streets aided in detecting any unauthorized persons outside the building at night.

A striking difference was noted in the appearance of the Federal prisoners now being brought into Richmond. A majority of the Northern captives were foreigners. They represented the Union's recognition in Europe plus that government's ability to pay and outfit a larger armed force than the Confederacy. Prison clerks found it thoroughly frustrating in trying to record unpronounceable names. In many instances, the captives were of little assistance because many of them could neither write nor speak effective English.

Another disparaging difference was the overall appearance of new Federal captives. Despite the weariness and grime of the battlefield, the condition of their clothes, shoes and physical appearance showed that they had not lacked for human comforts.¹⁴ Their appearance did not go unnoticed by the Confederate military. Many of those marched into Richmond were still in possession of a lot of

¹⁴Richmond Dispatch, May 8, 13 and 14, 1863.

their U. S. military gear. Correspondence between Maj.-Gen. Ambrose P. Hill, Brig.-Gen. Henry Heth, Maj. Alexander S. Pendleton and others finally culminated in Capt. Turner being directed to confiscate any shelter tents found in the belongings of Federal captives. Declaring U. S. Military gear to be contraband of war, the prisoners lost items such as canteens, belts and sashes to their captors. As the war continued, the stripping of prisoners became more extensive. Lieutenant Joseph E. Moody of the 59th Massachusetts remembered "being arrayed like Joseph of Old in a suit of many colors" after undergoing this process.¹⁵

For those Federal prisoners on their way to City Point, the journey did not consist of a regular bumpy train ride to their destination. Instead, they marched the thirty-two miles from Richmond to City Point. Transporting large numbers of prisoners by rail had become too costly not only in repairs to the trains but in time lost transporting supplies to the soldiers in the field and to the city. Seven thousand newly paroled Federals set out for City Point. Among their number were several officers

¹⁵O.R., V, 626 and 948; Mass. Civil War Papers, II, 351.

who had the choice of marching now or waiting a few days for transportation. They chose the former. Doctors were in attendance as well as a few wagons that carried the necessary provisions for the journey.¹⁶

Several of the officers who made the march to City Point later reported numerous cases of mistreatment. They claimed that complaints by the prisoners of physical inability to continue the march were met with punishment. Soldiers allegedly walked ailing prisoners at bayonet point and threatened to run them through if they failed to keep up with the others.

Exchange agents on both sides demanded an investigation of the atrocity reports. Lieutenant John LaTouche, who was in charge of the march, stated that no such incidents occurred and that his own men marched the same distance with gear and gun without complaint. Lieutenant LaTouche reminded investigators that officers had a choice and that it was their decision to march instead of waiting to ride. The thirty-two-mile march took thirty-one hours to complete and the physically weak found themselves stressed in some instances beyond endurance. Such reports by returning Federals only resulted in retaliatory actions

¹⁶Richmond Dispatch, May 14, 1863; John B. Jones, A Rebel War Clerk's Diary (New York, 1935), I, 304, 321, 331.

actions by both sides; and in the long run those who suffered the most were the ones left behind.¹⁷

With the passing of each day, little misunderstandings like this endangered the exchange agreement. Federal prisoners in Richmond began to think that they had watched the last group of prisoners leave for City Point. Evidence began to mount that the exchange would halt any day. Libby Prison began to take on a more permanent air.

As new prisoners climbed the stairs from the commandant's office to their new quarters, their eyes lighted on what was to become known as Libby Prison's motto: "Abandon all hope who enter here." A few days after the motto's appearance, several Confederate guards armed with ropes, hammers and nails climbed onto the prison roof. Much yelling and pulling, preceded the erection of a flag pole. With the crowd cheering and a band rendering patriotic songs, a soldier solemnly hoisted the Stars and Bars over Libby Prison.¹⁸

In Cedar Bluffs, Ala., U. S. Col. Abel D. Streight surrendered his command to Confederate Gen. Nathan B. Forrest. Under Confederate guard, Streight's force of

¹⁷O.R., V, 625, 683-84.

¹⁸Richmond Dispatch, May 20, 1863.

approximately 1,400 men soon arrived in Richmond. When discussions of the paroling and exchanging of these men began, Gov. John G. Shorter of Alabama intervened. He accused Col. Streight and the officers of his command with illegal seizure of property from Alabama's citizens and with enlisting Negro slaves in the Federal army. Governor Shorter wanted the prisoners returned to Alabama for civil trial. Until the Confederates determined their status as prisoners or criminals, Northern authorities concluded that future exchanges ought to be suspended.¹⁹

Complicating matters from the civilian point of view, three newspapermen captured outside Vicksburg also arrived in Richmond at that time and were quartered temporarily in Libby Prison. Albert Richardson and Junius Henri Browne worked for the New York Tribune and Richard T. Colburn was a reporter for the New York World. Standard release procedures usually followed the capture of newspapermen. Both sides liked to maintain favorable relations with reporters. However, in this instance, Colburn alone received immediate release because of his pro-Southern sentiments. The reporters from the Tribune were detained in retaliation for Southern citizens detained in the North. The controversy surrounding their imprisonment

¹⁹CWTI, VIII (June, 1969), 39; O.R., V, 716; VI, 745.

lasted for eighteen months and followed them from Libby Prison to Castle Thunder and finally to Salisbury, N.C. From Salisbury, the reporters escaped into Union lines in Tennessee.²⁰

Military success at this time continued to bring problems to the Confederacy. During June 13-15, forces under Confederate Gen. Richard Ewell attacked Federal Gen. Robert Milroy's troops at Winchester. Resoundly beaten, over 3,000 of Milroy's men surrendered. The wives and children of some of Milroy's officers also made the trip to Richmond as prisoners of war. The civilians underwent brief detention in Libby and then in Castle Thunder, after which Confederate authorities dispatched them to City Point along with 1,000 soldiers from Milroy's command.²¹

Two major incidents that soon triggered the complete demise of the cartel were the paroling of Confederate prisoners taken by Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at Vicksburg and the Sawyer-Flinn episode. The successful seige of Vicksburg by Gen. Grant resulted in the capture of 29,000

²⁰O.R., V, 746; VI, 59, 657; Committee of the 73d Indiana Regimental Association (comp.), History of the 73d Indiana Volunteers (Washington, D. C., 1909), 159.

²¹Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, 937; O.R., VI, 69, 72; Roach, The Prisoner of War and How Treated, 58.

Confederate soldiers. These prisoners received immediate parole. However, many returned to active duty in flagrant disagreement of the cartel.

Meanwhile, in Richmond, the controversy surrounding the executions in May of Confederate Capts. William F. Corbin and T. G. McGraw then erupted into a full-fledged dispute. Robert Ould, the Confederate exchange agent, was still trying to get a satisfactory understanding of the deaths of these men. Yet Federal authorities procrastinated in submitting transcripts of the trial and other correspondence relating to the subject. After numerous weeks of fruitless paper volleys, the Confederate government decided on a route of action that would assure immediate reply.

General John H. Winder issued Special Order No. 160 to Capt. Turner. This order directed Capt. Turner to select two Federal captains then incarcerated at Libby Prison for execution. The method of determining the unfortunate recipients of this punishment was to be lottery.

To carry out Winder's orders, Turner had the names of the captains written on slips of paper and deposited inside a box. The captains assembled in the dining room

and formed a square around the table. Captain Turner stood near the box and read the execution order to the assembly. He bade the prisoners to pick one of their own to draw the names. Ironically, Capt. Henry W. Sawyer of the 1st New Jersey Cavalry suggested that the Rev. Joseph T. Brown of the 6th Maryland perform the selection. The first name to be drawn was none other than Capt. Sawyer. The second candidate marked for execution was Capt. John M. Flinn of the 51st Indiana.

Sawyer and Flinn were taken to the office of Gen. Winder, who allotted them two weeks to get their affairs in order. The general also permitted the exchange of letters and the visitation of relatives prior to the execution. Mrs. Sawyer quickly traveled from New Jersey to City Point only to be told that she would not be permitted a pass to visit her husband in Richmond.

From dungeon cells, the two captains dispatched petitions proclaiming the unreasonableness of their sentence. To Gen. Winder they outlined the injustice of their sentence by relating the facts as they knew them. First, they had not served under Gen. Burnside in the disputed area where Capts. Corbin and McGraw were arrested. Secondly, they had heard that two Federal captains in

Atlanta were being held in retaliation for the same offense. From Maj. Sawyer to his wife went an impassionate plea to recognize that he was giving his life for his country and not for any crime he had committed.

The Federal reply to this Confederate challenge was swiftly forthcoming. Two Confederate officers held by the Federals were ordered retained as similar ploys. There was no drawing of lots among Confederate prisoners. Federal authorities chose Gen. William W. F. "Rooney" Lee, the second son of Gen. Robert E. Lee, and Capt. William S. Winder, the son of Richmond's provost marshal. No executions followed on either side.²²

For those who remained in Libby, the upcoming Fourth of July took on a special meaning. They saw it as an opportunity to show their continuing loyalty to their country and the ideals for which they fought and now suffered imprisonment. With what little they had, they intended to celebrate with all the vim and vigor that

²²Long, The Civil War Day By Day, 379; O.R., V, 82, 87, 107, 109; Richmond Dispatch, July 7, 1863; Godfrey, Sketch of Maj. Henry W. Sawyer, 6-7; CWTI, I (June, 1962), 39-40; David S. Caldwell, Incidents of War and Southern Prison Life (Sayton, Ohio, 1864), 16-18. On February 25, 1864, the Sawyer-Lee exchange transpired. The Winder-Flinn exchange followed shortly thereafter.

they had. Yankee ingenuity went to work. Groups of prisoners worked on planning the agenda. The greatest contribution of other prisoners was the clothes off their backs. Possessors of white linen, red flannel and blue wool donated strips of their tattered garments to make the most essential item for the day's ceremony: a flag, the Stars and Stripes.

Cloaked in secrecy, a number of prisoners diligently sewed the scraps and patches together. Other inmates stood guard to make sure that Confederate guards did not discover their plans. On the appointed day, all was ready. As one participant remarked, "we had a respectable looking flag, and were prouder of it than if it had been made . . . of the finest silk."

At 1 p.m., the assembly began. Colonel Abel Streight stood underneath the banner to address the group. His speech brought rousing cheers and claps from the audience. So great was the noise that the guards hastened upstairs to ascertain the cause. Much to their horror, the first thing that they saw was the replica of their enemy's flag. The guards informed Capt. Turner, then returned upstairs and ordered the prisoners to pull down that "hateful rag." No one complied with the order. Red faced and angry, a

guard proceeded to carry out his own directive. Removing the flag did not end the celebration. Prisoners listened to the prepared speeches even at a risk of punishment.²³

With the events of the past few weeks behind them, Federal prisoners in Libby entered a new phase in their captivity. The cessation of the cartel not only meant an increase in their numbers but it also made them a less transient group. From this period until the resumption of the exchange twenty-two months later, the "Libbyan Society" developed.

²³Roach, The Prisoner of War and How Treated, 49-50;
Caldwell, Incidents of War, 12-14.

CHAPTER IV

THE LIBBYAN SOCIETY

In the upper floors of Libby, prisoners separated themselves into distinct groups. Rooms that used to be known as "upper west" or "lower east" became upper or lower Milroy's, Gettysburg's and --later-- Chickamauga's rooms. The prison's third floor housed officers. When space was available on the second floor, enlisted men received temporary accommodations. Their living conditions were intolerable. For those that would remain in Libby well into 1864, they would record how progressively worse their environment became.

In the summer and early fall of 1863, Libby's population averaged between 300-500 prisoners per room. New arrivals underwent the customary stripping of clothes, equipment and money before being sent to the upper rooms. Attempts to secrete valuables resulted in immediate punishment. The type and length of punishment initially depended on the officer who ordered it. After September 6, 1863, Gen. Winder ordered that only the commanding officer could order punishment, and he determined how much and what type. The fortunate ones received only a verbal reprimand of the foulest language, while others received what passed for normal corrective action on the part of those in command.

Punishment ranged from marching at the point of a bayonet, remaining at attention for prolonged periods, suffering the whip, or undergoing the humiliation of being "bucked and gagged." A prisoner who underwent the last-named indignity had his hands and feet tied. While in a sitting position, his arms were pulled over his knees, and a rod was inserted between his knees and arms to assure his remaining thus fastened. The more unruly prisoners had the gag stuck in their mouths. Worse than any of these punishments were confinement in one of Libby's dungeon cells, or being sent to Castle Thunder, where discipline was even stricter.

Whenever new prisoners were "registered" and sent on their way upstairs, loud shouts of "fresh fish" preceded them. The uninitiated immediately thought of rations. However, the call only announced the arrival of a fresh batch of prisoners. Life in captivity centered around thoughts of food. Prisoners even referred to their own lot in edible terms. A "sucker" was an inmate with a short time behind him. Those who could claim a lengthy stay were known as "dry cods." An exchanged prisoner was called a "pickled sardine."¹

¹Richard W. Surby, Grierson Raids (Chicago, 1865), 174-75; Earl Antrim, Civil War Prisons and Their Covers (New York, 1961), 205.

New prisoners found that the routine of Libby life ingrained itself very quickly. On arising in the morning, officers diligently applied themselves to the task of "skirmishing for graybacks." This intensive search required the removal of each garment for a thorough attack of enemy vermin in every seam. Rank had no privileges in this situation. From the lowest to the highest tank fell victim to lice and fleas. Attempting to make light of the situation, prisoners repeated each others repartees for entertainment. A conversation between Brig. Gen. Neal Dow and a fellow inmate transpired in such a vein. A priosner inquired: "What, General! Are you lousy?" "No," replied Dow, "I ain't, but my shirt is."²

Prison cleanliness was a battle constantly waged by inmates and prison authorities. Neither side managed to perform up to the other's standards. Earlier in the war, when Libby did not house such a large complement of captives, prison blacks scrubbed the floors on a daily basis. However, Federal prisoners objected. Such scrubbing required them to pick up their bedding, and

²Louis N. Beaudry (ed.), The Libby Chronicle (Albany, N.Y., 1889), No. 1, p. 2; Willard W. Glazier, The Capture, the Prison Pen and the Escape (Hartford, Conn., 1868), 59.

many claimed that they were too weak to get up. Inspector Richard Turner demanded adherence to his regulations. Failure to comply with the rules raised his temper and resulted not only in harsh words but in physical abuse. The suffering prisoner, a miscreant in Turner's eyes, found himself in solitary confinement or recovering from a blow to his person. Prisoners claimed that washing the floors in the morning made sitting on the floor uncomfortable during the day. If the floor was scrubbed in late afternoon, prisoners howled that it was a Confederate plot to see them all die of pneumonia because of the damp boards at night.

Attempts to whitewash the interior also received hostile greetings from many of the residents. While a coat of paint brightened the place, the process was messy, it smelled badly, clothes were damaged, and vermin remained intact. Added to these problems was the fact that the prison's basement was a breeding place for rats. The west cellar housed the morgue; cooking, carpentry and storage facilities occupied the middle cellar; the east cellar remained vacant except for an abundance of straw. There the rats were so abundant that this cellar was commonly referred to as "Rat Hell."

The rodents did not confine themselves to the basement. Several made their way to the upper floors and secured homes. The rafters on the third floor eventually became infested with these creatures. Unfortunately, with the doubling and tripling of the prison population, both sides found themselves fighting a battle that neither was going to win.³

In their daily accounts of prison life, very few of the prisoners related any attempt on their part to organize a cleaning staff. An individual directed his energy at trying to keep his own body free of pests. Given the overcrowded conditions in which all activities of daily life had to be performed, the physically weakened state of the prisoners and the discrepancy of what good hygiene was among inmates themselves, it is no wonder why cleanliness was difficult to maintain. The one thing which they did not lack and which Confederate authorities encouraged them to use was water. An ample supply existed on each floor. The prisoner need only have the desire and ability to use it. Was it punishment on the part of the Confederate

³JSH, XXIV (1958), 434-35; Clay MacCauley, "Through Chancellorsville, Into and Out of Libby Prison," Rhode Island Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society (Providence, R. I., 1904), 56. Frederic F. Cavada, Libby Life: Experiences of a Prisoner of War in Richmond, Va. (Philadelphia, 1864), 33-34; CWTI, IX (Oct., 1970), 30-31.

authorities to deny the outside purchasing of tobacco and apples when the inmates did not cease "spitting on the floor" and "throwing apple cores into the spit-boxes?"⁴

Prisoners could have exercised some control over cleaning the floors; however, they had no means of altering the filthy air that they breathed. Once inside the compound, the prisoners' lungs had to become adjusted to inhaling a mixture of aromas consisting of body odors, smells of cooked or decayed food, excrement and the stench of human decay from the basement morgue. Ventilation was exceedingly poor in all rooms, especially the center rooms. In addition, captives in the warehouse prisons could not escape the offensive odor created by housing excessive numbers of captives on Belle Isle. When the wind blew eastward, prisoners as well as citizens could only try to endure the smell. This was especially true during Richmond's hot and muggy summers.

The deadline still applied to the prison's windows. Prisoners who disregarded the regulation risked their lives as target practice for guards. To alleviate the captives' misery, prison officials permitted Federal

⁴O.R., VIII, 342; Charles M. Keyes, *The Military History of the 123d Regiment of Ohio Volunteer Infantry* (Sandusky, Ohio, 1874), 131.

prisoners to climb through the third floor trapdoor and walk out on the roof. For those who had shoes, walking on the tin roof in the heat of the summer offered an alternative to remaining inside the prison. Desperation drove others to flock to the roof regardless of their lack of apparel.

Prison authorities attempted to alleviate odors by fumigating the rooms. Each day a black prisoner, nicknamed "Gen. Johnson," entered the rooms carrying a coal hod filled with a mixture of tar and coals. He proceeded to swing the smoking apparatus back and forth while walking through the rooms and chanting: Here is your nice smoke without money and without price."⁵

At 7:30 a.m., the twice-daily ritual of falling in for roll call occurred. Either one of the Turners or Clerk Ross supervised this activity. Lining up four deep, prisoners remained standing until roll books and prisoners failed to assemble in a timely fashion. Such laxity subjected them to a profane lecture or to standing in line for fifteen minutes at bayonet point. For those

⁵Richmond Dispatch, Nov. 18 and Dec. 6, 1863; Albert D. Richardson, The Secret Service, the Field, the Dungeon and the Escape (Philadelphia, 1865), 369; Ohio Commandry, M. O. L. L. U. S., Sketches of War History, II, 349.

who intentionally perpetrated the offense, it served as amusement. However, other prisoners found it not only a painful exercise but highly embarrassing that their own compatriots would force prison authorities into such punitive action. The ordeal of roll call completed, food, mail call and various forms of entertainment consumed the remainder of the day until the next roll call.⁶

In the summer of 1863, various discrepancies occurred in the rationing of food. Previously, all food issued by Confederate officials originated in the Libby kitchen through the labors of prison blacks and Federal deserters. Some meals consisted only of soup. Many prisoners described the inadequacies of such a meal in great detail. Wooden buckets that "no decent New England farmer would feed his pigs from" were used to transport the soup. At times, maggots formed a cover over the top of the substance. Hunger dispelled any refusal that the prisoners might otherwise have made toward the meal. Those who scrambled for their rations thinging that being first was best found that they received mainly the liquid - and the maggots - of the soup. Others who waited awhile found

⁶Keyes, 123d Ohio Volunteer, 131; Louis B. Fortescue Diary, entry of Aug. 11, 1863, University of North Carolina.

their patience rewarded. In their cups, shoes, hands or whatever was available in which to draw rations, they found beans. Prisoners even managed to attach some humor to the situation with jokes such as "diving for a bean," "somebody lend me a bean to dip in my broth once more," and the like.⁷

Standard fare issued to the prisoners at this time consisted of two ounces of bacon or four ounces of inferior beef, half a pound of bread and a small cup of beans or rice. Confederate authorities allowed some of the prisoners to supplement their diets with purchases from the market. At one time, officers of Milroy's command used what little money they had secreted to get officers from Col. Streight's command to make purchases for them. A prison "trustee" purchased eggs, sugar, fresh vegetables and fruits, flour, corn, plus other extravagances requested and paid for by the Federal captives. One prisoner estimated that within a four-week span, 300 prisoners spent approximately \$11,000 in outside purchases. By compariso, Col. Streight reported an expenditure rate on necessities to be nearly \$1,000 a day.

⁷Cavada, Libby Life, 161; Roach, Prisoners of War, and How Treated, 58; Edward P. Tobie, A Trip to Richmond as a Prisoner of War (Providence, R.I., 1879), 39-40.

Even with access to the market place, Federal captives complained about the Confederate attempts to feed them adequately. Leading the group of protestors was Col. Abel D. Streight. In correspondence with both Confederate and Federal officials, he accused the former of keeping prisoners in a state of semi-starvation. Like many others, Streight conceded that the Confederate government supplied the prisoners with the best that they could afford. However, he rated their attempts as not good enough.⁸

Federal prisoners at that time were not the only ones complaining about survival. Richmonders themselves found it increasingly difficult to keep body and soul together. Clerk John Jones reported that his family was in "a half starving condition." For example, he noted, an evening meal consisted of cabbage. However, this cabbage consisted of only the vegetable's leaves. City newspapers carried daily complaints from citizens about the graining of their resources by the presence of Federal prisoners. Many vendors gladly sold their wares to Federal prisoners in order to get "greenbacks." Purchasing goods with Federal

⁸MacCauley, "Into and Out of Libby Prison," 49; O.R., VI, 241-41; Fortescue Diary, entry of Aug. 19, 1863.

dollars carried more leverage than with Confederate script. The "greenbacks" were essential to blockade-runners in purchasing supplies outside the South. By July, one "greenback" was equivalent to ten Confederate notes.⁹

Several of Col. Streight's fellow captives denounced his criticisms of the Confederate commissary. In laudatory letters to Capt. Jackson Warner, the Assistant Quartermaster, Federal officers expressed their appreciation for the diligent efforts of the commissariat to see that they received adequate rations. Unfortunately, these testimonies did little to erase the impression left by Streight's reports.

Confederate authorities were left defending their position and implementing new procedures. In response to Streight's charges, Robert Ould replied that like prisoners in the South, Confederate captives in the North suffered from a lack of spacious quarters, and he voiced criticisms on the quantity and quality of their rations. However, Ould pointed out that unlike Federal prisoners, some Confederate captives had to perform manual labor or be punished. He reported that it was not uncommon for

⁹Jones, A Rebel War Clerk's Diary, I, 358, 381; Keyes, 123d Ohio Volunteer, 130; Richmond Dispatch, July 27, 1863; Richardson, Secret Service, 366; Ohio Commandry, M. O. L. L. U. S., Sketches of War History, II, 357.

Southern prisoners of war to wear a ball and chain. Furthermore, in the case of Confederate Gen. John H. Morgan and his men, they resided in the Ohio State Penitentiary. They were not only subjected to the indignity of having their heads shaved like common criminals but also attired as such. Confederate officials wanted to impress Col. Streight with these facts since he and his men were being held in retaliation for Gen. Morgan and his men. At that time, Confederate authorities did not retain the Federal prisoners in a like manner.

General Winder forwarded Ould's reply to Col. Streight and further added that any discussion related to the confiscation of Federal dollars from Col. Streight at the time of his capture would now cease. Citing a Federal determination on the seizure of moneys, Winder noted that large quantities of money were to be considered public property for use by the government. Confederate officials would adopt the same practice and would later deviate from this decision. As for Streight's complaints about rations, Winder promised to investigate.

Since the Federal officers in Libby abhorred the culinary skills of their Confederate cooks, Confederate authorities permitted them the "luxury" of cooking for

themselves. The prisoners elected a Commissary-in-Chief, Lt. Col. James M. Sanderson. He divided the prisoners into squads of fifteen to twenty men. When prison officials delivered bulk rations, one man from each squad drew his group's allotment. Distributing the food equally also became his responsibility. There was no set way in which to handle an equitable rationing of food. One prisoner recorded the procedure in his squad and outlined how they managed to eliminate favoritism. Each man took a number corresponding to the group's size. After the squadron leader divided the rations into the appropriate number of shares, the group turned its backs on the rations and him. Even though the piles were evenly divided, this technique dispelled any question of equality. He would then point to a pile and inquire who wanted to be the recipient. The lowest number responding received that ration, and thus it continued until all the piles were claimed.¹⁰

Cooking the food could be a task. Confederate officials installed additional stoves in the prisoners'

¹⁰O.R., VI, 267-68, 278-79; Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, 566; Cavada, Libby Life, 29; Michael Dougherty, Prison Diary of Michael Dougherty While Confined in Pemberton, Libby, etc. (Bristol, Pa., 1908), 12-13.

quarters. Depending on the number of residents in Libby, the cooking process could take up a majority of the day. Usually the cooking was done on a rotating basis by each member of a mess. (Since March, 1863, the Federal army had initiated the practice of company cooking performed by detailed soldiers under the direction of officers). Still, attempting to prepare edible food with inadequate utensils on broken stoves for massive numbers was a feat if accomplished. In some instances, only a tin plate or a block of wood serving as a plate and a knife or fork (some used a sharp stick or their fingers) were the prisoners' only tools. In addition, Federals had little time to dawdle over the stoves. Sometimes two stoves were all that were available on which to cook the rations of over 200 prisoners. Limited fuel supplies also demanded that the chore be completed quickly.¹¹

Reports from prisoners that they fared better under this new process did not ensue. Instead, as time passed

¹¹Richardson, The Secret Service, 366-67; Junius H. Browne, Four Years in Secessia (Hartford, 1865), 279-80; Cavada, Libby Life, 29; William Q. Maxwell, Lincoln's Fifth Wheel: The Political History of the United States Sanitary Commission (New York, 1956), 37; Isaac N. Johnson, Four Months in Libby (Concinnati, 1864), 54; Robert H. Kellogg, Life and Death in Rebel Prisons (Hartford, 1865), 363.

their complaints grew. Confederate authorities were not the only recipients of their hostility. The nature of their fellow inmates came under close scrutiny. Lieutenant Louis Fortescue appraised his compatriots as not only selfish but in complete "discard of all rules of politeness and etiquett."¹²

When not preparing or consumed with thoughts of food, Federal prisoners sought other means to occupy their time. A highlight of any prisoners' day was receiving mail from home. An official would enter the prisoners' quarters. Finding a box or stool on which to stand, he would read the names on letters and pass the treasured packets into the hands of those closest to him. In the excited flurry of locating recipients, prisoners jostled each other and shouted their location so fellow prisoners could relay their letters to them.

News from home made prisoners yearn to communicate with loved ones. A prisoner applied himself diligently to the task of letter writing. Letters to be sent or received had to conform to certain standards. Letters had to be sent in double envelopes. The outer envelop had to be addressed to the Commissioner for Exchange in Richmond. After being examined, the letter was sealed in the first

¹²Fortescue Diary, entry of Sept. 1, 1863

envelope, handstamped and forwarded to Fortress Monroe. This process usually cost the prisoner three cents; however, authorities permitted the prisoner to send letters postage due. Letters from home underwent the same scrutiny. They were limited to one page and had to treat only of domestic matters.¹³

By mid-summer, 1863, a craze for education infected Libby's rooms. Prisoners bought books from Richmond's stores. They themselves became the teachers. Coming from diverse backgrounds, they were able to form the basis for instructing each other in a broad education. Native instructors taught classes in French, German, Spanish and English. Latin, Greek, Algebra, Geometry, Philosophy, Religion and various other self-interested courses were on the agenda.

Others pursued a trade for the dual purpose of art and money. Craftsmen fashioned jewelry and trinkets out of bones left from the daily fare. Pocket-knives, pieces of metal or glass served as the craftsmen's tools. Boxes from home became chairs, tables and shelves under the creative hands of the prisoners. Their dismal environment received other homey touches with the addition

¹³Antrim, Civil War Prisons and Their Covers, 22-23, 116, 183.

of coat hooks made by forcing splinters into the wall and lamps made from tin cans, scraps of material and fat rind unconsumed at mealtime.¹⁴

The daily newspaper, when purchased from "Old Ben" for twenty-five cents, added to the topics of discussion. This was one of the factors leading to the development of the debating club or Lyceum. The formal name was quickly broken down to the pun most remembered and appropriate for the prison: "Lyce-I-see-'em." Members of this group studied subjects avidly before presenting this serious form of diversion to their club. The range of debate subjects was endless. Topics such as religion, philosophy, history and etiquette underwent a thorough examination. One of the most popular lecturers was Gen. Neal Dow. The prohibitionist from Maine was famous for his rousing temperature lectures. With a captive audience, Dow had many converts until such time as some of them could "get where whiskey is cheap."¹⁵

Chaplain Louis N. Beaudry directed the publication of the prison newspaper, The Libby Chronicle. There was no mass printing of the paper. Instead, contributors

¹⁴Richardson, Secret Service, 377; Browne, Four Years in Secessia, 268; Cavada, Libby Life, 73-74.

¹⁵Roach, Prisoners of War, and How Treated, 72; JSH, XXIV, (1958), 433; Louis N. Beaudry, Historic Records of The Fifth New York Cavalry (Albany, N. Y., 1868), 260-61.

submitted slips of paper to the editor. All articles gathered and assembled remained in the editor's care. On Fridays at 10 a.m., the masses gathered in excitement to hear the "reading" of the paper. The "news" consisted of prison events, exchanges, manners, poetry and other subjects of their daily existence. One talented prisoner, a Lt. Col. Williams, composed a modernization of Homer with lice as his subject. His verse went thusly:

Think not my theme is trifling, none
of you can mention
Receive here in Libby half so much
attention.
A phonographic class of half a dozen score,
In one short, wretched week, falls off a
half or more;
French also and Spanish, as all can plainly
see,
Lose their students and interest in the
same degree.
But who, alas! so lazy, so busy, so nice,
Neglects to give an hour or two each day
to lice,
Will be beset, at times, with troubles
great and small,
And have dreadful scratching to get along
at all.
If old poets wrote of battles 'twixt frogs
and mice,
Why not I write of skirmishes 'twixt men
and lice?
And while thus these verses rude we are
inditing
Look 'round to see the different styles of
fighting.
But I'll cease scratching lines and scratch
"Scotch fiddle" tunes
At something crawling in my shirt and panta-
loons. ¹⁶

¹⁶Beaudry, The Libby Chronicle, No. 1, p. 1; No. 5, p. 2-3; Cavada, Libby Life, 34, 36; Fortescue Diary, entry of Sept. 6, 1863.

Even though the subjects were old, prisoners jostled for sitting space to hear each other's opinions.

Other forms of entertainment popular with the prisoners were also hazardous to their health. Inmates used their ingenuity to make chess/checker boards by etching the lines on boxtops or marking with chalk on the floor. Buttons became checker pieces while chessmen derived their origin from leftover soup bones. Games such as these coupled with cards and dice are not harmful in themselves. However, when the element of chance was an added feature, problems occurred. As seriousness akin to life and death began to be attached to the moves made by each player in a game. Articles of clothing, food and money exchanged hands as players and onlookers bet items they could ill afford to lose. For some prisoners, the games stirred too much excitement. Bodies weak from reduced rations and physical ailments could not deal with the emotional pressure of watching the games. Many fainted. For others, tempers flared as those who gathered around the game argued over the players' decisions. Fights became commonplace. Unless quelled internally by the prisoners, guards would enter the rooms. Their presence meant punishment for offenders.

Continually seeking new entertainment, some prisoners devised "country shows." A successful show not only

consisted of the developers' ingenuity but also of on-lookers' imagination. Blankets and prisoners combined to make a variety of animals. Musicians and drum majors marched through the rooms announcing the upcoming events of the circus. Prisoners even submitted to being bucked for the entertainment of their compatriots. Once bucked, their fellow prisoners formed a circle around the two contestants to watch a cockfight.

A milder form of entertainment for one and all was singing. A tune such as "Home, Sweet Home" would find the Confederate guards ready participants. However, more than one verse of "The Star-Spangled Banner" or "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" irked Capt. Turner and other prison officials. Needless to say, prisoners risked punishment for such actions.¹⁷

Toward late afternoon, guards brought the evening's rations upstairs. A repeat of the morning's activities

¹⁷John A. Owens, Sword and Pen (Philadelphia, 1882), 177, 182-83; Richardson, Secret Service, 368, 377; Cavada, Libby Life, 75-76; James D. Fox, A True History of the Reign of Terror in Southern Illinois: A Part of the Campaign in Western Virginia, and Fourteen Months of Prison Life at Richmond, (Aurora, Ill., 1884), 37; Earle Lutz, A Richmond Album (Richmond, 1937), 56. The author asserted that inmates in Libby Prison with being the first prisoners in the South to sing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

transpired in each room as prisoners jostled for cooking space. Exhausted from the work associated with feeding themselves, prisoners had little time to rest. At 5 p.m. the summons to evening roll call resounded through the rooms. Weary prisoners tried not to incur the keeper's wrath by rising slowly to the call. All concerned desired a quick end to this tiring task.

The setting sun and the prospect of sleep conjured up few thoughts of peaceful respite. Being in possession of a blanket or a rudely constructed cot meant that the owner lived in a state of luxury in comparison to fellow inmates. At least he had something to separate him from the filthy floor. When the rooms were intensely crowded, the prisoners had to sleep in "spoon" fashion. Sleeping head to foot in alternating rows, Federals thus endured the passage of night. Many found the long evening hours more painful than their daily suffering.

Having as much space to sleep in as a dead man has in a coffin, the prisoners' skelton-like bodies offered little cushioning from debris-covered wooden floors. Searing pains surged through emaciated frames when forced to remain in one position for too long. The order to "spoon-over" resounded. Prisoners to a man followed the command. Failure to comply with the order meant verbal abuse, jabbing from fellow bedmates or being the unlucky recipient

of a pelting spree of objects. The same treatment befell a prisoner who interrupted the nightly peace with groans of agony.¹⁸

Some evenings, before prisoners attempted to find some release in sleep, they found entertainment in making animal noises. Cats, dogs, roosters, owls and other creatures came alive with prisoners' vocal talents. Another more popular method of evening enjoyment was the Libby Catechism. The question and answer series was narrow enough in subject to be interpreted as a group reprimand for daily behavior of certain inmates, or broad enough to act as a forum to express opinions. The verbal ruse went as follows:

Why ought the best of English poetry to
 enamate from this room?
 Because we have a Spenser and a Burns here,
 and they live in a garret---the poet's
 usual abode.
 Who stole Moseley's hash?
 Carpenter.
 Who says he does not belong to the Abolition
 Army?
 Glasboro.
 Who offered to enlist in the rebel army, if
 he could be released from prison?
 Pierce.

¹⁸ Charles L. Francis, Narrative of a Private Soldier in the Volunteer Army of the United States (Brooklyn, NY, 1879), 143; Solon Hyde, A Captive of War (New York, 1900), 73; Illinois Commandery, M. O. L. L. U. S., Military Essays and Recollections, I, 266.

How does Libby differ from another public institution in Philadelphia?
That is a Northern home for friendless children---this is a friendless home for Northern children.¹⁹

As with any activity in Libby, if the participants attracted the attention of the guards, punishment ensued. Night or day, there was no escaping life in Libby.

For those who could no longer endure their suffering, ill health was a ticket out of the prisoners' quarters and into Libby Hospital. All the prisoner had to do was report to morning sick-call. During the summer of 1863, Surgeon John Wilkins headed the hospital staff. He described his facility as one which received a daily cleaning of floors and bathrooms. According to him, the patient's diet was of a high standard, well prepared and more than could be consumed. Cases of dysentery and diarrhea were constant. A few cases of scurvy and smallpox occurred. In August, two cases of typhoid were treated. In a three-month period, the hospital served 650 patients, Out of this number, forty-two died. On an average, Surgeon Wilkins reported losing to death less than one percent of his patients.

¹⁹Fox, Reign of Terror in Southern Illinois, 37; William C. Walker, History of the Eighteenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers in the War for the Union (Norwich, Conn., 1885), 167.

Few Federal prisoners painted so good a picture of the hospital facility. On occasion, a prisoner would report that he received "humane" or "kind" treatment, but this was usually followed by a statement that Federal surgeons had treated him. On one occasion, when Lt. Fortescue sought medical attention, the doctor diagnosed his case as "only an attack of chronic diarrhea." Since this was a common complaint, Fortescue returned to his quarters. No treatment for the ailment followed other than what he provided for himself. According to most prisoners, the hospital was overcrowded. Patients slept on the floor, sometimes without blankets, because not enough bunks existed. When the hospital reached capacity, the very ill were forced to remain in their quarters. Some died in the presence of their fellow countrymen.²⁰

For some prisoners, death was the only "exchange" that would get them out of Libby Prison. Reduced to skelton-like forms, their bodies could not endure more physical or emotional abuse. Death became a welcomed release. Earlier in the war, prison officials permitted

²⁰ Caldwell, Incidents of War, 26; O.R., VI, 262-63; Owens Sword and Pen, 169; Roach, Prisoners of War, and How Treated, 64; Glazier, The Capture, the Prison Pen and the Escape, 52; Fortescue Diary, entry of July 27, 1863.

officers to make a comrade's funeral arrangements. Officers took up a collection, purchased a coffin, and sometimes received permission to attend the services. As the war progressed and the number of dead increased, the amities decreased.

Confederates used the west basement as a depository for corpses. The makeshift morgue had only one attribute that the Federal prisoners could ascertain: Confederates did not have to carry the bodies far. Federal prisoners viewed it as the final outrage to their captivity. Dogs, rats and hogs had access to the room and some human bodies served as food for these animals. To make matters worse, heavy rains caused the river to rise and flood the basement. When this occurred, it was not uncommon for bodies to be seen floating downstream.

For corpses which escaped these indignities, prison blacks had the unpleasant task of removing them for burial. Left for days in the summer's heat, transferring the decayed bodies was a loathsome job. The stench in the morgue was just as insufferable for the workers as it was for the prisoners in the rooms above. When a wagonload of bodies accumulated, a prison black would load them aboard for the journey to Oakwood Cemetery. Through ingenious methods, prisoners monitored the departure and arrival of coffins. They even managed to mark the boxes. When a new shipment

subsequently arrived, several captives noticed that the "new" coffins were in fact "old" coffins. Careful observers from the Dock Street side of the prison noted that some of the dead did not even receive the courtesy of a coffin. (As the war continued, wood became a scarce item in Richmond.) John G. Adams of the 19th Massachusetts reported seeing his fellow countrymen carried out of the morgue clothed only in blankets. What clothing they had possessed belonged thereafter to the living.²¹

It was in this environment that Capt. Emil Frey of the 82nd Illinois found himself quartered on his arrival in Richmond at Libby Prison. Captain Frey, like many foreign-born officers spoke minimal English. He remained confined in Libby for fifteen months. During the later part of his imprisonment, he spent seventy-seven days locked in a dungeon cell with four other Federal prisoners. They were held in retaliation for alleged barbarities to Confederate prisoners in the North. Their participation

²¹Owens, Sword and Pen, 168-69; John G. Adams, Reminiscences of the Nineteenth Massachusetts Regiment (Boston, 1899), 107; U. S. Christian Commission, Record of the Federal Dead Buried from Libby, Belle Isle, Danville and Camp Lawton Prisons and at City Point and in the Field before Petersburg and Richmond (Philadelphia, 1866), 8; CWTI, IX, (Oct., 1970), 30; U. S. Sanitary Commission, Narrative of Privations and Sufferings of U. S. Prisoners of War in the Hands of Rebel Authorities (Boston, 1864), 9; Richmond Dispatch, Aug. 14, 1863; Glazier, The Capture, The Pen and The Escape, 60.

in the Civil War broadened their education in the English language and customs. This was the case with Capt. Frey. In later life, he would attribute his proficient English and understanding of Americans to the Libbyan Society. No one knew at that time that this group was tutoring a future Swiss Ambassador to the United States and, later, President of the Swiss Confederation.²²

As the year progressed into autumn, conditions for prisoners and citizens alike worsened in Richmond. Granted, Confederate victories such as the Battle of Chickamauga were good news and gladly celebrated; however, victories continued to cause problems for the Confederacy. This battle alone brought an influx of 7,000 Federal prisoners into an already-crowded city. To accommodate the new masses, Gen. Winder impressed Grant's and Smith's factories for prison usages. Libby Prison, which housed 1,447 prisoners in January, 1863, had 4,211 prisoners crammed inside it eight months later.²³

²²CWTI, II (April, 1963), 37; Richmond Times-Dispatch, Feb. 13, 1916; Ella Lonn, Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy (New York, 1969), 250-51.

²³Jones, A Rebel War Clerk's Diary, II, 52; O.R., VI, 323; Richmond Dispatch, Sept. 3, 1863.

In October, the Richmond Dispatch described the Federal presence as "becoming as thick as blackberries in harvest." Robert Ould tried laborously to negotiate an exchange program with his new Federal counterpart, Brig.-Gen. S. A. Meredith. What resulted from the discussions was an exchange of Federal complains and surgeons. No other releases of prisoners appeared imminent. Over 13,000 Federal prisoners occupied Richmond at the Confederate government's expense. Daily discussions occurred concerning the removal of the Federal captives into the Southern interior.²⁴

Citizens in Richmond were barely surviving. The prices that they paid for food caused many to go without the necessities. Eggs sold for \$1.25-\$1.50 a dozen, bacon was \$2.00 a pound, corn \$30-35 per barrel and a shinbone cost \$5.50.

To many Southerners, the Federal prisoners were faring better than they were. Letters from prisoners to their government outlining the lack of clothing (nearly all prisoners lacked a major item such as shirts, stockings, shoes, coats, etc.) and food resulted in re-negotiations with the Confederate government to allow the North to provide these items. The relief effort began immediately.

²⁴ Ibid., Oct. 5 and 30, 1863; O.R., VI, 141, 338; Fortescue Diary, entry of Oct. 10, 1863.

Five hundred blankets arrived for disbursement to the prisoners. The U. S. Sanitary and Christian commissions sent food, clothing, books (especially bibles) and other necessities.²⁵

As the senior ranking officer in Libby Prison, Gen. Dow distributed Federal supplies to all prisons within Richmond. This enabled him to get a firsthand look at the conditions in which non-commissioned officers and enlisted men lived. Through a member of the U. S. Christian Commission and direct letters to the Secretary of War, Dow reported the unbearable sufferings endured daily by the prisoners. Summarizing the conditions at Belle Isle, he related that eight to ten men died daily, the remainder existed on half rations, and a majority endured the elements without benefit of clothing or shelter.

Since the prison authorities were again returning confiscated money in the form of Confederate scrip to the prisoners, they could supplement their rations by purchasing items from the market. With this in mind, Dow suggested that the U. S. government secrete \$100,000 worth of Confederate money in tin cans and repacked in other cans

²⁵Jones, A Rebel War Clerk's Diary, II, 35, 60; O.R., VI, 329, 354; Richmond Dispatch, Oct. 21, 1863; Keyes, 123d Ohio Volunteers, 133.

containing jellies, butter, molasses and solified milk. He would receive the packages and ration the money to the officers at a rate of \$100 each. This suggestion was never implemented.²⁶

General Dow's unfavorable reports, coupled with a committee report by newly released Federal surgeons, put the Confederate authorities on the defensive. Authorities relieved Gen. Dow of his duties and replaced him with a Board of distribution. Colonel A. Von Shrader, Inspector-General of the XIV Army Corps, Col. Louis di Censola of the 4th New York Cavalry, and Lt. Col. J. F. Boyd, a quartermaster in the XX Army Corps, formed the newly appointed board. Colonel James Sanderson, who "supervised" the rationing of food in Libby, replaced Col. Censola. Confederate Capts. C. M. Selph and D. D. Munro received all items sent from the U. S. government and turned the goods over to the board. On December 4, the board reported having discharged all items assigned to them.²⁷

The arrival of Federal supplies into Richmond was welcomed by both Federal prisoners and their captors. Food supplies in the city continued to be uncertain. For brief

²⁶O.R., VI, 482-83, 507-10, 572-74.

²⁷Ibid., VI, 523, 543, 642-43.

period, prisoners did not receive meat rations. Daily fare consisted of corn bread, a little rice, salt, and sweet potatoes as a substitute for meat. Captive and captor alike complained. Prison officials were mandated to provide equivalent rations to prisoners as was supposed to be issued to their own men in the field. By mid-November, Richmond's prisons held 14,000 Federals. The Confederate quartermaster could provide only 2,500 pounds of meat for them. General Winder feared that prison riots would ensue. To help alleviate the problem, 700 Federal prisoners prepared to leave for Danville, with more to follow.²⁸

For those in Libby, as elsewhere, the level of their existence continued on a downward trend. Food dominated their thoughts. Mixed reports from survivors related how, at this time, prisoners received more food than civilians. Others told only of the horrors of their conditions. Glad to see food, more than one famished prisoner bolted down a food package from home only to have the excessive eating result in death. One prisoner told of watching a dying man try to consume a dirty piece of bread. Failing to do so, the bread remained clasped in his hand. Watching and

²⁸Ohio Commandery, M. O. L. L. U. S., Sketches of War History, II, 347; O.R., VI, 497-98, 511; Leo M. Kaiser (ed.), "Inside Libby and Out," Kentucky Historical Society Quarterly, LIX (1961), 326.

waiting to be sure the man was dead, a Zouave crawled across the filthy floor, unclasped the dead man's fingers and consumed the bread. For others, memories became exaggerated. As one distraught prisoner recalled, "I used to blame myself for not eating more when at home."²⁹

Man's inhumanity to man became more obvious. As prisoners gathered around the stoves to benefit from what little heat there was, groups of "raiders" would charge in pell-mell fashion, upsetting and trampling them. It proved a successful ruse. Whenever a few prisoners wanted heat or food, they attacked their compatriots in such an unmerciful manner. Prison officials noted that incidents of captive beating captive for food and clothing occurred more frequently.

Drum-head court martial convened with increasing frequency. Asking for a blanket from a prison official became a treasonable offense. Once-loyal soldiers began to defect. Taking the oath of allegiance to the Confederate States, they became cruel keepers of their former brother soldiers. Resented by loyal Federal officers, Southerners were not overjoyed by this group's free status. By

²⁹U. S. Sanitary Commission, Narrative of Privations, 8; Warren L. Goss, The Soldier's Story of His Captivity at Andersonville, Belle Isle and other Rebel Prisons (Boston, 1875), 27-28.

December, over 400 Federal deserters had their liberty in the city. The Richmond Dispatch pointed out the danger that their presence created. These men of dubious loyalty not only could organize and create havoc in the capital; they could even launch an attack against President Davis.³⁰

In late November, Confederate authorities intercepted a letter stating that greenbacks were being smuggled in the relief boxes. Federal prisoners traded their dollars for Confederate scrip and purchased goods. However, some Federal prisoners altered the face value of the bills, changing one-dollar bills into ten dollars. The bogus money infuriated Confederate recipients and created problems for the treasury. Guards thereafter searched prisoners' packages. Instead of jars of jellies, butter and other desirable tidbits, prisoners received boxes with the contents broken and mixed together.³¹

By early December, Federal prisoners no longer received relief boxes from the North. Misunderstandings on both sides halted this humane action. General Meredith received reports from two Federal surgeons that most of the relief

³⁰Ohio Commandery, M. O. L. L. U. S., Sketches of War History, II, 338-39, 356; Keyes, 123d Ohio Volunteers, 131; O.R., VI, 545-46; Richmond Dispatch; Dec. 23, 1863.

³¹R. Randolph Stevenson, The Southern Side (Baltimore, 1876), 251; Dougherty, Prison Diary of Michael Dougherty, 15; O.R., VI, 459, 483, 852-53; U. S. Sanitary Commission, Narrative of Privations, 153.

boxes were going to Gen. Lee's Army. Additionally, Federal prisoners still complained about their conditions and implied that Confederate officials allowed their boxes to be pilfered. Robert Ould countered with questions concerning the delivery of supplies to Confederate prisoners. He decided that, under the circumstances, it would be best to discontinue receiving supplies. Those boxes that were on hand would be distributed. Any goods received afterwards would be stored in a nearby warehouse. Federal prisoners' actions resulted in punishing themselves. Ould declared that the Federal prisoners would get no more rations than Confederate soldiers in the field.³²

Prison hospital facilities also came under fire from returning Federal chaplains. William A. Carrington, the Confederate Medical Director, diligently researched the accusations of unfair treatment. Since November 1, prisoners on Belle Isle were dying at a rate of ten per day. Carrington attributed this to the prison's overcrowded conditions and to a lack of appropriate supplies. Prio-

³²O.R., VI, 343, 483, 485, 569, 571, 686; Stevenson, The Southern Side, 251; Cavada, Libby Life, 192-93. In the long run, a few prisoners benefited from the non-distribution of supplies. The warehouse used for storage became a focal point in their escape.

soners' lack of hope and survival only of the strongest were additional factors for the high mortality rate.

In the city proper, Carrington noted that prison hospitals needed expanding. The handicap to solving the problem quickly was finding buildings that could easily be guarded. Assurances that hospitalized Federal prisoners received the same medical treatment and rations as Confederate wounded originated not only from Confederate officials. Some Federal prisoners reported that Confederate surgeons treated them with kindness and consideration. To reiterate further the status of prison hospitals, General Order No. 159 placed prison hospitals "on the same footing" with Confederate hospitals. Instructed to equalize rations between Federal and Confederate soldiers, the order also stipulated that prisoners requiring special purchases from the market would be supplied accordingly.³³

In December, smallpox erupted on Belle Isle and in Lynchburg. General Benjamin F. Butler, the newly appointed commander of the Departments of Virginia and North Carolina, seized the opportunity to ingratiate himself to Confederate authorities by sending vaccine. For his concern, Butler received a kind thank-you-note from Judge Ould. An earlier

³³O.R., VI, 587-88, 647, 1086; Glazier, The Capture, The Prison Pen and The Escape, 51.

attempt to arrange a man-for-man exchange with Judge Ould met with failure. The Southern exchange agent reiterated that he was always ready to negotiate an exchange. However, Northern Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton reminded Butler that unless the Confederates agreed to exchange blacks and their officers on an equal basis, an agreement could not be established. Since the Confederates would not meet the Federal terms, the exchange remained stalemated.³⁴

As Christmas day approached, Libby's population prepared to celebrate another holiday away from home. The privilege of buying food from Richmond's markets had ceased days ago. Whatever supplies the prisoners had on hand plus their meager rations had to suffice for the occasion. As in previous years, Federal prisoners endured bitter disappointment. Ironically, Gen. Butler was again the center of controversy. Replacing Gen. Meredith, he now served as a special agent of exchange for the North. In this capacity, he decided to send 520 Confederate prisoners to Judge Ould as a Christmas present. This bold action to initiate the reestablishment of the exchange failed. Granted, Judge Ould sent an equal number of

³⁴O.R., VI, 528, 549-50, 563-64, 659; Richard S. West, Jr., Lincoln's Scapegoat General (Boston, 1965), 252; Hans L. Trefousse, Ben Butler: The South Called Him Beast (New York, 1957), 142.

Federal prisoners back to Butler, but no further exchanges occurred. Difficulties stemmed from the fact that President Davis had issued an 1862 proclamation declaring Butler to be an outlaw. This was still in effect. Butler's status was such that he could not even be received under a flag of truce. Consequently, negotiations between the agents of exchange bore little fruit.

The year ended with the Confederate Congress locked in debate over the cartel. Meanwhile, Richmond's citizens and Federal prisoners realized that no relief was forthcoming to improve their existence. On December 31, the Richmond Examiner aptly described the sentiments of friend and foe alike when it stated that "today closes the gloomiest year of our struggle."³⁵

³⁵Tusken, "In the Bastile," 328-29; O.R., VI, 757, 768-69; Trefousee, Ben Butler, 142; Richmond Examiner, Dec. 31, 1863.

CHAPTER V
THE CLOSING YEARS

Despair overcast hope. The tide of events was turning against the South. The year 1864 opened with Richmond facing the worst stages of deterioration since the beginning of the war. President Davis' popularity was at low ebb and citizens openly showed their discontentment. Food prices increased as supplies diminished rapidly.

Reports flourished in the Richmond Dispatch of nightly raids by citizens and Confederate soldiers on government warehouses located on Cary Street. These buildings contained an abundance of clothing and food-stores shipped from the North and intended for Federal prisoners. The warehouses held over 900 boxes of non-perishable goods that the Confederate government was not going to distribute until Southern prisoners in the North received boxes shipped to them.

Prison guards became so accustomed to evening raids on these buildings that the intruders soon went unchallenged. Throughout January, frustrated Federal prisoners not only read about the situation but watched as their life-preserving staples supported their enemies'

well-being. In the long run, their immediate deprivation of goods proved advantageous to many prisoners.

Confederate Gen. John H. Morgan visited Libby Prison after a spectacular tunnel-escape from the Ohio State Penitentiary. His exploits preceded him and no doubt gave encouragement to the Federal captives. Several Union tunnels had already failed. An impassable wood-lined sewer outlet, water seepage, timbers of seasoned oak and soft dirt had arrested previous tunnel attempts. After several reconnaissances throughout the prison, Col. Thomas E. Rose of the 77th Pennsylvania and Maj. Andrew G. Hamilton of the 12th Kentucky Cavalry decided to attempt another shaft.

With enfeebled bodies and disheartened spirits, a group of 420 of Libby's 1,200 residents took the oath of secrecy and prepared to start again. A selected few did the actual labor while the remainder tried to cover their absence. They gained access to the "rat hell" via the kitchen fireplace (in which the prisoners removed bricks and cut an S-shaped crawl space). Work then commenced on the back east wall of the prison. Only the meanest of tools existed with which to accomplish the task. Using an old chisel, a wooden box, candle light, a rope (procured from a clothing shipment) and a rubber blanket (soot was collected from the fireplace and used to camouflage the

bricks' removal), prisoners boldly undertook the hazardous job of digging.

Plagued with the constant fear of being detected not only by Confederate guards but also by uninitiated fellow prisoners, Rose and his men labored throughout the prison's sleeping hours as well as safe periods of the day. On several occasions, they barely eluded discovery. The most trying occurrence happened after the shaft was well underway. Captain Isaac N. Johnson of the 6th Kentucky Cavalry and Maj. Bedan B. McDonald of the 101st Ohio remained in the basement too long and were unable to reach their quarters in time for morning roll-call. Even the trick of employing "repeaters" failed. Clerk Ross, upset by previous Yankee tricks, had the prison register brought upstairs for a man-by-man count. Authorities quickly identified the missing men. Rumors of their escape or seclusion in the prison became the highlight of prisoners' conversations.

To make matters worse, Col. Rose had to inform Capt. Johnson and Maj. McDonald of their discovery. Captain Johnson, at the risk of his health, decided to remain in the basement and continue work on the tunnel. Major McDonald, to the amazement of his compatriots, returned upstairs for the next morning's roll call. He alleged that during morning sick call he left his quarters

and returned to Col. Streight's room. The doorways between the rooms were now boarded up and, therefore, he could not return to his own room. At a loss as to what to do, he remained in Streight's room until the next morning's sick call, when he hoped to return to his quarters undetected. The excuse oddly enough did not result in any punishment for his disappearance. This near discovery behind them, Rose and his crew continued to dig their way toward freedom.

Was it going to be another failure? Misjudging the distance, a laborer tunneled upward. The ground above him broke and gingerly he peered out. He had come up in the middle of a field. Immediately, the incident was reported to Col. Rose. Scrambling to the tunnel, Rose crawled to the hole and stuffed a shirt into the exit. The hole went unnoticed, and the dig continued. Finally, a fifty-foot tunnel successfully led from Libby Prison to the adjacent yard of Kerr's warehouse, one of the storage buildings for Federal boxes.

Completing the shaft at three o'clock in the morning-- a full seventeen days after they had started, the Federals were anxious to start their escape. Reason overcame desire. Rose and Hamilton decided to wait until the next evening to make their breakout. Praying for a quick passage of the hours, the group tensely awaited the signal

to proceed to the basement. The escape party had increased with the addition of trusted friends. Knowing that all involved could not escape in one evening without detection, Col. Rose thought nightly escapes could take place as long as the tunnel went undiscovered.

On the evening of February 9, Rose (followed by Hamilton) entered the shaft and crawled toward the exit. Emerging from the hole, the next obstacle in their course was to exit the warehouse yard via a gate near a gas streetlight without attracting the guard's attention. Once in the street, some headed for homes of known loyalists while others made a direct run for the Union lines. Some 109 prisoners managed to escape. The mob-like behavior of prisoners in the basement attracted the guards' attention and almost caused the discovery of the tunnel.

News of the prison-break spread rapidly to every quarter of the city. Search parties combed every possible avenue of escape leading to Federal lines. Libby's prison guards, composed of the city's home guard, were arrested and confined in Castle Thunder. Prior to the tunnel's discovery, Confederate authorities thought that the prisoners might have effectively bribed the guards. Federal inmates did nothing to dissuade their captors' suspicions. Out of the 109 escapees, 59 made it safely

to Union lines, 48 returned as captives to Richmond, and 2 men drowned. Colonel Streight and Maj. Hamilton made good their escape. Among the unfortunates to be caught was the group's leader, Col. Rose.¹

This escape, coupled with raids around Richmond by Gen. Butler's forces, added to the anxiety of the civilian populace. Danville was receiving Federal prisoners from Richmond, yet the numbers left in the city could wreak havoc if a Union raid was successful. Food supplies became more limited with each attack made by Federal forces on the supply lines. A repeat of the Bread Riot of June, 1863, seemed imminent. Citizens demanded, and the Confederate government ordered, a tightening of prison security.

Inside Libby, access to the ground floors was promptly abolished. Pulleys raising and lowering the staircases enabled prison guards to keep prisoners lodged in upstairs rooms. From Castle Thunder, Capt. George

¹Jones, War Clerk's Diary, II, 123-26; Richmond Dispatch, Jan. 4, 5, 6 and 11, Feb. 10, 11 and 12, 1864; O.R., VI, 954 Christian M. Prutsman, A Soldier's Experience in Southern Prisons (New York, 1901), 17; Frank E. Moran, Bastiles of the Confederacy (Baltimore, 1890), 29; U. S. Sanitary Commission, Narrative of Privations, 8-9; Long, The Civil War Day By Day, 454; CWTI, II (July, 1960), 16-17; IX (Oct., 1970), 31-39; Caldwell, Incidents of War, 25-26; Homer B. Sprague, Lights and Shadows in Confederate Prisons (New York, 1915), 43; Margaret W. Peelle (ed.), Letters from Libby (New York, 1956), 40.

Alexander's huge guard dog, "Hero," was brought to patrol Libby's exterior.²

Even prisoners' communications with the outside world now came under closer scrutiny. Major Turner limited correspondence to a weekly letter consisting of no more than six lines. Prisoners labored to crowd all their feelings and needs into these cryptic letters. One captain, falling short of the goal to express himself briefly, concocted an invisible ink and proceeded to write an elaborate love letter. His undoing was the postscript in which he informed the recipient to bake the letter and read it again. Needless to say, prison authorities took his message to heart and warmed the letter. Federal captives constantly tried to evade the rule of six, while Confederate authorities remained vigilant in combating any infraction of the rule.³

Toward the end of February, several events transpired simultaneously and altered Libby's daily routine. Arrangements finally materialized for the long-standing Sawyer-Lee-Flinn-Winder exchange to take place. General Neal Dow, the temperance lecturer from Maine, also left

²Tusken, "In the Bastile," 319; Richmond Dispatch, Jan. 23 and Feb. 17, 1864; Stevenson, The Southern Side, 18; Peele, Letters from Libby, 52; George H. Putnam, A Prisoner of War in Virginia (New York, 1912), 27-28.

³Roach, The Prisoner of War, and How Treated, 75; Owens, Sword and Pen, 171.

for the exchange point at this time. On February 27, unfinished Camp Sumter in Georgia received its first group of Federal prisoners. Better known in history as Andersonville, this prison was intended to alleviate the number of Federal captives held in Richmond. Captain Henry Wirz, a former acting commandant of Libby Prison, commanded what was to become known as the most notorious prison in the South.⁴

Confederate authorities and Richmonders alike felt relieved to have so large a hostile burden removed from the close proximity of the Federal lines. The recent tunnel escape and Union raids close to the city caused a great deal of worry over public safety. Unfortunately, prior to the removal of any large quantity of Federal prisoners, rumors of a massive Federal raid against Richmond became prevalent. Confederate authorities, fearing that the city's defenses were too weak, decided on a controversial method of maintaining Federal prisoners in Libby. In the advent that Federal soldiers were successful in their raid into the city proper, prison authorities had stored large quantities of gunpowder in Libby's basement with the intention of blowing up the building and the prisoners. For added security, prison

⁴O.R., VI, 899, 927, 991; Long, The Civil War Day by Day, 469.

officials informed the captives that the lethal charge existed. Outraged, the prisoners had no power to alter the situation. As the raiding parties of Gen. Judson Kilpatrick and Col. Ulric Dahlgren approached the city, Federal prisoners, who had at one time prayed for the mission's success, despaired over their own fate.

The Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid turned out to be ill-fated from the beginning. Separated into two parties, the Federals planned to converge on the city from different directions. On March 1, Gen. Kilpatrick's force reached the northern fortifications of Richmond. His party not only lacked the element of surprise but they encountered defenders who put up strong resistance. Consequently, Kilpatrick chose to retreat.

Lacking constant communication with Kilpatrick, Col. Dahlgren continued to execute his original plan of action. He sent 100 of his 500-man force on a skirmishing expedition to destroy property and to enter Richmond from a northern angle. Meanwhile, the remainder of the party was to ford the James River and enter the capital from the south. Misdirected by a guide, Dahlgren's party never reached the ford; instead, their advance met with resistance from Confederate forces under the command of Gen. Custis Lee. Heading toward King and Queen Court-house, Dahlgren's force engaged the enemy again. The

ensuing fight took the life of Col. Dahlgren and resulted in the capture of 130 Federal soldiers, of which 38 were Negroes.

Accompanying the death of this popular young Union cavalryman is a still-unresolved controversy. Supposedly, papers found on his body indicated that the full purpose of his mission was not only to pillage and burn Richmond and free Union prisoners confined in the city, but also to capture or kill members of the Confederate Congress and Cabinet. The prize target of the expedition was to be President Jefferson Davis. When appraised of this information, the Southern populace became enraged at the thought of such a fiendish scheme.⁵

Federal troops captured from the raid felt the Confederates' wrath. Black and white officers from this group found themselves quartered together in one of Libby's dungeon cells. Located in the middle cellar, the eight-by-twelve-foot room housed twelve to fifteen officers. Ventilation and light was minimal. The smallest of human comforts were non-existent. Unlike the upper rooms, no water closet existed. An open tub substituted

⁵Richmond Dispatch, Feb. 17 and Mar. 10, 1864; Ferguson, Life Struggles in Rebel Prisons, 38; Sprague, Lights and Shadows in Confederate Prisons, 45; Stevenson, The Southern Side, 252-53; Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, 460-61; SHSP, XIII, (1885) 518-20, 554-56; Beaudry, Historic Records of the 5th New York Cavalry, 94-95.

for a privy. At mealtime, whites and blacks lined up alternately in a row. In the presence of the guards, the prisoners tried to consume their food without benefit of plates or utensils. If illness struck any of the group, only their own resources prevented them from dying. Attempts to alleviate their suffering by fellow countrymen were limited to passing tidbits of food and words of comfort through a hole in the floor. For approximately four and a half months, the Dahlgren raiders endured this treatment.⁶

In May, 1864, an attempt by prisoners to set fire to Libby only strengthened the Confederacy's desire to get the massive number of inmates out of the capital and removed from any attempted contact with Grant's forces. Presently, Maj. Turner was assisting Capt. Wirz in expanding Andersonville to accommodate the prison cast-offs of Virginia. The Federal population in Richmond systematically moved to Danville and then to Andersonville. General Order No. 45 also effectively decreased the city's warehouse population by directing that all prisoners captured south of the Confederate capital would bypass the city's confines and proceed directly to Andersonville.

⁶Allen O. Abbott, Prison Life in the South (New York, 1865), 258-59; Asa B. Isham, Prisoners of War and Military Prisons (Cincinnati, 1890), 29-30, 34-35; Christian M. Prutsman, A Soldier's Experience in Southern Prisons (New York, 1901), 17.

Meanwhile, the on-again, off-again special exchanges, plus sick-and-wounded exchanges continued spasmodically to alleviate prison and hospital numbers.

Richmond's reprieve from the blue horde was short-lived. Engagements at Beaver Dam, Spotsylvania Court House, Cold Harbor, Petersburg and vicinity brought an influx of Confederate and Federal wounded, plus inevitably large contingent of captives. From May 1 to September 1, records at Libby indicated that 16,086 Federals registered and passed through the building on their way to another Confederate residence. Once again, Libby was a transient prison.⁷ For those passing through Libby, life was exceedingly more difficult. Body searches for valuables became more extensive. The quantity and quality of food decreased to levels of bare subsistence. Consequently, the death rate soared to new all-time highs.

Daily prison life followed the established routine pace. Now Confederate cooks and prisoners shared in preparing the existing rations. In May, a prisoner related that the daily fare "consisted of a piece of cornbread two inches thick by two and one half inches square, simply mixed with water, without salt, and baked; bean soup, which was made up of brown beans, black bugs, and long brown

⁷JSH, XXIV (Nov., 1958), 441; Richmond Dispatch, Apr. 25, May 7, 16 and 30, June 4, 6, 8 and 25, Sept. 3, 1864; O.R. VII, 103.

worms, in about equal proportions, suspended in a liquor having the color and much of the flavor of tan-vat water." By October, prisoners paid more attention to the quantity of food. Cornbread issued with corn cobs, bugs or pieces of mice embedded in it met with avid consumption by the prisoners. The only thing that mattered was that some substance filled the void in their half-starved bodies. Even suspicions that the food might have poison in it fell on death ears. "What don't poison will fatten" appeared to be a common attitude.⁸

Prisoners bombarded new arrivals with questions concerning the war. For many prisoners, just looking out the windows was answer enough for them. Marching to Richmond's defenses were old men, young boys and ambulatory wounded. Prison authorities had impressed Federal Negro prisoners to work on the city's fortifications. Daily the sounds and sights of war came closer to Richmond. Exploding shells and smoke-filled skies were regular occurrences.

Confederate wounded straggling into the city supported the Federal captives' feelings that the days of the Confederacy were few. Nightly, prisoners had their sleep

⁸O.R., VII, 117; Darby, Incidents and Adventures, 104-5; Isham, Prisoners of War and Military Prisons, 31; Booth, Dark Days, 62-63, 81; Putnam, A Prisoner of War in Virginia, 24; Massachusetts, Civil War Papers, II, 508-9.

interrupted by the scrapping and clanging sounds of the staircases being pulled into place. Roused from an uncomfortable sleep, prisoners lined up and proceeded downstairs. There they received meager rations meant to last three days; then they left Libby's confines to be transported into the Southern interior. For weeks, nightly evacuations transpired until the Confederate government recognized the fact that the Union's stranglehold was not going to cease.⁹

A war-weary Richmond greeted New Year's Day, 1865, with little enthusiasm. Plans to evacuate the city spread from home to home. Citizens could see government offices being packed up. The unspoken question on many lips was: "When?"

The only soldiers who joyfully entered Richmond were Federal prisoners. In February, a formal exchange program resumed. Union captives gladly marched to Libby Prison. The red and white building looked like an oasis in a desert. Now the prison served as the holding depot for Federal prisoners bound for the exchange point.¹⁰

⁹Henry L. Estabrooks, Adrift in Dixie (New York, 1864), 60-61; Sprague, Lights and Shadows, 46; O.R., VII, 987-88.

¹⁰Jones, War Clerk's Diary, II, 423, 437, 445; Putnam, A Prisoner of War in Virginia, 84-86.

On April 3, prison guards pulled the stairs into place for the last time. Remaining Federal prisoners prepared to line up. Like the Confederate army, they were leaving the city. Marching out of Libby, the Federals observed Maj. Turner standing in his office and burning all of the prison's records that he could before he too departed the city. Like a captain on a sinking ship, he was the last to leave. Libby Prison now stood desolate against the backdrop of smoke and flames.¹¹

¹¹Cary L. Daniel, The Confederate Scrap-Book (Richmond, 1893), 100-1; SHSP, XIII (1885), 249.

EPILOGUE

Then and Now

Amid out of control flames, an advance party of the 4th Massachusetts Cavalry galloped into the fallen Confederate capital. No one hindered them as they raised the Union flag over the capitol. Fires set by evacuating Confederate forces had destroyed major businesses on Cary and Main streets. However, Libby Prison remained unscathed.

Federal forces quickly rushed to the prisons to release fellow countrymen. They unceremoniously hauled down the Stars and Bars from its staff on Libby's roof; yet the building's usefulness had not ended. Federal authorities retained it as a prison. When President Abraham Lincoln visited the site, he found Confederate stragglers, civil offenders and Confederate officials confined in the former Federal compound.¹

The most noteworthy of the new residents was Capt. Richard Turner. This former Confederate prison official found himself lodged in one of Libby's dank and filthy dungeon cells. In later years, his son William told of securing food at the end of a string and lowering it through the bars of his father's cell. According to

¹Richmond Dispatch, Feb. 10, 1893; Cary L. Daniel, The Confederate Scrap-Book, 100-1; SHSP, XXXII (1885), 74

William, Federal authorities then moved his father to the Virginia State Penitentiary. Only the kindness of a prison guard alleviated the suffering of his mother and himself when, upon countless occasions, prison authorities told them that they had just dispatched Dick Turner to his maker. For over a year, Capt. Turner remained imprisoned without official charges lodged against him and without benefit of any type of hearing. The Official Records indicate that Dick Turner received his parole from Libby Prison on June 18, 1866. Broken in health, he spent the remainder of his years in the Virginia countryside. He lies buried in a small cemetery outside Smithfield.²

Fate was far kinder in some regards to Gen. John H. Winder, Maj. Thomas P. Turner and Clerk Erasmus Ross. They received no prison sentences. Two months prior to the fall of the Confederacy, Winder died of natural causes in Florence, S. C. Major Turner, like so many other Confederate soldiers, fled to Canada. He remained there for approximately ten years, then returned to the United States and practiced dentistry in Memphis, Tenn. On Christmas Eve, 1870, a fire broke out in the Spotswood

²Turner, The Black Swan, IV (Aug., 1929), 34; IV (Sept., 1929), 28; IV (Oct., 1929), 22-35; O.R., VIII, 636, 929, 930, 960-61, 966.

Hotel in Richmond. Numbered among the victims was Clerk Erasmus Ross.³

On Aug. 3, 1868, Libby Prison ceased to serve in any official capacity. The building reverted back to the Enders family as the property of Mrs. George S. Palmer. The Southern Fertilizing Company purchased the west section of the building. It was not until the late 1880's that the former prison attracted anyone's attention. While visiting Richmond, William H. Gray of the Knights Templar Assurance Association of Chicago decided that the old prison would make a profitable business venture as a museum in Chicago. Gray, along with Josiah Cratty, John A. Crawford and Charles Miller (plus the Burnham and Root's architectural firm), gave \$23,000 for the property. They secured Messrs. Rawlings and Rose of Richmond to act as their real estate agents in the purchase of the warehouse.

In December, 1868, the work of dismantling the old prison began. The undertaking was immense. Each brick and timber had to be numbered so that it could be exactly reassembled in Chicago. Even the nails and shingles were

³Ibid., Ser. I, XLVII, pt. 2, 1121; Turner, The Black Swan, IV (Sept., 1929), 28; Illustrated Guide and Catalog . . . in the War Museum (Chicago, 1900); Richmond Dispatch, Dec. 28, 1870; Rauscher, Music on the March, 44.

carefully itemized. All this transpired under the watchful eye of Louis M. Hallowell, a noted Philadelphia architect.⁴

The Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad received the contract to transport the dissembled materials to Chicago. The job required 132 twenty-ton cars. Misfortune occurred at Ashtabula, Ohio, when the train wrecked and scattered its cargo. Workers completed the laborous task of recovering the timbers. However, many bricks were left along the track.

As the train continued its journey, preparations were transpiring in Chicago for the building's arrival. On Wabash Avenue between 14th and 16th Streets, a wall of artesian stone was erected around the perimeter. Architect C. M. Palmer of Chicago directed the construction of this wall, which later became part of the present-day Chicago Coliseum.⁵

In September, 1889, the reconstructed "Libby Prison War Museum" opened its doors to the public. The total cost of the dismantling and reconstruction was \$200,000. Among the items contributed to the museum was the extensive collection of war relics, portraits and papers from North

⁴Bernard J. Henley, Richmond, Va., 1607-1963 (n.p. n.d.); Walls That Talk. Libby Prison, 3; Robert W. Waitt, Jr. (comp.), Libby Prison (Richmond, n. d.) 2; Will P. Kent, The Story of Libby Prison (Chicago, [1890]), 5-8.

⁵Waitt, Libby Prison, 2-4; Putnam, A Prisoner of War in Virginia, 26-27; Richmond Times-Dispatch, July 30, 1962.

and South belonging to Charles F. Gunther. A prize possession on display was a chisel used by prisoners to dig their way to freedom. The building's timbers told a story of their own. During the war, prisoners had engraved names and units into the wood.

For the first five years of the museum's existence, the venture was profitable. In 1893, the prison museum had to compete with the World's Fair in Chicago. Not associated with this event, Libby Prison Museum still managed to operate in the black. However, in 1895, rumors that Libby Prison Museum was insolvent began to ring true; discussions increased of transferring the project to Washington, D. C.

By 1899, the museum no longer attracted visitors. With deficits increasing, its directors decided to tear down the site. Relic hunters took bricks as souvenirs, and local contractors hauled bricks away for reuse on new projects. In an attempt to preserve some of Libby Prison's history, the north wall of the Civil War Room in the Chicago Historical Society was rebuilt of bricks and one of the original entrance ways from the prison.⁶

A farmer from La Porte County, Ind., then purchased the beams and timbers. On his farm in Hamlet, he erected

⁶Waitt, Libby Prison, 2-3; Kent, The Story of Libby Prison, 5-6; Richmond Times-Dispatch, June 3, 1897.

a large barn. For approximately sixty years, the barn stood as a silent tribute to the memory of years past.

A renewed interest in Libby Prison surfaced with the advent of the Civil War Centennial. On October 20, 1962, J. Ambler Johnston and Robert Waitt of the Richmond Civil War Centennial Commission, along with members of the La Porte County Historical Society, dedicated a marker near the Libby Prison barn. Ignoring the "no trespassing" signs, tourists began wandering through the farm to the barn.

Dismayed with the invasion of their property, Miss Ella J. Davis and her sister, Mrs. Charles Dowdell, decided to sell the barn. Charles K. Mercer, a realtor from Spencer, Ind., purchased the barn and had it dismantled. It took two truckloads to transport the pieces to Spencer. The new owner intended to reconstruct the barn and use it as a museum. To date, however, the timbers remain in storage. Future plans for their utilization remain undecided.⁷

While the building itself was undergoing these alterations, its original site in Richmond did not remain vacant. For many years after the Libby warehouse was

⁷Ibid., Mar. 25, 1959; Sept. 28, 1962; Feb. 14, 1964; Indianapolis Star, Dec. 23, 1963; Charles K. Mercer to Sandra V. Parker, July 7 and Aug. 30, 1977, letters in possession of writer.

razed, the Crystal Ice Company (later the Richmond Ice Company) conducted profitable business at the 20th and Cary streets location. In 1939, Samuel I. Seldes purchased the buildings and had them demolished. The location then served as a junkyard. During the early 1960's the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee voted to purchase a billboard picturing the prison and giving a brief historic text. The display stood for a short time at the corner of 20th and Cary streets.

Also in the 1960's, the Richmond City Planning Commission proposed to purchase the property and convert it into a park. This idea never materialized. Finally, late in 1980, the junkyard disappeared. Philip Morris, Inc., purchased the property and had it paved for a parking lot. The company had the prison's original foundation wall repaired and erected a security fence around the property. On October 4, 1980, members of the Sons of Veterans Reserve and Sons of Union Veterans met at the former Libby Prison location. North and South united along with Luther Libby's great grandson, Luther Libby, Jr. of Richmond, to dedicate a plaque commemorating the existence of Libby Prison.⁸

The plaque is mute testimony to a time when an innocent-looking storage warehouse became a notorious focal point of a great civil war.

⁸Richmond News Leader, July 14, 1939; Oct. 6, 1980; Richmond Times-Dispatch, Dec. 15, 1961; Nov. 17, 1964.

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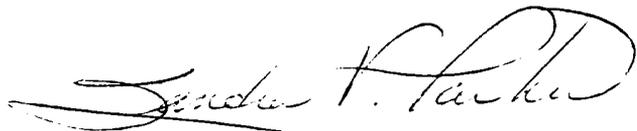
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VITA

Sandra V. Parker, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Roger L. Parker, was born July 28, 1953, in Red Bank, New Jersey. Attending schools in West Germany and various counties in Virginia, Miss Parker graduated in 1971 from the Chesterfield County School system. In the fall of that year, she began pursuing an undergraduate degree in English and History at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Upon receiving her B.A. degree in 1975, she entered into the History graduate program.

Completing the course work for this degree, Miss Parker obtained employment with the Richmond Public Schools and the Henrico County School systems. In 1978, Miss Parker became an employee of Henrico County. For the next three years, she worked as a counselor and contract coordinator for the CETA grant. Returning to Blacksburg in May, 1981, she completed her thesis under the direction of Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr.

Miss Parker is also affiliated with the following organizations: Richmond Civil War Round Table (past president), Virginia Historical Society, National Trust for Historic Preservation, National Historical Society and Mid-Atlantic Manpower Professionals Association.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sandra V. Parker". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned at the bottom right of the page, below the text of the biography.

A HISTORY OF LIBBY PRISON, 1862-1865

by

Sandra V. Parker

(ABSTRACT)

Libby Prison ranked as one of the most notorious of Civil War compounds. Used as a transitory depot and hospital as well as a permanent place of confinement, over 125,000 Federal prisoners passed through Libby's doors. The Confederate States Military Prison headquarters located in Libby Prison made it the focal point of Richmond's spindly prison system.

Prisoners' diaries tell of depravations suffered during captivity. Insufferable living conditions, poor food rations, inadequate hospital facilities and harsh punishment composed a majority of the prisoners' complaints. Daily newspaper accounts reflected the lifestyles of Richmond's population and residents' attitudes toward the presence of Federal captives in their city. A majority of the time, prisoners had access to the daily papers. Yet very few of them attempted to draw a correlation between the type of existence that they endured within Libby Prison versus the civilian population's struggle to sustain itself in likewise unsuitable circumstances. The Official Records of the Civil War round out the picture

of the difficulties faced by the Confederate government in trying to maintain large numbers of prisoners with proper shelter and food. Added to this was the continual desire of Confederate authorities to establish an exchange system to alleviate their burden and Federal prisoners' suffering.

This thesis attempts to draw these major sources of information together. Prisoners' reminiscences used in this study were critically evaluated for their validity. To establish the diarists' retention in Libby Prison for the period indicated in the diary, Roll Call Books located at the National Archives were consulted. Newspapers and official correspondence balanced out the interpretation of Libby life. Throughout the Civil War, the Confederate government did not attempt intentionally to deprive Federal prisoners of adequate provisions. A majority of the time, circumstances dictated the actions disliked by captor and prisoner alike.