

PRison narrative of Sergt. Samuel Preston 64th NY

Nov. 11th, 1864 With orders to send a train load to some other prison C.M. Ellis D. Wod[ford] of the 154 NY Vol & myself took the opportunity to flank out of the prison. Passed Macon during the night arrived at Augusta the next day here we were side tracked with orders to remain near the cars about 5 we started again towards the rising sun during the day we procured a little salt & some matches for some little trifles all this time we had been toled we were going to Savanna to be paroled the guards were placed on top the cars & we hoped we were to go to Gods country During the night we came to Branchville & in place of going south as we supposed they took the road north which convinced us that there story was false & they were taking us to some other prison. After leaving the second station from Branchville & the guards had ceased to wach the door on the shadowey side of the car we came to the desperate conclusion to leave without permission so one by one we dropped from the car lying down close by the track untill the train had passed out of sight as previously arranged we were soon together & free for the time at least from Confederate guards & at liberty to draw our rations from the cornfields & sweet potato patches of the great state of South Carolina good by to the stingy rations of corn bread & Etc furnished by the Rebels our first feast was a partial ripe water melon We had a plan which we thought would be successfull that was to reach the sea this could be accomplished only by secreting ourselves during the day & traveling as nearly east by night as possible rivers to cross large forests to pass through incessant rains by day & night shivering in our wet clothes such as we had.

The crossing of the Santee River. after making sevrал efforts to reach its back which was lined with heavy forests & a bottom land that was overflowed & looked like a fit place for Allegators & Lizards We succeeded in reaching its banks in this manner skirting along the edge of the timber during the day we crossed a road which we thought would lead us to the river which proved corect but we dared not attempt it during the day so we laid down & went to sleep there was the sound of a man chopping at some distance Ellis sliped away while we were sleeping & discovered it was an old darkey cutting down trees & gathering grapes & reported same. some dogs soon discovered his trail & came tearing after us we gathered up our filthy garments & made a break for the swamp which took us nearly to the knees after a short run like this we found ourselves in the bank of the river & oblige to await results soon the dogs overtook us but by placing our backs together & with our heavy canes we kept them from harming us soon the old Darkey came thinking the dogs had treed a possem which he told us soon after. It was such a relief to know it was no white man Ellis put his arms around him & embraced him He proved to be very usefull to us he toled us where his young masters boat was tied brought us another oar with a promise of some sweet potatoes after dark Which he fullfilled & in the darkness of the night we left the old man with a god bless the Lincom solders we find the boat chained & locked we find a pole & by pressing between the chain & tree the chain is broken Ourselves potatoes & old tin pan are loaded in and we are afloat in the darkness of the night on the great Santee River. not knowing what moment a chalange from a sentry would stop us in our race for liberty after two or three hours ride we secreted the boat cooked some potates & waited for daylight to be able to see our way out of the wilderness our shoes are so worn

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& our feet so sore that we are obliged to travel in the roads by night passing through the town of Maning about 11 PM we were halted by a couple of white men that thought we were negroes But when they found we were white men they made a very nice apology which was very exceptable to us & we resumed our journey gladly. We reached the Pedee river laid in the brush near the ferry & all day caught a small eel with a pin hook rosted in a fire & thought it was the sweetest meat we ever eat Again we are obliged to get information from our friend the darkey he tells us that a white man tends the ferry on this side of the river & his darkey on the other We secure a small boat cross the river tie it securly on the other side thinking perhaps some of his neighbors had used it & thus distroy suspision but not so A short walk of three miles brings us to the Bull river. When the tide raises it breaks acrossed this narrow piece of land & forms the Island which we are on This is saturday night & a long weary sabbath awaits us we again secret ourselves near by to await developments We observe the travlers call the ferryman from the opposite side just as the evening shade have come A team makes it appearances on the scene. the usual call is made "Hello" the answer comes back what do you want "The flat" (these are moments of importance to us) the flat soon comes the team is soon on board & is ferried across the Branch in place of its starting place We now place ourselves under the shade of a tree near the landing & we hear the boat returning This seems to be our time "Hello" what do you want again goes back over the water the flat this soon proves to be our salvation as the flat neared the shore we staped in the moonlight And the Darkey immedittly on seeing us says I can't take you but the boat is large & heavy & it is impossible for him to stop it & as soon as it touches we are on board now the Darkey tells us that his master has been there during the day & toled him not to take any footman off the Island for there was some runaway Niggers & some escaped yankees on the Island. We tried to persuade him but the fears of his master was more than all our entreaties then we toled him that he must or we would put him under the boat this had the effect after we reached the other side he took us to his cabin fed us with the best he had A walk of five miles brings us up to a Negro village where we spend the night under the roof of a frendly negro. Again we seek reffuge in a corn field during the day in a deserted house & are found by another Darkey We have a long talk with him He toled us where to got that night & we would find friends which proved to be true they took us to an old Darkey that hired his time of his master & worked for himself He had been working for the Rebs on the fort at georgetown & toled us just how to go down the river sent these two men with his boat to secure us another which they stole & brought to us another night of waiting with but little too eat but we must have a full night to make the trip & locate our selves either on North or South Island before morning we are lost again on the Wacaman River & we cant tell wheather we are going up or down stream on account of the tide nothing to do but to land & wait for the morrow when morning came we find we are between the Fort & georgetown with no possible chance to get anything to eat this day The light house between the Island is in sight to tell us where we want to go poor little frail boat or dug out must carry us safely to the Island or leave us in a watery grave my strength fails me to row more & all I can do is to bail out the water that slops over the sides at last we reach south Island I crawl out on the grass & rest while my comrades seek a friendly tree to climb & find out our location they soon return & tell me that we must take the boat again & cross to the other

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Island for the Darkey toled us we would be more likely to find something to eat for people had lived on it before the war While crossing & coming round near the light house Woodford was sitting in the stern of the boat steering & had a good view down the chanel He sais I see a vessell & insists on crossing to the Island Ellis replyes no I am going to have something to eat be it Rebs or yanks we soon got the chalange "hoo" comes there friends soon the chalange again reply escaped yankee Prisoners pull up or you will go astern the torpedo net is raised our little boat floats under its wings the ladder of the Ship is reached & we are on board & under the Stars & stripes in gods country the gun Boat Petonirpeg [?] this ended our four weeks tramp for liberty  
SE Preston

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