

PRISON LIFE IN TEXAS.

Capture, Imprisonment and Escape of J. N. Howard, Co. "E," 32 Iowa Volunteers.

CHAPTER I.

Though there has been much written concerning other prisoners during the rebellion, there has been little said of the Tyler Prison in Texas. As many have spoken to me in regard to this, I have decided to give the people a short narrative of that prison as near as I can from memory since I have no memorandum of dates. It will give it as correct as possible without fiction—facts only as they happened in the spring of 1864.

My regiment, the 32d was in camp at Vicksburg in command of General Sherman. About April 1st there was a call for ten thousand of Sherman's corps to assist General Banks in the Red River expedition. This detachment was commanded by Gen. A. J. Smith, was provided with ten transports, one thousand men to the vessel; we had gun boats in front and rear. We started on the 9th of April.

This gallant crew proceeded up the river in good spirits, anxious to meet the reb's who had made their boast that the whole world could not strike Texas. We found them in force on the Atchafalpa where they were strongly fortified. We landed our transports two miles below their fort. Our gunboats proceeded up toward the fort; the infantry coming up in the rear on land and soon succeeded in dislodging the enemy who evacuated and fell back to Fort Derussy where they were located in a short bend in the river and very strongly fortified.

The town of Derussy through which we passed was three miles from the fort. For some distance the road was across a level plain to a point where it turned square to the east on the way to the fort. It was down grade for a half mile. At the mouth of a lane my company, being directly in front, was surprised by receiving the enemy's fire from his heaviest guns. Although they were still more than a mile away, the ball passed directly over our heads barely missing us and struck the ground just at the foot of our company. Fortunately it did us no harm. This was the first that we knew of their whereabouts. Here we halted and opened ranks. This left the road clear for our artillery to pass from rear to front. They came down the lane as fast as their horses could run making the very earth tremble as they came. They passed through the timber and took position on an open field in plain view of the enemy. Here there was a deadly fire opened on both sides, which was indeed terrible. We could scarcely distinguish time between the reports of the cannon. While this was going on, the infantry marched on quick time through the timber and out on the open ground in sight of the rebel fort.

The Johnnies opened fire on us with one of their heaviest guns, the ball passing just over heads. We were ordered to the hollow and barely escaped the next ball. We passed down the hollow until we were out of range of their artillery though they could drop their small balls all around us. Here Captain Howard was sent out to reconnoiter and find out the position of the rebels.

He came back in a short time and called for fifty sharpshooters, fifty of us boys responded, we started across a high point of ground in plain view of their fort. They threw their lead uncomfortably close but we succeeded in gaining a partial shelter behind stumps and logs and in a very short time we silenced their big guns. Then there was a general charge made all along the line. I tell you it was a grand sight to see the blue coats flying toward the fort, pouring volley after volley into the rebels. When we got to within a short distance of the fort, the Johnnies ran up the white flag. There was a ditch eight feet wide and eight feet deep, the dirt being thrown out on one side, making it sixteen feet deep from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the breastwork. We ran down into the ditch then up on the top. The Johnnies were very glad of a chance to surrender. They said that they expected that we would kill the last man of them, but instead of that we shook hands with them and passed the matter off in a joke as if it had been merely a game of foot ball. We captured a good many prisoners and arms. The next day we proceeded up the river as far as Alexandria where we expected a general stand but somehow the rebels did not seem so disposed and they fell back to Shreveport.

As Banks was marching by land we in the boats could go no faster than he marched as we had to stay in line with him until we got within forty or fifty miles of Shreveport. Then we had to stop until we heard from Banks. We tied up all day and until the next morning, when at the break of day we heard the cannon in the direction of Shreveport. We were ordered in line of march at once, leaving our boats and sick, behind. This seemed hard to do as in all probability we would never see each other again. Here I will make mention of one brave boy in particular by the name of W. H. Long who was disabled at the battle of Derussy. When we went to bid him goodbye, he turned his head toward his very

nice overgreens and said that is the most beautiful sight I ever saw, he then said goodbye, shook hands. We left him with many others. He lived a few days. We started on a forced march toward the designated cannoning which was constant all day. We went until in the night. When we traveled into the night. When we went into camp! we found ourselves on a pleasant hill, the cannon had ceased firing and all was quiet as far as we knew. We made our coffee, eat our hard tack and bacon. I had but one relative with me. Jasper Parriott by name. He was my cousin, and a good boy. He and I slept together. After eating our hard tack, we gathered some leaves and made us a bed. We lay down when Jasper said "this may be the last time we will make our bed together" and my reply was "I hope not," though I knew it was very likely as the probabilities were that we would be called in battle the next morning. We knew that the battle had been raging all day but we knew nothing of the result. This was kept from us. We slept well, was not disturbed until morning which was bright and clear, we eat our breakfast and waited for orders. About nine o'clock we were ordered in line and marched out to the main travel road which was a quarter of a mile off. When we struck the main road we could then see some of the effects of the battle of the day, here on either side of the road was hundreds of the boys that had been in the battle.

Now readers you will ask the question, "what was the appearance of those boys?" My answer is, "horrible to one not accustomed to seeing such things." They were all, more or less, injured, there were those called slightly wounded but made a bad appearance from the fact that they were all bandaged with white cloth around some part of the body, arm, leg or the head hand or foot. As we come up they said "boys it is your turn now you will catch it today" well, we did catch it for a fact and I will try to tell you how it came about. We marched out to the open field, where we left our knapsacks in a pile. Then we turned to the left, took our stand just in the edge of the open field with the battery in front and was playing away on the rebels a half-mile off, just at the other side of the field though they had not made their appearance. They were laying very close to the ground and waiting for reinforcements from Prises army which arrived about two o'clock.

While waiting here in line of battle, my cousin made a cup of coffee then brought it to me and said, "help me drink my coffee, it may be the last time we will take dinner together" well we sat down and commenced drinking coffee when the rebels made their appearance on the other side of the field. They came out of the timber like swarms of bees and yelling like wolves, first a line of cavalry and in the rear their infantry. On they came; we stood there without firing a shot until they were within fifty yards of us, when we opened fire on them and sent them back as fast as they come, though there was many of them poor fellows that did not get back. But this did not end the matter for as soon as they could fall back

and reform, they came again and were repulsed as before. These charges were kept up all the afternoon, at last being reinforced and throwing their forces on our flanks, our lines were broken. Our forces fell back and reformed forty rods in the rear, planting batteries and covering them with pine boughs. The enemy, thinking that the reform forces were in full retreat, rushed on and fell into the trap that was set for them. When they came in range of our big guns those bows were thrown off and fired immediately, the infantry pored in such a deadly fire that the enemy was completely routed and driven from the field.

This last charge I was not in as I was captured and was going across the open field under guard—going pretty fast as the bullets from our boys were flying all around. I said "let them come," for our boys were following them and pouring into them a storm of lead. I knew when I heard our boys raise the yell that they were victorious. It was the first time that day, but I was not with them. I will tell you how it came about: Our line of battle was in a semicircle, my regiment, the 32d Iowa Infantry, was in the center and was closer to the enemy than the rest of the line. When the command was given to retreat we did not hear the order as our dispatch barrier was killed, the second dispatch barrier was also killed. The third one was sent then. We had orders to retire. By this time nearly all of my comrades were killed, yes, piled up on the field of battle. I will give the names of some of my friends that fell in that battle, the first that fell was Captain Howard who dropped at the first charge. After that charge some of the boys fell at every volley my cousin, Jasper Parriott fought about an hour when a ball struck him on the side of the nose passing straight through the head. He fell and crawled on his hands and knees. Delance Patten was another one of my best friends, a boy about 18 years old his place in rank was just behind me, when he would shoot his gun he would hold it close to me. When the shooting stopped in the rear I looked around and saw Patten lying at my feet. There were two brothers, Luther and Charles Lewis they were both good boys, Patten was a brother-in-law of Luther and when Luther saw that Patten was dead, he took his stand by his side and every time he fired his gun he would hold right over Patten. I think he fought for an hour when a ball struck him square in the forehead and he fell back against his brother Charles. I make mention of these boys to show my readers how the battle went.

We finally received orders to fall back then to our surprise we saw that every regiment on the line had been driven back, the rebels were marching down on us two columns deep. What there were left of us started back. Just then there was another one of the boys struck in the neck and out the jugler vein he, rushed to me for help. I threw down my gun and tried to bind up his neck with a part of my shirt, this was to stop the blood which was running in a stream as large as a straw. The blood was spinning out I think six feet before it struck the ground. I could do but little then as the rebels were so close that I was compelled to run for life. I caught up to the rest of the boys who were going back in a fast walk, shooting as they went. They were going back single file and I was the rear man. A boy by the name of Julian Waters was first in rank ahead of me. We had not gone

but a short distance when Julian Waters started to shoot, he leveled his gun, but a ball struck him just above the belt. I think it must have passed through his heart, his gun dropped from his hands, he reeled clear around and fell square on his back. All the struggle he made was a moving of the lips. Poor boy he was gone and I could do nothing for him (I will make mention of him hereafter) when he fell I stooped to see what could be done, seeing it was all over with him I started to run but the rebels had got in the advance of me and cut me off entirely. All I could do was to surrender at once or die at the spot. I was spared for variables. While this was being performed, I looked off about three rods from me there lay my cousin, Jasper looking straight at me. He was still alive but I was not permitted to go to him. I had to leave him there to suffer and die with so many others. It was now sundown, the air was quite cool and of course those wounded would soon chill to death. Oh, think of the horrors of that night as they could not be attended to that night, there were some of them that were able to make a fire to warm themselves and those that could crawl to the fire did so. There was one poor boy that was shot through the lower part of the bowels and let his intestines out on the ground but he gathered them up with his own hands and carried them to the fire and warmed them.

Now I have told you how it happened that I was taken prisoner. I was hurried away as fast as possible as the boys in blue were pressing the rebels very hard. They kept me going quite fast for three miles when I took a rest for a while for the purpose of bringing up some more of the boys who had not the same fate as myself. In a short time there were seven of us together. While they were holding me there, the guard had many questions to ask me. They wanted to know what we were fighting them for. I told them that we did not want to fight that we were there against our will, but the union must be saved at all hazards, that Washington was the father of our country and it was their duty to remain in the union. "Yes, but you want to take our negroes from us," No I told them, "not until it becomes a war necessity." I told them that Lincoln had declared the negroes free against his will. I told them all this and lots more. I felt in a mood to talk just then. I was thinking of those that were lying on the battlefield—those that stood by me in many places of trial, many hard days marching. They were there no more.

We started on our march and went several miles, where we stopped for the night. There was a strong guard around us. We were started on our march next morning for Mansfield, this was Sunday and about 300 prisoners. We were put in the court house up stairs, all in one room. Now I tell you we were not sent to fight that we were there for a necessity. There was a strong guard around us. We were started on our march next morning for Mansfield, this was Sunday and about 300 prisoners. We were put in the court house up stairs, all in one room. Now I tell you we were not sent to fight that we were there for a necessity. There was a strong guard around us. We were started on our march next morning for Mansfield, this was Sunday and about 300 prisoners. We were put in the court house up stairs, all in one room. Now I tell you we were not sent to fight that we were there for a necessity. There was a strong guard around us. 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