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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BATTLE OF THE CRATER; AND  
EXPERIENCES OF PRISON LIFE \*\*\*

**PERSONAL NARRATIVES**  
OF EVENTS IN THE  
**WAR OF THE REBELLION,**  
BEING PAPERS READ BEFORE THE  
**RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS**  
**HISTORICAL SOCIETY.**

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**BATTLE OF THE CRATER**  
**AND**  
**EXPERIENCES OF PRISON LIFE.**

BY  
**SUMNER U. SHEARMAN,**  
[Late Captain, Fourth Rhode Island Volunteers.]

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## **BATTLE OF THE CRATER; AND EXPERIENCES OF PRISON LIFE.**

I have been asked by the Society under whose auspices we are gathered to-night to tell you something of my personal experiences in the Battle of the Mine, or of the Crater, as it is sometimes called, and to supplement those experiences with some account of my life in a Southern prison.

At the time of the battle I was captain of Company A, Fourth Rhode Island Volunteers Infantry. The regiment to which I belonged was a portion of the Ninth Army Corps, under the command of General Burnside. The battle was fought on the 30th of July, 1864. But some months previous, as far back as January, 1863, the regiment, as also the corps, had been detached from the Army of the Potomac. Burnside, as you know, succeeded McClellan after the battle of Antietam in command of the Army of the Potomac; but he himself was removed from that command in January, 1863, and taken away from the Army of the Potomac. But the regiment to which I belonged ultimately became separated from the corps, and was on detached duty in the city of Norfolk, Virginia, and afterwards at Point Lookout, Maryland, where we were when the order came for us to rejoin the Ninth Corps, which had been brought back to the Army of the Potomac.

We arrived in front of Petersburg, at a point on the line where the Ninth Army Corps was stationed, on the Fourth of July, 1864. The two lines, our line and the enemy's, were at this point very near each other, from one hundred and fifty to three hundred yards apart, the distance varying according to the line of the works. We were ordered to encamp in some woods in the rear of our line of rifle-pits, and not far from them.

Shots from the enemy were continually coming into our camp, being fired at the men in the breastworks in front. We had to erect a barricade in the camp to protect ourselves, behind which we lived. Men of course strayed more or less away from the barricade, and every now and then some one would be wounded. Every three or four days it became our turn to take our places in the rifle-pits, where we had to stay forty-eight hours, and sometimes longer. We never went into the rifle-pits without some one being killed or wounded.

While we were encamped in this way, we heard of the plan of Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Pleasants, of the Forty-eighth Pennsylvania Infantry, who was a practical miner, and his men were largely men who had worked in the coal mines of Pennsylvania. He conceived the idea of building a mine under a certain portion of the enemy's works, with the purpose of blowing them up. At a certain point in the enemy's line, opposite the point where we were located, was a very strong earthwork, mounting several guns of large calibre, which did very much damage to our fortifications and troops. It was but one hundred and fifty yards from our line to that point. Back of it, on higher ground, was a hill called Cemetery Hill, regarded as a strategic point. If we could capture that hill, it was believed that much would be done to force General Lee out of Richmond. This fort stood in the way. Colonel Pleasants believed that he could remove it by his plan of blowing it up. The idea was that, if the fort could be removed by the explosion, the enemy being taken by surprise, opportunity would be afforded for our troops, already in position, to charge in through the open space thus made, and, taking advantage of the surprise on the part of the enemy, to push on to the crest of Cemetery Hill.

Colonel Pleasants met with no encouragement on the part of General Meade, in command of the Army of the Potomac; nevertheless, as General Burnside, his corps commander, approved of it, he was allowed to undertake it. No assistance whatever was afforded him by the Engineer Corps of the Army. He had to devise such methods as he could to accomplish his purpose, working at a great disadvantage all the time, but he finally accomplished the task. He began the work inside of our lines, under cover of a hill, at a point where the enemy could not perceive what was being done, and carried his tunnel through the earth the whole distance of one hundred and fifty yards, until he reached the fort. It was twenty feet beneath the surface of the ground at the point he reached. From thence he made a branch at right angles on either side, making it in the form of a letter T, as it were, at that point. In these branches he placed large wooden tanks in which powder was to be put. Four tons of powder were placed in these wooden boxes, and connected by a fuse at the entrance of the mine.

The 30th of July, 1864, was fixed upon as the time for the explosion to take place. It was intended to have it take place somewhere about three o'clock in the morning. Troops were gotten into position the night before under cover of the darkness, ready to charge as soon as the mine should be exploded.

I had been engaged for some days previous at the headquarters of the Third Division of the Ninth Army Corps, General Potter commanding, as judge advocate in connection with a court-martial. On the evening before the battle, the evening of the 29th, an order came to me to report to my regiment. I did so, and found that it was about to take its place in line of battle, ready to join in the charge on the morning of the next day. I had my supper in camp as usual, and we started to take up our position, carrying with us no food, nor anything in the way of clothing, except the clothes we had on.

The time arrived when the explosion was expected to take place, but no explosion occurred. It was learned that the fuse had gone out. An officer of the Forty-eighth Pennsylvania volunteered

to go in and relight the fuse; and, as I remember, it went out a second time, and was relighted. Shortly before five o'clock, just as the sun was rising, a sound as of thunder was distinctly heard, and in a moment the earth at the point where the mine had been constructed was thrown upward, slowly mounting into the air to a height of some two hundred feet, and then, spreading out like a fan, fell back again into the excavation made by the explosion. The soil was of a clayey character, and enormous boulders of clay were thrown up and fell back around the opening, resembling in some respects the crater of a volcano; hence the battle has sometimes been called the Battle of the Crater. The men who were in this fort, and the artillery, and everything pertaining to the fortifications, huge timbers, ammunition, tents, and everything that would be naturally located there, were all thrown heavenward. The men, of course, were either killed or wounded, with hardly an exception. A large number of men were in the fort. It has been estimated by some that there were a thousand.

As soon as the explosion took place, the artillery all along the line on our side, some one hundred and twenty pieces or more, began firing at that point. The firing lasted some moments, and then the troops were directed to charge. It had been the plan of General Burnside to have his division of colored troops lead the advance. There was in the Ninth Corps at that time a division of colored troops. They had been drilled with the idea of taking the advance, but General Meade overruled Burnside's plan, and thought it best that the colored troops should not be put in that position. So General Burnside called together his division commanders, and told them of the change of plan on the very night before the battle, and allowed them to draw lots to see which one should take the lead. The lot fell to General Ledlie, the least efficient of the division commanders in the Ninth Corps.

When the Third Division, to which my regiment belonged, charged over our breastworks and across the space between our line and the enemy's line, they came upon the enemy's works to the right of the crater; but by that time the enemy had recovered from his surprise, and was concentrating a terrible fire upon all that region. The men instinctively sought shelter in the excavation made by the explosion, but when we arrived at that point we found the crater filled with troops of General Ledlie's division. There seemed to be complete chaos reigning there. The lieutenant-colonel of our regiment, who was in command, Colonel Buffum, tried to rally the men, as did officers of other regiments, and to push on to Cemetery Hill; but General Ledlie, who should have been with his command, remained behind in a bomb-proof. I remember seeing him, as we passed the front, secure in a bomb-proof. His troops had fallen into confusion in the way I have explained, and he was not there to remedy the situation. It seemed impossible for the officers to accomplish anything in the midst of the reigning confusion.

The Fourth Rhode Island, the few of us that were together at that time, followed the colonel and the color bearer out beyond the enemy's works towards Cemetery Hill, but we encountered such a hurricane of shot and shell that it was impossible to face it, and we were driven back again into the shelter of the enemy's works, where we remained. The attempt to capture Cemetery Hill had proved a failure. Many of the men and officers tried to get back to our own line, but the enemy by that time had a raking fire over the space between their line and our own, and it was almost sure death for any person to undertake to cross it. Very few of those who did, escaped being killed or wounded. The space between was so covered with the dead and the wounded that it was possible for a person to go from one line to the other without stepping on the earth. I have learned since that an order was issued for the troops in the crater to return to our own lines, but I myself did not hear of such an order, neither did Lieutenant-Colonel Buffum. We remained in the crater. It was on the 30th of July, as I have said, and one of the hottest days of the summer. The enemy had gotten range upon the crater, and were dropping mortar shell into our midst, but we held them at bay until our ammunition gave out. Finally they made a charge, and succeeded in reaching the crater, and were firing directly down upon us. General Bartlett, the highest officer in rank in the crater, a general from Massachusetts, gave the order for us to surrender. An officer of my regiment, a lieutenant of the Fourth Rhode Island, Lieutenant Kibby, tied a white handkerchief on his sword, and held it up in token of surrender. The enemy ceased firing.

I may mention that General Bartlett in a previous battle had lost a leg, and it had been replaced by a wooden one. A shot struck him and his leg was broken, but it proved to be the wooden leg.

During all this time we had no water to drink, and we were parched with thirst. I had the feeling at the time that if I had a thousand dollars I would give it cheerfully for a drink of water. The sun beating down upon us as it did, exposed as we were, and having neither water to drink nor food to eat, I became very much prostrated. I have always believed that I came very near having sunstroke, from the after effects upon me.

When we surrendered, I, in common with others, began clambering out of the excavation, up over the boulders of clay to firm ground, and as I reached the surface, a Confederate soldier confronted me, saying, "Give me that sword, you damn Yankee!" I of course immediately surrendered my sword, giving him sword and belt and pistol. I was walking with the colonel to the rear, under the escort of Confederate soldiers, when another soldier, without any ceremony, took my colonel's hat off his head, and put a much worse one in its place. The colonel wore a felt hat, and they seemed to be desirous of hats of that description. I had on an infantry cap, and my head was not disturbed. We had gone but a few paces when another Confederate soldier took off the hat that the colonel now had, and put on a still worse one. It seemed very strange to me to see my colonel treated with such disrespect, but he endured it without protest.

I felt very weak, and I suppose was not able to walk with my usual steadiness, for I heard one Confederate soldier say to another, pointing to me, "I wish I had the whiskey in me that he has." If I only could have had a little at that time, I think it would have been good for me.

We were taken to the rear of the enemy's line to a field just outside of Petersburg, where we were placed under a Confederate guard, and remained there all that afternoon and all night. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when we surrendered. A mounted officer rode up during the afternoon to take a view of us, who I was told was General Lee. If it was, it was the only time I ever saw that famous officer.

As I have said, I was completely prostrated, and lay upon the ground, with no desire and scarcely the strength to get up. A fellow-officer brought me some water, which I drank, and bathed my head and forehead and breast, in order to restore me, if possible, from the fainting condition I was in. As the sun went down and the night came on, it became cooler, and I began to revive and feel renewed vigor. The Confederates gave us nothing to eat. An apple was given me by some one, and that was the only food I had that day. The next day was Sunday. In the morning the Confederates took the officers and the negroes who had been captured in battle and arranged us in an order like this: four officers, four negroes, four officers, four negroes, and so on, until all the officers and negroes were formed into a line of that character. Then they marched us all over the town of Petersburg, through the streets, to show us up to the inhabitants. The idea they had in view, I suppose, was to humiliate the officers. We passed one house, in the doorway of which stood a white woman, with a colored woman on either side of her, and as we passed I heard her say, "That is the way to treat the Yankees; mix them up with the niggers, they are so fond of them, mix them up." I thought to myself that she was very much in the same position that we were. Another woman whom we passed, called out, saying that if she had her way she would put all those Yanks in front of a battery and mow them all down.

A man said to me as we marched along, "They are going to take you down to Andersonville. They are dying down there three or four hundred a day; you will never live to see home again." I thought to myself that his welcome was not, to say the least, hospitable. The guard who was marching along by my side said to me that he did not believe in insulting a prisoner; that he had made up his mind never to insult a prisoner, because he had the feeling that he might some time be in the same position.

We were taken to an island in the river Appomattox, the officers at last being separated from the colored men. About eight o'clock Sunday evening eight hard crackers and a small piece of uncooked bacon were given to each of us. I had had no food except the apple that I spoke of, since the Friday night previous in camp; I went from Friday night to Sunday night without anything to eat. I ate part of the crackers and the bacon, thinking that I would make them go as far as possible, not knowing when I might receive any more. It was dark when they gave us the crackers and the bacon, and in the morning I discovered that the bacon was alive with maggots and that I had been eating it. I scraped off the maggots, and ate the rest of it.

On Monday morning they put us aboard box freight-cars. There were no seats in the cars, and we were packed in like so many cattle, and started on our journey to Danville, Virginia. Arriving there, we were imprisoned in a tobacco warehouse, where we remained two or three days. This warehouse the Confederate government had improvised as a place in which to incarcerate prisoners of war, and a very large number of men were confined here. We saw some most revolting sights, men reduced to skeletons and so weak that they could scarcely crawl about. Here we were given boiled bacon and hard crackers for our food.

The enlisted men remained here, but the commissioned officers were taken on board freight cars again, and carried in the same way as before to Columbia, South Carolina. It was a very tedious and trying journey. It was insufferably hot, and very little food was supplied us. We arrived at Columbia after dark in the evening, and marched directly to the county jail, situated in the city of Columbia.

We were placed in rooms in the jail. The one in which I was had nothing in the way of furniture in it. We simply lay down upon the floor just as we had come from the freight cars. The next day we were distributed around in the rooms on the floor above that on which we were first placed.

The jail stood on one of the principal streets of the city, close to the sidewalk and adjacent to what I took to be the city hall. In the rear of the jail was a yard, surrounded by a high fence and containing out-houses. It was a small yard. In it was a small brick building containing a cook-stove. A pipe from a spring led into the yard, with a faucet from which we drew water, which was of very excellent quality.

The room in which I was placed I should think was in the neighborhood of twenty feet square. There were, as I remember, seventeen of us in that room. There were seven similar rooms, four on one side and three on the other side of a hall running the length of the building. The side of the room towards the outer wall consisted of an iron grating. Between that grating and the outer wall was an alley-way perhaps three feet in width. There were windows in this outer wall, which were also covered with gratings. The room contained nothing whatever in the way of chairs or beds or anything for our comfort. It was absolutely empty of everything, except lice and bedbugs, until we entered it. All along on the angle made by the walls and ceiling were rows of bedbugs, and at night they came down upon us.

Having been divided in these rooms, we organized ourselves into messes, there being a mess in each room. Each mess detailed men from its number to do the cooking. We appointed the highest officer of our number in the prison, Colonel Marshall, as provost marshal. He appointed a lieutenant as adjutant, who kept a roster and detailed two men every day in each of the rooms to do police duty. Their duty was to sweep the floor, and to scrub it when necessity required. No broom was supplied us. We therefore had to purchase one. The men in the room in which I was, clubbed together and bought a broom, of very inferior quality, for which we paid five dollars in

Confederate money. There was a tub belonging to the room, very roughly made, in which we brought up water from the yard below whenever we found it necessary to wash the floor. We would dash the water over the floor, and then scrub it with the broom.

We were allowed out in the prison yard each day, at daylight in the morning for an hour, and again in the afternoon for an hour. During the morning hour we all gathered around the one faucet in the yard, to perform our morning ablutions. There were some one hundred and twenty of us, as I remember, and of course we could not all engage in this process at the same time.

The cooks were allowed to go into the brick house of which I have spoken, long before daylight, where they built a fire with wood supplied by the Confederate government, and proceeded to fill a wash-boiler connected with the cook-stove, with water, which they heated and stirred in the corn meal supplied us as the chief article of our diet. This they afterwards baked in two dripping pans, these being the only cooking utensils which the building contained. After they had finished baking this corn-bread, they divided it into pieces about as large as one's hand and perhaps an inch or two thick, and spread it out on boards, which they brought up into the prison about eight or nine o'clock in the morning. A piece of this bread and a tin cup full of cold water constituted our breakfast.

When I entered the prison I had nothing with me but the clothes I had on, and a tooth brush and a small pocket comb. At the time I was taken prisoner I had some twenty or twenty-five dollars in greenbacks, and this I exchanged for Confederate money, through one of the guard placed over us, receiving, as I remember, some fifteen or twenty dollars for each dollar of the currency of the United States. With this money I bought me a pint tin cup, paying five dollars for it, Confederate money. A naval officer who had been captured at Fort Sumter a year previous to our imprisonment, and who was also in this prison, gave me a small caseknife and a fork made of the handle of a toothbrush. A fellow prisoner who was ingenious with the jackknife, carved a tablespoon out of a piece of wood, of which he made me a present. These articles constituted my kit.

The ration supplied us consisted of cornmeal, rice, and sorghum. The rations were issued to last ten days. They amounted to about a pint of meal a day, a tenth of a pint of rice, and a gill of sorghum. The cornmeal was sometimes good, sometimes it was wormy, sometimes it consisted of the corn and the cob ground up together. The meal was cooked in the way I have described, and twice a day we had a piece of the size I have mentioned. Sometimes we would save our rice and sorghum, and have what we considered a feast. At other times we would sell the sorghum, through the guard, to somebody outside the prison, in exchange for cow-peas, and out of these peas a soup would be made. Of course, it consisted of nothing but the peas boiled in water. We had no meat and no salt. When such an exchange was made, we had the luxury of a pint of this soup.

As I have said, I had no change of clothing, so when I indulged in the luxury of washing day, I had to go without underclothing until my clothes were dry. Of course, each man had to wash his own clothes.

Every now and then it came my turn to wash the floor, and clean up the room as best I could. Retiring at night, consisted in sweeping the floor. We went to bed, of course, upon the floor, wearing the clothes that we had worn during the day. I was fortunate enough to procure a log of wood out in the jail-yard, which I utilized as a pillow, folding up my coat and placing it on top of the wood to make my pillow more comfortable.

Of course time hung heavy on our hands. We therefore tried to while it away by engaging in games of various kinds. We clubbed together and bought a pack of cards, paying fifteen dollars for them, and they were very poor cards at that. Some one of our number made a checker and chess-board out of a square piece of plank, and whittled out rough checkers and chessmen. We used to tell stories, and indulged largely in telling what we would like to have to eat, and what we would have if we ever got out of that place. I often dreamed at night of having magnificent banquets, and that seemed to be the case with my fellow-prisoners, for we frequently told each other in the morning of the splendid repasts we had had in our dreams. The naval officers of whom I have spoken, some fourteen in number, having been there for a year, and having received their pay in gold regularly, by an arrangement made with the Confederate government on the part of Admiral Dahlgren, had been able to purchase a good many things. They had supplied themselves with a number of books. They had Sir Walter Scott's novels, they had Don Quixote and Gil Blas. The two latter I borrowed of them, and read them in the prison with great interest. Some of the men in the room in which I was having learned that I knew something of Latin, asked me if I would not undertake to teach them Latin, so I obtained from these naval officers a Latin grammar and a Latin Prose Composition, and established a class in Latin. So in one way and another we managed to get through each day.

A portion of each day was occupied by each one of us in a critical examination of our underclothing, in order to make sure that we destroyed the crop of vermin which we found there each day. They were not the kind that are found in the heads of school children, but seemed to infest woolen clothing, and, as we all wore woolen clothing, we were greatly annoyed by them. This process we called "skirmishing," and it was one of our daily duties.

There were guards around the prison in the jail-yard and on the street below at each side of the prison. At the front of the prison there was a large window, which we were ordered not to approach after six o'clock at night. The guard had instructions to fire at any prisoner who might show himself at the window. We not infrequently tantalized the guard by going near enough to be seen by him, and dodging back just as he fired.

We were allowed out in the jail-yard, as I have said, early in the morning. A Confederate corporal would unlock the door, and shout out, "Yanks all out!" Of course, we were counted as we went out, and when we returned we were all drawn up in line and counted again, to make sure that all that went out had returned.

The captain in charge of the jail seemed to be a very excellent man. He was an elderly man, too old for active service in the field, and the men under him were either old men or boys, some of them hardly old enough to carry a musket. This showed to us, as we thought, that nearly all their available men were at the front. The guard was frequently changed; that is to say, the men who served for a few days would disappear and an entirely new set take their places. They wore no uniform, and we therefore concluded that they were rustics and others in the neighborhood, temporarily serving as guards over the prisoners.

One day while I was waiting for the officer to let us return into the prison, we having been allowed out in the yard, I was walking back and forth in the lower hall. While doing so three young girls came up to the sentinel on duty at the front of the building and spoke to him. They were evidently of the class known in the South as "poor white trash," who had come from the country. I heard them say to the guard that they would like to see a Yankee. He immediately pointed to me and said, "There's one." They replied, looking critically at me, "Why, I don't see but what he looks just like other men." What they expected to see I am sure I cannot tell, some monstrous being or other, I presume, for there had been most surprising stories told at the beginning of the war, among the ignorant white and colored people, of the horrible appearance of the Yankees. It was declared that they had horns on their heads, and altogether presented a very devilish aspect.

We used to talk more or less of the possibility of escape. We could easily have gotten away from the prison, because of the inferior quality of the guard. Whenever we were allowed outside, we could have made a rush, and thus gotten away from them. Some of us, of course, would probably have been killed or wounded, but a majority could have escaped from the prison itself. The difficulty was to get to our own lines, the nearest place being the seacoast at Charleston, S. C. This long distance had to be traversed, travelling by night and hiding by day. The Confederates were accustomed to hunt prisoners with bloodhounds, so the chances of ultimate escape were very small.

Two of our number, however, determined to take those chances at the first opportunity. So one night, when a severe storm was raging, the wind blowing, and the rain pouring down, they tied some blankets together as a rope by which they could be let down to the street. Here I may say that some of the prisoners happened to have blankets with them when they were captured, though I myself was not one of the fortunate ones. We had discovered that the sentry on duty when the nights were stormy, was in the habit of retiring within the porch over the front door of the prison; therefore these two men thought if they could reach the ground while the sentry was within the porch, they might possibly make their escape under cover of the darkness.

The plan proved successful. We let them down from the window, and saw and heard no more of them. Whether they were recaptured or not I did not know for years afterwards. They were not brought back to the prison, and I have since learned that they succeeded in getting away. In order to deceive the officer who called us out in the morning, we placed two dummies on the floor in place of the men who had escaped during the previous night. This ruse deceived the prison officials, so the men had a longer opportunity of making their escape; but it was discovered at night when the roll-call was made that there were two men lacking, and, of course, I suppose the two escaped prisoners were at once pursued.

The windows in the prison were sadly lacking in glass, many panes having been broken out. Glass was almost an unknown quantity in the Southern Confederacy at that time, as they manufactured none themselves, and the blockade was so stringent that they could import but little. The consequence was, when winter weather came on, that the prisoners suffered from cold. The captain of the jail fitted up the vacant spaces with boards, and so many panes had to be supplied in this way that it seriously darkened the prison. He also placed a stove in the centre of the hall which I have spoken of as running the whole length of the prison. It was very insufficient in its capacity to heat the prison, nevertheless it was better than nothing. Of course the fuel supplied us was wood.

An old colored woman was allowed to come into the prison whenever she chose, to sell what the southern people call "snacks," to such as were fortunate enough to have money to buy them. The lunches consisted mainly of baked sweet potatoes and flour-bread or biscuit. A New Hampshire officer had quite a little sum of money when he was taken prisoner, and this he had husbanded to the best of his ability, and had some of it left when the cold became quite severe. Through the old colored woman, by paying her liberally for it, he obtained an old carpet that had seen its best days. It was quite ragged and torn. This, those who slept on my side of the room placed over them, and thus had some little protection from the cold weather. We used to sleep spoon-fashion under this carpet, and of course we all had to turn over at the same time to keep the carpet over us. We appointed one of our number to give the word of command whenever he was disposed to have us turn.

Thus we lived week in and week out, until nearly six months had gone by. One day, when I was engaged in teaching my class in Latin, I heard shouts from some of my fellow-prisoners, calling, "Shearman! Shearman! You are wanted!" Making my way toward the direction of the shouts, I found that a Confederate corporal was at the prison door, who informed me that he had good news for me. He took me down stairs, and there I found a Confederate major, who told me the

joyful news that I was to be exchanged next morning. I could scarcely believe what he said to be true, for I, in common with the other prisoners, thought we should be compelled to remain there until the end of the war, and when that might be we did not know.

I might say here that we were allowed to write letters home, but they were limited to one side of a half sheet of note paper. The paper and envelopes were of the poorest quality imaginable, and cost an exorbitant price, reckoned in Confederate money. These letters had to be read by the captain in charge of the prison, and forwarded by him to their destination. In my letters I almost always asked my father to do what he could to get me exchanged, but I had no hope that he would be successful. It seems, however, that the two governments had made an arrangement to exchange ten thousand sick men. The exchange was to have taken place at Savannah, and five thousand were exchanged at that point, when General Sherman arrived at Savannah, which compelled a transfer in the place of exchange. The remainder were exchanged at Charleston, South Carolina. Through the influence of General Burnside, a friend of my father's, my name was included in the list of those to be exchanged, although I was not sick. All this I learned after reaching home.

After my interview with the Confederate major, I was taken up stairs again into my portion of the prison, and told my fellow-prisoners of my good luck. There were six others to whom the same glorious news was imparted. Of course it was the topic of conversation from that time on during the rest of the day and evening. Many of the prisoners took advantage of the opportunity to send letters home by us, and wrote much longer communications than were allowed, we agreeing to secrete them about our persons, and carry them away surreptitiously. They could thus write many things about themselves and their condition that would not pass muster, going through the captain's hands.

I did not sleep a wink that night. The excitement of the news which I had received would not permit me to close my eyes. I might say here, speaking of sitting up nearly all night, that we had no lights in the prison, and when night came on, we had to sit in the darkness until we were ready to lie down upon the floor. Occasionally we would indulge in the luxury of a tallow candle of the poorest quality, for which we paid a dollar in Confederate money. Sometimes a pine knot would be found among the wood which the cooks used. This we would take up into the jail and light in the evening. Of course it afforded light, but it also filled the room with clouds of smoke which escaped through the broken windows. Next morning our faces would be covered with soot.

To come back to the matter of my exchange, on the afternoon of the next day I was duly liberated, with my six companions, and marched to a freight train. I remember that it was a cold day for that region, and that snow was falling. It was the only snow, as I recollect, that we had during the time I was a prisoner. The train of cars soon started on its way to Charleston, S. C. A large number of prisoners were gathered at various points, coming from Andersonville and Florence. We reached Charleston early the next morning, and were marched across the city to the wharves.

Charleston was completely abandoned by its inhabitants because of the siege on the part of our forces, and it was the most desolate looking place I have ever seen in all my life. The damages inflicted by shot and shell were to be seen on every hand. The grass had actually grown in the streets of Charleston, although at the time we were passing through, a light snow was on the ground, adding to the desolation of the scene. General Toombs of Georgia had threatened before the war began that the South would make grass grow in the streets of Boston, and that he would call the roll of his slaves on Bunker Hill. Grass actually did grow in the streets of Charleston as a result of the war.

Arriving at the wharves, we were placed on board of a steam vessel, which proved to be a blockade runner, and were carried out to a fleet of vessels under the walls of Fort Sumter, which our government had provided for the transport of prisoners. I was placed on board a ship called the *United States*, with a number of my fellow-prisoners. Those of us who were officers were assigned by the captain of the ship to staterooms. We found that there were nine hundred prisoners on board from Andersonville and Florence, some of them in the last stages of emaciation. Two or three of them died on the voyage from Charleston to Annapolis, and their bodies were buried in the sea. The Sanitary Commission had an agent on board, with an ample supply of underclothing. I at once got rid of the clothing which I had worn so long in the prison, throwing it overboard, and accepted with alacrity the new and clean clothing given me by the agent of the Sanitary Commission.

We lay at anchor one night in Charleston harbor, and the next day sailed for Annapolis, Md. Arriving at that point, we found each prisoner had been granted a thirty days' leave of absence. I telegraphed my father of my arrival at Annapolis, and found, on reaching home, that he could hardly bring himself to believe it.

We went from Annapolis to Washington to obtain our pay, which had been accumulating during the period of our imprisonment. I purchased new clothing, and then joyfully started for home. I had served nearly three years, and my regiment had been mustered out of service during the period of my imprisonment, its time having expired. Some of its members had re-enlisted, and were consolidated with the Seventh Rhode Island; but I felt that I had done my duty, and that I was entitled to withdraw from the service, so I sent in my resignation direct to the Secretary of War at Washington, accompanying it with a surgeon's certificate of my health, and setting forth the facts of my service and my imprisonment. I obtained the endorsement of the Governor of the State to my application, and it came back in a few days accepted, and I was out of the service. I have often felt that I would have been tempted to return had I known that the war would end as

soon as it subsequently did, so as to have had the satisfaction of being in at the close, if possible.

I have never regretted my being in the army during that most trying and critical period of our country. I feel as did the Westerner who said that he would not part with his experiences for a hundred thousand dollars, and he would not go through with it again for a hundred million.

## Transcriber's Notes

Minor punctuation and printer errors repaired.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BATTLE OF THE CRATER; AND  
EXPERIENCES OF PRISON LIFE \*\*\*

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