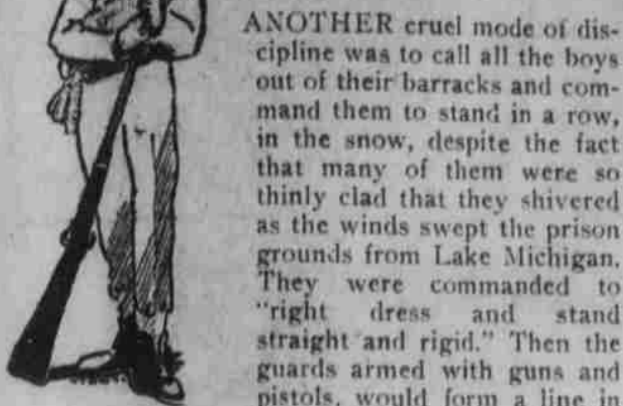


MORGAN'S MEN

STORIES OF THEIR EXPLOITS

As Told by C. W. GEERS, One of Morgan's Men



front of them, and with cocked guns presented, command them to bend their bodies over in a stooping posture until the tips of their fingers would touch the ground under the snow, the knees to remain perfectly stiff. They called this "reaching for corn," and we would be compelled to stand in this position sometimes as long as four hours. Many of the defenseless boys, hundreds of miles from home and friends, would become so fatigued that they would give up and fall over in the snow. For this they would be conveyed to a warm room in headquarters, and after being thawed out, would receive a barbarous flogging as incorrigibles and past cure except by torture. The blood would run from the nose and mouth of many, and the guards would taunt them as "paying dear for their whistle," though "they were getting off light for their treason."

Another mode of torment was to march all the prisoners out of the barracks and make them sit down in the snow and so remain for two hours. There are men in Denton county, prisoners in Camp Douglas, who will verify the statements which we are making.

If all the Federal guards as mean as Henry Wirz were punished in the same manner as was Henry, the pension rolls would be greatly reduced in number. To cover up their own diabolism they cried "stop thief" and hanged Henry Wirz.

Another cruel method was employed to punish a whole barrack at once. The guards would march all the boys out and make them stand in the snow erect in line, telling the sentinels to shoot any man who moved hand or foot. Then they would go off to a stove and warm themselves, and on their return, would examine the snow at the feet of the boys, and if they found the boy had moved would act as though the boy had committed a murder. They would drag him to the whipping room and flog him without mercy. They enjoyed the sport. Denuded of his clothing, they would tie his hands together, and command him to "come across." If he moved while being whipped he would get twenty-five or thirty lashes extra. If he cried out under the torture it was an excuse for doubling the whipping, and a fresh guard would lay on extra lashes. Other guards would stand with pistols cocked and pointed at his head. In case the victim could not lie still they would tie his feet and hands together. If he begged for mercy, they would threaten to shoot him.

Right here we desire to record the fact that these guards were, in the later part of 1864, sent to the front, and many of them could not be made to fight at all. They ran for their lives and two of them were ordered shot for cowardice, so we heard, after the war closed. They were the vilest and most arrant cowards in the Federal army. By this time all of them, no doubt, have crossed the river Styx to give an account of their crimes and receive such punishment as Satan desires for the unregenerate.

The guards would hold conferences to learn if any new device of punishment had been invented and they would always find a new mode. Tying men up by the thumbs and the other punishments described above, becoming too monotonous, they hit upon a new source of sport. They would procure one-half of a barrel and have a hole made in it large enough for the prisoner's head to slip through and so as to let the barrel rest on his shoulders. They would pick out some proud-looking Confederate prisoner, accuse him of violating some rule which they would not name, and then put this ornament over his head. Then they would force him to walk from one end of the prison to the other a whole week every day, continually. Often this "hazing" process like that of Annapolis, while fun for the guards was death to the victim.

Again, they would pick out a nice appearing and comparatively well dressed boy, accuse him of breaking a rule and make him climb up and down a ladder for a whole week without rest except at night and at meal time.

Often in the dead of night the sharp report of a musket would be heard, which meant death to some one. The next morning we would learn that some guard whose identity was unknown, had fired into a barrack and killed a sleeping Confederate soldier. We would view the corpse as it was conveyed in a cart to the burying ground on the outside.

We remember that often our boys were caught about the slop barrels in search of bones from which to make soup, so nearly starved were they. If anyone was caught at this, the guard with cocked pistol at his head, would make him take it in his mouth, get on his hands and feet and go from one end of the street to the other and bark like a dog. They would do this in seeking an excuse for killing him for disobeying orders. This was called the "dog performance." Dante's Inferno does not furnish a parallel to the suffering of the boys in Camp Douglas.

If a prisoner stepped over the "dead line" intentionally or by accident, he would be shot down by the sentinels on the parapet. If as many as three prisoners were seen standing together on the streets of the prison, they would be fired upon by a sentinel and one of them killed or wounded. The most innocent mistake would cost someone his life.

All the Free Masons and Odd Fellows were domiciled in barracks to themselves. All the "loyal men," or those who had petitioned for the oath of allegiance, or to join the Federal army, were stored away to themselves. We mean those who had asked to be permitted to fight against their homes.

The "loyal men" were the Benedict Arnolds of the Confederacy and were small in number. The great body of prisoners determined to rot and perish upon the altar of their country rather than betray or desert their comrades. Like the Romans, who declared that "while the Coliseum stands, Rome will stand; and when the Coliseum falls Rome will fall," so declared our boys in prison: "While Richmond stands the Confederacy will stand; when Richmond falls, the Confederacy will fall;" and they resolved to rather die as martyrs for the cause of the South and to the Stars and Bars.

An application to join the Yankee army had to be made in writing to Lieutenant Fife. When a prisoner was seen to enter that office, we knew he would be transferred to the "loyal row." He would try to keep it a secret; but his sneaking, villainous presence, his hang-dog air and mien, invariably betrayed his treachery, and his comrades would look at him as though they were viewing a corpse. The traitor, feeling his shame and degradation, would stand isolated and alone, with his cap drawn over his eyes, or lie in his bunk until summoned to return to headquarters and thence to the "loyal and deserters row." The three barracks composing this "row" were looked upon by the boys in gray with more scorn and hatred than were the negro soldiers or the Federals. We were told by the Federals that they had orders from Washington to pick out the "white sheep" and separate them from the goats, to be looked after by the great Shepherd, lest they become contaminated by contact with the rebels. The Yankee soldiers, however, looked upon this class of men with a suspicious eye, and would not trust two or three of them together with guns in their hands. No two of them were allowed to serve together in the same regiment, and we heard that no Yankee would sleep with them under the same blanket.

After having undergone all the preliminaries and taken the oath, the prisoner, escorted by two or three Federal soldiers, would return to the barracks and get his things and then leave, never to be seen by us again.

We were allowed to write short letters home, within the Federal lines, once a month, but were not allowed to seal them, as they had to be inspected by the censor.

Lieutenant Fife passed through the prison one day, followed by his pet dog. The little dog was fat and playful and wagged its tail all the time. The dog was enticed into one of the barracks. Fife missed his dog and put a notice on the bulletin board, offering ten dollars reward for its return. A prisoner wrote under Fife's notice: "For lack of bread, the dog is dead; for want of meat, the dog is eat." This enraged Lieutenant Fife and he instituted a rigid investigation as to the fate of his dog. Ultimately the barrack was discovered which had butchered and eaten the dog. As a penalty for this offence, rations were withheld for three days from the boys occupying this barrack.

One morning General Joseph Hooker entered the prison on horseback, followed by an escort of officers. They were mounted on fine horses and their uniforms were trimmed with lace and their shoulders were decorated with flashy epaulettes. It was an imposing scene. They dashed around the prison square, and then out through the gate, making their visit brief indeed.

Governor Morton and Governor Oglesby also visited the prison in a fine carriage. Morton made a speech in which he said he was in favor of an exchange of prisoners.

We were also visited by twelve Indian chiefs representing twelve tribes. They were on their way to Washington City, to confer with the "Great Father." They remained in the prison but a few minutes.

A Baptist preacher would occasionally visit us from Chicago. Ignorance seemed to be his fort. He loved our souls but denounced our bodies as animal and carnal, that ought to be destroyed as they consisted of meat only, being unspiritual and brutal. He despised our "ways" also, which he thought should be destroyed as "stubble," meaning our principles, habits, conduct, etc. As our ways were directed by the spirit, the body being but an instrument to do its will, we could not see how he could love the author of our ways and hate the meat. The guards would stand around and cry "amen" and look at us to see the effect of the sermon. He would blow his nose, sniffle tears, and smite his breast, while speaking in a whang-doodle tone, asking the Lord to open our eyes and be merciful toward our souls. He was the blindest, most illiterate, heathenish jacobin we ever saw at large in the country. But the guards, many of them as mean as the preacher, enjoyed his low ribaldry, and we were forced to be present at the point of a bayonet. Several of the boys were made to ride the "mule" for declining to shake hands with him. We heard at the time that we were sub-

jected to this infliction in retaliation for baptizing Federal prisoners in Kentucky and Tennessee. But our preachers had never forced the Yankees to be baptised or to listen to preaching. Such as were baptised had voluntarily confessed Christ.

During the night, in the dead of winter, the prisoners were not allowed to approach the stove.

I pray the Lord my soul to take." Scores of our men were shot and killed without provocation, but there is no record of a Federal guard being called to account for murder.

Sometimes a prisoner would be compelled to get up in the night. If caught he would be conveyed to "Morgan's mule" or shot down "for attacking the guard." From day to day and

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The bleak and storm-beaten barrack issued a melancholy moan as the chilly currents of air blew through its rifts and cracks diversified only by an occasional report of a gun, and the cry of a wounded or dying soldier boy. All felt that they were in danger of being killed before morning, and hundreds of them employed the prayer which they had committed to memory at their mother's knee: "If I should die before I wake,

night to night, the process of pain, starvation and shivering was continued in this wretched abode, which we shall not attempt to describe further, but will leave the boys here for the present and follow Morgan and his officers who were marched from the cars at Columbus, Ohio, to the penitentiary.

Stories of Morgan's Men will appear once a month in this section of the paper.

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