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Belle Isle, Point Lookout, the Press, and the Government: The Press and the Reality of Civil War
Prison Camps

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of History
at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by
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Abstract

BELLE ISLE, POINT LOOKOUT, THE PRESS, AND THE GOVERNMENT: THE PRESS AND THE REALITY OF CIVIL WAR PRISON CAMPS

By Marlea Susanne Donaho, Master of History

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of History at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2017

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The study of Civil War prisons is relatively new within the broader study of the Civil War. What little study there is tends to focus on bigger prison camps. It has been established in the historiography that prisoners suffered across the divided nation, but it has not been ascertained how the decisions and policies of the government, as well as the role of the press in those decisions, effected the daily lives of Civil War prisoners. Belle Isle, a Confederate Prison, and Point Lookout, a Union prison, will be analyzed for key differences to provide a fuller picture of life inside a Civil War prison camp, as well as how the press and government affected that daily life. It was discovered that the role of the government and the press was heavily influential in the lives of Civil War prisoners, leading to much suffering.

Introduction

Thousands of prisoners were captured during the Civil War, both by the Union and Confederacy. After capture they were dispersed to hundreds of prisons that were overcrowded and ill supplied. John Ransom was captured by the Confederacy and described the despondency he felt with his capture after a few days on Belle Isle, an open-air prison camp in Richmond, Virginia. He wrote that he was “thoroughly disgusted with the Confederacy and this prison in particular” when he was eating rice soup out of a broken bottle. At that time he recognized an old friend from his company who had been captured before himself, but Ransom “Did not want to see him or anyone else I had ever seen before,” due to the shame of being captured. The friend approached anyway, and Ransom warmed up to the idea of talking to his old comrade while they bonded over “freezing to death, [being] half-starved and gray backs crawling all over.”¹ Ransom’s experience was echoed by thousands of Union soldiers upon arrival at Belle Isle.

Meanwhile, in the Union, Bartlett Yancey Malone arrived at Point Lookout, an open-air camp in St. Mary’s County, Maryland. He was not as blatant about the state of his emotions as

¹ John L. Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary. Andersonville Diary* (1881, repr., New York: Dell Publishers, 1964), 18-19. Lice were commonly referred to as gray backs inside Civil War prisons.

Ransom, but instead immediately took to describing the lack of provisions provided to prisoners and prisoners being shot by guards, conveying fear and uncertainty to the pages of his diary. Malone was captured in November and it took him much longer to adjust to his situation than it took John Ransom in Belle Isle. Malone was quite despondent until he recorded on December 31, 1863 that “maby I will never live to see the last day of 64. And thairfour I will try and do better than I have.”² Malone and Ransom both survived Point Lookout and Belle Isle respectively and recorded their remembrances to tell the story of life inside those prison camps.

Prisoners at Belle Isle in the capital of the Confederacy, and Point Lookout in the Union lived with untold suffering on a daily basis while imprisoned, and their suffering was compounded by the decisions of both governments. Confederate President Jefferson Davis’s administration made the decision to treat captive African American soldiers as escaped slaves rather than as prisoners of war, which led to drastic overcrowding in all prisons as the Union refused to exchange prisoners until African Americans were exchanged as well, rather than being sold into slavery or executed. Union President Abraham Lincoln’s administration practiced retaliation on Confederate prisoners of war for the conditions in which Union prisoners were kept in the Confederacy, caused in large part by the Union blockades that limited supplies to the Confederacy. As will be demonstrated, both governments contributed to prisoner suffering equally, though with different reasons, while using their own newspapers to camouflage the suffering on their own soil and attack their opposition’s treatment of prisoners of war. The suffering of those prisoners, as well as the role of the government and the press in that suffering,

² Bartlett Yancey Malone, *Whipt’ em Everytime: The Diary of Bartlett Yancey Malone*, ed. William Whatley Pierson, Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1919), 95. Malone spelled based on sound, not from practical learning. His original spellings were preserved by the editors of his diary and in this essay, as a result the grammar and spelling in quotes out of his diary are not accurate, but interesting.

has not been the subject of sufficient historical analysis, and that story needs to be told in a fuller capacity.

There were two critical documents passed during the Civil War that addressed prisoners of war and the exchange process. The Dix-Hill Cartel was written by Union Major General John A. Dix and Confederate Major General Daniel Harvey Hill and signed into action on June 22, 1862 (see Appendix 1). The primary goal of the Cartel was to ensure that “all captives would be exchanged in the most expeditious fashion possible.”³ Prisoners were to be exchanged within ten days of their capture to prevent the overflow of prisons, as well as mistreatment of prisoners, both Union and Confederate. This also put the majority of the expenses on the soldier’s own government as exchanged prisoners could not fight until the exchange was reconciled. Both the Union and the Confederacy followed the guidelines of the Cartel for the most part, immediately after its publication. As a result, the Cartel worked like a well-oiled machine for roughly ten months, but did eventually break down, resulting in a drastic swelling in the number of prisoners of war.⁴

The Cartel broke down because of the actions of soldiers in the Confederate Army and a decision made by President Lincoln’s administration. Lincoln and his staff were infuriated over Confederate officials refusal to acknowledge African American soldiers as prisoners of war. Rather, Confederate officers were selling captured African American soldiers into slavery, whether they were escaped slaves, had been manumitted, or they had been born free. Confederate Government officials were terrified that the sight of African Americans fighting for the Union would incite their slaves at home into rebellion. Confederate troops often simply killed African American troops on the field, while their white officers were executed for inciting a

³ Paul J. Springer and Glenn Robins, *Transforming Civil War Prisons: Lincoln, Lieber, and the Politics of Captivity* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 11.

⁴ Springer and Robins, *Transforming Civil War Prisons*, 11, 13.

slave rebellion. This was done to prevent a rebellion, and before selling black captives into slavery. White troops with white officers were taken as prisoners of war. The most well-known instance of this mass murder of African American troops occurred at the battle of Fort Pillow, Tennessee, in 1864. Confederate soldiers gunned down many African American troops, witnessed by Confederate General Nathan B. Forrest.⁵ This deliberate mass murder of troops clearly based on race was a blatant disregard for the Dix-Hill Cartel. This angered Lincoln, leading to his decision to stop the exchange of prisoners until the Confederacy changed their ways. This was a strategic move that would limit the number of Confederate soldiers in battle leading up to the summer campaigns of 1864. Both the Union and Confederate administrations believed the other would cave, leading to a stalemate that lasted the duration of the war, drastically swelling the number of prisoners and leading to thousands of unnecessary deaths.⁶

The end of the Dix-Hill Cartel brought on horrible conditions for the prisoners held captive by unprepared governments. Both sides were overwhelmed by the number of prisoners and lacked the provisions to provide for their new charges. Francis Lieber and General-In-Chief Henry W. Halleck assembled a committee to draft General Orders 100 in an attempt to “constrain Federal soldiers and guarantee the humane treatment of their enemies.”⁷ The Lieber Code, or General Orders 100, was made into law on April 23, 1863 (see Appendix 2). The Code “provided that ‘all soldiers...’ were ‘prisoners of war’ and ‘subject to no punishment’ for their fighting. No revenge was to be wrought upon prisoners by the intentional infliction of suffering, nor by ‘disgrace, by cruel imprisonment, want of food, by mutilation, death, or any other

⁵ “Black Soldiers in the Civil War,” *National Archives and Records Administration*, accessed March 21, 2017, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war>.

⁶ Springer and Robins, *Transforming Civil War Prisons*, 13-16.

⁷ D. H. Dilbeck, *A More Civil War: How the Union Waged A Just War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 70.

barbarity.”⁸ Article fifty-one of the Lieber Code specifically prohibited torment by lack of food, a recurring problem in all prison camps, though it was more deliberate in the Union than in the Confederacy. Food shortages were a constant problem for both sides, but more so in the Confederacy than the Union by the end of the war due to Union blockades. The code was disseminated to both Union and Confederate prisons, and despite the Union government having no control over the actions of Confederate commandants, the Union expected the Confederacy to uphold the Lieber Code. This expectancy increased tensions between the Union and Confederate administrations as the number of prisoners of war climbed steadily upwards. The Lieber Code could have been tremendously beneficial to prisoners of war by ensuring proper treatment and living conditions, but it was largely ignored by both the Union and Confederate governments.

One of the most historically significant contributions in the Lieber Code was a definition of who was defined as a prisoner of war and how they should be treated (see Articles 49, 50, and 53 in Appendix 2). This definition included just about everyone attached to an army in some way, including reporters following the armies. It did exclude religious and medical personnel unless they were needed by a capturing army. The Lieber Code also outlined every prisoner’s right to medical attention, one aspect of the Code severely neglected by both sides, as will be discussed in each chapter. Though written for the Civil War, “its definitions of lawful combatants, unlawful combatants, and civilians, and how each classification should be treated by the enemy, remain the underpinning of international military laws today.”⁹ The Lieber Code had a profound impact on the morality of fighting a just war, both during the Civil War and in subsequent wars.

⁸ John Fabian Witt, *Lincoln’s Code: The Laws of War in American History* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 232.

⁹ Springer and Robins, *Transforming Civil War Prisons*, 2.

I chose Belle Isle and Point Lookout as case studies in the analysis of Civil War prisons. These prisons were selected for their geographic similarities, their importance within their government's web of prisons, and their lack of analysis in other historical literature featuring Civil War prisons. Belle Isle and Point Lookout were both selected as sites for Civil War prisons due to their proximity to large bodies of water. Belle Isle was selected because it is an island in the middle of the James River, surrounded by rapids that would prevent prisoner escape. Point Lookout is a peninsula in between the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay, with only a small strip of land preventing it from being declared an island itself. Both Belle Isle and Point Lookout were in close proximity to enemy lines in an attempt to increase the speed of prisoner exchanges.¹⁰ Although these points make Belle Isle and Point Lookout ideal for comparative analysis, themes such as prisoner suffering and racial tensions can certainly be applied to other prisons. These geographic similarities allow for comparative analysis in the ways that the Confederacy and the Union treated their prisoners of war.

Belle Isle and Point Lookout were also important within the hierarchy of each government's prison system. Both served primarily as a prison for enlisted soldiers, though there was a separate holding facility for officers at Point Lookout for a brief time.¹¹ Both prisons were featured in much of the decision-making of each government. For example, when prison camps of the Confederacy came under scrutiny, Belle Isle was frequently chosen to be investigated as it was in the heart of the Confederate capital, making it easy for the Confederate government to conduct an investigation there.¹² Point Lookout, on the other hand, was a source of

¹⁰ Benjamin G. Cloyd, *Haunted by Atrocity: Civil War Prisons in American Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 11-12.

¹¹ Richard H. Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital: The North's Largest Civil War Prison* (Middletown, DE: Coastal Books, 2014), 11.

¹² Maj. Isaac Carrington to Brig. Gen. John H. Winder, November 18, 1863, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 127 vols. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901) Series II Volume 6, 545.

experimentation for the Union government, particularly experimentation with retaliation and ways of saving money.¹³ Point Lookout was also the Union's largest prison, while Belle Isle led directly to the opening of the Confederacy's largest prison.¹⁴ Both prisons played key roles in the prisoner of war policies and systems of each government. Comparing Belle Isle and Point Lookout will provide key insights into the differences in how prisoners of war were treated depending on whether they were held by the Union or the Confederacy, as well as how government policy affected prisoners directly.

Historians neglected the study of prison camps for nearly a century after the conclusion of the war, meaning much of the work is recent and the history largely unexplored. There were more than one hundred and fifty prisons established during the war, but only a small number have been the focus of historical analysis on an individual basis.¹⁵ As a result, there are many aspects of the prison camps that remain to be uncovered and corrected, including the stark contrasts between the reality of the camps and what was printed by the newspapers; therefore, this research will contribute toward filling a historical gap that has not yet been adequately analyzed. The scholarship in existence was written more for popular consumption than an academic audience, and, as such, the scholarship is not very rigorous, leaving room for corrections.¹⁶

¹³ Luther W. Hopkins, *From Bull Run to Appomattox: A Boy's View*, (Baltimore, MD: Fleet-McGinley Co., 1908), Kindle Edition, LOC 1436; George M. Neese, *Three Years in the Confederate Horse Artillery*, (South Haven, MS: Booker House Publishing Inc., 2012), Kindle Edition, LOC 9651.

¹⁴ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*.

¹⁵ Yancey Hall, "U. S. Civil War Camps Claimed Thousands," *National Geographic*, July 1, 2003.

¹⁶ For sources written toward a popular rather than academic audience see Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*; Alfred Hoyt Bill, *The Beleaguered City: Richmond, 1861-1865* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946); Ernest B. Furgurson, *Ashes of Glory: Richmond at War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996); Edwin W. Beitzell, *Point Lookout Prison Camp for Confederates*, (Abell, MD: Edwin W. Beitzell, 1972); Mike Wright, *City Under Siege: Richmond in the Civil War* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1995).

Most studies that have been conducted on Civil War prisons often focus on Andersonville, a prison camp in Georgia.¹⁷ Belle Isle of Richmond, Virginia on the other hand, has been neglected in the historiography, relegated to an occasional mention in support of some broader argument pertaining to another specific prison or Civil War prisons as a whole.¹⁸ The exceptions are Frances H. Casstevens' *"Out of the Mouth of Hell:" Civil War Prisons and Escapes*, and Roger Pickenpaugh's *Captives in Blue: The Civil War Prisons of the Confederacy* in which each has an entire chapter devoted to Belle Isle.¹⁹ Don Allison also narrated and supplemented background information in regards to J. Osbourne Coburn's time on the island in *Hell on Belle Isle: Diary of a Civil War POW*, though that narrative focused on Coburn more than Belle Isle itself.²⁰ Belle Isle deserves as much analysis in the secondary literature as Andersonville, especially since Belle Isle and Andersonville were so intricately entwined.

Point Lookout has been given considerably more scholarly attention than Belle Isle. There have been a small number of books and articles written in regards to the prison camp there, but the historiography pales in comparison to that of Andersonville.²¹ The two definitive

¹⁷ For historical literature on Civil War prison camps that focus heavily on Andersonville, see Cloyd, *Haunted by Atrocity*; Frances H. Casstevens, *"Out of the Mouth of Hell:" Civil War Prisons and Escapes* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company Inc., Publishers, 2005); Robert Scott Davis, *Ghosts and Shadows of Andersonville: Essays on the Secret Social Histories of America's Deadliest Prison* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006); William Best Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* (1930, repr., Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998); and Roger Pickenpaugh, *Captives in Blue: The Civil War Prisons of the Confederacy* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2013).

¹⁸ For examples of Belle Isle playing a small role in a larger argument see Cloyd, *Haunted by Atrocity*; Furgurson, *Ashes of Glory*; Davis, *Ghosts and Shadows of Andersonville*; Bill, *The Beleaguered City*; Joseph Wheelan, *Libby Prison Breakout: The Daring Escape from the Notorious Civil War Prison* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010); Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*; Wright, *City Under Siege*; Frances H. Casstevens, *George W. Alexander and Castle Thunder: A Confederate Prison and Its Commandant* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004); Charles W. Sanders, Jr., *While in the Hands of the Enemy: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2005), 109, 185, 207, 291.

¹⁹ Casstevens, *"Out of the Mouth of Hell"*, 189-201; Pickenpaugh, *Captives in Blue*.

²⁰ J. Osbourne Coburn, *Hell on Belle Isle: Diary of a Civil War POW* ed. Don Allison. (Bryan, OH: Faded Banner Publications, 1997), 63.

²¹ Articles and books that focus on Point Lookout include Richard A. Blondo, "A View of Point Lookout Prison Camp for Confederates," *Organization of American Historians Magazine* 8, no. 1 (Fall 1993): 30-36; J. G. De Roulhac Hamilton "The Prison Experiences of Randolph Shotwell: 1. Point Lookout," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 2, no. 2 (April 1925): 147-161; Pickenpaugh, *Captives in Gray: The Civil War Prisons of the*

works focusing on Point Lookout are *Point Lookout Prison Camp for Confederates* by Edwin Beitzell and *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital* by William Triebe.²² They are useful in that they are an excellent repository of primary sources, but any secondary analysis is minimal and dated on Beitzell's part, and admiration for Beitzell's work on Triebe's part. Beitzell, for example repeatedly used the word "negro" throughout his work, indicating the racial tensions of the 1970s that were a part of daily life when his work was written. Triebe in particular demonstrated a strong hatred for Union Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, doing his best to place the blame for the conditions at Point Lookout only on his shoulders. One example of his blatant hatred is when he initially discussed Federal retaliation, declaring that "There was no excuse for this form of retaliation other than Stanton's vindictive nature.... The Secretary of War condemned [the prisoners] to a slow, painful death by disease, frostbite, and gangrene."²³ As a result, these two works, though considered secondary, will predominantly be used as repositories of primary sources.

Due to the lack of scholarship on Belle Isle and Point Lookout, there is a wealth of information we can learn about these prison camps. The key historiographical understanding that can be gained through analyzing these lesser studied prisons is that the horrors inflicted on prisoners, such as those in Andersonville and the other widely studied camps, were not exclusive to those locations. The suffering uncovered here occurred at all prisons of the Civil War and each prison needs to have its story told to fully understand the prison system and prisoner of war issues that were in existence during the Civil War. Analyzing Belle Isle and Point Lookout is only one small step toward that goal.

Union (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005); and Jack E. Schairer, *Lee's Bold Plan for Point Lookout: The Rescue of Confederate Prisoners that Never Happened*, (Jefferson, N.C., McFarland and Co., 2008).

²² Beitzell, *Point Lookout*; Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*.

²³ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 20.

Primary sources serve as the bulk of the support for this paper as there is little to no scholarly analysis on these prisons. Sources for Belle Isle are more difficult to uncover as the official records for Belle Isle and the Confederate Government were destroyed in the fire lit by Confederates as they retreated from Richmond. There are numerous first-hand accounts scattered across the North, in the home states of the prisoners who sent their stories home or were able to bring them home themselves. Many prisoner accounts did survive and remain in Richmond, predominantly housed at the Virginia Historical Society. These primary accounts will be analyzed and compared with one another in an attempt to determine the validity of popular opinions, events, and conditions. Such comparisons are necessary to uncover what really happened due to the circumstances in which the sources were recorded. At Belle Isle, the vast majority of eye-witness accounts were recorded inside the prison, meaning that the anger and frustrations the prisoners were feeling could have led to exaggerated or fictionalized accounts. Comparing one soldier's story to another provides insight into which events likely happened and in what way they happened. The primary sources for Belle Isle consist largely of diaries, letters, and memoirs about prisoners' times on Belle Isle and will serve as the basis for analysis in chapter one.

There have been numerous primary accounts published from Point Lookout that will provide the bulk of the materials needed for analysis in chapter two.²⁴ Many more published accounts have emerged from Point Lookout than from Belle Isle. After the war, soldiers

²⁴ Published primary sources will include C. W. Jones, "In Prison at Point Lookout," (Martinsville, VA: The Bulletin Printing & Publishing Co.); Hopkins, *From Bull Run to Appomattox*; John R. King *My Experience in the Confederate Army and in Northern Prisons*, (Clarksburg, WV: United Daughters of the Confederacy, 1917); Malone, *Whipt' em Everytime*; Neese, *Three Years in the Confederate Horse Artillery*; Marcus B. Toney, *The Privations of a Private: Campaigning with the First Tennessee, C.S.A., and Life Thereafter*, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005); Reverend J. B. Traywick, "Prison Life at Point Lookout," *Southern Historical Society Papers, Volume XIX*, (Richmond, VA, 1891, p. 432-435, accessed October 18, 2016); Sergeant James T. Wells, "Atrocities as Noted by Point Lookout POWs," Descendants of Point Lookout POW Organization, accessed January 25, 2017; and Hiram Smith Williams, *This War so Horrible: The Civil War Diary of Hiram Smith Williams*, eds. Lewis N. Wynne and Robert A. Taylor, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1993).

published their accounts in an effort to gain a pension from diseases and disabilities they received on the battlefield or in prison.²⁵ As the Confederacy suffered more destruction than the Union, perhaps Confederate soldiers returning home felt more financial pressure to gain a pension than their Union counterparts did. Due to this motivation, published accounts must be read carefully for exaggerations and falsehoods in the former prisoners' attempts to get more money. However, several stories have been uncovered in recent years and only recently published, making them somewhat more reliable. Unpublished diaries and memoirs will also be analyzed, but letters were censored, rendering them highly ineffective for historical analysis. These sources will also be compared with one another in an attempt to validate events and the degrees to which they actually occurred.

I also use newspapers and government records and correspondence. The government documents provide important insight into the decisions of the government and their direct applications to Belle Isle and Point Lookout, allowing analysis of which decisions did and did not ultimately affect the prisons. Many decisions detailed in government correspondence are verifiable through prisoner narratives.²⁶ Newspapers, on the other hand, require much scrutiny before they can be used to corroborate prisoner accounts. As a result, there are sections within each of the following chapters that focus specifically on press analysis. Historian Ford Risley noted that "government and military officials wanted to make sure that what was reported did not reveal military information."²⁷ This included prison information. As a result, much of the accounts from Northern newspapers on conditions inside Northern prisons consisted of glowing

²⁵ Ann Fabian, *The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 154.

²⁶ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 127 vols. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901) provided the vast majority of government records and correspondence.

²⁷ Ford Risley, "Civil War Journalism," *Essential Civil War Curriculum*, 2010, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com/civil-war-journalism.html>.

reviews far from the truth, while Northern correspondents were reporting the horrors occurring inside Confederate prisons. The same can be said for Confederate newspapers and journalists. Risley noted that “accounts by correspondents [abroad in the Confederacy or Union] honestly and faithfully chronicled the war.”²⁸ This contradiction was to pacify the readership at home that no such atrocities were occurring on their own soil, as well as to instill fear of the enemy in the public.

Newspapers and the government were intricately entwined during the Civil War. Certain newspapers in the North and in the South “supported the administration’s policies on virtually every issue.”²⁹ If the government wanted people to believe their prisons were beautifully maintained, that is what the press printed. While President Davis did not hand out favors to journalists, President Lincoln did reward his “friends in the press with patronage and political appointments.”³⁰ In addition, both governments censored their newspapers. Censorship was shifted from one department to another in the Union. Censorship was the responsibility of the postal service in the Confederacy. As a result, newspapers felt pressured to support their governments’ views and policies whether they agreed with them or not. Newspapers considered disloyal to the government were often shut down or issued heavy fines, in both the Union and the Confederacy.³¹ This censorship makes comparative analysis between news stories necessary to uncover the truth, but it also tells a story about the relationship between the press, the government, the public, and prisoners of war.

This thesis contains two chapters, the first focusing on Belle Isle and the Confederacy, the second focusing on Point Lookout and the Union. Both chapters will follow discussion topics

²⁸ Risley, “Civil War Journalism.”

²⁹ Risley, “Civil War Journalism.”

³⁰ Risley, “Civil War Journalism.”

³¹ Risley, “Civil War Journalism.”

in the same order to allow the reader easier points of analysis. The central topics will include minorities inside the prisons, including women and African Americans; lack of supplies, food, and shelter; diseases and hospital care; punishments and mistreatment of prisoners; death; the mental health of the prisoners; and the soldiers' creation of community that they created to cope with their imprisonment. At the end of each chapter, there will be analysis on the newspaper reporting and the relationship of that reporting with the public and the government. Through analyzing these issues, a more detailed picture of life in Belle Isle and Point Lookout can be formed.

Chapter 1

Belle Isle Prison Camp



Figure 1: Belle Isle from the North Bank of the James River. "Civil War Richmond," http://www.mdgorman.com/Prisons/belle_isle_from_the_north_bank.htm. Accessed September 8, 2016.

Belle Isle prison played a key role in the system of Confederate prisons as well as relations between the Confederacy and the Union, both of which stemmed from the deplorable conditions in which the prisoners were held. For years, historians mistakenly reiterated press publications from the Civil War describing how beautiful and well-kept Belle Isle was as it served as a prison, failing to acknowledge the dire suffering that occurred there.³² Soldier accounts confirm that prisoners at Belle Isle were subjected to extreme punishments,

³² "Belle Isle," *Richmond Examiner*, Sept. 1, 1863. Belle Isle Folder, Richmond National Battlefield Park (Chimborazo site), Richmond, Virginia [repository hereafter cited as RNBP]; Bill, *The Beleagured City*, 144.

uninhabitable shelter, and inadequate nutrition by the Confederate government. Despite this, the press distorted the reality of the prison into a more positive image to support the government and pacify the public.

Richmond prisons, under the management of Brigadier-General John H. Winder, were at the center of the Confederate government's prisoner exchange system. They were predominantly tobacco warehouses or other improvised structures, such as the open-air camp on Belle Isle. The Confederacy focused their prisoners in Richmond in the hope that the proximity of Union lines would accelerate prisoner exchanges. Winder was placed in charge of Richmond's prisons in the summer of 1861. His father had negotiated prisoner exchanges during the War of 1812, but Winder had no personal experience with such negotiations. Historian Benjamin G. Cloyd determined that Winder was spread too thin with too many responsibilities to properly devote his time and attention to the prisoner of war crisis rapidly emerging in Richmond. Therefore, Winder developed the prison at Belle Isle in the spring of 1862, as a temporary solution to relieve the pressure on the other Richmond prisons until prisoner exchanges increased. The Dix-Hill Cartel of 1862 did some good toward relieving the overcrowded nature of Richmond's prisons, even to the point that Belle Isle was closed for a time, but the task soon fell back to Winder himself in late 1863. Cloyd noted that one of Winder's biggest problems was uncoordinated leadership within the Confederacy, both administrative and military. Those in charge of the prisons disregarded his orders outright in favor of their own methods, including operations in Richmond, though he had more control over the local prisons than other distant penitentiaries.³³

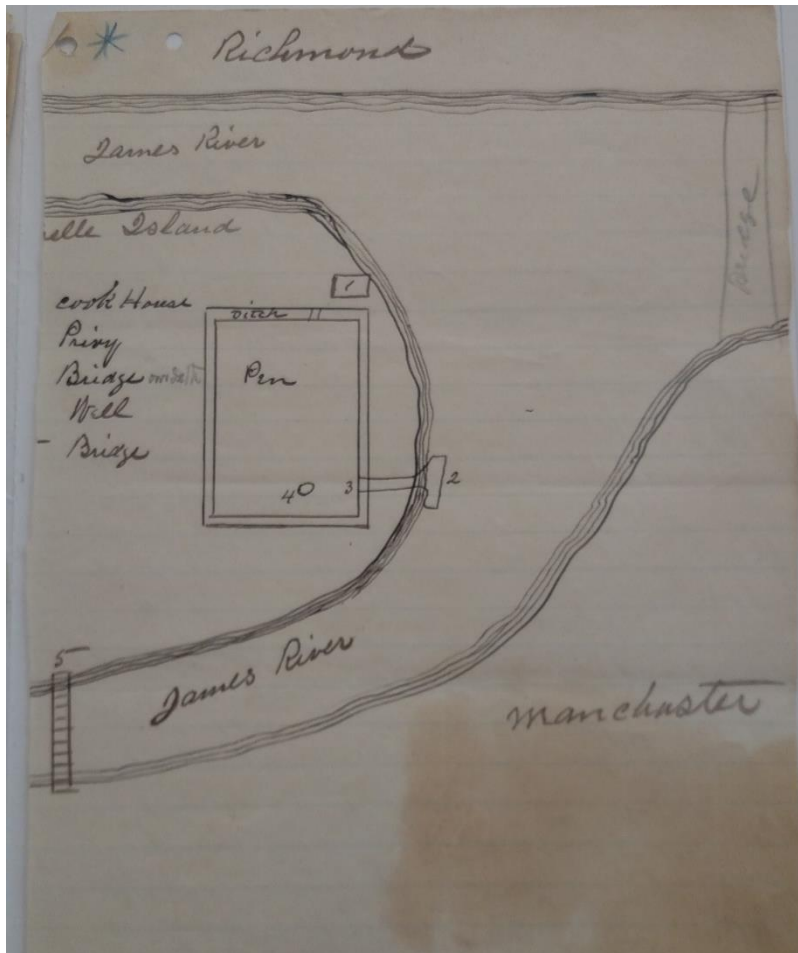
The extreme punishments that were inflicted upon prisoners at Belle Isle came from Lieutenant Virginius Bossieux. Belle Isle came under the control of Lieutenant Bossieux in early 1863. He had developed a bad reputation among the prisoners at Belle Isle as well as within

³³ Cloyd, *Haunted by Atrocity*, 11-12.

Libby Prison, Richmond's nearby prison for officers. His heritage was French, but he was a true southerner.³⁴ John Ransom described Bossieux as "talking so much like a negro that you would think he was one, if you could hear him talk and not see him," referring to his southern accent.³⁵ Bossieux is another piece of the history of Belle Isle that has been neglected. Very few secondary sources discuss him in any depth.³⁶ Bossieux's bad reputation was confirmed by numerous prisoner accounts. One prisoner on Belle Isle detailed a horrific incident he witnessed in a letter to the editor of the *National Tribune*:

I saw the rebel Lieutenant Bossieux,...set three men on what resembled a sawhorse, sharp edged, with legs about eight feet high; each were bucked and gagged, their hands tied behind them, a rope attached to each ankle, and then a man at each rope stretched their legs apart to the utmost limit, and then tied the ropes to pegs driven into the ground, and the officer's hellish heart allowed them to remain in that positions until two of them fell off dead.³⁷

Bucking and gagging referred to the tying of a prisoner's limbs while they were gagged. In



retaliation, the prisoner and a few others enjoyed "bull-dog steaks" from Bossieux's prized bulldogs. A second prisoner described a similar situation in which "I have seen men put astride a wooden horse such as masons use, say five feet high,

ens, "Out of the Mouth of Hell;" and 82.

Figure 2: Map of Belle Isle. Thomas Bean Manuscript. Library of Virginia. The rectangle labeled "pen" was the area prisoners were held.

with their feet tied to stakes in the ground, and there left for an hour or more on a cold winter morning. Often their feet would freeze and burst open.”³⁸ Exposure to the elements, encountered on a daily basis rather than just as punishment, plagued the prisoners and resulted in numerous problems for their health and well-being.

Prisoners moved from enclosed prisons to the open-air camp did not fare better than their comrades who remained confined indoors. They were grateful for the fresh air, but their condition was not improved at all, mentally or physically.³⁹ The prison was estimated at three to six acres, fluctuating depending on the prisoner account consulted, and housed up to ten thousand men at one time, despite a capacity of only three thousand.⁴⁰ One Libby prisoner visiting Belle Isle noted how much worse off the prisoners on the island were compared to Libby because they were so exposed to the elements. On Belle Isle, men “died like diseased sheep.”⁴¹ Statements such as this reflect the tensions that pervaded the camp. Outside prison walls, the rest of the divided nation was developing a commitment to individual rights; “honoring the dead became inseparable from respecting the living.”⁴² This change was a result of the family members and friends left at home while soldiers went off to war, “who found undocumented, unconfirmed, and unrecognized loss intolerable.”⁴³ Undocumented, unconfirmed, and unrecognized loss became synonymous not only with battle, but with prisons as well, despite attempts at prisoner exchanges in the beginning of the war.

In August, 1862, the Union and Confederacy attempted a prisoner exchange under the Dix-Hill Cartel, which merited the attention of the Town War Committee of La Fayette, New

³⁸ William Wood, letter to the editor, *National Tribune*, September 2, 1882.

³⁹ David Torrence, Papers, Virginia Historical Society. Repository hereafter cited VHS.

⁴⁰ “The Southern Military Prisons,” *New York Times*, Sept. 15, 1864; Casstevens, “*Out of the Mouth of Hell*,” 189.

⁴¹ “Prisoners on Belle Isle: How They Looked to the Eyes of a Libby Man,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1891.

⁴² Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 135.

⁴³ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 135.

York. The three men that made up this committee wrote to Governor Edwin D. Morgan describing the condition of Belle Isle Prisoners: “It is well known that the exposures on the island and the want of food caused much sickness and such prostration in many cases as to render it impossible for the prisoners—many of them—to march the distance required.”⁴⁴ The condition of the prisoners clearly violated the terms of the cartel. The imprisoned population at Belle Isle was moved to Varina, Virginia, to make room for exchanged Confederate prisoners while they waited for their exchange to be reconciled under the Dix-Hill Cartel.⁴⁵ The prison was emptied for a time in September, 1862, until the Dix-Hill Cartel began to falter in early 1863.

Although Belle Isle was created to hold white male enlisted soldiers, African Americans, as well as a few cleverly disguised women, were also held there. Few African Americans were held prisoner because of the Confederacy’s refusal to acknowledge them as soldiers.⁴⁶ They are not even mentioned in secondary historiographical literature. There were also two women discovered among the prisoners on Belle Isle. Mary Jane Johnson was promptly shipped north once her secret was uncovered.⁴⁷ The *National Tribune* described Johnson as sixteen and parentless, forced into service by her captain.⁴⁸ The second woman was simply referred to as Madame Collier who “had ‘followed her lover a soldiering’ in disguise, and being of a romantic turn, enjoyed it hugely until the funny part was done away with.”⁴⁹ She was discovered and removed north as well, but not before mentioning another woman among the prisoners. Collier refused to name this other woman, so it is uncertain whether the other woman was Johnson or if

⁴⁴ H. G. Andrews, E. Park, and L. Baker to Governor Morgan, August 25, 1862, *OR* II:4:433-34.

⁴⁵ John M. Coski, “Chronological File,” 3. A special thanks to Dr. Coski for sharing some of his personal notes and research on Belle Isle with me, including this chart detailing daily activities within Belle Isle’s prison over the course of the Civil War.

⁴⁶ “Prisoners on Belle Isle.” *New York Times*, March 1, 1891.

⁴⁷ Casstevens, “*Out of the Mouth of Hell*,” 191.

⁴⁸ “Belle Isle,” *National Tribune*, July 11, 1889. Civil War Richmond, http://www.mdgorman.com/Written_Accounts/National_Tribune/national_tribune_7111889.htm, accessed Sept. 8, 2016.

⁴⁹ Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, 28-29.

there were even more women disguised as men among the Union prisoners on Belle Isle. Perhaps Johnson and Collier were the same woman, Collier being a false name given by Johnson to continue hiding her true identity. Without the official records of this incident, the truth will likely remain buried.⁵⁰ Minorities were rare at Belle Isle and there is no record of what happened to any African Americans imprisoned there, but women were only on the island for a short time once their sex was discovered.

⁵⁰ Ransom, *John Ransom's Diary*, 28-29.

General Neal Dow was a prisoner at Libby who was able to visit Belle Isle in the fall of 1863 when he described the conditions in a desperate letter to the Union: “There are 5,400 on the island, which is low and unhealthy.... Many have no pants; many have no shirts; so of shoes; and almost every individual lacks some essential article of clothing.”⁵¹ By November 17, 1863, Dow’s number of prisoners on Belle Isle had increased to 6,300; 7,568 by January 18, 1864.⁵² The Confederate government’s administration claimed an inability to furnish clothing, but if the prisoners formed a committee, they would be allowed to disperse any supplies sent from the Union.⁵³ This proclamation encouraged Dow and other officers in Libby to take action. After describing the condition of the Belle Isle prisoners, Dow stressed the importance of having necessary supplies sent as soon as possible: “They are dying at the rate of eight or ten daily now, and the rate must fearfully increase from this on. One hundred will die daily by January 1.”⁵⁴ Dow, like so many other prisoners of war, felt the Union government was either outright neglecting them by not sending provisions, or were unaware of the suffering that Union prisoners were enduring at the hands of the Confederacy. The tone of Dow’s letter reflects the frustration of the Union prisoners who were owed upkeep by the Confederate government, yet were forced to plead with their own government for the assistance owed to them by their captors.

Morgan, another Libby prisoner, was selected to help General Dow and his committee disperse supplies on Belle Isle, which were sent in response to Dow’s plea, and cited the number in November at 15,000 though this was likely an exaggeration.⁵⁵ Even Winder, now in charge of the prison system of the Confederacy east of the Mississippi, “hoped to transfer the prisoners out

⁵¹ John Hussey, *Delegate U.S. Christian Commission*, to Unknown, November 7, 1863. *OR* II:6:482.

⁵² Isaac H. Carrington to Brig. Gen. John H. Winder, November 18, 1863, *OR* II:6:544; Statement of clothing issues to Federal prisoners of war at Richmond, VA by a committee of officers of the U.S. Army, from November 10, 1863, to January 18, 1864, *OR* II:6:852.

⁵³ Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 119.

⁵⁴ Hussey to Unknown, November 7, 1863. *OR* II:6:482.

⁵⁵ “Prisoners on Belle Isle,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1891.

of Belle Isle at the first opportunity, reasoning that their lot could not fail to improve at virtually any other location.”⁵⁶ The prisoners themselves were anxious to leave Belle Isle, despite many of them being sent to the notorious Andersonville prison camp in Georgia rather than freedom or a more habitable location.⁵⁷

Lack of food was a prominent cause of the prisoners suffering on Belle Isle. The prisoners of Belle Isle were so hungry that they captured the pet poodle of Lieutenant Bossieux, in addition to his bulldogs, and ate it.⁵⁸ This particular tale is recounted in numerous other works and discussions on Civil War prisons, however, there is not much detail in the secondary literature.⁵⁹ In a letter to the *National Tribune*, former prisoner Louis P. Leinberger, in an attempt to uncover the identity of the man who killed the dog, best identified as the “Indiana man,” described prisoners luring the dog into their tent and killing it.⁶⁰ The author of the anonymous memoir “Fourteen Months a Prisoner,” described “Bawsoo’s” reaction. Bossieux coerced the prisoners into naming the men who had killed his dog and forced them to come forward. Once they had, he forced them to eat the dog raw.⁶¹ Aaron Eugene Bachman, writing fifty years after his time on Belle Isle, noted that the man forced to eat raw dog meat in front of Bossieux had already gorged himself on the dog, making the punishment even more severe due to an already full, and shrunken, stomach.⁶² After force-feeding the guilty prisoners, Bossieux had them tied

⁵⁶ Springer Robins, *Transforming Civil War Prisons*, 39.

⁵⁷ Davis, *Ghosts and Shadows of Andersonville*, 8.

⁵⁸ Hessletine, *Civil War Prisons*, 124. Other breeds are mentioned in various stories, including a poodle and a pointer.

⁵⁹ See Davis, *Ghosts and Shadows of Andersonville*, 5; Wheelan, *Libby Prison Breakout*, 213; Casstevens, “*Out of the Mouth of Hell*,” 196-197; Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, 35; Pickenpaugh, *Captives in Blue*, 94.

⁶⁰ “What Became of the Dog Slayer?” *National Tribune*, Jan. 6, 1887. Civil War Richmond, http://www.mdgorman.com/Written_Accounts/National_Tribune/national_tribune_161887.htm, accessed September 8, 2016.

⁶¹ Anonymous, “Fourteen Months a Prisoner,” Manuscripts, VHS.

⁶² Aaron Eugene Bachman, *Diary*, RNBP.

outside of the breastworks where they were whipped every two hours.⁶³ Leinberger, on the other hand, simply remembered the “Indiana man” being brought out of the prison by Bossieux, never to return.⁶⁴ Bossieux’s dogs were not the only target of the starving Yankee prisoners. One person, writing to the *National Tribune* forty years after the war recalled, “the little rat-and-tan that followed the Doctor.... was captured and slain by a hungry Yankee.”⁶⁵ Coburn and Ransom, along with other eyewitnesses, mention eating the dogs of other officers as well. Dogs of Richmond citizens were even captured and eaten as their owners toured the island.⁶⁶ Prisoner De Witt C. Walters told *Harper’s Weekly* that in the twenty days he was on Belle Isle, he noted four dogs that were enticed to the prison by the prisoners whereupon they were rapidly cooked and eaten.⁶⁷ Meat in particular was in short supply within the prisons, driving the prisoners to the desperate act of eating pets. These food shortages were one of the greatest obstacles the Confederate administration had to contend with to provide for their captives.

Another significant contributor to the suffering of the Union prisoners on Belle Isle was a lack of tents or any other sort of shelter. Ransom noted in November, 1863, “about half of the six thousand prisoners here have tents while the rest sleep and live out of doors.”⁶⁸ Earlier that fall, General Dow also noted, “They have not tents, into which by crowding more than one-half can enter at all; the remainder sleep without on the bare ground without sufficient clothing and almost entirely without blankets.”⁶⁹ The number of tents did not increase as the number of prisoners grew over the coming months. One source numbers the tents at no more than three hundred, but the reality was around three thousand. They were Sibley tents, conical in shape, and

⁶³ Anonymous, “Fourteen Months a Prisoner,” Manuscripts, VHS.

⁶⁴ “What Became of the Dog Slayer?” *National Tribune*, Jan. 6, 1887.

⁶⁵ “He Ate the Dog,” *National Tribune*, June 25, 1903. RNBP.

⁶⁶ “Prisoners on Belle Isle,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1891.

⁶⁷ “Union Prisoners at Richmond,” *Harper’s Weekly*, December 5, 1863, 779.

⁶⁸ Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, 19.

⁶⁹ Hussey to Unknown, November 7, 1863. *OR* II:6:482.

roughly big enough to hold ten men each.⁷⁰ In an attempt to cope with the shortage of shelter, “many [prisoners] walked the whole night through, and overcome by fatigue and weakness, some lay down and froze.”⁷¹ One prisoner captured at Petersburg recollected “three weeks we were there without any shelter whatever.”⁷² William Tippet recollecting being sent to Belle Isle and “laid down on the ground to sleep—Had no blankets or any cover of any kind whatsoever commenced a cold drizzling [sic] rain and continued until morning. This place is the worst that I ever imagined.”⁷³ The deaths of comrades had a profound impact on the prisoners. Historian William Best Hesseltine asserted that “most of the diseases among the prisoners were due to these factors of mental depression and bad physical surroundings.”⁷⁴ The inadequate shelter and frequent deaths were closely intertwined with one another.

Lice were prolific on Belle Isle and in other Richmond prisons. J. Osbourne Coburn noted that even the hospital was, “over run with lice. Will not all the plagues of Egypt be visited upon [the Confederates]?”⁷⁵ Historian Roger Pickenpaugh analyzed numerous other accounts in which prisoners described the issue of lice. One prisoner noted a regular occurrence of louse hunts multiple times a day to rid the vermin of their person and clothing. Prisoner George Hegeman described the ground as “‘alive with vermin,’” so much so that he declared it “‘worse than [the] Egyptian plague.”⁷⁶ Prisoners with high morale made a point to keep themselves free of lice, such as John Ransom, who noted that he and his tent mates had the rule, on pain of

⁷⁰ Angela M. Zombek, “Belle Isle Prison,” *Encyclopedia Virginia*, June 8, 2011.

⁷¹ Van Santvoord, *One Hundred and Twentieth Regiment, New York State Volunteers*, 96. Belle Isle Folder, RNBP.

⁷² Jonas H. Kocher to Colonel Dugane, Nov. 10, 1867, *Fifth Annual Report of the New York State Bureau of Military Statistics* (1868), 299, RNBP.

⁷³ William Tippet, September 18, 1863, Diary, Library of Virginia. Repository hereafter cited as LVA.

⁷⁴ Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 54.

⁷⁵ J. Osbourne Coburn, *Hell on Belle Isle: Diary of a Civil War POW* ed. Don Allison. (Bryan, OH: Faded Banner Publications, 1997), 139.

⁷⁶ Pickenpaugh, *Captives in Blue*, 92.

eviction, that they were to remain “free as circumstances will permit of vermin.”⁷⁷ Others, however, were “so lazy that they allow the lice to get so thick on them as to be seen crawling on the outside of their clothes.”⁷⁸ While laziness may have contributed to an inability to remain pest free, the inability to bathe because of prisoner security concerns made it impossible for prisoners to rid themselves of lice, even for a few minutes.

Malnutrition contributed significantly to the problem of illness on Belle Isle, but it was a common problem in all Civil War prisons. This was also compounded by the close confines in which the prisoners lived. Diarrhea and dysentery were the most prevalent illnesses on Belle Isle, but in December, 1863, smallpox broke out on the island.⁷⁹ Union General Benjamin Butler inquired as to the shortage of vaccines and promptly sent an unofficial gift of the vaccine to Robert Ould, the Confederate Agent of Exchange under the Dix-Hill Cartel.⁸⁰ The prisoners were quickly inoculated, preventing future breakouts of the disease.⁸¹ One of the most significant contributors to disease was lack of cleanliness, because “bathing critically prevented the spread of bacteria and helped to detach the insects responsible for conveying disease.”⁸² Bathing and other forms of self-care were rare occurrences for the prisoners, spreading disease efficiently. In the field before capture, “soldiers taught each other techniques [of self-care] or learned from officers, formed communal messes to share food, cared for one another when illness did strike, and reached out to civilians at home and at the front for advice, supplies, and comfort.”⁸³ Prisoners still practiced these same methods and techniques within the confines of captivity, but they were limited in their means of practicing self-care. The major limitations on practicing self-

⁷⁷ Ransom, *John Ransom's Diary*, 22.

⁷⁸ Pickenpaugh, *Captives in Blue*, 92.

⁷⁹ Benjamin F. Butler to Robert Ould, December 7, 1863, *OR* II:6:658.

⁸⁰ Hessletine, *Civil War Prisons*, 128.

⁸¹ Casstevens, “*Out of the Mouth of Hell*,” 193.

⁸² Kathryn Shively Meier, *Nature's Civil War: Common Soldiers and the Environment in 1862 Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 101.

⁸³ Meier, *Nature's Civil War*, 2.

care were lack of soap, restricted access to bathing water and restrooms, referred to as sinks by the prisoners, and the quality of the food distributed.

The quality of food issued to Union prisoners contributed to malnutrition and illness. Prison hospitals in the Confederacy received more varied rations for the sick prisoners than camps and prisons received for their charges. Surgeons in the capital of the Confederacy, despite these improved rations, reported that, “after a time, the bread had become cornbread of unsifted meal, rice was substituted for beans, and then, taking the place of both rice and meat, one small sweet potato was received.”⁸⁴ This held true for Belle Isle as well, where exposure to the elements also played a factor in the health of the prisoners:

“Private Howard Leedom.... soon displayed signs of a serious case of frostbite. He testified that his ‘good shoes’ had been confiscated by his captors and he had been given ‘an old pair of shoes, all cut and split open.’ He added that the Confederates had taken his blanket and ‘a pair of buckskin gloves,’ but offered no replacements.... When asked by the committee how badly his feet were frozen, Leedom replied, ‘Well, my toes are all off one of my feet now.’”⁸⁵

Leedom also mentioned a leaky tent and the meager rations distributed to the prisoners. Meat might be distributed as infrequently as once a day or once a week, according to the young private. The shortage of supplies did not only include prisoners among its victims. The entire Confederacy was struggling to feed and clothe its people, including the guards of the prison camps. The shortage drove the Confederate guards to steal away provisions meant for the prisoners under their care. The number of prisoners in the Confederacy overwhelmed the government.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Hesselstine, *Civil War Prisons*, 122.

⁸⁵ Springer and Robins, *Transforming Civil War Prisons*, 66.

⁸⁶ Hesselstine, *Civil War Prisons*, 115.

Hospital care was insufficient. Prisoners were not admitted to a hospital until they were too sick to get themselves to the island's surgeon, therefore, a visit to the hospital was essentially a death sentence. Prisoners were responsible for getting themselves medical treatment, yet on Belle Isle "only one surgeon is assigned...and he makes but one visit a day, during which he does not enter the inclosure [sic] where the men are kept to see those too sick to walk, but attends to those only who are able to come to him. When the neglected men are sent to the hospital it is often too late."⁸⁷ Prisoners brought to hospitals were sometimes left outside, exposed to the elements for days, which often resulted in loss of limbs.⁸⁸ Libby's surgeon, John Wilkins, declared Richmond's prisons to be "admirably adapted to the purposes for which they are now used."⁸⁹ There was also a hospital tent on the island itself, used primarily for simple cures such

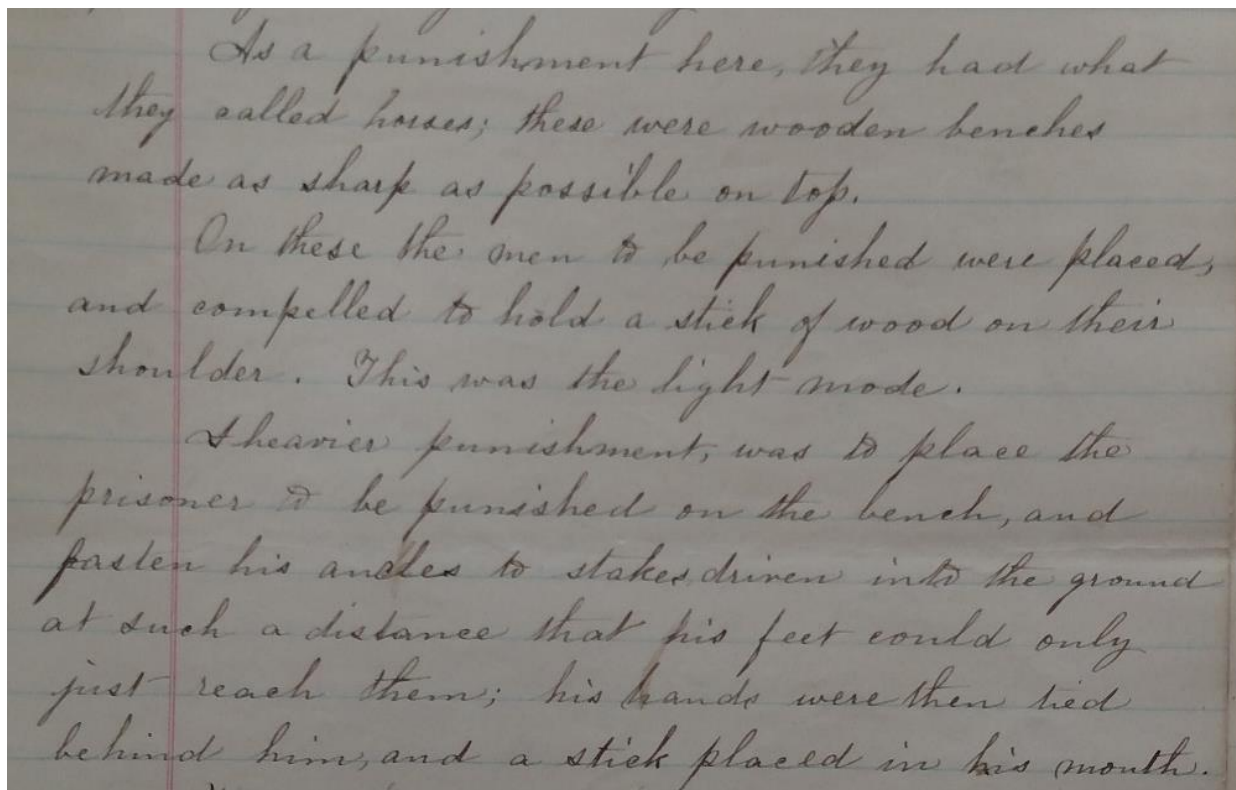


Figure 3: Passage from Anonymous, "Fourteen Months a Prisoner," Virginia Historical Society.

⁸⁷ S. A. Meredith to Gen. E. A. Hitchcock, November, 26, 1863, *OR* II:6:573.

⁸⁸ Wheelan, *Libby Prison Breakout*, 197.

⁸⁹ John Wilkins, Surgeon of Libby Prison Post, to Brig. Gen. John H. Winder, September 5, 1863. *OR* II:6:262.

as powders to stop diarrhea. Prisoners were often denied treatment, mostly through being put off in an attempt to delay the prisoner receiving medical attention. Prisoners would routinely either get better on their own or perish from their illness before receiving medical attention, a contradiction to the claim that they were “admirably adapted.” Those who did receive treatment were already on death’s door.

Punishments were part of daily life inside prison camps. Sawhorses were used repeatedly as a torturous form of punishment on Belle Isle. An anonymous author whose memoir was never published described prisoners being forced to sit astride the sawhorses, which had been cut to be sharp, while holding a log on their shoulders. The anonymous author cited this as the light punishment with the severe punishment being that inflicted upon prisoners by Lieutenant Bossieaux earlier in this chapter.⁹⁰ Though newspaper articles should be taken with a grain of salt as they were written for inflammatory publication, other eyewitnesses, including John Ransom, corroborated the story of men being bucked and gagged with their ankles staked to the ground as they straddled sharpened sawhorses. Aaron Bachman, a prisoner, also verified this story noting, “We never knew how long [the prisoner] was kept there, but a short time of such punishment was enough to kill him.”⁹¹ Another punishment described by Bachman was a prisoner “tied and gagged, lying on a store box about three and half feet square. The box was on the edge of the James River and was leaning toward the water. Had the prisoner made the slightest move, he would have rolled off into the water and drowned.”⁹² The most common method of punishment, however, was bucking and gagging, minus the sawhorse, during which the prisoner was left exposed to the elements. Prisoners were punished on a near daily basis, for both minor and severe grievances. This threat and execution of punishment earned Bossieaux, as

⁹⁰ Anonymous, “Fourteen Months in Prison,” Manuscripts, VHS.

⁹¹ Bachman, Diary, Belle Isle Folder, RNBP.

⁹² Bachman, Diary, Belle Isle Folder, RNBP.

well as other prison camp commandants, the hatred and retaliation that prisoners inflicted on him in various ways. The disgust for Bossieux and his punishments only came to historical light through the letters and diaries of ranting prisoners. Some prisoners, such as the prisoner or prisoners who ate Bossieux's dogs, were able to retaliate in a more concrete and immediate manner. The officers of the enlisted men languishing on Belle Isle did not fare much better in Libby Prison, Richmond's prison for officers, but some of these officers at least had the authority to petition the Union government for supplies so desperately needed in Richmond's prisons.



Figure 4: Image depicting the atrocities that occurred on Belle Isle. Thomas Nast, Published in Harper's Weekly, Dec. 5, 1863. Courtesy of Robert Krick, Belle Isle Image file, Richmond National Battlefield Park (Chimborazo site), Richmond, Virginia.

The portion of Belle Isle reserved for prisoners was surrounded by a ditch, with the dirt piled on the outside to form a breastwork. This became known among the prisoners as the

deadline, as any prisoner who approached it was shot on sight, without question.⁹³ Despite rampant overcrowding of Belle Isle's prison facilities in 1863, George Erwin Comstock noted, "overflow we dare not for there is a dead line and on that line focus the murderous guard. Touch that line and a deadly bullet or a bloody bayonet will do you up right quick."⁹⁴ These sudden and unexpected deaths disturbed the prisoners, who, due to the culture of the time, expected what was considered a proper death for themselves and their comrades. Sudden deaths robbed prisoners and soldiers of that comfort. One soldier, Samuel A. Valentine, described the sudden deaths of two of his comrades and "wrote that although he had seen many comrades die, this incident was especially upsetting.... The suddenness, the lack of preparation, made these deaths a particularly 'awful sight.'"⁹⁵ This reaction was indicative of the effect death had on the mental health of Civil War soldiers.

The prisoners were concerned with the state of their mental health, in particular worry over how their seemingly hopeless situation could get themselves or their compatriots feeling blue, which could lead to an increase in illnesses. Ransom noted that "the prisoners are blue, downcast, and talk continually of home and something good to eat."⁹⁶ This demonstrates the two most important desires of prisoners: home and food. Virtually all diaries and memoirs noted how prisoners longed for those two things. J. Osbourne Coburn mused in his diary, wondering whether the women back home pined for their missing lovers only to find out years after the war that their lovers had perished in a prison camp. Coburn worried, "O Eva, Eva, will it be true with you? Must it be my lot to thus pass my remaining days, when I had pictured in my mind such a happy future with you.... I will let hope predominate and feel determined that I shall live to

⁹³ Casstevens, "Out of the Mouth of Hell," 190.

⁹⁴ Ted Genoways and Hugh H. Genoways, eds., *A Perfect Picture of Hell: Eyewitness Accounts by Civil War Prisoners from the 12th Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 208.

⁹⁵ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 18.

⁹⁶ Ransom, *John Ransom's Diary*, 19.

escape and see the end of all this trouble.”⁹⁷ Coburn’s worry did come true when he succumbed to diarrhea, which he referred to as “camp disease,” in a Richmond hospital some months later. Another man pleaded with Confederate Secretary of War, James Seddon on behalf of the brother of an acquaintance, whom he described as “shoeless and almost naked, and the guards absolutely refuse to receive and convey to the prisoner goods furnished by his brother.”⁹⁸ Seddon responded a few days later inquiring as to the name of the informer as “the course pursued in the case mentioned is so different from the general practice known to me that I think there must be some mistake.”⁹⁹ For a time, the Confederate government did in fact allow the Union to ship supplies to their prisoners in the Confederacy. This allowance was revoked as the war escalated and prison conditions deteriorated rapidly as a result, leaving prisoners desperate for some sort of recourse.¹⁰⁰

Alternatives to Belle Isle were offered to some captured Union soldiers. Many were given the opportunity to switch sides and swear allegiance to the Confederacy before being brought to any prison. They were offered the opportunity once more upon arriving at their place of imprisonment. Prisoners on Belle Isle were also given the opportunity to work at Tredegar Iron Works, just across the river from Belle Isle, if they swore allegiance to the Confederacy, while they awaited release for their loyalty. Hardly any men accepted this offer, determined to stay true to the Union.¹⁰¹ This was surprising as Confederate prisoners who swore allegiance to the Union were liberated and conscripted into service in the Union Army.¹⁰² Another option was to help distribute the clothing that was sent by the Union at General Dow’s request, and at subsequent

⁹⁷ Coburn, *Hell on Belle Isle*, 66.

⁹⁸ A. M. Keiley to Hon. James A. Seddon, *Secretary of War*, September 28, 1863. *OR* II:6:326.

⁹⁹ James A. Seddon, *Secretary of War*, to A. M. Keiley, Esq., *House of Delegates*, September 30, 1863. *OR* II:6:331.

¹⁰⁰ Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 119-120, 123-124.

¹⁰¹ Van Santvoord, *One Hundred and Twentieth N.Y.S. Vols.*, 95. Belle Isle Folder, RNBP.

¹⁰² Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 72-73.

requests of other officers, which did not require allegiance to the Confederacy. John Ransom did this and was able to leave Belle Isle during the day, though he was required to return in the evening. Escape was the second alternative available to the prisoners, but due to the rough waters of the James River surrounding Belle Isle, escape was nearly impossible. Some were successful, yet one of the only accounts from a successful escapee is that of George Erwin Comstock, who utilized a risky method of escape.

Comstock's escape was a spontaneous decision. He and his comrade Coolidge were sent by their tent mates to fetch the soup for supper. They arrived at the cookhouse only to discover that the soup was not ready yet. As they waited, they watched a line of previously selected sick men entering a tent to be paroled. Inspired by the moment, Comstock announced to Coolidge his intentions and casually walked over and joined the line of men to be paroled. After succeeding in the first stage of his escape, Comstock dropped to his knees, and "I had only been there a few moments until Coolidge came and fell down by my side as mightily agitated as myself. As he fell by my side he said, 'O God, Comstock, how can this be? How did we escape those guards?' I said, 'Yes, but keep still. We are not out yet.'¹⁰³ Both were able to pass the doctor's inspection and be paroled, despite the fact that they had not been selected previously.¹⁰⁴ Only a few were able to escape in this traditional sense. A more final method of escape was suicide. As prisoners were shot on sight for approaching the deadline, many prisoners chose to escape the torture of starvation and exposure by simply taking a few steps toward the ditch, where they were shot and killed.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Genoways and Genoways, *A Perfect Picture of Hell*, 215-216.

¹⁰⁴ Genoways and Genoways, *A Perfect Picture of Hell*, 215-216.

¹⁰⁵ Casstevens, "Out of the Mouth of Hell," 198, 200.

Escape attempts, under the Lieber Code, were not a punishable offense (see Articles 77 and 78 in Appendix 2).¹⁰⁶ The Confederacy's continued punishments for escape resulted in escalating tensions with the Union, because the Union expected the Confederacy to uphold the Lieber Code even though their administration played no part in drafting or approving the Code. At most, the prisoners who were caught attempting to escape could be subjected to increased confinement to prevent future escape attempts.¹⁰⁷ However, group escapes could be punished extensively. John Ransom and several of his comrades attempted an escape and attested to Bossieux punishing them severely: "we were bucked and gagged twice a day for an hour each time, and for four hours each of us carried a big stick of wood up and down in front of the gate, a guard to prick us with his bayonet if we walked too slow to suit him."¹⁰⁸ That was not the extent of their punishment. In addition to the harsh punishment the men endured during the day, "Hendryx had been strung up by the thumbs. Nights we have been thrown into a damp, cold guard house to shiver all night."¹⁰⁹ Colonel Streight, held in Libby Prison, did suffer unjust punishment after he attempted to escape with one other man. He described being thrown into a cell in the cellar of Libby where caught escapees were held in darkness and filth. A few had windows in their cells but many did not. They were also only fed bread and water during the three weeks they were held in the dank cellar. He wrote to the *New York Times* after escaping to describe his captivity and being in the cellar: "The weather was very cold during the time, and we nearly perished. There was a large amount of filth in the cell which I could not induce them to remove, nor could I get them to permit me to remove it."¹¹⁰ Other men were held in the cells with no blankets, two of whom were ill and denied medical treatment. These punishments, and

¹⁰⁶ Springer and Robins, *Transforming Civil War Prisons*, 17.

¹⁰⁷ Springer and Robins, *Transforming Civil War Prisons*, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Ransom, *John Ransom's Diary*, 40.

¹⁰⁹ Ransom, *John Ransom's Diary*, 40.

¹¹⁰ "The Condition of Prisoners in Richmond," *New York Times*, March 3, 1864.

other punishments enacted in Confederate prisons, were all violations of the Lieber Code, enraging Union officials who in turn demanded that ill or injured prisoners be released into Union care.

In November and December, 1863, a total of 489 sick and wounded prisoners were paroled from Belle Isle. Horrified Northerners described the liberated prisoners as having “dangling, long, attenuated arms and legs, sharp pinched features, ghastly cadaveric [sic] countenances, [and] deep sepulchral eyes.’ Their blackened skin was caked with ‘loathsome filth,’ they were covered with lice and ‘large foul ulcers and sores,’ and their battle wounds were largely untreated.”¹¹¹ The Lieber Code was in place at this point in time, if not signed by the Confederacy, and the soldiers’ bodies provided evidence of numerous violations. The condition of the prisoners at Belle Isle inspired Union General Ethan A. Hitchcock to declare that “history can hardly furnish a parallel to it.”¹¹² Union Colonel William Hoffman also ordered an investigation of Richmond prisons in direct response to the conditions on the James River island. Those conditions led prisoners to develop a sense of community and various coping mechanisms to survive the island.

Hope was important for the physical health of the prisoners in addition to the mental benefits. General Dow declared that “another class of causes [of disease] is the depressing moral influence prisoners labor under, especially noticeable since they have been told that there is no hope of exchange. They die from slight diseases, having lost all hope.”¹¹³ Ransom described the prisoners’ reaction to the possibility of parole when Lieutenant Bossieaux “stepped upon the bank and said that in less than a week we would all be home again, and such a cheering among us; every man who could yell had his mouth stretched. Persons who fifteen minutes ago could

¹¹¹ Wheelan, *Libby Prison Breakout*, 74-75.

¹¹² Hitchcock to Stanton, November 30, 1863, *OR* II:6:611.

¹¹³ Carrington to Winder, November 27, 1863, *OR* II:6:588.

not rise to their feet are jumping around in excitement.”¹¹⁴ Escape provided hope for many men. Ransom described meeting “E. P. Sanders, from Lansing Michigan, and a jolly old soul is he. Can’t get discouraged where he is. Talk a great deal about making our escape but there is not much prospect.”¹¹⁵ Ransom also described his time with his tent mates in which “we tell stories, dance around, keep as clean as we can without soap and make the best of a bad situation.”¹¹⁶ This reflected the camaraderie among the prisoners that they used to keep from succumbing to a state of depression from which they were unlikely to recover. The rules in Ransom’s tent even included the stipulation that they were “not to allow ourselves to get despondent, and must talk, laugh, and make light of our affairs as possible. Sure death for a person to give up and lose all ambition.”¹¹⁷ Coburn reiterated this notion that good spirits could keep a man alive when he wrote, “it does require a stout heart to keep from being utterly discouraged, and yet if I allow myself to indulge in such feeling I shall assuredly go down.”¹¹⁸ For prisoners, maintaining their health went a long way to keeping their spirits up. Tactics such as those implemented by the men in Ransom’s tent demonstrated historian Kathryn Meier’s idea that “self-care also improved morale because it reinforced the men’s sense of democratic identity, which involved the right and responsibility to care for one’s own well-being and that of one’s comrades.”¹¹⁹ Self-care and morale were intricately linked and the men fighting in the Civil War were aware of this, even using it to keep themselves and their friends alive during imprisonment.

When possible, prisoners sent letters home describing their conditions as a form of therapy and irregularly received mail in response. By November 8, 1863, the Confederates had

¹¹⁴ Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, 24.

¹¹⁵ Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, 21.

¹¹⁶ Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, 22.

¹¹⁷ Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, 22-23.

¹¹⁸ Coburn, *Hell on Belle Isle*, 111.

¹¹⁹ Meier, *Nature’s Civil War*, 3.

stopped the flow of mail out of the prison altogether.¹²⁰ Writing letters greatly lifted the spirits of the prisoners, and when this was taken away they suffered for it. Coburn, wishing to correspond with his fiancé Eva, wrote, “it often seems as if it would be such a relief if I could but write her and receive her sweet, interesting neat little love letters.”¹²¹ Two months later, Coburn received such a missive, writing in his diary, “Hi ho got a letter from Eva, the first I have received since my capture. O bless you Eva, ever faithful and true. I’ll try to be to you a good kind husband with God’s permission.”¹²² Coburn’s elated response was indicative of how much simple gestures meant to the despondent prisoners.

When General Dow initially heard of the crisis on Belle Isle, though he was imprisoned himself at Libby, he alerted Union officials via mail. His only means to do so was through “letters folded up and concealed in the shirt buttons of paroled surgeons and chaplains” who were on their way home, due to the restrictions placed on mail leaving Richmond’s prisons.¹²³ These letters received a direct response of clothing and blankets sent to Belle Isle prisoners with Dow overseeing the distribution “on parole of honor.”¹²⁴ Union Colonel Abel Streight had to escape from Libby to tell his story. After reaching Washington D.C., Streight drafted a report for a Congressman of the House Committee on Military Affairs. He began, “It is impossible for me to give you an account of all the acts of barbarity, inhumanity, and bad faith I have witnessed during my captivity.”¹²⁵ Streight, however, described Belle Isle as somehow even worse than the deplorable conditions he described at Libby. In May, 1863, the men in Colonel Streight’s regiment were sent from Libby to Belle Isle and “turned into an inclosure [sic] like so many

¹²⁰ Coburn, *Hell on Belle Isle*, 81.

¹²¹ Coburn, *Hell on Belle Isle*, 86.

¹²² Coburn, *Hell on Belle Isle*, 127.

¹²³ Wheelan, *Libby Prison Breakout*, 69.

¹²⁴ Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, 21.

¹²⁵ Wheelan, *Libby Prison Breakout*, 196.

cattle into a slaughter pen.”¹²⁶ He remarked that few tents were issued to his men and those tents that were issued “were so poor and leaky as to render them but little better than none.”¹²⁷ At least Streight and his fellow officers were sheltered from the elements inside the converted warehouse.

Another powerful coping mechanism employed on the island was music. In the fall of 1863, four soldiers formed a chorus quartet to raise their comrades’ spirits. Two died of exposure and starvation that October, but they were remembered as having “cheered up their sick and starving comrades.”¹²⁸ A. P. Watson, a member of the quartet, even composed a song detailing the horrors they encountered living on the island:

Comforts here are very great,
You get some grub though often late,
Just take the Sergeant by the hair,
And hold him until we get our share.

They feed us here but twice a day,
So little a bird could carry it away,
With stinkin’ meat and buggie soup,
That gives all the measles and the croup.¹²⁹

The descriptions of the food in the song were accurate, corroborated through numerous other personal accounts, including John Ransom and J. Osbourne Coburn. The buggie soup was often the most troubling to the prisoners who were disgusted by the amount of bugs found regularly in their food.

Belle Isle also inspired a song written by John Ross Dix, a British poet imprisoned at Belle Isle (see Appendix 4). Dix’s song aptly demonstrated how the prisoners rallied around a cause to keep their morale up. In his song, the prisoners were still determined to be faithful to the

¹²⁶ “The Condition of Prisoners in Richmond,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1864.

¹²⁷ “The Condition of Prisoners in Richmond,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1864.

¹²⁸ “The Belle Isle Quartet,” *National Tribune*, May 2, 1901. Belle Isle Folder, RNBPP.

¹²⁹ A. P. Watson, “The Belle Isle Prison Song,” RNBPP. Presented is only a selection of verses, not the complete song. For the complete lyrics, see Appendix 3.

Union, despite their suffering. These songs, though they described the degrading and unhealthy conditions on the island, were a vital coping mechanism for the prisoners who used song to lift their spirits and give them something to keep fighting for. Ransom mentioned a brass band visiting Belle Isle on January 10, 1863 in an attempt to lift the mood of the prisoners. This attempt was not successful as the brass band played only Confederate songs, which enraged the Union captives. About a month later, the Confederate songs were played again for the Yankee prisoners, but this time, instead of groaning, they responded by singing “Yankee Doodle” en masse.¹³⁰ Coping mechanisms such as these lifted the spirits of the men and gave them the moral push to fight illnesses and avoid a trip to the hospital.

One hope of the prisoners, in their desperation to leave Belle Isle, was to be shipped further south, away from the frigid Virginia winters, to Andersonville. Andersonville prison camp was created by General Winder as a direct response to the overcrowding on Belle Isle.¹³¹ Early in 1864, there was a sharp increase in the daily death rates of prisoners on the Richmond island. Medical Director William A. Carrington cited malnutrition and overcrowding as the primary reasons. His solution was “a more southern climate,” which would solve some problems, such as frostbite and hypothermia. Winder concurred with the doctor’s conclusion and began searching for a more southern location for his prisoners. Shortly thereafter, Winder’s son, William Sydney Winder, led the development of Camp Sumter.¹³² Known widely as Andersonville, Camp Sumter was built to hold ten thousand men, but came to hold 32,899 at one time, and was referred to by the prisoners as the “Southern Hades.” Similar to Belle Isle, the

¹³⁰ Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, 34, 42.

¹³¹ Davis, *Ghosts and Shadows of Andersonville*, 156.

¹³² Wheelan, *Libby Prison Breakout*, 133.

prisoners were exposed to the elements, but it was three times the geographic size of Belle Isle at sixteen and one half acres.¹³³

The initial wave of prisoners into Andersonville came from Belle Isle, which only altered the circumstances of their suffering rather than alleviating it as Winder intended. Prisoner accounts, including John Ransom, J. Osbourne Coburn, and William Tippet, record five or six hundred prisoners being shipped south daily, with everyone left behind yearning to be sent to Andersonville next. The conditions were similar to Belle Isle, but being farther south, the prisoner's primary concern was the heat rather than losing limbs to frostbite during the unusually cold Virginia winters of the Civil War. Many more men died at Andersonville than on Belle Isle, nearly thirteen thousand, though the number of men who died on the Richmond island is unknown because of the destruction of records and misinterpretation of numbers by Confederate officials. The prisoners so desperate to leave Belle Isle had no idea what lay in store for them in Georgia. All they knew was that they were being offered a chance to leave their current suffering.¹³⁴

Contradicting most prisoner accounts from Belle Isle, Confederate Major Isaac Carrington described the rations thusly: "There have been issued full rations of all the articles mentioned in the abstract excepting meat. Owing to the large number of prisoners suddenly consigned to their care without notice, the officers have not always been able to provide a full ration of meat. The deficiency has never existed but for a short time, and whenever it did exist it was remedied as far as possible by extra issue of other articles."¹³⁵ As stated previously, food shortage was an issue, but the Confederacy was receiving goods from the Union that did not all

¹³³ Casstevens, "*Out of the Mouth of Hell*," 181.

¹³⁴ In his diary, John Ransom titled a chapter A Good-bye to Belle Isle—Good place to be move from. He was sent to Andersonville.

¹³⁵ Maj. Isaac Carrington to Brig. Gen. John H. Winder, November 18, 1863, *OR* II:6:545.

make it to the intended recipients, due to the Confederate guards claiming portions of the goods for themselves. Carrington went on to list what was included in those rations: “one pound of bread, half pound of meat, half pound of potatoes, rice or beans, vinegar, soap, and salt” despite numerous reports to the contrary.¹³⁶ Coburn noted drastically fewer rations, but did add that it was possible to trade for cake or pie in the camp streets, though there is no mention of where these cakes and pies came from. In all likelihood, Coburn purchased the treats from sutlers in the camp. In regards to prisoners suffering and dying due to lack of food or method of keeping clean, Carrington blamed the prisoners themselves for a lack of ambition. In reality, prisoners lacked the supplies needed to maintain their health, such as soap and clean clothing. Carrington’s findings are not surprising as he was a Confederate officer investigating Confederate prisons to assuage Northern worries regarding the conditions in which their soldiers were kept.

The image depicted by Carrington does not conform with other accounts coming out of Belle Isle. One such account was enclosed in a report to General Hitchcock that described a U.S. Army officer who had visited Belle Isle after imprisonment in Libby, where hordes of prisoners followed him and begged for bread.¹³⁷ General Dow also wrote, “They are on half rations, have no fuel of any kind, no soap is issued to them.”¹³⁸ In November, 1863, John Ransom described the rations as “half a pint of rice soup and one quarter of a pound of corn bread. The bread is made from the very poorest meal, course sour and musty; would make poor feed for swine at home.”¹³⁹ Historian Roger Pickenpaugh also noted that Richmond’s bread riots led the citizens of Richmond to steal bread meant for the prisoners, compounding the issue.¹⁴⁰ Less than ten days after the initial letter describing how great things were at Belle Isle to General Winder,

¹³⁶ Carrington to Winder, November 18, 1863, *OR* II:6:545.

¹³⁷ Meredith to Hitchcock, November 26, 1863, *OR* II:6:573.

¹³⁸ Hussey to Unknown, November 7, 1863, *OR* II:6:482.

¹³⁹ Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, 18.

¹⁴⁰ Pickenpaugh, *Captives in Blue*, 95.

Carrington sent a private letter more accurately describing the condition of the prisoners on the island: “They have not sufficient quantity of blankets nor sufficient fuel supplied. They sleep on the ground and are exposed to all the vicissitudes of temperature incident to our climate.”¹⁴¹ Despite Confederate attempts to cover up the deplorable conditions, the Union government was not convinced.

In May 1864, the Union Joint Committee on the Conduct of War began to investigate Confederate treatment of Union prisoners. They reviewed prisoners who had been exchanged to the Annapolis, Maryland, parole camp. These prisoners came from both Libby and Belle Isle. The condition the prisoners were found to be in so abhorred Colonel Hoffman that he declared retaliation against Confederate prisoners by reducing the rations in all Union prison camps. Eight prisoners from Libby and Belle Isle were photographed for the report, but two had died before the visit of the committee, two died immediately after, and the remaining four were recovering. Their testimony, and the testimony of the other released prisoners at Annapolis, revealed exaggerated conditions of the two Richmond prisons. The conclusion reached within the report was that the Confederacy had deliberately disabled Union soldiers and attempted murder through starvation.¹⁴²

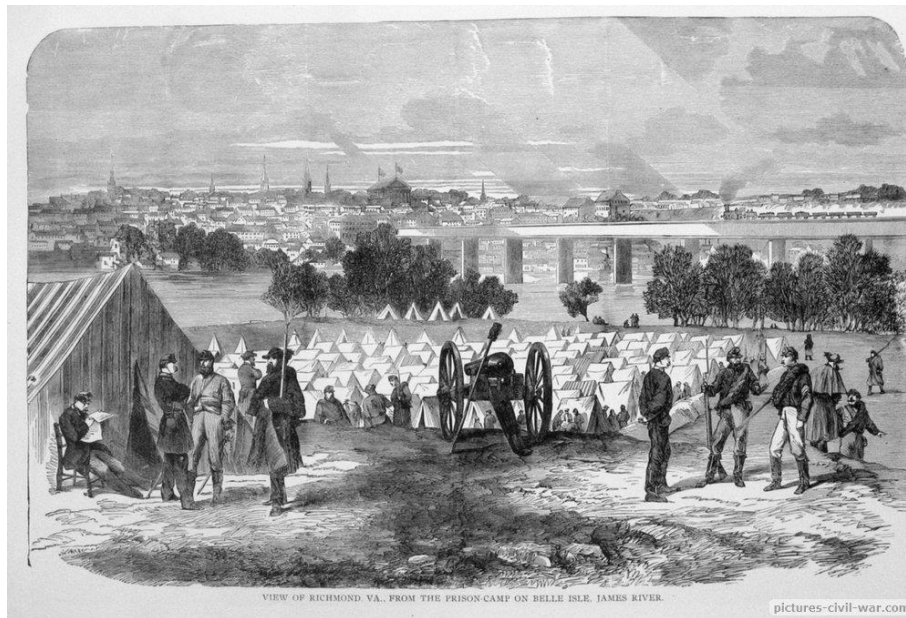
This report was not the only investigation into the conditions on Belle Isle. Newspapers also frequently commented on the conditions and called for investigations of prisons in both the Union and the Confederacy. Despite reports such as Isaac Carrington’s private letter and missives from the prisoners, some newspapers reported that all was well on Belle Isle. The *Richmond Examiner* reported that, after Belle Isle closed temporarily in 1862, “the removal of the tents revealed a great number of wells sunk by the Yankees, which provided them with

¹⁴¹ Carrington to Winder, November 27, 1863, *OR* II:6:588.

¹⁴² Hesselstine, *Civil War Prisons*, 195-199.

abundance of good water.”¹⁴³ This is a stark contrast with prisoner reports of unclean water that led to chronic problems of diarrhea and other health issues among the prisoners. Many prisoners took precautions with the drinking water provided on Belle Isle. Ransom’s tent mates had laid ground rules to remain living in the tent which included “drink[ing] no water until it has been boiled, which process purifies and makes it more healthy.”¹⁴⁴ An unnamed author described a canal dug so that the prisoners did not have to approach the river for drinking water. However, “the water could not be used for drinking purposes in the warm months, and the prisoners sunk barrels in the sand. The water obtained from these was better, but still tainted by the seepage from camp filth and deposits.”¹⁴⁵

A year later, the *Richmond Examiner* still upheld this ideal image of Belle Isle: “The camp is beautifully laid out, with streets formed by the rows of tents, and wells are sunk in every



street.”¹⁴⁶ The article neglected to mention the shortage of tents and the diseased soldiers living in the “streets.” William Tippet noted, “many prisoners have no shelter or Blankets they

Figure 5: An Idealized Belle Isle. Image found in Coburn, *Hell on Belle Isle*, 61.

¹⁴³ “City Intelligence,” *Richmond Examiner*, Sept. 24, 1862. RNBP.

¹⁴⁴ Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, 22.

¹⁴⁵ Coburn, *Hell on Belle Isle*, 63.

¹⁴⁶ “Belle Isle,” *Richmond Examiner*, Sept. 1, 1863. RNBP.

have to stay out in the streets of the camp all the time in all kinds of weather.”¹⁴⁷ *The Southern Opinion* even claimed that Belle Isle was “a paradise compared to Johnson’s Island and Point Lookout, swept over by the keen winds of winter and parched by the torrid [illegible] of summer without shelter or shade.”¹⁴⁸ This Confederate ideal lasted for generations. In 1946, historian Alfred Hoyt Bill wrote about Richmond in the Civil War, and claimed that the prisoner’s “low death rate bore witness to the healthfulness of their conditions.”¹⁴⁹

Historian Frances H. Casstevens, writing in 2005, claimed that compared to other Richmond prisons, “Belle Isle was a paradise.”¹⁵⁰ However, one prisoner visiting Belle Isle from Libby claimed, “this place has the advantage over Libby [and other Richmond prisons] in that there was an abundance of fresh air and sunlight, but, these apart, it was infinitely worse.”¹⁵¹ The prisoner, only noted as Morgan the Famous Raider, emphasized how the prisoners on Belle Isle were so much worse off: “lines of tattered tents, holes dug in the wet sand and covered with roofs of ragged canvas, shelters of earth and barrel staves, in which the prisoners crouched together from the cold, and where death kept his headquarters, and yet so crowded was the island that only the fortunate ones had this protection.”¹⁵² Shockingly, the same newspaper article cited here was one of the most cited newspaper articles in Casstevens’s discussion on Belle Isle, revealing just how neglected Belle Isle is in the historiographical literature. Casstevens did acknowledge this article, but glossed over how poor conditions were on the island, simply asserting that they had no protection from the elements as a sort of “however” to the sentence prior in which she reasserted her idea that Belle Isle was better for prisoners than Libby. Later in

¹⁴⁷ Tippet, November 15, 1863, Diary, LVA. Tippet frequently capitalized the word “blanket” in his diary, an indication of the importance of the item.

¹⁴⁸ “Belle Isle in the James,” *The Southern Opinion*, August 10, 1867. RNBP.

¹⁴⁹ Bill, *The Beleaguered City*, 144.

¹⁵⁰ Casstevens, “*Out of the Mouth of Hell*,” 189.

¹⁵¹ “Prisoners on Belle Isle,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1891.

¹⁵² “Prisoners on Belle Isle,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1891.

the chapter, she even included the quote above from Morgan, but neglected that Morgan was arguing how much worse Belle Isle was compared to Libby.¹⁵³

Given the abysmal conditions of prison camps, newspapers argued for reinstatement of the Dix-Hill Cartel in an effort to have their soldiers returned home, disregarding the enslavement of black Union troops and executions of their white officers. President Lincoln sided with the newspapers on this issue, but the majority of army and government officials did not. Drawing on the historical record of past wars, supporters of retaliation pulled examples from times when Americans had practiced retaliation against prisoners of war, namely in the Quasi-War in 1799 and the War of 1812.¹⁵⁴ Union General-In-Chief Henry W. Halleck declared that “retaliation is fully justified by the laws and usages of war, and the present case seems to call for the exercise of this extreme right....it is revolting to our sense of humanity to be forced to so cruel an alternative.”¹⁵⁵ In the end, the Union administration decided on retaliation, with General Ethan Allen Hitchcock instilling punitive measures for Confederate prisoners in Union prisons: “Commandants banished the sutlers, whose wares had eased the Confederate captives’ lives, and then they issued a blanket ban against all prisoner purchases.”¹⁵⁶ Rations were cut back and Hitchcock advised that prisoners be moved from any low security prisons to state penitentiaries or islands for added security against insurrections.

Newspapers of the North and South were also at war with one another: “the *Richmond Dispatch* accused Northern newspapers of spreading lies about the Rebel war prisons in order to ‘blow up the declining war spirit in the North,’ and to justify the ‘new cruelties’ that the Union

¹⁵³ Casstevens, “*Out of the Mouth of Hell*,” 190-191.

¹⁵⁴ Wheelan, *Libby Prison Breakout*, 76-77.

¹⁵⁵ H. W. Halleck to Hon. E. M. Stanton, *Secretary of War*, November 15, 1863. *OR* II:6:524.

¹⁵⁶ Wheelan, *Libby Prison Breakout*, 77.

had in store for the Rebel captives.”¹⁵⁷ Northern newspapers on the other hand, “suggested that Southerners had been corrupted and dehumanized by the institution of slavery and could not be trusted to care properly for Union captives.”¹⁵⁸ This tension lasted throughout the war, with both Union and Confederate newspapers feeding off of and retaliating against one another in this manner which led to legal investigations.

Harper’s Weekly announced a report examining prisoners from Libby and Belle Isle, simply telling the public that “the harrowing and sickening details....are sad beyond belief, and they are incontestably established.”¹⁵⁹ The previous December, the same newspaper described Belle Isle as “a sandy desert...low, damp, swept with winds, and wrapped in fogs. Our men are without blankets, and but one-third of them sheltered under mould-eaten tents. All the starved sicken instantly, and run down with a frightful rapidity.”¹⁶⁰ The Northern newspapers recounted stories very similar to those preserved in diaries and letters written by prisoners while they were on the island, as well as in the years that passed after the war. Newspapers were designed to incite passion and response in their readers, and should therefore be analyzed with caution, but the North was reporting far more accurate news than the South in regards to Confederate prisons.

Memoirs published after the Civil War were common among the soldiers who fought in an attempt to relate what had happened to them to others. Those who had been imprisoned “attempted to portray the inhumanity of their captors and to describe their battles against boredom, loss of hope, the weather, starvation, disease, and death.”¹⁶¹ J. Osborn Coburn was one such soldier, though his memoir was actually a diary, transcribed into a memoir nearly a century

¹⁵⁷ Wheelan, *Libby Prison Breakout*, 79.

¹⁵⁸ Springer and Robins, *Transforming Civil War Prisons*, 65.

¹⁵⁹ “Rebel Treatment of Union Prisoners,” *Harper’s Weekly*, Oct. 29, 1864, 691.

¹⁶⁰ “Union Prisoners at Richmond,” *Harper’s Weekly*, Dec. 5, 1863, 779. This article was published in conjunction with Figure 4.

¹⁶¹ Springer and Robins *Transforming Civil War Prisons*, 80.

and a half after his death.¹⁶² Coburn perished in a Richmond hospital and his belongings, including his diary, were sent to his family where the diary was destroyed in a house fire in the 1970s. The only saving grace was that a past family member had submitted portions of the diary for publication in a newspaper mini-series, providing insight into the deteriorating conditions at Belle Isle as the war progressed.

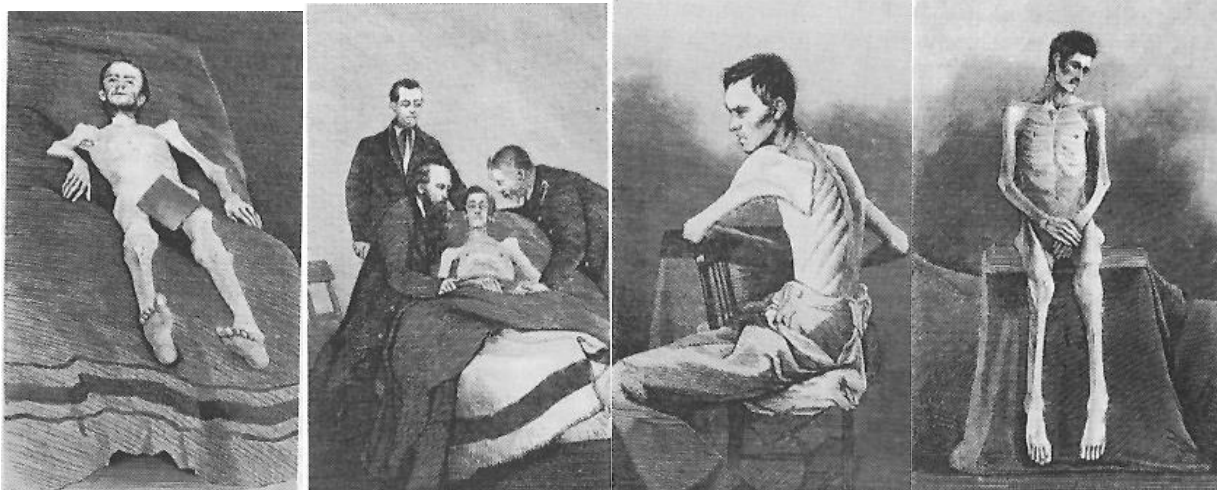


Figure 6: Lithographs of paroled prisoners from Belle Isle, sent to Annapolis, Maryland. Coburn, *Hell on Belle Isle*, 72-75.

The overall quality of life, or what little the prisoners had, deteriorated drastically by the end of the prison camp's life-span: "The men lived in pits clawed in the ground and a dozen a day died; starving prisoners trapped, cooked, and consumed dogs belonging to rebel officers; and men driven mad by hunger sometimes ate their comrades' vomited breakfasts."¹⁶³ Even William Carrington, who had previously sugar-coated the conditions on Belle Isle, was horrified at the condition prisoners were kept in:

An area sufficient for the accommodation of about 3,000 men have been crowded for many months past from 6,000 to 10,000 prisoners. To prevent escapes they have not been allowed to visit the sinks at night. These deposits of excrement have been made in the streets and small vacant spaces between the tents.... The whole

¹⁶² Coburn, *Hell on Belle Isle*, 13-14.

¹⁶³ Wheelan, *Libby Prison Breakout*, 213.

surface of the camp has thus been saturated with putrid animal matter.¹⁶⁴

By the time of this report, prisoners were being shipped en masse from Belle Isle to Andersonville as Union troops approached the Capital of the Confederacy. Surgeon Wilkins noted that the prisoners coming from Belle Isle to Richmond hospitals were in such bad of shape that most could not identify themselves. Of those that died, most succumbed to chronic diarrhea, as did J. Osborn Coburn.¹⁶⁵ Perhaps Surgeon Wilkins had cared for Coburn personally. This was likely given that Wilkins was the surgeon in charge of Hospital No. 21 where Coburn spent his final days.¹⁶⁶

By April 14, 1865, Belle Isle prison camp was emptied. The records do not survive of when and how this happened, but on April 14, the Richmond *Whig* reported that Belle Isle was to become a refugee camp, describing the island as “the once notorious prison camp.”¹⁶⁷ Richmond newspapers did not comment on the emptying of the prison, but some prisoners were likely sent south to other camps as the war drew to a close while others were paroled. The focus of the island returned to industry for several decades, but today it is a place of leisure. The ghosts of the prisoners who suffered on the island are only marked by a few signs, two memorials, and reconstructed earthworks to remind the sunbathers and hikers of the suffering that occurred there.

¹⁶⁴ Report on the sanitary condition of Belle Isle and the causes of mortality among the patients by Surg. G. W. Semple to Medical Director William Carrington, March 6, 1864, *OR II*:6:1087.

¹⁶⁵ JNO. Wilkins to William Carrington, March 7, 1864, *OR II*:6:1089.

¹⁶⁶ Coburn, *Hell on Belle Isle*, 137.

¹⁶⁷ “Richmond Whig, 4/14/1865,” Civil War Richmond, http://www.mdgorman.com/Written_Accounts/Whig/1865/richmond_whig_4141865.htm, accessed Sept. 8, 2016.

Chapter 2

Point Lookout Prison Camp

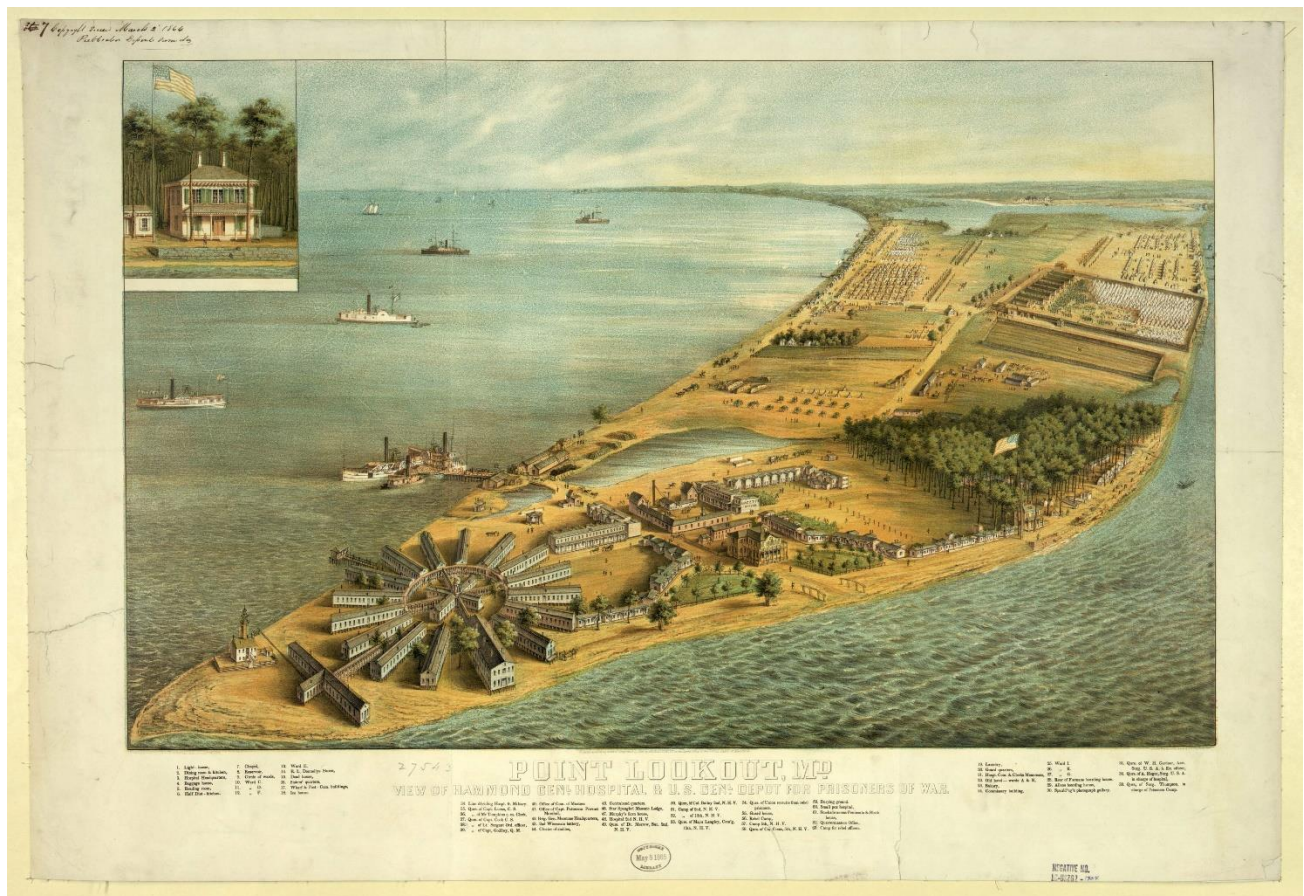


Figure 7: Aerial depiction of Point Lookout Hospital and Prisoner of War Camp. Accessed September 26, 2016 <https://oldtowncrier.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/civil-discourse-point-lookout.jpg>

Point Lookout was a Union camp for Confederate prisoners in St. Mary's County, Maryland, on an isolated peninsula. The Potomac River washes the sandy shores on the western side, while the eastern side is bathed by the Chesapeake Bay. It was "said to be the best prison in the north, but...there is nothing enchanting about this place."¹⁶⁸ However, life at Point Lookout could be much more bearable than life at Belle Isle. At Point Lookout, there were means to make oneself at least moderately comfortable through improved housing for example, yet unimaginable suffering still occurred on the sandy shores in the form of retaliation by the Union government. Point Lookout prison camp serves as an ideal point of comparison in regards to Belle Isle, as well as Confederate and Northern prison camps as wholes, because it served an important role in the web of Northern Civil War prisons as the largest Union prison. It also provides an excellent lens through which to view the back-and-forth of the two governments in response to the treatment and exchange of prisoners of war, primarily because retaliation was apparent at Point Lookout, violating the Lieber Code.

The prison camp, officially named Camp Hoffman, was commonly referred to as Point Lookout after the peninsula on which it was located. It was the largest camp in the Union, holding roughly 52,000 prisoners over its lifespan, of which nearly 4,000 prisoners, or eight percent, lost their lives.¹⁶⁹ Richard H. Triebe, author of *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital: The North's Largest Civil War Prison*, has increased this number by over four hundred in recent years through extensive research.¹⁷⁰ Point Lookout was home to a resort, complete with

¹⁶⁸ Matthew Wood Allen to Martha Susan Smaw, April 5, 1865, Manuscript Collection, Virginia Historical Society, Virginia. Hereafter cited as VHS.

¹⁶⁹ Matthew Wood Allen, *Personal Journal of Matthew Wood Allen, Private, Grimes Battery—Portsmouth Light Artillery, July 1, 1862 through June 23, 1865*. 68, Manuscript Collection, VHS.

¹⁷⁰ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, XI. It should be noted that Triebe intended this work as a follow up to Edwin W. Beitzell's *Point Lookout Prison Camp for Confederates*. While Triebe did some tremendous work in his volume in building on Beitzell's foundation, readers should be aware of a strong bias in Triebe's work. His hatred for the Union government, particularly President Lincoln and Secretary of War E. Stanton has impaired

cottages, a hotel, summer homes, and a light house before it housed a prison camp. With the onset of the war, recreation declined and the Union government turned its eye to the land known for its healthy sea breezes. The government leased the land, and built Hammond General Hospital for Union troops. After the Battle of Gettysburg at the beginning of July, 1863, the Union suddenly had a prisoner problem. Union forces captured thousands of prisoners in just three days and, with all of their prison camps already full, they had nowhere to house their new prisoners. Since Point Lookout was already established as a Union stronghold, the prisoners were sent there, to be housed in Hammond General until a prison camp could be erected.¹⁷¹

After the camp was completed, officers were held in a separate enclosure of roughly ten acres. This smaller prison was only in operation from August, 1863, to June, 1864, when the officers were sent to Fort Delaware to make room for more hospital tents for the prisoners. The prison for enlisted soldiers was double the size of the officer's prison at roughly 20 acres and was enclosed by a twelve-foot-tall fence made of two-inch planks. A walkway was on the outside of the fence, about three feet from the top that allowed the guards to monitor the goings on inside the prison from a safe vantage point, as can be seen in Figure 8. In this image by John Jacob Omenhausser, three prisoners discussed the sale of tobacco from a prisoner to a sentinel. The African American guard in the image, hearing this, declared "if I had known dat afore, he was gwoine to do me so, I'd kill's him on the spot." This dialogue was just one of the many indicators of racial tension inside the Union prison camp, to be discussed in depth below. Inside this fence were ten streets, roughly twenty feet wide. Each street was meant to hold a division,

much of his analysis and should be interpreted carefully. However, he was able to sift through personal accounts and compare them with the official records to discover 432 men who died unaccounted for, with sufficient evidence.

¹⁷¹ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 11-13.

which was made up of roughly ten companies of 100 men. As the prison population expanded, so did the number of streets, until there were twenty streets after prisoner exchanges ceased.¹⁷²



Figure 8: Three prisoners below a sentry, Private John Jacob Omenhausser, found in Ross M. Kimmel and Michael P. Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures:" *The Civil War Art and Letters of Private John Jacob Omenhausser*, (Annapolis, MD: Friends of the Maryland State Archives: 2014) 43.

¹⁷² Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 24.

Such a large number of prisoners required fastidious leadership. Colonel William Hoffman was the Superintendent of Prisoners for the Union, and as such was responsible for appointing officers and controlling the flow of prisoners. Hoffman looked favorably upon Point Lookout and would have sent many more prisoners to the location if not for the prison's proximity to Virginia and, therefore, the Confederacy.¹⁷³ There were four different commandants in charge of Camp Hoffman during its time of operation. The first was Brigadier-General James Marston, from July, 1863, to December, 1863. He was succeeded by Brigadier-General E. W. Hinks from December, 1863 to April, 1864. The third commandant was Colonel Alonzo G. Draper, from April to July of 1864. Draper was commandant for such a short time due to his ceaseless raids of Virginia for tobacco, drawing away his attention and the troops needed to guard Point Lookout's prison.¹⁷⁴ The final commandant was Brigadier-General James Barnes from July, 1864, to the close of the prison. Barnes earned a respected reputation among the prisoners as being fair and kind.¹⁷⁵

The provost marshalls of the camp were somewhat more long-lived in their positions, as there were only three of them. The first was Captain J. N. Patterson from July, 1863, to February, 1864. He was succeeded by Major H. George Weymouth who served in the role from March, 1864, to September, 1864. The final provost marshall was Major A. G. Brady who served from September, 1864, to June, 1865. The three provost marshalls, the four commandants, and the superintendent of prisoners all corresponded with the Union commissioner of exchanges, General Benjamin Butler. Known as "The Beast," Butler gained an unfavorable reputation among the prisoners held in the North for his lack of empathy.¹⁷⁶ Despite Butler's reputation,

¹⁷³ Beitzell, *Point Lookout Prison Camp for Confederates*, 182.

¹⁷⁴ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 66.

¹⁷⁵ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 90.

¹⁷⁶ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 56, 57, 58

according to historians Edwin W. Beitzell and Richard H. Triebe, the majority of the hardships suffered by Confederate prisoners of war were caused by Union Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton.¹⁷⁷

Stanton, according to Beitzell, was single-handedly responsible for the lack of food, clothing, and other supplies that caused the deaths of so many prisoners at Point Lookout.¹⁷⁸ Triebe supported this claim, stating that “the Federal government was fully aware of what was happening at their prisoner of war camps, but did little to relieve the men’s suffering. The North had an abundance of food and clothing, but due to cruel decisions in high places these materials were not adequately distributed.”¹⁷⁹ Triebe compiled some substantial evidence that Stanton was fully aware of the suffering of prisoners and made malicious decisions to keep them miserable; however, Triebe failed to take into account other demands placed on the Secretary of War that could have diverted him from the prisoner of war problem, or any other mitigating circumstances.¹⁸⁰ One example of Triebe casting blame onto Stanton was his reference to Colonel Hoffman declaring that prisoners would not be issued clothing if they already had any, “however much torn, you must issue nothing to him, nor must you allow him to receive clothing from any but members of his immediate family, and only when they are in absolute want.”¹⁸¹ Triebe only blamed Stanton for this, claiming that Hoffman could not have issued the order without Stanton’s express consent, neglecting the possibility that Stanton could have made the decision to trust Hoffman to make his own decisions on some matters. There is not enough evidence for support in either direction, but delegations such as those were common, and are still to this day, making it likely that Hoffman was left to make many decisions on his own.

¹⁷⁷ Beitzell is considered to be the definitive historian of Point Lookout’s prison camp.

¹⁷⁸ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 76.

¹⁷⁹ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, IX.

¹⁸⁰ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 13, 20, 31, 87.

¹⁸¹ Colonel Hoffman, quoted in Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 31.

Stanton may not have been as evil as Beitzell and Triebe attempted to portray him in their works, but the Union government certainly favored harsh treatment of Confederate prisoners under a policy of retaliation. In a paper written by General Henry W. Halleck, discovered after his death, one can see the method of thinking within the Union government in regards to utilizing the treatment of prisoners of war as a method of retaliation against the Confederate government. General Halleck was a key player in the prisoner exchange systems of the Civil War, acting as a consult in the creation of the Lieber Code, due to his experience with the subject.¹⁸² When the Union government learned of the conditions in which their soldiers were being starved in Confederate prison camps, Halleck declared, “if the actual authors and agents of this cruelty to our soldiers can not be reached, may we retaliate upon individuals who have not been active participants in such cruelty? We answer, undoubtedly yes.”¹⁸³ This supports political scientist Geoffrey P. R. Wallace’s idea that “states feel less bound by legal constraints if their adversary failed to commit” to their agreement, which provides insight into why the Union government was able to justify their retaliation in the form of prisoner abuse.¹⁸⁴ Under the Lieber Code put in place by the Union, prisoners of war were to be treated humanely and be provided with the same rations as soldiers in the field, as well as all necessary shelter and clothing to keep them comfortable. While the Confederacy never signed this order, the Union delivered it to them and expected them to treat their prisoners appropriately. When the food and supply shortages in the Confederacy began impacting the quality of life among the prisoners of war, the Union retaliated by reducing rations to Confederate prisoners. Stanton himself declared that, “precisely the same rations and treatment be henceforth practiced to the whole number of rebel officers remaining in

¹⁸² Witt, *Lincoln’s Code*, 2, 190-196.

¹⁸³ Henry Wager Halleck, “Retaliation in War,” *The Journal of International Law* 6, no. 1 (Jan., 1912): 111, www.jstor.org (accessed Aug. 24, 2016).

¹⁸⁴ Geoffrey P. R. Wallace, “Welcome Guests, or Inescapable Victims? The Causes of Prisoner Abuse in War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 6 (2012): 970, jcr.sagepub.com (accessed Aug. 31, 2016).

our hands that are practiced against either soldiers or officers in our service held by the rebels.”¹⁸⁵ Prisoner abuse as a form of retaliation had a long-standing history before the Civil War and though the Confederate and Union governments attempted to avoid deliberate abuse through military negotiations, in the end that negotiated agreement was not successful.

Wallace provided several possible motivations for the abuse of prisoners of war. First, Wallace declared, “prisoner abuse provides a means to test the enemy’s capability and resolve to continue fighting by increasing the costs of war,” essentially a war of attrition.¹⁸⁶ The Civil War is an excellent example of a war of attrition with one side grinding down the other back and forth until one of them had no manpower or resources left to wage war. As the Union closed in on Richmond, the Confederacy was losing fighting men at an alarming rate and supply sources were being cut off. After Richmond fell, the Confederate army had little to no resources at their disposal. Earlier in the war, when prisoner exchanges under the Dix-Hill Cartel were running smoothly, the Union government began to realize that by exchanging prisoners, they were handing resources back to the Confederacy. If they stopped prisoner exchanges, the number of Confederate soldiers would be reduced with every capture on the battlefield. When the Confederate officials refused to acknowledge African American soldiers as such, by treating them as escaped slaves, Union officials leapt at the chance to stop prisoner exchanges. Ceasing prisoner exchanges, however, lead to increased costs incurred by both governments.

One of the most significant contributors to prisoner abuse was lack of funds and resources. Wallace’s second theory that could lead to prisoner abuse was that “reallocating funds away from maintaining prisoners frees up resources to serve more pressing needs.”¹⁸⁷ For the Confederacy this inadvertently meant prioritizing their own soldiers and civilians over prisoners

¹⁸⁵ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 79.

¹⁸⁶ Wallace, “Welcome Guests, or Inescapable Victims?,” 960.

¹⁸⁷ Wallace, “Welcome Guests, or Inescapable Victims?,” 960.

of war. This in turn led to the Union declaration of retaliation in the form of prisoner abuse. When rations were reduced at Point Lookout, prisoners “were told that the short rations were given us in retaliation for the scanty food supplied to their soldiers in Southern prisons.”¹⁸⁸ Despite the Union government’s apparent enthusiasm for the policy of retaliation, Point Lookout prisoner George M. Neese pointed out, “our good people of the North ought to remember that they pronounce us Southerners ‘barbarians.’ Therefore, exalted civilization and pious enlightenment ought to blush with shame to hang its priceless diadem so low that its kindly light still leads its sanctified devotees to the shrine of the greatest transgression of returning evil for evil.”¹⁸⁹ As retaliation was practiced on prisoners of war even past General Robert E. Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, this thought did not seem to weigh too heavily on the minds inside the Union government, and did not stop with military prisoners of war.

Civilians were also subjected to abuse and suffering as prisoners of war. Wallace hypothesized that “the greater domestic demands placed upon democracies make them more willing to fight in nastier ways to prevail, such as victimizing enemy civilians.”¹⁹⁰ At Point Lookout, this theory is readily visible through the civilian prisoners held there, resulting in 38 civilian prisoner of war deaths.¹⁹¹ Civilian and political prisoners were arrested almost daily while the Courthouse at Leonardtown, the seat of St. Mary’s County, Maryland, was occupied by Federal troops from 1862 to 1865. During this time, hundreds of Confederate sympathizers were arrested and most were detained at Point Lookout.¹⁹² There is no mention as to whether these

¹⁸⁸ Hopkins, *From Bull Run to Appomattox*, LOC 1436.

¹⁸⁹ George M. Neese, *Confederate Horse Artillery* (Southaven, MS: Booker House Publishing, Incorporated, 2012) Kindle Edition, LOC 9651.

¹⁹⁰ Wallace, “Welcome Guests, or Inescapable Victims?,” 963.

¹⁹¹ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 106.

¹⁹² Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 11.

political prisoners were held in a separate pen or facility from the soldiers and officers, but there was private housing for the women arrested and imprisoned at Point Lookout.¹⁹³

Women, though few and far between, were imprisoned as political prisoners at Point Lookout, with one exception. Two women were noted as blockade runners captured in Leonardtown, but they were not held long at Point Lookout before they were sent to the Old Capital Prison in Washington D. C.¹⁹⁴ A third unknown female political prisoner was held for an unknown charge.¹⁹⁵ Jane A. Perkins, however, was an artillery sergeant held in the soldier's pen for three months. A schoolteacher from Danville, Virginia, Perkins followed her husband into war. She cropped her hair short and joined Captain B. Z. Price's artillery division along with her husband. She either never officially registered or, more likely, registered under a pseudonym. She was captured at the Battle of North Anna and sent to Point Lookout. After her arrival at Point Lookout, not only was her gender discovered, but also the fact that she was six and a half months pregnant, later giving birth to a baby boy while confined at Point Lookout. When Provost Marshall Brady asked why she had been imprisoned, Perkins supposedly claimed, "I can straddle a horse, jump a fence, and kill a Yankee as well as any Rebel."¹⁹⁶ She was assigned her own private tent while at Point Lookout.¹⁹⁷ United States Army Surgeon C. T. Alexander requested her removal in a missive to Colonel Hoffman.¹⁹⁸ Prisoner Marcus B. Toney recorded a story similar to Perkins, but noted that she was assigned women's clothing and immediately sent from the camp. Whether this was the same woman, or a different one, is unknown.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹³ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 23.

¹⁹⁴ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 23; Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 64.

¹⁹⁵ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 64.

¹⁹⁶ Louis Leon, *Diary of a Tar Heel Confederate Soldier*, (Charlotte, NC: Stone Publishing Company, 1913), 66.

¹⁹⁷ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 64.

¹⁹⁸ C. T. Alexander to Colonel William Hoffman, *OR II*:7:450.

¹⁹⁹ Toney, *The Privations of a Private*, 82.

Southern African Americans were also held at Point Lookout. Historian Edwin W. Beitzell noted at least four African American prisoners of war. Three were captured crossing the Potomac River and imprisoned when they refused to divulge information or swear the Oath of Allegiance to the United States. The fourth, only known by the name Dick, was a Confederate cook who had been captured at Gettysburg. He also refused to swear the oath of allegiance and was imprisoned at Point Lookout for twenty months.²⁰⁰ Unfortunately, there is no information indicating why those African-American prisoners would not swear the Oath of Allegiance to the United States.

Soldiers faced many new experiences as prisoners of war at Point Lookout. One of the most shocking for the staunch Confederates was the sight of African Americans as their guards. Most prisoners felt that the use of African Americans as guards was a form of vengeance that “made our Southern blood boil.”²⁰¹ Confederate prisoners remembered the African American guards as malicious, but given the racial tensions of the times, it is difficult to discern what mistreatments the African American guards carried out and which ones were fabricated or exaggerated by the prisoners who disliked the role reversal. It is clear that prisoners at Point Lookout suffered at the hands of their guards, both African American and Caucasian, though it was not to the extent that prisoners suffered at Belle Isle under its guards. Several prisoners at Point Lookout, including John Jacob Omenhausser, noted the African American guards declared “the bottom rail had got on top.”²⁰² Omenhausser drew a representation of an African American guard threatening a prisoner to reiterate the hostility prisoners received from the guards. In

²⁰⁰ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 39.

²⁰¹ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 99, 87.

²⁰² Ross M. Kimmel and Michael P. Musick, “*I Am Busy Drawing Pictures:*” *The Civil War Art and Letters of Private John Jacob Omenhausser*, (Annapolis, MD: Friends of the Maryland State Archives, 2014), 91.

Figure 9, the guard declared “Git away from dat dar fence white man, or I’ll make old Abe’s gun smoke at you, I can hardly hold de shell back in dar barrell,-The bottom rails on top now.”



Figure 9: A black sentry taunts a white prisoner. Omenhausser, found in Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 92.

These African American guards were sent to Point Lookout on February 25, 1864, and were members of the 24th and 36th Regiments of Colored Troops. Many Confederate prisoners felt that the use of African Americans as guards was a form of vengeance. Prisoner B. T. Holliday remembered, "It was a bitter pill for Southern men to swallow and we felt the insult very keenly. They were impudent and tyrannical and the prisoners had to submit to many

indignities.”²⁰³ Imprisoned Captain Robert E. Park declared, “this employment of former slaves to guard their masters is intended to insult and degrade the latter. Such petty malice and cowardly vengeance could originate only in ignoble minds. No generous heart could have ever devised or sanctioned such contemptible meanness and littleness.”²⁰⁴ Luther Hopkins noted the arrival of African American guards and declared that their presence, “made our Southern blood boil. As the darkies used to say, ‘The bottom rail had got on top.’”²⁰⁵ The blind hatred that many prisoners felt for the African American guards has made it difficult to tell reality from embellishment or even total falsification in the records. Some prisoners, such as John R. King, declared that he had African American friends, yet still recorded “the negro guard was very insolent and delighted in tantalizing the prisoners, for some trifle affair, we were often accused of disobedience and they would say, ‘Look out, white man, the bottom rail is on top now, so you had better be careful for my gun has been wanting to smoke at you all day!’”²⁰⁶ Shooting of prisoners by the African American guards, that were documented by the prisoners consistently, were in much higher frequencies than shootings by white guards.²⁰⁷ Whether the other brutal actions of these guards were recorded with any accuracy is questionable, but the hatred and indignation that Confederate prisoners felt was real and well recorded. Bartlett Yancey Malone, who was relatively fair in his descriptions of the African American guards, claimed that in December, 1864, the prisoners had “white gard now for patroles in camp of knights the Neagros got so mean that the General would not alow them in Side of the Prison.”²⁰⁸

²⁰³ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp for Confederates*, 58-59.

²⁰⁴ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 99.

²⁰⁵ Hopkins, *From Bull Run to Appomattox*, LOC. 1412.

²⁰⁶ King, *My Experience in the Confederate Army and in Northern Prisons*, 28.

²⁰⁷ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 24. Triebe determined that 72 percent of shootings of prisoners by guards were committed by African American guards, through analysis and comparison of numerous prisoner accounts. For a chart of his numerical analysis, see Appendix 5.

²⁰⁸ Malone, *Whipt 'em Everytime*, 114.

Despite the prominent presence of African American guards in the diaries and memoirs of prisoners from Point Lookout, the quality and quantity of supplies was the prisoner's greatest concern.²⁰⁹ Generally considered the most mismanaged Union prison camp during the Civil War, Point Lookout prisoners were often subjected to financial experimentation, primarily in the form of withholding rations, and retaliation. This makes Point Lookout an excellent point of comparison to Belle Isle, as the prisoners in both camps suffered horrifically in similar ways, but with different causes. Doctor Montrose A. Pallen wrote to Secretary of War Stanton in December 1863 describing the condition of prisoners in Union camps: "Many of these men are without the necessary clothing even to hide their nakedness, and during the late cold weather several absolutely froze to death at Point Lookout, where they are living in tents, and more than half of the 9,000 and more there confined have not a single blanket for covering or bedding and sleep on the bare ground."²¹⁰

The issue of supplying clothing to prisoners was a topic of frequent discussion between those in charge of Point Lookout, from the quartermaster general at the camp, to Secretary of War Stanton. The quartermaster general, M. C. Meigs, noted in a letter that "Many of the rebel prisoners at Point Lookout wear new light blue uniform trousers.... A supply of irregular and useless clothing [should] be sent here [instead]. If the pantaloons are exhausted, cut up the overcoats and make them into pantaloons."²¹¹ This is demonstrative of the abuse of power that Triebe and Beitzell described in their works. Meigs' statement insinuates that there is plenty of money for clothing prisoners, but instead he would rather have the prisoners cut up their overcoats to save the Union money. There is simply not enough evidence in this short missive to

²⁰⁹ Letters were consulted sparingly during the research on Point Lookout because all of the mail was censored. Prisoners were not allowed to write anything negative about the camp, including its guards, so the content of the letters generally consists of a longing for home and more letters, with mentions of illnesses felt by the prisoners.

²¹⁰ Montrose A. Pallen to Hon. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton *OR* 2:6:718.

²¹¹ M. C. Meigs, Quarter-Master General to Captain A. J. Perry, March 6, 1864, *OR* 2:6:1020.

come to such a definitive conclusion. Prisoners were stripped of any Union clothing they had collected off of battlefields so as to lessen their chance of escape, but what Confederate clothing they had was theirs to keep during their time in prison.

During the war, in both the Union and the Confederacy, it was common for family members to send their loved ones whatever clothing they could spare, whether their loved one was fighting on a battlefield or imprisoned. Clothing did not always make it to the intended recipient in any prison camp, but prisoners at Point Lookout had an added restriction to receiving clothing. If a prisoner received a new coat, for example, he would have to turn in a coat to receive the new one sent to him by his family. Prisoner Anthony M. Keiley added that “men who came [to Point Lookout] barefooted have been compelled to beg or buy a pair of worn-out shoes to carry to the office in lieu of a pair sent to them by their friends before they could receive the latter.”²¹² This practice prevented prisoners from building up any surplus items, such as coats or shoes, to help get them through the weather and seasons, magnifying the prisoners’ suffering.

Despite this restriction on clothing, numerous prisoners wrote to friends and family claiming that they were not suffering due to a lack of clothing, likely because they had the funds to purchase clothing inside the camp, while others felt the shortage keenly. While imprisoned, Doctor Frederick Griffith wrote to his wife claiming, “My clothing I must confess are in rather a dilapidated condition tho: I’ve not suffered in the least from cold since my capture.”²¹³ The letter, penned the first of March, 1865, does not indicate how long the doctor had been imprisoned, but he was very aware of the goings-on of the camp, indicating at least a few days had passed since he was imprisoned at Point Lookout. He does also indicate that he was held in a

²¹² Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 39.

²¹³ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 48.

separate area than the general population, writing “had it not been for my profession which entitles me to the position which I occupy, I believe I should not be numbered with the living for I could never stand the hardships which the prisoners of camp are exposed.”²¹⁴ Bartlett Yancey Malone noted his luck in receiving clothing from “Dixie,” a possible indication of how sparse shipments of clothing from the Confederacy were.²¹⁵ However, P. W. Carper commented that he was well clothed in a letter to his sister declaring “I received the underclothes Mother sent me....I shall do very well in respect to clothes except a hat and shoes.”²¹⁶ Shoes were among the most lacking in regards to articles of clothing, due to the hard marching Confederate soldiers had to endure with limited supplies, even before their capture.

Despite this scarcity of shipments of clothing to prisoners, Union officials would not allow Confederate sympathizers to provide clothing to the prisoners. Colonel Hoffman even admitted to limiting the clothing prisoners received from the Union itself, declaring that “Though it is the desire of the War Department to provide as little clothing for [the prisoners] as possible, it does not wish them to be entirely destitute and have it contributed by sympathizers.”²¹⁷ While this measure seems harsh, it is nothing compared to the weekly inspections of the camp, during which Union guards seized surplus blankets that prisoners had managed to collect. Malone described a particularly eventful search, during which the guards “smirched and taken evry other Blanket that had more than one.... They found too Boats that the Rebs had maid.”²¹⁸ Beitzell cites the ratio of blankets to men as one to three due to these searches and seizures.²¹⁹ However, the seizure of surplus blankets may have been beneficial to the greater prison population. While

²¹⁴ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 49. Class seemed to be important to maintaining any level of comfort at Point Lookout, to be discussed later in this chapter.

²¹⁵ Malone, *Whipt' em Everytime*, 99.

²¹⁶ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 49.

²¹⁷ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 21.

²¹⁸ Malone, *Whipt' em Everytime*, 97.

²¹⁹ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 22.

imprisoned at Point Lookout, the Reverend J. B. Traywick described inspections, which can be seen in Figure 10, in which “every case where prisoners had more than one blanket, unless



Figure 10: *Camp Inspection*. Omenhausser, found in Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 86

concealed, they were all taken except one to each man, and then those who did not have any were supplied with blankets that had been taken from their fellow prisoners."²²⁰ Traywick also detailed that clothing was issued during these inspections, claiming that “Barefooted prisoners were supplied with shoes, and a scant quantity of clothing was given to the most destitute.”²²¹ In

²²⁰ Traywick, “Prison Life at Point Lookout,” 432-435.

²²¹ Traywick, “Prison Life at Point Lookout,” 432-435.

Figure 11, a prisoner can be seen asking Captain Barnes for a pair of shoes and being told by the Captain to come to his office to conduct business, indicating that Barnes did personally place a high importance on the clothing of prisoners. Only the higher-class prisoners, such as the reverend and the doctor, describe this reissuance of articles, indicating a class structure among the prisoners that is not seen in Confederate prison camps such as Belle Isle.

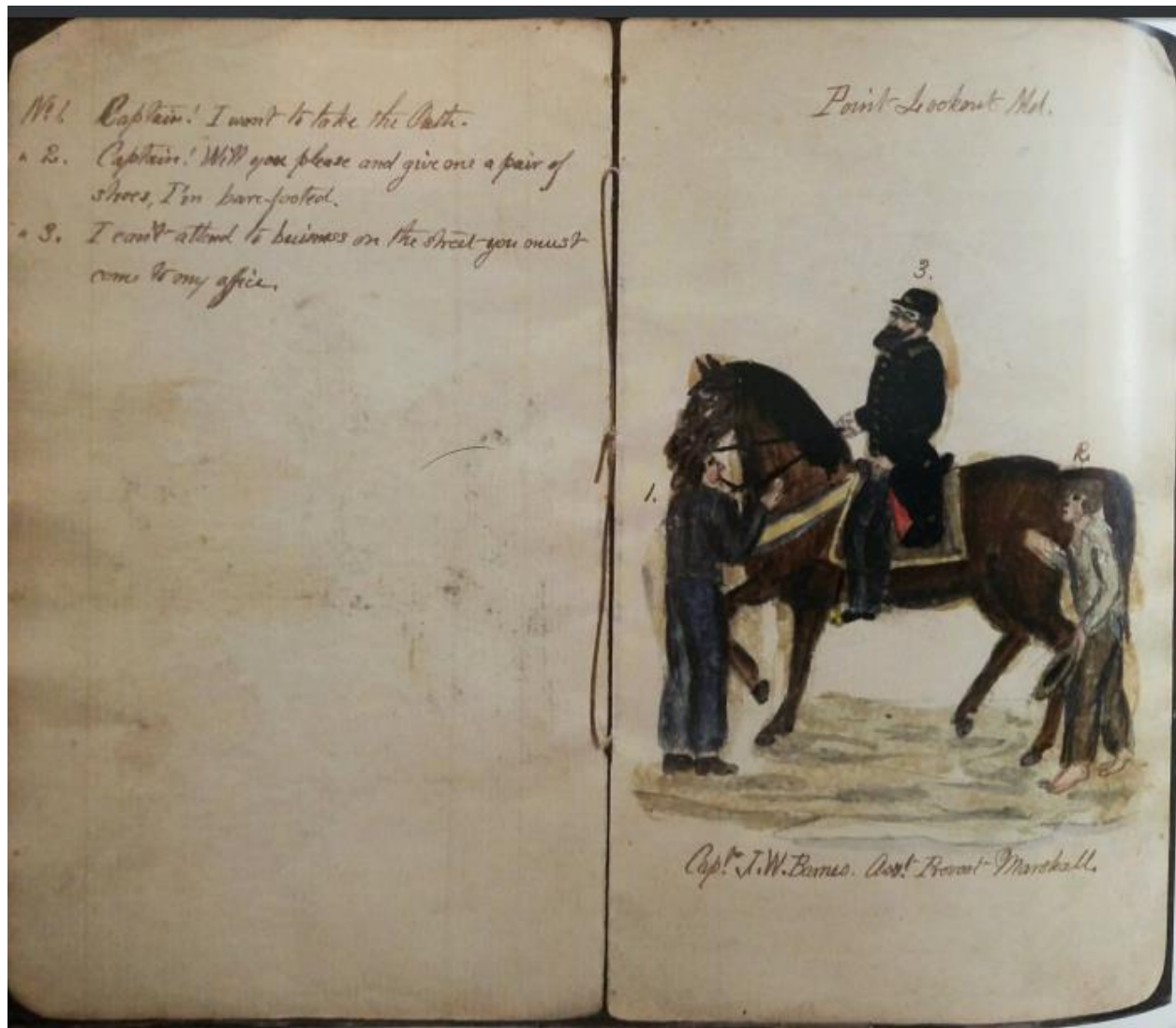


Figure 11: Capt. J. W. Barnes. Asst. Provost Marshall. Omenhausser, found in Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 82.

In addition to the worry over clothing, flooding was a common problem within the peninsular prison. Prisoner Charles Warren Hutt recorded on Wednesday March 30, 1864, that

“We had a very severe storm of rain and wind last night, and the whole camp is over-flowed—in some houses knee deep.”²²² Sergeant James T. Wells remembered, “the tide from the bay occasionally backed into the camp, and compelled those whose tents had been flooded to stand all night.”²²³ On yet another occasion, Bartlett Yancey Malone noted that on April 5, 1864, “it rained hard snowed and the wind blew the Bay so high that it overflowed part of the Camp. Some men had to leave their tents and moove up to the Cook house.”²²⁴ Whenever the waters receded, the first thought among the prisoners would have been warmth from a fire, but firewood was in short supply within the prison walls.

Firewood was issued sparingly to the prisoners at Point Lookout. Some prisoners never received firewood. According to Triebe, firewood was not issued at all eight months out of the year beginning in March, so prisoners had to acquire wood on their own for cooking and warmth. Prisoners were able to get firewood through purchasing a bundle for thirty cents from a fellow prisoner or by joining a work detail that left the confines of the prison so that they may collect a few scraps while outside the walls. When firewood was issued, one cord of wood was issued per division of 1,000 men. This ration was not issued every day, even during the winter months.²²⁵ Malone described the ration in November, 1863, as “one shoulder tirn of pine brush every other day for a tent 16 men to every tent.”²²⁶ By December, 1864, “we get two smawl shoulder turns a day to a Company Each Company has 100 men.”²²⁷ The isolated nature of the prison on the end of a small peninsula severely limited access to firewood, for both Union guards and Confederate prisoners.

²²² Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 71.

²²³ Wells, “Atrocities as Noted by Pt. Lookout POWs.”

²²⁴ Malone, *Whipt’ em Everytime*, 100.

²²⁵ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 59. A cord of wood typically measures four feet by four feet by eight feet.

²²⁶ Malone, *Whipt’ em Everytime*, 94.

²²⁷ Malone, *Whipt’ em Everytime*, 115.

Food was plentiful in the Union, but was issued sparingly to prisoners as a form of retaliation for small rations issued in the Confederacy. Unlike the Confederacy, the North had the industry needed to keep its civilians and soldiers well fed, when they were inside Union lines. Confederate prisoners held in the North, however, were served strict rations. Prisoner Luther W. Hopkins noted, “The food, while good, was very scant. Breakfast consisted of coffee and a loaf of bread, which under ordinary circumstances, with vegetables and other food, would probably suffice for two meals. This loaf was given us at breakfast, and if we ate it all then we went without bread for dinner.”²²⁸ Rations at dinner, according to Hopkins, “consisted of a tincup of soup (generally bean or other vegetable), a small piece of meat on a tinplate, on which a little vinegar was poured to prevent scurvy.”²²⁹ Over the lifespan of the prison camp, the amount and variety of rations fluctuated, depending on the current military and political situations, as well as seasonally.

The Union did its best to camouflage the limited rations issued in the prisons, which was similar to the false reports composed in the Confederacy regarding rations. In November, 1863, Doctor W. F. Swalm prepared a report of conditions at Point Lookout Prison Camp. At that time, he cited the full diet as: “Dinner—beef or pork, 4 ounces; potatoes, 4 ounces; hardtack, 3 ounces. Breakfast and tea—coffee or tea, 1 pint; rice, 2 gills; molasses, 1 ounce; hardtack, 3 ounces.”²³⁰ He also noted a practice very different from that in Confederate prisons: prisoners at Point Lookout were responsible for cooking a large portion of their own food. The prisoners had “no complaint in this quarter, except they were very poorly supplied with cooking utensils and were very much in want of tin cups, knives, and forks.”²³¹ It was likely that they appreciated having

²²⁸ Hopkins, *From Bull Run to Appomattox*, LOC 1427.

²²⁹ Hopkins, *From Bull Run to Appomattox*, LOC 1427.

²³⁰ W. F. Swalm to Dr. J. H. Douglas, Nov. 13, 1863, *OR* 2:6:576..

²³¹ Swalm to Douglas, Nov. 13, 1863, *OR* 2:6:576.

something constructive to do. Bartlett Yancey Malone cited the rations in November, 1863, as “5 crackers and a cup of coffee for Breakfast. And for dinner a small ration of meat 2 crackers three potatoes and a cup of Soup. Supper we have none.”²³² While this is similar to the rations described by Swalm as being prescribed to the prisoners, it is a noticeably smaller amount of food issued. Malone did note that crackers could be purchased, using money or chews of tobacco. Sergeant Wells noted that rations were reduced in November, 1863. Wells claimed, “for breakfast, half-pint, coffee or, regather, slop water; for dinner, half-pint greasy water (called soup for etiquette), also a small piece of meat, perhaps three or four ounces. For bread we were allowed eight ounces per day.”²³³ The most likely rations issued would have been somewhere along the lines of what Malone described, somewhere in-between the Union claim and the Confederate Sergeant’s tangible bitterness.

Though rations in Union camps were reduced as a form of retaliation much of the time, the North did face food shortages as well, typically in the winter. Come December, 1863, Malone noted a reduction in the rations. On Christmas day, he wrote, “onley got a peace of Bread and a cup of coffee for Breakfast and a small Slice of Meat and a cup of Soop and five Crackers for Dinner and Supper I had non.”²³⁴ This was indicative of the drop in rations that occurred every winter. By March, 1864, those rations had increased again, at least according to Colonel William Hoffman who described the issuance of rations to prisoners as having “been a little in excess, but I am preparing ration regulations on this subject which will probably go into effect on the 1st of May.”²³⁵ These regulations included the elimination of coffee from the prisoner’s rations. On June fourth, Malone recorded, “the Yanks are not going to give us no more

²³² Malone, *Whipt’ em Everytime*, 93.

²³³ Wells, “Atrocities as Noted by Point Lookout POWs.”

²³⁴ Malone, *Whipt’ em Everytime*, 94.

²³⁵ Hoffman to Lieutenant Colonel M. P. Small, March 22, 1864, *OR* 2:6:1081.

Coffee and Sugar from this on.”²³⁶ On the same day, Charles Warren Hutt noted, after a mention of Union General Ulysses S. Grant being driven back in battle, that “Our coffee and sugar is cut off.”²³⁷ While Hutt only hinted that the elimination of coffee from the rations was in retaliation, Private C. W. Jones openly declared it so: “our ration of coffee would be cut off, because the Confederate government had cut off coffee in the prison at Andersonville.”²³⁸ The prisoners considered this to be a harsh and vindictive measure.

Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton declared that coffee and sugar would only be issued to sick and wounded prisoners, and even then, only at the direction of their surgeon. This was in direct response to Union soldiers writing home claiming that their coffee had been stopped. After the coffee was stopped, prisoners began using crackers to make what they termed as coffee by boiling the hardtack, scooping the maggots off the surface, and calling it coffee. Another coffee alternative was bread crust, where bread was burnt intentionally to give the “coffee” more flavor.²³⁹ The prisoners relied on such ingenuity to keep their health and spirits up.

As in most prison camps during the Civil War, the rations were simply not sufficient. In May, 1865, Private Matthew W. Allen wrote in his journal that he had “suffered more with hunger in the last two days than ever before in my life.”²⁴⁰ The transcriber and editor of Allen’s journal, his great-grandson Walter Lee Shepard, noted that, “At Point Lookout, rations were considered to be below minimal with rampant scurvy and malnutrition. Accounts indicated that prisoners ate rats and raw fish. One POW is alleged to have devoured a raw seagull that washed ashore.”²⁴¹ Private Jones corroborated the story of the prisoner eating a seagull, describing “one

²³⁶ Malone, *Whipt’ em Everytime*, 103.

²³⁷ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 75.

²³⁸ Jones, “In Prison at Point Lookout,” 6.

²³⁹ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 38-39.

²⁴⁰ Allen, *Personal Journal of Matthew Wood Allen*, 71.

²⁴¹ Allen, *Private Journal of Matthew Wood Allen*, 71.

occasion when the tide on the bay was high it brought ashore an old sea gull which had been dead a month or more. It was picked up by a hungry rebel and devoured."²⁴² While the consumption of rotting seagulls was rare, rats served as a large portion of many prisoners diets. Triebe noted two stories in which rats were featured. The first was a prisoner who visited his



brother's tent only to discover that they were eating fried rats. He wrote, "I remember now how good they smelled. They did not offer me any, however.... after the war... [I] asked if it was a scarcity of manners that kept him from offering me a share, and he replied that it was a scarcity of rats."²⁴³

Triebe also noted prisoner George M. Neese's account of

Figure 12: *Rats*, Omenhausser, found in Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 53.

²⁴² Jones, "In Prison at Point Lookout," 5.

²⁴³ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 37.

prisoners eating rats: "Right now as I am writing these words there is a rat vendor going along the street carrying three large rats by the tail, and every few steps I hear him cry: 'Here are your rats, fresh and fat!... Three for five cents, cheap!' here men buy and eat rats to satisfy craving hunger right under the shadow of the proud Star-Spangled Banner and in a so-called Christian country and in a land of plenty."²⁴⁴ Neese was revolted, not by the consumption of rats in and of itself, but by the fact that men were being driven to eat rats when there was believed to be plenty



Figure 13: Point Lookout Md. Catching Rats, Omenhausser, found in Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 62

²⁴⁴ Neese, *Three Years in the Confederate Horse Artillery*, LOC 9784.

of food available should the Union choose to issue it. This is also demonstrated in Figure 12, in which a prisoner was shocked to see another prisoner in the process of skinning a rat. The second prisoner responded that he was certainly going to eat the rat, noting “they are as good as squirrel, and if a fellow did not look out for himself in this place he’d starve.” Bartlett Yancey Malone also noted two of his comrades consuming rats. On January 1, 1864, he recorded “too of our men was so hungry to day that they caught a Rat and cooked him and eat it. Thir names was Sergt. N. W. Hester & I. E. Covington.”²⁴⁵ According to this testimony, even officers were not afforded the luxury of having enough to eat and so were driven to consume the rodents scampering around the camp.

By June, 1865, prisoners were being released from Point Lookout due to the conclusion of the war. Releases were slow, and Matthew Allen noted that on June 11 he had had “Nothing but codfish & hardtack” since releases began.²⁴⁶ Two days later he simply wrote, “Nearly starved out.”²⁴⁷ It was another nine days before he was released. Despite the overwhelming number of testimonies citing a shortage of food, Union officials were adamant to the rest of the divided nation that its prisoners were well fed. In May of 1864, a report entitled “Description of the Rebel Camp and Its Occupants: How the Prisoners Employ and Amuse Themselves” was penned. In this report, rations were described as a single cup of coffee for breakfast. For dinner, a piece of meat ranging from one quarter to three quarters of a pound, plus another cup of coffee or a pint of soup. Bread was to be issued daily, roughly nine to ten ounces per prisoner.²⁴⁸ Prisoner John R. King, however noted around the same time that “The bread for either meal weighed when baked 3 ounces, the pork weighed about 2 ounces and the beef three ounces, it was often

²⁴⁵ Malone, *Whipt’ em Everytime*, 96.

²⁴⁶ Allen, *Personal Journal of Matthew Wood Allen*, 73.

²⁴⁷ Allen, *Personal Journal of Matthew Wood Allen*, 74.

²⁴⁸ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 111.

bone and very little meat.”²⁴⁹ George Neese described a memorable time when he drew his meat ration for the day declaring that it was “the upper part of a sheep’s head, his eyes still holding their old position and the eyelids decorated with cleanly washed hairy-like wool....I shaved off the wool and ate the eyes, lids and all.”²⁵⁰ The rations issued to prisoners were clearly not as wholesome as the Union claimed them to be.

There were in fact two official reductions in rations issued for Confederate prisoners of war by Secretary Stanton. Beitzell claimed that the reduction in rations and elimination of coffee were a direct form of retaliation for the starving of Union prisoners in Confederate prisons. Beitzell noted that there is no record of the Confederacy ever altering the official rations issued to prisoners. When rations were reduced, it was often because the Confederacy had run out of that item.²⁵¹ For example, at Belle Isle when prisoners complained of not receiving bread, the Richmond bread riots had resulted in women of Richmond stealing the bread meant for the prisoners at Belle Isle. There was no official order to withhold bread from the prisoners. There simply was none for a small period of time. Despite this, Union officials did reduce rations in their prisons in an attempt to coerce the Confederacy into better providing for prisoners.

Trading and selling were especially prominent at Point Lookout, and were used by the prisoners as a coping mechanism for the degrading conditions in which they were kept. Goods were sold by the prisoners for greenbacks, such as the vendor selling rats, or traded, usually for tobacco or crackers. Greenbacks, as Union currency, held more value and were therefore more desirable to the prisoners than Confederate money. Tobacco, however, was the most popular form of currency amongst the prisoners because money was not allowed. One quid, or one twentieth of a pound, of tobacco was worth roughly five cents. Hardtack was also common

²⁴⁹ King, *My Experience in the Confederate Army and in Northern Prisons*, 29.

²⁵⁰ Neese, *Three Years in the Confederate Horse Artillery*, LOC 9800.

²⁵¹ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 40.

currency and held the same value as a quid, also known as a chew, of tobacco. Tobacco was so valued that one prisoner recorded that he had “seen men following a lucky chewer and waiting for him to finish his chew and beg it for himself.”²⁵² Goods and trinkets were created by some of the prisoners who would sell their products for tobacco and hardtack. Therefore, if a prisoner had a skill, such as wood carving, and access to supplies, he could earn more food. John Jacob Omenhausser sold his art for food and coffee, resulting in several different collections of his artwork among descendants of prisoners from Point Lookout that have only recently been combined into one book.²⁵³

There were opportunities for prisoners to work with food, gaining the allowance to eat their fill, thereby improving their circumstances. Matthew Allen, presumably chosen to be among the cooks at Point Lookout, noted that on May 16, 1865 he had gone into the pie business. There were no details provided as to what exactly this entailed, including if and how he collected supplies or what profits he earned. The transcriber noted that “Family lore has it that Matthew was identified as a renowned baker and was selected to bake pies for the Union officers’ mess. It has also been told that he, on occasion, would include several undesirable ingredients as an added ‘treat’ for the Yankees.”²⁵⁴ Those extra ingredients could very well be family lore and nothing else, but it is not difficult to imagine prisoners retaliating in that form when given the opportunity. There is no way of denying or validating these particular family tales. It is likely that he was a cook in one of the mess halls and, if making pies, he probably was a cook for Union officers, as the family lore states, rather than for Confederate prisoners.

Mess halls and cookhouses provided a large portion of the small ration issued to prisoners. There were six for the prisoners use, roughly 160 feet long with twenty feet at the end

²⁵² Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 60.

²⁵³ Kimmel and Musick “*I am Busy Drawing Pictures.*”

²⁵⁴ Allen, *Private Journal of Matthew Wood Allen*, 71-72.

for the kitchens. These kitchens each had four fifty to sixty gallon pots for heating the prisoners' food. There were three tables in each hall, with space for cooks to stand in the middle to prevent gluttony among the starving prisoners. Despite the tables, prisoners did not eat in the mess halls. They were marched in single file, each to stand in front of a tin plate that had preemptively been placed on the table with their ration of meat. Once everyone was in place in front of a plate, the prisoners were given a command, whereupon they scooped up their ration of meat and were marched from the room to make way for the next wave of ravenous prisoners.²⁵⁵ It is unclear whether these mess halls and cookhouses were used all the time or if prisoners really did have to cook their own food a large percent of the time. Rations issued inside the cookhouses, according



Figure 14: *Prisoners Cookhouse Point Lookout Md.*, Omenhausser, found in Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 54.

²⁵⁵ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 54.

to Triebe, were scant, but the problem of food often paled in comparison to the water problem



Figure 15: Point Lookout Md. 4th Division Pump Scene, Omenhausser, found in Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 64.

that plagued the camp. The water at Point Lookout was unpotable. With the Chesapeake Bay just feet away from the prison, the water drawn from four out of the six wells was brackish and

pregnant with iron sulfate. Prisoners were only allowed to drink from their assigned wells, which meant that the vast majority of the prisoners were drinking unhealthy water.²⁵⁶ Freeman W. Jones described the unpotable wells as having “a sweet taste being impregnated with Copperas (iron sulfate), and after standing a while there was always a deposit on the surface upon which you could write your name. I believe this water produced more sickness and suffering than any other cause in the prison.”²⁵⁷ This statement indicated that the prisoners were aware that the water was making them sick, a realization that can be linked to the emergence of self-healthcare discussed in the previous chapter. Bartlett Malone even noted a staggering number of men dying, adding that “it is said that the water is not healthy.”²⁵⁸ Sergeant Wells described the water as “of such a character that we could scarcely use it, being so highly tinctured with Sulphur and iron as to render it almost unbearable. Clothes which were washed in it turned black and yellow.”²⁵⁹ In addition to the undesirable effect on clothing, diarrhea was also caused by this water.

Diarrhea plagued the prisoners of Point Lookout. The greatest cause of that affliction was the water provided to the prisoners. George Neese described how the water affected him within days of his arrival: “it produces a diarrhoea which sticks closer than a brother, and has already killed hundreds of our prisoners. The second day after I arrived here the water made me sick, with a violent diarrhoea that clung to me like a leech for several days, but I learned to do without drinking a drop of water, and by that means alone I survived the evil effects of its unwholesomeness.”²⁶⁰ As prisoners avoided the bad wells, the good pumps quickly became overcrowded. Luther Hopkins noted that “the pumps were always surrounded by a thirsty crowd of 40 to 50 prisoners, each with his tincup, trying to wedge his way in, that he might quench his

²⁵⁶ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 55.

²⁵⁷ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 56.

²⁵⁸ Malone, *Whipt' em Everytime*, 103.

²⁵⁹ Wells, “Atrocities as Noted by Point Lookout POWs.”

²⁶⁰ Neese, *Three Years in the Confederate Horse Artillery*, LOC 9518.

thirst.”²⁶¹ Between deliberately avoiding the bad pumps and the overcrowding at the good ones, prisoners faced a constant battle against dehydration. To compound the issue further, prisoner Algernon Chandler remembered, “the pumps would give out by ten-o-clock in the day and then the suffering was great I have seen men lined up for hundreds of feet all around these pumps fighting to quench their thirst.”²⁶² This problem remained with the prison until it closed.

One problem that Point Lookout had was very similar to a problem on Belle Isle: the quality and lack of shelter. Prisoners at Point Lookout were also crammed into Sibley tents. One key difference was that Belle Isle prisoners were free to roam at night. If their tent became too crowded, they could leave at any time, day or night. At Point Lookout, if a prisoner was caught outside of his tent after dark, even to use the latrines, he was punished severely, if not shot on sight. As a result, the tents were drastically overcrowded. However, there was one reprieve prisoners at Point Lookout had that Belle Isle prisoners did not. If a Point Lookout prisoner was sent money from family or friends, he could purchase supplies to build a better shelter for themselves. These were generally made from cracker boxes, therefore referred to by the prisoners as crackerbox houses.²⁶³

Before prisoners had the chance to purchase supplies and build a crackerbox house, everyone was assigned to a tent, usually a Sibley tent. Sergeant Wells recalled, “Our tents were miserable affairs, being full of holes, and very rotten.”²⁶⁴ Reverend Traywick added that the tents sent to Point Lookout “had been refused for use in the Federal army and generally leaked.”²⁶⁵ Triebe claimed that a third of the tents were absolutely unfit for human habitation and, to compound the issue, Point Lookout was the only Union prison camp that never built barracks for

²⁶¹ Hopkins, *From Bull Run to Appomattox*, LOC 1427.

²⁶² Algernon B. Chandler, Personal Papers, VHS.

²⁶³ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 19.

²⁶⁴ Wells, “Atrocities as Noted by Point Lookout POWs.”

²⁶⁵ Traywick, “Prison Life at Point Lookout,” 432-435.

their prisoners, preferring instead to house them in tents. Triebe also added that supplies needed to construct the barracks could have been paid for with the prison's fund and built by the prisoners themselves, therefore the cost to the Union would have been virtually nonexistent.²⁶⁶ Given the ease with which the Union could have provided adequate shelter to their prisoners, it is a natural assumption that this was done as a form of retaliation. Triebe believed it to be a direct form of retaliation against the treatment of prisoners at Belle Isle.²⁶⁷ Under the Lieber Code, this was a clear violation.

Despite the subpar housing provided to prisoners at Point Lookout, at least several prisoners had the option of improving their circumstances. Doctor Swalm, in his report discussed previously, reported plentiful good quality tents for the prisoners, but the prisoners' stories prove that the only way to gain habitable shelter was to construct it themselves.²⁶⁸ Bartlett Yancey Malone was one prisoner fortunate enough to be able to afford to build his own house with some friends. On January 6, 1865, he wrote "built us a house out of cracker boxes the house cost us \$8.80 cts we bought a stove from the Sutlar the Stove cost us \$8.00."²⁶⁹ Prisoners had to receive permission to build these houses, and all were located on one street of the camp known as "cracker-box row." They were constructed with the boxes in which hardtack was sent to the prison and purchased by the prisoners for ten to fifteen cents per box.²⁷⁰ These houses were undoubtedly a sign of wealth among the prisoners. Beitzell described them as "commodious and genteel," and prisoner Hiram Smith Williams longed for one in his diary: "Had I a wood house as some have, with money enough to buy what I dearly need, both food and clothing, I could

²⁶⁶ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 19. The prison's fund was established by Colonel Hoffman from reducing rations to the prisoners and selling the surplus food back to the Union. By the end of the War, the prison fund for Point Lookout alone was \$544,556. The total from all Union camps was \$1.8 million.

²⁶⁷ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 19.

²⁶⁸ Swalm to Dr. J. H. Douglass, Nov. 13, 1863, *OR* 2:6:577.

²⁶⁹ Malone, *Whipt' em Everytime*, 117.

²⁷⁰ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 55.

content myself.”²⁷¹ Bartlett Yancey Malone, however, noted that in December of 1864, “the Yanks commenced building some little plank houses covered with clouth for the Rebs to stay in.”²⁷² Malone was the only prisoner to note the Union guards doing this for the Confederate prisoners and did not offer any information as to which Rebels were provided with those highly sought after accommodations.²⁷³



Figure 16: Point Lookout Maryland. The Reb Who Has Friends at the North/ The Reb Who Has No Friends at the North, Omenhausser, found in Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 55.

Most prisoners slept without any bedding other than a blanket on the ground. Charles Warren Hutt, an affluent prisoner, mentioned in November, 1864, that he was able to procure a

²⁷¹ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 110.; Williams, *This War So Horrible*, 131-132.

²⁷² Malone, *Whipt' em Everytime*, 114.

²⁷³ Charles W. Hutt noted in Nov. 1864 that "A great many little huts are now going being built in camp." He did not mention who built these huts. In all likelihood, they were crackerbox houses built by Confederate prisoners, but it could have been the start of the Yankees building huts that Malone described. Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 85.

mattress of pine straw for his house.²⁷⁴ On the other hand, Bartlett Malone, who was also well-off in the prison, noted that his and his comrades “beds at this place is composed of Sea feathers that is we gather the small stones from the Bay and lye on them.”²⁷⁵ This hardly seems preferable to the dirt beds of most prisoners, but the appeal of a pine straw mattress was clear. An additional survival strategy inside the tents was to dig pits. Captain Robert E. Park recalled other prisoners doing so to “use them as protection against the chilling winds and intensely cold weather, as well as receptacles for their little stores.”²⁷⁶ Even with the horrid conditions the Union attempted to hold Confederate prisoners in, as a form of retaliation against the Confederate government, there was a chance for the prisoners to improve their condition that the Union guards allowed.

During the day, prisoners had access to some of the most sanitary latrines of the Civil War. They were built out on a pier over the Chesapeake Bay where the tide was able to wash away any waste produced by the prisoners. At night, however, prisoners were forced to relieve themselves in tubs. Men also frequently relieved themselves in the streets, mostly due to the chronic diarrhea that plagued the majority of the prisoners. The internal latrines were not properly maintained and were a significant source of disease for the prisoners. Doctor Swalm first reported the breach in maintenance to Commandant Marston who demanded another inspection. The second inspector found the same issues, but there is no record of anything having been done to improve the latrines within the confines of the camp for the prisoners use.²⁷⁷

As with Belle Isle, the most prolific affliction at Point Lookout was diarrhea. Scurvy and lice were also rampant, but not to the same extent as diarrhea. In regards to scurvy, Dr. Frederick Griffith, a prisoner at Point Lookout, wrote in a letter to his wife that he believed “Dr. Thompson

²⁷⁴ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 85.

²⁷⁵ Malone, *Whipt' em Everytime*, 96.

²⁷⁶ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 99.

²⁷⁷ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 57.

U. S. Surg: in charge of camp does all in his power to alleviate their sufferings [from scurvy] but he is furnished with neither proper diet or a sufficiency of medicine to correct the malady.”²⁷⁸ The lack of vitamin C that produced scurvy was a problem in all camps. The only recorded attempts to prevent the disease at Point Lookout was General Marston ordering a boat load of vegetables that were not as high in vitamin C as fruit would have been, and the addition of vinegar to the prisoners rations. Vinegar was made from fermented apple juice and would therefore have some vitamin C, but not nearly enough for the malnourished prisoners.²⁷⁹ This was the best that could be provided since many fruits were out of season. There were other diseases that plagued the camp including smallpox, frostbite, hypothermia, dysentery, erysipelas, intermittent fever, typhoid fever, measles, and pneumonia. Diseases, particularly diarrhea, were the highest contributors to the number of prisoner deaths at Point Lookout.

Moon blindness was caused by the glare of the sun on the sand, tents, and water throughout and surrounding the prison, resulting in a major source of irritation for the prisoners. Prisoners suffering from moon blindness could see during the day, but they would lose their sight at dusk, not to regain it until the next morning.²⁸⁰ Marcus Toney even asked the doctor what caused the affliction because it was so peculiar. The doctor believed that “the salty soup mixed with the mineral water had something to do with it, but that the prime cause was the sun’s heat and reflection from the water, the sand, and the white tents.”²⁸¹ Luther Hopkins added the lack of greenery as a probable contributor for moon blindness and noted that “just as the sun was sinking behind the fence [some prisoners] would become totally blind, and had to be led about by

²⁷⁸ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 49.

²⁷⁹ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 48-49.

²⁸⁰ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 40.

²⁸¹ Toney, *The Privations of a Private*, 82.

someone. As morning light came the blindness would disappear.”²⁸² Moon blindness plagued many of the prisoners at Point Lookout, contributing to their suffering.

Lice were as prolific on Point Lookout as they were at Belle Isle. Prisoners devoted many hours of their day to the futile effort of ridding themselves of lice, commonly referred to as graybacks. The only way Point Lookout prisoners could get rid of them was to boil their blankets and clothing, a luxury not afforded to Belle Isle prisoners. This made no difference because the camp was so overcrowded with people, there was simply no way for everyone to boil all of their clothing and blankets at once. The tents and crackerbox houses were infiltrated and there was no reprieve from the lice. Triebe noted that washer men would set up early in the morning and wash throughout the day while their customers bathed in the salt water of the Chesapeake to rid their persons of lice and improve their health in the futile war against the vermin.

Despite Point Lookout’s origins as a hospital for Union soldiers, the prisoners were not even admitted to Hammond General Hospital, but were instead admitted to a separate hospital because they were enemy prisoners of war. This separate hospital was a series of eighteen tents, which were intended to sleep one hundred men total, with everyone furnished with a cot, mattress, and blanket during their stay. There the luxuries ended. There were no stoves for warmth or food and only one tent had a preferable wooden, rather than dirt, floor. As with Belle Isle, the hospital at Point Lookout was a last resort for prisoners who were close to their deathbeds.²⁸³ Sergeant Wells remembered that the hospital tents were so overcrowded, the majority who needed to be hospitalized were forced to remain in their own tents. Even worse, “men who were seen in the morning, apparently in health, were taken to the ‘Dead House’ in the afternoon, and some have been known to drop in the street, and die before they could be carried

²⁸² Hopkins, *From Bull Run to Appomattox*, LOC 1445.

²⁸³ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 44.

to the tents.”²⁸⁴ Death haunted Point Lookout much like it did every other prison camp of the Civil War.

Reverend Malachi Bowden remembered when he first arrived at Point Lookout as a prisoner that the other prisoners were dying rapidly. He declared that “one of the first things I did

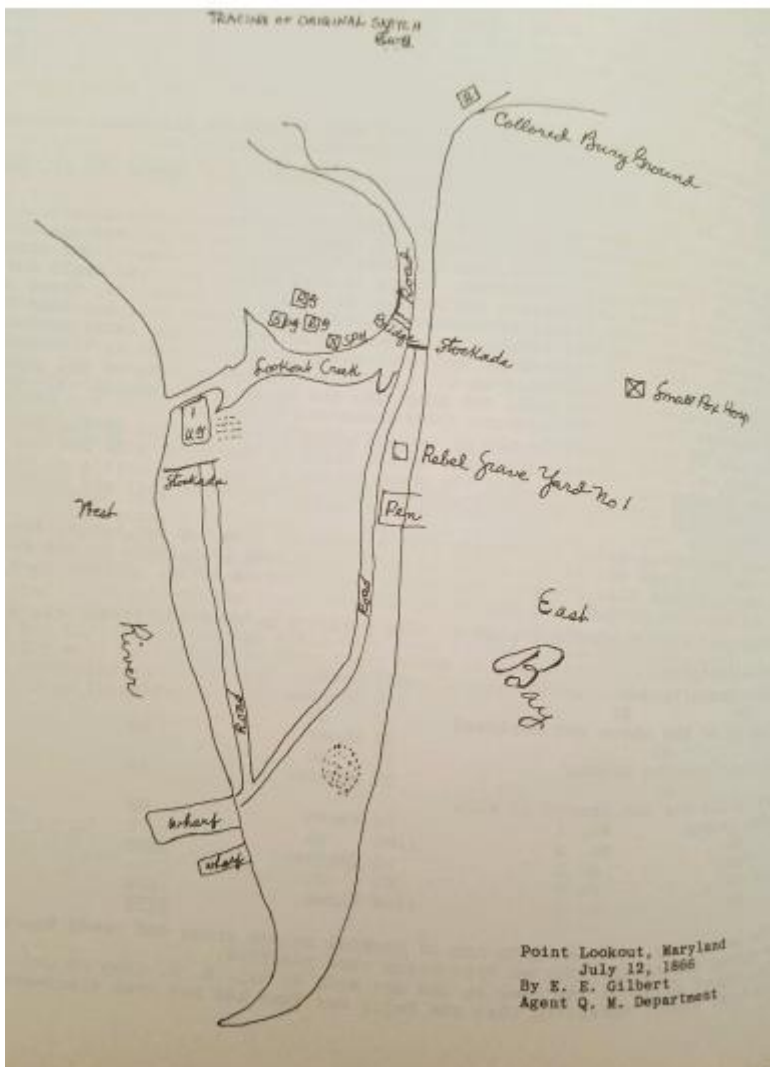


Figure 17: Map of the prisoner’s graveyards, Beitzell, Point Lookout, 116. For a map of where the graves were relocated after the war and closure of the prison see Appendix 6.

was ascertain how many men were dying per day, and to calculate when my time would come, should I live to be the last survivor. The calculation showed that I would have but a short time to live.”²⁸⁵

Bowden did not give any numbers or formula indicating how he reached that conclusion, but Malone recorded that he “saw the man to day that makes Coffens at this plaice for the Rebels and he sais that 12 men die here every day that is averidgs 12.”²⁸⁶ Malone

attributed the high death rates largely to the cold weather and

²⁸⁴ Wells, “Atrocities as Noted by Point Lookout POWs.”

²⁸⁵ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 97.

²⁸⁶ Malone, *Whipt’ em Everytime*, 96.

lack of clothing and blankets. A few days before his discussion with the coffin maker, he remarked that it “was so coal that five of our men froze to death befour morning.”²⁸⁷ The high number of deaths necessitated a dead house at Point Lookout.

C. W. Jones described his glimpse of the dead house while he was waiting to be paroled. He remembered that he made his “way to a large tent in the parole grounds. I peeped into a tent called the ‘dead house,’ and there lay twenty dead victims of scurvy and diarrhoea. Poor fellows, they were on their last parole.”²⁸⁸ The dead accumulated too quickly at Point Lookout to bury immediately, making the dead house a necessity. Luther Hopkins described the process involved with burying the dead, remembering that “The dead were all carried at once to the dead-house on stretchers, and once a day a two-horse wagon came in, and their bodies were laid in it like so much cord wood, uncoffined, taken out and buried in long trenches. The trenches were seven feet wide and three feet deep, and the bodies were laid across the trench side by side and covered with earth.”²⁸⁹

Like Belle Isle, Point Lookout had a dead line inside the perimeter of the prison. Any prisoner who approached the line would be shot on sight, despite the high fences surrounding the prisoner’s pen at Point Lookout that would have prevented any escapes of this nature on its own. It was roughly ten to fifteen feet inside the prison walls, but it was only six inches deep. Unlike Belle Isle, guards at Point Lookout were required to warn prisoners before shooting them for crossing the line. Also unlike Belle Isle, the Union government denied that there was a dead-line. However, numerous prisoner accounts that have been uncovered or recorded since the close of the war confirm that it was a reality for the prisoners at Point Lookout.²⁹⁰ George Neese recorded

²⁸⁷ Malone, *Whipt’ em Everytime*, 96.

²⁸⁸ Jones, *In Prison at Point Lookout*, 9.

²⁸⁹ Hopkins, *From Bull Run to Appomattox*, LOC 1471.

²⁹⁰ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 28.

“eight feet from the wall on the inside is a furrow ditch eight inches wide and six inches deep, which constitutes the dead line, and any prisoner who at any time steps across that line is liable to be shot by the sentinels on the wall without any further notice.”²⁹¹ Triebe noted a prisoner account where a prisoner noticed another prisoner get pushed over the dead line and was immediately shot by the guard.²⁹²

Punishments were used to enforce regulations set upon the prisoners by the guards and commanding officers at Point Lookout. Punishments ranged from digging new latrines and

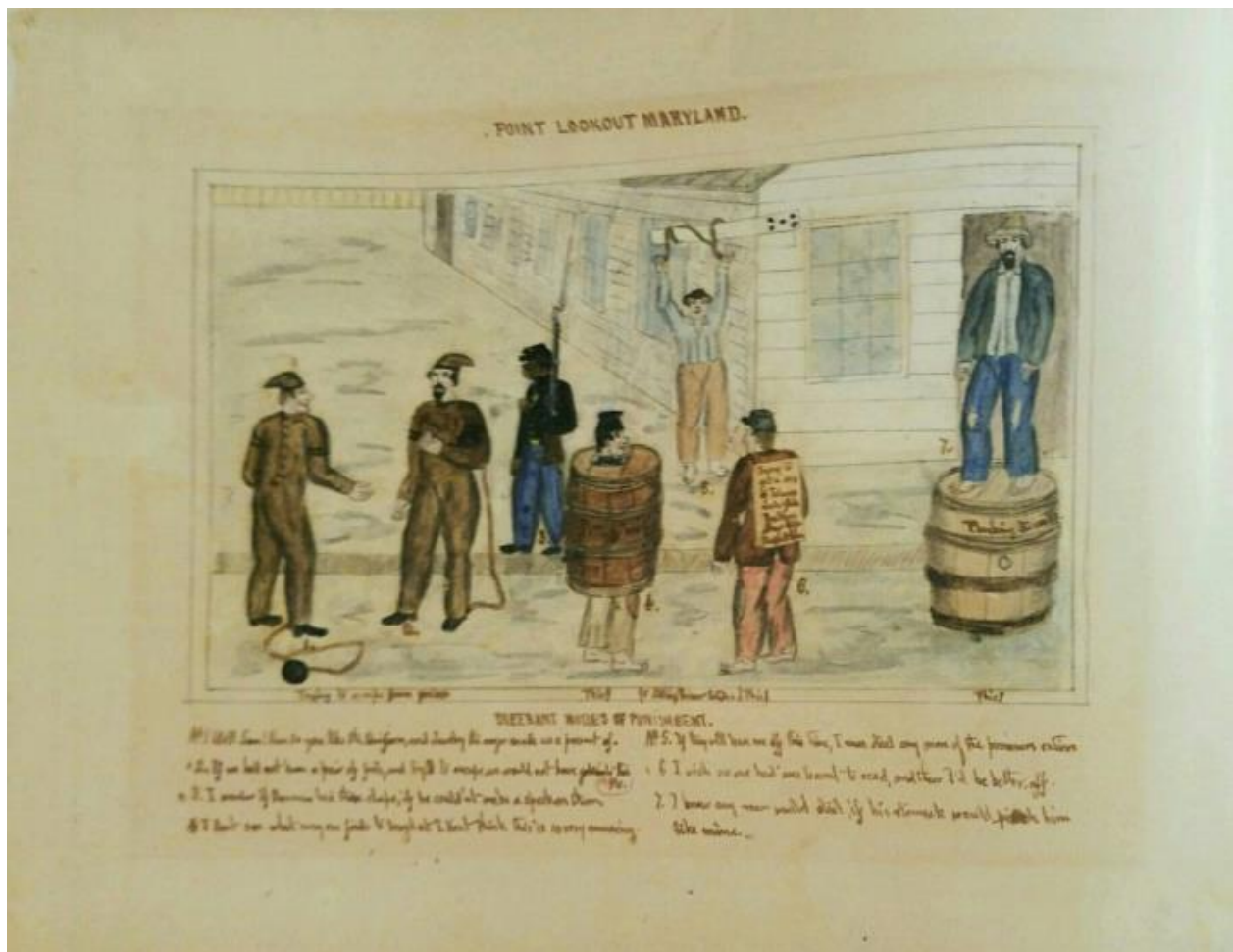


Figure 18: *Point Lookout Maryland. Different Modes of Punishment.* Omenhausser, found in Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 90.

filling old ones to wearing a barrel shirt, being strung up by the thumbs, and sweat boxing, many

²⁹¹ Neese, *Three Years in the Confederate Horse Artillery*, LOC 9394.

²⁹² Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 28.

of which are detailed in Figure 18. Violations of most prison rules merited the digging and refilling of latrines, as this was a constantly needed chore in a feeble attempt to protect the health of the prisoners. Slightly more severe transgressions, such as the eating of an officer's dog, warranted barrel shirts. These were barrels simply worn like a shirt, covering the torso of the prisoner, and generally had their transgression painted on it for the rest of the prisoners to see, such as dog eater or tent cutter.²⁹³ According to Luther Hopkins, "those who were caught at [escaping] were strung up to a pole by their thumbs, with the tips of their toes just touching the ground. Sometimes the men would faint, and had to be cut down."²⁹⁴ Sweat boxes were used for various transgressions and consisted of a prisoner being locked in a box for hours on end, without food or water, until they were nearly dead.²⁹⁵ Brigadier-General Winder of Belle Isle wrote to Colonel A. D. Streight of the U. S. Army claiming that prisoners at Point Lookout were forced to perform hard labor and if they refused, were strung up by the thumbs. Winder made the accusation that "a system of treatment has been inaugurated by the United States Government to Confederate prisoners infinitely worse, more inhuman, uncivilized, and barbarous than any to which you and the officers confined with you have been subjected."²⁹⁶ The Lieber Code had only been in effect for roughly four months when Winder wrote his missive, essentially calling the United States out for not following their own Code without stating it plainly.

There were the same three main alternatives to Point Lookout as there were to Belle Isle, namely escape, exchange, or release. Also like Belle Isle, there were more temporary alternatives. Working outside the camp was the best alternative to a daily life inside Point Lookout's prison walls. C. W. Jones noted that outside work details were used for things such as

²⁹³ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 63.

²⁹⁴ Hopkins, *From Bull Run to Appomattox*, LOC 1423.

²⁹⁵ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 63.

²⁹⁶ Winder to Streight, September 7, 1863, *OR* 2:6:267.

cutting wood, whitewashing buildings, and unloading boats that brought supplies to the prison, among other things.²⁹⁷ Work details were desirable among the prisoners but, “to get on them is no easy matter, being so much in demand that many a poor fellow has often to exercise his wits and his patience to get the privilege of working a day for a plug of tobacco, a piece of meat and an armful of wood.”²⁹⁸ These work details only provided the prisoners with temporary relief and, as a result, prisoners were often left searching for other alternatives, such as a method of escape.

Triebe ascertained that fifty prisoners were able to escape from Point Lookout.²⁹⁹ One of the earliest methods of escape was via small shovels concealed in hams brought into the camp by Catholic Priests of St. Mary’s County. Prisoners used these shovels to dig their way out of the camp, and the priests were no longer allowed to bring gifts to the Confederate prisoners.³⁰⁰ The cracker boxes that the prisoners purchased to build houses for themselves were also used as tools to escape. They would be used to form boats that the prisoners would assemble near the water after bribing a sympathetic guard to allow them to escape. More often than not, the boats were discovered before the escape attempt was able to progress so far as bribery. Malone noted two boats were discovered in February of 1864, which was verified by Charles Hutt.³⁰¹ C. W. Jones, however noted a successful escape attempt via this method, though he did not record the details of how the prisoners were able to accomplish such a feat.³⁰²

The most unusual form of escape, however, was that used by Luther B. Lake. Lake and his companions, who simply watched the guard when they were given the chance to bathe in the Chesapeake, and when the guard was turned around, they simply walked out to a sandbar and

²⁹⁷ Jones, *In Prison at Point Lookout*, 4.

²⁹⁸ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 111.

²⁹⁹ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 68.

³⁰⁰ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 11.

³⁰¹ Malone, *Whipt’ em Everytime*, 97. Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 68.

³⁰² Jones, *In Prison at Point Lookout*, 8.

followed it inland until they were away from the prison camp.³⁰³ Another unusual, but successful escape plan occurred when a man had been mistakenly marked dead. The man was able to exchange names with a prisoner who did not wish to leave the prison, likely for fear of facing more combat, and when the prisoner who wished to remain was called for parole, the man who had been mistakenly listed as deceased assumed the other man's identity and simply walked out of the camp.³⁰⁴ The most common method of escape employed the Chesapeake Bay. While bathing, prisoners were on constant watch for barrels or crates floating by on the tide, when one approached the shore inside the dead line, a prisoner would duck under or behind the obstacle and simply float along with it, out of sight of the prison. There is no indication that the guards ever caught on to prisoners escaping in this way.³⁰⁵

Exchanges did occur from Point Lookout at roughly the same frequency as they did at

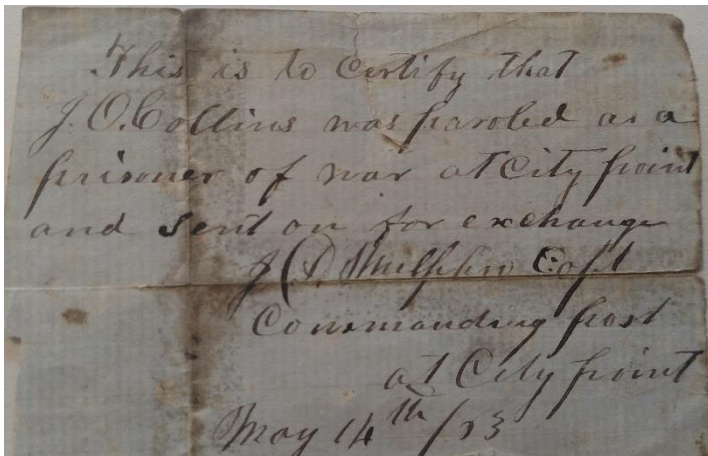


Figure 19: Certificate of Exchange for John O. Collins from Point Lookout, Manuscripts Collection, VHS.

Belle Isle. They were rare and usually necessitated by a wave of illness or increase in deaths among prisoners. Another common reason for exchanges was public outcry. People were irate at the rumors circulating about how prisoners were treated in prison

camps, so on Christmas, 1863, General Butler sent 502 prisoners from Point Lookout to City Point to await exchange, claiming that he examined the prisoners to be released, as well as the ones remaining, and determined them to be in good health. He asserted that this was motivated by his desire to comfort the public, hoping that Robert Ould would “be able to satisfy the friends

³⁰³ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 93-96.

³⁰⁴ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 98.

³⁰⁵ Hopkins, *From Bull Run to Appomattox*, LOC 1421.

of the prisoners who may be disturbed by the unfounded reports of ill treatment and cruelty suffered by the prisoners at Point Lookout.”³⁰⁶ Exchanges resulted in thousands of prisoners being exchanged over the course of the war, but it was not nearly enough to ease the overcrowding in the prisons.

The only relief for the overcrowding of prisons came after the conclusion of the war. Even though General Lee surrendered on April 9, 1865, prisoners at Point Lookout did not begin to be released until May 12. Belle Isle had been emptied since at least April 14.³⁰⁷ Even then, at Point Lookout only prisoners whose last names began with A or B and had taken the Oath of Allegiance to the United States before Richmond fell to the Union, were released. Taking the oath was more common in Union prisons than in Confederate ones, especially as the war drew closer to a conclusion. Even before the end of the war, prisoners felt that the Union was attempting to force them to swear the Oath of Allegiance through their acts of cruelty, such as not providing enough blankets, food, or proper tents. As a result, many prisoners took the Oath and joined the Union Army, but die-hard Rebels that caught wind of such treason would often attack the prisoner the night before he swore the Oath while in disguise.³⁰⁸ After the war’s end, prisoners were still forced to swear the Oath of Allegiance before being released. However, because they only swore the Oath after the Confederacy had fallen, they were released last. As of June 10, 1865, they called for release of all prisoners whose last names beginning with C to be released, skipping the A’s and B’s, indicating that the release process dragged on for several months after the conclusion of the war.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ Butler to Ould, December 25, 1863, *OR* 2:6:755.

³⁰⁷ “Richmond Whig, 4/14/1865,” Civil War Richmond, http://www.mdgorman.com/Written_Accounts/Whig/1865/richmond_whig_4141865.htm, accessed Sept. 8, 2016.

³⁰⁸ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 72-73.

³⁰⁹ Allen, *Private Journal of Matthew Wood Allen*, 71.

The strongest commonality between prisoners at Belle Isle and those at Point Lookout was that the prisoners developed a sense of community to keep their spirits up. Much like the prisoners on Belle Isle, Point Lookout prisoners were in agony being away from home and utterly helpless when their families fell on hard times.³¹⁰ That time away from home and loved ones, with no other option, caused depression among the prisoners. In April, 1864, Charles Hutt recorded in his diary that “I feel very gloomy and why shouldn’t I, for it has been more than two years since I saw those I love.”³¹¹ George Neese described the depression among the prisoners as best as he could, writing, “the melancholy gloom that settles down like eternal night on the spirit of man and crushes hope to the dark recesses of its lowest stage, so that life itself becomes a burden that may be dragged, but too wearisome to bear. No painter’s palette ever held a color black enough to truthfully delineate the shadows that constantly hang around and overarch the pathway that a prisoner of war in these United States is forced to tread.”³¹² The depression was so overwhelming that Charles Hutt even longed for death, writing on December 30, 1854, “O, to be with the Lord.”³¹³ Hiram Williams noted that the predictability of each day was also a cause of depression when he wrote, “This prison life is getting unendurable. The weary monotony of day after day, it is awful.”³¹⁴ Depression plagued the prisoners at Point Lookout.

The Chesapeake Bay provided ample pleasure to the prisoners at Point Lookout. John R. King remembered, “Bathing in the bay was a source of pleasure granted us and we certainly took advantage of it. It was thick with bathers every day, ... I sometimes went to the bottom where the water was ten feet deep and found a few oysters to eat.... When the tide was coming in the water was delightful, at the dead line we sat on the post until the waves were highest, then we rode

³¹⁰ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 49.

³¹¹ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 71.

³¹² Neese, *Three Years in the Confederate Horse Artillery*, LOC 9651.

³¹³ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 87.

³¹⁴ Williams, *This War So Horrible*, 131.

them to the shore.”³¹⁵ The prisoners had access to the beach from sunrise to sunset every day, but only under the close watch of the guards. Even so, this was a luxury prisoners in other prisons could only dream of. Prisoners on Belle Isle were even denied access to the water, though it surrounded the prison, for fear of attempted escapes. The bay was just one way for prisoners to improve their spirits at Point Lookout.

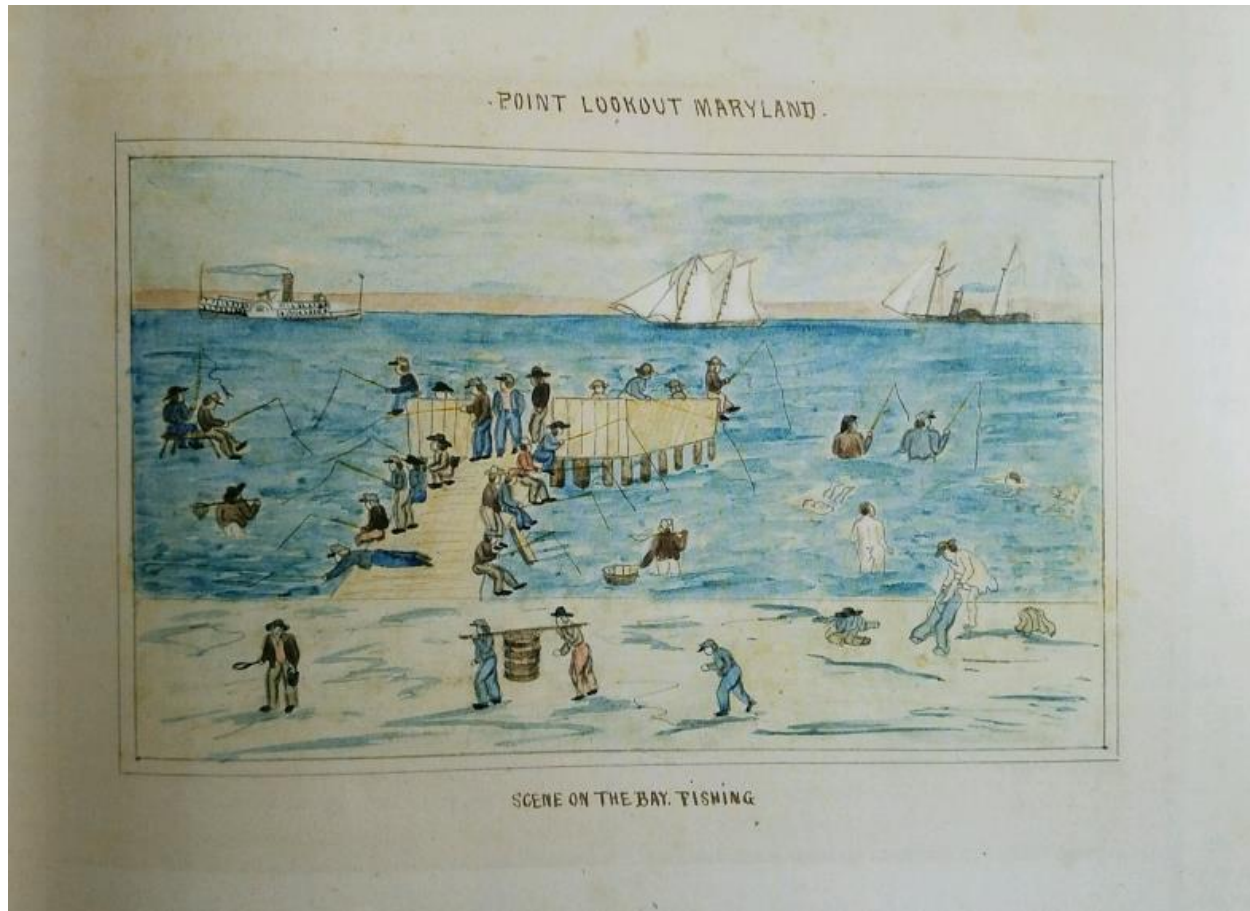


Figure 20: *Point Lookout Maryland. Scene on the Bay. Fishing.* Omenhausser, found in Kimmel and Musick, *"I am Busy Drawing Pictures,"* 77.

As at Belle Isle, prisoners at Point Lookout became creative when it came to trying to boost their own spirits and the spirits of their comrades. Prisoners developed hobbies including brick making, ring making, gambling, and trading, among other things, and it was noted by

³¹⁵ King, *My experience in the Confederate Army and in Northern Prisons*, 30.

Doctor W. F. Swalm that “while thus engaged they are unmindful of the cold.”³¹⁶ Ring making was particularly popular among the prisoners. Matthew Allen recorded in his diary on June 5, 1865, that he had made a ring for his mother. The transcriber of Allen’s diary added a note claiming the prisoners made trinkets such as this from coins, shells, driftwood, or any other available items.³¹⁷ Many of these items could be scrounged inside the camp, but the work details who had the privilege of leaving camp for the day brought back items from the outside world that could be crafted into something else.³¹⁸ These hobbies were beneficial to the mental health of the prisoners.

Numerous prisoners at Point Lookout recorded reading as one of their hobbies, unlike prisoners at Belle Isle who do not mention having any access to or receiving any reading materials. Charles Hutt recorded in his diary the numerous gifts he received from home, which consisted mainly of books. He frequently recorded in his diary what he was currently reading, creating quite a lengthy list.³¹⁹ Malone also noted a companion purchased a newspaper inside the prison and spent the day reading it, indicating that, unlike the Confederate prisons, the Union did not feel the need to limit prisoner’s access to the press.³²⁰ Alonzo Morgan noted that there was a tent in the prison, “called the Library Tent, in which, and through which we furnished books, tracts, &c. for distracts, hymn books, &c., making inquiry always to any who wanted testaments.”³²¹ The indication that there was a library provided for the prisoners is a powerful indicator that the Union was in fact trying to care for its prisoners. There is certainly no record of

³¹⁶ Swalm to Douglas, November 13, 1863, *OR* 2:6:578-579.

³¹⁷ Allen, *Private Journal of Matthew Wood Allen*, 73.

³¹⁸ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 89.

³¹⁹ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 65-87.

³²⁰ Malone, *Whipt’ em Everytime*, 115.

³²¹ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 106.

a library at Belle Isle, which is the likely cause of so many more prisoners at Point Lookout recording that they spent much of their free time reading.

Letters were highly desired reading material among the prisoners at Point Lookout, as much as they were at Belle Isle. Matthew Allen frequently recorded who wrote to him and whom he wrote to in return, noting that mail was not allowed to be sent if dated on a Sunday.³²² Doctor Frederick Griffith confirmed how much a source of joy receiving letters was for prisoners when he answered his wife's letter opening with "Your letter... has just been recd: & I dont know how I can employ my time more profitably or pleasantly than by answering it."³²³ Despite the benefit of writing and receiving letters, outgoing mail was censored to prevent the prisoners from writing home about the deplorable conditions they were being kept under. Marcus Toney remembered that "In writing a letter you could use only one side of the sheet, as all letters had to be examined and approved before mailing, and you had to be careful not to write anything contraband. The envelopes were stamped: 'Prisoner's letter, examined and approved.'"³²⁴ Prisoner John Collins, in a letter to his wife wrote, "I wish I could write what I pleased to you but we can only write so much."³²⁵ John Jacob Omenhausser even wrote to his fiancé, disguised as his cousin so that they could correspond while he was imprisoned, and described how much joy letters could bring when he wrote, "I was very low spirited today, on account of seeing so many prisoners going to there homes, but after receiving your ever welcome letter, I felt like another being."³²⁶ Writing and receiving mail was a benefit to the prisoners.

³²² Allen, *Private Journal of Matthew Wood Allen*, 66-74.

³²³ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 48.

³²⁴ Toney, *Privations of a Private*, 79.

³²⁵ John O. Collins to his wife, November 8, 1863, Manuscript Collections, VHS.

³²⁶ Kimmel and Musick, "*I am Busy Drawing Pictures*," 163. Correspondence to and from Point Lookout was limited to immediate family members only.

Another benefit to the mental health of the prisoners was a school established inside the prison. It was founded by Alonzo Morgan, a Confederate Methodist minister, who was responsible for the education of, at Omenhausser's guess, over 1200 students.³²⁷ He also served as the preacher for church services.³²⁸ Omenhausser mentioned the subjects taught, including "English grammar, natural philosophy, modern and ancient geography and history, geometry, bookkeeping, algebra, Latin, and vocabulary."³²⁹ Charles Hutt first noted the founding of the school in his diary on March 15, 1864, noting that it was under the control of a West Virginia



Figure 21: *Point Lookout Md. Prisoners Schoolhouse*, Omenhausser, found in Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 57.

graduate.³³⁰ Reverend Malachi Bowden made the decision to complete his education at the "first-class high school which was organized inside the prison.... Attendance was voluntary, and no

³²⁷ Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 56, 99.

³²⁸ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 61; Malone, *Whipt' em Everytime* 114.

³²⁹ Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 99.

³³⁰ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 70.

tuition was charged.”³³¹ The school was immensely popular, as noted by Malone, who with “Q. T. Anderson W. W. Murrie & W. F. Wells went up to the School house to a Debate but did not get in.”³³² Morgan, in a letter to an unknown recipient, even included a list of the teachers he used to help teach the numerous lessons.³³³ These lessons and debates provided a much needed, engaging distraction for the prisoners.

Games provided immense relief that the prisoners needed on a daily basis due to the monotony of prison life. The majority of the games were card games including chuck luck, seven up, faro, and draughts.³³⁴ Chess was also popular, but the most popular of all was gambling, primarily by playing the card game blackjack. Gamblers used tobacco as currency, and were also frequently spotted playing “keno,” a precursor to bingo.³³⁵ Similar to gambling, tobacco was also used as currency for trading, along with hard tack. Trading provided an outlet for those who were able to craft items such as rings and bricks, or even foodstuffs such as bread or coffee. Prisoners were even able to trade with the guards, though this was rare as it involved substantially more risk as many of the items the prisoners intended for barter were created out of supplies they were not intended to have.³³⁶

There were many benefits to learning a trade at Point Lookout. The first and most obvious, was as a distraction from the day to day tedium of prison life. If a prisoner spent the day making bricks, rather than sitting around his tent simply starving, the time was sure to pass quicker, and keep the mind off of the miserable conditions of the prison. It also allowed the

³³¹ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 97.

³³² Malone, *Whipt' em Everytime*, 115.

³³³ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 106.

³³⁴ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 99.

³³⁵ Kimmel and Musick, “*I am Busy Drawing Pictures*,” 99.

³³⁶ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 60.

prisoners to earn a wage so that they could purchase additional food or clothing, as well as any

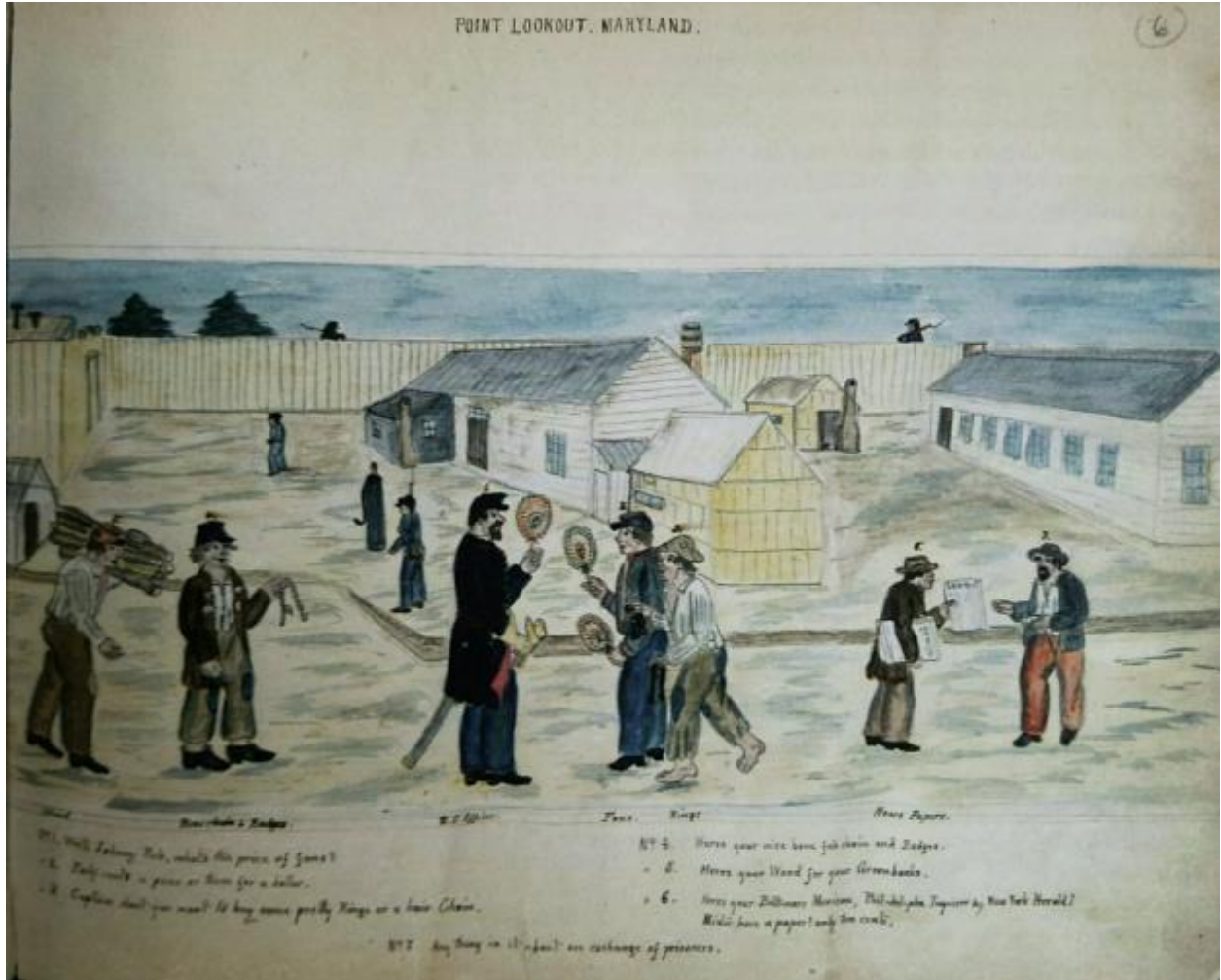


Figure 22: Point Lookout, Maryland, Omenhausser, found in Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 51.

trinkets made by other prisoners that they desired for themselves or to send back home to their families. Trade skills ranged from ring making to artwork, and included shoemakers, barbers, or laundry men. The only things prisoners needed to develop a marketable skill were the resources particular to their desires and a crackerbox table outside their tent upon which they placed their wares for sale. In line with trade skills, music was highly marketable and provided great entertainment to other prisoners.³³⁷ A glee club, known as the Confederate Varieties was formed and gave performances wearing blackface on December 1, 3, and 5, 1864 and can be seen in

³³⁷ Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 61.

Figure 23. Malone attended the December 3 performance, noting “it was a very good thing they performed in a vacon Cook-house.”³³⁸ Music was essential to help prisoners keep their spirits up and hope for release.

One of the greatest sources of hope for prisoners at Point Lookout was the Virginia



Figure 23: *Point Lookout Md. Confederate Variety's*. Omenhausser, found in Kimmel and Musick, "I am Busy Drawing Pictures," 102.

³³⁸ Malone, *Whipt' em Everytime*, 114; Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 62, 86, 100.

shoreline visible in the distance across the water. While imprisoned, J. A. Chamberlayne attested to the hope that the sight of Virginia gave the prisoners in a letter to his mother, in which he wrote, “Here the buildings are clean & airy & afar off, yet in sight, stretches the shore of the beloved land, a sight of which is precious after 7 months of Ohio.... I am comfortable—sand, & sea breeze, & a hazy view of Virginia shore, are better than mud & Ohio.”³³⁹ The Virginia shoreline was not the only source of hope for prisoners. Many had daguerreotypes of family members that gave them hope. Doctor Frederick Griffith mourned the loss of his image of his wife, writing to her saying “You dont know how much I have regretted not having your daguerreotype since my capture.”³⁴⁰ These images made prisoners feel that home was not so far away, much in the same way the hazy Virginia shoreline did.

The most tangible connection between the prisoners, their families, and the government was through the newspapers. The war between Southern and Northern newspapers did not only attack Confederate prisons. Union prisons were condemned just as vehemently. The *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, for instance, wrote that “Two-thirds of the number [of prisoners at Point Lookout] apparently had not reached the age of twenty-one, while the remaining third of them ranged between the years of twelve and sixteen.”³⁴¹ This remark was clearly inflammatory and wildly inaccurate as most recorded histories from inside the camp itself came from authors in their late twenties and early thirties. C. W. Jones was one of the youngest to record his memories, as he was only twenty when taken to Point Lookout. However, Southern newspapers did not always print inaccurate information. For instance, the *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, on March 10, 1864, published, “The fare at Point Lookout is one degree removed from starvation....

³³⁹ J. A. Chamberlayne to his Mother, February 14, 1864, Manuscript Collection, VHS.

³⁴⁰ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 48.

³⁴¹ “From Grant’s army—return of Butler’s expeditionary vessels—an attack by the Confederates Apprehended—the North Carolina Junior reserves, etc.” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 5, 1865.

Many of the prisoners without money are enabled by manufacturing trinkets to sell them.”³⁴² These facts were written down and confirmed by prisoners at Point Lookout, though the confirmation was not uncovered until after the end of the war and in later years. Just a few days prior, the same newspaper had also published that numerous prisoners of war that had just been exchanged from Point Lookout claimed that “the treatment at Point Lookout [was] good, and when compared to Fort Delaware, excellent.”³⁴³ Though the Southern newspapers did print inflammatory material regarding Northern prisons, that was clearly not always the case.

As was the case with Southern newspapers discussing Southern prisons, the Northern newspapers gave glowing reviews of their prisons. The *New York Times*, for instance claimed that “The prisoners all look hearty, well-fed and well-clothed, with sickness averaging only seven percent, and apart from the irksome confinement the sentiment prevailing among the majority, is a preference to remain as prisoners of war, rather than be sent back into the rebel army.”³⁴⁴ In September, 1864, the *New York Herald* published concise reports on the conditions of Libby and Belle Isle Prisons in Richmond, Virginia, concluding that “We need not say that our rebel prisoners are well, and even kindly and carefully treated in all the particulars in which the rebel authorities are so barbarously cruel. The rations are better than those usually given to rebel soldiers. They have room to walk, to play, and to live.”³⁴⁵ The North claiming that the prisoners were so well-kept should not be surprising, given that the Southern newspapers did the same regarding their own captives, but it was still inaccurate reporting. The prisoners at Point Lookout were crowded, not with the plentiful space as implied by the *New York Herald*. They

³⁴² “Prison Life at the North,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, March 10, 1864.

³⁴³ “The Prisoners from Point Lookout,” *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, March 8, 1864.

³⁴⁴ “From Point Lookout: The Rebel Prisoners, and how they are Treated—How they Employ their Leisure—The Iron-Clad Roanoke,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1864.

³⁴⁵ “The Southern Military Prisons, Inquiry by the United States Sanitary Commission—Confirmatory Account of the Suffering of Our Soldiers,” *New York Herald*, September 26, 1864.

were almost never issued the full rations allotted to them in an attempt to build up the prisoner's fund, and those rations issued were certainly sub-par.

The newspapers were the peacekeeping tools of the governments, as they were fed inaccurate information by each government to pacify the public and inspire fear for the enemy.³⁴⁶ They played a key role in the prisoner relations aspect of the government, because they were the main channel through which civilians received information and gave their response back in regards to the treatment of prisoners of war. These responses influenced the creation of documents such as the Lieber Code. When the government was able to pacify the public with reports that all was well, it saved them the time and money that would be required to facilitate more legislation and prisoner exchanges. Whether the newspapers knew the reality of what happened inside the prisons or not can never be proven. Whether they were simply fed false information by their respective governments can never be proven. Nevertheless, they were clearly a tool used to manipulate public feeling toward prison camps, whether they did so of their own volition or of that of the governments is the real question.

Prisoners languished at Point Lookout much as they did on Belle Isle. Their particular forms of suffering may have been different and their freedoms greater, but they were still mistreated at the hands of a government that was responsible for their well-being. As Captain Robert E. Park noted in his diary, "These resolute, suffering private soldiers and their comrades in the field are the true heroes of the war: they, and not the men of rank, deserve the most honor and gratitude."³⁴⁷ He wrote that statement while he was a prisoner of war at Point Lookout, after reflecting on his observations on both the battlefield and inside prison walls. The "heroes" imprisoned at Point Lookout were all finally released on July 5, 1865. General Barnes reported

³⁴⁶ J. Cutler Andrews, *The South Reports the Civil War*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 527.

³⁴⁷ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 99.

that “all prisoners had been released except for a few in the hospital; and on July 13, Point Lookout was officially discontinued as a garrison post and one Company, the 24th Regiment of U. S. Colored Troops, was left to look after the government property.”³⁴⁸ The “heroes” across the recently reunited nation were on their way home.

³⁴⁸ Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, 41.

Conclusion

The Civil War is known to this day as one of the deadliest wars in American history. A large percentage of these deaths occurred under horrendous conditions in prison camps, of both the Union and the Confederacy. It is estimated that 56,000 men perished in prisons across the divided country.³⁴⁹ The opposing governments had a mighty hand in the high death rates among prisoners of war, due to their decisions to use prisoners of war in their political warfare. Through the lenses of Belle Isle and Point Lookout, it is clear that soldiers suffered at both Belle Isle and Point Lookout and that suffering was distorted by the press. The decision that began the domino effect that culminated in the drastic overcrowding of Civil War prisons was made by the Confederacy when they declared Union African American soldiers as escaped slaves rather than prisoners of war. This led to mass executions on the battlefield and soldiers being sold into slavery, which angered the Union government, and resulted in the North halting prisoner exchanges until every one of their soldiers were recognized as such and captured instead of murdered or sold. Overcrowding caused by these decisions caused numerous problems, both on the ground inside the prisons, and in the government, where decisions about treatment and supplies were made.

³⁴⁹ Hall, "U. S. Civil War Camps Claimed Thousands," *National Geographic*, July 1, 2003.

John Ransom and Bartlett Yancey Malone both survived the war and described their first moments of freedom. Ransom had been transferred to Andersonville prison in Georgia and was able to escape. After living on the run for several days Ransom finally wrote “Safe and sound among our own United States Army troops, after an imprisonment of nearly fourteen months. Will not attempt to describe my feelings now. Could not do it.”³⁵⁰ Malone’s recounting of his release was not as grandiose as Ransom’s. The excitement was still evident in his writing, but he simply described stopping at various homes of family friends on his long walk home after years away, fighting in the war and imprisoned at Point Lookout.³⁵¹ Ransom and Malone illustrated two different responses to freedom, but those responses mattered little to the newly freed men. All that mattered to them was getting home.

Belle Isle’s prison camp has only been recognized in memoriam in recent years. Today, the Richmond island is a part of the James River Park System, and is one of the most sought after places for outdoor recreation among the people of Richmond. There are hiking trails and a large path that wraps around the island, giving sunbathers and swimmers access to the rocks and waters that create the rapids that kept prisoners trapped on the island that was home to so much suffering. Until a recent project increased awareness, there was nearly no indication that anything horrific had happened on the sunny island. There was also only one non-descript sign that only hinted at the atrocities suffered on Belle Isle. The recent project to increase Civil War memory added several signs as well as a memorial bike rack in the shape of a Sibley tent, which is what the prisoners that were lucky enough to have had a tent would have lived in.

Despite these improvements, it is still difficult to find any information on the memorial and history of the prison camp during a basic Google search of the island. The people who

³⁵⁰ Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, 184.

³⁵¹ Malone, *Whipt’em Everytime*, 119.

frequent the island would much rather highlight the fun side. Any search adding “memorial” or “Civil War” leads to results regarding the preservation of Belle Isle, Michigan, as that park was founded during the Civil War. The bike rack memorial itself was a project developed for a class by a Virginia Commonwealth University professor and not a project of the James River Park System. The bike rack was erected in December, 2014, but within three months vandals tossed it into the James River. It has since been re-erected with more memorials planned by the professor, should he be granted permission to erect them by the James River Park System.³⁵² An online



Figure 24: Kirk Richardson, "Belle Isle Interpretive Bike Rack Series," Indiegogo, June 25, 2015.

fundraising campaign for the project was established in June of 2015, but in over a year and a half only nine hundred and fifty dollars of the twenty-four thousand dollar goal has been raised, making it unlikely that there will be more memorials erected to commemorate the prisoners who suffered on the island and even lost their lives there. There are four or five signs around the location of the prison camp to help visitors to orient themselves and realize

³⁵² Kirk Richardson, "Belle Isle Interpretive Bike Rack Series," Indiegogo, June 25, 2015, accessed February 27, 2017.

what occurred there. Vandalism is a recurring problem on Belle Isle resulting in many of the historical ruins and markers to be doused in fresh spray paint not long after they have been restored from the previous acts of vandalism. The lack of security on the island is indicative of the lack of importance placed on Civil War memory, at least in Richmond, Virginia. The memorials at Point Lookout, Maryland, are another story entirely.

The main focus of Point Lookout today, like Belle Isle, is as a place for recreation. It is now a Maryland state park and offers recreational activities such as summer programs, camping, and fishing. There is also a beach picnic area for eating, swimming, and sunbathing, which also includes a playground. Also available to visitors is a pavilion for parties, a park store, a Civil War Museum and Marshland Nature Center, boating, self-guided tours of Fort Lincoln, tours of the lighthouse, hiking, and hunting.³⁵³ The Point Lookout Confederate Cemetery is now under the protection of the federal government and there are two monuments at the cemetery that were erected in honor of the fallen Confederate soldiers buried there.³⁵⁴ The Descendants of Point



Figure 25: The monuments erected by the State Park and the Federal Government to honor the Confederate Prisoners who lost their lives at Point Lookout. http://www.cem.va.gov/cems/lots/point_lookout.asp

³⁵³ “Point Lookout State Park,” Maryland.gov, accessed February 27, 2017.

³⁵⁴ “Point Lookout Confederate Cemetery—Civil War Era National Cemeteries: Discover Our Shared heritage Travel Itinerary,” National Park Service, accessed February 27, 2017.

Lookout POW Organization purchased three acres adjacent to the cemetery and created the Confederate Memorial Park. Here, they erected their own memorial, a bronze statue of a Confederate Prisoner of War, surrounded by the Confederate flag and the flags of the thirteen states that fought for the Confederacy.³⁵⁵



Figure 26: Descendents of Point Lookout POW Organization's Memorial,
<https://www.visitstmarysmd.com/site/detail/confederate-memorial-park>

The memorials at Belle Isle and Point Lookout highlight a stark contrast in Civil War memory. A large part of that difference is due to the Union winning the Civil War. The victors have no reason to try and forget the war. The south, on the other hand, perhaps having felt the keen sting of their loss, has far fewer memorials for the Civil War, particularly where atrocities, rather than acts of Confederate heroism, occurred. Belle Isle and Point Lookout are good representations of the different sides Civil War memory. Given the relative lack of historiography on Civil War prison camps and the lack of memorials to commemorate the victims of those camps, it is vital for historians to uncover, as best they can, the reality of what happened in the prison camps of the Civil War, without the racial bias and Confederate pride that plagued so much of the previously published Civil War histories.

³⁵⁵ “Welcome to Confederate Memorial Park’s Website,” Welcome to Confederate Memorial Park, INC., accessed February 27, 2017.

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Appendix 1

The Dix-Hill Cartel

HAXALL's LANDING, ON JAMES RIVER, VA.,

July 22, 1862

The undersigned having been commissioned by the authorities they respectively represent to make arrangements for a general exchange of prisoners of war have agreed to the following articles:

ARTICLE 1. It is hereby agreed and stipulated that all prisoners of war held by either party including those taken on private armed vessels known as privateers shall be discharged upon the conditions and terms following:

Prisoners to be exchanged man for man and officer for officer; privateers to be placed upon the footing of officers and men of the Navy. Men and officers of lower grades may be exchanged for officers of a higher grade, and men and officers of different services may be exchanged according to the following scale of equivalents:

A general commanding in chief or an admiral shall be exchanged for officers of equal rank, or

for sixty privates or common seamen.

A flag officer or major general shall be exchanged for officers of equal rank, or for forty privates or common seamen.

A commodore carrying a broad pennant or a brigadier-general shall be exchanged for officers of equal rank, or twenty privates or common seamen.

A captain in the Navy or a colonel shall be exchanged for officers of equal rank, or for fifteen privates or common seamen.

A lieutenant-colonel or a commander in the Navy shall be exchanged for officers of equal rank, or for ten privates or common seamen.

A lieutenant-commander or a major shall be exchanged for officers of equal rank, or eight privates or common seamen.

A lieutenant or a master in the Navy or a captain in the Army or marines shall be exchanged for officers of equal rank, or six privates or common seamen.

Masters' mates in the Navy or lieutenants and ensigns in the Army or marines shall be exchanged for officers of equal rank, or four privates or common seamen.

Midshipmen, warrant officers in the Navy, masters of merchant vessels and commanders of privateers shall be exchanged for officers of equal rank, or three privates or common seamen.

Second captains, lieutenants or mates of merchant vessels or privateers and all petty officers in the Navy and all non-commissioned officers in the Army or marines shall be severally exchanged for persons of equal rank, or for two privates or common seamen, and private soldiers or common seamen shall be exchanged for each other, man for man.

ARTICLE 2. Local, State, civil and militia rank held by persons not in actual military service will not be recognized, the basis of exchange being the grade actually held in the naval and

military service of the respective parties.

ARTICLE 3. If citizens held by either party on charges of disloyalty or any alleged civil offense are exchanged it shall be only for citizens. Captured sutlers, teamsters and all civilians in the actual service of either party to be exchanged for persons in similar position.

ARTICLE 4. All prisoners of war to be discharged on parole in ten days after their capture, and the prisoners now held and those hereafter taken to be transported to the points mutually agreed upon at the expense of the capturing party. The surplus prisoners not exchanged shall not be permitted to take up arms again, nor to serve as military police or constabulary force in any fort, garrison, or field-work held by either of the respective parties, nor as guards of prisons, depots or stores, nor to discharge any duty usually performed by soldiers, until exchanged under the provisions of this cartel. The exchange is not to be considered complete until the officer or soldier exchanged for has been actually restored to the lines to which he belongs.

ARTICLE 5. Each party upon the discharge of prisoners of the other party is authorized to discharge an equal number of their own officers or men from parole, furnishing at the same time to the other party a list of the prisoners discharged and of their own officers and men relieved from parole, thus enabling each party to relieve from parole such of their own officers and men as the party may choose. The lists thus mutually furnished will keep both parties advised of the true condition of the exchange of prisoners.

ARTICLE 6. The stipulations and provisions above mentioned to be of binding obligation during the continuance of the war, it matters not which party may have the surplus of prisoners, the great principles involved being, first, an equitable exchange of prisoners, man for man, officer for officer, or officers of higher grade exchanged for officers of lower grade or for privates, according to the scale of equivalents; second, that privateers and officers and men of different

services may be exchanged according to the same scale of equivalents; third, that all prisoners, of whatever arm of service, are to be exchanged or paroled in ten days from the time of their capture, if it be practicable to transfer them to their own lines in that time; if not, as soon thereafter as practicable; fourth, that no officer, soldier, or employee, in the service of either party, is to be considered as exchanged and absolved from his parole until his equivalent has actually reached the lines of his friends; fifth, that the parole forbids the performance of field, garrison, police, or guard, or constabulary duty.

JOHN A. DIX

Major General, U.S. Army

D. H. HILL

Major-General, C.S. Army

SUPPLEMENTARY ARTICLES.

ARTICLE 7. All prisoners of war now held on either side and all prisoners hereafter taken shall be sent with all reasonable dispatch to A. M. Aiken's, below Dutch Gap, on the James River, Va., or to Vicksburg, on the Mississippi River, in the State of Mississippi, and there exchanged or paroled until such exchange can be effected, notice being previously given by each party of the number of prisoners it will send and the time when they will be delivered at those points respectively; and in case the vicissitudes of war shall change the military relations of the places designated in this article to the contending parties so as to render the same inconvenient for the delivery and exchange of prisoners, other places bearing as nearly as may be the present local relations of said places to the lines of said parties shall be by mutual agreement substituted. But nothing in this article contained shall prevent the commanders of two opposing armies from

exchanging prisoners or releasing them on parole from other points mutually agreed on by said commanders.

ARTICLE 8. For the purpose of carrying into effect the foregoing articles of agreement each party will appoint two agents, to be called agents for the exchange of prisoners of war, whose duty it shall be to communicate with each other by correspondence and otherwise, to prepare the lists of prisoners, to attend to the delivery of the prisoners at the places agreed on and to carry out promptly, effectually and in good faith all the details and provisions of the said articles of agreement.

ARTICLE 9. And in case any misunderstanding shall arise in regard to any clause or stipulation in the foregoing articles it is mutually agreed that such misunderstanding shall not interrupt the release of prisoners on parole, as herein provided, but shall be made the subject of friendly explanations in order that the object of this agreement may neither be defeated nor postponed.

JOHN A. DIX

Major-General, U.S. Army

D. H. HILL

Major-General, C.S. Army³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ John A. Dix, D.H. Hill, Dix-Hill Cartel, *Civil War Era NC*, accessed May 7, 2016, <http://cwnc.omeka.chass.ncsu.edu/items/show/611>.

Appendix 2

Selections from Gen. Orders 100, or the Lieber Code

Section III: Deserters—Prisoners of War—Hostages—Booty on the Battle field

Art. 49: A Prisoner of war is a public enemy armed or attached to the hostile army for active aid, who has fallen into the hands of the captor, either fighting or wounded, on the field or in the hospital, by individual surrender or capitulation.

All soldiers, of whatever species of arms; all men who belong to the rising en masse of the hostile country; all those who are attached to the army for its efficiency and promote directly the object of the war, except such as are hereinafter provided for; all disabled men or officers on the field or elsewhere, if captured; all enemies who have thrown away their arms and ask for quarter, are prisoners of war, and as such exposed to the inconveniences as well as entitled to the privileges of a prisoner of war.

Art. 50: Moreover, citizens who accompany an army for whatever purpose, such as sutlers, editors, or reporters of journals, or contractors, if captured, may be made prisoners of war, and be detained as such.

The monarch and members of the hostile reigning family, male or female, the chief, and chief officers of the hostile government, its diplomatic agents, and all persons who are of particular and singular use and benefit to the hostile army or its government are, if captured on

belligerent ground, and if unprovided with a safe conduct granted by the captor's government, prisoners of war.

Art. 53: The enemy's chaplains, officers of the medical staff, apothecaries, hospital nurses and servants, if they fall into the hands of the American Army, are not prisoners of war, unless the commander has reasons to retain them. In this latter case; or if, at their own desire, they are allowed to remain with their captured companions, they are treated as prisoners of war, and may be exchanged if the commander sees fit.

Art. 56: A prisoner of war is subject to no punishment for being a public enemy, nor is any revenge to be wreaked upon him by the international infliction of any suffering, or disgrace, by cruel imprisonment, want of food, by mutilation, death, or any other barbarity.

Art. 58: The law of nations knows no distinction of color, and if an enemy of the United States should enslave and sell any captured persons of their army, it would be a case for the severest retaliation, if not redressed upon complaint.

The United States cannot retaliate by enslavement; therefore death must be the retaliation for this crime against the law of nations.

Art. 72: Money and other valuables on the person of a prisoner, such as watches or jewelry, as well as extra clothing, are regarded by the American Army as the private property of the prisoner, and the appropriation of such valuables or money is considered dishonorable, and is prohibited. Nevertheless, if large sums are found upon the persons after providing for their own support, appropriated for the use of the army, under the direction of the commander, unless otherwise ordered by the government. Nor can prisoners claim, as private property, large sums found and captured in their train, although they have been placed in the private luggage of the prisoners.

Art. 74: A prisoner of war, being a public enemy, is the prisoner of the government, and not of the captor. No ransom can be paid by a prisoner of war to his individual captor or to any officer in command. The government alone releases captives, according to rules prescribed by itself.

Art. 75: Prisoners of war are subject to confinement or imprisonment such as may be deemed necessary on account of safety, but they are to be subjected to no other intentional suffering or indignity. The confinement and mode of treating a prisoner may be varied during his captivity according to the demands of safety.

Art. 76: Prisoners of war shall be fed upon plain wholesome food, whenever practicable, and treated with humanity.

They may be required to work for the benefit of the captor's government, according to their rank and condition.

Art. 77: A prisoner of war who escapes may be shot or otherwise killed in his flight; but neither death nor any other punishment shall be inflicted upon him simply for his attempt to escape, which the law of war does not consider a crime. Stricter means of security shall be used after an unsuccessful attempt at escape.

If, however, a conspiracy is discovered, the purpose of which is a united or general escape, the conspirators may be rigorously punished, even with death; and capital punishment may also be inflicted upon prisoners of war discovered to have plotted rebellion against the authorities of the captors, whether in union with fellow prisoners or other persons.

Art. 78: If prisoners of war, having given no pledge nor made any promise on their honor, forcibly or otherwise escape, and are captured again in battle after having rejoined their own army, they shall not be punished for their escape, but shall be treated as simple prisoners of war, although they will be subjected to stricter confinement.

Art. 79: Every captured wounded enemy shall be medically treated, according to the ability of the medical staff.

Art. 80: Honorable men, when captured, will abstain from giving to the enemy information concerning their own army, and the modern law of war permits no longer the use of any violence against prisoners in order to extort the desired information or to punish them for having given false information.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁷ All selections were pulled from Springer and Robins, *Transforming Civil War Prisons*, 144-149.

Appendix 3

THE BELLE ISLAND PRISON SONG.

As composed and sang on Belle Island by a starving Union
war prison quartette, during the Slave Holders Rebellion, 1861-65.
This Island is in the James River, near Richmond, Va.

(Air—"Robert Ridley.")

Come list to me old soldiers true,
While I'll a story sing to you,
Its all about this Island, Belle,
Where cruel starvings made to tell.

CHORUS—

Ho! Belle Island, Ho!
O Ho! Belle Island, Ho!
O Ho! Belle Island, Ho-o-o!
We long from you to go

Belle Island is a splendid camp,
You sleep so nice you get the cramp,
Tents are open behind and before,
The gray backs stand guard around the floor.

CHORUS—

Comforts here are very great,
You get some grub though oftimes late,
Just take the Sergeant by the hair,
And hold him until we get our share.

CHORUS—

They feed us here but twice a day,
So little a bird could carry it away,
With stinkin' meat and buggie soup,
That gives all the measles and the croup.

CHORUS—

Jeff Davis, he does all things well,
Though he and his army will go to Hell—
Where they say its all agreed,
That from the devil they can't secede.

CHORUS—

You have nothing to do but roam the street,
With ragged clothes and nothing to eat,
Now comrades you must not despair,
Columbia never seemed so fair.

CHORUS—

You must not fret but happy be,
Until Uncle Abe doth set us free,
When down the river we will go,
To see that fortress called Monroe.

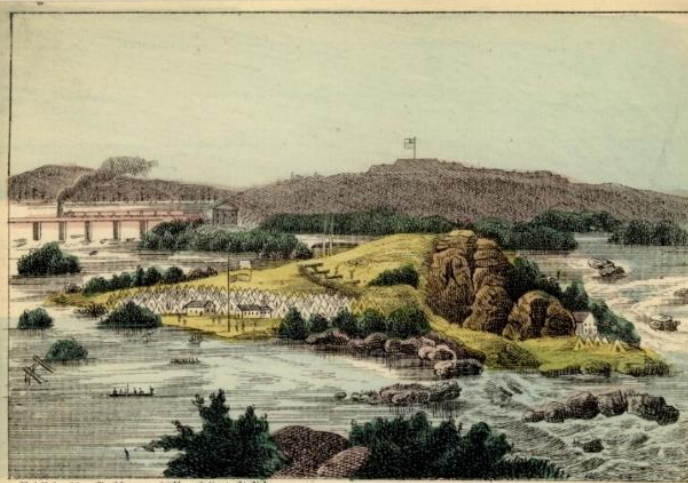
CHORUS—

O Ho! Belle Island, Ho!

A. P. Watson, Indiana, Pa. No. 11, U. V. L., Post 28, G. A. R.

Figure 27: Courtesy of Robert Krick, RNBP

Appendix 4



Published by Ch^s Magnus 12 Frankfort St. N.Y.

BELLE ISLE Richmond Va.

Here in Belle Isle's dreary Prison.

By JOHN ROSS DIX.

Air: "Just before the Battle Mother."

Here in Belle Isle's rebel prison,
Pining through the livelong day,
I am dreaming, sad and lonely
Of the dear ones far away:
Comrades brave are sinking round me,
I like them may droop and die,
But though Tyrant-chains have bound me,
UNION! still shall be my cry.
CHORUS: Farewell dear ones! if I perish—
Hard I fought our Flag to save—
Then, the Soldier's memory cherish,
Lying in a distant grave.

Would I were once more in Battle
Mingling in the bloody strife!
Not where Rebel walls are crushing,
But a free-born Soldier's life!
But in bonds each aspiration
Are for Freedom—though I die!
God preserve our glorious Nation!
UNION! *Peace and Liberty!*
CHORUS: Farewell, dear ones—if I perish—
Hard I fought our Flag to save
Then the Soldier's memory cherish,
Lying in his bloody grave!

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1864, by
CHARLES MAGNUS, in the Clerk's Office, of the District Court of the United States
for the Southern District of New York.

Appendix 5

Date	Shooting Information
11/16/1863	Guard shot prisoner for looking through fence. Report of Joseph M. Kerns.
1/12/1864	Silas Douglas shot by guard. Report of Charles W. Hutt.
3/20/1864	White Sergeant Edward Young shoots and kills Lawrence Payton for sassing him. Reported by Bartlett Y. Malone.
3/22/1864	White Sergeant Edward Young shoots and kills Lawrence Payton for sassing him. Reported by Charles W. Hutt.
4/18/1864	Negro guard shot and wounded a prisoner. Reported by Bartlett Y. Malone
4/21/1864	Negro shot into tent wounding two men. Reported by Bartlett Y. Malone. May be same report as James T. Wells and N. F. Harman's, neither has a date. According to Sergeant Major William H. Laird two prisoners were shot in the foot during the same night.
5/23/1864	Negro guard shoots and kills man who accidentally stepped over the deadline near the mess hall. Wounds four other prisoners. One man later dies. Report of L. Leon and Joseph M. Kerns.
5/24/1864	Negro guard shot and killed one prisoner and wounded three more. Reported by Bartlett Y. Malone.
8/7/1864	Negro guard shot and killed a prisoner for no reason. Report of Charles W. Hutt and Joseph M. Kerns. May be same report as Bartlett Y. Malone of the same date.
8/7/1864	Negro guard shot and killed a prisoner for no reason. Report of Bartlett Y. Malone. May be same report as Charles W. Hutt of the same date.
8/15/1864	White guard shoots at a prisoner, misses him, severely wounds prisoner in tent. Report of Joseph M. Kerns.
8/28/1864	Guard shot and wounded prisoner. Report of Bartlett Y. Malone.
11/29/1864	Guard shot prisoner for looking through fence. Report of Bartlett Y. Malone.
12/7/1864	Negro guard shot and wounded a feeble prisoner for walking too slowly away from the latrine. Report of Alfred Perkins.
12/16/1864	White officer shot men crowding prison gate. One prisoner is killed and four were wounded. Report of Bartlett Y. Malone and Joseph M. Kerns.
1/22/1865	Negro guard shoots and kills prisoner during the night. Report of Bartlett Y. Malone.

Figure 28: Shooting of Prisoners by Guards with Known Dates, William Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 27.

Date	Shooting Information
Unknown	Negro guard shot two men outside their tents at night using the latrine. Report of Walter D. Addison.
Unknown	Negro guard shot several prisoners over several days for being at the water pump. Report of a Confederate officer. May be same report task J. B. Stamp.
Unknown	Negro guard shooting into tent at night killing two prisoners. Report of N. F. Harman. May be same report as James T. Wells.
Unknown	Negro guard shoots and kills two prisoners and wounds another two over a watch. Report of John R. King.
Unknown	Guard shoots and kills man for whittling on gate. Report of Charles T. Loehr.
Unknown	Negro guard shot at one prisoner, missing him, but wounded three more at water pump near hospital. Report of J. B. Stamp.
Unknown	Guard wounded two prisoners crowding the deadline near the gate. Report of Marcus B. Toney.
Unknown	Negro guard shot into tent killing two men and wounding 2 to 3 more. Report of James T. Wells.

Figure 29: Shooting of Prisoners by Guards with no Known Dates, William Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 28.

Appendix 6

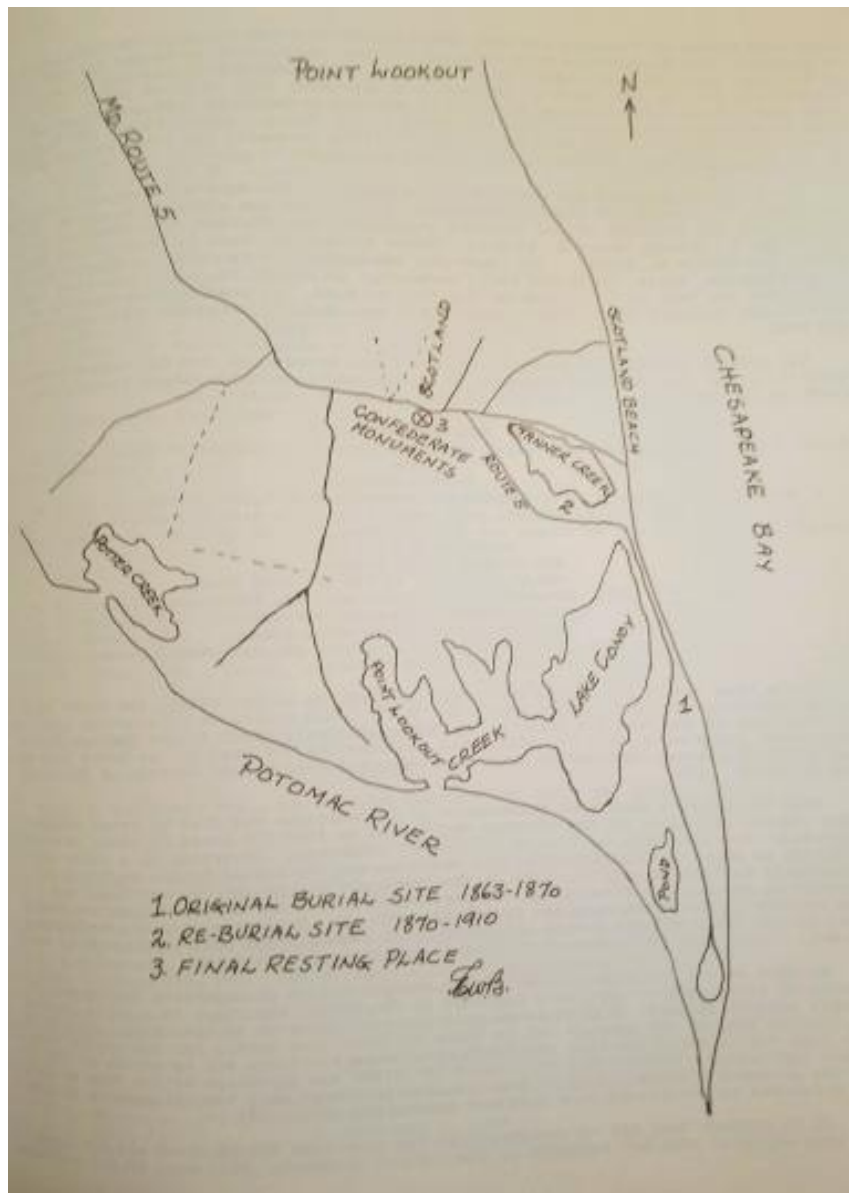


Figure 30: Map of the prisoner's graveyard at various times. Beitzell, Point Lookout, 119.

Vita

Marlea Susanne Donaho was born on November 9, 1991, in Shreveport, Louisiana, and is an American Citizen. She graduated from Cosby High School, Midlothian, Virginia, in 2010. She received her Bachelor of Arts in History with minors in English and Recreation Leadership from Ferrum College, Ferrum, Virginia, in 2014. At Ferrum, she was a member of the Boone Honors Program, Phi Alpha Theta (National History Honors Society), Alpha Chi (National Honor Society), Sigma Tau Delta (International English Honor Society), and Lambda Sigma (National Sophomore Honor Society). While at Ferrum, she also earned an academic scholarship, the Boone Honors Program scholarship, the Richard L. Jasse Scholarship in History, and was named to the Dean's List every semester in attendance. She also attended Louisiana State University for a year of graduate study toward a Master of Library Science. She received a Master of History from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2017. She was also a contributing author to the publication of an updated registration for Tuckahoe Plantation in the National and State Historic Registers Program, to be published in the Summer of 2017.