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I, Alpheus Pike: A Civil War Memoir

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I, Alpheus Pike: A Civil War Memoir

Adapted by Jared Brown

from the unpublished account, "Prison Life of Alpheus H. Pike."

(Pike is seated in a wheelchair, his legs covered by a blanket. Nearby is a table holding a small oil lamp and a sheaf of pages)

To look at me I suppose you wouldn't guess that I was a soldier in the War Between the States. I'm old now – well, I'm 45 years old, but I know that I look older than that. It was what happened to me in the war, especially my confinement in prison, that turned me into an invalid. And that isn't all. Heart trouble. Partial loss of sight. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's start from the beginning. I remember it well, for I wrote down my account of the Civil War on these pages right here.

Only one man can be called the youngest soldier who enlisted at the beginning of the Civil War and served to its end. That man is me, Alpheus Pike, of Bloomington, Illinois. I joined the Union Army, the 39th Regiment, Illinois Volunteers, in 1861, when I was only fourteen years old. For about thirty days our regiment was quartered at Benton Barracks in St. Louis, where we spent seven to eight hours a day drilling ourselves into military shape. Eventually, we were ordered to to Alpine, Virginia, where I saw battle for the first time. One evening in 1862, couriers came into camp saying Jackson's army was on the march toward us. Our company assembled immediately. We had scarcely been in line ten minutes when we heard the clatter of the feet of rebel cavalry coming down the turnpike. We were unobserved by them until they were nearly opposite, a distance of not ten rods from us, when the command was given: ready, aim, fire – which we did and with good effect, too. Eight or nine were killed and twice as many wounded. The rebels fled and we took out after them, marching to Cumberland, Maryland through rain. (He removes the blanket and springs to his feet. His behavior is that of a fourteen year old) But, being a growing boy, and a hungry one at that, nine miles out of Hancock I fell out of line to a neighboring farmhouse, placed my shoulder against the door, which yielded on hard pressure. I laid my gun and knapsack on the floor among the pans of milk, not spilling quite all of them. I satisfied my thirst with the milk; then, in a corner I found a crock of fresh butter and I thought it would help to season my biscuits. But having no way to carry a crock of butter, I decided to butter my biscuits then and there. So I raised the flap of my haversack and jammed my hand deep down into the butter, and then, in turn jammed the butter into my haversack on top of the biscuits. But it smelled so good I couldn't stop. I put several more handfuls into the sack and some in my pocket, feeling sure my comrades would envy me when they discovered the bonanza I had struck. When I found the line and began to march, after about half an hour the butter became warmed up and a fellow says, "Pike, what is that running down your leg?" And the butter dripped down my trousers all day long. I tried to make them think it was a good thing, and I even invited them to partake, but they said, "No," some of them politely, some of them falling down with laughter.

Well, that's about the last funny story I'll be telling you today. I suppose you want to hear about the glory of combat, the thrill of victory. All right, I'll tell you something about the war – but there may not be much glory in it. Remember, I was only fifteen years old when I first tasted battle, so it all seemed like a fine old adventure at the time. Later, I'd find out different. Anyway, another time we marched to Port Republic to try to prevent Jackson crossing the Shenandoah at that point. We arrived there about the time Jackson's advance arrived. Our batteries were planted so as to command the bridge. His columns charged through the bridge and were swept down three times before they got a foothold on our side. Swinging into line they charged our batteries and a fierce conflict ensued, our gunners even using their swabbing rods as clubs, while our infantry was doing their share in an equally determined manner. The superior number of rebel troops compelled us to retreat. The fact that the 84th Pennsylvania lost more than half of their number – and the other regiments suffered severely – shows the character of the conflict. We retreated about 30 miles, and were lucky that Jackson did not follow us.

In May 1863, we were put aboard vessels, and put out to sea about midnight. In the morning we found ourselves approaching Coal Island, one of the small islands on the coast near Charleston, South Carolina. A few days later we made contact with the rebels. As the sun peeped above the waters the signal was given to fire, and under the scorching fire the enemy was obliged to retreat. Under the cover of our guns pontoon bridges were placed and our army crossed over without much resistance. But the guns from the enemy fort soon opened with grape and canister, which created sad havoc in our ranks. Still, we continued to advance. The order being given to charge, our troops bore down on the enemy double quick. The rebels stood their ground manfully and fought like tigers, but so did the union men. But we were inferior in number and had to retreat. 1700 men were killed and wounded. Our commanding general sent a flag of truce into the enemy's fort asking permission to bear off the wounded and bury the dead, which was granted. Squads were then detailed with stretchers and shovels, to perform the sad task. This continued until far into the night.

Here's another memory that burns bright, even to this day: In November 1863 an order was given to the effect that all soldiers who would re-enlist for another three years would be rewarded with thirty days furlough and four hundred dollars. Most of the men thought this a grand opportunity to see friends at home, and \$400 was no mean thing to a poor man. Seven-eighths of the men re-enlisted, including me. If I had known what was in store, I would have turned down the offer then and there, but, of course, there was no way I could know such a thing.

(His attitude and physical demeanor change to a degree. No longer a fourteen-year old, he shows signs of a growing maturity)

But here's the main part of my story: In May of '64 we were stationed about nine miles from Richmond. We had not been long at rest when we saw the enemy's skirmishers jumping over the fence at the other side of the field. We opened fire on them, making them scamper back into the woods for protection. We held our position until nearly sunset and then our whole force was ordered back to camp. The next day we were

ordered to move on – where we did not know, but it soon became clear that we were going after the rebels.

As we crossed a railroad track, I and several others left our places in the ranks to fill our canteens from a brook near by. While we were doing so, I heard somebody holler, ‘Halt!’ A regiment of rebel cavalry was coming down the track so close on me and my comrade that we could not escape. The first one rode up to me with a cocked revolver, the second with a drawn sword, shouting, ‘Surrender and give me that haversack.’ The other says, ‘Give me that blanket.’ They took our guns, searched the sack and the blanket, then threw them back at me. The rebels marched us to Petersburg, a distance of ten or fifteen miles.

At last we halted before a stone building with heavily grated windows. We were marched into the building two or three at a time and searched. Everything of value was taken, even rings off of fingers, and were never returned. When nighttime came, there was nothing to lie on except the floor. I used my shoe for a pillow. After about eight days, we were marched out and placed on freight cars so thick with men – not less than sixty in a car – that, even during the night, it was impossible to lie down. The journey occupied five days until we got to a remote spot in Georgia on the first of June, 1864 – and arrived at that notorious prison, Andersonville, the worst in the history of the world.

Andersonville wasn’t even a village, merely a sidetrack on the Macon and Georgia railroad. This place, located in the midst of the vast forest, was so far from any town of consequence that the Confederates thought it would be the most secluded spot to encamp the Union prisoners. The prison consisted of a stockade, a vast enclosure holding thirty seven thousand prisoners, fronted by two strong lock gates.

On the top of the stockade every 100 feet there were small sentry boxes built with a ladder leading up, wherein was placed a sentinel at all times, his principal instructions being to shoot without warning any Yankee, as they called us, who should cross the “dead line.” Those instructions were well carried out as many a well filled grave will attest. The Confederacy had on guard at this place, as near as I could judge, between three and four thousand soldiers – mostly old men and young boys either too old or too young to go into the field. They delighted to have the slightest provocation or excuse to shoot a Yankee.

The “dead line” was an important feature in the drama of prison life. For many a poor fellow lost his life, and many were severely wounded by going too near or touching this dread mark. The prisoners were not allowed to touch it or to hang anything on it. The ever watchful guard was on the alert. Of course, it would be supposed that they would not dare to shoot a man down without provocation, but in many instances such was the fact, for it was told to us by the rebels themselves that whoever shot a Yankee on the dead line received a furlough of thirty days. Every few days there was someone shot. This then is the picture of one of the most horrible prison pens that ever existed – and where my comrades and I knew not whether we would ever be released. Each of us in his own mind realized our truly horrible position – being in the center of the Southern

Confederacy, enclosed in a stockade, without blankets, without shelter, without much food, exposed to the rain and sun, and there for a time indefinite.

(Again, his physical demeanor changes, reflecting fear and suspicion. His rhythm slows)

One day, to my surprise, I recognized the face of a fellow prisoner as a boy I had played with when I was a child at home. He came up to me and shook hands most heartily, saying he was glad to see me. Then he said, "Ivory is here," meaning my brother. This was a surprise to me although I had several months before received word from home that he had been captured. My boyhood friend then said, 'Come along with me and we will find him,' so we passed along around the camp from one place to another until we at last saw him, and he truly was as much surprised to see me as I was him. 'I'm damned glad to see you,' Ivory said, 'but damned sorry to see you here.' Dirty and begrimed, without shoes or stockings, wearing a sheet with sleeves four inches too short and a pair of pants reaching midway between the knee and ankle and well shredded at the bottom, he presented a spectacle I shall long remember. Ivory was 20 years old, 6 feet 3 inches in height, and wearing a hat that added another foot to his height. His advice to me was simple but forcible. "Now, Alph," he said, "you must not think of home, or pies or pudding or anything good to eat, but pretend that this is the best place on earth, your food of the best and most plenty, and do not hate yourself to death, as this one and that one is doing," pointing out to me different ones who were dying from homesickness.

The camp was so extremely crowded that every available spot was occupied by a sleeper. They lay so close in the streets that you would have to feel your way among them, placing your feet carefully so as not to step on them. The prisoners were generally in an extremely emaciated condition. This was partly on account of the poor quality of the food, but mostly caused by the impure water in the creek, our only drinking water. This water acted as a brilliant laxative and fully 4/5 of those who died at Andersonville were carried off with diarrhoea. It was sad to see those poor emaciated fellows going to their death and still calling for a drink and all we had to offer was the miserable creek water. Of those attacked by diarrhoea, not more than one in fifty recovered. The deaths averaged 125 per day.

One could buy most anything in camp for money. Everything was at extremely fabulous prices. At that place one dollar of Northern paper money was worth seven dollars in Southern rebel money. There was plenty of money in the camp among the few. A great many of the squads coming into camp were bounty men and had surrendered unconditionally and brought their money with them. But this money and a few valuables caused a great deal of strife and wickedness. From the time the camp originated at Andersonville there was always thieving and robbing among the prisoners. In most all flocks you will find some black sheep, and in this flock there were a great many very black ones. These thieves banded themselves into gangs to protect themselves from those they had stolen from, and a prisoner who had been robbed did not dare pursue, fearing he might be roughly dealt with. So as time went on these gangs became bolder and would commit highway robbery. If anyone resisted, he would receive a horrible beating. These gangs would eat a man's food. The robbers became hearty and strong, while those whom

they were robbing became weak and emaciated. As the camp got older the gangs grew bolder until at last three men were found in a well one morning with their throats cut. There was not a week that passed without somebody found murdered or horribly cut and beaten. I was often awakened at night by the cry of "Murder, murder," in different parts of the camp.

Quite a few of our men, not wanting to be murdered, when they went out searching for wood, would bring in an oak or hickory limb and cut these into clubs about two and a half feet long, then tied them with a strong string around the wrist. This company armed with clubs were called Regulators, and a formidable looking squad they were, too. Now, it happened that Captain Werz, the camp Commandant, heard about the robbers, and he ordered all of them to be taken outside the camp and be executed by a firing squad. The robbers slunk away – toward the rest of us – and tried to hide themselves, but they were too well known for that. The consequence was that they were all found and taken out – about five hundred of them. The rebel officers proposed they should give the robbers their choice: to be shot or to go back into the camp by passing through a line of Regulators armed with clubs. The first man who came back inside the camp was knocked down before he had gone ten feet and pounded to death by several of the prisoners. The second broke through our line and was chased across the camp by the Regulators and beaten to death. Three or four more were killed and another three or four horribly beaten. We hung the rest of them – on Monday, the 11th of July, at 5:30 p.m. One of the robbers looked up to the scaffold and said, "Life or death," and made a bound over the heads of the Regulators, and like a deer ran across the camp through the swamp with a dozen or more Regulators after him, overtaking him and beating him down with clubs. Regulators took hold of his arms and others pushed him back to the scaffold. He was crying, "For God's sake, spare me," while the blood was running down his face. The Regulators swore at him and answered, "We will spare you just as you spared our comrades. Come along, we'll show you how to kill." In this way they pulled him up and mounted him on the scaffold where the others had been placed. At a signal, the prop was pulled away from under the scaffold. Down he came, struggling terribly in his agonies, trying to free his arms and whirling around backwards and forwards, slowly strangling to death.

Am I proud of what we did that day? No, I can't say that I am – but it just shows how life in prison turned us all into animals – though the robbers were the worst. Anyway, from that time on, anyone who might have been inclined to become a thief was so terrified that we could almost leave our money in the open and not have to be concerned about it.

Well, that provided some excitement, but most of the days at Andersonville were filled with boredom and discomfort. How we longed for pure cold water those hot summer days, no tongue can tell. We set about the task of sinking a well, begging the rebel authorities to loan us instruments – even so much as one shovel and a rope – and although they had plenty of them they flatly refused to do so. Our only alternative was to tear up blankets and clothes, as valuable as they were, and twist and braid them into a rope, one of them over 80 feet long. Then, with tin cup and plate and perhaps a wooden

shovel, we gradually dug down, down, down, until a depth of 72 feet had been reached. It was a hazardous thing for a man to begin the descent when supported by such a poorly made rope. But the dirt at the bottom of the well was as dry as it was at the top, and at last the diggers gave up in despair.

About this time, the fifth of August, 1864, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon there came a heavy thunderstorm. Rain poured in torrents for thirty or forty minutes. During the storm a pure cold stream of water broke out of the hillside. Sure if God ever did anything in those days it was done then. And it was said that in all the country round there was no water like this, so we named it Providential Spring. For a time it revived the health of the camp and seemed to give new life. Mortality in the camp dropped off nearly one half. But when Providential Spring dried up the men began taking sick as they had before.

(He seems to reflect an attitude of despair in his physical being)

The "sick pen" as they called it was an enclosure just outside the south gate, well surrounded by guards. Medicine was dispensed but the kinds they had were not applicable to the diseases prevalent in camp. So, after a few trips to the sick pen the soldiers were taken to the "dead house." The dead in camp were picked up and carried out in blankets by those prisoners strong enough to hold the weight. Each morning three or four large wagons, each driven by six mules, would drive up to the dead house with its ghastly load, bodies thrown on the wagon as carelessly as wood, each body simply bearing a tag pinned to the breast. Burial took place in a long trench 9 feet wide and 3 feet deep, the corpses laid side by side.

One fatal disease was scurvy. It attacked one in various ways. Sometimes under the joint of the knee which would gradually swell, the cords growing stiff, growing black, drawing up the limb, swelling more, growing blacker, until sores would break out and the discharge so great the patient would die of emaciation. Ofttimes the feet would swell up and burst and rot off. Sometimes it would attack lips, tongue, and throat. The tongue would swell to fill the throat and choke the patient to death. Many others died of homesickness. I have known great hearty men to come in there and be carried out in ten days, though they seemed not to have died of any disease.

The rations at Andersonville consisted of cornbread, the meal not having been sifted, no seasoning, not even salt which was our great luxury. No salt, but plenty of dust and bugs. Most always we were given ham and bacon, so strong it was yellow, tainted and rotten – unfit for the rebel soldiers but given in place of good meat to the prisoners. I have seen the hams so far decayed that the rind would almost slip off itself, but when taken off there was exposed underneath one solid mass of cooked maggots. Some prisoners would willingly take a good portion of cooked maggots as their portion of meat. I was an eyewitness to one prisoner cooking and eating beans that had passed whole through an invalid prisoner. They gave us raw peas one day that looked perfectly good. I sat down and said to my brother, "Now I will have a mess of peas without bugs." I put them into our little black quart tin pail, put water in and set them on the fire. When they began to boil the bugs began to rise to the top of the water. I then gave up the idea of ever having

a mess of peas without bugs, but contented myself with skimming the bugs off the top of the water with a wooden spoon. Most of the men paid not much attention to the bugs. I oft times saw prisoners pick lice off their heads and clothes and eat them, and they seemed not ashamed that others should see them.

(He grows significantly older. The youthful vigor we once saw is almost entirely gone)

The rations grew shorter and we grew more hungry. For the rest of my stay I was hungry all the time. There were cases of prisoners lying on the ground and dying. They called for food and water, but no one paid attention to their call. One man lay in the hot sun on the sand, on his back, near the Providential Spring, calling for water. Although prisoners were passing and repassing with pails of water, no one seemed to heed him, for this reason: as the prisoners said, he had scurvy, and if we let him drink out of our cups we will all have it. When I saw this I said to them, "He shall have a drink out of my cup even if I die with the scurvy." I went to my tent, got my cup, and filled it with cold water which he greatly relished. It seemed to revive him to the extent that he regained his feet and moved on. (He begins to cry) Thank God for the water of Providential Spring.

But the point where most of the men came to their death was at the creek near Providential Spring, for many of the soldiers washed and bathed in the creek, and many others dipped their cups and pails into the water to get what was needed for drinking and cooking purposes. It would be natural for them to reach and get water as clean as they could, and in reaching they'd come within several feet of the dead line. The fiendish guard, without a word of warning whatsoever, would take deadly aim and fire. This occurred every few days, and would have happened more often except that one guard might be more tenderhearted than another, if such a thing could be said.

(He seems to wither before our eyes, becoming smaller and more frail)

The cry both North and South has been "Let us forgive but not forget." But how can we who were there and suffered forgive these heinous deeds even were we inclined to forgive their deeds of lesser vindictiveness?

Some of the prisoners tried to escape by tunneling their way to freedom. It was entirely out of the question to make a plan among the prisoners to overcome the guards, or in any way make a rush on the gates or scale the stockade. In that place it was every man for himself. Such was the rule and there were almost no exceptions. Had others in the camp known you had been plotting or tunneling or trying in any way to make your escape, they would have told of the plot to the rebel authorities.

A great deal of my time at night was spent in digging tunnels or trying to find out where a tunnel was being dug so I could join the man who was trying to escape. I would lay down on the bank of the creek, sometime after ten or eleven o'clock and keep on the lookout. A man with a haversack on his shoulder would seat himself on the bank of the stream, looking round here and there, peering into the darkness, acting as though he was wondering if anyone was watching him. When satisfied that there was not, he quietly

took off the haversack and poured something out of it into the water. It was fresh dirt. When I saw this, I knew that someone was digging a tunnel, for all the dirt had to be secretly carried and put in the creek between ten o'clock at night and the morning, for it was dangerous to have even a crumb of dirt lying around in the vicinity where a tunnel was being dug. So, seeing the man I was waiting for, I would approach him and say, "I want a hand in that work," which was generally granted, for there wasn't much else he could say.

We'd prepare ourselves with some short pieces of board, say three feet long. We would commence digging a hole as near the dead line as possible, saving the dirt to cover up the hole in the morning after having put the boards over it. Then, replacing the straw or dried leaves as the case might be, covering up all trace of our work. The ground had to look untouched, for the quartermaster made it his duty to prod the ground near the dead line every two or three mornings. Working night after night, we would try sink the shaft about seven or eight feet, then horizontally right out under the stockade, calculating to come up in as secluded a spot as possible. One rainy night at eleven o'clock, going down to the creek for a drink of water, I saw a man making some peculiar movements near the dead line. I watched him closely and he crawled to a point midway between the two sentry posts. It was so dark I could hardly see him but I crawled after him and found that he and another man with a short handled shovel were digging under the stockade. I says to them, "I guess I'll help you do this piece of work." They says, "All right, but keep still." So I went to work with them digging with a will, one after another as hard as we could work, leaving the dirt at the top of the ground. In about three hours we had nearly finished when we saw the clouds were breaking up and the half moon coming out. We covered our work as quick as we could with weeds and grass and left it to finish another dark night. I lay down in my tent but could not sleep. In a half hour I got up and went to the place where we had been tunneling, as I feared they would break the tunnel and leave me behind. All was quiet and I went to my tent again and slept until the seven o'clock roll call. When I got out I turned my eyes to where the tunnel had been dug and saw a squad of workmen filling up the hole. I learned that the tunnel had been opened and that probably some had escaped without notifying me. For one reason or another all the tunnels I was engaged in digging were found out by the quartermaster. I never once got outside of camp. But even those who did escape probably didn't get very far, for every man and woman and child through the whole country outside the stockade were on guard as spies against us. I know that there was a man kept for the occasion with a pack of bloodhounds and a cur dog. With these he circled the camp every morning close to the stockade, and were a prisoner lucky or unlucky enough to escape the stockade, his trail would be taken up and followed through all the other footmarks until the open country was reached. Then away they would fly like the wind on the trail, the cur dog following the track of the hounds leading the posse who were in pursuit. Reports were prevalent that packs of hounds had torn prisoners to pieces. Some of them were brought back alive, put in stocks, and punished very severely by the orders of Captain Werz, the commander, who was bloodthirsty and cruel. He thought no more of shooting a Yankee than killing a snake. At his trial at Washington City after the war, a comrade of mine, John Belcher of Bloomington, Illinois, principal witness against him, said that he had seen Werz shoot

two men dead. Others, also, testifying to his cruelty, made the case so strong against him that the jury condemned him to death and he hung a few months afterwards.

On September 8, 1864, my term of three years' service expired. This was also my eighteenth birthday. I didn't feel like eighteen, I can assure you. With all I had seen and lived through, I felt like seventy or eighty – or whatever age it is when you give up all hope. But my birthday came just after some of the Yankees were released from Andersonville prison at last. The rebel authorities, fearing a raid from our forces who were pushing a heavy campaign in the vicinity of Atlanta, Georgia, deemed it advisable to break up the vast number of prisoners in the camp and send them to different places, so if our forces were successful in their raid on any prison they would not release so many prisoners. So, on September 5th, orders had come into camp for the first three detachments to get ready to move, there being 270 men in a detachment. The report was also circulated that they were going to be exchanged. This set the camp wild with excitement, for many of us thought we were going home. In some instances as high as one hundred dollars or more was offered by prisoners of other detachments who hoped to change names and places with a soldier who was going to be exchanged. I don't know of one case where the change was made. The next day, the detachments were moved out of the camp and boarded railroad cars with a hurrah and shook hands with those who were left behind. I, being one who was left, will say that nobody who was never placed in such a position can never realize such loneliness. The confinement seemed worse than ever before. It seemed that the men who boarded the cars were going to life while the rest of us were being left to die. But some of the men who attempted to board the cars could not make it. So sick were they that some of them died on the way to the cars and some of them after they got inside. The next day five more detachments had orders to pack up. Hurrah. That meant me and my brother Ivory were in the detachment. We moved the next day, with a mixture of elation, sad feelings and tears. Some of the soldiers collapsed on the way, but the rest of us were loaded into cars, without water or rations, about 70 in a car, guarded by three guards at each door and others on top. We had thought that we were going home, but the next morning about 7 o'clock the train stopped in Savannah and we saw on each side of the train a line of armed rebel soldiers. The prisoners said to one another, "This surely means another stockade." And so it did. They unloaded us and marched us some three-quarters of a mile to an open field where they had this large enclosure – and into this heavily guarded prison they led us. Each day more prisoners arrived from Andersonville. The rebels dug a canal around the outside and filled it with water, so when some prisoners tried to tunnel out of camp, they nearly got drowned.

Thanks to my brother, Ivory, we contrived to get an axe which was a jewel in the extreme. Money and diamonds couldn't compare with the priceless value of that axe. There were only two other axes in this camp of nine thousand prisoners. And they were so valuable because a ration of wood was even scarcer than a ration of food. So I'd chop some wood, then go out on the streets with a load of wood and exchange it for meat, soupbone, rice, and cornbread. Let me say right here this soupbone would not have a particle of meat on it, being stripped as clean of meat as a walking cane of hair. But if the bone was broken you could find the marrow inside – unless the feller who sold it to you

had bored a little hole and sucked the cooked marrow out with a straw. But usually we could make a delicious soup from the marrow, and as my brother would say as he smacked his lips, "That'll grow hair on your eyeballs." Then the soupbone was laid carefully away and brought out again the next day and broken into small pieces and cooked again. So after we gained possession of the axe we lived high the rest of the time at Savannah, four weeks. We would lend it out to other men in exchange for a ration of wood. That axe was going night and day.

With the food we got in exchange for the wood, don't think we forgot our poor starving comrades, for we always felt that we must share with the poor and cold and hungry. When night came the evenings were chilly for thinly clad prisoners, so we would take a portion of a surplus stock of wood and build a little fire out in a spot where prisoners could gather around. Their thin features would light up with a smile. Long would the poor boys sit around the embers of our campfire, long after we were in our tent and fast asleep, and perhaps until every spark and glow had died out.

Now, let me speak of a case of ingratitude, in the case of John Burk of Bloomington, Illinois, showing how ungrateful a man can be. We found him dying at Savannah of hunger and disease, took him, nursed him up and got him well. He sat at our table side, always had a chance to eat his fill from the best we had, sat at our campfire and smoked our tobacco. We did all this because he was from the same town as we were. Now here comes the treacherous part. Later, after the war was over, my brother was running for constable and this same John Burk refused to cast a vote for him! Here it is, almost thirty years later, and it still gnaws away at me just to think about it.

Orders came to break camp at Savannah and move again – this time to Milan, Georgia. On the march from the Savannah camp to the railroad cars some of the prisoners suffering from dysentery would be obliged to stop along the way, but Lieutenant Davis of the rebels soon put a stop to that, by crying out to the guards, "If any damn Yankee falls out of line shoot him on the spot." Anyways, the camp in Milan was the best camp in the whole South, a large enclosure of forty acres with a stream of cold water fed by springs. This was a delight, you can believe me. And another great delight was plenty of wood so each prisoner could and did have a little campfire of his own now and then. Plenty of room we had, too, on good, solid, nice, dry ground, besprinkled with leaves and twigs and grass. The air seemed fresh and it was a delight to hear the birds sing their songs those October days. But the scurvy was more prevalent than before, for we had been so long without needed nutriment. And here also, as at the other two camps, the fatal dead line was established.

Each day new prisoners arrived. Still, the camp was never more than half full, I suppose in fear of capture by our forces. But from what I learned after getting out of prison, it seemed that our government did not want a lot of poor, broken down, sick and crippled soldiers to nurse into new life, even if they could get them by marching fifty miles and liberating them. This turned out to be true, although we poor fellows were ignorant of it while we were in prison. The South had asked time and time again for an exchange of prisoners and our government would not have it so. They were ashamed to own up to the

truth and tried to evade it. When the subject of exchange of prisoners was broached by the Southern Confederacy during the summer of '64, the Northern government would flatly answer, "No, we will not exchange now because if we do we will turn back to the Southern army fifty or sixty thousand able-bodied soldiers, while in return we will receive the same number of sick and disabled soldiers to nurse, clothe and feed, and a great many will not be able to enter the ranks again." Now, I don't know where the blame belongs – with President Lincoln or Congress, but I think with the President, he being commander-in-chief of the army as well as President of the United States. So they allowed us to stay in the rebel prison camps and suffer, when like men we had done our duty and were still loyal to our country. In fact, one day in November the Colonel commanding the Milan prison camp got on a stump and said, "Your government has refused to exchange prisoners with us at our solicitation time and time again. We have wanted to exchange ten thousand sick and they flatly refused us. So we will give you a chance to enlist in our ranks. If you do, you shall be treated the same as our men. I'll guarantee that you will do fort duty and never go to the front." At the close of his speech a man by the name of Loyd stepped up on a fallen log and said, "My dear Colonel, I know that our government is true to us and will stand by us. We are proud of the Stars and Stripes that waves over our homes and firesides. To maintain it we offered our lives and limbs and now when the oppression is the greatest we cannot and will not turn traitor. No, Colonel, we welcome your stockade in preference to that." He stepped down off the log, somebody proposed three cheers, we gave them, and then all but six of us filed back into camp. We heard afterward that the Colonel said, "Brave boys, may their country be proud of them." This is sort of like my bitter feelings about John Burk, who refused to vote for my brother – but a whole lot worse. All these years later, and I can't forget how our government forgot us. It festers. It festers.

Everything went on as usual until October 10th, when orders came from the rebel surgeon to send two thousand of the sickest and most disabled men north to their homes. When we heard the news we all became the sickest lot of soldiers ever seen. And I was sick: I was suffering from scurvy, my left leg being drawn up, swollen and somewhat black under the knee. And Ivory was pretty sick himself. So we boarded the train Sunday night and a jolly crowd we were, too, for there was no guard on this train. I climbed on top of the car, clung on and slept there in naps all night. The train was fired upon several times during the night by some miscreant rebel, but as good fortune would have it there was nobody struck. When morning came, the train came to a halt in the city of Savannah, and on each side of the train there was a line of guards. We were unloaded from the cars and stood in line. Those too sick to walk were put into wagons. The line was ordered to march. One prisoner says to the other, "Well, if we are going to a camp it must be a different one." But we didn't go to any camp at all. They took us to the Savannah River, which runs down the coast to where our Union forces were at Fort Pulaski. We were loaded on to an old-fashioned side wheeled steamer lying at the wharf, and when we were all aboard the vessel cast off from its moorings and slowly floated out into the stream and down toward the sea. Yes, we were surely going home now. We could see the ocean and Fort Pulaski in the distance. The prisoners could hardly contain themselves, they cheered and laughed and wept, but still they clung to their old ragged blankets and clothes which were well begrimed with dirt and had a goodly stock of

vermin. They kept tight hold on their little, old, dirty, black tin cups, pails, wooden buckets and frying pans. And then, not far from us, we saw a large, beautiful, side wheel Yankee steamer, and oh, what a contrast there was between it and the rickety old tub that we were on. The boats were made fast to one another, the gangway plank was thrown across from one vessel to the other, and the order given for the soldiers to go forward into the other boat. We immediately made a rush, for we could hardly contain ourselves. No one can tell what a feeling possessed us at that moment. As each soldier stepped on to the deck of the Union steamer, he turned around and threw his blankets and everything but what he had on into the sea, and felt thankful to God that he had no more use for those old things.

The soldiers were taken to the large washroom and each one was given a thorough bath and their hair was combed. Then we were given some meat and hardtack and some coffee with sugar in it. This was the finest meal I ever expect to eat. We were given nice woolen blankets, too. Oh, my, what a change this was. The vessel sailed away that evening, the 21st of November, 1864. We landed at Annapolis the morning of the 23rd and went into barracks there. I immediately wrote my parents that I was safe and well – and free.

The health of the soldiers picked up wonderfully, for we were in good clean quarters and had good clean clothes and hot baths. Each of us former prisoners was given the privilege of a thirty-day furlough if he chose to accept it, and a great many did, including Ivory. But I waited for my final papers, and was then sent to Springfield, Illinois. There I went into quarters at the soldiers' home, where the eatables were nice white bread, well cooked peas, beans or rice, nicely cooked salt pork or fresh meat, and generally soup at dinner time, each meal accompanied by a fairly good cup of coffee or tea. So after waiting at this place for about two weeks I finally received my discharge and my pay, for I had received no money for about eight months. The wages amounted to \$16 a month, quite a bunch of money for a poor little soldier boy. I also expected to receive a government warrant for 160 acres of land – this had been promised when I enlisted, and it was the general understanding among all soldiers that this would be forthcoming – but I did not get it, and neither did anybody else. Just another example of our government's treachery. Still, the most important thing was that I was free this 25th day of February, 1865, having been in the army three years, five months and fifteen days.

That night I took a train home, arriving there safe and sound with a hearty and glorious greeting from my parents. Ivory soon came on his furlough, but had to return again after thirty days, as his service had not expired. But the war was nearly over, so only a short period of time was required of him, and that was performed in camp, not on the battlefield.

(He walks – with difficulty – back to his wheelchair, and puts the rug over his legs. He speaks haltingly)

But I never did recover my health, as it turned out. Oh, I was given a pension for life – of \$2.00 a month. On that meager sum I've lived here, at 300 Washington Boulevard in

Chicago, for many years. Forty-five years old now, but I know that death isn't far away. Maybe if it hadn't been for my days at Andersonville and Savannah I could look forward to a better life, but even the doctor doesn't hold out any hope.

(pause)

That's the whole story. Maybe you can find some hint of glory in it. Maybe you enjoyed the thrill of battle.

(coughs)

But me – I'd just like to bring some of my comrades back to life and maybe give myself another ten or twenty years.

(coughs)

That's all. I don't want to talk no more.

(Lights fade)