

INTRODUCTION OF THE ROACH ANDERSONVILLE MEMOIR

Author of this introduction is unknown, but it appears in one printed version of the memoir.

Henry Milton Roach was born 1845 in Fairview, Guernsey County, Ohio. By his sixteenth birthday, he stood five-feet-four with blue eyes and light hair. On November 28th, 1861, Roach claimed to be eighteen years old and enlisted in his hometown of Batesville, in Beaver Township, Noble County, Ohio. As a Private in Captain Peter Gebhart's Company G, Roach was sent to Camp Gilbert, near Zanesville. On February 28th, 1862, his ninety-day enlistment expired and Roach reenlisted for three more years. Before ever reaching the front, Roach fell ill at Crumps Landing on March 24th, 1862, and was hospitalized at Savannah, Tennessee, until June 20th, 1862.

On January 20th, 1864, he reenlisted at Vicksburg, Mississippi, as a Veteran Volunteer. On April 7th, he took a furlough and returned to duty on May 15th with the Division Train. While on this detached duty, Private Roach was captured during action at Jonesboro, Georgia, on September 4th, 1864. Roach was imprisoned at Andersonville from September 19th, 1864, to 1-5 April 1865. He was released by the Confederates at Jacksonville, Florida, on April 28th, sent first to Camp Parole, then to Camp Chase, Ohio, where he was mustered-out between June 14th and 20th, 1865.

On August 14th, 1871, Roach married Hannah E. Thompson in Batesville. Between 1872 and 1896, Roach sired 13 children and the family moved to Caldwell, Noble County. In 1880, suffering from chronic indigestion and neuralgia incurred at Andersonville, Roach filed for pension and received \$25 per month.

During his post-war years, Roach served as a County Recorder in Noble County for two terms and Deputy Probate Judge for several years. From 1898 to 1900, he served two terms as Recording Clerk of the Ohio Senate in Columbus and Sergeant-at-Arms. In addition, he was on the staff of General John A. Logan, Commander-in-Chief of the GAR.

Roach died on November 4th, 1904, and was followed by Hannah on September 4th, 1918.

The transcript which follows is, we hope, a faithful reproduction of Roach's 23 page, hand-written manuscript. All spellings and grammatical constructions are his, as well as all corrections, deletions and insertions. This version was retyped by Shelby Mullins at the direction of the webmaster of this site from a copy of the original manuscript. As a result there are some discrepancies from earlier typed versions that appear elsewhere. Very careful attention was paid to the details of this process and it is hoped that the result is at least a slightly more accurate rendition of what Roach originally wrote.

Andersonville Prison

Capture and Experience

By H M Roach

Private Co G 78th O.V.V.I.

2nd Brigade 3rd Div 17th Army Corps

Army of the Tennessee

November 28th 1861, at the age of Sixteen I enlisted in Co. G 78th Ohio Vol. Infy, the rebellion at this time had assumed gigantic strides; and the Rebels all along our front were flushed with victory, our arms up to this time not having gained a single battle. My Regiment was ordered to the front, and we arrived on the field of Fort Donelson Feby 15th 1862, while that battle was in progress, here was when the hardships of the 78th unit began, here was the place that many noble boys of our Regiment contracted and suffered with disease, and death, the following months and years of the war. But Donelson was fought and the victory was ours, the first of any note to pierce upon our banners. But from this time on a series of victories follows under the leadership of our noble Grant. of the Battles my own Regt participated in under him, were Donelson, Shiloh, Corinth, Iuka, the campaign to take Vicksburg from the rear in the winter of 62 & 63, Grand Gulf, Thompson Hill, Raymond, Jackson, Champion Hills, Siege of Vicksburg, Bogochitia, Bakers Creek, and the great munition raids. After these grand victories a lull and rest the first we had known, for many long weary weeks.

Our three years enlistments are drawing to a close, and yet the great Rebellion is a mission of huge proportions; and Uncle Sam is holding out inducements, for ReEnlistments. Our Regt accepts his generous offer, and again enrolled for three years more. We don the Veterans Chevrons, take our Veteran furlough and start for the North, and the girls we left behind.

Our furlough of thirty days soon expired and we again are off to the front, and join Genl Sherman in his great Atlanta Campaign and march to the Sea,

Resecca, Big Shanty, and Kenesaw Mountain are fought and won, and almost numberless affairs and skirmishes, of less importance, my Regt and Company left their mark in sweat and blood,

July 22nd 1864 [28 years ago today] Atlanta was strongly invested by the Union forces, the gallant Rebel Genl Johnson had just been superceded, by the hot-blooded, dashing Genl Hood, he makes a bold effort, and concentrates his forces in the left Center of the Union lines, striking mainly the 17th Army Corps of which my own Regt was a faction. his flanks also overlap both the 15th and 16th Army Corps,

Here begins one of the fiercest contests of the war, The Rebel hordes are dazed [dazed?], with powder and whiskey, they charge, and again they charge, but are met with a stubbornness and bravery almost unparalleled; they are driven back, their ranks are thinned, but they again rally, and again they come, and again are met and repulsed with great slaughter, their ranks are shattered and broken, but they reform and repeatedly make the same onslaught. The Battle rages fiercely, and becomes a hand-to-hand struggle the fists and clubed guns are freely used, but the rebels were handsuredly repulsed with a terrible slaughter. But a gallant Commander has ~~given~~ yielded up his life, the brave, the lamented, the handsure, ~~the gallant~~ Genl McPhersen had ~~yielded up his life~~ fallen in defence of his Country.

I give this Batttle somewhat in detail, that it may be understood what a Soldier could safely pass through, and afterward meet with a misfortune of an entire different nature; a misfortune most

certainly a hundredfold greater than the wounds of battle. ~~and just such misfortune befell me, I give it here as follows,~~ I was captured and made a prisoner of war immediately after my capture I was informed that I would be taken to that famous receptacle for Union Soldiers, Andersonville. Oh horrors, has it indeed come to this, must I end my career as a Soldier in that den of misery and death? the situation was indeed deplorable.

But hark! is there not yet hope, I hear in the distance the music of marching -- and it is our boys in blue! louder, louder, it sounds! nearer, nearer they come, until the clashing of steel, and saber is heard. What a moment of suspense, surely I will be rescued. Vain hope? the devils placed me in front of their Battle line, and thus I am between two fires, hope of rescue dies within me, for my captors became alarmed as to their safety, and wheeled about and fled to the rear, taking me along as Company. pulling up at a safer distance they interrogated me with a series of questions, which ran as follows: How old are you, How long have you been in the Army, How long are you Enlisted for, What did you's all come down here to fight we all for, and [illegible edit here] well you can't never subjugate the South.

After the above ~~Colloquy~~, I was subjected to a search for valuables, and promptly relieved of all my possessions, which however was of no great value, But it did happen that I was the possession of a brand new Burnside hat which had the necessary gold cord and gold mountings, I was very proud of my hat; consequently it greatly attracted the attention of my rebel admirers, and many were the admiring glances it attracted and of the number, a six footer from Texas bartered me for a hat trade, O, horrors! I had to give up my loved Burnside and don the old dilapidated planter that decked the head of my six foot Texan, for I assure you the trade was all a one sided affair.

We were then some 60 miles from Andersonville and the distance had to be traveled over land, and I was exhibited all along the route (decked out in my new Texas planter) as a yankee Curiosity. in showing us up to the fair ladies along our line of march, invariably off would come the old planter, with the remark, Ladies this is the Uniform hat of your old Confederacy which was presented to me, on the occasion of entering your lines. many were the taunts and jeers heaped upon us by the chivalrous gentry we met on our way.

In due time we arrived at our destination and were drawn up in line before the Commandants tent, which was located about a quarter mile from the prison.

Major Henry Wirz made his appearance, and greeted us with all the abusive epithets he could command; after which the Guard was instructed to turn us in the Stockade where we might rot, with the ballance of the unfortunates there confined.

On entering the gate of the prison my eyes were greeted by sight of about fifty dead bodies (union Soldiers) deposited in rows on either side, which as I entered should have wailed forth, "Leave all hope behind."

The yell of fresh fish went up from all over prison, to us new comers we were at a loss to know the meaning; but were soon enlightened on that score, and became ~~considered to be~~ old fish, (the term fresh fish) were applied by old prisoners, to all new advents within the walls of the stockade.

The Stockade enclosing the prison was about eighteen feet high, the posts comprising it being of huge pine timbers and sunk in the ground about five feet, it originally comprised an area of eighteen acres, but was subsequently enlarged to twenty-seven acres, The Inclosure was on the side of a hill looking south, at the foot of which was a small brook about five feet wide, and as many inches deep, which furnished the water for the use of the prisoners. Within this inclosure were turned the prisoners as we arrived, and left to provide for ourselves, there being no shelter or any kind of protection offered by trees or otherwise against the burning rays of the Southern Sun; the furious storms of the freezing winters.

The small brook which ran through the stockade and which supplied the water for drinking and washing, ~~this brook~~ had its ~~rise~~ rise in a swamp not far from the prison. At no time was the water ~~suitable~~ pure or healthy, but when the filth and drainage of the whole camp of prisoners came to be superadded to the natural unfitness of the water for drinking or cleaning purposes, you can Judge what thirst was assuaged or fever cooled, or throbbing temples washed, by this floating stream of disease and death! At any time under the most rigid hygiene restrictions, it is difficult to maintain health and cleanliness among a large body of men. What do you think was the condition of Thirty five Thousand half-naked, half starved men, without any police regulations, under no moral or restraining influences!

When it rained as it does in that climate about continuously during the spring and fall month, the soil within the inclosure was one mass of bubbly soft ground, at least ten inches in depth, through which stalked and staggered the guant half-dead wretches thus confined.

Our rations in food consisted in an half pint of corn meal once per day; and in a great while a small piece of rancid spoiled bacon, which was all devoured at one meal.

We were haunted in our dreams nightly with loaded tables of good things only to awake and have the delusion broken by the same old routine and bill of fare and missirable wretchedness!

The water which we used was procured from the brook ~~which~~ was as poluted with disease and death. Our sufferings from this were at length alleviated, by what was believed an intervention from Providence; From one of the most elevated portions of the prison grounds, and which had always been perfectly dry excepting when it rained very heavily, there sudenly and without any previous sign, burst forth a fountain, thick as my arm, of pure sweet, and healthy water, and during the time we remained there, it continued to flow, without any abatement, as full and strong a current as when it first spurted up from the bowels of the earth.

We were robbed of everything that could in the smallest degree, contribute to ~~the~~ our health ~~and~~ ~~comfort of either man or beast~~, neither clothing, blankets or shelter of any kind was afford us, nor scarcely fire sufficient to cook our starvation ration of corn meal, (this too in the midst of a country abounding in great forests of huge pine timber), to say nothing of an amount necessary to preserve the warmth of life in naked human beings, exposed as we were, day and night, to the inclemency of an unfriendly latitude in mid winter.

Through the day, when the sun would come out for a little while and lend his kindly smiles to our encouragement we would huddle together, and in heaps on the ground, endeavor to sleep, But when night with its chilly dews and poisonous vapors, enveloped the prison, we might have been seen in squads of fifteen and twenty, crouched together over the suffocating smoke of a few green pine fagots, which occasionally, by dint of hard blowing, spring up for a moment of cheerful blaze.

Thus most of us sat, and watched, and cursed, and prayed night after night, throughout the long, dreary wretched winter. Others however whom cold and starvation had not reduced so greatly in strength and energy, would keep on their feet, and pace up and down the Camp all night, this also to prevent perishing with the cold and frost.

I saw while confined at Andersonville wretchedness, and degradation too low and horrible, for the pages of history, or ever to be uttered, in public; Imagination cannot even conceive of such misery and heartrending scenes as were there experienced, by our soldiers, whom by the fortunes of war, have placed them; Pen cannot describe it; Language cannot portray it, men became maniacs; and numbers deliberately rushed on the dead line to thus end their misery! (The dead line was a railing about two feet high; and twenty feet inside the stockade, The Penalty to even touch it was death, by a minnie ball, delivered by the Guard up on top of the stockade)

[Illegible insertion here, could be "Howls of" or maybe "Hundreds of"] Men who had been wounded, and made prisoners, and thrust into this den of misery, without the aid of medical treatment, or surgical operations, durring the hot summer, ~~their wounds~~ would fester, and become fly blown; I saw numbers of such cases, and the poor victims would shake the maggots in streams, from the stump of an arm, Scurvy and Gangrene were prevalent; and hundreds were suffering and dying from these dread diseases, it was no unusual occurrence to see men snatching the teeth from their mouths, or scraping the maggots, from sores on the limbs.

August, September, and October 1864, the mortality was the greatest, the average death rate per day, during these months, was one hundred and twenty five, or one in every ten minutes during evry twenty-four hours, or one of our number, every ~~in~~ ten minutes, ~~were~~ carried out, unshrouded and uncoffined, to an untimely grave!

Was it not enough to sicken, and disharten, the strongest of us; how some would our time came, to be carried to the south gate, and then be deposited in the same row with those Whose spirits ~~that~~ had already taken their flight to that home whence no traveler returns,

(The total number of Union prisoners buried at Andersonville is Thirteen thousand some hundreds.

Tunneling was extensively carried on during the forepart of the year 1864 but very few of the Prisoners gained their liberty, thereby. Blood hounds were kept by the Chivalrous Soliery doing guard duty at the Stockade, and evry morning, the toot, toot of a horn could be heard summoning the hounds, to their daily hunt, for escaped Union prisoners, and woe be to the luckless victim that fell prey to their ~~gleaming~~ and glistening teeth, I saw very many ~~many many~~ of those poor wretches who had been hunted down, and trapped again within the prison, their poor bodies all torn, bleeding and lacerated, by these most detestible of all brutes.

On of the most pitiful scenes, that came before my observation, was that of a man of middle age, who through patriotism had sacrificed the dearest ties to man, that of leaving wife and children, all that his Country and flag might live! This patriot through fiendish barbarity hunger and privations became Insane! and in his bewilderment, would imagine he were at home with his family, gathered at the Breakfast, Dinner, or Supper table, and calling on his wife to help herself to a biscuit. and their again urging his Daughter to take a piece of the ham. To such a famishing ~~extent~~ condition had we become that our thoughts were only occupied with things that were the farthest from us.

This poor victim whom I have described above was kindly released by death; but the last lingering words from his lips ~~was~~ were Mary! (his wife)

(Amidst all those scenes of misery and suffering, there was no lack of levity; Love for the ridiculous was the life sustaning balm, and which brought hundreds of the poor unfortunates safely through.)

When Sherman started from Atlanta on his great march to the sea, and presumed to take in Andersonville on his route, and liberate us; all became bustle and excitement, and the works of Transferring us to other prisons, and scatering us around, touring the swamps of the South became general; I recall this occasion as one of the most wretched, and bitter experiences, of my whole Captivity. We were hustled out of the Stockade as fast as Transportation could be furnished, and placed on open flat cars provided with three days rations, which the most of us devoured at a single meal, and still remaining hungry; during the whole time of removal three days were consumed, the first day it rained in torrents, and at night all turned to sleet, you may inagine being drenched with a November rain, under ~~reasonable~~ average circumstances, but to us, without proper clothing, or sufficient food, our suffering was intense, and almost unbarable! On the second day we began to suffer the pangs of hungers. and on the third day many deaths occured! It is impossible to describe the missery and woe, that we indured on that day! I, myself was so overcome ~~with~~ with hunger and exposure that I Could not maintain my feet; but we were finely releaved to some extent by having an allowance of half pint of shelled corn issued us, which we crunched like swine, on our march from the railroad depot to our Camping ground

which was some thing like a mile, [illegible insertion] I fainted away and dropped to the ground, some two or three times, and I believe the only pitting or kind word offered in my behalf by the Chivalry was on this occasion offered from a Rebel Lieutenant, who remarked that the poor boy would die before reaching camp. I heard the remark and it stimulated me to greater exertions, and I still lived, thus thwarting their design on ~~one~~ [illegible insertion] Yankee Prisoner

In Justice to an Old Comrade of my own Regiment, I here relate an incident which occurred on my first entering the prison gates, As I was ushered in and through the Motly Crowd of many thousands, I was surrounded by the Mass, all eager to Catch a word of news from the outer world, and perchance to hear of friends and home, among this throng of miserable and pitiful wretches, was an individual who crowded his way to me, exclaiming "Hello there ~~Mike~~! What are you doing here? I was thunderstruck! I was not dreaming of seeing a single individual I ever knew in that Vast assemblage, on this abrupt interogation, I replied, Who are you?

Why don't you know me, Lash Slack!

Could it be posible a Comrade of my own Regiment, a boy among a thousand, and who ~~was~~ in trials, hardships, and Joys never who I Knew better! all resemblance of the Lash Slack I once knew was completely oberliterated by the grime and dirt of the prison. Observing my look of bewilderment he says; Oh you need not worry about my looks, for you will soon look Just like the rest of us! But come you don't want to stop here! this is New Yaaks! N yaack I replied what do you mean by N Yaak.

Oh this crowd on this side of the prison is comprised mostly of of prisoners from New York Regiments and we call them Yaaks for short. Why they would murder you before morning if you would drop down among them, they are a gang of cut throats and have allready murdered and robed several of the prisoners in their first entering this place." (~~of~~ these Cordly villians whom [enticed by large ~~Money~~ bounty to enlist] by the large bounties, found their way into the Union Army, and then by skulking in the rear, were made prisoners of war,)

A number of this gang were finally hunted down by the prisoners who had organized themselves into a vignalante (vigilance) committee, a court martial was Convened, and six of the Culprits were Convicted and Condemned to death, permission of the verbal authority being granted, a gallows was erected within the prison walls, and the six guilty wretches, in sight of Thousands of their comrades, were launched into eternity.

But to return to my old friend Slack, he conducted me through the motly Crowd to the north side of the the prison ground, where I found a number of my Same Regiment who had preceed me to this famous Hovel (?), among the numbers was Henry Spiker of my own Company, and Gabriel Holland Hospital Stewart of the Regt, also Clem Bell of Co B.

About November 1st general Sherman and the Rebal General Hood, agreed on a special exchange of two thousand men of their own respective Armies, the number were counted out, the boys of

my own Regiment including myself, were among the number; As we passed out the gates, we tossed our scanty supply of cooking utensils back to our comrades, we left behind, bidding them farewell; and expressing the hope that they would soon follow after us. With buoyant hopes of soon greeting our Comrades at the front; we started for Rough and ready station the place designated for the exchange; we arrived in due time, and working trading man for man, tediously began, I saw the boys of my Regiment counted out one by one and pass into the Union lines. Would my time never come? Alas how true! a disagreement was between the authorities, and the remainder of us were hurried away and returned back into the Stockade, to suffer long weary months after, thus I was separated from my friend Slack, and have not met him from that day to this.

Andersonville has been freely discussed and yet the myth has not half been told, I thought before reaching it, that I could nerve myself to Witness, and undergo mortal agony and wretchedness, as I had heard it described, without blanching or trembling, but if the Condensed horrors of a hundred black holes had been brought before my mind to prepare me for the ordeal, of eight long wretched dreary months, they would have failed to realize the facts as I saw there face to face.

I could go on and on in telling the scenes of horror, I there experienced, but it is not necessary ~~I leave the task with more able writers~~, Time the great healer of our woes, brought on the fall of Richmond, the Surrender of Lee and Johnson, and the news was imparted to the remnant of us poor miserable wretches yet remaining in the stockade. We were marched out and across the country to Thomasville, thence by way of Lake City Fla, and turned loose to find our way into the Union lines which was 20 miles away. We arrived in Jacksonville Fla, on the 28th day of April 1865, the most wretched, pitiable, and abject looking human beings that in any land - Christian, heathen or pagan - ever trod the Almighties footstool, or breathed the air of heaven. Black as most of the slaves on any plantation in the "Confederacy," gaunt, haggard and thin as skeletons. In surprise and horror we were interrogated as to who we were!

United States Soldiers, whom the fortunes of war had thrown into the hands of a people, who with many appeals to Christian principals, asked the favor of Divine Providence in the cause which they were engaged, but as a Just retribution of their wicked deeds, the Almighty cursed them instead. We poor victims of their fiendish treatment were fresh from the prison hell at Andersonville Georgia.

Our Sufferings were now over, and we again breathed the free pure air of heaven, under the protecting folds of the Old Stars and Stripes.

End