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Frederick G. Hoyt
La Sierra University, Riverside, California

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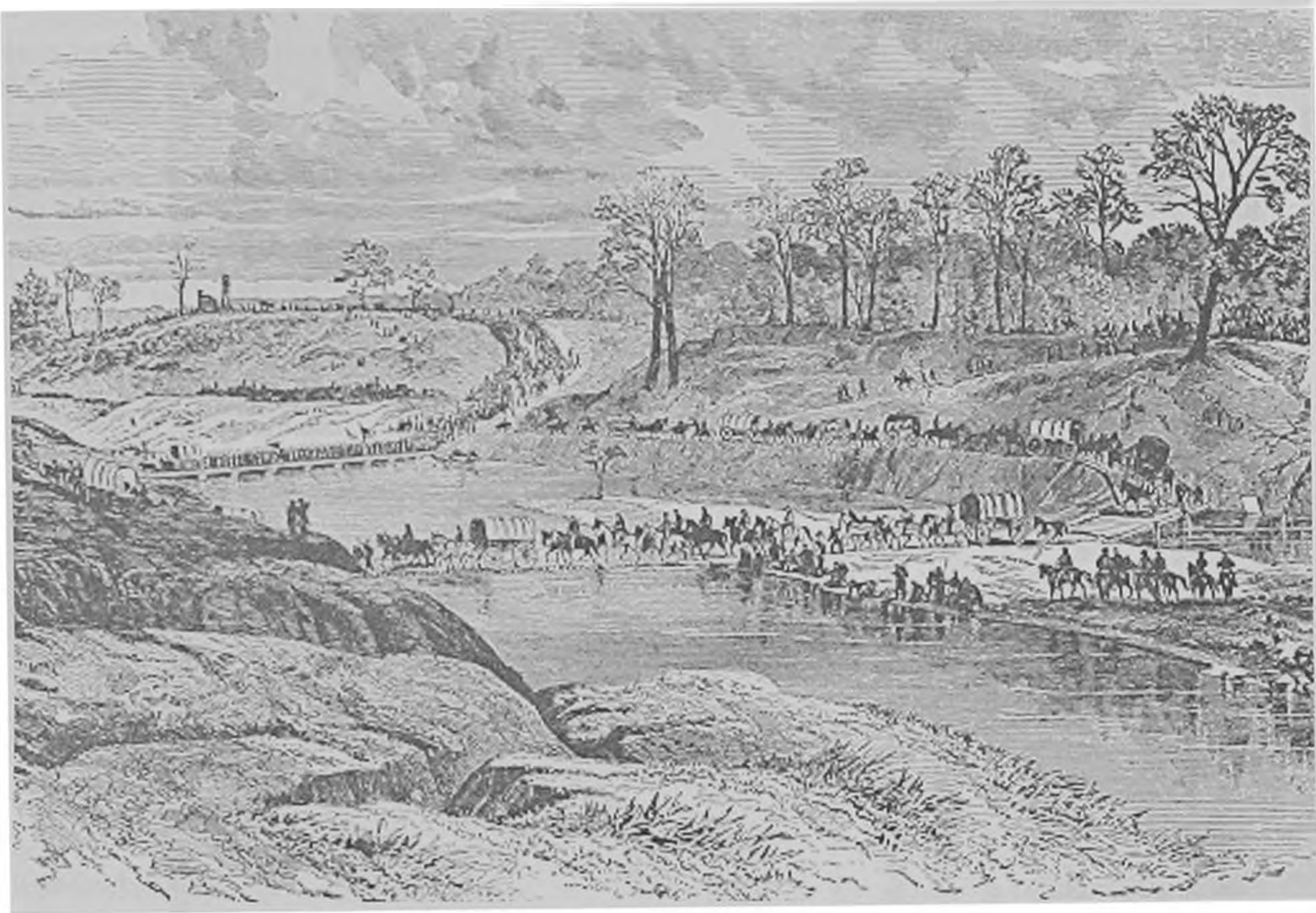


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Major General Nathaniel P. Banks's army crossing the Cane River, March 31, 1864. As a foot-soldier in Banks's army, Private Albert E. Hutchinson came to grief at the battle of Pleasant Hill. Wounded and captured by Confederate troops, he spent the rest of the war as a prisoner in Texas. *Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., THE CENTURY WAR BOOK: BATTLES AND LEADERS OF THE CIVIL WAR, PEOPLE'S PICTORIAL EDITION (1894).*

THE INDELIBLE SCARS OF PRIVATE HUTCHINSON, MAINE 15TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

FREDERICK G. HOYT

Private Albert E. Hutchinson of the 15th Maine Regiment survived thirteen long and dreary months of imprisonment in a Confederate prisoner-of-war camp, an experience so horrific he made two unsuccessful attempts at escape. It was over thirty years before he could tell his story of abandonment by his own regiment in Louisiana and incarceration in Texas. Surprisingly, his greatest trauma came after the war, when the released POW arrived home as a "straggler," neglected and disregarded by officials and citizens in his home state. The glorious welcome other veterans received contrasted starkly with his shoddy treatment. Private Hutchinson's confrontation with thirty years of bitterness provides interesting insight into the psychology of war and patriotism. Frederick Hoyt is Emeritus Professor of History at La Sierra University in Riverside, California. He holds a Ph.D from Claremont Graduate University and is a veteran of the Pacific Theater in World War II. His research interests include naval, Civil War, and Maine history.

THE PHYSICAL scars borne by Private Albert E. Hutchinson, Company C, 15th Maine Infantry Regiment, came from a musket ball that entered his lung during the battle of Pleasant Hill, Louisiana, on April 9, 1864. More significant were the scars embedded so deeply in his memory they could never be erased. Fearful of reliving the scenes that lay hidden in his subconscious, Hutchinson was reluctant to talk about his Civil War experiences. But in October 1898, more than three decades after the peace at Appomattox, Private Hutchinson wrote a long and detailed epistle to the Bridgton, Maine, *News*, laying bare the trauma that he had experienced in 1864 and 1865. Despite the risk of reopening these unhealed psychic wounds, Hutchinson prepared a thoughtful, restrained, and detailed account of his experiences. Whether his writing brought renewed afflictions of spirit, he did not reveal.

What prompted Albert Hutchinson to share his harrowing story with a new generation of Americans? Renewal of the martial spirit at the start of the Spanish-American War in 1898 may have played a role. President William McKinley seized upon the occasion as a means for reuni-



Pleasant Hill is located in the upper left corner of the map. Credit: *Benson J. Lossing, PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, vol. 3 (1870).*

ying the nation by appointing former Confederates Fitzhugh Lee of Virginia and “Fightin’” Joseph Wheeler of Alabama as major generals, along with other southerners and Democrats selected for lesser commissions. These gestures helped conciliate the South and move the country along in its healing, and perhaps it was this same quest for healing that encouraged Albert Hutchinson to take pen in hand and write of his painful experiences. He began: “It is a very difficult matter for me to make a short story of a long one, and having for a subject something I never care at this late date to talk about; but I will make the story as brief as possible.”¹

Mainers Go to War

Following the attack on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, Maine joined the other northern states in calling out its militia. “No State [would be] in advance of Maine in showing its devotion to the national cause,” wrote two Maine historians shortly after the war ended. Maine had

6,750 men in the Navy and Marine Corps during the war, and furnished an impressive 72,945 soldiers to the Army, arrayed in thirty-five regiments, seven batteries of mounted artillery, seven companies of sharpshooters, thirty companies of unassigned artillery, seven companies of coast guards, and six companies assigned to coastal fortifications. At war's end, 2,801 Maine soldiers were dead of wounds and 4,521 of disease, a mortality that took in more than 10 percent of the total.²

Private Albert E. Hutchinson's 15th Maine Regiment was raised principally in Aroostook County. It rendezvoused in Augusta and mustered into active service on January 23, 1862. The recruits moved on to Portland in February and embarked for Ship Island in the Gulf of Mexico on March 6, as part of General Benjamin Butler's expedition against New Orleans. After occupying that key city, the 15th saw varied duty in Louisiana and Texas. During this period the regiment saw no combat, but it suffered an appalling mortality from sickness and disease. The Regiment left Maine with 962 rank and file. During its first year it lost 329 by desertion, discharge, and death, while adding only 15 new recruits.³ Inexplicably, these statistics do not account for soldiers who, like Private Hutchinson, were taken prisoner of war.

The Red River Campaign and the Battle of Pleasant Hill

When Major General Nathaniel P. Banks included the 15th Maine Regiment in his ill-fated Red River campaign in early 1864, it was to be their first major combat experience. The campaign sent a large expedition up the Red River to capture Shreveport and clear the Confederates from Louisiana, in preparation for a full-scale invasion of Texas. Banks's army was supported by a fleet of gunboats and transports under the command of Rear Admiral David Porter, but two major weaknesses soon emerged: command of the various forces was divided, and the forty-seven-year-old Banks was a "political general" without West Point training. Banks's lack of training and acumen was "common gossip" among his men, who called him "Napoleon P. Banks" or even more scornfully, "*Mr. Banks.*"⁴

The Red River campaign climaxed at the battles of Sabine Cross Roads and Pleasant Hill on April 8 and 9. The 15th Maine was heavily engaged at Sabine Cross Roads, and was forced to retreat to a small village felicitously named Pleasant Hill. They retreated during the night but so surreptitiously that a number of their pickets were left behind to be captured by Rebel cavalry. In the fight that followed on April 9, the Union forces won a substantial victory. Here again the 15th was fully en-



The Red River campaign climaxed at the battles of Sabine Cross Roads and Pleasant Hill on April 8 and 9, 1864. In a debacle that drew comment from enlisted men as well as officers, Banks withdrew his troops, leaving behind advance pickets and the army's wounded – among them Private Hutchinson. *Lossing, PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR.*

gaged, but as regimental historian Henry A. Shorey wrote, “it was especially fortunate in the number of its casualties.” No one was killed, and only twelve were wounded (although some later died of their wounds).⁵ Shorey, a captain in the regiment, was a witness to the battle and wrote movingly of the night of April 9, a night that Private Hutchinson would never forget:

The tumult of battle having subsided, at a late hour the woods adjacent to the battle-field were illuminated with torches of pine, and the sad duty of caring for the dead and wounded was as faithfully and carefully performed as was possible under the circumstances. It was a ghastly spectacle, such as not even the most unsympathetic nature could have witnessed without emotion, and one which the changing scenes of more than a quarter of a century have failed to efface from the memory of the survivors of that band of “Good Samaritans,” who on that memorable April night, roamed the Western Louisiana forests in search [of] the bodies of their comrades—the wounded, the dying, and the dead. Every tree and shrub seemed to be the shelter for some mangled form, and from every hillock and ravine some poor fellow, wearing either the blue or the gray—there was in that hour, happily, no

distinction—might have been heard gasping a piteous appeal for aid—a tender message for the loved ones at home—a call for a drought of water with which to moisten the parched lip or soothe the fevered brow—or, mayhap, an urgent call to the medical officers for professional aid in staying the rapidly-flowing life-blood while earthly aid might prove availing. The dead and maimed of both armies, strangely commingled, lay in winrows [sic] all along the front of the line, and indeed in all directions in the vicinity. Unfortunately the medical supply-train, with the necessary and indispensable appliances for surgical work, had gone to the rear in the morning—a stupendous blunder—and the physicians labored under very many disadvantages.⁶

Ludwell H. Johnson, author of the only work devoted solely to the Red River campaign, noted that “a fresh battlefield was always a frightful and sickening place, but the one at Pleasant Hill seems to have impressed the soldiers as one of particular horror.” One survivor declared that the awful aftermath “was worse than the fighting itself.” An unidentified member of the 114th New York Infantry Regiment vividly described the scene: “The air was filled with groans, and shrieks, and delirious yells. Such touching appeals for pity, such earnest prayers, and such tender references to home and friends, from dying lips; such agonizing groans of pain; such maddening curses and blasphemies, were all enough to test the power of human endurance to the utmost.”⁷

Although the Union forces emerged victorious at Pleasant Hill, they retreated immediately to Grand Ecore, Louisiana. Back on the Red River, the troops were “weary and disconsolate, but most of all . . . contemptuous of their commander,” whose seemingly pointless maneuvers cost the



Banks's bungling had been a “useless waste of their blood and labor” was the judgment of the men in the ranks. Why he left the field of battle so precipitously after achieving a victory was a matter of debate. As for Private Hutchinson, now in the hands of the enemy, a new ordeal was about to begin. *Johnson and Buel, CENTURY WAR BOOK.*

lives of 8,000 men, along with nine ships and fifty-seven guns.⁸ Ludwell Johnson concluded that “even Banks’s friends could only regard his campaign as a sad failure; his enemies would call it a disaster.” The judgment of the men in the ranks was even more severe: Banks’s bungling had been “a useless waste of their blood and labor,” and following the battles the Major General was accorded the “ultimate humiliation of a commander when he was hissed by his troops.” General William Tecumseh Sherman, who had not been directly involved, bluntly called the campaign “one damned blunder from beginning to end,” and Admiral Porter wrote Sherman that it was “a crying sin to put the lives of thousands in the hands of such . . . political generals.” The campaign, according to Porter, was “an affair the management of which would be discreditable to a boy nine years of age.”⁹

In view of the carnage left behind on the battlefield on the night of April 9, an angry Captain Shorey proclaimed the treatment of the regiment’s wounded as “very shabby” and spoke derisively of Banks’s decision to retreat.

Surely no one imagined that a hasty retreat was on the docket for the morning following our glorious victory at Pleasant Hill. But, alas! it seems to have been the logic of this decidedly illogical campaign to interpret victory as a reverse and defeat as a brilliant success. As a matter of fact, however, it was found, at midnight of the 9th, an imperative military necessity that the army establish a connection with its supplies, on the transport steamers on the river, at the earliest moment practicable. The “larder” had become well-nigh empty. There was food for neither man or beast . . . [nor] water to quench the thirst of the famished beasts. [This hasty retreat afforded] . . . no opportunity . . . even for inquiring into the condition, or learning the whereabouts, of our wounded comrades; the tidings first reaching us, on the march, that the poor fellows had been left within the rebel lines, though in charge of some of our medical officers detailed to remain with them.

As a company officer, Shorey did not miss the reactions from the soldiers themselves, who were “amazed and indignant at the apparently unnecessary abandonment of the wounded.” According to Shorey, the muttered expressions “savored strongly of those sometimes construed as tending ‘to the prejudice of good order and military discipline,’ in which it was deemed very imprudent for soldiers to indulge.” As one of the twelve wounded, Private Albert Hutchinson surely would have sympathized with such “mutinous” statements, but his own reactions apparently remained firmly repressed in his mind for more than thirty years.¹⁰

Although this was a great personal disaster for Hutchinson, his name never appeared in any official dispatch or report. He was simply another wounded private among a multitude of other wounded privates in the Union Army. He was lucky to be alive, even if soon a prisoner of the Confederates.

Private Hutchinson's later comments on the battle of Pleasant Hill are startlingly brief but provocative: "My experience as a prisoner of war began when I was wounded in the battle of Pleasant Hill, April, 1864. That engagement was different from any other in the fact that both armies retreated after the fight, the rebels in a panic, back up the road as far as the old mill, and our forces down to Red River, leaving the wounded, or a portion of them in possession of the field."¹¹

A Fateful Decision to Retreat

Banks's decision raises two questions. First, did the situation warrant a precipitate retreat from Pleasant Hill to Grande Ecore after a battle he apparently won? Second, if the situation did warrant a retreat, could Banks justify abandoning the wounded and dying to inevitable capture by the Confederates? Banks apparently believed that his army needed to move to a more secure position. In his estimation, the Union forces could not maintain the gains made that day on the battlefield; they were exhausted, and they needed to re-supply and reorganize. However, Banks's assessment of the conditions would only justify a retreat. The conditions at Pleasant Hill did not warrant abandoning the wounded and dying soldiers. The battle may have been particularly brutal, but both sides made haste away from the battlefield.

Subsequent accounts by the Confederates contradict Banks's rationale for a rapid Union retreat. Despite early dispatches that "claimed a signal and glorious victory," Confederate General Kirby Smith's August 28 report to President Jefferson Davis admitted that Confederate troops were "completely paralyzed" by the Union advance on Pleasant Hill. "Our repulse was so complete," Smith wrote, "and our command was so disorganized that had Banks followed up his success vigorously he would have met but feeble opposition to his advance on Shreveport." In a letter to his brother intercepted by the Union, Confederate Lieutenant Edward Cunningham, chief of artillery during the battle, declared that pursuit of Banks was impossible "because we had been beaten, demoralized, paralyzed in the fight of the 9th."¹²

Union officers were no less critical, since even under trying circumstances, a soldier's responsibility to aid his fellow soldiers took prece-



Prisoner of war treatment was scandalous in both the North and South. Food shortages, poor medical care, exposure, and disease resulted in high mortality rates. Camp Ford was not the worst of the Confederate camps, but as the main prison west of the Mississippi it has been curiously overlooked. *Johnson and Buel, CENTURY WAR BOOK.*

dence over personal comfort or safety.¹³ Banks's decision to abandon the battlefield with its dead and wounded brought the enmity of other Union generals. Upon hearing of Banks's retreat, Union General A.J. Smith reacted angrily, even shedding tears. He had considered the battle a Union victory. In his official report to General U.S. Grant, Banks explained that "the absolute deprivation of water for man or beast, the exhaustion of rations, and the failure to effect a connection with the fleet on the river, made it necessary for the army, although victorious in the terrible struggle through which it had just passed, to retreat to a point where it would be certain in communicating with the fleet and where it would have an opportunity of reorganization."¹⁴ Banks glossed his abandonment of the wounded and dying: "When it was decided to retreat, the wounded were removed to nearby houses. Since the wagons had been in retreat to Grand Ecore even before the battle began, they were not available to transport the wounded. To make matters worse, the wagons containing the medical supplies were also in retreat. Some medical personnel agreed to remain behind to care for the wounded, and they were well treated by their Confederate captors."¹⁵

Private Hutchinson's personal experience belies Banks's facile assumption that the wounded were well treated. "In some way I got down to a log house a mile or two below the battlefield and found myself in the yard, covered with a blanket, among federal soldiers who were all western men. Only one man belonging to our Nineteenth Corps was there except myself, Randall, Co. A, Fifteenth Maine, who was also wounded.¹⁶ I laid in that yard for six weeks under the surgeon's care. He got the ball from my lung, and as soon as I was able to walk I with about thirty others, marched to the town of Shreveport." Confederate doctors did treat Hutchinson's wounds, and in that sense, Banks's account was



Hutchinson's escape attempt, which took him through the swamps and sloughs north of Tyler, was an act of desperation. *Lossing, PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR.*

accurate. However, as soon as Hutchinson was able to walk, his captors sent him and the others on to Camp Ford, near Tyler, Texas. Like so many other prisoners of war, Hutchinson could not have anticipated this aspect of war.

Civil War Prisons and Prisoners of War

American historian Henry Steele Commager declared that the management of prisoners during the Civil War "is doubtless the darkest chapter in the history of the war." Neither side was adequately prepared to care for prisoners or their medical needs. The uniformly bad conditions in all prisons—food shortages, poor medical care, dirt, disease—resulted in high mortality rates. In a chapter titled "In the Prison Cell I Sit," James I. Robertson commented that of the 408,000 Civil War soldiers captured by the enemy, more than 56,000 "died painfully and neglected while locked in the remote and makeshift compounds of North and South." Mismanagement turned prisons into factories of disease and death, generating "nauseating stories of filth, vermin, disease, poor food, abominable sanitary practices, and inadequate medical care." What made Hutchinson's experience exceptional was not the brutality of his prison experience, but his relegation to historical obscurity. William B.

Hesseltine, who studied the voluminous literature of Civil War prisons, mentions the Texas prison in a single sentence in a footnote, even though Camp Ford was the principal prison west of the Mississippi. The authors of a small book written on Camp Ford declare that its “lack of recognition is somewhat mysterious . . . [as it] was the largest such compound in the trans-Mississippi Confederacy.” Ludwell Johnson’s study of the Red River Campaign failed to include a single reference to the large number of Federal troops who became Confederate prisoners of war, and he makes no mention of Camp Ford in his detailed study. In a sense, history has abandoned these men as surely as Banks abandoned them after the Battle of Pleasant Hill.¹⁷

Hutchinson’s situation deteriorated further after his arrival at Shreveport. His account described the harsh conditions of the forced march he undertook with his fellow prisoners.

From Shreveport to the prison stockade near Tyler, Texas, is one hundred and ten miles. This we were compelled to march in five days. We marched in files of fours in the middle of the road. Our guards were mounted and formed flanking lines on each side of us, with a large company both in our front and rear. It was very hot and the dust was ankle deep, and arose in clouds; in fact, we could hardly see. We were robbed of our canteens, and were not allowed a drop of water until night. In fact we were not allowed to leave the road for any purpose. Our men were beaten with revolvers to make them keep up. My wound had not healed and I had my arm in a sling. I was weak, and, Oh! how I longed for a cool drink of water in those awful days! Our mouths became so dry and parched we could not speak above a whisper. We camped every night where there was plenty of good water and wasn’t that a feast! How we did drink and drink!

We arrived at the stockade the Fifth day of May. From that time until the 16th day of June it rained nearly all the time, and in all that time I had as much shelter as one might get out here in the road, without even a blanket. I was soaked with rain and shivering with cold, until the sun came out and the weather cleared. Then we were allowed out under guard to cut some brush to make us a shelter from the sun.

At Tyler, Hutchinson was reunited with his comrades. He wrote that “when I arrived in the stockade I found the following . . . members of the 15th Maine: Leman H. Bard, John H. Hayden, Page Grover, Jeff. Bailey, Tom H. McDonald, John McNutt, John Leighton, John Huston, Jas. Brennan, Frank Russell, Angus McGilvary, and Mark Ellis. McGilvary died in prison. Mark Ellis became discouraged and went up to the guard one night and asked the sentinel to shoot him! For some reason the sen-

try refused; Ellis went away, and from that moment no one has ever seen or heard of him, to my knowledge. As far as I know, all of the rest of the 15th boys came out of that death-pen alive.”¹⁸

Camp Ford was named in honor of Colonel John S. ‘Rip’ Ford, a Texas Ranger, state senator, newspaper editor, and commander of Confederate forces in Texas. The camp belonged to that lowest class of prisons, which were simply “barren stockades with no shelter save what the prisoners themselves were able to construct.” This type, which existed only in the South, also included Fort Sumter (Andersonville) in Georgia, the most infamous of all Civil War prisons. Within these places life followed a monotonous routine. Into this particular camp were crowded four to five thousand prisoners, who eked out a “miserable existence . . . for thirteen long and dreary months.” Captain Shorey wrote that the “hardships endured by these poor fellows . . . may be imagined; they cannot be adequately described.” Prisoners at Camp Ford represented over 100 infantry and cavalry regiments from eighteen states, including two “colored” cavalry regiments from Kansas. Along with regular soldiers, the camp held signal corpsmen and a collection of civilians, including Union teamsters, Union sympathizers, suspected spies, and a newspaper correspondent from the New York *Herald*. The prison population also included captives from twenty-one vessels, including twelve gunboats, five government contract steamers, three government contract transports, and one schooner.¹⁹

F. Lee Lawrence and Robert W. Glover, who wrote the history of Camp Ford, claim that morality at the facility was among the lowest of any Civil War prison, North or South. In northern prisons, mortality ranged around 12 percent, and in southern prisons, it stood at 15.5 percent; the rate for Camp Ford was less than 5 percent. This was not due to humane treatment, but rather to the beneficence of Mother Nature, and particularly to the abundance of pure spring water and good drainage, which reduced the threat of disease.²⁰ Nevertheless, Hutchinson remembered his experience as “a hell upon earth.” Only those who were “inured to hardships and were disciplined by years of service,” he went on, “could stand it to be starved and roasted, and froze, and exposed to those terrible Texas northers without clothes or fire.” Throughout this ordeal, Hutchinson and nearly all of his fellow prisoners remained firm in their allegiance to the Union. “We endured it and are glad to remember that through it all the offer was always open, that any one who would go out and take the oath of allegiance to the C. S. A. [Confederate States of America] could have plenty to eat, and clothes to wear! But if there is a

thing I am proud of, it is that only a very few among all the thousands who were prisoners of war, did this. They preferred death to dishonor.”

The issue of escape, however, was foremost in the minds of many prisoners. Even after thirty years Hutchinson recognized that “I might have had less suffering if I could have been contented to stay in prison until exchanged. But I was always seeking to escape.” In Civil War prisons, escape attempts by prisoners were common, even though they were usually unsuccessful. Statistics suggest that one in ten to fifteen succeeded, although the exact number of escapees cannot be known. Some prisoners were embarrassed at being captured (a common form of desertion was to surrender needlessly to the enemy during a battle); others considered captivity an insult to their manhood, and some could no longer bear up under prison conditions, considering it more reasonable to attempt escape than to die in degradation. Major Abner Small of the 16th Maine Regiment wrote that “I was both angry and mortified at being a prisoner [as] freedom was more desired than salvation, more sought after than righteousness.” Robertson asserted that because “living conditions inside all the prisons were an abomination, to escape from the living nightmare became the hope of every prisoner at one time or another.” According to Lawrence and Glover, “in spite of the various security measures and punishments, the escapes [from Camp Ford] continued right up to the very end of the war.” Although they faced “insurmountable odds, there were always a few who were willing to risk everything to get back to their own lines.”²¹

Among the indeterminate number who tried twice—unsuccessfully—was Private Hutchinson. He narrated his first failed escape attempt in candid detail, including stirring episodes of assistance from slaves, encounters with hostile whites, and a dramatic pursuit by an armed posse and their bloodhounds:

On the 18th day of March, 1865, five of us made our escape: James Bickford of the navy, John Winship and George Decker, 18th New York cavalry, Tom Whistlehunt, 3d Arkansas cavalry, and myself.²² It was a desperate undertaking. We were more than three hundred miles from our lines, in an enemy’s country, where every white man was our sworn enemy, without food to start with and nearly naked; and yet we were considered lucky to have a chance to get away, regardless of the fact that there was a general order nailed to the gate of our prison, setting forth that any one trying to escape from the stockade, or caught after having escaped, should be shot by the guards.

In the face of all of that, we went out through the gate in broad daylight [probably by forging passes, such as for wood-cutting, or by brib-



On the march back to the stockade, Hutchinson was befriended by a slave who provided an old pair of shoes and stockings for his blistered feet. Surreptitious assistance of this sort was not uncommon, as this drawing—escaping prisoners fed by slaves—depicts. *Albert D. Richardson, THE SECRET SERVICE, THE FIELD, THE DUNGEON, AND THE ESCAPE (1865).*

ing guards], and in the darkness of night crawled out by the rebel guard, and were away for God's country and freedom! But alas! if we could only have seen what we were to suffer we would never have attempted it. We were thirteen nights following the north star, through streams, and bogs, and tangled thickets. We were two days crossing Sabine River. Its banks were overflowed, and the bottom lands each side of the river were under water; and through this water, sometimes swimming, sometimes wading among the trees, we made our way. Whistlehunt could not swim, and that delayed us much. When we came to where the water was too deep to wade we would pull down a grape vine from the trees. Some of these were more than a hundred feet long. Our "no-swim" comrade would hang on to the vine while we pulled him across. More than half the time he would be under water. But he "didn't mind a little thing like that," not he; he was a brave man, with lots of nerve. We had some parched meal to start with to eat, but we got it wet crossing this river, and were without anything by the time we were across. The first night we laid on a knoll that was an island in this swamp of water; and wet, and cold, and hungry, and shivering, we passed the night. Soon after starting next morning we came to the main river, not over five rods wide, but deep and swift. We twisted



Johnson and Buel,
CENTURY WAR BOOK.

withes and made a raft of driftstuff for W[histlehunt]. We made a grape vine fast to the raft, and I took one end and made a noose and put it over my shoulder on the up river side, and started to swim over. My associates were to lay out the vine and keep it clear of snags, but when over half way across the vine caught on something and was held fast. The swift current carried me down stream. I struggled to free myself from the vine, but before I could do so I was drawn under water. When I did succeed in getting the vine from my arm, I was nearer dead than alive. But I struggled to the bank and got hold of some bushes and the boys pulled me out. I lay a long time, nearly exhausted from my hard struggle, but after I got well over it, I wanted one of the others to try getting the vine across! But none would try it. As I was the best swimmer they were willing I should try again! And I then went over without any trouble!

Although his story is sketchy, it is clear that the next ten days were horrendous. Hutchinson's escape party continued to struggle through swamps and woods, traveling at night and procuring food from slaves. On the thirteenth day, they were discovered by a white southerner who directed them to the Red River. Unfortunately, after so many days, the party was exhausted. With their pursuers close on their trail the party gave themselves up at the next house:

I must not dwell on the hard struggle we had for the next eight or ten days. How we managed to procure food from the Negroes, and to

hide in the swamps and woods days, and travel nights, with only the north star to guide us, or how on the thirteenth day of our journey we were discovered by a white man; how he told us we were only fifteen miles from Red River, and where to go to find the road leading there; and where we hid in the woods, waiting for darkness; and while waiting hearing the hounds in pursuit of us; and how we ran for nearly a mile before we found a house; here we gave ourselves up and claimed the protection of the old man who was there.

The bloodhounds were pretty close to us, and behind them came the man who told us the way to Red river, with his son on horseback, with guns; they demanded that we should be given up!²³ But our old friend refused to do so. But we were recaptured and next morning we were taken to Clarkesville and given up to the enrolling officer. We were kept here one night and the next morning five mounted guards were ordered to march us back to the prison, and to shoot us if we made any attempt to escape. But that was needless. We were comple[t]ely discouraged and broken down in despair. After all our hard strugg[le] for liberty, and what we had suffered and endured, to have to go back seemed almost like death!

After their escape attempt, the party was almost naked. Although Hutchinson and Winship were shoeless, their Confederate captors forced them to continue the march. In Hutchinson's narrative, the cruel indifference of the captors toward the sad condition of his feet becomes juxtaposed with the kindness of a southern slave. What follows is one of the best of a genre of Civil War stories in which slaves assist white Union soldiers:

It was a fearful journey back to the prison. I don't know how long we were on the road. One day while hobbling along, nearly doubled up with the pain in my feet, I gave up in despair, and a feeling of desperation such as I had never had before came over me.²⁴ I stopped and sat down by the side of the road and refused to walk any further. The guard, with a cocked revolver, ordered me forward, threatening to shoot. But I had arrived at that pitch that I was perfectly willing for him to do so.

I think for the time I was insane. I know I cursed him and said everything to have him shoot, but he called another of the guards and made him dismount and let me ride; and from that [point] on I was helped along, and so was Winship.

I must tell you how I got some shoes and stockings. One night we camped near a big plantation where there were some hundred or more Negroes. We were put in a small grove of trees a short distance from

the house, and some rations sent down for us to eat, after which we lay down on the ground to sleep. Some time in the night I was wakened by a Negro who cautioned me to make no noise and then he pulled out of his shirt bosom a pair of old plantation shoes and stockings and gave them to me. He said he had seen us going by and his pity for us had made him run the risk of a flogging to bring the shoes. In the morning the guard asked me where I got my shoes, and I said that the Almighty sent them to me in the night! He smiled and said he was glad of it.

Hutchinson should have felt no embarrassment at sensing the approach of mental breakdown. Wartime prisons were scenes of unremitting trauma. Mental depression was endemic because of conditions that included idleness, insufficient food, clothing, and medical care; deprivation of liberty, lack of privacy, harassment by prison officials, the claustrophobic nature of prison, the unknown future, and the presence of death.²⁵ When his prisoner coffle reached Camp Ford, Hutchinson faced an overwhelming emotional challenge: "When we arrived at the stockade we were taken up to the headquarters and the commander of the post ordered us taken to Tyler and delivered to the officers in command of the guard there. He said to us, 'I don't know how you got out of the stockade nor do I wish to know; but one thing I wish you to know, you won't get out again. I will put you where you will be no further trouble to me.' And to the guards, 'If they offer to leave the road shoot them like dogs.' And we were marched away four miles to Tyler jail."

What Hutchinson and his fellow prisoners faced there represented one of the worst punishments to occur in Civil War prisons, that of prolonged confinement in a small, crowded cell. In this case, Hutchinson and fourteen fellow prisoners were incarcerated in a ten-by-ten-foot cell. Hutchinson survived to relate his experience, apparently the sole source for this record.²⁶ Hutchinson's account vividly describes the horrible conditions where he felt himself losing his hold on sanity:

When we arrived at the jail we were put into a cell where we found 10 more of our men from the prison, who were being punished for the same offense we were guilty of. We made 15 in all, and a worse looking lot of human beings it would be hard to find. We had indeed jumped from the frying pan into the fire, for the stockade, with all its terrors, was a paradise compared with that accursed hole in Tyler jail. The cell was about 10 feet square. Inside of the cell was an iron cage six feet square, set up a foot from the floor. This cage was a pen. The only way to lie down was to put our feet under the cage and lie on the hard floor. An iron door opened into the cell about three feet high. This cell was lighted by a hole in the wall, two feet long by six inches wide, all the



Camp Ford Survivors. In the early years of the war, conditions were not harsh at the camp, but when the number of prisoners increased and the flow of supplies and wood diminished, life in the camp deteriorated. As this photo of bare-foot Iowa soldiers attests, the experience left enduring physical—as well as emotional—evidence. Francis T. Miller, Ed., *THE PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR IN TEN VOLUMES*, vol. 7, *PRISONERS AND HOSPITALS* (1911).

light and air we had. Our ration consisted of one piece of corn bread once a day, about as big as one's hand, and one pail of water was set in once a day for us all. And in this awful place we were kept for 27 days—never let out for any purpose whatever! The air we breathed was hot and stifling and the stench was fearful. Six out of the 15 died in the time and the only wonder was that we did not all die. We made one desperate effort to escape and failed. It has always seemed like a dream to me, those 27 days. I am sure that a good part of the time I was out of my mind; things seemed dim and confused.

A longer confinement in the “Tyler hole” and Hutchinson might not have survived to write his unique memoir. He did not relate the details of the desperate and unsuccessful escape attempt, but apparently his first failure had not taught him a lasting lesson. Perhaps their situation had become so hopeless that rationality gave way to another desperate attempt to gain freedom and life.

Hutchinson made two escape attempts and neither succeeded. In the end, his deliverance came in the form of the war's end:

But at last, and before death claimed us all (as they intended it should), the light came. One morning the guard who set in our water said he had news for us, and gave us a paper in which was printed a general order from Kirby Smith, in which he set forth that Lee and [General Joseph E.] Johnson had surrendered to the Yankees, and the war was over east of the Mississippi, but calling on his army in Texas to rally around the Texas flag and they would make Texas once more independent. It also set forth that Lincoln was assassinated. All of this was news indeed for us. We had not heard a word for months about the war. But Kirby Smith's army had got enough of fighting, and after a few days we were taken out of the jail den and marched back to the stockade. If there ever were any human beings that looked worse than some of us I pray God I may never see them! They would draw tears of pity from hell itself.

Hutchinson's account of the events following his release became somewhat disjointed. That his memory failed him is understandable, but this time his mental lapses probably resulted from euphoria rather than trauma:

Back to the stockade we went. When we got rid of the filth and vermin, and had gained a little strength to march, we were released from the stockade. One morning, last of May, '65,—over a year after our capture—we were awakened before day by the rebel guards shouting and yelling and firing off guns! We couldn't think what the trouble was.

But at break of day every guard had disappeared and the old prison was no longer guarded. The rebels had gone home and left us free to go where we liked. Here we were three or four hundred miles from the federal lines, turned loose without a crumb of food, to get home the best we could. Some of our officers went to Tyler and prevailed upon some one to haul us some corn meal. A letter from a prison chum some time ago asked if I ever told my children how we marched from the prison to Shreveport, one hundred and ten miles on one quart of corn meal. To tell the truth I don't remember much about that march, only that we were going home. I remember something of a team coming out of the town of Marshall to meet us with rations (Marshall was sixty miles away) and of the team going back on the road to pick up those who fell out. I remember a pond of water by the side of the road with the carcass of a dead hog in it, and in spite of this how the boys were eager to drink from the filthy pool. I will not dwell upon our passage down Red River, of our formal exchange, and the trip to New Orleans.

The prisoners left Camp Ford on May 17, 1865. The final number of prisoners had dropped from a high of some 6,000 to this remnant group of only 1,200, mainly as a result of deaths, escapes, and exchanges.²⁷ Unfortunately, Hutchinson neglected the details of his homeward-bound trip down the Red and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans, and also the formal prisoner exchange processes. Obviously, to him they were truly anticlimactic.

Hutchinson handled the final act in his Civil War ordeal almost apologetically:

In view of what is said now of the suffering of the boys in the present war with Spain [probably a reference to the heavy casualties suffered by the troops in Cuba from tropical diseases], and the way they are sent home, I will just tell you how we were sent home, after our year's service in rebel prisons. At New Orleans, we cast away our ragged prison clothes, and each received one pair of pants, a shirt, blouse, a cap, a pair of shoes and stockings, and one blanket. We were then put aboard a steamer for New York. I don't remember of getting into any bunk on the long passage. I slept on deck. On our arrival at New York we were sent to Governors Island for a week or two; were then sent to Hart Island and were there two or three weeks longer. Nobody knew or cared who we were or where we were to go; and at last we had to write to Maine's Governor Cony to have us sent home. All of this time we had the same clothes furnished us in New Orleans. After weeks of delay and vexation we got to Augusta, where we were paid off and discharged. Our regiment being still in service, in South Carolina, we were, like all the prisoners of war, turned loose, treated as stragglers,

the officers of our regiment having no knowledge or responsibility as to our whereabouts.

After weeks of frustrating effort to get home, Hutchinson and his contingent made it back to Maine wearing the same clothes they had been given in New Orleans. They discovered that their official status had been reduced to “stragglers.” Having suffered the horrors of more than a year in Confederate prisons as a result of incompetent leadership, these traumatized and forgotten veterans would have been justified had they launched bitter protests. But to those who lived through the Vietnam era, Hutchinson’s stoic words, spoken not only for himself but for his wartime comrades, come as a startling surprise: “Still, despite all this, I do not recall that we blamed the government for our sufferings, regarding these experiences as among war’s privations meted out to us.” Then, very tentatively, almost as an afterthought, he raised the possibility that there could have been grounds for complaint: “Some of us did think, perhaps, that when the government refused to exchange any more prisoners [after 1863] and thus leaving us to die or not as good fortune might will, it was a trifle severe.” Quickly, however, Hutchinson—still the soldier—caught himself and figuratively came to attention for his final riveting words: “Yet those in authority knew best. And, thank God, we were enabled to endure all this at our country’s call!”

What can be said about such a moving testimony, delivered after more than thirty years to brood on a traumatizing prison experience? Albert Hutchinson’s words stand as a testament to what Nazi concentration camp survivor Viktor E. Frankl described as “the defiant power of the human spirit”—a more impressive Civil War memorial than any statue.²⁸

In July 1865 a detail of Federal occupation troops under Major Thomas D. Fredenburg of the 10th Illinois Cavalry was ordered to destroy Camp Ford. Understandably, they enjoyed this task, and undoubtedly Hutchinson would have been delighted to join them.²⁹ Still, he was able to make his own peace with the camp, as evidenced by the *Bridgton News* article written thirty years later.

Maine Welcomes Home Veterans

How were other Maine veterans treated when they returned home? “When Johnny Comes Marching Home,” proclaimed the headline for a short item in the *Portland Eastern Argus* on May 15, 1865. Actually the “Johnny’s,” from undesignated military units, rode the train into Portland. While in town these soldier boys, as they were called in those days,

were given a good meal, and they departed “with three cheers for Portland.” Thus began the complex process of disbanding and paying off Maine’s soldiers following the surrender at Appomattox on April 9, 1865. It proved to be a maddeningly slow and inefficient process, especially for former prisoners of war such as Private Hutchinson, whom the great bureaucratic machinery in Washington virtually abandoned.

The arrival of the 19th Maine Regiment (Infantry) in Portland on June 3, 1865, began a series of major receptions and welcomes for larger military units. During the remainder of June, Portland experienced a veritable military invasion as detachments, batteries, companies, and regiments arrived either for formal discharge at nearby Camp Berry, or on their way to other cities (principally Augusta and Bangor) for final discharge and mustering out.³⁰

The flood of “Johnny’s” continued, although by year’s end the numbers had dropped sharply. The last to arrive in 1865 was the Second Maine Cavalry, some 550 strong, which reached Portland by special train on December 17. Here they were provided with a bountiful meal before heading to Augusta. At this point, only a few severely reduced Maine regiments remained in the field: the 8th, 11th, 12th, 29th, Hutchinson’s 15th, and the First Battalion of Infantry—about 2,000 men in all. Occasional brief items appeared in the *Argus* concerning Hutchinson’s old infantry regiment, which had been retained in South Carolina at the end of the war. But there was never a mention of Hutchinson or any other prisoners of war.³¹

By the end of 1865 there was still no news concerning Hutchinson’s fate, even though the war ended months before. And, to this point, nothing has surfaced to indicate public concern for his status or that of the numerous other prisoners of war. Regrettably, there seems to have been no mechanism for his regiment, still on duty in South Carolina, to locate and assist him. In fact there is no evidence that they even attempted to keep in touch with him and his fellow prisoners after their capture. So Hutchinson was left adrift on a wreckage-strewn bureaucratic sea.

Albert E. Hutchinson, a man without a viable military home or a friend in even a moderately high place, told the story of his bureaucratic nightmare in a few brutal words that may very well have renewed his feelings of desperation: “Nobody knew or cared who we were or where we were to go,” Hutchinson recalled more than thirty years later. “We were, like all the prisoners of war, turned loose, treated as stragglers, the officers of our regiment having no knowledge or responsibility as to our whereabouts.” Despite his hellish experience at Camp Ford, he did not

even become a statistic in Maine's Civil War history, since no data on its prisoners of war has been printed.

Statistical records do not speak to the suffering endured by prisoners of war like Hutchinson. Nor is there any record of his being welcomed home to Maine as a hero, a returning patriot warrior, or even simply an honorably discharged combat veteran. If anyone ever apologized to Albert Hutchinson or any of his fellow Maine prisoners of war for this shameful neglect, it was not made a part of any public record. Thus his making peace with the United States government, the state of Maine, the regimental officers of the 15th Maine Volunteers, and the officers of his own Company C becomes even more impressive.

NOTES

1. Bridgton News, reprinted in Portland, Maine, *Evening Express*, October 15, 1898; Lewis L. Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1980). McKinley himself was a former Union soldier.

2. William E. S. Whitman and Charles H. True, *Maine in the War for the Union: A History of the Part Borne by Maine Troops in the Suppression of the American Rebellion* (Lewiston, Maine: Nelson Dingley Jr. & Co., 1865), pp. 2, 633-34.

3. Whitman and True, *Maine in the War for the Union*, pp. 236, 335-36.

4. Whitman and True, *Maine in the War for the Union*, p. 341; Alvin M. Josephy Jr., *War on the Frontier: The Trans-Mississippi West* (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1986), pp. 47, 51, 52; Shelby Foote, *The Civil War, A Narrative: Red River to Appomattox*, vol. 3 (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 40.

5. Captain Henry A. Shorey, *The Story of the Maine Fifteenth; Being a Brief Narrative of the More Important Events in the History of the Fifteenth Maine Regiment* (Bridgton, Maine: Bridgton News, 1890), pp. 79-91, 98.

6. Shorey, *The Story of the Maine Fifteenth*, pp. 98-99.

7. Ludwell H. Johnson, *Red River Campaign: Politics and Cotton in the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1958), pp. 164, 283; Richard T. Waterfall, "The Battle of Pleasant Hill, Louisiana, April 9, 1864," in LeRoy H. Fischer, ed., *Civil War Battles in the West* (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1981), p. 83.

8. Josephy, *War on the Frontier*, pp. 63, 71.

9. Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, p. 283; Carl Sandburg, *Storm over the Land: A Profile of the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1942), pp. 244-45; Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, *How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 522. See Bruce Catton,

Never Call Retreat, vol. 3 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), pp. 336-40.

10. Shorey, *Story of the Maine Fifteenth*, pp. 98-101.

11. Portland, Maine, *Evening Express*, October 15, 1898. See *New York Times* April 21, 22, 24, 1864; Foote, *Civil War*, vol. 3, pp. 47-50.; Major General N.P. Banks to Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, April 13, 1864, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, ed. by Lieutenant Colonel Robert N. Scott (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1891), pp. 181-85, 194-218 (hereafter *Official Records*).

12. Josephy, *War on the Frontier*, p. 62; *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 4 (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1956), p. 356.

13. Josephy, *War on the Frontier*, pp. 62-63; Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, p. 165; John D. Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), p. 357.

14. Banks to Ulysses S. Grant, April 15, 1864, *Official Records*, Ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, p. 184; Banks to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, April 6, 1865, *ibid.*, pp. 194-218.

15. Johnson, *Red River Campaign*, p. 165; Waterfall, "Battle of Pleasant Hill," pp. 83-84; Banks to Stanton, April 6, 1865.

16. The 19th Corp's First Division, Second Brigade, consisted of the 13th Maine, 15th Maine, 160th New York, and 47th Pennsylvania. The only Randall listed for Co. A in the official history of the 15th Maine was a Jonathan Randall, Jr., who appears under "dropped from the Rolls as Deserters" in 1864. Since Randall is not among those of the 15th who arrived at the Tyler prison stockade on May 5, he must have deserted sometime between April 10 and May 5. See *Official Reports*, Ser. 1, vol. 34, pt. 1, p. 174; Shorey, *Story of the Maine Fifteenth*, appendix, p. 5.

17. Henry Steele Commager, ed., *The Blue and the Gray* (New York: Fairfax Press, 1982), pp. 685-88; James I. Robertson, Jr., *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 190; William B. Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1930), footnote 19, p. 163; Johnson, *Red River Campaign*; F. Lee Lawrence and Robert W. Glover, *Camp Ford C.S.A.: The Story of Union Prisoners in Texas* (Austin: Texas Civil War Centennial Advisory Committee, 1964), p. ix. Only 550 copies of this little book were printed.

18. Bard was listed as a prisoner of war, exchanged in 1865 (Shorey, *Story of the Maine Fifteenth*, appendix, pp. 6, 7); Clarence Bailey is the only Bailey listed for Co. K (p. 20); Thomas H. McDonald was discharged for disability in 1865 (p. 2); John McNutt was discharged for disability in 1865 (p. 2); John F. Leighton appears under "mustered out by reason expiration of term," August 1865 (p. 5); John Huston was "discharged for disability" in 1865 (p. 11); no one named James Brannan appears on the roster of Co. I, but there is a James Brennan in the record for Co. I under "mustered out by reason expiration of term,"

January 1865 (pp. 18, 19); Frank Russell was mustered out in 1865 when his enlistment ended (p. 19); Angus McGilvary appears under “died in the service,” with a further entry, “missing in action” April 1864 (p. 5); Mark Ellis appears under “discharged for disability” as “prisoner of war and not afterwards heard from” (p. 15).

19. Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, pp. 194-95; Lonnie R. Speer, *Portals to Hell: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1997), pp. 131-34; Lawrence and Glover, *Camp Ford*, p. 91; Shorey, *Story of the Maine Fifteenth*, pp. 107-08.

20. Lawrence and Glover, *Camp Ford*, pp. 72-73.

21. Harold Adams Small, ed., *The Road to Richmond: The Civil War Memoirs of Major Abner R. Small of the Sixteenth Maine Volunteers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939), pp. 155, 166, 175, 176; Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, p. 206; Lawrence and Glover, *Camp Ford*, p. 63.

22. Lawrence and Glover, *Camp Ford*, pp. 89, 90, list only an 18th New York Infantry Regiment and a 3rd Arkansas Infantry Regiment.

23. Lawrence and Glover, *Camp Ford*, p. 55, explain that these dogs were probably not bloodhounds but rather a “common East Texas hound variety, used even today to hunt raccoons and foxes.” Nevertheless, they were efficient. Often called “Negro dogs,” they were probably used to hunt runaway slaves.

24. Lawrence and Glover, *Camp Ford*, p. 54, point out that “footwear was their biggest clothing concern, and it was not uncommon for escapees to limp to freedom on swollen, bare feet.”

25. Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, pp. 51-52; Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1987), p. 261; Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, p. 211.

26. Lawrence and Glover, *Camp Ford*, p. 60, only mention that some prisoners “were sent to jail in Tyler in irons.”

27. Lawrence and Glover, *Camp Ford*, pp. 77-78.

28. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), p. 171.

29. Lawrence and Glover, *Camp Ford*, p. 79.

30. *Eastern Argus*, June 5, July 3, 6, 1865.

31. *Eastern Argus*, September 6, October 27, November 1, December 17, 1865.