

Dr. John C. Bates testifying for the prosecution regarding camp conditions

I have been residing for the past four or five years in the State of Georgia. I am a practitioner of medicine, and have been engaged in that profession since 1850. I have been on duty at the Andersonville Prison as acting assistant surgeon I was assigned there on the 19th of September, 1864; reported for duty on the 22nd, and left there on the 29th of March 1865. [A paper was here handed to witness.] I think I have seen that before. It is a pass given me by Captain Wirz to enter the stockade. [The pass was then put in evidence.] I was ordered by Medical Director Stout to report to I. H. or J. H. White, surgeon in charge. He having been hurt by some railroad accident, I reported to Dr. R. R. Stevenson.

I reported to Dr. Stevenson, who assigned me to the third division of the military prison hospital, under Dr. Sheppard; I was assigned to the fifteenth ward, as then designated.

Upon going to the hospital I went immediately to the ward to which I was assigned, and, although I am not an over-sensitive man, I must confess I was rather shocked at the appearance of things. The men were lying partially nude and dying, and lousy, a portion of them in the sand and others upon boards which had been stuck up on little props, pretty well crowded together, a majority of them in small tents that were not very serviceable at best. I went around and examined all that were placed in my charge. That was the condition of the men. By and by, as I became familiarized with the condition of affairs, the impressions which were at first produced upon me wore off, more or less. I became familiar with scenes of misery and they did not affect me so much. I inquired into the rations of the men; I felt disposed to do my duty; and after the men found out that I was inclined to aid them so far as I could in my sphere of action, the frequently asked me for a teaspoonful of salt, or an order for a little siftings that came out of the meal, I would ask them what they wanted the siftings for; some of them wished them to make some bread. I would inquire into the state of their disease, and if what they asked for would injure them, I would not allow them to have it. I would give them an order for sifted meal where I found that the condition of the patient required something better than siftings. They would come at times in considerable numbers to get these little orders for an extra ration, or if not a ration, whatever portion they could get. I spent a considerable portion of my time in writing orders, and I did it very laconically. I had three words that constituted a bona fide order, which should be respected by the head cook or baker. The order would read in this way: "Bob-meal-Bates." If any more words were attached to it, it was not a genuine order. I used that discrimination in order to favor the sickest of them, so that they might get what they could, at the expense, perhaps, of those who could get along better without it. These orders were constantly applied for, and I would sign them till my patience was almost worn out. The meat ration was cooked at a different part of the hospital; and when I would go up there, especially when I was a medical officer of the day, the men would gather around me and ask me for a bone. I would grant their requests so far as I saw bones. I would give them whatever I could find at my disposition without robbing others. I well knew that an appropriation of one ration took it from the general issue; that when I appropriated an extra ration to one man, some one else would fall minus upon that ration. I then fell back upon the distribution of bones. They did not presume to ask me for meat at all. So far as rations are concerned, that is about the way matters went along for some time after I went there.

Clothing we had none; they could not be furnished with any clothing, except that the clothing of the dead was generally appropriated to the living. We thus helped the living as well as we could.

Of vermin or lice there was a very prolific crop there. I got to understand practically the meaning of the term "lousy"; I would generally find some upon myself upon returning to my quarters; they were so that it was impossible for a surgeon to enter the hospital without having some upon him when he came out, if he touched anybody or anything save the ground, and very often if he merely stood still any considerable length of time he would get them upon him.

When I went to the hospital I found the men destitute of clothing and bedding; there was a partial supply of fuel, but not sufficient to keep the men warm and prolong their existence. Shortly after I arrived there I was appointed officer of the day. I learned that the officer of the day was in supreme command of all pertaining to the hospital, and that it was my duty as such to go into the various wards and divisions of the hospital and rectify anything that needed to be cared for. In visiting the hospital I made a pretty thorough

examination. As a general thing, the patients were destitute; they were filthy and partly naked. There seemed to be a disposition only to get something to eat. The clamor all the while was for something to eat. They asked me for orders for this that and the other - peas or rice, or salt, or beef tea, or a potato, or a biscuit, or a piece of corn bread, or siftings, or meal.

Medicines were scarce ; we could not get what we wished. We drew upon the indigenous remedies; they did not seem to answer. We gathered up large quantities of them, but very few served for medicines as we wished. We wanted the best powerful anti-scorbutics, as well as something that was soothing and healing, especially to the lining membrane of the alimentary canal, and such things as were calculated to counteract a dropsical disposition and a gangrenous infection. Those were prominent things in the hospital. We had not at all times the proper remedies to administer, and the indigenous remedies did not serve us, and could not serve us in those complaints. We were obliged to do the best we could.

There was in my ward a boy of fifteen or sixteen years, in whom I felt a particular interest. My attention was more immediately called to him from his youth, and he appealed to me in such a way that I could not well avoid heeding him. He would often ask me to bring him a potato, a piece of bread, a biscuit, or something of that kind, which I did; I would put them in my pocket and give them to him. I would sometimes give him a raw potato, and as he had the scurvy, and also gangrene, I would advise him not to cook the potato at all, but to eat it raw, as an anti-scorbutic. I supplied him in that way for some time, but I could not give him a sufficiency. He became bed-ridden upon the hips and back, lying upon the ground; we afterwards got him some straw. Those bed-ridden sores had become gangrenous. He became more and more emaciated, until he died. The lice, the want of bed and bedding, of fuel and food, were the cause of his death.

I was a little shy. I did not know that I was allowed to take such things to the patients; and I had been so often arrested that I thought it necessary to be a little shy in what I did, and keep it to myself. I would put a potato in my pocket and would turn around and let it drop to this man or others. I did not wish to be observed by anybody. When I first went there, I understood that it was positively against the orders to take anything in.

I can speak of other cases among the patients; two or three others in my ward were in the same condition; and there were others who came to their death from the bad condition of thing and the lack of necessary supplies. That is my professional opinion.

I had occasion to visit the entire hospital occasionally, and so far as I saw its condition was generally the same as I have been describing. At the time I went there, I think, from the best observations I could make, there were, perhaps, 2,000 or 2,500 sick in that hospital.

We had cases of chilblains or frost-bitten feet. Most generally, in addition to what was said to be frost-bite, there was gangrene. I did not see the sores I the original chilblains. I do not think I can say if there were any amputations or any deaths resulting from suffering of that character, not having charged my mind as to whether the amputations were in consequence of chilblains, or because, from accidental abrading of the surface, gangrene set in. But for a while amputations were practiced in the hospital almost daily, arising from a gangrenous and scorbutic condition, which, in many cases, threatened the saturation of the whole system with gangrenous or offensive matter, unless the limb was amputated. In cases of amputation of that sort, it would sometimes became necessary to reamputate, from gangrene taking hold of the stump again. Some few successful amputations were made. I recollect two or three which were successful. I kept no statistics; those were kept by the prescription clerks and forwarded to headquarters. I did not think at the time that the surgeon-in-chief did all in his power to relieve the condition of those men, and I made my report accordingly.

In visiting the wards in the morning I would find persons lying dead; sometimes I would find them lying among the living. I recollect on one occasion telling my steward to go and wake up a certain one, and when I went myself to wake him up he was taking his everlasting sleep. That occurred in another man's ward, when I was officer of the day. Upon several occasions, on going into my own wards, I found men whom we did not expect to die, dead from the sensation of chilblains produced during the night. This was in the hospital. I was not so well acquainted with how it was in the stockade. I judge, though, from what I saw, that numbers suffered in the same way there.

The effect of scurvy upon the systems of the men as it developed itself there was the next thing to rottenness. Their limbs would become drawn up. It would manifest itself constitutionally. It would draw them up. They would go on crutches sideways, or crawl upon their hands and knees or on their haunches and feet as well as they could. Some could not eat unless it was something that needed no mastication. Sometimes they would be furnished beef tea or boiled rice, or such things as that would be given them, but not to the extent which I would like to see. In some cases they could not eat corn bread; their teeth would be loose and their gums all bleeding. I have known cases of that kind. I do not speak of it as a general thing. They would ask me to interest myself and get them something which they could swallow without subjecting them to so much pain in mastication. It seemed to me I did express my professional opinion that men died because they could not eat the rations they got.

I cannot state what proportion of the men in whose cases it became necessary to amputate from gangrenous wounds, and also to reamputate from the same cause, recovered. Never having charged my mind on the subject, and not expecting to be called upon in such a capacity, I cannot give an approximate opinion which I would deem reliable. In 1864, amputations from that cause occurred very frequently indeed; during the short time in 1865 that I was there, amputations were not frequent.

I cannot state with any certainty the proportion of prisoners treated in the hospital who recovered and were sent back to the stockade. There were clerks appointed to keep all those accounts, and I tried to confine myself strictly to my own duty, and did not interest myself in any statistical enumeration of facts or data.

The prisoners in the stockade and the hospital were not very well protected from the rain; only by their own meager means, their blankets, holes in the earth, and such things. In the spring of 1865, when I was in the stockade, I saw a shed thirty feet wide and sixty feet long--the sick principally were in that. They were in about the same condition as those in the hospital. As to the prisoners generally, their only means of shelter from the sun and rain were their blankets, if they carried any along with them. I regarded that lack of shelter as a source of disease.

Rice, peas, and potatoes were the common issue from the Confederate government; but as to turnips, carrots, tomatoes, and cabbage, of that class of vegetables, I never saw any. There was no green corn issued. Western Georgia is generally considered a pretty good corn-growing country.

[Mr. Baker objects to the line of examination that was being pursued by the judge-advocate, on the ground that it was taking too wide a range, and that the evidence elicited was not connected in any way with the defendant. The court, after deliberation, overruled the objection. The witness resumed.]

Green corn could have been used as an anti-scorbutic and as an antidote. A vegetable diet, so far as it contains any alterative or medical qualities, serves as an anti-scorbutic.

The ration issued to the patients in the hospital was corn meal, beef, bacon - pork occasionally but not much of it; at times, green corn, peas, rice, salt, sugar, and potatoes. I enumerate those as the varieties served out. Potatoes were not a constant ration; at times they were sent in, perhaps a week or two weeks at a time, and then they would drop off. The daily rations was less from the time I went there in September, through October, November, and December, than it was from January till March 26th, the time I left. I never made a calculation as to the number of rations intended for each man; I was never called to do that. So far as I saw, I believe I would feel safe in saying that, while there might have been less, the amount was not over twenty ounces for twenty-four hours.

From January to March the rations were better than they had been before. The surgeon of the post had been changed. Dr. Stevenson was superseded by Dr. Clayton, who, I thought, interested himself very much to relieve the sufferings of the prisoners there. While Dr. Stevenson was director of the hospital. I never saw much interest manifested on his part to relieve the necessities of the prisoners.

Q. What number of ounces of healthy nutritious food is necessary to support life and health?

A. Upon one unvaried diet, confining a man to any one article or any one set of articles for a length of time, I do not know but that a man would starve to death upon plenty. That is a physiological question. The various secretions of the system demand a multifarious diet for the proper feeding of the system. If you were to confine a man to a single article of diet or four or five articles of diet for one year, I am inclined to

say that he could not live, It is a nice physiological point. The monotonous diet issued from September till January, which continued afterward, though in larger quantities, was such as the men, without varying it, could not have lived upon without very bad effects, upon the nervous system especially. There are physiological points which I did not expect to be asked about. The diet was monotonous, consisting of corn meal, peas of not very good quality, sometimes sweet potatoes, sometimes tolerably good beef, at other times not so; sometimes good bacon, at other times raw bacon, which was not good. It is my opinion that men starved to death in consequence of the paucity of the rations, especially in the fall of 1864, the quality not being very good and the quantity deficient.

Q. Did you ever examine the question sufficiently to state the number of ounces of nutritious food necessary to sustain life and health?

A. I had a little discussion with Dr. Clayton upon that. It was after the first of January when he took charge. I was ordered to make a particular and especial report of every article that was issued, taking the number of patients then in the hospital and the attendants. I went to the commissary myself, and saw the provisions loaded up, carried in, and weighed. I took those figures and the figures of the attendants in the hospital. The calculations which I made there were that sixteen ounces of meal would make twenty-eight ounces of bread, and sixteen ounces of flour would make twenty-two ounces of bread. I gave the prisoners in that calculation the benefit of the increase. In reference to the meat, I did not make any calculation for the bones, because they were generally disposed of by the prisoners, who were glad to get them. By the first definite calculation which I made, the patients received thirty-two and some tenths ounces, and the attendants received thirty or thirty-one ounces. This was after Dr. Clayton got charge. These facts were stated in my first report to him. Six days afterward I was called upon to make a similar report, and I think then the attendants got thirty two ounces, and the patients got twenty-eight ounces of this monotonous food. I am not prepared to say how long life could be sustained upon a monotonous diet.

Q. Did you think that the food served out was sufficient in quantity?

A. After January, 1865, the quantity was sufficient if it could have been varied. Dr. Clayton and myself concluded that thirty to thirty-three ounces for the sick was a sufficiency at that time. Many of the sick did not consume all that was issued to them, but appropriated it otherwise. There was great trading and bargaining going on all the time. I know that the patients in the hospital greatly improved after the change of administration from Dr. Stevenson to Dr. Clayton. I know that they got more provisions and were better cared for. I never made a report to Dr. Clayton as medical officer of the day but he heeded every point, and when I pointed out any deficiency he would ask me to interest myself personally and remedy it, and he would do anything that could be done.

Q. Was that the fact before Dr. Clayton took charge?

A. I cannot say that it was.

An altercation took place there between Dr. James and Captain Wirz. Upon going into the hospital one morning I learned my chief clerk was arrested, and had been ordered to be bucked and gagged; I did not see him gagged; I saw him bucked; he was sitting outside of the gate of the hospital. Upon inquiry, I found that he had by some means or other neglected to report a man that was missing; and it was a question whether the duty of reporting this man belonged to the Confederate sergeant, whose duty it was to call the roll of the sick, or to this clerk. Dr. James wrote a letter to Captain Wirz, or some other man; I saw that letter; Dr James read it to me. I am not positive as to whom it was addressed to; but he spoke of Captain Wirz's tyranny in the punishment of this man, as he was very faithful in doing his duty. Dr. James rather felt outraged at the manner in which the man had been treated, and he made a demurrer.

Q. Describe what kind of exhalations or odors arose from that prison.

A. There are two kinds of miasma laid down by medical writers: the kino and the ideo; one consists of exhalations from the human body in a state of disease, and the other of exhalations from vegetable decompositions and saturations generally. There were both kinds there. The miasmatic effluvia emanating from the hospital was very potent and offensive indeed.

Q. In what way would it affect the healthy?

A. If I had a scratch upon my hand - if the skin was broken or abraded in the least - I did not venture to go into the hospital without protecting it with adhesive plaster. I saw several sores originating from the infection of the gangrenous effluvia saturating the atmosphere. For this reason we were all very cautious. If a prisoner whose system was reduced by inanition, which invite and develop disease, should chance to stomp his toe (some of them were barefooted) or scratch his hand, almost invariably the next report to me, so far as my charge was concerned, was gangrene, so potent was the influence.

Immediately upon the west side of the stockade, and between there and the depot, there was timber scattered; on the north side, beyond the cook-house a little, there was plenty of timber; on the south side plenty had been cut in logs and lay there, and down by the hospital there was plenty. That is a woody country and there was plenty of wood within a mile. It was fine timber, and could have been made into shingles or clapboards. I did not see any of it used to make shelter for the prisoners. A set of sheds were being erected there, as represented on the diagram, outside of the stockade and the hospital. They were in course of erection at the time of the abandonment of the place. No patients had ever been put in them. I regret to say that the supply of wood was not sufficient to keep the prisoners from what we term freezing to death. They would not, perhaps, actually freeze to death, but a patient whose blood is thin, and his system worn down, is very susceptible to the influence of cold. In the absence of sufficient food, sufficient stimulus, and especially in the absence of fuel, many of the patients (I speak now of what I saw in my own ward) would, during the night, become so chilled that in the morning, passing round, I would remark to my steward, "Last night did the work for that poor fellow; he will die"; I cannot resuscitate him with the means in my hands, his system is so reduced." Lying upon the ground during those chilly nights, (the weather was not freezing, but sufficient to thoroughly chill the whole system,) the patient would reach a condition in which resuscitation was a matter of impossibility after he commenced going downhill from this exposure. I have seen a number die in that way. In my judgment there was sufficient timber growing in the vicinity to supply fuel for cooking and for keeping the prisoners warm, and also to furnish shelter for them, I frequently made observation while there, that there was plenty of wood to supply every demand - shingles, boards, logs to make huts, and plenty for fuel. That is a woody country; the wood is pine wood. I judged that it could be made into boards and rails from the fact that they were pretty plenty there, and from the fact that I saw the boys splitting boards for the new hospital shed that was going up. There was no deficiency of wood.

[A diagram was exhibited to witness]

I have seen that before; it was given to me in Andersonville Prison by Felix De La Baume. The tents, chimneys, fence, trees, cart and mule, etc., are correct. One sketch here of "Dr. Bates" is pretty good, but rather spindle-shanked. The great point in which it is not facsimile is that too few men are represented. If there were forty delineated where there is one it would be more correct. These men walking on their hands and knees and on crutches, some carrying their tin cups in their mouths, represent men who could not go there otherwise. They were afflicted with scurvy as a general thing. One man represented here I recognize as a man named Ison, who was a subject of dementia; he only crept along on his haunches and feet. I recognize several others whose names I never learned, but whom I frequently saw. That man with the bucket in his mouth, I frequently saw crawling up for his rations. I see one man here representing "Dr. Bates examining the character and quantity of the beef," together with the confederate surgeon and Ed. Young, boss of that cook-house. I see one man figure representing "Dr. Bates giving beef bones to the cripples." It was my prerogative as officer of the day to supervise the cooking and administration of the rations, and to attend to anything that generally belonged to the hospital. When rations were being issued I would frequently go there. Those detailed to cut up the meat would put the bones in one pile and count the rations and put them carefully in another. When I would go there from twenty to one hundred or more would ask me, some of them very imploringly, for a bone. I would say, "Yes, you can have all the bones." I see that I am represented here as handing bones to those cripples. I would hand them out as here represented. The general representation in this diagram is about correct, save that there were twenty or forty men to one represented here. They were very thick about the cook house.

[Diagram was then put in evidence.]

On entering the stockade, I would find dead prisoners. They were generally laid up at the gate under some sheds or boughs constituting a dead-house. They were first brought up to the gate and laid just inside the inner stockade; they were then carried on litters to the inside of the outer stockade, and from there they were hauled away in wagons - sometimes two-horse, sometimes four-horse wagons. They were laid in the

wagons. They were laid in the wagon, I believe, head foremost, one on another, regularly along in layers. I do not know how they were buried.

The dead house of the hospital was in the southwest corner. When I first went there, what was called a dead-house consisted of some boards put up into a kind of shed. These boards were used by the inmates of the hospital or somehow else; at any rate, they disappeared. For some time the dead were laid there without any shelter. Every time I came on duty as officer of the day, which was every six days, I reported that there was no dead-house, and called the attention of the authorities to the erection of a dead-house or some place to deposit the dead, not to let them lie without shelter and exposed to the sun. This was in the hospital. They did not allow the corpse to lie long enough to cause any exhalations from putrefaction. Outside they were hauled off immediately to the graveyard; at least I saw them hauled away - I never saw the graveyard.

We needed a dead-house, so as to have some place to lay the corpses decently. At one time we got a tent erected for a dead house, but that did not last very long. Every morning when I would go in I would find a blanket or a quilt sliced off. The men would appropriate them to wrap themselves up. At first the top commenced going, and in a few days all was gone. I remarked that it was no use to erect such dead-houses as that, except to supply the men with blankets, though I had no objection to their being erected every night, if the men could thereby get blankets. If my memory serves me right, no more dead-houses were erected. I think that tent I managed to get erected was the last.

The morning after making my first tour as officer of the day, I sat down and made a report, the language of which I do not now recollect, but the substance was based upon the condition in which I found the hospital. That report was sent up, and I being a novice in military matters, for some things which I had said in that report I received a written reprimand, signed "R. R. Stevenson, by Dr. Diller," his assistant in the office. The date of that report was about the 24th or 25th of September, two or three days after I reported. I continued to make the reports, but I think they were not heeded.

Meetings of the surgeons were held to see whether these things could not be remedied. Petitions were written and partially signed, and were then destroyed for want of proper channel by which to send them up, or some other objection. Finally there was a report made to the medical department; it was to be sent to Surgeon-General Moore or the secretary of war; I am not certain which. Dr. Eiland, Dr. McVey and some other doctors there signed it. It was not sent, as I understood. These things were talked of, and the result was a medical investigation appropriated for the Union prisoners. During the course of this investigation medical gentlemen were called upon the stand, myself among the rest, and the account current of the hospital was examined by these two medical gentlemen, who were inspectors under orders from the secretary of war. This was after Dr. Stevenson left; he was ordered, I think, to Florence. I never saw any official opinion or report emanating from Dr. Guillot or Dr. Llewellyn,

[A paper was exhibited to witness.]

Q. Do you recognize the handwriting in that document?

A. It was written before I went to the Andersonville Prison, but I recognize it as the handwriting of Dr. Pelot, so far as I recollect his handwriting. I frequently saw him write; we made our morning report together.

Q. Were you familiar with his handwriting?

A. Tolerably so. [The paper purporting to be a morning report, made by Dr. Pelot as medical officer of the day, was offered in evidence. Mr. Baker objected to its admission, on the ground that it was not in any way connected with the prisoner. The court, after deliberation, overruled the objection. The following report was then put in evidence;]

FIRST DIVISION, C. S. M. P. HOSPITAL,
September 5, 1864.

SIR: As officer of the day, for the past twenty-four hours, I have inspected the hospital and found it in as good condition as the nature of the circumstances will allow. A majority of the bunks are still

unsupplied with bedding, while in a portion of the division the tents are entirely destitute of either bunks, bedding or straw, the patients being compelled to lie upon the bare ground. I would earnestly call attention to the article of diet. The corn bread received from the bakery being made up without sifting, is wholly unfit for the use of the sick; and often (in the last twenty-four hours) upon examination, the inner portion is found to be perfectly raw. The meat (beef) received by the patients does not amount to over two ounces a day, and for the last three or four days no flour has been issued. The corn bread cannot be eaten by many, for to do so would be to increase the disease of the bowels, from which a large majority are suffering, and it is therefore thrown away. All other rations received by way of sustenance is two ounces of boiled beef and half pint of rice soup per day. Under these circumstances, all the skill that can be brought to bear upon their cases by the medical officer will avail nothing. Another point to which I feel it my duty to call your attention is the deficiency of medicines. We have but little more than indigenous barks and roots with which to treat the numerous forms of disease to which our attention is daily called. For the treatment of wounds, ulcers, &c., we have literally nothing except water.

Our wards - some of them - are filled with gangrene, and we are compelled to fold our arms and look quietly upon its ravages, not even having stimulants to support the system under its depressing influences, this article being so limited in supply that it can only be issued for cases under the knife. I would respectfully call your attention to the above facts, in the hope that something may be done to alleviate the sufferings of the sick.

I am sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. Crews Pelot,
Assistant Surgeon C. S. and Officer of the Day.

Surgeon E. D. Eiland,

In charge First Division C. S. M. P. Hospital.

Q. What effect had the treatment you have described upon the mental condition and moral sensibilities of the prisoners?

A. There was among them generally an enervation of the nervous system, which ran down in consequence of this scarcity of supplies. The nervous system must of course sink under such pressure. I have seen the effect manifested in idiocy, dementia, and other mental weaknesses. I have seen several instances of that; not a great many; four or five, perhaps, came under my immediate observation. Morally, I would have expected that such abject circumstances would have produced deep humiliation and resignation, but the effect was otherwise. The moral feeling of the prisoners gradually evaporated. Instead of having a healthy influence upon their morals, it had a contrary effect. Men seemed to abandon themselves. It seemed to me at times that no man interested himself further than "I"; a well man would sometimes steal from a sick man; and if a sick man could steal anything from a well man, or anybody else, he would do so. It seemed to me that all lived for themselves, having no regard for anybody else. I judged this to be superinduced by the paucity of the rations - the starving condition of the men.

Q. From your observation of the condition and surroundings of our prisoners - their food, their drink, their exposure by day and by night, and all the circumstances you have described - state your professional opinion as to what proportion of deaths occurring there were the result of the circumstances and surroundings which you have narrated.

A. I feel myself safe in saying that seventy-five per cent of those who died might have been saved, had those unfortunate men been properly cared for as to food, clothing, bedding, etc.

Andersonville is nothing more than a railroad station. There were but a few houses there until the military shanties were put up. There were commissary stores there. There was one private store there; I think a dry-goods store. There was no grocery store while I was there. The prisoners could not obtain anything for their comfort or convenience without going into the country and foraging. They were not allowed to do that. Some of the paroled men used to do it, sometimes.