

The Horrors of Prison Life In the Civil War

at

Andersonville, Georgia, Prison

(Reprinted from the Indianola Record)

By LEE OGAN, Pleasantville, Iowa

Lest we forget that suffering for ones country is not a new experience under the sun and that the sacrifice of the boys of '61 to '65 was what preserved us a land worth sacrificing for in 1918, it is worth while to read the story of life in Andersonville prison written by Lee Ogan of Pleasantville, father of R. J. and Homer Ogan of Indianola. It was first printed in the Pleasantville News of a recent date, and contains so much of real interest and is so vividly written that we are glad to reprint it in full.

Enlisted in '62

"I Enlisted in Company B, 90th Ohio Infantry on August 5, 1862, at the age of nineteen years to serve three years or during the duration of the war. I went south with my regiment as soon as it organized and we were put into active service at once.

"Our first battle was at Perryville, Ky., October 8, 1862, two months after my enlistment. Our next battle was at Stone River, Tenn., December 31, 1862. Our third battle was at Chickamauga, Georgia, September 19 and 20, 1863.

"I was wounded during the second day of this last mentioned battle and was taken prisoner. I was sent to Richmond along with several hundred other prisoners, and was confined in the Pemberton build-

ing until February 15, 1864, when I was sent to Andersonville, Georgia, prison.

Among the First at Andersonville

"I was among the first arrival at Andersonville and we were turned into the enclosure like cattle being turned into a field. There was no place to go and we wondered what would happen next. But soon an officer and men came in and formed us into companies for roll call. We had to line up for roll call every day. Every man had to be accounted for whether able to be in line, sick or dead. After roll call we were given permission to go anywhere we pleased within the "bull pen."

"Together with three other comrades we "located a claim," eight feet square, northeast of the north gate to the prison. We excavated our "claim" to the depth of about twelve inches and filled the hole up with small pine limbs which answered for our bed. Our bed was fairly comfortable for a while but the limbs soon became worn and our bed was no more.

"The stockade was not quite completed when we arrived at the prison. Negroes were doing the work with a lot of rebel soldiers looking on. The stockade was built partly of timber on the inside, and the builders left a quantity of limbs and chips which we had access to. We used the limbs to build a shade and the chips to cook our daily rations.

Eating Corn and Cob Meal

"Our first rations were cornmeal—a poor quality—ground coarse, cob and all. Some of the men had means of cooking the meal and others had not. I happened to have a small tin can which answered as a cooking utensil. Some of the men were compelled to eat the meal raw which caused much sickness in the way of bowel complaint. Later on our meal was cooked into bread—small loaves about the size of a brick and about as hard. One loaf was the ration for two men for 24 hours. The bread contained no salt. Salt and soap were unknown at An-

dersonville. Occasionally they gave us a small piece of strong bacon and the diet brought about much disease.

"We were compelled to stay in that miserable pen with no protection from the cold spring rains. Many a night I would lie down and try to sleep with my clothes as wet as water could make them. We would lie close together in order to get all the heat possible from our bodies. Often we would have to get out of our dug outs at night and turn our backs to the storm like so many cattle and stand there and take the cold rain.

100 Dying Every Day

"As time went on our number increased at the prison at a rapid rate. The armies were on the move, battles were being fought and more prisoners were being taken every few days. By June it was thought that there were at least 20,000 men inside of the stockade and still more coming. Then disease made its appearance—fevers, diarrhea, scurvy, etc., and prisoners were dying at a rapid rate. By July the death rate was one hundred a day.

During the months of July and August I had scurvy so badly that my mouth was as raw as a piece of beefsteak. I had to eat my own blood every time I ate my corn bread. My feet and legs were swollen to my knees—twice their natural size, and were as black as a crow. I began to think I would soon be numbered among the dead, but from some cause I got better and pulled through the awful ordeal, but it required lots of grit.

"Think of 30,000 men being cooped up on 16 acres of land who had no other place to attend the calls of nature and were compelled to live amidst this filth together with the swarms of flies and no end of lice and maggots. In this awful place I have seen men who were fly-blown, with maggots working in their bodies before they were dead. The stench was so great that it is a wonder that anyone confined in that awful hole ever came out alive.

Same Wagon Hauled Food and Dead

"The dead were carried to the gate each day, stacked up in rows and later hauled away. The wagon would come in every morning and two men would load in the dead prisoners. The dead soldiers were handled like hogs that die with cholera. They were thrown onto the wagon and piled up as long as one would stick on and were taken to the burying ground. This method was continued until all were hauled away and the action repeated each day.

"Some time during each afternoon our little rations were brought to us in the same wagon that hauled away the dead. The rations consisted of only a few bites but we got no more for 24 hours. I was hungry all the time, and you can't imagine the misery of real hunger. I would try to sleep for some of the time but I would no more than close my eyes until all kinds of good things to eat would come up before me in my dream—the dinners mother had served for company—and when I would awaken you can imagine my feelings.

Commander Could Swear English

"I want to say a few words about Captain Wirz, in command of the prison. He was a small man, weighing about 125 pounds. He wore a pair of gray pants, cow hide shoes, a calico shirt with a belt containing two revolvers. But he always had the revolvers in his hands when he was inside the stockade. He talked very broken German, but he could swear pretty good in English. He was an extremely wicked man and I never saw him in a good humor. I saw soldiers hanged and I saw his guards shoot down men in cold blood. One man I remember was shot for hanging a piece of blanket on the "dead line" pole, to dry after a hard rain. That is only one of a number who were shot for getting over, or sometimes too near, the dead line.

"The water we had to use was very bad on account of the filth, and to make matters still worse there was a camp of rebel soldiers with a

battery of artillery just above the stockade with their cook house near the little stream that ran through our camp. Every time it rained their filth came down through our camp and you may guess at the rest. We got along pretty well after spring came as we had good water, and it looked like providence had something to do with it.

"I have told these happenings just exactly as I saw them and I could tell much more about the horrors of southern prison life that would almost make your blood run cold.

Exchanged

"I will give you a short description of our transfer to Florence, S. C. A man came to the camp one day and said he wanted a certain number of men for exchange and we fell in line for we were always ready to go anywhere. We believed he was lying but when we were marched to the station we found a train of box cars which we were ordered to get into. We filled every car until there was hardly standing room. We were given one day's ration before we started. We traveled all night and the next day until evening when the train stopped and we were ordered to unload. We were then marched into another stockade at Florence similar to the one at Andersonville, but we were not crowded so badly and the place was not so filthy. This was to be our home for the winter. Our treatment here was about the same as at Andersonville. We had a red-headed mule for commander named Berrett.

The White Flag on the Engine

"We had nothing here at Florence to protect us from the winter rains and our clothing was about worn out. Men died at a fearful rate.

"The last day of February, 1865 we received orders to be ready to march the next day, which meant we were in for another change. We were loaded on open flat cars and felt happier this time as we had a very light guard along. In the afternoon we discovered a white flag on the engine and

we knew what that meant. Everyone was trying to shout but it was a very feeble noise we made. I don't believe we could have been heard 20 feet away. Soon the train stopped and we got off without orders this time, as we could see the blue coats and Old Glory. We were near Wilmington, N. C. It wasn't long until the grub wagon came around with rations consisting of hard tack, bacon, coffee and sugar, and oh—but we were happy—our cup of joy was full and running over.

"We stayed in Wilmington about a week waiting for transportation and then were sent to Annapolis, Md., to a parole camp. I was among the weak ones to be unloaded at Annapolis as I was just getting over the small pox.

Home Again

"The first thing we did was to stack our old clothes, what there was left of them, lice and all. My clothes consisted of a piece of a shirt and what was left of my pants. I had no cap or hat and no shoes and had gone through the winter in that condition. We got a good scrubbing here, a new suit of clothes and then I was sent to a small pox hospital where I had a cot and a tick full of straw to sleep on and my! I can't describe my feelings, I was so happy.

"How I or anyone else lived through these hardships, only the good Lord knows. I stayed in the hospital for a week and then Uncle Sam gave me 25 cents a day ration money and a thirty days' furlow and told me to go home. You can bet that I went. I arrived home March 22—a living skeleton—weighing 90 pounds with my overcoat on! Before being in prison I weighed 150 pounds.

"This is my experience of 17 months and 10 days as a prisoner during the Civil War and I have told it just as I saw it with my own eye. I could tell as much more but don't think it necessary in order for you to grasp the horrors of the cruel prison life."