

# The Last Prison

*The Untold Story  
of Camp Groce CSA*

by

Danial Francis Lisarelli

Copyright (c) 1999 Danial Francis Lisarelli  
All rights reserved.

published by  
Universal Publishers/uPUBLISH.com  
1999 • USA

ISBN: 1-58112-783-9

[www.upublish.com/books/lisarelli.htm](http://www.upublish.com/books/lisarelli.htm)

## INTRODUCTION

Five years ago, I was told that Union prisoners of war from the Civil War were buried in Hempstead, Texas. In being a descendent of six Union veterans of the Civil War, I was obligated to investigate. The story turned out to be true, but there was much more to it than what I bargained for.

My original goal was never to write a book but to simply account for all of the prisoners who died at Camp Groce. As time went by however, I realized that researching and telling the history of Camp Groce was needed as well.

Although I sacrificed much during this project I also gained a great deal. As I struggled to understand what happened at Camp Groce and to account for all of the prisoners, I began to see that I would be held responsible for the memories of those who are still there today. That is truly an awesome responsibility. I have done my best to live up to it.

The search began when I was referred to Mr. Randy Gilbert of Tyler, Texas. Mr. Gilbert had already done extensive research on Camp Ford, and he agreed to help get me started. We met at a re-inactment at Sabine Pass. There at the place of so much strife, a man dressed in Confederate grey met a man in Union blue, shook hands and agreed to cooperate. My journey into the past began on a wet September day in 1994 at Sabine Pass, Texas, but the story of Camp Groce started on the docks of Galveston 131 years before.



DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY  
OF  
MY SISTER  
**Judy**  
WHOM I LOST ALONG THE WAY.

*I can see her on the other side  
with all of the boys  
around the camp fire.  
She's singing to them.*



## FOREWORD

*“So, Companions, let our desire for harmony and reconciliation overrule any harsh feeling of criticism, but, at the same time, let us preserve the memory of the brave men who died for the honor of their country.”*

John Read, Paymaster  
USS Granite City  
December 7, 1910

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	<i>Island of Misfortune</i>	1
CHAPTER 2	<i>A Camp of Instruction</i>	10
CHAPTER 3	<i>Summer on the Hill</i>	16
CHAPTER 4	<i>The Battle for Texas</i>	24
CHAPTER 5	<i>Death of an Irishman</i>	39
CHAPTER 6	<i>Prisoners of State</i>	44
CHAPTER 7	<i>On to Shreveport</i>	54
CHAPTER 8	<i>Into Oblivion</i>	62
CHAPTER 9	<i>Hempstead Bound</i>	68
CHAPTER 10	<i>The Devil's Summer</i>	73
CHAPTER 11	<i>Treue der Union</i>	82
CHAPTER 12	<i>Over the Wall</i>	88
CHAPTER 13	<i>The Scene was Horrible</i>	102
CHAPTER 14	<i>Gloria Deo!</i>	116
CHAPTER 15	<i>The Last Stand</i>	127
CHAPTER 16	<i>A Despised Man</i>	132
CHAPTER 17	<i>Sacred Ground</i>	139
CHAPTER 18	<i>Clarence Miller</i>	145
CHAPTER 19	<i>The Prisoners of Camp Groce</i>	147
CHAPTER 20	<i>The Sons of Africa</i>	170

CHAPTER 21	<i>The Last Memorial</i>	174
CHAPTER 22	<i>Sterling's List</i>	200
CHAPTER 23	<i>The Union Honor Rolls of the Battles of Galveston and Sabine Pass</i>	206
CHAPTER 24	<i>The Confederate Honor Roll of Camp Groce</i>	211
CHAPTER 25	<i>Last Glance with a Paymaster</i>	214
CONCLUSION		217
IN GRATEFUL APPRECIATION		218
END NOTES		220
BIBLIOGRAPHY		250

### *About the Cover*

*The Cover Art is a color adaptation of an illustration of Camp Groce found in the work, Camps and Prisons, Twenty Months in the Department of the Gulf, by Augustine Joseph Hickey Duganne, J.P. Robens Publisher, New York, 1865, colorization done by Leda A. Chang Ph.D.*

## CHAPTER 1

### *Island of Misfortune*

When the sun rose upon his position Colonel Burrell saw that he had no choice. The USS Harriet Lane had been rammed, boarded, and captured, and the steamers Clifton and Owasco had escaped under a temporary truce. The flagship of the squadron, the USS Westfield, had run aground near Pelican Island. In order to prevent her capture, Commodore William R. Renshaw, the squadron commander, ordered the entire crew of the Westfield onto a transport while he attempted to scuttle the ship. While two cutters waited alongside for Renshaw to finish setting the charge, it went off prematurely, killing Renshaw and thirteen other men waiting alongside in the two boats.<sup>1</sup>

On Kuhn's Wharf, Colonel Isaac Sanderson Burrell, Commander of the 42nd Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, had successfully defended his position with only three companies of infantry, but was now surrounded by land and sea. Left with no options, Burrell ordered Corporal Henry W. MacIntosh to the stand on the barricade with a piece of sailcloth tied to an oar blade. It was surrender.<sup>2</sup>

When the Confederates observed the signal of capitulation, Brigadier General William R. Scurry cautiously approached the barricades. Colonel Burrell stepped out in front of the works and offered Scurry his sword, which was refused. "Colonel--a brave man deserves his sword, and I cannot take yours" said Scurry. The Battle of Galveston was over.

Colonel Burrell was then introduced to Major General John Bankhead "Prince John" Magruder, the overall commander of the Confederate attacking force. The victorious general consoled Burrell by telling him, "Don't be cast down colonel, it is the fortune of war; you will soon be paroled."<sup>3</sup>

General Magruder had kept his promise. From a speech made on the steps of the Galveston Customs House weeks before the battle, Magruder said, "Gunboats, troops and all, I will clear the state of Texas of the Yankees by New Year's."<sup>4</sup>

After the surrender was finalized, the Confederates swarmed upon the wharf, celebrating their great victory. Aboard the captured Harriet Lane, the Union sailors were disgusted. The crew of the Harriet Lane was made up of men from the USS Congress and USS Cumberland, two ships which had been attacked and destroyed by the CSS Merrimac the year before. As the sailors were marched off the ship, they were heard to say, "This is New Year's, our liberty day."<sup>5</sup>

## THE LAST PRISON

The day was indeed New Year's Day, January 1, 1863. The forces under the command of General Magruder had won a brilliant battle. They captured Companies D, G, and I of the 42nd Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, the USS Harriet Lane and her crew of 110, three sailing vessels loaded with coal, a large supply depot on Pelican Island, and the regimental colors of the 42nd Massachusetts. The defeat of the Union forces present at the Battle of Galveston was stunning.

Little did any of the Union soldiers and sailors captured at Galveston know that the entire Confederate attack was based upon the reports of a Union deserter. On Christmas Day 1862, Coxswain George Monroe of the USS Owasco left his ship and was soon reporting to the Confederate authorities in Houston. Claiming "the fleet can be easily driven out of the harbor," Monroe wanted to serve the gun himself on the lead attack boat. Although it is not known if he participated in the attack, Monroe's report was enough to convince the Confederates that the attack should be commenced at once. As things turned out, the deserter's reports were true.<sup>6</sup>

Left behind in Galveston harbor was the Harriet Lane, which was badly entangled with the CSS Bayou City. General Magruder ordered his Chief Engineer, Major Albert Lea, to inspect the Lane for salvageability. Major Lea, a Confederate, knew before the battle that his son, Lieutenant Commander Edward Lea, was the First Officer of the Harriet Lane. After boarding the ship, Albert found his son Edward who was mortally wounded. Badly hurt, Edward was able to recognize his father, and spoke the words that became the legend of the Battle of Galveston when he said, "My father is here," and then died.<sup>7</sup>

As are the fortunes of war, Rear Admiral David G. Farragut in New Orleans wrote an order relieving Edward Lea of his duties on the Harriet Lane and assigning him to command the mortar boats on the Mississippi River. The order was dated January 1, 1863.<sup>8</sup>

While Albert lamented the death of his son Edward, one of the sailors on the Lane, Ordinary Seaman Robert Buchanan, was welcomed on shore by his brother, a member of the attacking forces present that day.<sup>9</sup>

In one of the blockhouses on Kuhn's Wharf, Ariel Ives Cummings, Regimental Surgeon of the 42nd Massachusetts, began the work of caring for the wounded of his regiment. Cummings had set up a hospital just before the battle had begun. One of his first patients, Private James O'Shaughnessy of Company D was taken to the hospital with gunshot wounds to both legs. While O'Shaughnessy was howling in pain, Surgeon Cummings amputated the lower portion of O'Shaughnessy's right leg.

## THE LAST PRISON

Fourteen other soldiers of the 42nd Massachusetts were wounded in the fight, but only one, Private Francis L. Nott of Company G died of his wounds, some seventeen hours later.<sup>10</sup>

The casualties of the Confederate forces were more severe, being an attacking force in the dark of night upon a fixed position while subject to severe Naval artillery fire. A few bodies were found floating in the water in front of the wharf after the battle. The total number of Confederate casualties was reported to be 26 killed and 117 wounded men.<sup>11</sup>

After the surrender, the Union officers were ordered to surrender their swords, and were promised that they would get the swords back after the officers were paroled. The officers only needed to mark them with their names for identification. Colonel Burrell was apparently allowed to keep his, compliments of General Magruder.<sup>12</sup>

Three hours after the battle, the three companies of the 42nd Massachusetts along with the sailors of the now CSS Harriet Lane marched through the Confederate lines and were held in the city until late that evening. At 1:00 A.M., they were marched to Virginia Point where they boarded railroad cars bound for confinement in Houston.<sup>13</sup>

Later that morning of the second, the balance of the force intended for the occupation of the island appeared offshore. Aboard the Steamer Cambria were 300 men of the 1st Texas Union Cavalry Regiment, recruited in New Orleans from men who were Union loyalist refugees from Texas, as well as a detachment of the 1st Vermont Artillery.

Several attempts were made to signal for a pilot to come out and bring the Cambria into port, not knowing that even though the US Flag was still flying above the US Custom's House, the island was now in Confederate hands.

A volunteer crew of four men from the 1st Texas and some civilian refugees rowed into port to find a pilot. They never returned. Captain Sumner of the Cambria remained until the next day when a cutter appeared with a trick. Confederate Army Captain T.W. Payne was on aboard, trying to trick Captain Sumner into believing that he was a pilot, but some of the Texan refugees aboard the Cambria recognized Payne.

Captain Payne and his crew were taken aboard as prisoners, where Payne admitted that the island was now in Confederate hands. Sumner had no choice but turn back to New Orleans with the news of the disaster two days before.<sup>14</sup>

The soldiers that volunteered to row into port to find a pilot were Privates John Hand, Morris Foley, Charles Williams, and Joseph Cronea of Company B, and a deserter from the Confederate 1st Texas Heavy

## THE LAST PRISON

Artillery Regiment by the name of Thomas B. “Nicaragua” Smith. Recognized by the Confederate authorities, Smith was tried for desertion and sentenced to death by firing squad. He was executed in the streets of Galveston on January 8.<sup>15</sup>

The prisoner’s trip to Houston ended at the railroad station in town. Colonel Burrell, now a senior prisoner of war, admonished the large group of prisoners to march into town smartly. More than 400 prisoners entered town with all of their baggage, and the locals were impressed by their appearance.

The procession passed by the offices of the Houston Telegraph Newspaper, where the prisoners had to endure a difficult sight. Inside the display case of the Telegraph rested the colors of the 42nd Regiment lying under the flags of the Confederacy. This angered many of the prisoners, and some wanted to fight to get them back. Burrell quickly admonished them to behave however, and the idea was quickly dismissed.<sup>16</sup>

The officers were then separated from the enlisted men. The officers were confined on the third floor of the Kennedy Building at the corner of Travis and Congress, while the enlisted men were confined in Allen Cotton Press building on the banks of Buffalo Bayou.<sup>17</sup> Among the Confederate officers in-charge of the prisoners was none other than a younger brother of Mary Todd Lincoln, who was remembered by the prisoners as a loud and profane officer.<sup>18</sup>

Most of the prisoners and most of the officers of the Lane did not stay in Houston long. On January 22, they were forwarded for parole and exchange to Vicksburg, Mississippi, guarded by a detachment of thirty men under the command of Lieutenant W.J. Howerton.<sup>19</sup>

The prisoner-in-charge was Chaplain George Sanger of the 42nd Regiment, and each company of the 42nd Massachusetts was supervised by noncommissioned officers. The route was by rail from Houston to Beaumont, on the New Orleans and Texas Railroad. One sailor, James Cummings of the Lane, was left behind at Beaumont, too sick to continue. The prisoners continued up the Sabine River on the CSS Roebuck and landed at Barr’s Ferry, Texas, on February 5.

At Barr’s Ferry one of the prisoners, Private David Chapin of Company I, 42nd Massachusetts, died and was buried there. The detachment arrived at Stark’s Ferry, Louisiana on February 9, where another prisoner, Private Henry C. Sella of Company D of the 42nd died and was buried. They arrived at Alexandria, Louisiana and, finding no provisions having been made for the receipt of prisoners, Lieutenant Howerton was ordered to take the prisoners under a flag of truce to Port

## THE LAST PRISON

Hudson, Louisiana to arrange for their release. On February 23, Howerton met with Confederate States Agent of Exchange, Colonel Ignatius Szymanski, who immediately ordered him to proceed to Baton Rouge with his charges. On February 24, 1863, Howerton turned over more than 330 soldiers and sailors to the US exchange agent in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, ending their month long journey from Houston back to freedom.<sup>20</sup>

While in New Orleans, the newly paroled crew of the Harriet Lane had some hard feelings for the sailors of the Clifton. The Lane sailors thought that the Clifton had purposefully abandoned them during the battle in Galveston, and numerous brawls had to be broken up between the crews.<sup>21</sup> The sailors of the Lane would have the last laugh in the matter later that year.

Left behind in Houston were all of the officers of the 42nd Massachusetts, along with four officers from the Harriet Lane and two soldiers from the 1st Texas. Also left behind was a small group of soldiers and sailors from the 42nd Massachusetts and the Harriet Lane who were too sick or too badly wounded to travel.

No sooner had the great victory in Galveston been won when yet another US Navy disaster occurred in Texas waters. On January 21, three US ships, the Schooners Velocity, Rachel Seaman, and the sailing ship Morning Light, were chased out of the waters of Sabine Pass, Texas by a superior force of Confederate steamships led by the CSS Uncle Ben and Josiah Bell. A wild running battle into open waters ensued with the faster Confederate steamers overtaking the slower sailing ships. The Confederate ships drew up to the Morning Light where Confederate musketry soon decided the battle, pinning down the crew of the Union ship. With no other choice, Acting Master John Dillingham surrendered the Morning Light and the Velocity followed suit. Only the Rachel Seaman would escape capture. The severest casualties on board the Morning Light were caused by a shot that nearly destroyed an entire gun crew. Instantly killed was Seaman Patrick Ferlin, his body torn to pieces. Suffering severe wounds were Ordinary Seamen Albert W. Marshall, Archibald MacArthur, and Colored Ordinary Seaman Benjamin Drummond. Twenty-two other sailors were slightly injured in the battle.

The crews of the Morning Light and Velocity were taken to Sabine Pass where the colored sailors were separated from their white shipmates. The twenty-nine colored sailors were treated harshly, and they were robbed of whatever valuables they had.<sup>22</sup> Among them was Officer Steward Joseph C. Shorter, a native of New York City, who had joined the Navy at the outbreak of the war.<sup>23</sup> The white officers and sailors were given their

## THE LAST PRISON

paroles at Sabine Pass, with Captain O.M. Marsh of Spaight's Battalion acting as witness.<sup>24</sup>

On January 22 the remains of Seaman Patrick Ferlin were carried to the Sabine City Cemetery and buried with full military honors. Five days later, Ordinary Seaman Albert W. Marshall died in Sabine City. Marshall's cause of death was tragic as well as extraordinary. A fragment of a shell, no larger than a pea, had entered the right temple over Marshall's eye, passing directly backward through the brain and lodging in the posterior extremity of the right hemisphere, just within the cranium. Marshall's body was also taken to the Sabine City Cemetery and buried alongside Ferlin with military honors.<sup>25</sup>

Surgery was performed on Archibald MacArthur's mangled left arm. MacArthur had been hit in the upper left arm near the shoulder joint by a shell fragment that severely damaged the bone. The ship's surgeon, John W. Sherfy, was obliged to remove three inches of MacArthur's humerus.

All of the surviving Morning Light prisoners arrived in Houston on January 25. The senior prisoner was Acting Master John Dillingham, Captain of the Morning Light. The commanding officer of the Velocity was Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Nathan W. Hammond. The sailors were sent to the same Allen cotton warehouse on Buffalo Bayou that the Galveston prisoners had been held. The officers of the Morning Light and Velocity joined the Galveston officers on the third floor of the Kennedy Building, which doubled as the headquarters for the local Provost Marshal General, Major Waldemar Hyllested.<sup>26</sup>

When the twenty-nine colored sailors of the Morning Light arrived in Houston, they were combined with the ten colored sailors captured on the Harriet Lane. Among the colored Harriet Lane sailors was Captain's Cook George Brown of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. When the war started, Brown wanted to find a situation that would allow him to serve. He enlisted in the Navy and found himself serving as the Captain's Cook on board the Harriet Lane.<sup>27</sup> Brown, Shorter, and the other colored sailors were to receive less than friendly accommodations. All 39 were sent to the state prison in Huntsville, Texas under a sentence of hard labor.

On January 30, Acting Master Willis F. Munroe of the Harriet Lane died of his wounds received on the deck of the Lane. He was reportedly shot in the face by an enemy soldier on the deck of the ship, whereupon 3rd Assistant Engineer A.T.E. Mullin killed Munroe's assailant on the spot. Master Munroe was buried the next day with full military honors, and his personal effects were forwarded to the US Fleet stationed

## THE LAST PRISON

off Galveston. He was a native of Brooklyn, New York.

After Munroe's funeral, the prisoners began a long stay in Houston. The officers from Galveston signed personal paroles allowing them to move freely about the city as long as they did not leave the city limits. These paroles were revoked a couple of weeks later, and no explanation for this action was given.

Now held at close quarters, except for necessity of buying supplies, the Union officers were warned that they were being watched closely and that Union sympathizers in town could be in danger.<sup>28</sup> Many thought appropriate to hang the prisoners, which reportedly was the case on February 5, when one of the Texan prisoners, Private Joseph Cronea of the 1st Texas Union Cavalry, was hung in the streets of Houston for no crime other than that of being a Union loyalist.<sup>29</sup>

The sympathizers were chiefly responsible for providing the prisoners with money to see to their needs. There were some transplanted Massachusetts citizens living in Houston at the time, including H.W. Benchley, a former Lieutenant Governor of the state of Massachusetts. Another civilian provided the officers with a stove which got him thrown in jail.<sup>30</sup>

The officer prisoners heeded the advice of the local Northerners and barricaded the door to their quarters every night in the event of an attack. They armed themselves with clubs in case they had unwelcome visitors, which never came to be.

On February 12, Corporal Henry W. MacIntosh, the soldier from the 42nd Massachusetts who signaled the surrender of his regiment at Galveston, died of dysentery in the hospital in Houston at six in the evening. He was buried the next day at a place called Sulphur Springs, about two miles west of town, and a wooden headboard was placed upon his grave.<sup>31</sup>

The sailors were now getting cabin fever in the warehouse. Surgeon Cummings became concerned, so he got permission from the Confederate medical director to allow the prisoners to walk around for two hours at a time. The prisoners eventually got permission to cross Buffalo Bayou and play a new game called "baseball", probably the first time the game was ever played in Texas.<sup>32</sup>

The prisoners were also busy making souvenirs. Using old beef bones, ring making became a cottage industry among the men. Some of the guards liked the quality of the work so much that they procured steel files for the prisoners to work with. One sailor made \$27.00 by selling them to his captors.<sup>33</sup>

## THE LAST PRISON

While the sailors of the Morning Light were making some money from their souvenirs, a junior Confederate officer who was present at Galveston was trying to get a hold of something he wanted and needed as a commissioned officer:

*Feb. 20th, 1863  
Houston, Texas*

*To Capt. E.P. Turner  
A.A. General  
Diss of Texas New Mo. and Arizona  
Captain*

*I wish to procure a sword which was captured at Galveston. I have not one at present the above mentioned swords have been appraised to day. Will you be kind enough to endorse this so that I can purchase one. I am Captain very respectfully your Obt. Servant*

*R.W. Dowling 1st Lieut. Co. F Cooks Regt. Arty.*

Turner later explained to Dowling that the swords captured at Galveston had been reserved for the staff officers of the district and that his request could not be fulfilled. So the swordless Dowling went about his business, hoping that somehow, someday, he would get that much cherished symbol of authority.<sup>34</sup>

Back on the bayou, Surgeon Cummings could not keep all of the prisoners well. On March 12, Quartermaster Harry Bross of the Lane died of heart disease in the military hospital in Houston.<sup>35</sup> Nine days later, another prisoner died, that being 3rd Class Boy James Sashia of the Morning Light. He enlisted on June 26, 1862 along with his two brothers, Baza and Philip, and all three were captured on the Morning Light. They were all prisoners in Houston at the time of James' death, and they were also among the twenty-nine colored sailors captured on January 21. He was the first and only known Union prisoner of African descent to die in Texas during the Civil War.<sup>36</sup>

The Houston Telegraph was read by the prisoners daily, with a special emphasis being placed upon finding news of parole or release. None ever was noted. January, February, and March came and went. With frustration among the prisoners on the rise, Captain Dillingham wrote a letter to his commanding officer:

## THE LAST PRISON

*Houston April 1st, 1863*

*Sir,*

*I forward you a list of the officers and privates captured on the US Ship "Morning Light" and Schooner "Velocity" included. Enclosed is also a list of the officers and privates of the US Steamer "H. Lane" and 42nd Regt. Mass. Vols., and would beg to call your earliest attention to having us exchanged via Galveston, and the Mississippi River, instead of overland, via Alexandria, as many of our men are partially invalided, and not capable of making the journey. I have forwarded a list of our names to Major Watts the Confederate Agent for Exchange of prisoners at Port Hudson and are advised to ask your assistance in having the exchange effected as soon as possible.*

*Very Respectfully your obt. Svt.,*

*John Dillingham*

*Acting Master USN*

*Late Comdg., USS "Mg. Light"*

*To Commodore Bell Comdg. US Naval Forces off Texas*<sup>37</sup>

Dillingham's letter to Commodore Bell did no good. With the month almost gone, an abrupt end to the accommodations at the Kennedy Building was announced. General Magruder received an order from Richmond stating that all captured officers that were in Union General Benjamin Butler's Army were to be placed in state prisons, apparently in retaliation for the same treatment of Confederate officers at the hands of General Butler. Colonel Burrell tried to explain to his captors that they were under the command of Union General Nathaniel Banks when captured, who had superseded General Butler.<sup>38</sup>

But Burrell was unable to produce proof of this, because he left New Orleans without any written orders.<sup>39</sup> Burrell, Dillingham, and seventeen other officers were told that they would be leaving for the Huntsville Prison on April 31. Dr. Sherfy of the Morning Light would be excused from the trip, allowed to remain in Houston to care for the enlisted men.

## CHAPTER 2

### *A Camp of Instruction*

The officer prisoners were escorted to the train depot by a squadron of cavalry to catch the 9:00 A.M. train on the Texas Central Railroad. Traveling by special car, the route went through Cypress City, Hempstead, and Navasota, where the officers stayed together in a very small room in the Morning Star Hotel. Dinner was eaten that night at the hotel, and so was breakfast the next day. During breakfast, none other than Sam Houston, hero of the Texas Revolution, paid the officers a visit. Houston promised to visit them after they arrived at the prison in Huntsville. Houston, who at the outbreak of the war called talk of secession lunacy, had been deposed as governor of the state by the Confederate regime.

After Houston's visit, the prisoners rode in four wagons from Navasota to Huntsville, and were consigned to the prison on May 1. They were informed that they would be held in separate cells, causing the prisoners to draw up a petition to protest such treatment. After all members of the party had signed, Surgeon Cummings and Frank Veazie, a civilian cook for the officers of the 42nd Massachusetts went back to Houston with the document.

For the first nine days of captivity in Huntsville the officers were held in small, hot cells. On the May 9, Colonel Carruthers, superintendent of the prison, obtained lumber that was used to build cots for the officers that were placed in a much cooler upper room of the prison.

Colonel Carruthers also provided them with food at his own expense instead of the usual prison fare. Carruthers was remembered for his kindness towards the officers, which continued for two months.

As promised, General Houston, his wife, two daughters, and a son, Andrew Jackson Houston, visited the officers frequently and did what they could to make the prisoners confinement bearable.<sup>1</sup>

Back in the General Hospital in Houston, seventeen year old Landsman James Duffey of the Morning Light was clinging to life. Sick with Congestive Remittent, death took the Duffey on May 29. Two of his shipmates, Seamen William Little and Charles Mosely, were at Duffey's side when he died. Duffey willed his clothing allowance and back pay to Little and Mosely before he died.

On June 1, Surgeon Cummings of the 42nd Massachusetts wrote the following:

## THE LAST PRISON

*Houston Tex., June 1, 1863.*

*Maj. Gen. J. Bankhead Magruder, C.S. Army,  
Comdg. the Dept. of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona &c.*

*General: My stay in this department being rendered no longer necessary professionally on account of the removal of the officers of my command to Huntsville and the recovery of my wounded in the hospital and by the exchange of all my command except the officers and wounded with the exception of four privates, and as Acting Assistant Surgeon Sherfy, late of the ship Morning Light, is here to take care of his men and accompany them when they shall go to be exchanged, I very respectfully ask to be allowed to return to New Orleans as soon as can be convenient. My health is very infirm and has been for three weeks or more, and I have been unable to leave my room most of the time for that period. I very respectfully ask for this reason that I may be allowed to go by water by way of our fleet either at Galveston or Sabine--of course under such restrictions as your honor may deem necessary.*

*There are also here ten wounded and infirm men, five of my own regiment all wounded, the whole ten unable to walk any distance and all of whom will be discharged from the service as soon as they reach our lines. It would a matter of great satisfaction to me if you would allow them to go with me, either paroling them as our forces did your sick and wounded recently in Louisiana, or allowing them to be receipted for by myself or the commander of blockading fleet. All those remaining here save those men are able to march, thus saving transportation for any invalids or wounded men when they are sent forward for exchange. For nearly five months I have remained here and at Galveston, during which time I have given my undivided attention to the care of the sick and wounded, Confederate as well as Federal, and now I am desirous for reasons above named to return to my regiment that I may be useful, as I have ever tried to be heretofore, in striving to relieve the sufferings of frail humanity wherever found and whoever they are. I trust I may be of service as heretofore to the Confederate sick and wounded in the hands of the Federal forces as will as to those of my own command more immediately depending upon my care, and also to any medical officers of the Confederate Army who like myself believe it to be their duty to remain with their sick and wounded for a time in the hands of the Federal forces. As there are but eight men of my command (except the officers) remaining here and five of them are wounded it would give me great pleasure if possible to take them with me as well as the few others of the Harriet Lane and Morning Light who are*

## THE LAST PRISON

*unable to march.*

*Inclosed is a list of all my own men remaining, those wounded marked, and also of the few others unable to march who only wait to get back to our lines to be discharged from the service. The term of service of my (present) regiment will expire on the 1st of July, and I trust the officers will not be kept longer than is absolutely necessary and that the men of the late ship Morning Light will be forwarded for exchange as soon as possible. Permit me, General, to return to you my most cordial and heartfelt thanks for your uniform kindness to me as for many favors shown me since I have been in your department; and I have the honor to remain, general,*

*Your humble servant,  
A.J. Cummings, M.D. LL. B.,  
Surg. 42nd Regt. Mass. Vols., late Post Med. Director, &c.<sup>2</sup>*

Unfortunately for Doctor Cummings and his patients, freedom was not in the cards for any of them. Cummings' request did neither him nor his patients any good, so Cummings chose to remain with them. Among the remaining 42nd boys were privates Edwin F. Josslyn, Dennis Dailey, and Joseph W.D. Parker, all of whom were wounded in the battle of Galveston some five months earlier.

While the struggle for freedom in Houston continued, a dispute had erupted concerning the holding of prisoners of war in the state prison, especially since a Confederate cotton works was operated there. The prisoners held in Houston were also presenting a problem, too. The Commander of the Guard in Houston was Captain L.G. Clepper and his Company K of Elmore's 20th Texas Infantry served as the guards. The Morning Light sailors and the boys from Company K had apparently become too friendly for the stern Provost Marshal Hyllested, who was known to enjoy court-martialing captains just for the fun of it.

The last straw for Clepper and his men was when three of the Morning Light sailors broke free from the Allen Press and went on a wild romp through town with some of Clepper's men. This included riding horses into a local tavern where they were all arrested by more reliable Provost Marshal guards.

Clepper and his men were quickly dispatched to Galveston Island for other duties, and they were replaced by Captain Claudius I. Buster and his Company C of Elmore's 20th. The Morning Light boys had taken a shine to Clepper but soon realized that Buster and his men were anything but cordial. The prisoners soon learned to hate Buster's men.

## THE LAST PRISON

With all of the problems in Huntsville and Houston, the decision was made to find other accommodations for the Yankee guests. On June 13, Captain Buster received orders to load his prisoners onto the train. Placed on open flat cars in the miserable summer sun, the crew of the *Morning Light* and the few remaining prisoners from Galveston were to be taken to a place where their officers would soon rejoin them. Similar orders were issued for the officers held in Huntsville and on June 27, another trip was planned for Navasota. This was not the intended destination, for the Confederates had another place in mind.

Another cavalry guard was procured, and the officer prisoners said goodbye to Huntsville. They also said goodbye to the African sailors who also had another destination. The wagons left filled with baggage and prisoners, and twelve miles was made the first day. That night they slept in an old schoolhouse and they dined upon food prepared by Mrs. Carruthers. The next day twenty-one miles was made and that night they slept in the starry moonlight. On the June 29 they reached Navasota, where they waited until the next day for a train-ride back the way they came when they were transferred from Houston to Huntsville.<sup>3</sup>

The other destination for the colored sailors was a newly formed bureau within the Department of Engineering of the District of Texas. Officially called the Negro Labor Bureau, the officer in-charge was Captain Henry B. Andrews whose headquarters was located in Houston.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of the Bureau was to procure slaves from Hill Country counties that would be used to build fortifications at strategic points on the upper Texas coast. The most critical point was Galveston Island. As early as April 30, 1863, a total of 601 Negroes was assigned to the works on Galveston Island. At that time, work was hampered by two problems. One was the apparent refusal of Confederate soldiers stationed on the island to do any work on the forts, and the other difficulty was the need for at least 1,000 Negroes to complete the work. Out of the 601 Negroes present on the island that Spring, only 481 were actually working, the balance being sick or assigned as cooks.<sup>5</sup> The work on the island was going too slowly and more labor was needed. Getting slaves from the Hill Country was slowed due to a Confederate law preventing the impressment of slaves without proper authority from the Secretary of War in Richmond.<sup>6</sup>

The African sailors from the *Morning Light* and the *Harriet Lane* were not slaves, however. They were prisoners of war and were being treated as such, albeit held under separate conditions. Because of the critical need for labor on the island, the colored prisoners were apparently handed over to the Negro Labor Bureau in Houston.<sup>7</sup> As the African

## THE LAST PRISON

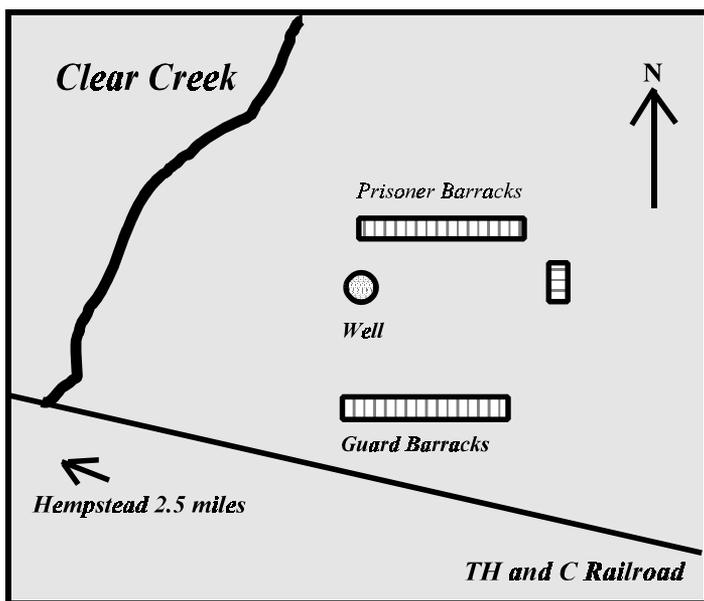
sailors were being sent to Houston, their white officers were approaching their final stop. Upon arriving at the town of Hempstead the officers were ordered off the train.

Southeast of Hempstead, on the eastern bank of Clear Creek, were four rough buildings that the Confederates once used as barracks for recruits while being mustered into service.<sup>8</sup> This post, no longer used as a training camp, became the new home for all of the prisoners.

Located on Liendo Plantation, the camp was named in honor of Leonard Waller Groce, now serving as an officer in the Confederate Army and the owner of the property.<sup>9</sup> As was the custom to name camps during the war for leaders and heroes, the place was named Camp Groce. The officer prisoners were introduced to their new home at 11:00 A.M. on the thirtieth day of June 1863.

There to welcome them were the enlisted prisoners who arrived at Camp Groce on June 13 under the care of Captain Buster.<sup>10</sup> A happy reunion between the officers and their enlisted men quickly ensued.

Camp Groce was a large camp that began on the east side of Clear



*Camp Groce Spring 1863*

## THE LAST PRISON

Creek and ended on the western side of the road that served as an entrance to the Liendo Plantation house from the railroad. The railroad line came out of Houston from the southeast and continued northwest into Hempstead. The railroad served as the southern border of Camp Groce, while the northern border was Pond's Creek, which joined Clear Creek to form the northwest corner of camp.<sup>11</sup>

In the Spring of 1862, the sloping hill inside the wedge of land just east of Clear Creek and north of the railroad line was cleared in-order to erect the barracks that were to be used as quarters for the Confederate recruits.<sup>12</sup>

Two 200 foot long barracks were constructed along with some smaller buildings that made a rough square pattern. The barracks farthest away from the railroad stood 300 yards from the rails, and another 200 yards of open space stood between both barracks. In between the barracks closest to the railroad were a frame house and two other buildings that served as headquarters and guard houses. Two wells were dug in camp that was used to store water for camp residents. The buildings were surrounded on three sides by dense thickets, with the fourth side providing a view of the open prairie.

Camp Groce was built in a terrible place. The post was ill-suited for habitation, and had been abandoned by the Confederates. The nearby Clear Creek was an ideal breeding ground for disease-carrying mosquitoes, where water for bathing, cooking, and cleaning was drawn by camp dwellers. Captain Buster's men drew their quarters in the barracks that was closest to the railroad, while all of the prisoners were consigned to the barracks farthest away from the rail.<sup>13</sup>

## CHAPTER 3

### *Summer on the Hill*

A long, hot stay at Camp Groce had just begun. Hopes of release were only camp rumors. On June 26, a new prisoner from Louisiana, 1st Lieutenant John Roberts, Adjutant of the 175th New York Infantry, wrote to Lt. Colonel Richard B. Irwin, the Assistant Adjutant General for the Department of the Gulf in New Orleans a letter expressing the following sentiments:

*Sir: I have the honor herewith to transmit the names and rank of the officers, non-commissioned officers, and privates held as prisoners of war in the State of Texas. Many of them have been prisoners since the 1st day of January last, taken at the fall of Galveston, and they fear that they have been overlooked, possibly forgotten by the Government, as they have seen many Confederate officers and soldiers that have been either paroled or exchanged, returned to their homes, but as yet no intimation has been received here as to the action the United States Government has taken, if any, in reference to the prisoners of war confined in this State. We respectfully request your kind interference, that we may be liberated at as early a date as possible.*

*It may be improper to address this communication to you, sir, but we are certain that you will interest yourself in this matter and call the attention of the proper officers to the fact that a number of your officers and soldiers are prisoners in this State and anxious to be exchanged and returned to their respective commands. In the list I place Surg. A.J. Cummings' name, but he is not held as prisoner of war, yet he is with us at present very unwell and not able to travel, but will probably start for our lines as soon as he recovers his health.*

*I am sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,*

*John Roberts  
First Lieutenant 175th New York Vols.<sup>1</sup>*

The letter that Roberts sent across the lines did little good for the veteran prisoners. The long, dreary stay at Camp Groce would go on the entire summer, which made the prisoners realize that adaptation to this place was for now the best means of survival.

The prisoner's barrack was divided into three separate compartments, with crude wooden bunks built against the walls of the