

The National Tribune

A Monthly Journal devoted to the interests of the Soldiers and Sailors of the late war, and all Pensioners of the United States.

GEORGE E. LEMON & CO., } VOL. I, No. 6.
Editors and Proprietors.

WASHINGTON, D. C., MARCH, 1878.

TERMS, FIFTY CENTS PER YEAR.
Single Copies, 5 Cents in Currency or Postage Stamps.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year of our Lord, 1878, by George E. Lemon & Co., in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington, D. C.

Libby Prison, Richmond, Virginia.

This bastille was situated at the southeast corner of Carey and Eighteenth streets. It consisted of a building, or block, of three stories, with an attic. The first story and attic were used for enlisted men, officers being confined on the second and third floors. The dimensions of the rooms were one hundred and five by forty-five feet, connected by door-ways and having five windows at each end.

Dungeons below the level of the street and under the sidewalk were used for the confinement of prisoners who violated any known or unknown rule of the prison. Into the six rooms devoted to the confinement of officers, as many as twelve hundred have been crowded at one time, which allowed but twenty square feet, or four and a half feet each way, for each

On the 9th of February, 1863, one hundred and nine men made their escape from this prison through a tunnel extending some sixty feet across the street on which the prison was situated. Fifty five of them, including Colonel Streight, succeeded in reaching our lines.

The horrible purpose and intention of the rebels, of sacrificing our officers confined in this prison in cold blood rather than permit their release by the arms of the republic, appears to be well established. A magazine containing several hundred pounds of powder was placed in an excavation beneath the building, with a fuse attached, with a view to its explosion in case the raid of Kilpatrick in February, 1864, had proved successful. The Richmond papers of the time boasted that measures had been taken to prevent the release of the Union officers by Federal troops.

east side. The swamp contained about three acres of land, or nearly one-fifth the territory assigned us; along the borders of the stream, and extending back to either edge of the morass, were frequent bogs, in which the stagnant water, oozing up through the loose earth, had formed in little pools, and was covered with a thick, dark scud, which gave out a sickening stench when it was disturbed. At its eastern extremity, where the water made its exit, the prison sinks were located; although from the weakness of the sick men, the lower part of the stream, for the distance of several rods, was used for this purpose. The water was warm and disagreeable: it had a boggy, earthy taste, and was, in its purest state, of a dark, reddish-brown color; yet, if all the arrangements for our imprisonment had been as good as this we should never have murmured. On the west side, near the dead line, was a bridge of loose boards, upon which communication could be had with the opposite side of the swamp. Above this a place had been scooped out directly beneath the dead line, where water for drinking and cooking purposes was dipped up in cups; below, the water was reserved for bathing and washing clothes. These arrangements, however, had been made by common consent of the prisoners, the authorities having nothing to do with it; there was nothing to prevent the evil-disposed from disturbing the water and rendering it unfit for use, except the moral influence of camp.

DISTRIBUTION OF RATIONS.—COOKING.—WOOD.

"Some time in the afternoon the ration wagon drove into the stockade laden with corn-meal, bacon and salt, which were thrown down into a heap in an open space about midway the inclosure. It was a horrible sight to witness the haggard crowd gathered about this precious pile, while the commissary superintended its division among the squad sergeants; gazing, meanwhile, with wolfish eyes upon the little heap as it diminished, or following their sergeant commissary back to his quarters, as famished swine follow clamorously the footsteps of their master, as he carries their food to the accustomed trough. The rations were distributed by the division-sergeant to the mess-sergeant, who then divided them among the men. To avoid quarrelling, during the last distribution, it was the custom among all the messes for the mess-sergeant to separate the rations into as many small parcels as there were men in the mess; one man of the mess was placed a short distance off, with his back toward the parcels, in such a position that he could not see them; the mess-sergeant then pointed to one, with the words: 'Who has this?' to which the man replied, announcing the name of the recipient, when it was given to him. In this manner the whole number was gone through with, with satisfaction to all.

"Iron bake-pans, like those used by the confederate soldiers, had been issued to the prisoners who first arrived at this place, in which to bake their meal and fry their bacon; but nothing of the kind was ever given out afterwards, to my knowledge. The United States soldiers, as is well known, were never provided with other cooking utensils than mess-kettles and mess-pans, both too large to be transported in any other way than upon army wagons. At the time of our capture, in numerous instances, the tin cups and plates which we had were taken from us; our knives, it will be remembered, were confiscated at Danville; nothing, therefore, was left in our possession with which to cook our raw food after it was given us. How to accomplish this necessary feat was a grave question. We made shift, however, with chips, half canteens, tin cups, that had escaped confiscation, and pieces of sheet-iron, to bake one side of the stuff, while the other was scarcely warmed through. The solder of the tin, melting and mingling with bread, added another to our almost innumerable hardships. But with all our care and labor, the rations were at last devoured in a half cooked state—a fact which aided in the increase of the frightful misery that subsequently occurred, quite as much as the small quantity that was issued. A more extended account of the quantity as well as the quality of our food will be given hereafter.

"A few tops of the pine trees, which had been left within the stockade by the confederate authorities when the interior was cleared, together with the greater part of the stumps, had been used by the first detachment, and an adequate supply of wood was never afterwards provided, although just outside the prison walls, millions of tons, apparently worthless to this country, were growing; and we would have gladly gathered it and brought it in upon our shoulders if we had been allowed to do so. Such permission was never granted, except for a few times, when a squad from each division was sent under guard to forage for dead limbs and sticks; the practice being brought to an end by one of the 'details' seizing the guard and marching northward with him. After this circumstance took place, Captain Wirz devised a kind of parole, or obligation which the boys agreed to before going out, where-in they agreed to make no attempt at escape while foraging; but even this was not respected, and the plan was dropped in a short time. During all the time in which the men were allowed to go out of the blockade, any one with sufficient money or other valuables were permitted to hire a guard, if he could find one unemployed and willing to be hired, and with him to go into the woods to gather up such dead wood and loose twigs as were lying upon the ground. No axes or any tools for cutting wood were ever furnished by the authorities, except a few issued when the first prisoners were confined there. Some of the boys, however, had bought axes of the sentinels,



prisoner. Major T. P. Turner commanded the prison, and Richard Turner was prison inspector. This was the place to which prisoners were usually taken to be searched and robbed. It was one of the first established by the rebels, and continued in use until nearly the time of Lee's surrender. Many thousand prisoners were temporarily confined here previous to being sent south. Eleven hundred prisoners, however, were confined here many months. As early as 1863, men were starving in this prison. They were fed with broth made of rusty and decayed bacon, covered with white maggots, and from beans and peas. Here the inmates slept on the hard and naked floor, or, in colder weather, sought protection in filthy blankets covered with vermin.

It was here that Colonel Streight was lured into an attempt to escape by the perfidy and murderous intentions of the commandant of the prison. He was captured, ironed, thrust into a cell full of filth and vermin, and reduced to a diet of bread and water. Here he found six soldiers confined in the foul stench of this loathsome cell.

The foul and uninhabitable condition of Libby prison was well known to the higher officials and officers of the Confederacy, who were accustomed to visit it.

Extracts from the Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War by the Rebel Authorities.

The following are extracts from the testimony taken by the Committee of the House of Representatives of the fortieth Congress, appointed to investigate the treatment of prisoners of war by the rebel authorities, continued from our February number:

"The only unoccupied space in the inclosure north of the swamp was a narrow strip fifty feet wide, reaching quite across the east side of the pen, from north to south. Into this we were ushered in due form, and turned loose to shift for ourselves. In this confined space we were permitted to select our position, and the right to it, when selected, was based upon the principle of squatter sovereignty; if the fortunate occupant of the soil, however, was too weak to maintain his right, he was subject to be ousted at any time by his stronger neighbor. Generally, each detachment had a portion of soil assigned by the authorities, as we afterward learned, where it was required to 'locate' for purposes of roll-call, sick-call, and the issuing of rations; but the men were not obliged to remain there at any other time or for any other purposes.

THE MORNING.

"Morning broke at last, and rising from the couch on which we had in vain sought repose, we rolled together our blankets, wet with the chilling shower of dew which had fallen copiously during the night, and fastening our cooking utensils to the bundle, left them with a friend, while we set out in search of water. Taking the direction of a belt of fog, which had settled down about half way between our situation and the south end of the stockade, we found, on reaching it, a black, boggy swamp, that appeared to be about eighty yards in width, through the center of which flowed a muddy stream of water, winding its sluggish way along till it passed between the timbers of the stockade, slightly scored off for the purpose, on the