

parties, as at Rich Mt., Springfield and Lexington, upon their parole not to bear arms until released from their obligations. We ask for our men that they may be permitted to return to their homes upon the same pledge. We are assured that a knowledge of our condition would incline you favorably to consider this application. The officer having the care of us, Lieutenant Casey, of this post has been active in kindness, to us, but the want of room, the presence of contagious diseases among us unused as we are to this climate defy all his efforts to protect us against its force. Four of our men have died within the past five days and many others are dangerously ill.

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North Carolina Volunteers (and 633 men)

Other prisoners dared more direct but anonymous action in attempting to obtain their release from the grim castle, and some of their adventures were as amusing as they were audacious. One of the best was that of the spry young rebel, who incredibly contrived to squeeze unnoticed through the stockade gate, but then found himself faced with the serious difficulty of getting by an unanticipated sentry who was walking post directly across his only possible line of escape. When the sentry had passed him the suddenly inspired southerner dashed out and then boldly turned to retrace his steps towards the gate just as the sentry also started back. The guard immediately challenged the other, stated that visitors were not permitted near the stockade, and peremptorily ordered the Confederate away. Nothing could have coincided more exactly with the views of the southern tourist; he at once obeyed his instructions and since he was not seen or heard from again, it has always been assumed that he safely made his way back to the other side of the Mason-Dixon Line.

The happiest bit of history in all this grim time, however, was furnished by Captain William Robert Webb, one-time adjutant of the 2d North Carolina Cavalry. He had transferred to this swashbuckling band of bravos after a serious wound made it impossible for him to continue foot-soldiering with his original doughboy regiment. But his injury was not serious enough to keep him on the inside of the Castle Williams stockade, when he could see the lights of New York on the outside. The mere fact that the city also was on the opposite shore of a waterway, notorious for its raging tides and whirling eddies, made no difference to the valiant cavalryman. One dark night he slipped silently from the castle walls into the racing waters

and set off across the channel.

In the years to follow several other unwilling guests of Castle Williams would attempt to take their leave in the same manner only to turn up as water-logged corpses weeks later and miles away, but this time fortune was on the captain's side. Without incident he negotiated the treacherous currents and at length clambered wet and disheveled up the rocks at the Battery. Immediately, a passer-by noticed him without recognizing the Confederate uniform he was wearing and, roaring with laughter at his appearance, asked him how he ever came to fall in and if he wanted any help. Considerably nettled at what he considered the callous attitude of his unappreciative audience, Webb haughtily introduced himself, by name, as a captain in the Confederate Army, and an escaped prisoner from Governors Island. To any other explanation the New Yorker might have paid some serious attention but this truthful statement obviously struck him as merely a highly humorous sally and he sauntered off chuckling in amusement.

Left alone and properly reluctant to swim back to the island, Webb walked boldly into the city, where he was several times accosted by various people who inquired the cause of his bedraggled dampness and offered help. To all of them, the captain told the same story he had told his first interrogator, and like him, all of them refused to believe a word of it. Lee surrendered to Grant a few days later, so Webb was relieved from further fruitless attempts to convince skeptical Yankees of his identity. After negotiating the water passage from Governors Island to New York City, arranging a trip by land from New York to the south, must have been child's play to him and he was next heard from as a senator from Tennessee.

Its prisoners at last released and its stockades torn down, Governors Island was ready for peace. But the start of the postwar period was to plunge the garrison into a bitter struggle with a new and unseen foe against whom no retaliatory measures seemed availing. The pestilential conditions consequent to the overcrowding of prison camp and barracks during the war years bred disease that quickly spread into virulent epidemics. In 1866, again in 1867, and once more in 1868 the island was scourged by outbreaks of cholera, and there were few days during that frightening period when the sounds of rifle volleys and Taps did not echo from the cemetery.

Then the plague went its foul way, never to return, and Governors Island was belatedly free to look forward to a long period of peaceful existence and development, richly deserved.