

# New Yorkers Tell Civil War Stories

## Central New Yorker Reports on the Civil War

Andrew J. Grover was born in West Dryden, Tompkins County, New York, on December 22, 1830. After serving in the U.S. army during the Mexican-American War, he attended seminary in Cazenovia, New York and became a Protestant minister. With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Grover helped organize the Seventy-sixth Regiment from central New York State and he was commissioned as Captain. In 1862 he fought in northern Virginia where he was seriously wounded. After his recovery, he was appointed Major of his Regiment. He was in command of the regiment at the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863 where he was shot and killed. The 76th lost three-quarters of the officers and men on the first day of the battle. Andrew Grover wrote many letters that were published in the *Cortland Gazette and Banner* during the Civil War. In a letter dated June 11, 1862 (vo. 1, no. 39, p. 2), Grover described a conflict between his regiment and local police authorities in Washington DC who were determined to capture runaway slaves.

A. "The regiment was marching quietly through the streets of Washington, when unexpectedly to both officers and men, Marshal Lamson and posse broke into and through the ranks to seize the persons of

several fugitives who had by services rendered become almost a part of the regiment. It was an outrage, and the Marshal should have had at least a broken head for his conduct. No officer or soldier was

under obligation to ask the Marshal his

business; he should have taken the trouble to have stated it to the proper persons. He chose the opposite course. He broke the ranks and jostled the men, and got for his pains a few heavy blows. He was backed up by quite a number of assistants, who, doing as he did, received like treatment. The affair at one time looked serious. The men began to load their pieces, and fix their bayonets, and had not the Marshal and his confederates beat a hasty retreat, vital blood would have been made to flow. Aside from the question of delivering up fugitives, the men did right in resisting even a United States officer. But we are not slave catchers; we are adverse to the slaveholder's peculiar interests; we will not deliver up the man who escapes from his unrighteous bonds. As we look at it, our enemy is not the southern men, but slavery; and we shall never be wanting when a direct blow can be

given to it." In the same letter Grover described the attitudes of enslaved Africans and southern Whites met in Fredericksburg, Virginia toward the national government and the Civil War.

B. "The Negroes are mostly for the Union, and they would do much for it if our government would permit. They know the country, are acquainted with secession operations, know the persons of secessionists, and can and are willing to do us service. But policy refuses to use them as they might be used, and the consequence is they dare not trust us as they would if we were unequivocally their friends."

C. "The citizens are apparently unanimously secession. The women exhibit the prevailing spirit. Before the Seventy-sixth got into

the city they were in the habit of hissing and spitting upon soldiers. They would not walk under the Union Flag as they passed in the streets, but would leave the sidewalk to avoid its shadow. When they met a soldier they would gather up their dresses, shy off from them, as if they were contagion which they dare not touch. And sometimes, ladies, of the first families, would resort to indecencies which I cannot write or get printed in a respectable northern newspaper . . . If a Union man reveals himself, his secession friends swear vengeance on him at once. His danger is imminent, and government affords no protection that

compensates for his risk.”

### **Questions**

1. Who was Andrew Grover?
2. What happened to him during the Civil War?
3. How did 76th Regiment from Central New York respond to slave catchers in Washington DC?
4. How were the men of the 76th regiment greeted by southern Whites?
5. Why was Andrew Grover critical of government policy toward enslaved Africans?

## Private Tracy Describes Andersonville Prison

Private Prescott Tracy of the 82nd New York State Volunteers was a Southern prisoner at Andersonville, Georgia. Tracey was part of a prisoner exchange in August 1864. He described his experience at Andersonville in a report published in *The Sanitary Reporter*, II (9), Office of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, September 15, 1864.

On entering the Stockade Prison we found it crowded with twenty-eight thousand of our fellow-soldiers. By crowded I mean that it was difficult to move in any direction without jostling and being jostled. This prison is an open space without trees or shelter of any kind. The fence is made of upright trunks of trees, about twenty feet high, near the top of which are small platforms, where the guards are stationed. Twenty feet inside and parallel to the fence is a light railing, forming the "dead line," beyond which the projection of a foot or finger is sure to bring the deadly bullet of the sentinel.

Through the ground runs or rather creeps a stream varying from five to six feet in width, the water about ankle deep, and near the middle of the enclosure, spreading out into a swamp of about six acres. Before entering this enclosure, the stream, or more properly sewer, passes through the camp of the guards, receiving from

this source, and others farther up, a large amount of the vilest material. The water is of a dark color, and an ordinary glass would collect a thick sediment. This was our only drinking and cooking water. It was our custom to filter it as best we could, through our remnants of haversacks, shirts and blouses.

Our only shelter from the sun and rain and night dews was what we could make by stretching over us our coats or scraps of blankets, which a few had, but generally there was no attempt by day or night to protect ourselves. The rations consisted of eight ounces of corn bread, the cob being ground with the kernel, and generally sour, two ounces of condemned pork, offensive in appearance and smell. To the best of my knowledge, our ration was a starving one, it being either too foul to be touched or too raw to be digested. The clothing of the men was

miserable in the extreme. Very few had shoes of any kind, not two thousand had coats and pants, and those were late-comers. More than one-half were indecently exposed, and many were naked.

The "dead line" bullet spared no offender. One poor fellow, just from Sherman's army – his name was Roberts – was trying to wash his face near the "dead-line" railing, when he slipped and fell with his head just outside the fatal border. We shouted to him, but it was too late. It was a common belief among our men, arising from statements made by the guard, that General Winder, in command, issued an order that anyone of the guard who should shoot a Yankee outside of the "dead-line" should have a month's furlough, but there probably was no truth in this. About two a day were thus shot, some being cases of suicide, brought on by mental depression or physical misery, the poor fellows throwing themselves, or madly rushing outside the "line."

Some few weeks before being released, I was ordered to act as clerk in the hospital. This consists simply of a few scattered trees and tents, and is in charge of Dr. White, an excellent

and considerate man, with very limited means, but doing all in his power for his patients. I have seen one hundred and fifty bodies waiting passage to the "dead house," to be buried with those who died in the hospital. The average of deaths through the earlier months was thirty a day. At the time I left, the average was over one hundred and thirty, and one day the record showed one hundred and forty-six.

The proportion of deaths from starvation I cannot state; but to the best of my knowledge, information and belief, there were scores every month. We could, at any time, point out many for whom such a fate was inevitable, as they lay or feebly walked, mere skeletons. In some cases the inner edges of the two bones of the arms, between the elbow and the wrist, with the intermediate blood vessels, were plainly visible when held toward the light. The number in camp when I left was nearly thirty-five thousand, and daily increasing. The number in hospital was about five thousand.

### Questions

1. How many people were prisoners at Andersonville when Tracey arrived?

2. What were food and water like in the prison?

3. What was the major cause of death in the prison?

4. What happened to a prisoner who

ventured to close to the “dead line”?

5. In your opinion, what was the most horrific part of imprisonment at Andersonville? Explain.

# The Civil War Diary of Captain Nathan S. Baker

Captain Nathan Baker served in the 86th regiment New York infantry. It was organized at Elmira and known as Steuben Rangers. Most of its members were from Steuben County in southwestern New York. This excerpt is from a letter he wrote to his wife on August 10, 1863. In the letter he described the regiment's actions in the days leading up to the Battlefield of Gettysburg. In this piece he describes battle skirmishes that took place north of Fredericksburg, Virginia.

**Source:** [http://libraryweb.org/~digitized/books/Civil\\_War\\_Diary\\_of\\_Captain\\_NS\\_Baker.pdf](http://libraryweb.org/~digitized/books/Civil_War_Diary_of_Captain_NS_Baker.pdf)

On Monday morning our Brigade advanced as skirmishers. I was sent off with the left of our Regiment and Lieutenant Stanton had charge of the rest of our company which was in reserve. We only had two men wounded and about noon were called in. Since then we have not been under musketry fire. We remained in position for battle the rest of the day & night & the next day till dark when the army commenced recrossing the Rapidan River.

We marched hard all night & crossed just daylight. Remained near ford until P.M. then came toward this place marching most of next night & reaching here just at break of day on Thursday. While we were over the river we had a very cold & pretty hard rain making the roads very bad & this is the only reason I can give for recrossing the River, without a general engagement. We had packed up a few days before we got ready to advance & a rain storm stopped us I cannot give any further accounts of the fighting & do not know which army had the best of the fight only where we fought we beat them.

Some of the men who passed over the ground in our front next day after the fight said there was 150 dead Rebels. Our loss in

## Questions

1. Who was Captain Nathan Baker?
2. What was the "Steuben Rangers"?
3. Why were the terrain and weather difficult?
4. What happened in the battle he describes in this letter?
5. In your opinion, why are letters and diaries valuable historical documents?

Regiment was about 40. Three of which were killed the balance wounded, one of which has died. I think we shall not be likely to fight much more this winter as it is very difficult for either army to move. I have been stopped twice since I commenced writing this letter. Last time we had to go to witness the execution of another Deserter from 3rd Regiment. He was shot as the other one, I wrote you about. Mail has come in but no letter from my wife - have not got our pay yet. Love to all, kisses besides to wife & babies.



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