Cruelties to Southern Prisoners

By Jerry Long
c.2025

"Cruelties to Southern Prisoners"
by W. R. Haynes, of Whitesville, KY,
Louisville Daily Courier, 7 November 1867, p.1,
reprinted from the Southern Shield, Owensboro, KY

Whitesville, Ky., Sept. 10, 1867.

Having a few days ago read a letter published in the Shield, from J. G. Wilson, President of the Huntsville Female College, Alabama, concerning the treatment of Confederate prisoners in Camp Morton and Fort Delaware, I see fit to submit the following for the "Independens in all things and neutral in nothing," hoping it may find a place in its columns, and be a *Shield* to the "dead past."

I was captured with my friend G. W. Gosnell, of Louisville, in May, 1864, while on our way to the Confederate army. We were first incarcerated in the Ohio county jail, where we met two others of our comrades, who were captured the day before. We were kept there one night, and then all sent to Owensboro jail. When we arrived there the hearse was bearing the corpse of Jimmie Mitchell to the cemetery. He was shot during the skirmish at Sullivan's barn, by a home guard, after he bad clearly and distinctly said, with uplifted bands, "I surrender!" We were put in the lower apartment of the jail among, the negroes, but threats being made to exterminate their colored friends, the authorities thought it expedient to elevate us to the upper story, which was accordingly done. A double guard was placed around the jail, some of which during the night fired two shots, making the balls range in the fence as though they had come from the upper window in the jail. Next morning sixteen of the blood-thirsty villains made their appearance in the room, with muskets presented, and ordered us to hand over our coats, which we did readily, but reluctantly. Instead of shooting us as we expected, the Dutch Captain began a search, at the same time saying, "My guard was fired on by some of you last night, and if I find shooting irons among you, the last damned one of you'll go up." This relieved us, for we knew they had done the shooting, and would find no arms among us. In the evening we were handcuffed and taken to Louisville, thence to Camp Morton. We arrived there on the 22d of May, 1864, and I was released on the 9th of January, 1865, by taking the amnesty oath. I shall say nothing in regard to my individual abuse, & c., for it is so insignificant when compared with the barbarous treatment of hundreds of others it would scarcely be noticed. I was an eye witness to many horrible scenes, similar to those portrayed by J. G. Wilson; have stood in the line at roll call and inspection when the order of "dress to the right," or "stand in line," was given only by a report of a pistol in the hands of Sergeant Baker, and the whiz

of a ball down the line, which frequently crippled some innocent person. We were made to stand in line of "inspection" for two or three hours at a time, with hats off, and not allowed to move our feet. It mattered not how cold the ice-sleeted earth might be, or how piercing the winter winds, or how hot the burning summer sun, the external obeisance of pulling off hats to their highness was always done at "inspection." Many have I seen jerked to the ground by this Baker for the slightest pretext. Men, half starved and half naked, who I learned had peaceful and happy homes in the South, in answer to their cries for mercy received repeated kicks which, no doubt, would have killed them, had it not been for the stimulating hopes of some day being permitted to return to their homes und hearing the voices of dear ones respond to their call. But, alas! many of them died in consequence of exposure from open barracks, & and c. I hare seen men's hands and arms broken, and faces gashed tor three inches for standing around the cook-house to get skins of the meat that were intended for the sloptub.

The barracks were fired into nearly every night among four or five hundred men.

It was the custom among the old men in the prison to parch bread and use it as a substitute for coffee. Three of the prisoners were once discovered by a Yankee named Mierau, (under the back of a slough that runs through the prison,) drinking this coffee. He forced them to stand on their heads, while he, with a pole, would hold their feet and backs to the bank for several minute. He then called to Baker (who had a detail of workmen with spades, & and c.) to "come up and let's bare some fun."! He made the men lay down. and ordered the workmen to pitch in dirt on them, which fell about eight or ten feet; at the same time he would pitch spades full of solid earth so high up that he might hear it thump as it fell on the men, and then he and Baker would indulge in humorous laughs at the groanings of the victims of their savage atrocity, as Satan's imps only can.

The truth of the above any ex-prisoner of Camp Morton can do me the justice to acknowledge, and that the half is not told.

W. R. HAYNES

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William Robert Haynes (1845-1923) wrote the preceding letter in response to reading the following article that was syndicated and widely circulated:

<u>Owensboro Monitor</u>, Owensboro, KY, 28 August 1867, p.1:

The Treatment of Rebel Prisoners by the Union Authorities.
[From the St. Louis Republican.]

Northern journals have boasted of the humane treatment enjoyed by rebel prisoners, and have denied that there was either neglect, brutality or cruelty in the conduct of those charged with the custody of the rebels. Keenly alive to the criminality of rebel officers charge of Andersonville and other Southern prisons, they have demanded their trial and execution, and Wirz was tried and hung. But have they ever called for the trial and execution of such men as are described in the letter which we print below, which we take from a radical paper, the New York *Times*, of the 28th of June? It appears from that letter, written by one whose respectability and responsibility the *Times* vouches for, that deaths by freezing, by starvation and neglect, were common in Northern prisons. Gaunt skeletons, walking about ern like ghosts, were not seen in Andersonville alone. It was not there only that they rotted away in disease. It was not rebel officers only who beat, and maimed, and killed prisoners with clubs, and sabers, and muskets. Union officers did the same.

No tale of Andersonville is more horrible than this told by one who was an eye-witness of the ghastly scenes in Northern prisons. – The North has had the advantage of the South in parading facts calculated to inspire hatred of the South, while concealing equally disgraceful facts concerning the North. – They had the newspapers and the pictorials, and with these they exaggerated the tales of rebel cruelty and blackened Southern character. We are sorry to admit that there was foundation for it at all; for it is degrading to the American name. But it is no more so than the inhumanity to helpless and defenseless prisoners practiced by Northern, jailors, whose crimes merit punishment not less than those charged upon Wirz.

Here is the letter from the *Times*:

FEMALE COLLEGE,
HUNTSVILLE, ALA., June 18, 1867.

To the Editor of the New York *Times*:

My attention has been called to an article in your paper of the 31st ult., in which, replying to some remarks of the Richmond *Enquirer* in regard to the treatment of prisoners, it is said:

"Nobody on either side ever pretended for a moment that rebel prisoners ever died in our hands or even seriously suffered for lack of food clothing or shelter. No such charge has ever been made."

Will you then permit such charges to be made through your columns? I was captured in October, 1863, and spent six months at Camp Morton. In March, 1864, I was removed to Fort Delaware, where I remained until June, 1865. The winter of 1863-'4 is well known to have been intensely severe.

Many rebel prisoners, to my own knowledge, spent that winter without a blanket, and in the scant and ragged summer clothing when captured. The barracks were old cattle sheds used when the prison was a fair ground, and open enough for the winter winds to sweep through freely. Scores of men in the dead of winter slept in these sheds, upon the bare ground, without covering, huddling together like hogs, to keep from freezing.

They were often three or more hours in line, like soldiers on dress parade, and cursed like brutes or beaten over the heads with sabers or clubs, and sometimes shot at for moving a little to keep from freezing. In several instances persons were shot on the frivolous pretexts. A quiet, orderly man, an Englishman named Coats, belonging my division, was murdered in cold blood by a private of the Invalid Corps named Baker, who was on guard.

Instead of being tried and punished, Baker, though a private, was sent next morning into camp to take charge as sergeant of our division, in which position he heaped upon the defenseless men every indignity that so inhuman a wretch could devise.

At the very time that such an outcry was raised about the mortality among Northern soldiers in Southern prisons, the inmates of amp Morton knew the mortality then in proportion to the number of men to be several per cent, greater.

At Fort Delaware our barracks were more comfortable, but the rations were miserably insufficient, and prisoners who could not obtain money from friends with which to procure extra supplies from the sutlers, suffered the pangs of hunger night and day, and reduced to skeletons, and eaten up by scurvy from scanty and unwholesome food, fell ready victims to disease, and died by hundreds.

At the close of the war, of about 7,000 men in one pen, fully one-half, if not three fourths, were but walking skeletons, hundreds of them ruined for life with scurvy.

It was a daily occurrence for large numbers of the men to be beaten over the head with a bludgeon, or kept for hours tied up by the thumbs in most agonizing torture. A Dutch Lieutenant,

Dietz, in charge of our pen, was for weeks in the habit of coming in with a large cowhide and lashing the men most unmercifully – in one instance cutting a gash in the face of an Alabamian named Pardue, in which your finger could have been laid.

It was no uncommon thing for the guard, upon the slightest pretext, to fire into the quarters in which, were three or four hundred men, and several prisoners were needlessly and recklessly killed by them.

The above, and the half has been told, are plain, unexaggerated facts which can be substantiated by most unquestionable testimony, and for the truth of which I pledge my character and reputation as a minister of the Gospel.

I request the insertion of this as an act of justice.

J. G. WILSON,

President of Huntsville Female College.

This letter comes from a source so respectable and responsible, and its statements are so specific, that we have no hesitation in publishing it. Our Government has no excuse for inhumanity to the prisoners it captured during the war, and its honor is involved in punishing with just severity all instances of such cruelty on the part of its agents as are specified above. – Ed. *Times*.

The following biography of William Robert Haynes was published in the book:
Kentucky: A History of the State, W. H. Perrin, J. H. Battle, G. C. Kniffin,
F. A. Battey Publishing Company, Louisville, KY & Chicago, IL,
c.1886, Grayson County section, p.1110:

WILLIAM R. HAYNES was born in Haynes Precinct, Grayson County, March 15, 1845. He is the youngest of four children born to Henry and Lurana (DeWeese) Haynes, natives of Ohio and Grayson Counties respectively, and of English and French extraction. He was reared on the homestead farm until he was nine years of age, when his parents moved to Cloverport, Ky. There his father engaged in the tobacco business for four years, and was ruined financially by having to pay a security debt. He returned to Grayson County and rented the original homestead farm, where he remained about one year, then moved to Leitchfield. Here be engaged in the hotel, livery and tobacco business, and remained from 1858 until the fall of 1864. He [Henry] was elected sheriff of the county in 1860, and served two terms. In 1864 he removed to Whitesville, Daviess County, where he lost his second wife, Rebecca, sister to his first, Lurana; thence to Webster County, where he died July 15, 1880, at the residence of his son, Dr. J. E. Haynes. William R. Haynes was educated principally at the schools of Leitchfield, and **in the spring of 1864 enlisted in the Confederate Army under Gen. Forrest; two months later, in the fight at Sullivan's barn, Kentucky, he was captured and conveyed to Camp Morton, at Indianapolis, Ind. There he was retained until January 9, 1865, when he was pardoned by President Lincoln.** He returned to Kentucky and located at Whitesville, where he taught school and studied law in the meantime. In 1868 he was admitted to the bar of Owensboro, and entered on the regular practice of his profession at Calhoon, where he remained eighteen months. He then removed to Dixon, Webster County, and remained practicing his profession until 1874, editing for some time the *Webster County Appeal*; then came to Leitchfield, practiced his profession, and started the *Grayson County Herald*, the first newspaper in the county. In August, 1880, he was elected State's attorney for the Sixth Judicial District and is still serving. April 11, 1878, he was married in Breckinridge County,

at Basin Spring Farm, by Rev. W. W. Lambuth, to Ellen Peyton Chick, the accomplished daughter and only child of George E. and Ellen J. (Peyton) Chick, natives of Kentucky. To Mr. and Mrs. Haynes four children were born: Luella (died in infancy), an infant, George Henry and Willie R. In 1876 Mr. Haynes was appointed and served as assistant State presidential elector; he has gained considerable prominence as a politician, and also as a literary man, having written among other things, the life of "Doc" Brown, the famous outlaw of Grayson County. Mr. Haynes is devoted to his profession, in which he is eminently successful.

[Note: William Robert Haynes in 1900 moved to Lexington, Oklahoma Territory. He died at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, OK on 8 October 1923. He was buried in the Rose Hill Burial Park in Oklahoma City, OK.]

Camp Morton was a military training ground and a Union prisoner-of-war camp in Indianapolis, Indiana, during the American Civil War. Camp Morton was among the largest of the Union's eight prison camps established for Confederate noncommissioned officers and privates. The camp was established in 1862. It closed when the last Confederate prisoner on 12 June 1865 was paroled. The camp's average prison population was 3,214. More than 1,700 prisoners died at the camp during its four years of operation.

At the conclusion of the war, the property resumed its role as the fairgrounds for the Indiana State Fair. In 1891 the property was sold and developed into a residential neighborhood known as Morton Place.

Prisoners at Camp Morton