

Prison Life in the South

By

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The following eight part series of articles was published in the *Hancock Jeffersonian* under the editorial guidance of David Ross Locke from late April-June 1865 and recounts Captain Alban's experiences throughout the Southern prison camp system following his capture September 20, 1863 at the Battle of Chickamauga.

This title of this narrative is something of a misnomer, as it skips over his first year of imprisonment and focuses in on his escape in October 1864, recapture, and subsequent imprisonment at Danville, Virginia. Captain Alban's writing talents are certainly evident here, talents he would put to good use in the 1880s when he purchased an interest in the *Findlay Republican*, the editorial successor to the *Hancock Jeffersonian*. He would continue to operate the newspaper until his death in 1892.

In the interest of constructing a smooth flowing narrative, I have elected to publish this as one continuous article as opposed to separating it into eight parts as was originally done.

We arrived at Columbia on the morning of the 7th of October between 4 and 5 o'clock and remained on the cars till after daylight and near the place of getting off the cars until about 2 P.M. We were then marched to our prison camp. This camp is situated on the opposite side of Broad River from Columbia and about two miles distant from the city. We were formed in four ranks with the old guard that came with us from Charleston on either side and in front and a company of young fops, taken, as they thought, from the first families of South Carolina and educated at the military school in Columbia, in our rear. This company was formed across the road reaching from one side of the street to the other and crowded us up so closely that we were soon massed across the road. If anyone happened to fall a little behind his comrades he was promptly reminded of the fact by a quick prod from the bayonet of one of the cadets which they seemed to enjoy very much.

We reached camp before 3 o'clock. We found it pleasantly situated on a rolling piece of ground that once had been cultivated but now overgrown with scattered shrub pines which gave it, at a distance, very much the appearance of an orchard. Its proximity to water made it well suited for a military camp, but not for a prison, as there was scarcely a dark night that some of the prisoners did not escape either by bribing the guard or running or crawling through the lines. Our only shelter

in this camp was such as we could construct of the boughs of the pine trees which did very well in dry weather but was of no account in wet.

About the third day after our arrival at Columbia, the Rebels commenced to bring in recaptured prisoners who had escaped from the train on our way from Charleston. One officer was brought in badly torn by dogs. He had jumped off the train and was taken sick shortly afterward and compelled to lie down. The dogs soon came up with him and, as he was unable to defend himself or even stand, they tore him badly before the Rebels who were following the dogs could come up. He died a few days afterwards. I will just state that these packs of hounds are not owned by slave holders generally but are kept by men who make it their business to catch slaves. They usually consist of about 15 track hounds and two bloodhounds.

We had remained in camp ten days without anything of importance taking place. I had been watching for an opportunity to escape for some time and on the evening of the 17th of October I thought I discovered this opportunity. My plan was to watch the guards and when they walked from each other, which frequently happened, to crawl across the dead line which was 20 paces wide and rise to my feet near the hospital tents (which were occupied by sick officers and paroled nurses) as soon as I had crossed the sentinel's beat. The standing orders to the sentinels were to fire, without hailing, upon any person seen on the dead line after night. I rolled up my blanket, got down flat upon the ground and, placing my blanket in front, I crawled about half way across the dead line without stopping.

Here I was interrupted in my progress by the officer of the day who was making his usual visit round the lines. I remained quiet for a minute or two until the officer had gone and then crawled to within about ten feet of the sentinel's line when I was again interrupted by the approach of the sentinel. He came up to the end of his beat, which was but little more than ten feet from me and stopped. He then peered through the darkness towards me as though he thought he discovered "a nigger in the woodpile;" then, bringing his piece to the ready, he continued to look, apparently puzzled to know what to make of that which he saw. This was indeed a critical moment. If I jumped up and ran it was almost certain death as he was so near that he could hardly miss me. My only chance then was to lie still and try to deceive him. This required more nerve than I ever needed on the battlefield, but believing it to be my only chance for life, I remained quiet until he seemed to be satisfied; and swinging his piece upon his shoulder, he walked leisurely away.

This was my opportunity and rising to my hands and feet, I went out on the double quick. I steered my course northwest to the Saluda River, taking the north star for my guide, intending to follow up the river as far as Chappel Bridge and then to follow up the railroad. But on reaching the river, I found the difficulties of traveling along the river bank too great to overcome. I was therefore compelled to relinquish that route and seek some more feasible one. I struck west through the woods and had not gone more than three miles before I struck a road that had every appearance of being extensively traveled and which ran in the direction which I wished to go. I concluded that I could make so much better speed on the road than through the woods and as there were not likely to be any white men on it at the time of night, I thought I would risk it. The weather was fine, the moon shone brightly, and feeling that I was once more free, I pushed forward with a vigor that almost astonished myself.

That first night I travelled 21 miles. I did not start with anything in the shape of provisions but salt and had nothing but raw corn to eat till midnight of the 18th. I then obtained some sweet potatoes (how it is needless to say) and going into a deep forest, built a fire and roasted them and made a hearty meal. I had nothing more to eat until the night of the 20th when, as I was passing a plantation, a Negro and his daughter came out of one of the huts. I approached him and told him I wanted something to eat- that I was a Yankee officer escaped from Columbia and that I had to depend on the black people to feed me. "Well," said he, "you don't want the white folks to know it?" I said, "Certainly not." Speaking to his daughter, he said, "See here, Tabithy, you go and tell your missus to send some medicine for yer mammy, but mind you don't say 'nuffin 'bout nobody bein' here," and then turning to me, he said, "Do you like possum?" I said, "Oh yes," so he went back into the hut and after a short absence he returned with a hoe-cake, a pitcher of milk, and a roasted possum. I then found for the first time in my life that I liked possum for I really thought I never had eaten anything so good. I forgot to mention that while at Columbia, we did not receive a particle of meat.

While I was eating, the Negro seemed uneasy and admonished me to "eat quick and get out of dis for it is a dreafful dangerous place." After I had eaten what I wished, I put the remainder in my haversack and went my way convinced that there was at least one class of people in the South who were willing to risk almost anything to relieve us. On the night of the 21st about 10 o'clock, I met a white man. "Hallo, who are you?" said he. "A stranger, traveling through the country," I answered. "Who are you anyhow?" he said, evidently frightened. "A Yankee officer," said I. "I escaped from Columbia and am trying to make my way to our lines." He said, "Well, you better hurry on." I asked "are you a friend?" He said he was, whereupon he gave me all the instruction he could relative to the road. He had been lying out to avoid conscription and was going home for provisions.

Nothing further worth relating transpired until the night of the 22nd when I accidentally fell in with another escaped officer. I had been compelled to seek provision early in the evening and as the Negro from whom I obtained my supply did not know the exact locality of his hen roost, it was nearly midnight before I got back on the Columbia & Greenville Railroad upon which I was now traveling and being anxious to make up lost time, I was pushing forward with a speed perhaps unequalled on any railroad (except the Findlay Branch) when I was hailed from the roadside with "How d'ye do?" I answered that I was alright and thinking it was one of the patrols that roam the country to catch Negroes and not wishing to make an acquaintance of any such person, I again started on. He again called, "Where are you from?" I answered him that I was from Columbia, and going to Greenville. "You are a Yankee," said he, "escaped from Columbia and so am I. I am Lieutenant Cooper of the 12th New York Cavalry.¹ Give me your hand."

I found upon inquiry that he had been living on parched corn and that he had broken down for rheumatism and that his comrades had that evening left him to his fate. After partaking freely of the hoecake with which I furnished him, he seemed much revived and asked permission to

¹ First Lieutenant Alonzo Cooper of Co. I, 12th New York Volunteer Cavalry was captured April 20, 1864 at Plymouth, North Carolina. He was exchanged in the spring of 1865 and mustered out with his regiment July 19, 1865 at Raleigh, North Carolina. He later wrote a book entitled In and Out of Rebel Prisons and died in 1919.

accompany me which was readily granted. We immediately set forward and although it was past midnight and Cooper was quite lame, we made 17 miles by 5 o'clock when we camped and slept until day. We then roasted the two chickens I had obtained from the darkey and fared sumptuously on roast chicken, sweet potatoes, and hoecake. On the night of the 24th, it became necessary to seek another supply of provisions. For this purpose I took the lead by a few rods and hearing someone approach, I gave the usual signal of danger (a low whistle) and retreated a few paces into the woods. As soon as he came so near that I was satisfied that he was black, I stepped out and accosted him in the usual manner, telling him who we were and that we were dependent on the blacks, etc. "Mas'r," said he, "our folks sometimes talks that way to us. They gets us to help 'em and then they whips us. You isn't that kind, is ye?" I said no, and Cooper, who was dressed in full uniform, threw back his overcoat and displayed the blue. This satisfied him and he promised to help us. We gave him \$20 for our supper, five chickens, and as much hoecake as we could carry in one haversack. I carried the bread, and Cooper the chickens, but the load proved too much for rheumatic ankles and I was compelled to carry all.

We only reached Anderson that night, a distance of ten miles from where we started the evening before and camped at 5 in the morning of the 22nd. We roasted three of our chickens to last us until the next morning after which we laid down until night. We started at sunset and traveled all night. At 5 o'clock in the morning we came into a deep cut in the railroad and could not climb up either side until daylight should come to our assistance. This caused us considerable alarm as we were liable to be discovered at any moment. We got safely through, however, and finding a good camping place, proceed to roast our two remaining chickens. We had about finished roasting them when, hearing rustling in the leaves behind us, we looked around and beheld to our horror a Rebel soldier, an elderly man (whom we subsequently ascertained was the soldier's father), and two dogs. The old man apologized for the interruption by stating that he had seen the smoke and though the hunters had set his fence on fire. Cooper then spoke up, "Old man, there is no use in trying to dodge. You know as well as we do who we are. We are Yankee officers who have escaped from Columbia. Now what are you going to do with us?" The soldier said, "You can go where you pleas, I shall not trouble you." The old man said "that's the ticket" and then gave us a history of his trouble since he had been living under the dictatorship of Jeff Davis as he very aptly termed the government of the Confederacy and concluded by saying that he was born in the Union and wished to live and die in no other.

We were then warned by the soldier that the woods were full of deserters and that there was frequently government officials in pursuit of them, but if we would come with him, he would conduct us to a place of safety. We were somewhat fearful of a trap, but the fellow seemed honest and we felt we could not do better under the circumstances than to trust him. He took us to a thicket where there was plenty of clear water and told us to stay there until he returned in the evening. He and his father returned after dark, bringing with them a basket filled with biscuits and sweet potatoes. The young man then entertained us with a portion of his history. At the commencement of the war, he was employed as a clerk in a dry goods establishment and that although only 15 years of age, he had been frequently urged to volunteer but he steadily refused, that regardless of the remonstrance of the father that he was too young, and the urgent entreaties of the

mother not to take her only son from her, they conscripted him and put him in the South Carolina heavy artillery. He was then home on a 30 days' furlough and had come to the conclusion that he would serve the Confederacy no longer. He proposed to accompany us, but his mother opposed it so strongly that he had to abandon the project.

We then started under the guidance of our young grayback friend who accompanied us to the road leading to Walhalla (a village at the present terminus of the Columbia & Knoxville Railroad) and gave us all the information necessary in reference to flanking that place which was guarded by three regiments of militia. He also informed us that Tunnel Hill, a point on the line of the railroad six miles west of Walhalla, was strongly picketed. We had traveled till 1 o'clock in the morning and reached a point within two miles from Walhalla when the sky became suddenly overspread with clouds and having no compass and the North Star being invisible, we thought best to lie down until morning and take daylight for flanking the town. Near morning it commenced raining in torrents. I sprang to my feet and called to Cooper to get up and set forward for that was the time to go through Walhalla. He considered it dangerous and at first objected, but as I told him he could do as he pleased- that I was going at all hazards, he concluded to go, too.

We reached the eastern extremity of the town just as day was breaking and as I had anticipated, found that the guard had all been removed during the rain. The town was one of those everlasting country places that are built all along the road and it was nearly broad daylight before we reached the western extremity. We, however, reached it in safety. We stopped one mile west of town at the Hotel de Bramblebush where we breakfasted on wheat biscuits, sweet potatoes, and roast chicken. We then pushed forward, taking to the woods with the intention of flanking Tunnel Hill. We soon struck the Blue Ridge, and having no means of judging our course, we soon became so completely lost that we wandered round and wound, frequently passing the same objects a second and third time. At length we struck a trail and after following it for two hours we came to a house which we had passed in the early part of the day, but we did not make our appearance for fear of betrayal.

We then attempted to return in the direction from whence we came in the morning and thus get back to the road which we had left- the Georgia State road. About sundown, we came to a road that we felt confident was the one for which we were searching. We then secreted ourselves till 8 o'clock. We then started for Tunnel Hill, taking the left hand end of the road which we knew must be in the right direction if we were on the Georgia State road. We had traveled but a short distance when we came to a camp of Rebel cavalry who, by their whooping and yelling, notified us of our danger in time to enable us to flank them very easily. About 9 o'clock we came to a crossroad and casting our eyes to the right, we discovered that we were in close proximity to a village, and believing it to be Tunnel Hill, bent our steps in that direction. When we had gone some distance in the village, Cooper exclaimed, "Cap, we have come right back into Walhalla! There is the identical church and on the public square is the well we passed this morning."

Just at that moment the clouds broke away in the north (it had been raining all day) and our old friend the North Star peeped forth on our left as if to admonish us that we were on the backward track. We quickly faced about and with all the energy we could command in our exhausted condition, wended our way toward Tunnel Hill which we reached without any accident that we once

took the wrong road where the road forked and were set right by the ever friendly black man. The night was so excessively dark that we could not see ten feet before us. This made it very laborious climbing the hill.

We reached the summit about midnight and were startled by the familiar word "Halt!" only a few feet in front of us. We had unwittingly run into a picket post. The sentinel evidently did not understand his business for he stood some time apparently not knowing what to say next. I broke the silence and relieved him of his embarrassment with "What will you have?" He asked who we were. "Soldiers going home on furlough," we replied. "Did you come on the cars?" he asked. We told him yes, and he asked "You have the necessary papers, I reckon." We replied "certainly sir, you did not think we would attempt to pass the guard at Walhalla and here without papers, did you?" He said "Well, I have to obey orders. I will call the doc (the doc was the man they called the corporal of the guard) and let him examine your papers." I presented him an old pass that I had received from Colonel John F. Miller at Nashville in the fall of 1862. He labored some time in order to get a light by which to read the pass but the wood was all very wet and he could not succeed. At last he thought of trying to get some dry splinters from the inside of his cabin and succeeded in getting a few by which he laid on the fire and soon had a bright blaze. At that moment I dropped the paper behind me and in reaching back to pick it up (I was sitting on a log) I accidentally stuck out my foot and kicked the fire out! I made many apologies for the accident but he politely answered that it was no difference- he reckoned it was all right and permitted us to proceed on our journey. Being very much exhausted, we only traveled two miles from the picket post when we struck into the woods and lying down, slept soundly until broad daylight.

The weather turned cold during the night and when we awoke in the morning we were so chilled that we could scarcely stand. On rising we held a consultation. We were then fairly in the mountains- a country inhabited almost exclusively by non-slaveholders from whom we would be compelled to get our supplies and it being now the time of year (October 27th) when we must reasonably look for unpleasant weather, we decided to pass for Rebel soldiers and travel openly. Pursuant to this plan, we stopped at the first house we came to and tried to get some breakfast and were told that they had nothing; that they were compelled to await the return of the husband who was then gone to the mill ere they could get anything for themselves. They informed us, however, that two miles ahead there was a widow who kept travelers.

We found the widow very willing to feed us and while she was getting up our breakfast of fried mutton, corn bread, sweet potatoes, and rye coffee, she entertained us with the narrative of her troubles since the commencement of the rebellion. Her husband had died four years before, leaving her four sons, two of whom, being of sufficient age, volunteered at the beginning of the war. One was killed on the field of Antietam and the other died of wounds received at Chancellorsville. The third son was an invalid having had disease of the lungs from childhood. Even this did not suffice to save him from the clutches of the government officials. He was conscripted as soon as he became of sufficient age and being unable to withstand the hardships of the camp, he gradually sank beneath the load and died in a few months, another victim of Jeff's folly, and another witness against the institutors of the rebellion in the day of judgement.

Having breakfasted, we hurried on in order to overtake some teams that had passed while we were eating for the purpose of crossing the Chattooga River on their wagons. We overtook them in good time and were carried across on the horses, the wagons being so full that we could not get in them. Having safely reached the opposite bank, we halted for some time to rest and also to gather some grapes that were in abundance on the river bank. Lieutenant Cooper rested while I gathered my hat full of grapes and while we sat upon the grass eating them, two Rebel officers, a captain and a lieutenant, came galloping along and accosted us in the following manner: "Well boys, where are you going?" We replied "home on furlough." They asked where we lived, and we replied Towns County, Georgia. Before they had time to ask another question I proffered them a share of our grapes. They accepted them very gratefully and added, "Well, boys I suppose you are coming up the road?" On being answered in the affirmative, he said, "We will see you again as you pass" and rode off.

We were not very anxious to extend the acquaintance of our newly made friends and chose to hide ourselves till evening ere we attempted passage of their residence. We crawled into a pile of brush in the edge of a clearing, where we remained from 10 A.M. till 8 in the evening when we resumed our journey. The road wound along a mountain stream, frequently crossing it. The bridges had all been flooded away at the time of Noah's flood and had not since been rebuilt, so that we were compelled to wade all the streams except where some of the mountaineers, a little more enterprising than their neighbors, had erected a foot log. The night was exceedingly dark and all combined made it very difficult for us to pursue our journey. About midnight Cooper became unable to travel any further in consequence of rheumatism and we were compelled to halt for the night. We crawled into an old fodder house where we remained until daybreak the next morning. We had no provisions with us and it was 2 o'clock before we were able to procure any.

That night we stopped with a man by the name of King who had some fine brandy with which he was very liberal. Two half pint glasses made Cooper very patriotic and by 8 o'clock his tongue was running like a race horse in favor of the Union. I became alarmed for the fate of the Confederacy and took the opposite side and I think for about half an hour we had one of the stiffest quarrels that was ever maintained for that length of time. King joined in with Cooper and I was compelled to haul down my colors, completely vanquished. After paying for our supper, breakfast, and lodging, which only cost us one dollar each, we started for Hiawassee, a little town 30 miles distant and situated near the banks of a river of the same name in Towns County, Georgia. We reached Major Carpenter's near sundown where we put up for the night. The major was an ardent Rebel and believing us to be what we professed, he received us very kindly, gave us our supper and a good bed to sleep in for which he charged us nothing. From him we learned it would not be safe for us to go much further north as the Yankees scouted as far as Notley Bridge only 20 miles distant nearly every day and their scouts did not dare go beyond that point. Of course we would be careful!

We started as soon as it was light and stopped at the house of a Baptist minister for breakfast having traveled for three miles. He was not home when we arrived having gone to fill an appointment at one of the neighboring churches. While the wife was getting breakfast, we seated ourselves; Cooper to enjoy a smoke, and I to enjoy a chat with her mother who was sitting in the chimney corner complacently smoking her pipe. She was not long in giving us to understand that

she did not approve of our fighting against the Union. When we plead the conscription, she said now was our time- if she was in our places, she would never go back an inch to fight for any such rotten consarn, that she wouldn't. She would let Jeff Davis see that he couldn't tramp on her toes without getting kicked, that she wouldn't. Breakfast being ready, we were about to sit down when the minister came home. He was rather a fine looking man about 40 years of age and bore the impress of great decision of character. He said but little in reference to the war. After breakfast we invited him to accompany us to the Hiawasse bridge. On our way there we told him that we did not intend to return to the army but did not tell him who we were. This I think was a blunder. I believe he was a staunch Union man and if we had made a clean breast of it, he would have helped us. As it was, he seemed fearful of a trap and said that every means had been tried since the war commenced to convict him of harboring deserters and helping them away. He would not agree to assist us but promised to say nothing about the matter.

Today we passed Fort Emery- talked with the citizens- asked for the news, and was told there was none and passed by unquestioned. This was our last line of guards and having passed that we began to feel that we were safe. We were compelled to stop two or three times during the days march in consequence of the lameness of Cooper. At 4 o'clock we reached Horshaw's house within Notley Bridge and 23 miles from Ducktown, Tennessee where our forces were stationed. Here we stopped to rest and get some supper, feeling confident that in a short time, we would be out of the reach of our enemies but we had "reckoned without our host."

While we were awaiting our supper, two cavalymen rode up and demanded where we belonged. We told them we belonged to the 32nd Georgia Infantry- that our family had lived near Atlanta; that when Sherman had issued his order compelling all to "choose whom they would serve," that our families had chosen to cleave unto the South and that the last we heard of them they were on Big Bragstown Creek. They demanded our papers. We told them that we had the necessary papers, but had left the knapsack contained them at the house of Major Carpenter to which we purposed returning as soon as we had found our families, not wishing to be encumbered with the burden. They told us it was their duty to arrest us but if they found on reaching Major Carpenter's that we had told the truth we would yet be all right. We acquiesced with apparent cheerfulness, intending to seize the first opportunity to escape. They started, marching us one in front of each man. We had proceeded but a short distance when the sergeant suddenly called a halt and ordered the other guard to search us for papers. I had none, but they found on Cooper his recruiting papers for the 12th New York Cavalry and also his Odd Fellows traveling card. He immediately exclaimed, "You are U.S. officers! How came you here?" This spoiled all our pretty story and we partially atoned for our past offenses by making a clear confession. The search being ended, we again resumed our journey in the same order as before. The young man who guarded me appeared hurt when he found who we were. He said he wished he had stayed at home and then we would have been on our way rejoicing. He asked me if I was very much fatigued and I answered in the affirmative. "You will not take advantage of me if I let you ride behind me?" continued he. "No, certainly not," said I. "Jump on," said he, "my mule can carry us both." Cooper was taken on behind the sergeant on the same conditions.

We gradually fell behind. My guard, whose name was R.T. Herbert, grew communicative. As soon as we were out of hearing of the other guard (Dick Hancock by name), he informed me that his brother had been indicted and tried by the Confederate authorities for treason but had been acquitted and now was a member of the North Carolina legislature. "I am as good a Union man as you or anybody else, but I am compelled to make some sort of show or leave the country. I would let you go now if I dared but Captain Sanderson is Secesh and will hold me responsible for you until I deliver you to him. I will likely be one of the guards to take you to Franklin and if that should be the case, watch your opportunity when there is none but myself present and take to the woods. I will shoot after you but will not hurt you," he said. We reached the residence of Captain Sanderson about 10 P.M. The captain, who had retired, reluctantly crawled out of bed and showed us to an outbuilding where we were kept under strict guard till next morning.

November 1, 1864, we were paroled for the purpose of washing our clothes. At 4 o'clock we resumed our journey and reached the house of James Garrison at sundown. On the way thither we stopped at the house of a widow Thompson for her son who was to accompany us as a guard. The old lady seemed very kind. She set out a basket of pineapples for us and did everything in her power to render us comfortable while we stayed. The son being ready, we were about to start when the old lady, pointing to the new guard, said to me in a low tone, "That is my son; he is not dangerous." I immediately understood that to mean "get away if you can, he will not hurt you." On reaching Mr. Garrison's, the old man demurred somewhat before agreeing to keep us; but when Lieutenant Leatherwood, who was in charge of us, adduced the argument that would stay anyhow, he seemed convinced that he was wrong and ushered us into his cabin. The lieutenant, although strongly imbued with Secesh principles, treated us kindly. While under his charge he procured three meals per day for us and a good bed to sleep in at night for which he paid with an order on the Confederacy at the rate of one dollar per meal.

Sometime during the night of the 1st, Captain Tidwell, the commander of a company in Thomas' Legion, and young Herbert who had left us at Captain Sanderson's came in. On the morning of the 2nd we resumed our journey. Our guard consisted of Lieutenant Leatherwood and Dick Hancock (Rebels), R.T. Herbert and T.J. Thompson (Union). Captain Tidwell also went along a little ways as he said, "just for fun." After traveling a short distance with us, Tidwell invited me to get on behind him and ride. After I had mounted, he put his hand behind him and slipped \$15 into my hand. He then informed me that Herbert, Thompson, and he had concocted a scheme for our escape. His plan was to obtain a canteen of applejack- we were all to pretend to drink in order to get the two Rebels to drink themselves drunk and then seize the first opportunity to break and run. "If you get away," he said, "come back to my house and I will furnish you all you need of these and set you across the line," as he showed me a roll of greenbacks.

We were then commencing to ascend the Nantahala Mountains. We traveled some distance up the mountain when Tidwell said (pointing to a mule on the mountain about 100 yards from us) "Leatherwood, you and Dick go and get that mule on the cliff for the captain to ride. We can get along much faster if we are all mounted." I neglected to mention that Cooper, being lame, had been furnished a horse by Captain Sanderson. They went and were putting the halter on the mule when Captain Tidwell said to us, "Now go to that spring like you were going to get a drink, and then split

like the devil up the mountain.” We did as directed and Tidwell cried “halt!” He then fired three successive shots with his revolver not intending to hit us. One of the bullets, however, passing Cooper hit a rock and bounded back against his face with such force as to remain almost buried in the wound. This was a happy thing for our friends for it removed all suspicions of their complicity in the affair. Lieutenant Leatherwood, hearing the noise, looked around and seeing what was up took across a ridge of the mountain and intercepted Cooper coming in a short distance behind me. “Halt,” he yelled, “I don’t want to kill you.” I adopted the maxim that discretion is the better part of valor, obeyed.

Dick was too drunk to render any assistance in catching us but when we were brought back he drew his revolver and swore that he would shoot us. Captain Tidwell rushed in and ordered him to put up his pistol and not make a fool of himself. He then tried to make us promise not to make another attempt at escape. I told him it was his business to keep us and it was my privilege to get away and I would improve every opportunity that presented itself. He then attempted to tie us but Herbert and Thompson interfered, and we were suffered to proceed as before, but they never suffered us to be alone with either Herbert or Thompson. Captain Tidwell left us here.

We continued our weary way up the mountain, I on foot, for be it remembered that I didn’t get a mule to ride. At noon we stopped at the cabin of a mountaineer and, without knife or fork, dined on corn bread, buttermilk, and bear meat, all cold. At night we stopped at the house of a Mr. Scott on the east side of the Nantahala Mountains where we were provided with an excellent supper and breakfast and good lodgings. Here I again tried to escape by crawling to the door and working it open, but their suspicions being awakened, they never for an instant relaxed their vigilance.

We reached Franklin, the county seat of Macon County, North Carolina on November 3rd about noon and were turned over to the adjutant of the post with the injunction “You must watch that big red-whiskered cuss or he’ll get away sure as hell!” We were taken to the county jail and there kept until the next morning. We remained at Franklin till the morning of the 5th. Our guard, a Mr. Johnson (a wealthy citizen of the place) remarking that the jail was rather uncomfortable, took us to his own house where we received the kindest of treatment by all the members of the family. Very soon after reaching Mr. Johnson’s house, the adjutant sent him a notice that he would hold him responsible for the safe keeping of the prisoners. He politely requested that dignitary to attend to his own business and he would attend to his.

On the morning of the 5th, we started under charge of our new guard for Asheville, Buncombe County, North Carolina. At night we put up in Webster, Jackson County, North Carolina. There had been a meeting in the town during the day for the purpose of raising a company of home guards. Some of the chivalry, rendered more chivalrous by the too free use of applejack, swore that “the damned Yankees should never pass through that town alive.” The lieutenant in charge, hearing of their threats, thought best to stop at a private house in the suburbs of the village. He informed us that in case of an attack we should be furnished with arms. A few came around and offered to come into the house, but being admonished by the lieutenant that he would shoot the first man that offered violence to the prisoners, they retired and the night passed off quietly. We reached Asheville on the night of the 7th without any other incident worth noting.

We were immediately taken into the presence of the colonel commanding the post. He told us he was unable at present to furnish us with comfortable quarters but as soon as court would adjourn, which would be in two or three days, he would remove us to the courthouse. He called the sergeant of the guard and told him to take us to the jail and tell the sergeant in charge of prisoners to put us in the best room in the building. Accordingly we were conducted to the jail and the sergeant, after relieving us of everything that might be of any use in case of an attempt to scape, took us to a front room in the third story of the house. When he opened the door, we looked into the prison and our hearts sickened at the loathsome spectacle and for the first time in my life a feeling akin to despair came over me. Here, in a room 14' x 16', were incarcerated 24 filthy, ragged, half-starved human wretches all covered with vermin. Most of them were deserters and men who refused to serve in the Rebel army. Some of them had been already seven months in the horrid place. In one corner of the room was a stove and in another a tub used as a privy. These were the only articles of convenience or comfort in the room, there not being the semblance of a chair, bench, or stool. We remonstrated against putting prisoners of war into such a place but all to no purpose. There we must go and there we must stay until he got orders to remove us.

Shortly after our arrival, the cook brought in our grub. It consisted of one-half pound of sad, warm, wheat cake and about two ounces of boiled beef, which was plenty for me, considering that the cook dealt out the meat with his hands that bore unmistakable evidence of a long standing disease called itch. When night came we found that only 24 of us could lie down at once, so two were compelled to remain up all night. We took turns, however, and thus endeavored to render our misery as light as possible. On the fifth day after our arrival we sent a note to the commandant of the post complaining of our usage and reminding him of his promise to give us better quarters, but received no answer.

On the 13th, two ladies made a visit to their friends in prison and brought them some provisions. They told the sergeant in charge of the prison that they had brought some apples for the Yankees and would like to carry them up and present them. Said he, "I'll tote 'em up." This did not seem to satisfy the ladies, but they finally agreed to it on the condition that he would tell us to hold them up to the window that they might see that he had performed his mission faithfully. They seemed very much pleased when we exhibited our treasures at the window. They then requested their friends to divide with the Yankees, which they did freely and said they would come back the next week and bring them more. As some of the prisoners nearly every day had friends bring them provisions and they seemed to vie with each other in liberality to us. We fared very well so far as provisions were concerned.

The women in all the mountain region through which we passed, although many were warm advocates of secession at the beginning of the war, are now almost a unit in their denunciations of the rebellion as a thing calculated, if successful, to benefit the rich only. The male portion of every family are either in some branch of the army, or lying in the mountains to avoid conscription, and thus the females are compelled to do the farming to avoid starvation. At almost every plantation we could see a female performing some part of the labor of the farm, either plowing, husking corn, gathering apples, or making cider. The tenth of all they raised, be it much or little, they were compelled to give for the support of a cause that taken away their husbands, sons, and brothers, and

made slaves of themselves. If any remain over and above what the government agents think necessary to sustain life till the coming of the next crop, it is seized upon and paid for at such prices as they choose to give. Many thousand bushels of wheat and corn lie hidden perhaps even yet in the mountains and many thousands of pounds of bacon lie buried in the earth to keep them out of the hands of the impressment agent.

November 14th I saw in the hands of one of the prisoners an army screwdriver. This instrument is composed of two parts, shutting together like shears. One prong of this I drove into a round stick of stove wood and the other I bound fast to the stick with a cord and ground sharp on a stone window sill. Below us was a room which the jailor used for storing away corn, bacon, potatoes, etc. In the north end of this room is a window 13 feet from the ground. On each side of the building is one sentinel. The night is cold and the four sentinels are collected nearly all the time around the fire at the southwest corner of the building. Seeing this, I went to work with the screwdriver to cut a hole through the center of the floor to get into the room below and thus escape through the window. In two hours I had a hole through the floor two feet long and twenty inches wide. On raising the floor, I found a ceiling below of three quarter inch boards. To cut through this with the implement I had and without light I found to be impossible. I therefore had to devise some other means of getting through the ceiling. By heating the handle of an old iron fire shovel, I found that I could burn through, but this consumed so much time that I did not get through until day was dawning in the east and as it was impractical to escape then, and there was seldom any person in the room below, I shut up the hole as well as I could, hoping that it would remain undiscovered until darkness would again favor us with his gracious presence. Just before the sergeant came in to make his usual search, I threw a blanket over the place and four of the prisoners say down over the place to take a game of poker. The sergeant came in, made the search, found nothing, and went out satisfied.

In the course of an hour, the sergeant came back in a terrible rage. The jailor's better half had gone into the room below to get corn for her cow and discovered the hole in the ceiling which she immediately reported to her husband and he informed the sergeant. "You think you're very smart boys," said he as soon as he came in, "but you've got to get up early if you get ahead of me." He then turned to a deserted by the name of Matthews and seized him by the collar and said, "You doned this- I'll put you where you won't hurt nobody." And was about leading him out when I spoke and told him, "Not to be so fast Mr. Sergeant. You had better be sure before punishing anyone. I concocted the plan and did all the work and I am very sorry the night was not two hours longer as I would have bid you good bye." The sergeant said, "All right, we'll take care of you." I said, "Do your worst. Uncle Sam is at my back and it will come your turn sometime."

He went and reported to the post adjutant whom came with him to the prison. He looked at the hole awhile then turning to me asked, "Where are the tools with which you cut this hole?" I handed him the screwdriver which I had divested of its handle. He looked at it and exclaimed, "Give me the tools, sir; you didn't cut that hole with this." I answered that I certainly had and that I had nothing else. "Damn me, if a Yankee can't do anything. All right; get away if you can- it is our business to keep you. I was a prisoner once myself and I know what it is." During the day they fixed up the place. The carpenter that repaired the place had been an inmate of the prison himself and on

receiving a wink from one of the party he was careful to fix it so it would be easily raised but could not be detected.

On the 17th the prisoners in one of the other rooms attempted to escape by snatching the keys from the sergeant and taking him into the room and locking him in when he came up in the evening to let the cook in with the supper. The leader of the plan, a Mr. Hooper, was to take the keys and a Negro boy who had been taken in an attempt to escape from his master and incarcerated in the prison, was to take the sergeant into the room and hold him till the rest were all out and then he was to come out and the door was to be locked. Hooper took the keys and the Negro took the sergeant in, but those who were to rush out and secure the guard fizzled and the attempt failed. The leader and a few of the most active in the plot were put into the cage, but the poor slave received 75 lashes for his trouble. Poor fellow! It was truly pitiful to hear the shrieks, groans, and pleadings of the Negro as the inhuman wretch put on the lash. After he had given him 50 lashes, being exhausted, he gave the whip into the hands of another ruffian to administer the next 25. He ordered him to stop his howling or he would kill him. The punishment was administered in the hall of the jail that all the prisoners might hear and take warning.

On the night of the 19th, the prisoners broke out of the cage by picking the lock. They attempted to pick a hole through the brick wall of the prison and thus escape, but they made so much noise at the work that they were detected and all, 24 in number, put into our room until morning. They reopened the hole that we had attempted to escape through, although I begged of them to refrain, that the keys of the prison might not always be kept on the watch by our fruitless attempts, but they would not hear. The guard was too vigilant and they were again foiled. We succeeded in concealing the place for several days, but were unable to escape on account of the unusual vigilance of the guard. On the 22nd the plan was again discovered by the jailor and of course the whole thing blamed on me. I did not deny it was I knew if any of the other prisoners were exposed they would be severely punished. They took us (Cooper and myself), however, and put us in the cage for safekeeping. If we had succeeded in escaping from Asheville prison, we were almost certain of success in getting to a place of safety as by this time we had become fully acquainted with the route of the underground railroad.

Deserters were now being brought in nearly every day, chained together like brutes, and cast into prison. The prison was now becoming so crowded that it was necessary to remove some. Accordingly on the 24th we started for Morganton, North Carolina, a distance of 60 miles, in company with three other Federal officers who had been recaptured and brought to Asheville since our arrival, together with 11 deserters who were being sent to Petersburg to their commands- all under the charge of a lieutenant and 20 men, all on foot. Each guard took his man and was held responsible for his safe delivery in camp at night.

We reached Morganton on the evening of the 25th about sunset and on the morning of the 26th we took the train for Salisbury, distant 80 miles, which we reached by sunset of the same day. At 8 o'clock we took the cars for Danville, distant from Salisbury 100 miles which place we reached the following evening. Among the prisoners at Danville I found a young man by the name of Burket from Hancock County and also Rummell, formerly a resident of Findlay. To these gentlemen am I indebted for much kindness during my imprisonment at Danville; may God reward them. Danville

is situated on the Dan River about five miles from the North Carolina line. It is the terminus of the Richmond & Danville Railroad. About a year ago there was constructed from Danville to Greensboro, thus connecting Columbia with Richmond by that route, and making it the shortest route by rail from Richmond to any portion of the Confederacy.

We were on our arrival taken to prison No. 3, a large, black, uncomfortable looking three story brick building formerly used as a tobacco warehouse. The second and third stories alone were used as prisons, to better prevent escape; the first floor was occupied by the guards. The floors were not plowed and grooved but merely jointed together and nailed down so that after the usual shrinkage of the lumber cracks of from one-eighth to one-quarter of an inch in width were left, and as we had to sleep on the floor with nothing but a blanket under us, it made it very disagreeable, especially in cold windy weather, the windows all being open in the lower story. On the next morning after our arrival, I was awakened from a sound slumber by a loud cry of "buckets for water" and thinking the building was on fire, I sprang to my feet. But the thing was explained by a fellow prisoner nearby who stated that the prisoners had to obtain their supplies of water from the river nearly one-fourth of a mile distant and that there were permitted to go in squads of from 8-15 for that purpose and this was the usual way of collecting the squad.

About 9 o'clock the rations were brought in; they consisted of a mixture of cobs, bran, and corn stirred together and mixed with water. This composition was then raised till it was so light that one pound, our usual allowance, only weighed three-quarters of a pound. In the afternoon we received a pint of something the natives called thin soup. For the life of me I never could discover in it any resemblance to that article and had it not been for the few beans found in the bottoms of the pails in which the soup was brought, I would have been at a loss even to this day to know what to call it. Three or four times after I went to Danville they issued beef at the rate of two ounces per man instead of soup. The beef consisted of the refuse of the slaughterhouse. Heads, livers, and lights were all thrown together untrimmed into a large kettle and boiled. I remember very distinctly of receiving for my ration the gristly piece off the end of the nose. I was not hungry for meat that day so I gave mine away and I easily found a man hungry and willing to eat it. Even this was stopped in a short time and about the middle of December 1864 we were reduced to three-fourths of a pound of corn bread.

Now came hard times, indeed. Many of the prisoners were almost destitute of clothing; some had one blanket, many had none, and the weather about this time became intensely cold. In describing my own case I describe that of many others of my fellow prisoners. My underclothing was entirely worn out and thrown away; my blouse and shirt were so worn that my arms were bare to my shoulder; my vest was minus the back and all the buttons but one and a good part of the front. By unraveling old socks and darning my pants whenever I discovered a break I managed to keep them together. I think when I came to Richmond where General Hayes issued me a new suit, I had the darndest pair of pants ever a white man wore. I had neither shoes, hat, nor socks.

As we had no light by which to read and nothing to read if we had light, we generally went to bed at dark. After the weather became cold we could not stand it more than one-half or three-quarters of any hour without getting up to warm. I would get up and go to the fire five or six times a night and always found a large crowd of men around the stoves in the same condition as myself. The

enlisted men were in an infinitely worse condition than we were. Those of us who had money were furnished flour at \$3 a pound, meal at \$1.50 a pound, rice at \$2 a pound, butter at \$15 a pound, potatoes at \$90 a bushel, eggs \$9 per dozen, and everything else in proportion. I may as well state here that it appeared to be a uniform practice among those having charge of us to make a fortune out of us. The rations allowed by the Confederate government, if issued in full quantities, were hardly sufficient to sustain life in most men. We were not allowed even this. The salt, rice, beans, meat, and vinegar were retained, this compelling those who had money to buy or starve.

Most of the officers succeeded in negotiating a loan with some of the citizens at \$2 Confederate money for \$1 of greenbacks, or six for one in gold; if they had the money in their pockets they could get twenty for the greenbacks and eighty for the gold. Not so with the enlisted men. They had been robbed of their blankets, overcoats, and many of them of every article of clothing they had on, being compelled to put on old clothes the Rebels threw away when they donned the Yankee uniform. They had no money and they had no credit to obtain it. They were robbed of their rations by these Confederate hounds of hell and then left to die the most horrible of deaths- starvation. Think of this secession sympathizer, think of it vile traitor, and then ask that the inhuman perpetrators of these fiendish crimes go unpunished!

About the 20th of December 1864, there was an effort made to escape. The plan was to overpower the guard, rush out, break open the prisons of the enlisted men, seize the stores and arsenal to clothe and arm them, and then march through the country to our lines, the nearest point of which was 140 miles distant. The expedition was commanded by Brigadier General Alfred N. Duffie² and the charge was led by Colonel Rohlson. They chose 15 men who at about 3 P.M. would go on the lower floor with pails in their hands and call "buckets for water" and as soon as the sergeant would open the door they were to seize him and the guard, disarm them, and then rush out, the rest to follow. They made the effort; Colonel Rohlson had captured and disarmed one guard and another of the party the other guard when Colonel Rohlson was fired at from the outside of the building and severely wounded. General Duffie ordered a retreat and the crowd rushed upstairs in considerable confusion, closely followed by the guard who by this time were in crowds around the building. Thus ended that effort. The thing at best was impractical as the distance to our lines was too great. The time was badly chosen as the weather was cold and the 3 o'clock time meant that all were awake and soon rallied. Every man in the South, by a law of their Congress, is a soldier and is compelled to turn out at a moment's warning, and in a very few minutes the streets were crowded with armed men.

After this, they treated us pretty much the same as they had done- no better and they couldn't treat us much worse. During my stay in Danville, they issued an order that no person should throw water out of a window. An officer in passing a cup of water which had been placed on a window sill of the lower floor accidentally overset it and some of the water ran on the outside of

² Brigadier General Alfred Napoleon Alexander Duffie, a native Parisian who left the French Army to immigrate to the United States, served as commanding officer of the 1st Rhode Island Cavalry until commissioned a brigadier general in June 1863. He was captured by John S. Mosby's troops near Bunker Hill, West Virginia on October 20, 1864. He was eventually paroled at the same time as Captain Alban.

the window; he was immediately fired at, but the ball missed him and passed through the upper floor and wounded one man who died shortly afterward.

Nothing more of importance transpired during my stay in that prison. The subject of exchange was freely discussed and many rumors were afloat relative thereto. The spirits of the prisoners varied according to the nature of the rumor. On the last day of January I became indisposed. The disease soon developed itself and was discovered to be lung fever. My constitution, unable to withstand the tax upon it, finally gave way and I was removed to the hospital which was but little better than the prison except that we had a straw tick, bunk, and bed clothing. Our rations consisted of a small piece of bread three times a day and an ounce of boiled bacon twice a day; in the morning we had some kind of coffee, but I could never tell what it was made of.

During my stay at the hospital the clothing arrived for our men and a committee of our officers was appointed and paroled for the purpose of issuing it. They were very busy at this work when word came that we were all exchanged. They had finished issuing to No. 4 and No. 6 as they were the most needy when orders were given them to be ready to move the next morning. The order was changed and No. 1 and No. 5 taken in their stead. No. 4 and No. 6 were found to be dying off at the rate of from eight to ten per day and for every man that died they got a suit of new clothes. The others had not had the clothing issued to them and it was no profit to keep them. Just as certain as a man went to the hospital with a good suit on he would die. Colonel Rohlson went there with a fine suit on; they immediately put warm poultices to his wound, something hardly ever heard of in the civilized world, mortification took place and in a few hours he was dead and they had his clothes for their pains. Major Ruggles went there a day or two before I did with a good suit on and was not very sick; when I went there he was working in spasms caused by poison I suppose and died in a day or two- they fell heir to his clothes. As my suit was of such poor quality, I felt comparatively safe.

On the 15th of February, we received the glad tidings that we were to start at 5 o'clock that evening for Richmond to be exchanged. At 5 we mustered and marched to the depot one-fourth of a mile distant. There were 39 sick officers and only three blankets, the balance having left their blankets at the prison expecting to return. The weather was cold- we remained at the depot about an hour when we were informed that we could not go until the next morning. We were marched back to the hospital. Next morning, without anything to eat, we started in open box cars for Richmond. We had no blankets or overcoats and our other clothing in a dreadful condition, none of us having yet received any clothing. I was assisted to and from the cars by Lieutenant Murphy of the 15th Pennsylvania Cavalry. We reached Richmond at 8 o'clock that night and were kept waiting three hours in the cars and in the streets before we were taken to the hospital and by that time I was nearly frozen. On the next day we were paroled preparatory to going to our lines. On the 21st we were taken by a steamer down the James River and in a few hours were on board the *New York* and under the protection of my country with the glorious old flag of the Union floating proudly in the breeze. My feelings, dear reader, can better be imagined than described, therefore I decline the task.

The March 3, 1865 issue of the *Hancock Jeffersonian* reported that Captain Alban contacted his wife in late February to let her know that he had been exchanged and was in Annapolis, Maryland.

“His sufferings have been intense, as have been the sufferings of all our prisoners,” Locke opined.
“To get out of one of the Rebel prisons alive is almost as though they were from the dead and anyone with a sympathizing heart will rejoice with their friends on their happy escape.

Daniel A. Masters

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