

David Cobb's Story

A Florence Man's Suffering During the War

Among the veterans who enlisted near Watertown or even in any locality in this state or county. Probably no one could tell a more harrowing tale of simple, true facts relating to trials among rebels, than did David Cobb, formerly of Alexandria Bay but now residing in Florence, Oneida County (who is endeavoring to secure a pension.) If all he said is true, to a Times reporter yesterday, no one could be better entitled to a pension. He has passed through the war as a private, and had many dangerous excapades. (sic) He has dodged bloodhounds, been assissted (sic) by the Southern negroes in trying to reach federal camps again and never flinched under threats by officers at Anderson Prison to put him to the rack he said.

I was captured in the Chickahominy swamps the night of June 12, 1864 because of the carelessness of the officer of the day in a federal camp. I was transferred from that place to Libby prison at Richmond. After staying there fourteen days I was conveyed to Danville and from there to Andersonville Prison. We found a most horrible state of affairs when our party arrived there. There were large numbers lying about nearly naked. The wounded uncared for, the healthy and the well men were under-fed. Of all wretchedness the state of things at this place was most wretched.

There was a party of young fellows – federals they were too – who raided the other prisoners, depriving them of their food of what money they had – everything that could be used for any purpose. When I went into the prison, the rebels stripped me of all except my under clothing. The Union officers in Andersonville finally decided that they could allow no more raiding and accordingly had a court martial. This was caused partly by the demands of the rebels on the outside, who declared that no more rations would be given to the prisoners until the raiders were brought out and punished. Six of the twenty-five tried were declared guilty by the court. A fellow named Limber Jim and I offered to hang them, and the execution took place in prison on the 11th of July 1864. This stopped that nuisance,” he continued, “and we were much more comfortable. They were a terror to all. They would ask fellow prisoners to change a \$20 bill which they had, and if the prisoners showed any money at all we would find him dead in the morning. Every morning a large number were found dead inside the prison. They stood in with some of the rebels and sold groceries. After this time I staid (sic) in prison nine and one half months. For five whole months I was entirely naked and for four months all I had on was a shirt collar. I began to get desperate I was no more than a skeleton and so determined to escape.

My escape was effected in January and for four nights I traveled north ward. Then I was recaptured by a rebel at the house of one of his negroes. He locked me in his garret. That night I tore the bed clothes in stripes and got to the ground. Two hounds were lying beneath the window watching, but the negro was still a friend to me and he led

them away. It was only with the assistance of the darkies that I could have escaped (sic) at all. The negroes fed me. They ran me from one refuge to another, and put me on the tracks of the "under ground rail way." For one whole day I was dogged by the hounds, and directed to another trail. For three days and three nights after this I traveled with nothing to eat, hardly daring to allow myself to be seen. I traveled night after night lying in swamps much of the time. On January 15th, 1865, I was lost in the Big Swamp and was without food again for five days and five nights. A panther lay right over my head in a tree in the swamp. He took after another animal the last night I was there and did not return. Every day I started out and went as far as I could returning each time to the same tree and finally my persistence was rewarded and I reached solid earth again. An incident occurred (sic) which filled me with horror one morning while in the swamp I awoke and stretched myself and in so doing touched a big alligator on the back. It raised its tail and slapped it down again with great force, sending a creeping chill over me. Hardly had I reached hard land when I heard the hounds back again. They were on my trail. Soon after in turning away to get farther away from the hounds I met two rebels. I was by this time clothed in rebel clothes and was accosted as a deserter. A little unwisely I told them I didn't know what they called it, but I wanted to get away. That led them to suspect I was a Yankee, and took me in charge. One of them seemed particularly anxious to shoot me, but the other, in hopes of getting a reward for my return to Andersonville to which place I learned they were going anyway, opposed the idea. During the council between the two as to what they should do with me, I sat on a log, listening, with two of their hounds watching me, ready to pick up a club and fight for my life in case of necessity. Here I thought it was a pretty close thing for me, when that fellow stated that he wanted to shoot one Yankee before the war was over. He was terribly mad when I asked him why he did not go to the front, but they finally took me to Baldwinsville, near the spot of my capture and from there to Andersonville.

The first remark ever made to me personally by Commander Wirtz of Andersonville prison was on my arrival back there when he said: Aha! You tamm Yankee you don't get away, don't you.

Upon my telling him I had as good a hand as he and I was going to play it. He drew a revolver and asked me what I meant. After some talk, he gave me a parol (sic) of honor. That allowed me a opportunity to earn a better living. But he threatened to put me in the stocks if I attempted to run away again. I saw three men put in the stocks when I was there, for three hours. One stood it a hour and a half; the second held out one hour and forty five minutes and the third lived two hours and fifty five minutes. The last was determined to live through it but failed not with standing.

"My history as to the war ended soon after this for four days I was reported at headquarters as having accomplished the task of chopping wood and on the fifth had got my allotted amount of work done at 9 oclock in the morning, and decided again to escape (sic). I got five miles out from camp when I met a man. He seemed to rise right out of the ground. It was marvelous to my eyes then and seems to now, but he spoke finally. He was going to see Wirtz, to get a man to stay with him while prisoners were left at Andersonville and I got on good terms with him. He asked the Commander if he would

let me go. I stayed with this man six weeks when the war closing we were turned loose at Baldwinsville.

Watertown Times

[Mr. Cobb is a brother of Mrs. Geo Clark of this village. He enlisted in Co. E. 94 Regiment NY on the Sept. 12th, 1862 at Alexandria Bay.]

