NARRATIVE

OF

Amos E. Stearns,


A PRISONER AT ANDERSONVILLE.

With an Introduction by

Samuel H. Putnam.

Worcester, Mass.:

Franklin P. Rice, Publisher.

MDCCCLXXXVII
TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY COPIES PRINTED.

Copyright, 1886,
By F. P. Rice.

Publisher's Private Press.
To the

MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION

Union Prisoners of War.
Introduction.

The Narrative of Prison Life as told in the following pages is the simple story of a private soldier, a member of Company A, Twenty-fifth Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers. That his tale is honestly told—that he narrates his own experience truthfully, and describes what came under his observation faithfully—there can be no question.

As he speaks only of his prison life it may be well to give here his reasons for going to the war and enlisting in Company A, as they show clearly the character of the man. I use his own words as I heard them from his lips:

"I have often been asked how I came to go to the war in Company A, 25th Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers. It was because I wanted to go in a company and regiment whose officers had had some experience. And as Captain Pickett had been out three months in the 3d Battalion of Rifles, I thought him just the man to go with, and so I went with him. I had the war fever from the time of the going of the first troops until I went myself. When I went to the war I was in debt something over one hundred dollars, having just lost my wife and infant child, they dying within three weeks of each other; and that left me without a home, so I felt more free to go. I was out of work most of the time that summer, and got in debt to the above amount.

"While I was in the service I paid this debt, and came home on a furlough in August, 1863, which cost me four months' pay. I also bought grave-stones for my wife and child, and at one time had ninety dollars on deposit in the bank. But after I went into the stockade at Florence I sent home for a box of things, as the Rebel officers said any box weighing less than one hundred
Introduction.

pounds would come to us by way of Charleston. I wanted clothing, stockings, shoes, a small camp kettle, dried beef and other articles, which cost me nearly thirty dollars, so that when I came home in 1865 I had only about sixty dollars in the bank. I received two hundred and sixty-two dollars on my discharge, and about twenty dollars back clothing money. I would have had more clothing money, but when I arrived at Camp Parole they made me draw everything just as if I was going to join the regiment again, and these things cost forty-one dollars. So you see the sutlers did not get very rich out of me. I saved all this money on a private’s pay of thirteen dollars a month, except the last year, when it was sixteen dollars.”

How plainly the above off-hand talk shows Mr. Stearns as he was and as he is to-day, his comrades can testify.

Mr. Stearns is of a tough and hardy make, possessed of a strong constitution and a frame built for endurance. He is short in stature, and belonged among the “ponies,” on the left of Company A. As a soldier he was ever “ready” for any duty assigned him, and as a member of old Company A I honor him, while as an honest, hard-working “bread-winner” I respect him.

Mr. Stearns is at present writing fifty-four years old, attending to his daily task at the works of the Washburn & Moen Manufacturing Company in Worcester, where he has been employed for years. He is quiet, economical, and strictly temperate in his habits; and talks freely of his prison experience, with hardly a thought that it is worth mentioning. He moves about among us, a hero, though he knows it not.

This narrative should have found a place in the Story of Company A, Twenty-fifth Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers, and it was so intended, but circumstances prevented. It is now printed in the same elegant style as that volume, and issued in the present form, with the hope that it will prove to the reader as interesting as it is truthful.

Samuel H. Putnam.
Narrative of Amos E. Stearns.
Narrative of Amos E. Stearns.

It was my misfortune to be taken prisoner May 16th, 1864, at the battle of Drewry's Bluff. As I now look back to those days it seems more like a dream than a reality; but time cannot dim my recollection of the sufferings, privations and starvation I witnessed and experienced during the nine months and eleven days I passed in Rebel prisons. But as it is not now my purpose to write a full and detailed history of my prison life, but only to give some of the many incidents which came under my observation, I will, without further prelude, proceed to give a short sketch of my experience, premising that the events are not mentioned in strictly chronological order.

At the time I was captured I was with Private Joseph Schusser of Company G in our own Regiment. He had received a wound, and I was assisting him to the rear. A dense fog overhung the
scene of conflict, and while we were endeavoring to find our way through it we came upon a company of Rebels, and were so near before seeing them that it would have been folly for us to have attempted a retreat, for we would have drawn the fire of the whole company; but had it not been for leaving a wounded comrade I think I should have taken the risk, and endeavored to give the Rebs "leg bail."

Having surrendered to one who was a little in advance of the company, he marched us up to the captain, who called for some sick and barefoot soldier to "take these men to the rear." Immediately after this the Rebels marched for Richmond. I had often thought that I would like to be present at the capture of Richmond, but little dreamed that I should go into the Rebel Capital in advance of General Grant.

The first thing I saw after starting that made me want to fight, was that the Reb who was guarding us at the rear had my tin cup full of dry coffee; how and when he took it off my haversack was more than I could tell, but at any rate he acted as though he had more pure coffee than he had seen in six months previously. As they took us to the rear we passed over the ground where their line of battle
had been that morning, and their dead and dying lay all around. There was a light battery there, most of whose horses were killed, so that there were not enough left to take away the cannon and caissons. Every building we passed from the battle ground to the landing above Fort Darling was being used for hospital purposes, and yet these were not sufficient, for many wounded were lying on the ground exposed to the rays of a burning sun.

Before reaching Fort Darling our squad was so much increased that a lieutenant was placed in command of us, and we were marched to the landing. Among our number was an Indian who had acted as waiter for a captain in the Tenth Maine regiment. The Rebel guard soon began to vent their spite upon him, called him some pretty hard names, and accused him of being a slave and belonging to a plantation near Richmond. He denied this, and told them he came from Bangor in Maine, and that he belonged to the Penobscot tribe of Indians. They told him they would “soon fix him”; that he would “make good pot pie,” etc. The lieutenant said nothing to them for a while, but shortly afterwards, ordering us to halt, addressed the guard as follows: “I was a prisoner on Johnson
Island five months. I was never used better in my life than when I was there. Now I want you to use these men well for my sake if for nothing more; will you?" "We will!" said they all; and so, after the prisoners had given three cheers for the lieutenant, we marched in peace to the landing place. I never learned what became of the poor Indian.

When we reached the landing above Fort Darling I found that Schusser and myself were not the only ones taken prisoners from our regiment. I saw two or three of the boys, who told me that more than fifty of our regiment had been sent up to Richmond on a boat. After waiting an hour or so, we (some eighty or more) were put on board a gunboat, and started for Richmond. If ever I thought I was to be roasted alive, it was on that trip up the river. We were placed on deck without any shelter from the burning sun, in proximity to the boilers of the boat, and the combined heat was almost too great for human endurance. The river from Fort Darling to Richmond was obstructed by sunken vessels and spiles driven nearly across from shore to shore. Several pontoon bridges stretched across at different places, and, as the boat proceeded up the river, one of their signal corps stood in the bows and signaled
all the way. The officer in command of the boat was a beardless youth belonging to one of the F. F. Vs., who strutted up and down the deck with all the pride of a first-class swell. He said it was against the orders of their government to take any of our greenbacks or currency, yet he wanted some of the prisoners to give him some of the scrip as “a keep-sake to remember the Yankee mudsills by!”

When we arrived at Richmond a number of men and women had collected on the wharf to see the Yankee prisoners; but I knew by their looks that although they had gained a victory, it was a dearly bought one. When we were marched from the boat we were placed under guard and none of the citizens allowed to speak to us. Shortly afterwards we were conducted to the far famed Libby Prison. One of the guard told me, while on the way, that he had been in the Rebel service eighteen months, and had not fired a gun at the Yanks. He said he lived in Worcester before the war, and had a brother who was in Millbury when he last heard from him; he was an Irishman, but would not tell me his name. He said he was sorry for us, as he thought they would put us on Belle Island, and it was a hard place.
When we arrived at Libby we were marched up to the third floor, which we found to be in a very clean condition, the floors having been washed and the ceilings newly whitened. No instructions whatever were given us, but we were not long in finding out what we could not do, for we had been in the room scarcely three minutes when Private Green of my company was shot through the right arm by one of the guard who was on duty in the street outside. Green and myself were among the first to enter the room, and the weather being extremely hot, Green went and sat down on the window sill, with his back towards the street, not thinking there was any harm in doing so, and the first we knew of its being against the rules was the report of a musket outside, when Green jumped up and said to me: "I am wounded!" at the same time putting his hand upon his arm. Upon examination I found that the bullet had passed through his arm just above the elbow, shattering the bone, and that a buckshot had grazed his head just behind the ear and had lodged in the ceiling, taking a lock of his hair with it. The wound was very painful; he said he had been wounded twice before, but did not suffer as much from both the wounds as he did from this one. He wanted
A Prisoner at Andersonville.

me to see what could be done about getting him to the hospital so that his wound might be dressed. I made an attempt, but as there were guards on each pair of stairs, I had to do some tall coaxing before I could get to the first floor, where the officers of the prison were. After some hesitation they told me I might get him down there and they would have him sent to the hospital. I had no trouble in getting back to the third floor, but when I started down again with Green, I had the same amount of talking to do as at first. At last I got him down, when one of the officers told me to put him on a rough table. I did so, and thought I would remain with him till he was taken to the hospital, but they would not allow it and I was sent back.

By this time I found all the prisoners had been sent to the third floor, and that the Rebs were about to search them. One of the officers got upon a box and told us that if we had any money or watches we had "better come and give them up"; that our names, companies, regiments, etc., would be taken and the property would be returned to us when we were paroled or exchanged—a promise never fulfilled. "If you do not give them up, and we find them on you," said the officer, "we shall take them,
and you will lose them anyhow." So most of the prisoners gave up what greenbacks and watches they possessed. I saw several hand in from ten to one hundred and twenty-five dollars each, while others hid what they had about their persons and clothing; but the keen-eyed Rebels found most of this, some of which had been concealed in the lining of caps, waistbands of trousers, etc. They made us take off shoes, stockings, coats and blouses. As for myself, I had only two dollars to lose. They allowed us to keep what currency we had, and I possessed about a dollar of that. I saw one prisoner take twenty-eight dollars out of his mouth after he was searched; he had rolled it up in as small a ball as he could, and placed it as far back in his throat as possible, and stood, of course, speechless during the period of his examination. They took our haversacks, canteens and cups. The Reb who searched me allowed me to keep the pictures of my wife and child, and a tin cup. I have always supposed him to have been the notorious Dick Turner, who, it will be remembered, was a deserter from the Union army, and after having joined the Rebs, was made a sergeant and placed on duty at Libby Prison, where he treated the prisoners with inhuman barbarity.
A Prisoner at Andersonville.

Our rations at Libby were not of the kind and quantity to make one grow fat very fast. The first day we received—nothing; and all we had to eat that day was the little hard-tack we had when captured. The second and third days we each got a loaf of corn bread about six inches square and two and a half inches thick. On the fourth day they reduced it one half, and with the half-loaf gave us half a pint of bean soup, which was made by boiling beans in water in which side bacon had been cooked, but we got none of the bacon, and there was about one bean to three waters. The reason they gave for reducing our rations was, that some of the men had thrown out bread to the guard, and they were giving us more than we could eat. When the rations were given out we were formed in companies of fifty each; and it so happened on the fourth day of my being there that the company I was in was the last to get their bread, of which there was not enough to go round by one loaf, and as I was at the extreme left, I had to go without my bread for that day. Some of the boys said, after we had broken ranks: “What are you going to do for rations today?” “Oh,” said I, “I shall be provided in some way.” “Well,” said they, “this is rather a hard place
to look for rations, where there are so many hungry men." Certainly the prospect was not very brilliant, but still I had confidence that in some way I should get something to eat before rations came the next day. Shortly after this conversation, I went to the other side of the room and there found McIntire, of Company I, sick with the chills. He told me if I would go and get him some water to drink he would give me his ration of bread, as he was sick and could not eat it. I brought him water then and afterwards during the day whenever he wanted it, so I was provided for after all.

On the 17th of May I wrote a letter to my father to let him know of my whereabouts after the battle. The officers of the prison said it would go down to our lines the next day, but my letter did not reach Worcester until July 3d.

On the Monday morning following my capture we were called up at four o'clock, and told to get ready to march; where to we knew not. Soon after we were formed in line outside of the prison, and then marched over the bridge across the James river to Gloucester, where we were placed in box cars, and after some delay, started on our long journey for Andersonville. We reached Danville about three
o'clock the next morning, and it being a bright moon-light night, we were marched to an old place which had been used for a cotton mill, but the machinery had all been removed excepting the frame of the cloth press.

I should have stated that when we left Libby each man received a loaf of corn bread the same size as that of which I have spoken; we were told that that was a day's rations, but those who had charge of us must have forgotten it, for we had nothing more to eat till Wednesday morning, when they gave each of us part of a loaf of corn bread, a small piece of meat, and some bean soup made the same as that at Libby. In about three hours after, they gave out a ration of bread which they told us was for that day's allowance; but alas! they again forgot what day it was, and we received no more food till Thursday night.

When they marched us from the old mill at Danville to take the cars, we passed one of their hospitals. There was a large number of wounded Rebels around there, some of whom wanted to know where we were captured, and when I told them Drewry's Bluff, one said: "Damn you! That's where we got wounded!"
1864.

After some delay we were again on our way into the heart of the Southern Confederacy. While at the station some of the women and children came down to see the Yanks, and to sell a few biscuits; which some of the boys bought, and paid ten cents apiece for them. I saw one of our number pay ten cents for three table spoonfuls of sorghum; the boy who was selling it had only about half a pint, and I thought it was a pretty heavy stock in trade.

On our way from Danville to Charlotte we passed through a place where our cavalry had torn up some of the railroad track, and had burned the depot; the track had just been relaid when we got there. We reached Greensboro' sometime during the night, and remained there until morning; soon after daylight a company of Rebels came down to the depot, and the officers in charge of the train ordered us all from the cars, for what purpose we did not know, but we heard soon afterwards that some of our forces were only a few miles distant from that place. After being off the cars for an hour or so we were ordered back again.

There were sixty or more men in each car, and we were so crowded that it was impossible for us to lie down, and we had to sleep in a squatting position.
We left Greensboro' about nine in the morning, and arrived at Charlotte at sundown; here we changed cars and received some more rations which consisted of six large hard-tack, and about a pound of side bacon to each man. The bacon was so rancid that it took the skin off my mouth.

We remained in the cars all night at Charlotte, and about ten o'clock next morning were on our way to Augusta, Georgia, at which place we arrived at noon Saturday. We were marched from the cars to a large yard in which were long sheds; this place had been used for storing cotton. There was a high board fence enclosing the yard so that we could see little outside except through the gate, which was kept well guarded. Here we again received rations of hard-tack and side bacon which was almost strong enough to "go it alone"; but men as hungry as we were did not stop to consider the quality; it was quantity we wanted.

We were kept in this yard from Saturday noon till Sunday forenoon without any water for drinking or washing purposes. Sometime in the forenoon of Sunday an officer came to the gate and wanted to know if there were any men inside who had been firemen at home, or knew anything about using
hose, as he wanted to run a line of hose from a hydrant into the yard so that the Yanks might have some water. I told him I was acquainted with its use, and as the work he wanted done was for the benefit of the prisoners, I would go. He took three or four more of us, and we went out. Some of the citizens came up and asked me where I was captured; I told them, and they wanted to know under what general I was serving. I said: "General Butler was in command of us." "Well," said one, "any person who would fight under such a man as Ben Butler ought to be made prisoner." Another wanted to know what state I was from. "Massachusetts, and I am not ashamed to own it!" At this they all left off talking, and watched the "Yanks" use the hose. Having run enough water into the yard—some six or eight barrels—we returned, and I made good use of some of that water.

About one o'clock Sunday afternoon they formed us in line and we marched to the depot, which was at some little distance. The street through which we passed was very wide, and had a row of large trees on each side of it; the streets that ran out of this were fine looking, and the place strongly reminded me of some of our northern cities. After
a time we entered the cars and started for Macon, where we arrived at daylight the next morning, and making a brief stop, departed for Andersonville, reaching that place at noon. We marched at once to Captain Wirz’s headquarters, where we were counted off by men taken from our own ranks, who were to act as sergeants of the squads after we should be turned into the stockade. While being counted off some of the prisoners sat and lay down on the ground, but Wirz came along and ordered all the “Gott dam Yanks” to stand up till they were counted.

While here we saw several of our drummer boys around with large tin stars on their caps or coats, and we were told that they were on their parole of honor, and that the star was to distinguish them from the other prisoners.

I ought to have stated that during all our long ride from Richmond to Andersonville we were not allowed to get off the train to get a drink of water, although many times the train stopped at places where we could have obtained it without going ten feet from the cars. There were times while on the way that I was so thirsty that my tongue became very much swollen.
While in front of Wirz's headquarters we could look over into the stockade, and a heart-sickening sight it was. The prisoners in there looked more like brown beavers than human beings. The shelters were of all shapes and sizes, and many of the prisoners were destitute of any. But we were not long allowed to view them from a distance, for we were marched to the gate as soon as our name, company, regiment, and place of capture were recorded.

The huge gate was opened and we passed in like so many sheep, with only the blue heavens above for shelter. The place assigned us was a low, marshy piece of ground near the creek which ran through the stockade, and was not fit for man or beast to lay upon; but we had to put up with it for a night or two, until we got places elsewhere among the prisoners.

I had been but a short time within the stockade when I came across S. P. Champney, formerly of Company D, who had been transferred to the U. S. Signal Corps, and was captured the February previous at Beach Grove, just outside of New Berne. From him I learned how our prisoners were being treated, and what the "dead line" was.
The first week I was in Andersonville I commenced, with the assistance of Charley Rice of Company H, and Private Plum of the Eleventh Connecticut, to make a mud house similar to others there; but after two days' work upon it we gave it up, partly for want of material, and partly on account of the wet land on which we had to build, for when it rained the water from the side of a hill near by would pour down upon us and make one grand mud hole. We then commenced looking around, endeavoring to get in with some of the other prisoners who had shelters or "shebangs," as they were called in the stockade. Charley soon found some one to take him in (it was Champney, of whom I have spoken), and Plum was lucky enough to find a place where he could stay for a few days. As for myself, I had no shelter; for a whole week I slept on the bare ground without covering of any kind. I found one good soul who gave me the privilege of laying up next to his shebang, and I thought myself quite fortunate in getting that place, even; I slept well except when the rain woke me up, for it rained more or less every day for the first twenty-three days we were there. I could, doubtless, have found some one who would have taken me in with them if I had
only had a blanket; for on inquiring, the first question asked me was: "Have you a blanket?" and when I replied in the negative, they said they could accommodate no one unless he had a blanket.

After I had been in there a week I thought I would just call on friend Champney, and find out if there was any news; so off I started to find his shebang. The first words he said to me were: "Stearns, I have good news for you; one of the boys in my shebang has gone to the hospital to work, and I have been looking for you to have you come in with us." You may believe that the "God bless you, Champney!" was no hollow sound with which I thanked him; it had the true ring in it. It did not take me long to move in; I had all my traps with me, for it was not safe to leave anything lying around loose if you wanted to see it again.

Champney's shebang consisted of two army blankets fastened together with wooden pins, and put up like an A tent, which, with a rubber poncho for the end, made a comfortable shelter compared with what the majority of them had; for at this time there were so many prisoners in the stockade that hundreds of them had no shelter at all, but had to lie out on the ground, in the paths and streets; and
after they had laid down for the night it was impossible to go about without picking your way very carefully. Often one could hear loud talk as some wanderer trod upon or stumbled over some sleeping form.

At the time of our arrival at Andersonville a part of the prisoners were getting raw rations, and a part cooked. We were counted off in detachments of two hundred and seventy; these detachments were divided into nineties, and the nineties into squads of thirty. There was a sergeant for each detachment, each ninety, and each thirty; these sergeants had extra rations for dealing out ours. Those of us who received raw rations obtained corn meal, stock beans, rice, and fresh beef; while those given cooked provisions had corn bread, boiled rice, mush, and cooked beef. I felt interested to know what mush was; at first I supposed it might be potatoes boiled and mashed, but before the night of the first day I found that it was made from corn meal, which was ground corn cob. It was made in large kettles, and when brought into the stockade was put into large wooden boxes which held six or eight bushels each. Rice and beans when cooked were furnished us in the same way.
When I saw what our rations were to be I thought I could get along for a while if I only had enough; but I found when they gave out our rations that they did not deal them out with a liberal hand. The first night we had raw rations, and I got less than a quart of corn meal, part of a tablespoonful of salt, and a piece of fresh beef not more than three inches square and two inches thick. This was to last me for the next four and twenty hours. It was no wonder that as I was trying to make a little mush in a pint cup over a small fire no bigger than my cup, that my mind went back to old Camp Oliver, and to thoughts of the quantities of soft bread I had seen thrown away because it was a little dry, and to some of those huge pieces of salt junk which I had dumped into the swill holes; but thinking did not bring any of it to me. However, as long as they gave our part of the stockade raw rations I got along very well and did not go very hungry, for while I was with Comrade Champney I would often change, letting him have some of my rations, which we would cook, and I would take some of his cooked rations. The food prepared by the Rebels was not cooked in a proper manner; the rice and beans were either under-done or burnt, and were often as hard
as on the day they were gathered from the fields. We managed to exist, however; but when a change took place, and those who had been receiving raw, received cooked rations, then it was that I knew what it was to be hungry. Our rations were given out in the afternoon about three o’clock, and perhaps the first in order would be mush or cooked beans, of which, as a general thing, we would get a quart cup nearly full; then the bread, and lastly the meat.

Many a time I have eaten what I received as soon as I got it, without waiting for the whole, or even trying to save any until the next morning; and before dark everything would be gone, and that, too, knowing that I should not receive any more till the next afternoon. Once in a while I would think of saving my bread, but whenever I did my empty stomach would get the best of me, and before I could go to sleep I would eat what little I had, fearing that some one might steal it from me, which was no uncommon thing there.

I will say here that our rations of bread would be a piece two by four inches square, and two inches thick; and our rations of beef would not be as much as there is in a piece two inches square.
Trading rations was quite common. At almost any time in the day men were heard about the stockade calling out: "Cooked beans for raw beans!" "Who has meal for beans?" "Beans for tobacco!" "Bread for beans!" "Who has a soup bone for meal or tobacco?" I have known men to trade every third day's rations for tobacco, saying that they could get along without their rations, small as they were, better than without their tobacco. I did not use the weed, and so did not resort to that kind of trading.

The Rebel sutler, who had a shebang on one side, asked high for everything he offered. I saw flour sold for fifty cents a pint; onions for twenty-five and fifty cents apiece; water melons, two to three dollars each. Some of the prisoners who had money would purchase flour and make it into biscuit, for which they would ask twenty-five cents each. Sometimes they would have a little butter, and then the price would be thirty cents. "Here's where you get your nice hot biscuits with butter on them!" was their cry. Others would buy sweet potatoes and make them into soup, and you would hear the vendors of that article calling out: "Here's your nice potato soup, well seasoned with salt and pepper;
taste and try, if you don’t like you needn’t buy.” These and other cries were heard from all parts of the stockade.

At times, on some pretext, the Rebels would stop the rations, and then there would be some hungry-looking faces. I have known them stopped for two days together, and only once did I know them to give any back rations.

Comrade Schusser died about six weeks after we reached Andersonville. Gangrene got in his wound, and neglect and exposure hastened his death. Green I never saw after I left him in Richmond. He died three weeks later. On the 15th of June Corporal Bugbee and others of the Twenty-fifth captured at Cold Harbor arrived at Andersonville.

When I first went into Andersonville prison I supposed, seeing we were all Union prisoners, that, amid such privation and suffering, all would strive to do what good they could, with what means they had, and be, as it were, members of one family. I was not long in finding out my mistake; I soon found that stealing was no uncommon thing, even in broad daylight. It was not unusual for one of the raiders (as they were called) if he saw a new prisoner with a better hat than his own, to take it
from him, and if the victim made any objections or 
offered any resistance, the first he would know he 
would get a blow on the head or a kick in the rear.

There was hardly a night during the first five 
weeks I was there that I did not hear the cry of 
"Murder!" or "Stop that raider!" and I could hear 
them running about the stockade; and if anybody 
made an attempt to stop one he would get a blow 
from some unexpected quarter, for the raiders were 
scattered all over the stockade, and were ever ready 
to help one another. There was an organized gang 
of them, most of whom were bounty-jumpers, who, 
rather than fight, had been taken prisoners. Their 
raids became so numerous that the other prisoners 
found it necessary to devise some plan to protect 
themselves. They organized a police force, ap-
pointed a chief, who also acted as judge of the jus-
tice court; and when anyone was caught in the act 
of stealing he was taken before the chief, who would 
hear the charges and evidence against him, and if 
found guilty he would order him to be half-shaved, 
which was done by shaving off half his hair and 
half his beard, if he had any. A card was then hung 
over his neck on which the word "Thief" was 
written, and he was marched round the stockade
A Prisoner at Andersonville.

by the police. Even this did not stop the raiders, though they were not quite as bold as before.

The raiding continued till July, when, one day, the raiders made a desperate attempt to rob a prisoner of his watch and money; he defended himself for a time, when they overpowered him and took his watch, but not till they had inflicted a severe wound on his face which bled profusely. As soon as he could get away he went to the south gate and called for the Rebel officer of the guard, who came, and to whom he told his story, and asked that he might go to Wirz's headquarters, and see if something could not be done to stop the raiding. The officer sent two guards with him to Wirz, who, after hearing his story, sent for the officer of the day, and ordered him to take a squad of men, and go inside the stockade and take out all who were known to be raiders. Several were taken out, and those not found guilty of murder (for it had come to light that two men had been killed, robbed, and buried under their shelters) were turned back into the stockade, where they were obliged to run the gauntlet between two rows of men. They had to duck and dodge for dear life, for the prisoners were so indignant that they would strike at them with sticks.
or anything they could get hold of. Many of them lost their hats and caps, but they cared little so long as they escaped with whole heads.

Six of the number taken out were found guilty of murder after a fair trial by a jury taken from the new prisoners just arrived, who, not having been inside the stockade, could take sides with neither party. An able lawyer, an officer in the Rebel army, conducted the defence. The raiders were sentenced to be hung; and it was said that a report of the trial was sent to General Sherman at Atlanta, and that he approved the sentence. On the 12th of July a gallows was erected near the south gate, close by where the men were murdered. About two o'clock in the afternoon Captain Wirz, accompanied by a guard, brought the prisoners into the stockade, and turned them over to the prison police. He made a short speech, in which he said the men had been tried and found guilty of atrocious murder, and that he would leave them with us for punishment. He, with the guard, then left the stockade. The police then formed a hollow square around the gallows, the ropes were arranged, the guilty men, who up to this time had not viewed the affair in a serious light, ascended the scaffold, and, leave being granted,
they protested their innocence, one or two calling on their friends to do their duty, which was understood to mean to rescue them from the police.

The ropes were adjusted about the necks of the condemned men, the bags drawn over their faces, and their hands pinioned. The drop fell, and five hung by their necks; the sixth one nearest the gate sprang at the time, or just before the drop fell broke the rope from his neck, gained his feet, and made a desperate attempt to escape. He was recaptured, however, and was soon hanging in mid-air with his companions. Thus ended the lesson of retribution that put a stop to murders in prison, and broke up a gang of bounty-jumping desperadoes.

While the gallows was building I desired not to see them hanged, so when the murderers were brought in I took my tin cup and started for the other side of the stockade for my rations; yet, being anxious to know if they had hanged them, I kept looking back, and just as the prop was knocked out from under the trap, I happened to turn, and saw the men drop. After that I think I could have seen any number of men hanged.

Up to this time large numbers of prisoners had been brought into the stockade, and we were much
crowded for room. I have seen while passing around the stockade in the morning, some of the number, worn out by exhaustion and hope deferred, dead, the living lying by their side, unconscious of the near approach of the grim visitor.

In consequence of the crowd the Rebels enlarged the stockade, and for a time we had more room, and wood was more plentiful; for many of the boys helped themselves to the timber, which, previous to the enlargement had formed the north end of the stockade. These men would trade the wood thus obtained for rations, for the supply of wood received from the Rebels was limited; once in three days each prisoner received a stick about a foot long and three inches thick. The wood was brought in pieces four feet long, and many times it was difficult to get an axe or anything with which to split it, hence it was not divided equally. If we obtained an axe or a railroad spike to split the wood, we had to give one ration of wood for the loan of the implement.

Comrade Champney was at one time sergeant of a squad, and had to divide the wood for thirty men. He had only a case-knife to do it with; it was somewhat bent when he got through with it, and when he died (August 11th) he gave it to me, as also a
meerschaum pipe, for which he paid eight dollars in New Berne, and which I sold for thirty-five dollars in Confederate money. The knife was stolen from me while we were going from Andersonville to Charleston, by some one who thought he had more claim to it than I had.

I will relate my experience in the wood business while at Andersonville. I bought a four-foot stick of fat pine wood from Comrade McCue of Company E for fifty cents. It was about five inches in diameter. I had no money, and he let me have it on credit. I cut the stick into pieces about eight inches long, and about as big round as my thumb, and made them into bundles about the size of our tin cups. These I sold for ten cents a bundle, which was cheap compared with ruling prices. I reserved enough to last me for two weeks, and quickly disposed of the rest, which realized one dollar and ten cents. I paid McCue, and wished to buy more wood on a cash basis, but he positively refused, saying he had no more to sell, though when he left the stockade two months later he left more than half a cord behind him. He afterwards said that the reason he did not sell me the wood was that he thought there would be a panic in the wood trade, and that I was
likely to make more out of it than he. As it was, I made two weeks' supply of wood, and sixty cents, which was quite a help to me in buying extra rations.

Exchange on the brain was one of the most common diseases in Andersonville, and the first questions asked all new prisoners were: “What regiment do you belong to?” “Where were you captured?” and the all-important “Did you hear anything about parole or exchange before you were captured?”

This “Exchange on the brain” had a bad influence on many of the prisoners, who would catch at every report that came into the stockade, and as the time for the reported exchange passed by, they would presently give up all hope of ever getting out of prison, and would lay down and die. I have seen many a man full of hope at first, give up finally and be carried out with the great throng of martyrs who sacrificed their lives for their country.

When I first entered the stockade I used to attach some credit to these reports, and all I heard I announced to Champney, who would quietly remark: “Well, Stearns, when you have been a prisoner as long as I have, you will not believe all the reports you hear about exchange; for there are always such rumors in camp.” This I found to be true; there
would be a report going around the stockade that a parole or exchange had been agreed upon by both governments, to take effect in two or three weeks; but before that time elapsed another rumor would spring up, and so on, till, at length, many would abandon hope, become disheartened, and die.

I have often thought how animated Champney was by a report of an exchange which was to take place September 1st, but, somehow, I had no faith in it, and told him so; but he said: “Of all the reports I have heard since I have been a prisoner, this seems the most favorable.” He was so confident that it would prove true that he wanted to shake hands on it. Alas! poor fellow! He died before the time arrived. His bright hopes of returning home and seeing his friends once more were never realized.

I often imagined I had seen it rain when in our lines, but there was a shower about the 1st of August that beat anything I ever witnessed. The rain came down in streams; the brook which ran through the stockade became so swollen that the outlet was not large enough to let the water pass through, so that a portion of the stockade at that point was carried off, and many a poor fellow's
shebang was washed away, with their tin cups, canteens, and other little keepsakes. I saw one of the guard have a narrow escape; he did not attempt to leave until the stream had so undermined the stockade that his sentry-box began to fall, when he had to jump for dear life. Many of those who had holes dug in the ground to live in found them filled with water, and had to scramble out or be drowned. I was fortunate enough to be in a place where the water did not trouble me, and I looked on and saw what others did. As soon as the Rebs saw that the stockade was being washed away they fired their artillery several times so as to frighten the prisoners and prevent their escape, and very soon brought a large force, which was kept there all night. It rained hard all the time, so the Johnnies had a hard time of it. There was, however, one good result from the shower, for where the stockade was washed away on the north side it opened a spring of pure water, enough to supply nearly the whole of the prisoners. For the first few days the water ran along inside the dead-line, and the boys used to tie their cups to the end of sticks and fish up the water in that way; but when the Rebel quartermaster saw the spring was a success, and the boys entreated
him to fix up something to bring the water inside, he finally arranged some troughs and some casks, so that it would run where we could obtain it. I have seen the time when we would have to wait nearly half an hour for a chance to get water, and there were two lines at that. The rush for water was greatest when the rations began to come in.

One day, while passing a shebang where the inmates were engaged in their daily occupation of killing lice, I heard one of them say to the others: "Andersonville is a place where lice-killing is no disgrace. I used to think if I did not kill more than one hundred and fifty at one lousing I was not very lousy!"

The monotony of our life in prison was what made it so hard to endure. The saddest of all sights was to behold the poor, disconsolate ones, who having given up all hope of ever getting out of that horrible place, would lay down by the creek where the ground was covered with vermin, and unless some friend would take them by force back to their quarters, they soon died. I saw one poor fellow who had a sore on his thigh nearly four inches in diameter, filled with maggots, and gangrene was making sad havoc with it. At last, tired of life, he
went and laid down inside of the dead-line, was shot by the guard, and after lingering several hours, died in great agony.

At length, after repeated rumors, about the middle of September orders came for certain detachments, or nineties as they were termed, to be ready to leave the prison. We were told that there was a Federal transport fleet at Savannah waiting for us. To all in prison this seemed the dawn of freedom; the most incredulous believed. Every one clamored for a chance, and feared to be left out of the exchange. Ninety after ninety went out of prison rejoicing and faintly cheering, the hollow eye growing bright, and the poor heart almost gay.

Many were so anxious that they would not wait for their ninety to go, but would try and flank out, thereby cheating some other poor fellow out of his honest chance; some of these were detected and sent back, but many succeeded. After the nineties had passed out you could see men crying because they had been cheated out of their chance to go. The ninety to which I belonged was almost the last to go out, and as I passed a squad of Rebs at the gate, I said: "Homeward bound!" Some of them smiled, and we passed on. I had hard work to keep
up with the squad in consequence of scurvy in my right leg, and had to walk on my toes because the cords were contracted; but as I thought I was on my way to our lines, and would soon be at home, I made one grand effort to get to the train. But, alas! how deceptive all things were in Dixie; for instead of being taken to Savannah, we were taken to Charleston, and there placed in the Fair Grounds outside the city. Here we had a change in our rations—a little of everything and not much of anything. The change, however, was quite beneficial to me, for by it I got rid of the scurvy in my leg.

While we were on the Fair Grounds we heard the reports of our guns down the harbor, and could see some of the shells burst over the city, several exploding near the Fair Grounds, at which our boys would shout out: "Bully for the Swamp Angel!"

At Charleston we obtained a kind of brackish water by digging shallow wells from three to five feet deep, and in a short time there were so many of them that they became a nuisance, for it was almost impossible to go about the camp at night without falling into them. During the first week of our confinement at Charleston our old enemy the
dead-line was introduced. A negro, superintended by the "irrepressible" white man, was sent around camp turning a furrow with a plow and mule attachment; this was the line, to overstep which was death to the prisoner.

Most of those sent here from Andersonville were supposed to be in good health; and, yet, out of the seven thousand nearly one thousand died during the three weeks we remained in Charleston. It was here that some of my regiment passed away; and as I write, the face of Comrade Brady of Company E comes up before me, and I think I see him as he lay on the ground, without blanket or shelter, asking for a cup of cold water, and how he could only look the "Thank you" when I carried it to him; and in less than three short hours he had gone to answer the great roll-call above.

After remaining at Charleston three weeks the Rebels commenced to take us to Florence, in South Carolina. I was among the last to leave, and after they had marched us off on one side from the camp, they made an attempt to count us, but could not get the number right; they found they had been giving out more rations than they had men. At last they marched us off to the railway, and put us
into box cars as they always did. Before we arrived at Florence it began to rain; we reached there about dark, and were marched into an old cornfield to stay over night; for the stockade was nearly a mile from the railroad. Those who had blankets made themselves tolerably comfortable. I had the soft side of a cornhill for my pillow, and got some sticks so as to make a tent out of my blanket, and let one poor fellow share it with me.

In the morning I saw a sight I never shall forget. There was a father and son who had been prisoners for some time together; the son had been complaining during the day, and that night died while lying under the same blanket with his father. The morning dawned, and the unhappy parent found his son lifeless by his side. Smitten with grief the father sat by his dead boy, who had shared with him the perils of the battle-field and the miseries of the prison pen, and his agony was terrible to witness. Some of the prisoners went to the officer of the guard, and requested permission to bury the body, but this poor boon was refused. They then asked that the father might see him buried. This was also denied. Their ears were deaf to the father’s pleading, their eyes blind to his tearful sorrow. He
spread the remnant of his handkerchief lovingly over the face of his dead son, folded the hands tenderly, and with a heart bursting with grief, turned and left him forever, not daring to cast a backward glance, lest he should behold cruel hands ruthlessly stripping the body.

When we arrived at the prison we found it to be a stockade similar to that of Andersonville, with the difference that there was a large ditch dug around the stockade, and the dirt was thrown up against the palisade, so that the guard could walk around, it being high enough to enable them to overlook the enclosure, through which ran a creek that furnished water for the prisoners. More than ten thousand were confined here, and to keep an account of their numbers they would send them all to one side of the stockade, across the creek, and then have them go back, two by two, count them, and issue rations accordingly.

We were better supplied with wood here that at any other prison; for they allowed some of the men to go out on parole and cut wood for the prisoners, for which they got extra rations, besides having the privilege of bringing in extra wood for themselves, which they would trade off to those inside. I have
seen them bring in wood, and out of some sticks they would take two or three quarts of beans which they had traded for with the guard, but this was done on the sly, as it was strictly forbidden. These sticks of wood, which were so productive, were hollow, and after the beans were put in, the end was plugged up and the plug cut off, so that it was hard to distinguish them from any other sticks.

Life at Florence was pretty much the same as at Andersonville, with the difference that it was cold weather, and there was nearly as much suffering here from the cold as at Andersonville from the heat. Many a poor fellow's feet were frozen; and as many had no shoes, rags—and he was lucky who had even these—were wound around the feet. Those who had no rags suffered terribly, the frozen ground cutting their feet at nearly every step, and you could trace the path of many of them in blood across the stockade.

At this place Comrade J. H. Fuller passed away to answer the roll-call of that great army who suffered and died in Rebel prisons. I shall ever remember how Jerry looked the last time I saw him. It was a cold, raw day, and as I went up to the hospital to see him I found him nearly naked, for the
hospital attendants had taken his clothes to be washed. He had only a shirt and blanket over his person, and looked more like a skeleton than a living being. With a faint attempt to smile, he said: "I am glad that one of the old Twenty-fifth has come to see me. I wish you would go to the hospital headquarters and get my clothes, for I don't want to lie all night without them." I got them, but they had not been washed. "Never mind," said he, "I am so cold, even with all my clothes on." I put them on to him and fixed his blanket for the night. While doing it he said to me: "Why does not our Government exchange us, and not let us die by inches here in this miserable place?" I told him I supposed they had some good reason for it. "Yes," he said, "but it is very hard to die in this manner." He again thanked me for coming, and as I turned to go, said: "Tell Benson to come and see me in the morning." But when the morning came Benson found no Jerry, for Jerry was gone, and his last thought was of Benson.

On one occasion at Florence I saw a cruel deed that made me want to fight. One of the prisoners started to go towards the dead-line, and when within about ten feet of it, asked the guard for a chew
of tobacco. The Reb drew up his gun, fired, and wounded the poor fellow in the leg. Such acts were cowardly.

When the time for the presidential election came, in November, 1864, the Rebel officers at Florence desired the prisoners to vote that they might get their opinion in regard to the candidates, Lincoln and McClellan. They made us fall in by hundreds, and marched us up to the main gate to vote. Those in favor of Lincoln cast black beans, and those for McClellan, white ones. The result was that Lincoln received, in round numbers, six thousand votes and McClellan fifteen hundred. Of course all the prisoners did not vote. I had some conversation about this time with a Rebel sergeant of the Fifth Georgia regiment in regard to the election. He said the South would much rather have McClellan elected than Abe Lincoln; "for," said he, "the war will end in six months if McClellan is chosen, but if Lincoln gets it, there will be four years of hard fighting." "But" said I, "do you expect to hold out four years longer?" "No," he replied, "but we do hope to hold long enough to worry Uncle Sam out, so that he will let us alone. The North will get short of men and rations." "Not much," said
I, "Uncle Sam is not so easily worried out. I was home on a furlough last year, and by the numbers I saw in the streets of Worcester, I would not have thought we had sent a man to the war." This was hard for him to believe, for he thought the North was depopulated and reduced to the same condition as the South.

Before leaving Andersonville I had traded jackets with a Rebel sergeant and got six plugs of tobacco to boot. One day Comrade Snow, of Company I, Twenty-fifth Regiment, came to me and begged me to let him have a plug of tobacco. The poor fellow was in a pitiful condition, with nothing but a cotton-flannel shirt and a pair of drawers to cover his nakedness. He had neither shoes, stockings nor hat. He said he could offer me nothing in return for the tobacco, but would give me his note for two dollars, which he would pay if he lived to get out; if not, his parents would give me the money after I returned home. I gave him the tobacco, and told him I would trust him without any note. A few days later he was found dead from exposure; for at this time water froze an eighth of an inch thick under the shelters. I have always felt glad that I gave him the tobacco, although it was quite a serious
matter to me at the time, for I was able thereby to render more comfortable the last days of a suffering fellow-soldier.

The Rebel guard had a great desire to trade with the Yanks. They had a great fancy for brass buttons; they did not want "turkey buttons," as they termed the army buttons, but those of the different states. Tricks were played on those fellows sometimes. One Reb, by good luck, had procured seven of these state buttons, which he had put on the skirts of his coat. He came into the stockade one day for four more to put on the breast of the same coat; a crowd collected around him, and while he was making his desires known, one of the prisoners cut off the buttons on his skirts, and then went up in front of him and asked him what he wanted to trade for. He said he wanted four more buttons like those on his skirts. "All right," said the Yank, "I have some." "How much do you want for them?" said Johnny Reb. "Five dollars." I'll take 'em"; and he paid the money. When he reached the gate he met another Johnny. "Look here," said Reb number one, "I have got four more buttons to put on the breasts of my coat like those on the tails." Reb number two made the discovery that
there was "nary" a button on the rear of the coat. "Well! I'll be dogoned if them ar Yanks aint stole 'em, and I bought 'em over again!" and he left the stockade in disgust.

While at Florence I was sick for more than three weeks, and during that time I have but a faint recollection of what happened. About the middle of February, or soon after Sherman marched from Atlanta to Savannah, the Rebs commenced to move us away from Florence, first to Wilmington, then to Goldsboro', back again to Wilmington, and from there to a place about thirteen miles out in the woods, where we remained a day and a night, then back to Goldsboro'; and on the 27th of February we were sent to Camp Parole, at Annapolis in Maryland.

I did not believe we would be paroled until within an hour of the time we were, although we had been running all night under a flag of truce. After signing the parole papers they gave us our rations, and had I known that they were the last we would receive in the Confederacy, I should have saved a few of the beans, as a sample of what we had to live on; but we had been deceived so many times that I had no faith in regard to it, even after we signed parole.
papers. What made me believe it at last was seeing a colored soldier on picket by the side of the railroad, with Uncle Sam’s uniform on. About an hour afterwards the train stopped, and we were ordered to get off. As I looked towards the forward end of the train, I saw that the boys were passing between a Union and Rebel officer, and in a short time it was my turn, and I found myself in our lines, and under the old flag once more. After passing the officers I felt so happy that I ran and jumped the best I could, and tried to shout, but no sound would come, I was so overjoyed. That is what I call joy unspeakable.

One incident I remember, which occurred at the time we were signing parole papers at Goldsboro’. There were some of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts among those who went to sign, and the Rebel officer made them turn back, saying: “We don’t parole niggers!” Just behind them, but ahead of Sergeant Bugbee and myself, was Sergeant Jeffs of the Fifty-fourth, who was as white as many of the Yankees—a mulatto; and when he saw the others turned back, he stepped out of the line to go with them. Bugbee said to him: “Stay in line; they never will suspect you.” But Jeffs replied: “These
are my people, and I am going with them”; and he did go. I heard soon after I came home that Sergeant Jeffs was in Boston, so he did not have long to stay; but this incident shows how strong an attachment the soldiers had for each other, even among the colored troops.

After getting inside our lines we were marched to General Terry’s headquarters, and as soon as possible we fell into line and received rations, which consisted of four hard-tack, a piece of fresh boiled beef, and a pint of coffee. They could not cook meat and boil coffee for all of us at one time, so a part had to wait; and as I was one of the first to get my rations, I sat down near where they gave them out, and when the second squad fell in they lacked one of having even files, so one of the men said to me: “Come, fall in!” I told him I had had my rations. “It will not hurt you to have some more,” said he; so I fell in and got my second allowance, and did not feel any ill effect from it. This was what the Rebs called flanking, and they never could prevent the Yankees doing it.

After we received our rations we were started on the march for Wilmington, and if we could not keep up we could take our time and go as we pleased.
that day; but the next day we had to keep in line, and under guard. It was a great treat to march along, and not be driven at the point of the bayonet, as we often had been in the Confederacy when we were changed from one place to another. When we arrived at Wilmington we were placed in the freight house of the Wilmington and Raleigh railroad, where we remained two or three days, when we were put on board the steamer, *Escort*, and taken down the river and over the bar to the transport steamer, *Charles Edward*, which started for Camp Parole at Annapolis, where we arrived in due time.

While at Wilmington we used to draw rations three or four times a day, as the officers in charge did not dare to give them all at once on account of our physical weakness and debility. One day while down on the wharf getting rations, I saw one of the quartermasters giving out soft bread to some of the sick prisoners; and Comrade Bugbee said to me: “You go, and he will give you some.” I did not think he would, for I did not pretend to be sick; but I thought I would go. When I got there the quartermaster was having a little spat with one of the boys who claimed to be sick, and had asked for bread. “You are not sick,” said the quartermaster,
"for I saw you drawing your rations this morning, and you took all you could get." When he dismissed the man I said: "Lieutenant, give me a piece of bread." He at once gave me a whole loaf, although he had been giving but half a loaf to each of the others; and when I went back Bugbee said: "I told you your face would get you the bread." I began to think then that I must be looking pretty bad, for before that I had supposed I looked as well as the best of them.

The Christian Commission had one of its agents at this place, who gave out milk punch to the prisoners. I could not drink all they gave me, as I was too weak, but what I could not drink Bugbee would, so none of it was wasted. We frequently "flanked," and drew rations twice; and what I could not eat Bugbee disposed of without any ceremony.

After waiting at Annapolis more than three weeks I was ordered to report in Boston for my discharge, and started for home, reaching Worcester March 25th. One little act of kindness on the way made an impression on my mind. Railroad conductors as a rule were not very kind or courteous to the soldiers traveling to and from the front, but I found one exception while returning home. When I
arrived at Springfield I thought I would have a lunch, so I went into the refreshment room and called for a cup of coffee and a plate of baked beans. Before I had time to finish them, I heard the cry: "All aboard!" and was about to rush for the train, when the conductor, Calvin Farnsworth, said: "Finish your lunch," which I did, and he waited until I had time to reach my car—for soldiers had to ride by themselves—and get aboard. I always think of this whenever I see Mr. Farnsworth.

When I reached home I weighed not quite ninety pounds; and although during my term of service of three and a half years I did not receive a wound, I carry more scars than many of my old comrades of Company A, who did their duty so nobly. My term of enlistment expired the day I went into Florence stockade, but Uncle Sam paid me up to the day of my discharge, and twenty-five cents a day for rations for the nine months and eleven days I was a prisoner.

AMOS E. STEARNS.