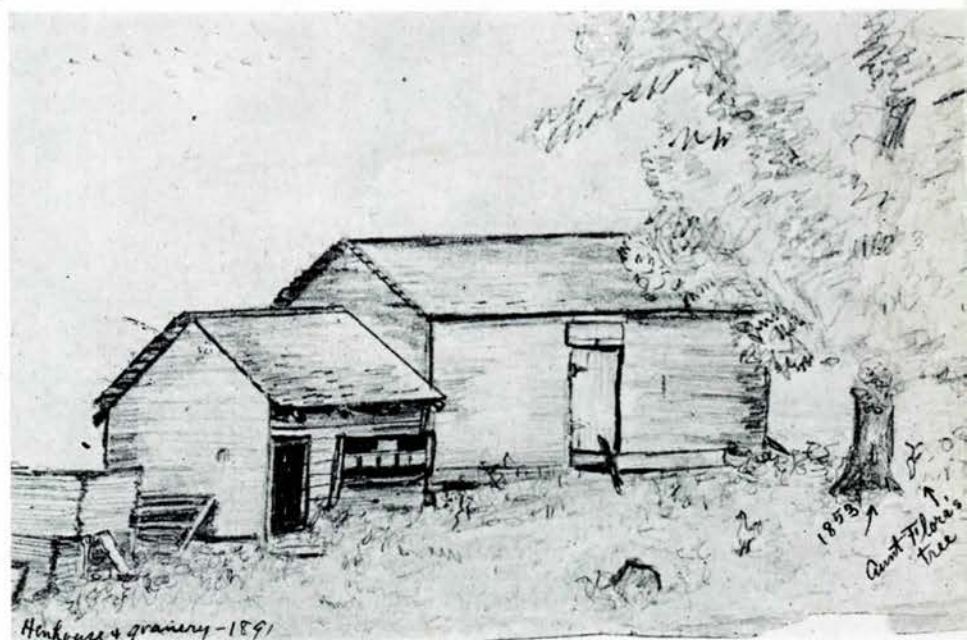
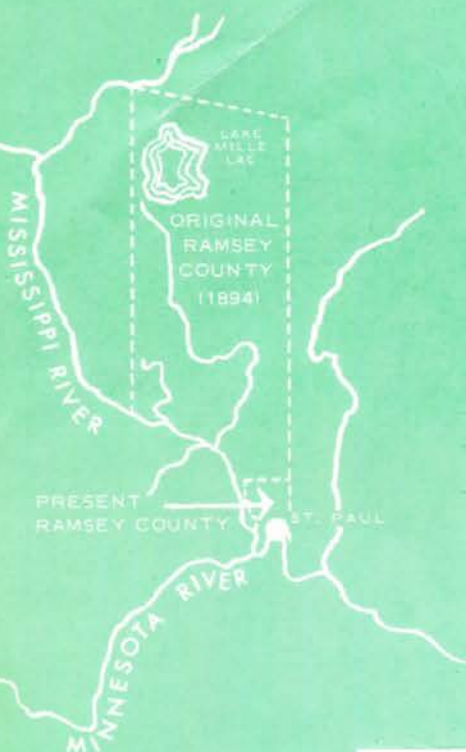


# RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY



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*... Conclude it my duty to Enlist & therefore Enlisted ...*

## THE DIARY OF A CIVIL WAR SOLDIER

BY HAL E. MCWETHY

*Author has photo of Burch*

**ABOUT THE DIARY:** *Newell Burch was the father of the late Mrs. Effie Burch Mcwethy of St. Paul. The author was his son-in-law. Despite his rigorous and tragic wartime experiences, Newell Burch lived until well into his sixties and married twice. After the war, he moved to Menomonie, Wis. In later years, two sons also lived in the Twin Cities. The late Dr. Frank E. Burch was a well-known St. Paul ophthalmologist and the late Edward P. Burch of Minneapolis was a consulting engineer with a national reputation.*

*Newell Burch actually wrote three separate accounts of his Civil War experiences. For more than a year, he made faithful entries in two small memoranda books. Near the end of 1863, while a prisoner at Belle Isle, Richmond, Va., he had filled up both books and, since he no longer had access to paper, the entries end on December 1 of that year.*

*Some years after the war he copied the diary entries into a ledger. The diary was a typical wartime diary consisting in great part of brief jottings. In copying it, he elaborated upon the entries with additional details from memory. The third version may have been a speech he delivered to a veterans' organization. His experiences during his last months at Belle Isle and his year at Andersonville, Ga., were written from memory after the war.*

*The author is greatly indebted to Dr. John Q. Imholte, Chairman, Division of the Social Sciences, University of Minnesota, Morris, and author of "The First Volunteers: History of the First Minnesota Volunteer Regiment, 1861-1864" (Ross and Haines, 1963). Dr. Imholte spent many months compiling a complete reproduction of the three accounts and correlating events described with historical sources. In this article, original diary entries are reproduced wherever possible but the other versions also have been used.*

**N**EWELL BURCH was a 20-year-old farmer's son when he enlisted in the 154th New York Volunteers at Jamestown, N. Y., on August 25, 1862. Reading his well-worn little diaries, it would seem that Newell Burch was the victim of almost every possible misfortune that could befall a Civil War soldier.

He was wounded at Chancellorsville, captured at Gettysburg, attempted (and failed) to escape, spent the remaining 635 days of the war imprisoned at Belle Isle in Richmond, Va., and Andersonville, Ga. He survived scurvy, pneumonia, gangrene and the ministrations of the infamous Henry Wirz who later was hanged for his treatment of his prisoners.

Dr. John Q. Imholte, of the Division of the Social Sciences at the University of Minnesota, Morris, who studied the diaries, commented: "It is remarkable how Newell was able to record his tragic experiences during the Civil War with a minimum of rancor and with a simple and naive and yet direct and cutting truthfulness. So many Civil War accounts written by participants from generals down to privates display their active prejudices; the facts are distorted to vindicate their behavior. It is refreshing to read an account in which bias is conspicuous by its relative absence. Burch, while neither defending nor attacking anyone, probably felt sorry for all of them."

\* \* \*

**THE DESIRE** to enlist apparently seized Newell Burch suddenly, one late summer day when the Civil War was 16 months old and after he had watched the earlier departure of two older brothers. He was sitting in school, at "the old Academy at Westfield, N. Y.," he recalled years later, "trying to get my mind centered upon Latin, German, Geometry, Trigonometry, etc." But his actual record of the event is terse, pithy and completely to the point:

## August 25, 1862

*" . . . at school to day but can not study therefore conclude it my duty to Enlist & therefore Enlisted."*

After a month of drill at Jamestown, during which he was promoted to corporal, the regiment broke camp September 29 and started for Washington, D. C.

## September 30, 1862

*" . . . arrive at Elmira at 6 oclock AM, and are marched off into a pasture in the edge of town and receive Enfield rifles, belts, etc etc and leave Elmira about 1 oclock P.M. towards Harrisburg & Washington. Pass through Troy Canton & Williamsport. The latter which contains 10000 population. Got our supper here & also a Kiss from a Very pretty, patriotic young Lady of about 16 or 18."*

The war became very real to Corporal Burch beyond Washington as the regiment continued southward.

*November 3,*  
**October 3, 1862**

*" . . . Am pretty stiff this AM. but pulled out with the rest, passed Bull Run battle field & creek with our first view of old broken cannon, all sorts balls, shells, Graves with toes sticking out, dead horses Bones etc etc. Passed Gainesville, Haymarket, etc. Can hear heavy firing over in the valley beyond the blue ridge by Burnsid's Troops."*

By this time, the 154th New York Volunteers, commanded by Colonel Patrick M. Jones, had been attached to the First Brigade, Second Division, 11th Corps, Army of the Potomac. General Robert E. Lee's thrust northward had been turned aside at Antietam, and units of the Army of the Potomac now were ranged along the northern bank of the Rappahannock river north of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, Va.

Here Corporal Burch remained for several months. He heard the cannon at Fredericksburg and advanced with his regiment to within a few miles of the battlefield. And he recorded the debacle:

possession.

## December 16, 1862

*" . . . Bad news from the front Fredericksburg evacuated and a great slaughter of troops. Lie in camp all day and get rigged up good for spending the night and am ordered to strike tents and fall in. About ¼ of the regiment drunk. Col Loomis three sheets over. Divide regiment into two Battalions & march by left flank, and am most ½ of the night going less than 2 miles, Lots of men lost Knapsacks, Guns, caps etc from being drunk. . . ."*

As if the discomforts and frustrations of the men serving with the hard-pressed Union army were not enough, illness, as it did throughout the war, was taking a far greater toll of the men in blue than were Confederate bullets. Corporal Burch was not spared. The winter weather of northern Virginia, which ranged from heavy snows to bitter cold to icy rain, did not help matters and by late February he was down with what he termed "lung fever," but was probably, from his graphic description of his symptoms, a well-developed case of pneumonia.

February 26, 1863

"Cloudy. Went to the surgeon and was excused from duty for the first time and got some pills and could not swallow them whole. and chewed them."

March 1, 1863

"...Spring clear but windy Have a very high fever today. Took a sweat and got mad at Dr. Day but it did not stop the fever."

March 2, 1863

"...Lungs awful sore...."

March 8, 1863

"...was sent to Regt Hospital, which I did not like and could not sleep any nights much and two or three days are pretty much blank

However my nearest neighbor who was very sick with measles & crazy was gone when I awoke one morning, think he had taken his last march."

March 14, 1863

"... did not sleep any last night. Ache a considerable to day."

Early in April, Burch was somewhat shakily back on his feet in time to record an important visit.

April 10, 1863

"... Reviewed to day by President Lincoln and Gen Hooker. Hard work for a weak man But lots of fun and learn the Presidents Salute."

Although his little diary does not seem to reflect this, these months during the first half of 1863 marked the darkest hour of the war for both the Union and the Confederacy. The South's drive northward had been checked at Antietam but after almost two years in arms, the North could look back upon little else but an impressive series of defeats.

Whether or not Corporal Burch gave much thought to the broader aspects of the war can be only conjecture at this point. His diary entries indicate that, soldier-like, he did have his mind very much on the

business at hand and, by the end of April, business at hand was the approaching title of Chancellorsville. He had just been discharged from the hospital after a long convalescence and he set out to join his regiment.

April 26, 1863

"... Pleasant, start for Regt at 9 AM. have a large train & make slow progress, go about 10 miles, & stop after sundown."

April 27, 1863

"... On guard last night, and a guard for teams to day Start on at 5 AM up Rappahannock Mud Mud Mud, but make 18 miles and find the regiment at Kelly Ford, (and Oh such a welcome). Am all right again sure, and such a scramble for Knapsacks and Tobacco etc. The boys say they are all lousy much more pleasant than on the lower Rappahannock and think a finer county."

All along the Rappahannock, the army was on the move. Corporal Burch's company was sent across the river as skirmishers but the only enemy they saw were "a few pickets at a flouring mill ½ mile above which were taken," a fact which made the men "disappointed but most happy."

On April 30 the 11th Corps crossed the Rapidan and arrived near Chancellorsville. The First Brigade, to which Corporal Burch's regiment was attached, was ordered to occupy the fields south of a plank road along which Dowdall's Tavern was located, about two miles west of Chancellorsville.

May 1, 1863

"... warm & pleasant. lie in camp this AM & at noon hitch up again & go about 100 rods & return to camp again. heavy firing the whole day & firing close by in evening. shells flying in all directions."

May 2, 1863

"... Pleasant. Slept a little last night Lay in camp all day waiting for developments and at about 6 P.M. just as our six were making arrangements for the nights sleep & bed it developed by

our being attacked by 'Stonewall Jackson's force in our rear, and driven hither skilter back ½ mile or more across the plank road and into a deep ravine loosing about ½ of the Regt Killed, wounded and missing Cannot tell who are Killed and wounded. . . . I Recd a ball in & through Knapsack & lodged in my clothing & bruised my shoulder."

Chancellorsville was another defeat for the Union army. Corporal Burch, in his diary entry for May 3, calls the battle "an awful slaughter on both sides," later reports half of his regiment killed, missing or wounded, and his own feeling of desolation.

### May 8, 1863

*" . . . Cloudy and cold for May. In camp all day, very very lonesome, So many of the boys gone, 32 out of 65 who went into the fight."*

But now the long road lay open to the small Pennsylvania crossroads town of Gettysburg where the war was to end for Corporal Burch and another, perhaps deadlier, struggle for survival, to begin. Here, on the first day of the battle which marked the turning point of the war, he was taken prisoner with nearly his entire regiment.

### July 1, 1863

*" . . . Left Emmetsburg early and traveled very hard in the rain and mud. Am about sick to day with diarrah and cannot keep up with the regiment but get along as fast as I can Infantry have to take the fields and woods and Artillery go by in the road on the run and can hear firing ahead reported at Gettysburg Came up with the regiment at Cemetery Hill in the village of Gettysburg with heavy fighting in front by cavalry and the 1st Corps. Stopped to rest—get water, and a cold lunch Cleaned and loaded guns, inspect ammunition, Etc and were marched down through the village and into the fight on the right side of the road with the 134th NY on our right who were soon repulsed and we changed front to the east but the Rebs were soon on both flanks and in our rear and nearly every man captured and hustled to the rear, was nearly the last one captured in Reg and was*

*greatly surprised to find so many of the Reg. when I got back to prison camp. When being taken back a reb gave me a basket of cherries which he said he would not need as he was going to the front. Some heavy Artillery work and some infantry fighting mostly on our right which shows our men have to fall back a little Rebs being heavily reinforced every hour."*

Four days later, Corporal Burch's march to Richmond and to prison began. He records how on that first day he tried to escape:

### July 5, 1863

*" . . . started out very slowly for Dixies capital. Had a bad Diarrhoea and made that a pretext to stop very often and in going over a spur of South Mts. after dark tried several times to get outside of guards and escape in a ravine but the guard stayed with me like another kind of Grayback which were getting to be very plenty about this time and finally pushed me into the ranks with his bayonet and some very strong language. . . ."*

In some sectors, Corporal Burch found the "people mostly friendly and when guards would let them would trade and gave us eatables," but later on as the column penetrated deeper into Virginia he notes "taunting Reb women" who sneered and stared at the men.

Late in July the prisoners arrived at Richmond.

### July 24, 1863

*"The great cry had been for the past year with and for our army 'On to Richmond,' and here we are at last. A few of us have reached the goal. But what a 'goal' to us and what shape compared with that which we had expected. Dirty, ragged, and ravenously hungry, we arrive at the Confederate capital, and emerged from a dirty box car to a hot, dirty, dusty street along which we are marched, without any very enchanting smiles from the Gaping, impudent looking rebels. . . . And as we were started on across the long bridge across the James River we saw*

for the first time on the side of Libby facing the river the well known sign 'Thomas Libby & Son.' We crossed over and entered the Island called 'Belle Island' from the upper end where was situated the greatest foundries of the Confederacy. The Tredager Iron Works which we passed directly through seeing the men at work stripped to the waist handling the heavy Red Hot Iron, before the red hot furnaces. And so on down the Island, to the lower end where we stood around in the hot sun and gave our names Cos. Regts. etc. Here we were searched for money, canteens, haversacks etc. Counted off into Squads of 90.ies and given a small piece of bread and a little slop. (called soup sometimes) and turned into the embankment. (called Prison) where we found about 3000. ahead of us, to occupy the tents there and where we camp down in the lousy sand where so many had been before us without tent or shelter."

In his historical analysis of the diary, Dr. Imholte described Belle Island as an oblong tract of land about a mile long and less than one-fourth of a mile wide situated in the James river. He quotes from G. E. Sabre's account, "Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War":

"The ground was low, wet and flat. . . . The area occupied by the prisoners was . . . about four acres. Around the whole was an embankment about three feet in height, somewhat resembling in appearance a hasty field defense. The ditch lay inside, and was about two feet in depth."

Now began the long days of prison life. Belle Island was a camp for enlisted men while captured Union officers were imprisoned in the Libby building which Corporal Burch mentions above. With an army career which had been fraught with frustration behind him, he was tragically doomed to spend the rest of the war in prison. There were occasional promises of exchange which always were broken. The fact was that by the fall of 1863, parole and exchange arrangements between Union and Confederate armies had virtually ceased, Dr. Imholte points out. Corporal Burch had no choice but to make the best of it and he displayed unusual adaptability.

### August 30, 1863

" . . . Eat bread and water. read and lie down again for a change. but as a rule try to sleep as little in day time as possible. That we may sleep more nights to make them as short as possible. Our rations were small and many were the fights we witnessed when there was any cheating anticipated or tried by some Hog. in human shape. When captured I did not have a cent in cash and very little in notion line. but soon found many of our guards were eager to get Greenbacks, knives, rings, Hdkfs or any little novelty we had for barter, such as Tobacco, pies (so called) biscuit, etc etc. \$100 of our money would then buy 10\$ Later 20\$ for 100 confed. and all trade was carried on upon that basis and as but very few prisoners cared to run the risk of being shot at, a few of us who took upon us that risk did most of the trading, and sometimes did quite a thriving business."

### October 24, 1863

" . . . 1100. more prisoners brot in to add to the suffering. No tents or covering for them and mud only to lie in. Many are dying daily Awful, Awful suffering. What is to be our fate. Small pox cases numerous in camp and many being vaccinated"

### November 5, 1863

" . . . Cloudy. Over 5000 prisoners huddled here in one and one half (1½) acres and half famished A few U S uniforms came to day and were drawn by lots but luck was against me"

### November 12, 1863

" . . . 2 Yankee officers from Libby in camp to see what we needed from the Sanitary Commission or U. S. No meat but Corn Meal wet in warm water Eben S. Ely, My Co., had a job of helping take the provisions for the Island across from Richmond on a flat boat, each day for which he got an extra ration. and I often had him buy pies, biscuit, Tobacco or any thing he could of guard on boat or colored women on Richmond side, on the sly.

Camp this M, had some make slow progress,  
 ham for dinner, ditto for supper. go about 10 miles  
 21<sup>st</sup> Rainy day, stay in the 14 stop after sundown  
 old camp, send a letter home. 27 Pleasant, start on  
 hear nothing from the Regt. at 5 A.M. Mud, Mud,  
 21<sup>st</sup> Porter left me this M. but got 14 miles to the  
 with the teams, for the Regt. regt to night, on guard  
 22 Cloudy, lone some almost to day & last night.  
 homewick to day, wrote to H. 28<sup>th</sup> Rainy, stay in camp  
 23<sup>rd</sup> rainy last night & rain all day & at night have  
 to day, hear nothing from the order to cross the river, which  
 24<sup>th</sup> rainy, lone some & alone we did in boats as skimmers  
 in the world, friendless. we, & returned to camp after  
 25<sup>th</sup> Pleasant, draw clean midnight & stayed till morn.  
 a qm. haul over knapsack. 29 Cloudy, cross again this  
 & take out over plus to morning, 2 or 3 corpses cross  
 work hard all day. last night & this morn.  
 26<sup>th</sup> Pleasant, start stay all night.  
 for the Regt. at 9 A.M. 31<sup>st</sup> Start for the Regt.  
 have a large train to this morning at 5 A.M.

Newell Burch's little diary is open to the "Mud, Mud" entry of April 27, 1863. The diary is reproduced here just slightly larger

than its actual size. Picture courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

and I sold them in camp or traded for knives, Hdkfs or any thing which the new prisoners or Fresh Fish as we called them were always bring in. and who durst not look at a guard themselves and in this way we kept our co. of 5 or 6. at a little advantage over others in the way of Grub. and we actually saved up a little fund of Greenbacks which I always carried and the Toughs . . . and thieves did not get.

"Our camp was in command of Lieut Bosseaux, a very pleasant man of about 35 years and although strict was as near a man as any confed I met. I was vacinated, or rather vacinnated my-

self from the arm of James Bacon of our Co. E. about the last of Nov. and it worked. . . .

" . . . the mud was deep sometimes and often prisoners without tents or blankets would lie down at night in the dryest place they could get. Spoon fashion and in the morning, many would be frozen in the mud so They could not get up without help. and many took their last long sleep in that position, and each morning many were laid away with their long furlough—Gone Home."

"Here Dec. 1/63 My memoranda book was full and I had no paper left."

With this entry the little brown note book No. 2, now hardly legible, closes the diary record. Fortunately it and its No. 1 predecessor, which was mailed home earlier, are now carefully cataloged and in the proper care of the Minnesota Historical Society. Also, the portion of the record referred to by Dr. Imholte as the "ledger" and the "speech," as well as a copy of his masterly historical analysis of the diary with his complete notes and historical references are all in the same file. Through the ledger and the speech, we are able to continue the record another 16 or more months largely in Corporal Burch's own words.

He was not destined to remain long at Belle Island. Dr. Imholte, in his commentary on the events described in the diary, sketches in the background:

"In November, it was decided by the Confederate government to move prisoners from the Richmond area to sites further south in order to reduce the temptation to escape to nearby Union lines, and also to prevent the co-operation of the prisoners in an attack on Richmond. The Andersonville site was chosen. . . . The stockade there was far enough along by February, 1864, to permit the initial captives to enter. . . ."

Sometime later in February the first men from Belle Island were loaded onto box cars and shipped to Andersonville. At Raleigh, N. C., where they halted for the night, Corporal Burch recalled:

"Several ran by the guards into the woods but I think one or two were shot and all captured and next morning we started on. I a very sick man and my chum Ely carried me in his arms a large share of the time from there to Andersonville Ga. where I think we arrived March 1/64 and I was carried most of the way between the boys from the depot to stockade and lain on a good soft bed of pitch pine tops or boughs. I knew they buried us boys without much clothing; but told E S Ely in case I died to take my Govt Coat, and I thought they would not want the balance of my rags, but I did not like the way they buried, and concluded to hold on a while."

In continuing Corporal Burch's account of his months at Andersonville, some edi-

torial changes have been made in his recollections for the sake of continuity and clarity.

"The second morning the boys had quite a brush shanty built and when I awoke, the first thing I noticed particular was that the man who lay beside me had been *furloughed* and *gone home* and forms one of the first of the 13,000 still sleeping at Andersonville; but pine boughs brought me around again and my lungs grew stronger. . . ."

". . . We fared better when we first went to Andersonville by having a clean camp in the brush and a little better rations for a few days, but it soon got to be the same old story I grew stronger for awhile but my arm never healed where I was vaccinated and grew worse in June July and August Gangrene got into it in August. My lungs also were very bad and chronic diarrhoea set in with more or less fever. . . ."

". . . About 33,000. was our average number in camp in June, July and Aug. 1864. and from 80 to 120, the number of deaths daily in July and Aug. Charles Pecor a friend of old from 112 N.Y. Regiment came in in May or June 1864 and again Christmas day 1864 from Blackshear Fla. to the Hospital . . . where I soon found him and helped him a little I hope. Boliver Hulbert of the 100th N.Y. came in June 1864 wounded in arm . . . which gradually grew worse, gangrene getting in although we gave him the best care possible under the adverse circumstances—But his time had come and he raised up to a sitting posture from his afternoon nap. and fell over back with a groan—dead—but death was on every side and at every hour in our midst. Now we pinned the Name, Co & Reg to his blouse and he was taken to the dead house. . . ."

". . . We soon moved our quarters from the south side where we formed our camp across the swamp and creek to the north side and Ely & I got a wool blanket up on poles to protect us from the sun and rain again. A guard was allowed to take out two men to get wood and brush for bed at first and I remember the day before Easter. I made arrangements with a guard for some eggs in exchange for a red cotton handkerchief I had got from some one. And our



squad of 4 or 5 had eggs for Easter. Those were the prettiest & best Easter Eggs I ever saw. . . ."

"Water in the creek which ran through the prison was very bad as the Reb camps were upon the creek above us and we commenced digging wells back from the swamp & creek, and were allowed a few shovels at first for that purpose. The sandy loam on top soon turned into a pretty clay and in places a very fine colored and pretty tinted Soap Stone which would do very well for soap.

"And here in helping to pull pails or dirt up out of a well my arm which had never healed broke out afresh and soon grew worse. Also had another severe attack of lung trouble and got Mustard and made poultices and blistered all my right side front & back so I drew nearly a teacup of water from blisters at once. Also Diarrhoea & Scurvy set in and my right arm was drawn up at right angles at elbow & later my left leg in same shape.

"Soon the boys got to using the shovels for tunneling out from the wells under the dead line & stockade and each morning at light the blood-hounds were let loose and soon found any tracks made by a prisoner. And about 9 or 10 AM they would be brought in with a ball and chain on their ankle or if a hound had been hurt by them they were put into the Stocks at the south gate. And the shovels were soon hunted up and then the only thing we had to dig with was  $\frac{1}{2}$  canteen as a general thing. but . . . I was not a digger with one leg and one arm and not much to brag of otherwise. . . ."

" . . . In June also as the water grew worse and the numbers of prisoners increased almost daily and the fearful lice, maggots, fleas, and almost incessant rain combined, the death rate or mortality increased to a fearful extent. In July our pen of thirteen acres including dead line creek and large swamp was fearfully crowded and was enlarged by adding to the north side a few acres. Wood was very scarce, every root of every stump having been dug out and used for fuel, and it would be impossible for me or any one else to describe the on-slaught upon the north end of the stockade when told they could have it for wood. It was demolished in half an hour. . . ."

" . . . About this time my arm was getting much worse, also Diarrhoea and I felt pretty blue, but Ely nursed and cheered me up as best he could. In July and Aug the filth and crowded condition of the prison, excessive heat, and no food that a dog would hardly eat told at a fearful rate, over 100 a day dying regularly. The wagons with the dead would roll out of the south gate heaped up as long as any would stay on, and carted out to the cemetery and of course the Name, Co, Regt, date of death etc if pinned on to any rags that might have been left upon the corpse were generally torn off and so 'Unknown' is marked upon the record book opposite the number of the grave in most cases. . . ."

" . . . I was sick and drawn out of shape by scurvy and gangrene in my arm and Ely was using every effort to get me out. Sick call was always at the south gate And finally on Aug 22 1864 Ely took me over. . . ."

" . . . When I got out to the Hospital I had just strength enough to crawl around on one leg and a stick, and one leg and arm drawn up in this way (at right angles at Knee and Elbows) but I commenced taking Blue Mass and I think I then first got some turpentine and rubbed my crooked knee with it. All told me it would spoil the joint for life but I rubbed the cords (there was not much else to rub) with it a few times and I thought it began to let up a little and I kept on and knew it helped me and then began on my elbow & arm. But Gangrene got into the sore on my arm . . . and I at last got some Nitric Acid and poured it into the sore. and burnt it out. time and again, but after the third time I got it all out. . . ."

" . . . The Rebs told us an exchange had been arranged and those in the Hospital belonging to the first division, or 1000, in the Stockade were marched out to the depot,  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile. And when my division was called I was on hand, and with the aid of two sticks I made that  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile and in pretty good time, too, considering the material. I found some of the boys from Stockade that I knew, and as they were helping me up into a freight car, Capt Wirz came along and yelled out—'Here you Yank. You go back to that last car with the balance of

sick & lame and you will not be so crowded and will have one Dr with you.'

"And I went, and when he got us poor devils all together he put a guard around us and started us back to the hospital, as he thought we would all die any way, and he was not far out of the way in his calculations, for I believe 9/10 of them did. But by sending me back he saved my life, for I had Gangrene in my arm and if I had gone on the cars without nitric acid and care, it would have been a short shift for me. . . . I remember on the way back to Hospital I did not make as fast time as on my way out. I was resting on a stump, and Capt Wirz came riding along and I says to him, 'Capt., Where are these men going?' And he says, 'Got Tam you. You think you know best. You find out.' But I says, 'No Sire, I asked for information.' And he stuttered a moment and said, 'Day go to Saffanna.' (Savannah, Ga.)

"Well, I went to applying acid and turpentine, and spending the little money I had left, and the news we recd from Uncle Billie Sherman (Sherman's March Through Georgia) was a great inducement for me to try and hold out a little longer. By a liberal use of Flax seed poultices and using my own soap and bandages, my arm finally commenced to heal in October. One day when about half healed, I showed it to our ward surgeon, Dr. J C Bates of the 12th ward, and he was surprised and looked at me in wonder, and said, 'How did you do it?' And I told him that I had my own Castile Soap and let no one else use it, also cloths, instead of letting the hospital steward dress it with the same soap & rags he used on others and in that way carried gangrene to those who had not had it at all.

"The next day he came to me and said, 'I've been thinking about what you said yesterday and believe there is something in it.' I told him he could be sure of it for it was true. He next wanted me to take all the gangrene cases in the ward and he would give me soap & cloths for each. We had 'A' tents large enough to hold 8 men, 4 bunks of two each, and a row of 8 or 10 tents made a ward. About ½ the cases were Gangrene in some shape or form.

"Soon, I had the tents at our end of the ward full of gangrene cases and tended to

each one as much as I was able, and cheered them up with news from Sherman, and soon had several cases healing. And as I got to be stronger and my leg and arm better I acted as Hospital Steward and Ward Master for which I got an extra ration of the best. . . ."

". . . Soon after taking charge of the ward I began to look into the scurvy cases and to the cause of it. The result was I took a large sorghum barrel and the ration of sorghum from the men suffering from diarrhoea, and got the siftings from the corn meal our bread was made of and in a few days had a barrel of pretty good *beer* and I gave each man who had the scurvy a pint to start on and I kept it up until I went out of the Hospital. I also traded a little with the guards again and sometimes got tobacco for the boys. . . ."

". . . About March 10/1865 Dr. Bates . . . came to me and said his wife had gone down to Americus 10 or 12 miles south on railway and he wanted I should go out to his log cabin and keep house for him awhile. And he would be responsible for me while out there as he did not think we would be there much longer from the general outlook . . . and I found out there were three doctors in the same fix and 3 boys of us to take care of the three shanties, and we had free air and no guards, picked up wood enough to keep a good fire and cook our rations. . . ."

". . . But now (there were) rumors that we should start for a parole camp soon, followed by a trainload being called out each day and going. Rumor said to Vicksburg parole camp, and I told Dr Bates that I wanted to get off as soon as possible. But he said, 'Wait till next Sunday. I want to go, too, as surgeon on that train, and I want to go when you do.' Saturday he went down and saw his wife and got a little roll of Greenbacks of her, and was on hand Sunday morning (March 24/65) and we left Anderson(ville), came up to Fort Valley, started west, and finally reached Vicksburg, Miss. . . ."

Here Corporal Burch was parolled on April 21, 1865. Within a day or two he boarded a steamer for St. Louis. Perhaps significantly, this steamer was named the "Olive Branch."