CAMP CHASE AND LIBBY PRISONS: A STUDY OF POWER AND RESISTANCE ON THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN HOME FRONTS

1863-1864

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CAMP CHASE AND LIBBY PRISONS: AN EXAMINATION OF POWER AND RESISTANCE ON THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN HOME FRONTS

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Thesis

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A patriotic fervor swept the divided nation when the American Civil War broke out in April of 1861. Northerners and Southerners hastily prepared for a war that would surely end within a few months. Union and Confederate politicians failed to foresee four years of bloody conflict, nor did they expect to confront the massive prisoner of war crisis that this war generated. During the years 1861-1865, Union and Confederate officials held a combined 409,608 Americans as prisoners of war.¹

The prisoner of war crisis is a significant part of Civil War history. However, historians have largely neglected the prison camps, and the men they held. Historians have shown little interest in the subject of military prisons and prisoners of war perhaps because, as historian Michael Chesson believes, “these subjects have always been the most controversial aspect of the Civil War” due to both the North’s and the South’s treatment of inmates.²

Andersonville Prison in Americus, Georgia, remains the exception to this drought in scholarship because of the atrocious conditions and haunting images of emaciated Northern soldiers incarcerated there. Since Southern prison conditions, especially those

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prison conditions, especially those at Andersonville, deteriorated drastically late in the
war due to destruction in the South, the historiography of Civil War prisons that does
exist primarily focuses on the Union’s treatment of prisoners in relation to Confederate
prison administration and conditions. However, this scholarship ignores the fact that the
war itself and home-front events affected prisoner activity and prison administration.
Many Civil War prison camps were located in cities that the war affected either by direct
battlefield conflict or by civilian demonstrations of support or opposition to the Union or
Confederate causes.

The histories of both Camp Chase prison in Columbus, Ohio, and Libby Prison in
Richmond, Virginia, evidence how prisons operated as part of the Northern and Southern
home fronts. Camp Chase’s founding as a training ground for Union soldiers in 1861,
establishment as a permanent holding facility for Confederate prisoners in 1862, and its
general operation and administration demonstrate how Columbus civilians’ support
and/or opposition to the Union cause specifically influenced prisoners’ resistance to
Union authority as well as the Federal authorities’ camp regulatory policies.

The events of 1863 clearly demonstrate the Northern home front’s influence on
the camp. From July to December of 1863, events on the Northern home front, namely
John Hunt Morgan’s July raid, imprisonment and November escape from the Ohio
Penitentiary, and Copperhead Clement L. Vallandigham’s exile, gubernatorial campaign,
and the Northern Peace Democrat movement that supported him, created opposition to
the Union cause in Columbus. Concurrently, Confederate prisoners engaged in acts of
defiance by attempting to escape. Prisoners presumably did not engage in disobedience
to demonstrate political resistance. However, the confrontational climate, which anti-war
Democrats created, encouraged Union guards and military authorities at Camp Chase to see Confederate resistance as political and, therefore, threatening. As tensions rose, Union officials needed to reassert control over the prison camp in response to the prisoners’ opposition.

Similarly, the events of early 1864 demonstrate the Southern home front’s influence on Libby Prison. The February 9, 1864 tunnel escape and the February 28 through March 4 Kilpatrick-Dahlgren cavalry raid on Richmond provide opportunities to examine how tensions escalated among Libby’s inmates, Richmond’s civilians, and military authorities. The prisoners’ tunnel escape and the Union cavalry raid increased opportunities for personal interactions between prisoners of war and civilians, which evolved into a controversial topic in the public forum. These events created opportunities for inmates to potentially escape and for civilians to aid in prisoners’ recapture, demean the Union cause, and argue for negative treatment of prisoners and their ultimate removal from Richmond.

The Confederacy lacked a centralized prison system throughout the majority of the war. Confederate authorities’ decision to establish prisons in Richmond and use Libby as a processing site for Union inmates compounded the already precarious situation in Richmond. Once exchange negotiations broke down in 1863, overcrowded prisons and lack of provisions plagued Richmond and created tensions between local civilians and Libby inmates. Sanitation conditions severely declined at Libby in January of 1864, and prison officials could not provide inmates with proper rations. Accordingly, Libby’s inmates devised a mode of escape to protest their condition, and Union sympathizers helped orchestrate an organized military maneuver to liberate Richmond’s
prisoners. Ultimately, the Confederacy’s loyal supporters in Richmond feared and despised Union prisoners, gloried in their humiliation, and harped on prisoners’ failed escape attempts in an effort to uphold Southern superiority and argue for prisoners’ harsh punishment and removal from Richmond.

While it is extremely probable that the respective Northern and Southern home fronts influenced other Civil War prisons just as at Camp Chase and Libby Prison, historians have ignored this factor and, instead, focused on prison atrocities. One of the first historians to look at prisons, William B. Hesseltine, concentrates his scholarship on the general crisis of Civil War prisons in relation to the cessation of prisoner exchanges and the South’s inability to provide for prisoners of war. Similarly, Ovid L. Futch and William Marvel examine atrocities that Union prisoners of war endured at Andersonville due to lack of resources and poor prison maladministration. Reid Mitchell acknowledges but goes beyond Hesseltine’s thesis by discussing how the prison system fit into the concept of total war, and critiques the historiography and popular memory of Civil War prisons. Most recently, Charles Sanders holds Northern and Southern guards culpable for inflicting intentional suffering on enemy prisoners of war.

Hesseltine’s 1930 publication, Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology, remains the standard work in the field despite its age. Hesseltine’s war psychosis thesis maintains that mutual delusions shaped both Northern and Southern prison policies and conditions. He argues that reports of the horrendous conditions which Northerners faced in Southern prisons reached the North and led Northerners to believe that Southern commandants and guards deliberately mistreated Union prisoners. Because of this, conditions in Northern prisons deteriorated and Union officials forced Southern prisoners
to suffer in retaliation for the South’s cruelty. Hesseltine notes that war psychosis affected both the Union and the Confederacy. He traces its development from the first prisoners and the establishment of the prison and parole systems, to the Dix-Hill exchange cartel of 1862 and its collapse in 1863, which forced the creation of notorious prisons, such as Andersonville, to deal with overwhelming numbers of captives. Hesseltine posits that the war instilled enmity in Northern minds -- that this hatred exacerbated Union proponents’ outrage at Northern prisoners’ treatment at places such as Andersonville and caused Union officials to enact a policy of retaliation against its Confederate prisoners.

Hesseltine’s 1935 article, “The Propaganda Literature of Confederate Prisons,” further examines the Northern will to vilify the Confederate prison system, in particular, and Southerners, in general, for atrocities that Union prisoners of war suffered while in Confederate hands. Hesseltine notes that both Northern and Southern prisoners believed that their captors intentionally subjected them to heinous treatment in order to reduce their ranks by starvation and death. Hesseltine analyzes Union and Confederate ex-inmates’ writings, Federal government, and Union Sanitary Commission reports of Southern prison conditions to demonstrate how prison propaganda bolstered Northern patriotism. Hesseltine acknowledges that some men fabricated propaganda accounts and notes that the production of prison literature fell when veterans’ focus shifted to demands for pensions in the 1870s. Ultimately, wartime and post-war writings, which rose in

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3 William B. Hesseltine, Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University, 1930; reprint, with a Foreword by William Blair, Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University, 1998), xxiv (page citations are to the reprint edition).

popularity during the trial of Henry Wirz, called for punishment of the South and he argues, lent the North an air of moral superiority.

Ovid L. Futch’s 1968 study, the *History of Andersonville Prison*, examines “the conditions which resulted in high mortality among the prisoners, and [considers] the question of responsibility for those conditions.”5 Futch notes that the architectural difficulties that Confederate officials faced while constructing Andersonville prison foreshadowed its future administrative troubles. Throughout the book, Futch emphasizes the suffering that Northern prisoners experienced at Andersonville through his discussion of disease, lack of Southern resources, and the band of prison “Raiders” that preyed upon fellow inmates. Futch fails, however, to examine thoroughly the impact that the Confederate home front had on Andersonville. However, he does mention that Confederate officials’ concern about potential Federal raids on the prison temporarily led them to stop sending Federal prisoners from the Carolinas to Andersonville when General Sherman’s army was active in Georgia.6 Futch ultimately contends that Confederate officials should have released Northern inmates due to the South’s inability to provide for them at Andersonville because of short supplies and poor prison management.

Similar to Futch, William Marvel examines the horrendous conditions that existed at Andersonville in his 1994 book, *Andersonville: The Last Depot*.7 While Futch particularly emphasizes Northern prisoners’ suffering at Andersonville, Marvel proposes the same argument but also notes that some Northern prisoners’ accounts were likely


6 Ibid., 113-114.

exaggerated. Marvel details problems of inadequate supply to the prison, disease, death, escape attempts, overcrowding, the Raiders’ presence, and prison logistics. Marvel notes Confederate fears of Northern raids on Andersonville and states that some Northern prisoners resented the Lincoln administration for halting prisoner exchanges because of the Confederacy’s refusal to trade black captives. However, he, like Futch, does not take into account the Southern home front’s effect on the prison. Marvel instead posits a brief argument that Andersonville itself operated as a city that consisted of roads, a marketplace with various commercial establishments, neighborhoods, ethnic ghettos, crime, and religious revivals. Marvel also concludes that commandant Henry Wirz became a martyr for Southern prison atrocities.

Reid Mitchell’s 1997 article, “‘Our Prison System, Supposing We Had Any:’ The Confederate and Union Prison Systems,” examines the formation of Northern and Southern prison systems as a step towards U.S. Army institutions’ preparation for modern or total war and notes the creation of the prison system, its failure, and consequent atrocious prison conditions. Mitchell focuses on familiar themes within Civil War prison historiography such as the exchange cartel’s effect on the formation and cohesiveness of the prison systems, the role of black prisoners of war in exchange negotiations, and physical conditions in the prison that caused disease, suffering, and death. Additionally, Mitchell addresses the fact that scholarship on prisons is lacking due to post-war finger pointing, bad memories, and Northern and Southern allegations of barbarity. Mitchell acknowledges Hesseltine’s thesis, but argues that Union and Confederate administrative
incompetence and neglect were as, if not more, responsible than a Union retaliatory policy for Confederate inmates’ death.\textsuperscript{8}

Charles W. Sanders, Jr. pushes the notion of Northern and Southern prisoners’ suffering in his provocative revisionist account of Andersonville, Cahaba, Florence, and Danville prisons in the South, and Camp Douglas, Elmira, Camp Chase, and Rock Island prisons in the North. Sanders’ 2005 book, \textit{While in the Hands of the Enemy: Military Prisons of the Civil War}, vehemently rejects the interpretation that Northern and Southern authorities could not control horrendous prison conditions and that no systematic maltreatment of inmates occurred.\textsuperscript{9} Sanders examines the Union and Confederacy’s unpreparedness in dealing with the prisoner-of-war crisis, and the political motivations for, establishment, and operation of the Northern and Southern prison systems and the aforementioned camps. Sanders acknowledges the exchange system’s role in creating negative prison conditions and recognizes the fact that both the North and the South suffered from supply shortages. However, Sanders reveals, through Union and Confederate prison officials’ own words, that prisoners of war suffered intentional maltreatment because of the fact that administrative figures viewed them as pawns in a political game. Sanders’ work is admirable because it unabashedly confronts the controversial topic of prisoners’ suffering and holds officials responsible for atrocities. However, this intense focus on culpability and prison conditions isolates the prisons from


the war’s larger context and ignores the fact that battlefield and home front events
significantly affected prison operations.

Few scholarly studies exist pertaining to Northern prison camps and, accordingly,
few focus specifically on Camp Chase. Authors, Robert Earnest Miller, Philip R.
Shriver, and Donald J. Breen, published short pieces on Camp Chase. These authors
analyze the prison using the same general framework that Hesseltine developed. Robert
Earnest Miller’s 1987 article entitled “War Within Walls: Camp Chase and the Search
for Administrative Reform” refutes Hesseltine’s war psychosis thesis by arguing that
conditions at Camp Chase steadily improved throughout the war; and that by 1864, the
prison was one of the most well-organized prison camps in the North.\(^\text{10}\) Miller chronicles
Camp Chase’s many functions which ranged from a training ground for Ohio troops to a
permanent holding facility for Confederate prisoners. He also highlights the struggle
between state and federal authorities for control of the camp. Miller’s study relies on
camp inspections that military officers conducted. He notes that these inspections were
instrumental in improving living, sanitary, and disciplinary conditions in the camp as the
war progressed. Miller maintains that by the end of the summer in 1864, state and federal
officials established an efficient administrative system and that, although Camp Chase’s
commanding officers slowly implemented improvements due to disputes as to authority,
commandant changes, and fluctuating prisoner populations, treatment of prisoners
improved rather than declined as the war progressed.\(^\text{11}\)

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\(\text{10}\) Robert Earnest Miller, “War Within Walls: Camp Chase and the Search for Administrative Reform,”

\(\text{11}\) Miller, “War Within Walls,” 55-56.
In a short monograph published for the Ohio Civil War Centennial Commission, Phillip R. Shriver and Donald J. Breen support Hesseltine’s war psychosis thesis. Shriver and Breen’s book, *Ohio’s Military Prisons in the Civil War*, notes that as conditions in Southern prisons declined, similar conditions of death due to filth, malnutrition, overcrowding, and disease appeared in Northern prisons as retaliation. Although Shriver and Breen present only a brief account of Ohio’s Civil War prisons, in general, they offer a detailed account of Camp Chase. Shriver and Breen examine Camp Chase’s establishment in 1861 and the conditions in the camp that resulted from the breakdown of the parole system. They also discuss the Dix-Hill Cartel’s establishment in 1862 and its termination in 1863, which resulted in a mounting prisoner population and a heightened feeling of war psychosis. This war psychosis inspired Union officials to reduce rations at Camp Chase, close the camp’s sutler store, and, despite freezing temperatures, confiscate prisoners’ blankets in January 1864. This led to mounting death rates for the remainder of the war.  

Scholarship on Libby Prison, like that of Camp Chase, is largely descriptive and does not break from Hesseltine’s war psychosis thesis. Historian Frank L. Byrne examines the tense emotional relationship that existed between inmates and guards, while Daniel Patrick Brown and Sandra V. Parker provide largely narrative accounts of Libby’s history, maladministration, daily operations, and horrendous conditions.

Byrne’s 1958 article, “Libby Prison: A Study in Emotions,” argues that the prison experience for guards and inmates became an emotional ordeal instead of a
These emotions, according to Byrne, caused guards to take drastic disciplinary action during the war that resulted in Commandant Dick Turner’s imprisonment without charge in the post-war years. Byrne contends that the inmates and guards’ heightened emotional state drove inmates into depression and caused guards to misinterpret the February 9, 1864 tunnel escape and the early March 1864 Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid. Despite the fact that Byrne acknowledges the two aforementioned events’ negative effects on prisoner-guard relations, his analysis primarily focuses on prisoner depravations, overcrowding, and resultant fear and hatred between guards and prisoners. Thus, Byrne’s work closely follows Hesseltine’s thesis and fails to develop the connection between the Confederate home front and Libby Prison.

Daniel P. Brown’s 1980 book, *The Tragedy of Libby and Andersonville Prison Camps: A Study of Mismanagement and Inept Logistical Policies at Two Southern Prisoner-of-War Camps* largely buys into Hesseltine’s psychosis thesis. Brown argues that conditions at Libby and Andersonville worsened because of maladministration, graft, and civilian lack of confidence in Confederate guards, and that Northerners interpreted unregulated Southern prison policies as intentional and ultimately malevolent. Brown’s work hints at the fact that the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren Raid caused civilian paranoia and, consequently, inspired Confederate guards to threaten to blow up Libby to quell the threat of escape. However, this incident is a side-note in Brown’s larger narrative and analysis of the prison, which focuses on failed Confederate prison management, and

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16 Ibid., 14-15.
consequent problems of unsanitary conditions, overcrowding, poor ventilation, lack of proper rations, and the failed exchange system.

Sandra V. Parker’s 1990 book, Richmond’s Civil War Prisons, is a comprehensive narrative history of Richmond’s four Civil War prisons, namely Libby Prison, Belle Isle, Castle Goodwin, and Castle Thunder. Parker’s work provides very little analysis of Richmond’s prisons, in general, and Libby, in particular. Instead, Parker details how and why Union inmates came to Richmond, prison establishment, logistical problems, and the ultimate failure of the exchange system. Like Brown, Parker notes the February 9, 1864 tunnel escape and the threat that the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid posed to Richmond’s prisons. However, Parker sacrifices deep analysis of home-front prison relations for detailed discussions of Libby’s sanitation issues, ventilation problems, poor rations, and prisoners’ daily activities. Parker ends her narrative with a discussion of post-war uses of each prison and the memorialization, or lack thereof, of the prison complexes.

While it is instructive to analyze conditions at Camp Chase and Libby Prison according to Hesseltine’s thesis, this interpretation ignores the fact that war psychosis was not the sole factor affecting prison reform and administrative policies. Additionally, this mode of analysis ignores the fact that relations between prisoners of war and civilians created opportunities for personal interaction between the two groups and fostered a climate of fear and resentment of prisoners among civilians. The Civil War’s historiography of military campaigns in general and prison camps in particular largely fails to consider, incorporate, and analyze the respective home fronts as they relate to battlefield and prison operations. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that the Civil War’s military events, prison operations, and civilian life on the home front were intimately
interconnected by revealing that army maneuvers, civilians’ political opposition to the
war, and citizens’ depravation of basic necessities inspired noncombatants’ dissent and
tense local settings that triggered prisoner resistance and prison guards’ exercise of harsh
discipline.

Camp Chase’s location in Columbus and Libby’s location in Richmond witnessed
a series of home-front events that specifically altered Union and Confederate guards’
interpretation of prisoner resistance. These events changed the power relationships
between officers and inmates and ultimately influenced prison policy decisions, elicited
civilian protest of prisoners’ presence, and caused Richmond civilians to emphasize
prisoners’ failed escapes to glorify the Southern cause.

Camp Chase’s history must be understood before prisoner resistance and power
relationships between Confederate inmates and Union guards can be assessed. The
prison’s establishment, purposes, administration, and events that occurred simultaneously
on the Columbus home front in 1863 are vital to understanding the crisis of
administration in that year. Similarly, it is necessary to outline Libby Prison’s
establishment, the precarious prisoner-of-war situation in Richmond at the war’s
beginning, and the city’s steadily deteriorating conditions to understand the origins of
Union prisoners’ desire to resist their captivity and the Union military’s attempt to rescue
Richmond’s inmates. Richmond’s internal dynamics and Federal escape attempts set the
stage for civilian-prisoner interactions and reveal the Southern home-front’s role in
creating tensions in and outside of Libby’s walls that led to drastic disciplinary measures.
CHAPTER II
HISTORY OF CAMP CHASE

Following the Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter in April of 1861, both Federal and state officials hastily organized manpower to face the newfound crisis. President Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers, and many Ohioans who met this call converged on Columbus. The volunteers met at a site called Camp Jackson, located about four miles west of Columbus, to train for war. On June 20, 1861, Columbus officials changed the training post’s name to Camp Chase in honor of former Ohio governor and Lincoln’s current Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase. The newly christened Camp Chase served four concurrent functions throughout the war. In addition to its use as a training camp for new Union recruits, the camp also detained paroled Union soldiers, served as a mustering-out location for Northern units upon the expiration of their terms of service, and imprisoned Confederate civilians and military captives.

Within a few weeks after Camp Chase’s establishment, it received its first prisoners of war from western Virginia on July 5, 1861. Camp Chase and other Northern prisons soon proved unfit to handle the prisoner-of-war crisis and looked to the Federal government for a solution.

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17 Osman Castle Hooper, *History of the City of Columbus, Ohio: From the Founding of Franklinton in 1797, through the World War Period, to the Year 1920*, (Columbus, OH: The Memorial Publishing Company, 1920), 47.


19 Ibid., 2.
At the beginning of the war, both the Confederacy and the Union lacked an organized system for dealing with prisoners of war. The Federal government initially solved the crisis by establishing a parole system where Union officials released enemy captives within a period of days pending the captive’s pledge not to take up arms against their captors. As the number of Confederate prisoners grew, Union military officials took further steps to remedy the disorganized prison system. In October of 1861, Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs selected Lieutenant Colonel William Hoffman of the Eighth U.S. Infantry for the position of Commissary General of Prisoners. Hoffman’s duties included keeping an account of prisoners, managing exchanges if Union authorities established an exchange cartel, and providing for the well-being of prisoners held in Northern camps.

Hoffman struggled early in his tenure to assert the authority that his position entailed. Secretary of War Simon Cameron failed to notify military departmental commanders of Hoffman’s position. Therefore, those commanders continued to solve the prisoner crisis on their own until the early months of 1862 when officers in the field finally recognized Hoffman’s function. Hoffman’s ambiguous position heightened the conflict between state and Federal officials regarding Camp Chase’s administration.

Camp Chase confined mostly political prisoners from July 1861 until February 1862. This period overlapped with the time that Hoffman struggled to make his position as Commissary General known. Union authorities arrested Confederate sympathizers

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20 Hesseltine, Civil War Prisons, 34.
21 Ibid., 35.
22 Miller, “War Within Walls,” 36.
from Ohio, Kentucky, and Virginia for their fidelity to the Southern cause and brought them to the then temporary holding facility at Camp Chase.\textsuperscript{23} Ohio Governor David Tod exercised jurisdiction over the camp during this time since many inmates were from Ohio. However, this situation changed rapidly.\textsuperscript{24} Following the fall of Fort Donelson in February of 1862, 15,000 Confederate prisoners headed to the northern stockades. Federal officers sent 3,000 of these men, mostly officers, to Camp Chase.\textsuperscript{25} Hoffman, General Meigs, and Governor Tod subsequently made a number of decisions about Camp Chase’s use in response to the influx of Confederate soldiers. Hoffman first decided that the prison should become a permanent holding facility for Confederate prisoners of war. Second, Governor Tod suggested that, for the purpose of maintaining discipline at Camp Chase, the most dangerous Confederate officers relocate to Johnson’s Island in Sandusky Bay, Ohio. General Meigs took Tod’s reasoning a step further and recommended that all officers held at Camp Chase transfer to Johnson’s Island, which subsequently became a prison exclusively for officers.\textsuperscript{26} Camp Chase, meanwhile, underwent expansion to accommodate its newly received inmates and its status as a permanent prison.

Camp Chase’s transition to a permanent, holding facility highlighted problems of prison administration because of inexperienced commandants and the struggle for control over prison administration between state and Federal officials. On February 18, 1862 Governor Tod appointed Colonel Granville Moody as the first commanding officer at

\textsuperscript{23} Shriver and Breen, \textit{Ohio’s Military Prisons}, 8.

\textsuperscript{24} Lonnie R. Speer, \textit{Portals to Hell: Military Prisons of the Civil War} (Mechanicsburg, PA., 1997), 47

\textsuperscript{25} For information about prisoners captured at Fort Donelson, see Miller, “War Within Walls,” 37.

\textsuperscript{26} For information about Hoffman’s, Tod’s, and Meigs’ decisions, see Hesseltine, \textit{Civil War Prisons}, 47.
Camp Chase.\textsuperscript{27} Moody had no military experience and proved ineffective as a commandant. Moody permitted inmates to roam Columbus on parole, keep slaves with them in camp, and benefit from liberal sutler privileges.\textsuperscript{28} When news of Moody’s lax policies reached Washington, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton sent Captain H. M. Lazelle to inspect conditions at Camp Chase despite protests from Governor Tod. Washington officials removed Moody on February 21, 1863 in light of Lazelle’s report.\textsuperscript{29} Not long after Moody’s removal, the U.S. War Department halted prisoner exchanges in July of 1863.\textsuperscript{30} This decision inflated Camp Chase’s population and posed control problems throughout the year for Moody’s successors, Col. C. W. B. Allison and Col. William Wallace. Administrative problems were not the only challenge facing Camp Chase’s operation, however. In 1863, home-front events that challenged the Union cause also hindered the prison’s effectiveness as civilian tensions impacted Camp Chase.

Support for the Union cause began to wane in Columbus with the dawn of 1863. Union battlefield failures, coupled with the Democratic Party’s success in the 1862 Congressional elections, stripped many Columbus citizens of the patriotic enthusiasm for the war that they had in 1861 and 1862.\textsuperscript{31} Peace Democrats, led by Clement L. Vallandigham, capitalized on the Union’s misfortune and the Democrats’ own recent electoral success to wage an anti-war campaign in 1863. The increasingly influential

\textsuperscript{27} Shriver and Breen, \textit{Ohio’s Military Prisons}, 11.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 12-13.

\textsuperscript{29} Dodds, \textit{Camp Chase}, 3.

\textsuperscript{30} Wagner, Gallagher, and Finkelman, eds., \textit{Civil War Desk Reference}, 597.

Peace Democrat movement’s support of Vallandigham’s bid for the Ohio governorship against Unionist John Brough, coupled with Morgan’s disastrous July raid, exacerbated tensions between the growing faction of Columbus Democrats and loyal Unionists.\(^{32}\)

Clement L. Vallandigham’s surge in popularity, beginning in the early months of 1863, his political martyrdom following his May 4 arrest, and his campaign for governor, which he conducted from exile in Canada, caused political disputes to erupt at Camp Chase. Vallandigham, the notorious Copperhead Ohio Congressman, enhanced his treasonous reputation with his January 14, 1863 speech to the House of Representatives. In this oration, Vallandigham denounced the war, stating that slavery would come out stronger because of it, and urged peace by foreign intervention or domestic agreement.\(^{33}\)

In response, Union General Ambrose Burnside, commander of the Department of Ohio, took measures to suppress such anti-government speech with his General Orders No. 38, which stated that people in the “habit of declaring sympathies for the enemy will not be allowed in this department. Persons committing such offenses will be at once arrested, with a view to being tried as above stated, or sent beyond our lines into the lines of their friends.”\(^{34}\) Vallandigham and his allies saw this order as an infringement on their Constitutionally-guaranteed civil rights and Vallandigham publicly asserted this stance in a May 1 speech at Mount Vernon, Ohio. On May 4, Union officials arrested

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\(^{32}\) Shriver and Breen, *Ohio’s Military Prisons*, 16. Peace Democrats, also known as Copperheads, opposed Republican abolitionists and later the Emancipation Proclamation. Some favored “ending the war by simply letting the seceded states go,” and they “resented what they viewed as complete usurpation of Federal power by Yankee interests.” For more information on Copperheads, see Wagner, Gallagher, and Finkelman, eds., *Civil War Desk Reference*, 165-167.


Vallandigham, subsequently tried and convicted him of treason, and exiled him to the Confederacy. Exile, however, did not hinder Vallandigham’s political influence as he reemerged in the 1863 Ohio gubernatorial contest.

All eyes rested on Ohio as divided loyalties came to a head in the 1863 gubernatorial campaign. Democrats selected Vallandigham as their party’s candidate despite his exile. John Brough, a staunch Unionist and War Democrat from Cuyahoga County, opposed Vallandigham. Both candidates appeared very threatening to their opposing party. If Vallandigham won, Unionists knew that his victory would insult the Lincoln administration and establish Ohio’s stance against the war, thus benefiting the South. It would also signify that the state approved of peace at any price and upheld the Constitution’s antebellum status quo which sanctioned slavery. On the other hand, Brough’s support of “arbitrary arrests” of anti-Unionists, his desire to force the war and amend the Constitution by “the strong hand of military power,” and his emancipationist stance outraged Democrats. The election’s results would force Democrats to cope with these alleged injustices.

After the election ended in October, Brough emerged victorious by a relatively slim margin. Columbus’ home county, Franklin, voted Democratic, however, and local

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35 For an account of Vallandigham’s May 1 speech, arrest, trial, and exile, see Randall and Ryan, *History of Ohio*, 216-219.

36 For the potential effects of Vallandigham’s victory, see Randall and Ryan, *History of Ohio*, 234-235.

37 *The Ohio Statesman* (Columbus) 25 June 1863 and 21 August 1863. Arbitrary arrests refers to General Burnside’s General Orders No. 38, which resulted in Vallandigham’s detainment and exile.

Copperheads took pride in Vallandigham’s strong showing.\textsuperscript{39} Area Democrats vociferously supported Vallandigham and criticized the Federal government in newspaper articles, rallies, and personal acts before, during, and after the gubernatorial campaign. Even Confederate General John Hunt Morgan’s raid, capture, and escape from the Ohio Penitentiary failed to cause anti-war Democrats to rally behind the Union cause.

In fact, the contentious political condition in Ohio enticed Confederate Cavalry General John Hunt Morgan to raid the state in midsummer of 1863 as he hoped to win support from Copperheads.\textsuperscript{40} Morgan and his approximately 3,000 cavalrymen began their ride north from Tennessee in late June and crossed the Ohio River into Indiana on July 8. Morgan’s commanding officer, General Braxton Bragg, ordered Morgan to stay south of the Ohio River. However, Morgan disregarded this directive and proceeded into Ohio.\textsuperscript{41} Morgan’s raid lacked a clear military objective. His men instead drew no distinction between enemies and potential allies, indiscriminately destroyed commercial buildings, railroads and bridges, looted local treasures, and held businesses for ransom thus terrorizing Northern civilians.\textsuperscript{42}

News of Morgan’s presence in southern Ohio in mid-July “stirred Ohio from center to circumference,” according to Union soldier William H. Knauss.\textsuperscript{43} Governor

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\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 422.

\textsuperscript{40} Randall and Ryan, \textit{History of Ohio}, 241.

\textsuperscript{41} Roseboom, \textit{The Civil War Era}, 423.

\textsuperscript{42} Wagner, Gallagher, and Finkelman, eds., \textit{Civil War Desk Reference}, 287 and 289.

Tod quickly responded to the Rebel threat on July 12 by ordering the state militia to assemble at Marietta and Camp Chase in order to repel the invasion.\textsuperscript{44} Morgan’s threat ended quickly, however, as Union forces captured the Rebel raider and his band at Salineville, Columbiana County, Ohio on July 26.\textsuperscript{45} Subsequently, Federal authorities sent Morgan and his fellow officers to the Ohio Penitentiary to be jailed as common horse thieves and incarcerated the remainder of Morgan’s men at Camp Chase.\textsuperscript{46} This influx of Confederate prisoners brought Camp Chase’s population to an all time high of 3,340 men. Camp Chase’s population subsequently remained high due to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton’s recent decision to halt all prisoner exchanges.\textsuperscript{47}

The massive number of prisoners at Camp Chase proved difficult for Union guards to control. Prisoner escape attempts increased, especially in September of 1863. Guards accordingly tightened prison regulations and responded to suspicious activity with firepower. From September through December of 1863, Union guards killed five inmates due to exacerbated fears that resulted from escape attempts, news of a conspiracy to liberate prisoners at Camp Chase, and Morgan’s escape from the Ohio Penitentiary on November 26. The aforementioned camp and home-front events culminated in the guards’ increased tension and, along with the shootings, afforded an opportunity to examine power relationships within Camp Chase.

\textsuperscript{44} Alfred E. Lee, \textit{The History of the City of Columbus, Vol. II}, (New York: Munsell & Company, 1892; Reprint and Indexed by: The Executive Board of Trustees, 2000), 128-129 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

\textsuperscript{45} Roseboom, \textit{The Civil War Era}, 424.

\textsuperscript{46} Shriver and Breen, \textit{Ohio’s Military Prisons}, 16.

CHAPTER III
BENEATH THE SURFACE-UNDERCUTTING THEORETICAL POWER

Northern military prisons, in this instance Camp Chase, operated as points of Union authority. Federal soldiers in control of the camp represented the Union cause to Confederate prisoners since these guards stood as reminders of the prisoners’ subordination. While Union guards at the camp held positions of authority, their power was not absolute. Although Confederate prisoners lost their freedom upon entering the prison camp, they retained their ability to resist the constraints of their imprisonment. Confederate prisoners at Camp Chase demonstrated that confinement did not equal control by responding to and creating opportunities to potentially steal back their freedom by escaping.

48 I see that the relationship between the Union guards and Confederate inmates at Camp Chase as following along the lines of power relations in prisons in the nineteenth century, which is best explained by Michel Foucault. Since Camp Chase was a Federal establishment, Union authorities authored the discourse of acceptable versus criminal behavior in relation to the Union cause. Guards at Camp Chase embodied this cause and were responsible for seeing that Confederate inmates did not engage in criminal behavior by revolting or openly questioning the Union’s established rules. Since the Federal government created the rules and Union guards at Camp Chase had a mandate to enforce these rules, the ultimate locus of power should rest with these guards. Union regulations and Confederate inmates’ position as captives should have kept these inmates subordinate. However, anti-Union activity both in and outside of the prison, and the prison structure itself afforded Rebel inmates the opportunity to network and resist Union authority, thus creating a flux of power. When Confederate inmates seized power by attempting escape, Union guards sought to reclaim their lost power through public execution of criminal inmates. These shootings, “restore[d] sovereignty by manifesting it as its most spectacular. The public execution, however hasty and everyday, belongs to a whole series of great rituals in which power is eclipsed and restored… over and above the crime that has placed the sovereign in contempt, it deploys before all eyes an invincible force. Its aim is not so much to re-establish a balance as to bring into play, as its extreme point, the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength.” See Michel Foucault. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 1977), 48-49 and 27-28.
Throughout Camp Chase’s history, the Union government’s mission, which the camp embodied, encountered challenges from Union authorities. The Federal government under Lincoln sought to demonstrate its superiority over the Confederacy both by battlefield victory and by keeping government opposition at a minimum. Challenges to Union authority at Camp Chase arose from the struggle to define whether the locus of authority over the camp should rest with State or Federal government officials as well as from the Union’s opponents, both inside and outside of the camp.

Colonel Granville Moody’s tenure as commandant at Camp Chase illustrates the conflict between State and Federal officials over Camp Chase’s operation. During 1862, Columbus citizens criticized how Colonel Moody ran the prison. Governor Tod appointed Moody as Camp Chase’s commandant when the camp held primarily political prisoners. Moody, a kindly Methodist minister and staunch abolitionist, had difficulty defining what constituted a prisoner of war and what rights these prisoners had. In February 1862, following the influx of Confederate prisoners from Fort Donelson, Columbus Unionists irately noted that Confederate officers, dressed in “all the gaudy trappings called for by the rebel army regulations,” roamed the streets of Columbus on parole, ate in the finest restaurants, and booked stays in the city’s finest hotels. The sight of Confederate soldiers wandering their Northern streets, complete with sidearms, undoubtedly disturbed Unionists, especially since Union authorities sanctioned this action. Upon receiving word of the disorder that existed at Camp Chase, General-in-Chief Henry Halleck ordered Moody to restrict prisoners to their barracks, to not allow

49 Ivy, “Camp Chase, Columbus, Ohio,” 24.

50 Ohio State Journal (Columbus, OH) 29 April 1862 in Shriver and Breen, Ohio’s Military Prisons, 12.
them to carry sidearms, and to discontinue permitting prisoners’ friends or Confederate sympathizers to visit the camp.\textsuperscript{51} However, prisoners continued to receive liberal paroles in Columbus despite this order.\textsuperscript{52}

Colonel Moody not only permitted Confederate captives to roam Columbus, in March of 1862 he also permitted Rebel inmates to keep their captured slaves as working servants.\textsuperscript{53} Moody’s motives for this are unknown, however, this fact is especially surprising because of Colonel Moody’s antislavery stance. When word of slavery within Camp Chase reached Columbus Unionists, they petitioned Governor Tod, Secretary of War Stanton, and President Lincoln to demand redress of the situation. Union authorities released the slaves four months later.\textsuperscript{54} Although officials in Washington criticized Moody’s operation of the camp, Governor Tod denied the charges of Moody’s laxity and asserted that Moody was a strong anti-slavery Republican who faithfully executed his duties.\textsuperscript{55} However, Federal authorities, Colonel Hoffman in particular, viewed Moody’s tenure as an abomination and advocated placing the camp under military control.

Colonel Hoffman, upon receiving word of Camp Chase’s disorganized and scandalous conditions, sent his aide, Captain H. M. Lazelle, to investigate the citizens’ complaints and the lack of Camp Chase’s military authority.\textsuperscript{56} Lazelle, in his July 13,

\textsuperscript{51} Shriver and Breen, \textit{Ohio’s Military Prisons}, 13.

\textsuperscript{52} Regardless of whether or not Union or Confederate officials at other prisons granted liberal paroles, this activity at Camp Chase clearly seems highly unusual.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{54} Ivy, “Camp Chase, Columbus Ohio,” 25.

\textsuperscript{55} Edward Earl Roberts, “Camp Chase,” (M.A. Thesis, The Ohio State University, 1940), 36.

\textsuperscript{56} The prison was under state control at this point in its history with Governor Tod’s appointment of civilian Colonel Moody as commander at Camp Chase. Miller, “War Within Walls,” 38.
1862 report to Hoffman, noted that he interviewed Governor Tod to discuss the camp’s administration. Liberal paroles granted to Confederate prisoners displeased Lazelle, and he found infuriating Tod’s practice of allowing “for the benefit of all curious people… a regular line of omnibuses running daily from the capital to the camp, past the chain of outer sentinels to the commanding officer’s quarters, and anyone who desires to spend twenty cents may visit the camp and go where they please except inside the prisons.”

Lazelle clearly believed that the prison and civilians should remain separated for the sake of discipline. He noted that the civilian presence interfered with the officers’ sense of duty and encouraged them to exhibit their authority arbitrarily over inmates only to put on a show for visitors. Despite Lazelle’s critique, Governor Tod and Colonel C. W. B. Allison, who soon replaced Moody as commandant, opposed the idea of disallowing visitors to the camp. Lazelle penned a scathing response to this, lamenting that Tod and Allison aimed to “make Camp Chase popular,” and that Colonel Allison “is not in any degree a soldier; he is entirely without experience and utterly ignorant of his duties, and he is surrounded by the same class of people.”

In addition to belittling Camp Chase’s operation, Lazelle also recommended improvements in the camp’s physical structure, discipline, and operation. Union authorities later implemented these suggestions. His report evidences the problems that


58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.
local civilians posed to effective camp organization and how the absence of centralized military authority bred confusion.

Although the military administration of Camp Chase subsequently increased in hopes of lessening Tod’s influence over the camp, the disciplinary problems that the Columbus home front inspired at Camp Chase exploded in 1863. 60 During this year, the Copperhead movement vociferously opposed the war and supported Clement L. Vallandigham’s bid for the Ohio governorship. In addition, the notorious Confederate cavalry raider, John Hunt Morgan, set foot on Ohio soil.

News of Vallandigham’s exile heightened support for his anti-government crusade among Columbus Peace Democrats and elicited scorn from the city’s Union soldiers. These tensions played out at Camp Chase as Union soldiers denounced Vallandigham’s party, physically abused his followers, and banned the reading of Democratic newspapers in the camp. One Union soldier, inspired by news of the Democratic Party holding its convention in Columbus to nominate its candidate for governor, wrote an angry letter on June 16 to the Ohio State Journal, the leading Republican news organ in Columbus. The soldier irately penned:

It is strange that we, as soldiers, had to leave our families and our homes and brave the hardships and dangers of the battle field south of the Mason and Dixon line, while so many black-hearted tories are in existence north of it. They make no secret of expressing their sympathy with Vallandigham, a rebel and a tory, and yet Columbus is the very place that they come to sport their treason. If they would come to Camp Chase we would be very glad to make a shooting match in honor of their Convention….. We, as soldiers, went in, not for three years but for seven times three, until the last armed rebel is dead and secession buried so deep that the trumpet tones of Vallandigham…can never reach it. 61

60 Miller, “War Within Walls,” 42.

61 Ohio State Journal (Columbus), 16 June 1863.
To many Union soldiers, Vallandigham and his supporters embodied disrespect for the cause for which these men were willing to give their lives. Federal soldiers and government officials vented their rage against the Copperheads by physically assaulting or arresting them for openly supporting Vallandigham and the cause for which he stood. On July 15, the Columbus *Crisis*, one of the city’s leading Democratic newspapers, reprinted and ridiculed an article from the *Ohio State Journal*, which chronicled Union soldiers’ assault of an old man. When the old man passed Camp Chase, Union guards inquired about his political views. After the man stated that he once supported Lincoln but now favored Vallandigham, the soldiers beat, stripped, and robbed him. The *Crisis* captured the outrage that many Democrats felt over such instances by stating of this incident:

… it is not necessary to reiterate the fiendish affair, but we repeat what we have before stated, that Major Webber, who has command of Camp Chase, is wholly unfit for his post. He has no more command of his men than a child. The outrages committed by a portion of the soldiers, and we are pleased to say only a portion, have become a terror to the whole county on the west side of the Scioto.62

To be sure, a number of Democratic Union soldiers inhabited Camp Chase, and the Union authorities’ control of news that circulated in the camp angered these men. In order to maintain support, or at least the semblance of support for the Union cause, Federal officers disallowed both of the major Democratic newspapers in Columbus, *The Ohio Statesman* and the *Crisis*, to circulate in camp. These newspapers vigorously opposed Lincoln’s administration, denounced the war and the Union Army, and

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62 The *Crisis* (Columbus), 25 July 1863.
attempted to obstruct the suppression of the rebellion by any means possible. Many Democrats felt that the censorship further suppressed civil rights, similar to the deprivation of rights that Vallandigham suffered. The Columbus Crisis indignantly responded to this suppression by printing, “The Democratic boys who were soldiering at Camp Chase, last week, complain indignantly that nothing but copies of the Ohio State Journal and Cincinnati Commercial were distributed through the Camp for sale, and they were there by the hundreds! They sent in and got several dozen numbers of the Crisis in spite of military orders there existing!” Tensions between Democrats and Unionists soon worsened as Vallandigham’s campaign versus Brough progressed.

The Ohio gubernatorial race further exemplified the controversy over the Federal government’s alleged infringement on civil rights and its attempt to control people’s political persuasion through censorship. The raging political tides again engulfed Union soldiers from Camp Chase, and the men responded with violence. On August 4, a group of Federal guards from Camp Chase tore down a sign with Vallandigham’s and his running mate’s names that hung over the local grocery store, A. Neiswander. Subsequently, a friend of the grocery store owner beat a Union soldier who voiced approval of the act.

In addition to vandalism, Union guards from Camp Chase frequently used scare tactics to coerce people to vote for Brough. In one instance, Union soldiers confronted Copperheads who passed in front of Camp Chase expressing support for Vallandigham.

63 Randall and Ryan, History of Ohio, 237.
64 The Crisis (Columbus), 15 July 1863.
65 Lee, The History of the City of Columbus, 129.
Upon hearing this, the guards forced the Democrats to take an oath of allegiance or be imprisoned. In addition, the Union men forced Vallandigham’s supporters to vow not to vote for him. The men refused this vow and the Union soldiers threatened to hang them, at which point the men pledged their vote to Brough.  

Although he did not win the governorship, Vallandigham’s campaign and the Peace Democrat movement instilled fear in the minds of Union soldiers at Camp Chase and, as the Crisis observed, indicated, “Ohio’s opposition to the war in general — both in Washington and Richmond.”  

The Union soldiers in charge of Camp Chase witnessed opposition to the cause for which they stood coming directly from the citizens of Columbus and simultaneously encountered resistance from Confederate inmates. Confederate General John Hunt Morgan’s foiled raid in the summer of 1863 further flooded Camp Chase with a multitude of rowdy Confederate soldiers who opposed not only the Union cause, but also their very imprisonment. The Rebel soldiers’ resentment of their situation as prisoners of war, coupled with the desire they shared with local Copperheads to undermine the Federal authorities, created a tense situation in the prison camp, especially in the months of September through December of 1863.  

As Union soldiers’ opposition to Vallandigham’s gubernatorial bid demonstrated, these men sought to put down opposition to their political views by using violence. Camp Chase’s guards exercised this mode of power over insubordinate Confederate prisoners in response to escape plots in September, November, and December of 1863.

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66 Crisis (Columbus), 17 June 1863.
67 Crisis (Columbus), 21 October 1863.
The increased prisoner population at Camp Chase was stressful for Union guards and Columbus citizens for many reasons. Camp Chase was never before so densely populated. By the end of July the population increased over eight times from the 380 inmates held at the end of June 1863 due to the capture of Morgan’s raiders. The sheer number of new prisoners certainly disturbed Union soldiers and Columbus citizens. The fact that these inmates took part in Morgan’s raid exacerbated their fears. Morgan’s men accomplished a rare feat by invading Northern soil and successfully damaging $66,526.32 in Ohio property. Columbus newspapers attempted to downplay Morgan’s character and ability as a cavalry commander by stating that Morgan was “no longer a brigand hero,” nor did he ever show “any high…qualities in battle,” rather, Morgan “manifested unusual capacity for getting out of the way. The present attempt…brought him to serious grief, and must materially damage the rather equivocal reputation he has heretofore enjoyed.” Despite these insults, Morgan’s raiders’ reputation preceded their arrival at Camp Chase, disrupted the camp’s order considerably, and caused Columbus citizens to cast a nervous eye on the number of prisoners at Camp Chase. Newfound rumors flew among prisoners that disloyal citizens were formulating an escape plan aimed at liberating them and Morgan. This seemed to justify the city’s fears.

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68 Miller, “War Within Walls,” 45-46.

69 The Ohio Statesman (Columbus) 15 September 1863.

70 Ohio State Journal (Columbus) 22 July 1863.


72 Shriver and Breen, Ohio’s Military Prisons, 16.
Union guards at Camp Chase undoubtedly had had enough of anti-Union sentiment in Columbus. These men read of the Copperhead movement’s treasonous campaign in local newspapers. Now the threat of rebellious Rebel inmates jeopardized their control over the camp. The Federal thwarting of Morgan’s raid and the staunch opposition to the Union cause that Vallandigham embodied in his bid for office bolstered prisoners’ animosity towards Union officials and led them to threaten mass escape from Camp Chase.\(^\text{73}\)

Increased escape attempts began in September of 1863 and Union guards responded with force. This trend undoubtedly resulted from heightened opposition, both in and outside of the prison, to the Federal government’s authority and Union guards’ role in enforcing the government’s rules. The guards’ uneasiness, which subsequently resulted in the death of five inmates, continued through December when tensions decreased and Union authorities altered prison regulations in response to the crisis of 1863.

Confederate inmates successfully completed an unprecedented nineteen escape attempts in September of 1863.\(^\text{74}\) The Columbus Crisis sarcastically criticized the Union’s loss of control over the camp just one day before the first prisoner died as a result of Union guards trying to reassert their authority. The newspaper commented on the Confederate challenge to Federal authority at Camp Chase by stating:

We learn that some of the officers in command at Camp Chase complain that the soldiers there have become so unruly that they cannot any longer control them…. Camp Chase for a long time has been in a state of rowdyism and disorder, until

\(^{73}\) Ivy, “Camp Chase, Columbus, Ohio,” 64.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 61.
even the Republican officers themselves are beginning to complain of their condition.\textsuperscript{75}

This public statement of Union soldiers’ own admittance of their loss of control further undermined the power that their position as guards entailed. Prison guards at Camp Chase served their country on their own soil, and the Federal government mandated them to maintain order in the camp. The prison guards’ admission of a loss of control undoubtedly provoked alarm among the citizens of Columbus who already dreaded the multitude of prisoners currently held at Camp Chase. Moreover, the guards’ public questioning of their own position created opportunities for Confederate inmates to directly defy Union authority.

The first prisoner to pay with his life for this flux in power was Samuel Lemley, an inmate belonging to the 19\textsuperscript{th} Virginia Cavalry. Union officials at Camp Chase tightened prison regulations in response to Confederate prisoners’ mutinous disposition prior to Lemley’s shooting. Guards forbade prisoners to communicate with sentinels or come within ten feet of the prison’s boundary fence. These regulations afforded prisoners three warnings before guards fired.\textsuperscript{76} Lemley openly and repeatedly defied these orders since many other prisoners successfully escaped. Lieutenant Thomas Reber, Officer of the Guard, on September 17 noted that “Private Moody…posted on the parapet in rear of Prison Number 2 and near the sink of said prison, complained that the prisoners obeyed his orders with reluctance in regard to running behind said sink, the back part of which was from six to eight feet from the fence. He had very often during the day

\textsuperscript{75} Crisis (Columbus), 16 September 1863.

\textsuperscript{76} For prison regulations, see Lieutenant Thomas Reber to Colonel W. P. Richardson, 6 March 1864 in O.R. Series II, Vol. VI, 1068.
warned them of his instructions.” After Reber forcefully reiterated the orders and left Moody’s post, he heard Moody call “halt” three times, followed by the report of a gun. The bullet struck Lemley, and his comrades soon carried him to the hospital. When Reber visited the hospital to check on the wounded man, inmates who crowded the scene openly disrespected the officer’s authority. Reber recalled:

The prisoners were very much excited, talking in a mutinous manner. I ordered them to quarters once or twice, and was obliged to put my hand to my breast, as if to draw a revolver, before they would obey, which was done in as sullen manner…. one or two prisoners, whom I judged were connected with the hospital, were examining the wound, one of them, looking up as I entered, said, "We will not stand this kind of work, shooting us prisoners," or words to that effect. I ordered him to stop his talking and proceed with the examination. He was very much excited, and I was obliged to partly draw my sword before he would desist. 

Although Lemley died for his disorderly conduct, the Union guards’ attempt to reassert authority over the camp was not a bold enough statement to curtail Confederate escape attempts. Instead, the past success of escapees in September coupled with outside attempts to aid the prisoners in stealing their freedom, emboldened prisoners’ confidence in their newfound power and increased their desire to claim their independence.

At the beginning of November 1863, Union authorities uncovered a plot which Vallandigham’s sympathizers devised to liberate soldiers at Camp Chase. This plot encouraged Rebel inmates to increase their escape attempts by tunneling under the walls and by trying to scale the prison walls. Guards used knowledge of the plot as justification for their increased use of firepower in November and December to quell the inmates’ rebellion. Union soldiers continued to exert brute force over prisoners even

77 Ibid.

78 For Reber’s full account, see Ibid., 1068-1069.
after Federal authorities detained the conspirators. Union guards’ forceful action resulted from the paranoia that opposition to their mission instilled. The 1864 investigation of the shootings demonstrates Confederate inmates’ defiance of Federal control and the Union guards’ belief that the use of force was necessary to reclaim their rightful position as arbiters of power at Camp Chase.

On November 2, 1863, the Ohio State Journal detailed the Camp Chase liberation plot and the arrest of its authors. Federal authorities detained State School Commissioner Charles W. H. Cathcart, a “strong Vallandigham Democrat,” and fellow Copperhead conspirators Nathan Cressup, Mr. Slade, a cutter in the local Mr. Childs’ Clothing Establishment, and Dr. Lazelle, a rebel surgeon on parole. Union authorities accused the men of having:

…laid a well arranged plan for releasing the rebel prisoners at Camp Chase, who now number nearly three thousand, to arm and equip them from the Arsenal as well as supplying them with horses in this vicinity, and after securing the release of John Morgan and his gang from the Penitentiary, they were to march for Dixie, doing on their route what damage they could. There is but little doubt but that this plan could have been carried into successful execution had it not been fortunately discovered in time to secure its defeat.

Federal jurors indicted the men on accounts of treason and the Republican Ohio State Journal criticized the Copperhead movement’s failed attempt to bolster its cause. The paper noted on November 3, 1863 that, “The defeat of Vallandigham killed this Copperhead faction, and this detection and exposure of the treasonable conspiracy on the

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79 The Ohio Statesman (Columbus) 16 July 1863.

80 Ohio State Journal (Columbus) 2 November 1863. It was later discovered that Mr. Slade was actually a Government detective who earned the conspirators’ trust and foiled their plot. For details on this matter, see Ohio State Journal (Columbus) 3 November 1863.

81 Ibid.
part of his most prominent friends, have gibbeted for public execration, what was before crushed by the people.” 82 Democrats, of course, had their own opinions on the matter.

The Democratic Columbus Crisis attempted to demonstrate the Copperhead conspirators’ innocence, and that the plot was a “silly invention of the Government spies and secret police [which is]… the most ridiculous humbug of the age.” 83 Not only did Democratic sympathizers view the plot as a Federal government ploy, they sarcastically noted that this alleged plot had a broader scope. The Crisis further noted:

…the ridiculous Government spy conspiracy in Columbus was not enough. This past week has been big with the still more monstrous stories of 100,000 organized, armed and drilled Secesh in Canada, with a fleet of sail…in the act of leaving Canadian ports, with tens of thousands of sympathizers everywhere in ambush to rise up and join them. They were to take Johnson’s Island, liberate 3,000 prisoners there, burn Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo…seize all the vessels…on Lake Erie, and then march down through the center of Ohio and play smash with — well we do not know exactly what they would have smashed; but we suppose from the way the stories are told with Mr. Vallandigham as one of the awful conspirators, that it was the Abolitionists that were to be “smashed up.” 84

Although nothing materialized in the accused men’s trials, news of the conspiracy and consequent actions of Confederate inmates at Camp Chase made Union guards trigger happy in response to Confederate escape attempts. 85 Union guards knew of the Copperhead conspiracy and used knowledge of the plot as justification for firing on Confederate inmates who dared to make escape attempts. Colonel W. P. Richardson’s report regarding the conditions at Camp Chase at the time of the escape plot illustrates

82 Ibid., 3 November 1863.

83 Crisis (Columbus) 11 November 1863.

84 Ibid., 18 November 1863.

85 Cressup was released on bail and Cathcart’s trial was so slow coming that he was eventually released and the trial forgotten. For more information on this issue, see Crisis (Columbus) 2 December 1863.
how fears of government opposition caused Union guards to behave forcefully.\(^{86}\)

Richardson noted that prisoners were not permitted to approach the prison wall within ten feet, collect in large numbers, or burn lights in their quarters after taps. All restrictions afforded prisoners three warnings to reform their actions before guards fired on them.\(^{87}\)

Richardson also cited the reasons for frequent shooting of prisoners as follows:

> It appears that during the months of September, October, November, and December of 1863 fears were entertained that an attempt would be made by disloyal persons in this State to liberate the prisoners confined at this post, and a very decided spirit of mutiny prevailed among the prisoners, arising, as was supposed, from their knowledge of the intentions of the persons referred to. Attempts to escape were frequent and persistent, and consequently the increased vigilance and severity were demanded on the part of the persons responsible for their safe-keeping. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the orders in regard to their conduct would be severe, and that they would sometimes be hastily and improperly executed.\(^{88}\)

These Confederate threats caused a number of Union guards to be on high alert and respond with gunfire to prisoners’ attempts to tunnel out of prison.\(^{89}\) Lieutenant Colonel A. H. Poten noted how Copperhead opposition specifically affected the guards’ mindset and the need to strictly enforce prisoner regulations. Poten wrote:

> In the months of November and December, 1863, frequent reports were received from the prison stewards and from detectives employed inside the prison that a conspiracy existed among the prisoners, in connection with Vallandigham sympathizers outside, to overpower the guard and break out. In many places they were undermining the wall; arms were found in their possession; their mutinous

\(^{86}\) Colonel W. P. Richardson replaced Colonel William Wallace as commanding officer at Camp Chase on February 11, 1864, and was ordered to submit a report to Hoffman regarding Camp Chase’s 1863 shootings. For more information on this subject, see Shriver and Breen, *Ohio’s Military Prisons*, 19.

\(^{87}\) For restrictions, see W.P. Richardson to William Hoffman, 8 March 1864 in O.R. Series II, Vol. VI, 1059.

\(^{88}\) Ibid.

\(^{89}\) For accounts of Confederate prisoners tunneling to escape, see Affidavits of Isaiah S. Taylor, 29 February 1864 and S. L. Hammon in O.R. Series II, Vol. VI, 1067 and 1069-1070.
conduct was increasing to such an extent that the guard had to be increased every night, and the order "lights out" after tattoo renewed.  

These rumors, coupled with the tension created by the Copperhead conspiracy, and the belief that prisoners continued to receive arms from Vallandigham sympathizers led Union guards to shoot and kill four inmates between November 1 and December 19, 1863. This Union disciplinary action was intended to check the power that Confederate prisoners had assumed to oppose the Federal government and to restore authority to Federal guards.

At the same time that Union authorities arrested the Copperhead conspirators, inmates at Camp Chase plotted to rush the camp’s gates in order to escape, thus demonstrating that the locus of authority at Camp Chase was negotiable in light of strong opposition to Union policy.  

First Lieutenant C. E. Sausser, officer of the day at Camp Chase on November 1, 1863, reported that the guards feared that the prisoners were organizing a mass escape.  Sausser noted:

I visited the guards and became satisfied there was some thing more than usual going on in the prison….About 11 p. m. the sentinels gave the alarm and every man was on duty.  I discovered the plan was to get up a general fight in the north end of the prison while some of them made their escape at the south end of the prison.  The sentinels ordered them to their quarters, which was not obeyed. One of the sentinels discharged his gun at the main crowd.  One William Jones was hit by a buckshot in the neck and instantly killed.  One other prisoner was wounded in the head (not serious).  Order was immediately restored after the gun was discharged.

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91 Ibid.
92 Speer, Portals to Hell, 235-236.
Contrary to Saussuer’s assertion, the restoration of order was only temporary. Even after the arrest of the conspirators, rumors at Camp Chase still abounded in November and December that inmates continued to plot mass escape attempts. Union guards shot and killed three more Confederate prisoners as a result of this tension. Commissary General Hoffman noted regarding the five total shootings that:

The apprehensions which prevailed at the time of a revolt of the prisoners justified a more than usual severity in enforcing orders by the guard, and three of the cases seem to have sufficient justification; but in the two cases where the sentinel fired into the barracks in consequence of a light in the stove, the circumstances were not such as to justify such harsh measures, though the sentinels seem only to have obeyed their orders.

The Confederate victims of Federal fire and the Union guards’ justifications for opening fire were as follows. On November 5, guards shot Private William Pope of the 9th Tennessee Cavalry for continuing to advance towards the prison wall in defiance of orders. Union guards shot Private Hamilton McCarroll of Welcker’s Tennessee Cavalry on November 16 for failing to extinguish a light in his quarters after specified hours. Finally, on December 19, guards shot Henry Hupman, a Private in the 20th Virginia Cavalry, for his refusal to extinguish a light after taps.

The shootings provoked much controversy among Union officials and local civilians and inspired Colonel Hoffman to order an investigation of the incidents in January 1864. Union and Confederate soldiers’ statements on this issue demonstrate

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94 Shriver and Breen, Ohio’s Military Prisons, 16-17.


96 For information on the individual shootings’ circumstances, see W. P. Richardson to William Hoffman 8 March 1864, in O.R. Series II, Vol. VI, 1059-1060.

conflicting notions of the perception of Union authority and the rules which governed the camp. While Union guards professed that the shootings effectively motivated Confederate prisoners to conform to Federal regulations, Confederate inmates’ statements reveal that the instigators were cognizant of Union orders and chose to defy them regardless. Further examination of Union officials’ sentiments reveals how heightened tensions at the camp caused Union guards to unnecessarily take prisoners’ lives. Union officials’ reformation of strict camp policy further emphasizes this point.

Union guards relentlessly enforced their orders due to challenges of their authority, such as the blatant defiance that William Pope showed. On the night of November 5, Provost Marshal of Prisoners, Isaiah Taylor, heard Pope test the Union sentry. Taylor noted that the guard told Pope to get away from the wall enough times and subsequently fired because of Pope’s refusal. Pope exhibited severe disobedience by approaching the wall, and Taylor noted that, “the blood on the ground [showed] that Pope was close to the wall when shot.”

Since prisoners reluctantly backed down, Union guards hastily pulled the trigger on prisoners who refused to extinguish lights after specified hours, a far less dangerous offense than charging the walls. Private John White, who stood sentry on November 16, allegedly saw a candle burning in a prisoners’ barracks and opened fire on the building after ordering the flame out three times. White exhibited the paranoia of Union guards at the time when he stated, “It was more light than I could allow and follow my instructions strictly to the letter. I did not see any one when I fired. I fired at the light to shoot it out according to my instructions. Very soon after I fired, the provost-marshal came and went

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into the barracks and reported that a man was shot.”\textsuperscript{99} White’s admission that he did not see anyone when he fired indicates that prisoners, most likely, were not up to foul play. However, the recent mutinous atmosphere among prisoners caused him to kill Hamilton McCarroll, a presumably innocent man.

On December 19, Sergeant of the Guard A. J. Russell noted a similar situation where a sentry observed that Confederate soldiers disobeyed his order to extinguish lights. The sentry consequently fired into the barracks at the light, killing Henry Hupman. Russel noted that Hupman’s comrades subsequently asked permission to burn the light for a few minutes to dress Hupman’s wound, but the sentry refused this since it violated his orders.\textsuperscript{100} Lieutenant Colonel A. H. Poten, assistant commandant at the time of Hupman’s shooting, approved of the sentry’s act and felt that the shooting was a valuable lesson in discipline. Poten stated:

\begin{quote}
As sad as this case may be, to wound a perhaps innocent man, by a soldier who obeys his order, it has proved to be a most excellent lesson, very much needed in that prison--Number 1--as the rebel officers confined in that prison showed frequently before a disposition to disobey the orders given to them by our men on duty. They have since changed their minds and obey.\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

Confederate soldiers’ statements question the extent to which Confederate inmates respected Union authority and how Federal firepower effectively reformed prisoner behavior. These statements reveal that McCarroll, who died on November 16, and Hupman, killed on December 19, both knew that burning lights in camp violated


Union orders, yet continued to act as they pleased. Confederate inmate H. P. J. Hatchcock stated of McCarroll’s actions that:

I was awake at the time Hamilton McCarroll was shot. McCarroll was sitting by the stove at the time. The stove door was open and threw considerable light. I did not hear the guard call lights out….. I think McCarroll knew it was against orders to have a fire at night. McCarroll had no blanket and I suppose that was the reason he was sitting by the fire.102

G. S. Barnes’s statement further solidified McCarroll’s knowledge and defiance of the “lights out” rule. Barnes wrote, “McCarroll said the evening before that if he was cold he would have a fire nights. We cautioned him particularly that it was against orders.”103 Similarly, Henry Hupman’s mess mates professed that, “we all knew that it was contrary to the prison rules to have lights or any disturbance after 9 o’clock,” yet alleged that there was no candle burning when Hupman was shot.104

Union guards felt justified in opening fire on disobedient inmates, and Columbus Unionists voiced approval of the disciplinary violence, especially in light of John Hunt Morgan’s escape from the Ohio Penitentiary on November 26.105 The questionable circumstances surrounding the deaths of McCarroll and Hupman inspired Secretary of War Edwin Stanton to order Colonel Wallace to curtail sutler trade, restrict letter writing to one per week, censor letters to disallow any professed opposition to prison administration or the Union cause in general, to punish persons who undermined the Union cause in such a manner, and hire private detectives and Rebel prisoners to spy on

105 Shriver and Breen, Ohio’s Military Prisons, 17.
fellow inmates incognito. These regulations soon caused Hoffman to worry that
security at Camp Chase was too strict. Hoffman, however, was not present in
Columbus to fully understand the tensions that mounted in the prison since September.
While the sentries involved in the prisoners’ deaths felt justified by the extenuating
circumstances of the camp and what they perceived as mutinous activity, Hoffman
regarded the sentries’ action as “a gross neglect of duty,” and believed that “all proper
measures” should be taken to “preserve order and subordination before resorting to those
of the greatest severity.” Hoffman subsequently acted to reform prison regulations.

On February 11, 1864, Hoffman replaced Wallace with Colonel William F.
Richardson as commanding officer at Camp Chase. Since Richardson investigated the
shootings, he knew of Hoffman’s belief that the Camp Chase shootings paralleled the
atrocious way Southerners allegedly treated Union inmates in Confederate prisons.
Hoffman asserted, “The rebels have outraged every human and Christian feeling by
shooting down their prisoners without occasion and in cold blood, and it is hoped that
Union soldiers will not bring reproach upon themselves by following their barbarous
example.” Richardson demonstrated his compliance with Hoffman’s wishes by taking
measures to curtail Union guards’ use of firepower on disobedient prisoners and by
relaxing the strict rules that Stanton ordered Wallace to implement. Richardson assured

106 Ibid., 18 and 17.
107 Miller, “War Within Walls,” 47.
108 W. Hoffman to E. M. Stanton and W. Hoffman to William Wallace, in O.R. Series II, Vol. VI, 1058 and
892.
109 Shriver and Breen, Ohio’s Military Prisons, 19.
Hoffman of the past shooting incidents that, “The instructions to sentinels have been so modified that it is not probable that anything of the kind will again occur, except it should be actually necessary to prevent prisoners from escaping.”

Richardson thus completely altered the strict disciplinary state of Camp Chase by reinstating liberal sutler privileges, permitting the sale of religious reading material, and requiring sentries to call the Sergeant of the Guard instead of automatically firing on prisoners who approached the wall, congregated, or burned lights after hours.

Richardson not only decreased camp security, he also permitted inmates to elect camp government officials and to publish their own camp newspaper. These privileges fostered excellent communication among prisoners and soon enabled them to devise a massive escape attempt. Although Richardson attempted to professionalize prison guards by reforming prison organization and standardizing regulations, this new control system unsuccessfully detected the Rebel inmates’ July 4, 1864 escape attempt until the plan commenced. Confederate prisoners began plotting in June to rush a neglected gate where bread deliveries came every morning at 10:00 a.m. Prisoners selected the Fourth of July as their breakout day since they heard that Union officers planned a grand review for that day, thus giving prisoners an excuse for mass mobilization. The well-planned plot backfired, however, when prisoners rushed the

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111 W. P. Richardson to W. Hoffman, 8 March 1864, in O.R. Series II, Vol., VI, 1060
112 Shriver and Breen, Ohio's Military Prisons, 19.
113 Ibid., 19-20.
114 Miller, “War Within Walls,” 49.
115 For information on the delivery gate and grand review, see Ivy, “Camp Chase, Columbus, Ohio,” 62.
gates prior to the appointed time of 10:00 a.m. Instead of reclaiming their freedom, the twenty-one men who escaped soon returned to camp under Union control, and a few prisoners were shot and wounded. The once lenient Hoffman ordered the number of guards increased on each shift and specified that sentinels be armed with revolvers. The July 4 escape attempt reflected the crisis of prison administration at Camp Chase that occurred in 1863. Federal authorities needed to learn the importance of asserting their role as arbiters of power in the camp and consistently define and enforce prison regulations so that Confederate inmates had no room to question their positions as prisoners or to take advantage of the questionable locus of power.

116 For information on the botched escape attempt and Hoffman’s reaction, see Miller, “War Within Walls,” 49
CHAPTER IV

HISTORY OF LIBBY PRISON

The first Union prisoners of war arrived in Richmond at the end of July 1861 following the first Battle of Manassas. Southern civilians celebrated the unfortunate Union men as proof that the Confederacy could defend itself as a nation.\textsuperscript{117} As the war progressed, Richmond citizens’ affinity for Union prisoners of war degenerated into an antagonistic relationship that centered on fear, suspicion, and competition for the overcrowded city’s limited resources.

Confederate President Jefferson Davis appointed John H. Winder as Provost Marshal of Richmond shortly after Winder resigned his commission in the United States Army.\textsuperscript{118} Winder promptly imposed martial law in Richmond and, subsequently, earned the citizens’ disapproval. Citizens alleged that Winder treated local civilians in an overly strict, harsh, and highhanded manner, while he afforded Union prisoners of war lenient privileges by liberally granting paroles and allowing inmates to roam freely around Richmond early in the war.\textsuperscript{119} Winder’s lax disciplinary measures speak to the South’s general lack of centralized control over the Union prisoner-of-war crisis.

The Confederacy lacked any form of centralized prison system. Accordingly, Richmond’s function in handling the prisoner-of-war crisis fluctuated throughout the war

\textsuperscript{117} Parker, \textit{Richmond’s Civil War Prisons}, 2.

\textsuperscript{118} Speer, \textit{Portals to Hell}, 13.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 13 and Parker, \textit{Richmond’s Civil War Prisons}, 2.
due to problems of overcrowding and the breakdown of the exchange system. Despite
the disorder that paroled Union prisoners created in Richmond, Confederate authorities
initially believed that the city was a desirable receiving depot for Federal captives. In the
war’s early stages, Richmond’s five railroads facilitated the transfer of inmates to other
facilities when Winder decided in the fall of 1861 that the increasing number of Union
captives posed a threat to the Confederate government and civilians. Additionally, the
railroads allowed for the easy transportation of Union prisoners when the exchange
system existed. Ultimately, Confederate authorities lacked a solution to the mounting
threat that Federal prisoners posed to Richmond’s civilians because no centralized prison
system existed. 120 Confederate bureaucracy, war conditions, and the absence of an
adequate alternative holding site caused Union soldiers to crowd Richmond throughout
the war and eventually threaten the health of fellow inmates, guards, and Richmond’s
own residents. 121

Confederate officials commandeered Richmond’s factories and warehouses in
order to accommodate the influx of captured Union soldiers in 1861. One such building
that Confederate authorities overtook was the Libby and Son Chandlers and Grocers
store. The Libby store, a three-story 100 by 150 foot brick structure, occupied the corner
of 20th and Cary Streets, and its rear was in close proximity to the Kanawha Canal.

120 The Confederacy appointed a Commissary General of Prisoners for the war’s last two years, however,
this appointment came too late to remedy prison problems and the mutual suffering of guards and captives.
For further information on Richmond authorities’ handling of Union prisoners, see Parker, Richmond’s
Civil War Prisons, 2-7.

121 Marie Tyler-McGraw, At the Falls: Richmond, Virginia, and Its People. (Chapel Hill: The University
Libby’s interior consisted of nine 105 by 45 foot rooms with eight-foot ceilings. Confederate authorities converted the Libby building into a prison because it was the only building in the area with running water, and sat in an isolated neighborhood that consisted of warehouses, shanties, an old meetinghouse, stables, and numerous vacant lots. Additionally, the Libby building provided easy access to rail and water transportation, and the structure’s location isolated it from the congestion of Richmond’s Main Street. Confederate authorities thought that these conditions would adequately separate prisoners of war from the prying eyes of civilians, furnish favorable living conditions for captives, and enable efficient distribution of rations.

While Confederate authorities found the Libby warehouse ideal, Union inmates’ experience proved less than satisfactory. Upon entering Libby Prison, new Union captives witnessed a sign that read, “Abandon all hope who enter here.” This sign foreshadowed what life would be like for Federal prisoners inside their new, three-story brick home. Overpopulation, unpopular management, and substandard living conditions plagued Libby Prison’s history. Libby served two purposes for Confederate authorities; it housed Union officers and acted as a depot prison where all Union prisoners of war visited before Confederate officials transferred them to other facilities either in or outside of Richmond. Unfortunately, more Union captives flowed into Libby than Confederate

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123 For information on Libby’s favorable conditions, see Speer, Portals to Hell, 89.

124 The sign hung at the top of a staircase leading from the commandant’s office to the prisoners’ quarters. See Parker, Richmond’s Civil War Prisons, 35.
authorities could ship out, so the prison suffered from immense overcrowding, except when exchange negotiations existed for a period in 1863.\footnote{For information on Libby Prison as a transfer depot, see Speer, \textit{Portals to Hell}, 122. Speer also notes that following the cessation of the exchange cartel, Libby’s population climbed to over 4,000, was never less than 1,200 on each floor, and averaged 400 men to a room thereafter.}

In order to control the massive prison population, Confederate authorities strategically decided when and how Union inmates could utilize certain areas of the prison. Union inmates occupied Libby’s upper two floors, which contained six rooms that furnished no bunks and few benches. Each room had four small windows that wooden bars covered to resemble the nonexistent glass. These openings contributed to overheating in the summer and frigid drafts in the winter; however, they only permitted enough light for about 25 feet thus leaving about 40 feet in the center of the room dark even in the daytime.\footnote{For information about Libby’s rooms and windows, see Brevet Major J. W. Chamberlain, “Scenes in Libby Prison,” in \textit{Sketches of War History 1861-1865 Papers Read Before the Ohio Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States 1886-1888 Volume II.} (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1888), 345-346 and Speer, \textit{Portals to Hell}, 90.}

Confederate authorities established a hospital in the first floor’s east room, erected the prison officials’ quarters and office in the lower floor’s west room, and created a kitchen in the center, the only room to which prison officials granted inmates free access. Additionally, Confederate authorities reserved the building’s cellars for a carpenter shop, dangerous prisoners, spies, and slaves who performed maintenance duties or acquired death sentences.\footnote{For information on Libby Prison’s layout, see Speer, \textit{Portals to Hell}, 90 and Casstevens, \textit{“Out of the Mouths of Hell,”} 265.}

Union inmates found both Libby’s living conditions and authority figures disagreeable. Inmates despised Libby’s commandant, twenty-one year old Lieutenant Thomas Pratt Turner, for exercising strict discipline. Prisoners similarly hated second
and third in command, Richard R. “Dick” Turner and George Emack, since these men quickly resorted to exercising physical punishment. While Federal captives intensely disliked both Turners, they perhaps harbored the most animosity for prison clerk, Erasmus Ross, who habitually taunted the inmates. Ross, ironically, feared the Federals and carried a large bowie knife and two revolvers while he issued daily roll calls and recorded new inmates’ names.\textsuperscript{128} Since Libby’s overall command was harsh, it is not surprising that Confederate guards displayed similar hostility towards Union inmates, especially in the early years of the war, in order to compensate for their guard assignment that negated their opportunity to prove battlefield valor.\textsuperscript{129} As the war progressed, however, and the Confederacy’s male population dwindled because of battle injuries and deaths, the harsh dynamic of prison guards softened. During the war’s latter stages, Libby Prison guards consisted of local civilians beyond the age of exemption and men unable to withstand active duty since the Confederacy needed able-bodied, military-aged men to fill the ranks of its army. These unprofessional guards treated Federal prisoners humanely.\textsuperscript{130}

Conditions in both Richmond and Libby prisons also slackened in late 1863 and early 1864. The fall of 1863 marked both crises in price and prison population control. Richmond’s food supply dwindled and rampant inflation caused prices of available goods

\textsuperscript{128} For information on Thomas and Dick Turner (no relation) and Erasmus Ross, see Speer, \textit{Portals to Hell}, 90-91.

\textsuperscript{129} Parker, \textit{Richmond’s Civil War Prisons}, 12

\textsuperscript{130} For guard information, see \textit{Walls That Talk: A transcript of the names, initials and sentiments written and graven on the walls, doors and windows of the Libby prison at Richmond, by the prisoners of 1861-1865}. (Richmond: R. E. Lee Camp, No. 1, C.V., 1884), 5.
to skyrocket. Food shortages and prisoner surpluses caused both Confederate civilians and authorities to stress over how to feed the rising civilian and captive populations. Winder warned that Union escape attempts would increase if prisoners starved, so Southern authorities’ sometimes diverted food from the private sector to feed Federal inmates’ hunger, thus enhancing civilians’ plight by cutting into their food supply.

Feeding captives was not the only issue that weighed on civilian and authorities’ minds. Richmond’s people watched prisons populations rise and subsequently feared for the Confederate capital’s security. As 1863 faded into 1864, the ratio of Confederate guards to Federal inmates in Richmond’s prisons decreased thus encouraging Union escape attempts and heightening citizens’ fear of a general uprising or outbreak of Federal prisoners, either of inmates’ own accord or with the help of Union cavalry raids.

Winder and Robert E. Lee argued to government officials that Confederate authorities should remove Union inmates from Richmond on account of overpopulation and the cessation of exchange negotiations. Lee objected to prisoners’ presence in Richmond because he disagreed with funneling increased supplies into the city for prisoners. Lee believed that supply lines should solely serve local civilians. Furthermore, Lee argued that prisoners distressed the less privileged classes and posed

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131 Following the Gettysburg campaign, flour cost $1,000 a barrel; apples $25 per bushel; butter $2.50 per pound; meal $10 per bushel; beef $2.00 per pound; molasses $15 per gallon; and tea $12 per pound. For additional statistics, see Ashbury W. Christian, *Richmond: Her Past and Present*. (Richmond, VA: I. H. Jenkins, 1912. Reprint edition Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1973), 244.

132 Parker, *Richmond’s Civil War Prisons*, 43.

significant danger from a military standpoint since they aided and informed the enemy and would endanger the city in case of Federal attack.\textsuperscript{134}

Logistics tied Winder’s hands regarding transporting Federal captives from Richmond in January 1864. Despite popular demand for Federal prisoners’ removal from Richmond, and his own personal desire to do so, Winder had no alternate place to send the inmates. Winder hoped to improvise and so complained to Arnold Elzey, Commander of the Department of Richmond, that he needed extra guards to relieve the prisons’ crowded conditions. Winder failed in his attempt to hire civilian guards and even tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to get disabled Confederate soldiers to serve as prison guards. In the end, Winder received 240 guards for prison duty. These extra bodies did not aid Winder’s cause, however, since he needed at least 1,000 guards to help curtail deteriorating prison conditions.\textsuperscript{135}

Richmond did have one reason to celebrate in January of 1864 despite its dismal conditions. Confederate cavalry general and celebrated Northern prison escapee John Hunt Morgan visited Richmond in early January following his brilliant getaway from the Ohio Penitentiary. Morgan arrived in the city on January 9, and the Richmond City Battalion escorted him to City Hall. Flocks of civilians crowded city hall’s grounds where the mayor introduced Morgan, who subsequently gave a short speech and expressed appreciation for his enthusiastic welcome.\textsuperscript{136} Later in the evening, Morgan visited Libby prison since he knew many of the inmates who hailed from his native state

\textsuperscript{134} For Lee’s sentiments on Federal prisoners’ presence in Richmond, see Hesseltine, \textit{Civil War Prisons}, 129-130.

\textsuperscript{135} For information on Winder’s attempts to obtain extra prison guards, see Blakey, \textit{General John H. Winder}, 172.

\textsuperscript{136} For information on Morgan’s reception, see Christian, \textit{Richmond: Her Past and Present}, 245-246.
of Kentucky. Morgan bragged about his brilliant tunnel escape during his visit and unknowingly inspired the freedom-hungry Union inmates to dig a tunnel of their own.\textsuperscript{137}

During the latter stages of 1863 and into early 1864, a group of Union inmates became particularly disgruntled with their status as captives and desired to reach Union lines once again. Colonel Thomas Rose of the 77\textsuperscript{th} Pennsylvania Volunteers and Major Andrew Hamilton of the 126\textsuperscript{th} Kentucky Cavalry organized work parties secretly to descend into the basement of Libby Prison and begin to dig a tunnel behind stoves and fireplaces in the prison’s kitchen. Federal soldiers dug their 60-foot route to freedom in 47 days using primarily knives, chisels, and spittoons. The ingenious inmates masked their work by spreading dirt from their digging over the cellar floor and covering it with straw.\textsuperscript{138} The Federal work crew withstood one failed tunnel attempt when their exit point unintentionally stopped right underneath the feet of Confederate sentinels. After this failure, however, 109 officers successfully made their escape in an abandoned area of the warehouse district on February 9, 1864. Ultimately, only 59 Union officers reached Union lines, two drowned, and Confederate authorities or civilians recaptured 48 men.\textsuperscript{139}

The Richmond press, local citizens, and Winder himself were stunned that the escape plot succeeded without attracting the attention of Libby prison guards. Confederate guards experienced flashes of paranoia when roll call on February 10 revealed so many missing bodies. Winder subsequently arrested and jailed a number of guards in Castle Thunder, whom he thought Federal officers bribed to keep quiet about

\textsuperscript{137} For further information on Morgan’s visit to Libby Prison, see Casstevens, “Out of the Mouths of Hell,” 273.

\textsuperscript{138} For information on the tunnel’s excavation, see Speer, Portals to Hell, 231-232.

\textsuperscript{139} Blakey, General John H. Winder, 172-173.
the escape. However, Confederate Lieutenant John LaTouche’s discovery of the Federal tunnel exonerated these Southern detainees. Confederate prison guards increased security following the mass exodus and, consequently, exhibited a desire to reassert extreme control to prevent future escape attempts.

At the end of February, only a few short weeks after the Union tunnel escape, Confederate authorities detected another threat of mass exodus. Richmond civilians and Confederate soldiers barely had time to catch their breath and calm visions of untamed Yankee soldiers roaming free around Richmond when the city received news of a Federal threat, namely, Union raiding parties under Union General Judson Kilpatrick and Colonel Ulrich Dahlgren’s advancing towards the Confederate capital.

Kilpatrick knew about the atrocious conditions that Southerners inflicted upon Union captives in Confederate prisons and justifiably believed that the Confederacy’s ability to defend itself was fading fast. Kilpatrick accordingly persuaded Lincoln and Stanton to utilize the North’s military superiority to raid the inadequately defended city of Richmond and liberate the city’s thousands of prisoners from enemy hands. Kilpatrick proposed to ride on the capital with 5,584 cavalry troops, six guns, eight caissons, three supply wagons, and four ambulances, while Colonel Dahlgren supported his main raiding party with 500 troops advancing on Richmond from the opposite direction. Additionally, Kilpatrick proscribed that General George Custer simultaneously launch a diversionary

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raid on Albemarle County in order to ensure that the main raid on Richmond keep an element of surprise.\textsuperscript{141}

The Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid lasted from February 28 to March 4. Ultimately, the Union cavalry attack failed when Confederate soldiers thwarted the Yankee advance, and subsequently captured a majority of Dahlgren’s raiders, killed the young leader, and mutilated his body. Richmond civilians and Confederate authorities undoubtedly feared for the city’s safety prior to the raid’s failure. However, orders allegedly found on Dahlgren’s dead body exacerbated Southerners’ fears of what might have been had the Yankees reached Richmond. Following Dahlgren’s death, a young boy named William Littlepage recovered the General’s instructions to his troops, which exhorted the Union raiders to march into Richmond, release and arm the city’s prisoners, burn and pillage the capital, and kill President Davis and his cabinet.\textsuperscript{142}

Union and Confederate authorities later debated the authenticity of Dahlgren’s malicious orders. However, the Yankee invader’s directives shocked Richmond citizens and seemed to justify Winder’s drastic action to ensure that Libby prison inmates stayed put. The Union raid alone inspired Secretary of War James Seddon to order Winder to secure the prisoners by any means possible. Winder acted out this order by authorizing Major Turner to dig a mine in Libby’s basement, fill it with 200 pounds of gunpowder, and threaten to blow up the prison if inmates attempted to escape. After Confederate soldiers killed Dahlgren and captured his motley crew, Winder claimed that he mined


Libby as a ploy to keep Union inmates in order; however, some Southerners alleged that
the mine existed and served as minimal punishment compared to the intent of Dahlgren’s
raiders.¹⁴³

Dahlgren’s orders, in turn, created hot debate among Confederate authorities
regarding how to treat the Union general’s captured band who Southerners deemed guilty
of violating the rules of civilized warfare. Many Confederate authorities, Seddon and
Chief of Ordnance Josiah Gorgas included, advocated hanging the new captives.
Regardless of personal sentiment concerning the fate of Dahlgren’s raiders, Richmond
civilians and Confederate authorities reached a consensus that the city’s recent past
rendered retaining Union prisoners inside the Confederate capital an unwise decision.
From this point forward, Winder promised, and followed through with his decision to
send Federal captives South at the rate of 400 per day.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ For information on the Libby Prison mine, see Blakey, General John H. Winder, 173.
¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 174.
CHAPTER V

FREEDOM AND CONFINEMENT: THE POLITICS AND POWER OF SPACE

Space was limited both in Richmond and in Libby Prison. Confederate power and civilian well-being depended on the ability of Southern officers to successfully confine Federal prisoners to various penal institutions throughout Richmond. Confederate authorities and civilians alike knew that it was unwise for the city to harbor an immense number of enemy captives since the Federal army constantly targeted Richmond. Southerners feared that the release of Federal prisoners, either of their own accord or with the Union Army’s help, would alter the prisoners’ status from captive to occupying force by granting former prisoners access to the city’s once forbidden space.

In order to ensure Federal prisoners’ status as trophies of war, Confederate officers needed to use Libby Prison’s structure and division of space wisely to maximize the ability of a dwindling number of qualified guards to control increasing numbers of restless inmates. Similarly, Confederate authorities needed to ensure that they furnished Federal inmates with adequate provisions and living conditions so that the prisoners’ desire for freedom remained at a minimum. Confederate officers at Libby Prison failed to meet these requirements during the latter stages of 1863 and especially in the early months of 1864. As a result, Federal inmates expressed extreme disapproval with their status as prisoners and transformed their suffering into an escape plot that defied Confederate authority and their captive status. Similarly, word of Federal inmates’
despondency and suffering reached Union army officers’ ears and inspired a plot to liberate Union inmates from the confines and cruelty of Southern walls.\textsuperscript{145}

By the winter of 1863-1864, approximately 1,000 Federal inmates in Libby Prison waited for the resumption of an exchange system that would never happen.\textsuperscript{146} Confederate authorities failed to alleviate Federal captives suffering from lack of space and want of food. Local civilians cast a nervous eye towards Libby Prison, and guards, accordingly, resorted to harsh disciplinary measures that led inmates to believe that Southern guards intentionally tortured them. Confederate and Union authorities permitted inmates to receive packages from home, the U.S. Sanitary Commission, and the Christian Commission in an attempt to alleviate Libby’s food and clothing shortages. However, equally hungry and ill-clad Confederate guards frequently pillaged these gifts and angered Union inmates.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{145} Similar to Camp Chase, Libby Prison’s guards and the structure itself upheld the rules and regulations of the Confederate nation. When Federal inmates sought freedom and the Union Army attempted to aid this cause, the Northern prisoners revolted generally against the Confederate State’s authority, and specifically against their very state of physical misery, which increased as overcrowding in Libby Prison escalated and the availability of adequate provisions declined in late 1863 and early 1864. Again, similar to Camp Chase, I see the history of Libby Prison during the months of January, February, and March 1864 following Foucauldian terms. In this instance, Federal inmates revolted against the physical aspects of extreme “cold, suffocation, overcrowding, decrepit walls, hunger, and physical maltreatment.” Additionally, Union inmates protested aspects of the prison itself, such as its isolating effect from the outside world, poor medical treatment, and intellectual boredom. (Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, 30). Consequently, Confederate authorities attempted to reassert their authority and diminish the Federal threat through such “security measures” as further restricting the space that prisoners could utilize, instituting threats intended to “neutralize [inmates’] dangerous state of mind and alter [their] criminal tendencies,” and, ultimately, remove the inmates from Richmond, a political and military symbol that could no longer afford Federal captives’ persistent threats. (Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, 18).


\textsuperscript{147} For information on Richmond’s early 1864 climate and boxes from the North, see Brown, \textit{The Tragedy of Libby and Andersonville Prison Camps}, 25 and 13; Byrne, “General Behind Bars,” 61; and Parker, \textit{Richmond’s Civil War Prisons}, 51.
Union prisoners and Confederate civilians suffered as a result of the Yankee prisoner population. Federal inmates grew physically and mentally depressed when they learned that the last hope of exchanges passed. As a result, the men abandoned their regular pastimes and games, and increasingly focused on their hunger or lack of packages from the North. Inmates feared that chances of their situation improving were slim, especially since they noticed the plight of nearby civilians outside Libby’s windows. Union prisoner Francis Cavada noted impoverished children frequently begging for food outside of Libby Prison. Cavada frequently threw corn bread to the beggars and noted the extent of the children’s misery by stating, “...these are the only inhabitants of the Confederate capital who dare openly to acknowledge their misery and to show their attachment to the Yankee barbarians, who, wretched and hungry enough themselves, are yet ready to share even with them the meager rations on which they are compelled to subsist.”

Confederate civilians duly noted Union prisoners’ lack of sustenance and feared that prisoners would rebel. Confederate war clerk John B. Jones wrote in his diary on January 19: that “The prisoners here have had no meat during the last four days, and fears are felt that they will break out of confinement.” Jones not only feared that Union prisoners would attempt escape because of their lack of rations, but that local Southern

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civilians would join the uprising since they too lacked food due to the “imbecility” of the Confederate government. ¹⁵⁰

Despite Confederates’ fears, Union inmates did not attempt a mass escape in January.  Federals, instead, took advantage of internal prison dynamics to stage subtle escapes.  Richmond city troops, with a proclivity towards delighting in inmates’ suffering, guarded Libby Prison in early 1864.  According to inmate J.W. Chamberlain, Confederate guards did not patrol inside of Libby, except for a couple stationed at the stairway leading to the second floor.  However, this fact did not prevent outside Rebel guards from quickly firing at prisoners for being too near the windows, or carelessly unloading at innocent prisoners while in the closet. ¹⁵¹

Federal inmates presumably feared enemy bullets if they blatantly attempted escape.  However, Libby’s internal dynamics in January of 1864 aided Federal exploitation of weaknesses in the Southern guards’ protective measures.  Consequently, prisoners made rather easy escapes.  Union inmate Emeric Szabad noted that an unusually high number of civilians visited Libby in January of 1864 in order to have a look at the Yankees, and that Confederate civilian visitors easily entered and exited Libby without guards challenging them. ¹⁵²  Union inmates picked up on this issue, donned Confederate civilian garb that was available to them in the prison, and walked out of

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 135.

¹⁵¹ Closet is assumed to mean bathroom.  For Chamberlain’s account of Confederate guards’ behavior, see Chamberlain, “Scenes in Libby Prison,” 350-351.

prison in broad daylight. The fact that Confederate guards, or even Southern civilians, often wore Union overcoats, which they stole from boxes intended for Union prisoners, temporarily aided Union escapees.

The Federals’ easy ticket to freedom did not last long, however, as Confederate guards became privy to Union plots, thwarted escape attempts, and consequently instituted punishments. Federal escapes revealed Confederates’ lack of internal control over the prison, but Southerners redeemed their authoritative reputation when they recaptured all but one of the escapees in under a week. Frederick Bartleson snidely attributed the incognito escapees’ recapture to, “how poorly we (prisoners) are adapted, from our confinement, for marching,” and resented the universal punishment that resulted from his comrades’ insubordination.

Confederate authorities’ decision to punish all of Libby’s inmates, instead of isolating direct offenders, undoubtedly damaged Federal morale within the prison. Confederate officers restricted letter writing to “the so-called United States” to one note per week consisting of no more than six lines, an act which, according to Bartleson, was, “mere spite work and is the revenge of the Commandant for [Federal] officers exercising their privileged right of escape.”

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153 For accounts of Union trickery and escape, see Cavada, *Libby Life,* 139-140. Frederick Bartleson and Dow give accounts of Federal inmates in Confederate dress walking out past Confederate guards on January 29 and 30 respectively. See, Frederick A. Bartleson, *Letters from Libby Prison.* Edited by Margaret W. Peelle. (New York: Greenwich Book Publishers, 1956), 16-17 and Byrne, “General Behind Bars,” 68.

154 Byrne, “General Behind Bars,” 68.

155 Ibid., 68.


157 Ibid., 20.
homeland, while its physical regulations further separated inmates from their main source of joy, namely, letters from home. Confederate authorities successfully reminded Federal prisoners of their subordinated status by forcing Union inmates to comply with this directive.

General Morgan’s arrival in Richmond coincided with the slew of incognito Federal escapes. Freedom-hungry Union inmates undoubtedly found the January 5 Richmond Enquirer article entitled, “General Morgan Escapes from Prison,” highly intriguing.\(^{158}\) This article provided a celebratory, detailed description of Morgan’s escape conceptualization, tunnel construction, difficulty of keeping sentinels ignorant of continued digging, and triumphant return to Southern lines.\(^{159}\) This article’s contents probably inspired, or at least sounded strangely familiar, to Federal prisoners at Libby already digging their grand escape route. Union captives soon baffled Confederate authorities with the same escapade for which Southerners praised Morgan.

Morgan paid a visit to Libby Prison following his grand reception at City Hall on January 9. Morgan desired to chat with Federal inmates from his home state of Kentucky. However, some Union inmates found the confrontation awkward, recalled Morgan’s boastful demeanor, and consequently desired revenge. Union inmate James M Wells declined to congratulate Morgan on his escape out of fear that Morgan might

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158 Union inmates at Libby Prison had regular access to Richmond newspapers judging from Szabad, Cavada, and Dow’s writing. Szabad notes that inmates received news from the papers “by a regular channel every morning” and provides multiple citations of inmates reading the Richmond Examiner and Enquirer. Similarly, Cavada notes that, “The first thing we hear in the morning is the stentorian voice of a certain fertile colored genius familiarly known in Libby as ‘Old Ben.’ This voice daily announces to the half-awakened prisoners that there is ‘great news in de papers! Telegraphic dispatches from ebery whare!’” Finally, Dow comments that he gleaned information about Confederate perception of the Southern war effort from Rebel papers. See, Beszedits, ed., Libby Prison Diary of Colonel Emeric Szabad, 82, 92, and 95; Cavada, Libby Life, 47; and Byrne, “General Behind Bars,” 62.

159 Enquirer (Richmond) 5 January 1864. “General Morgan’s Escape from Prison.”
recognize Wells as one of his captors, and scoffed that Morgan, “Having had a taste of prison life himself, made his tour of inspection in Libby, no doubt, that he might the better enjoy his own release from the toils, and incidentally, perhaps to witness the discomfort of the other fellows when under the conditions that proved to be so irksome to him.”

Similarly, an anonymous Union prisoner recalled Morgan’s larger-than-life reputation among Richmond civilians and exhibited disdain for Morgan’s patronizing admonishment of Federal inmates at Libby to resist rivaling his brilliant tunnel exploit. Following Morgan’s exit, a captain from the 1st Kentucky regiment, snarled “Let him chuckle. They laugh best who laugh last. Before many weeks go past, we’ll show them what a tunnel is.” Union prisoners believed that if Morgan successfully dug himself out of the solid brick Ohio Penitentiary, then they too could tunnel their way out of Libby Prison. Ultimately, the only hope of escape that Yankees had in February 1864 was the tunneling process since bars blocked Libby’s doors and windows and Southern soldiers heavily guarded Libby’s outside.

Richmond’s newspapers contained a number of ironic editorials about Libby Prison and its inmates in early February of 1864. The February 2nd edition of the Richmond Enquirer satirized Libby’s conditions, noted how humanely Confederate


162 Wells, With Touch of Elbow.
guards treated Northern inmates despite overcrowding, and commented on the fact that, “There men are kept here against our consent and in direct opposition to the wishes of the Government.” Furthermore, the paper mockingly noted beneficial security measures, such as the placement of iron bars over the windows, which, “should have been done long ago. Some of the Yankee officers facetiously remarked that the precaution was a wise one, as Colonel Streight had fallen out of a rear window and hurt himself.” Finally, the Enquirer ridiculed accusations of Libby’s harsh conditions by overexaggerating the idea that Libby was not a place that Union officers went never to return. This satirical article upheld Southern honor by noting the Confederacy’s humane attitude towards enemy prisoners, illustrated the futility of Yankee escape attempts by depicting Streight’s brief getaway and recapture as an accident, and minimized the prison experience by overemphasizing its temporality.

Other newspaper articles revealed Richmonders’ consternation regarding the prison issue that the Enquirer article masked in sarcasm. The February 5 edition of the Richmond Sentinel reported that, “On last Wednesday 109 Yankee prisoners…were received at the Libby. The prison is now crowded almost to overflowing, and we can hardly conceive how accommodations can be provided at that place for a number of others captured at the same time, who are now on the way.” The escape of 109 Union officers from Libby a few days later ironically made room, at least temporarily, for the

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163 Enquirer (Richmond) 2 February 1864. Colonel Abel Streight, Commander of Negro troops, attempted to escape from Libby a few weeks prior to this article’s publication. Confederate guards almost immediately detained Streight outside of the prison, and according to Szabad, guards placed him in solitary confinement, handcuffed him, and put him on a bread and water diet. Streight’s association with black soldiers and his failed escape attempt elicited scorn and ridicule from Southerners. See, Beszedits, Libby Prison Diary of Colonel Emeric Szabad, 97.

164 Sentinel (Richmond) 5 February 1864.
influx of new prisoners of war. This tunnel expedition and subsequent Union cavalry raid revealed Richmond’s internal and external vulnerability.\textsuperscript{165}

Union inmates at Libby Prison needed to defy the prison’s reputed security and its structured space in order to enact plots to break free. Frederic Cavada noted that:

The Libby has been, I believe, always considered the safest military prison in the Confederacy; its isolated position, and the vigilance of its commanding officer, Major Turner, having entitled it to high encomiums in this regard…. A prisoner, if he deserved the name, is always more or less occupied with the idea of making his escape; he becomes a plotter in spite of his scruples, he forms a thousand plans in his mind, all of which begin by appearing more feasible, and almost invariably end by being considered more impossible, than they really are.\textsuperscript{166}

Cavada’s recollection hints at the difficulties that the tunnel’s construction workers overcame, and also revealed the fact that desperation for seemingly impossible freedom drove Union inmates to success. Federal prisoners knew that Confederate authorities stored boxes intended for inmates in a building approximately 40 feet away from the prison. Prisoners deemed this area ideal for their tunnel’s opening since a high board fence enclosed the building’s lot.\textsuperscript{167} Colonel Rose, the tunnel’s mastermind, thus knew that the escape route needed to be 50 to 60 feet in length in order to furnish a safe exit. Rose also knew that he and his appointed digging crew needed access to Libby’s basement and adequate cover for his men’s work, their absence, and the excavation’s evidence. Thus, Union inmates not only had to defy Confederate guards’ physical presence, but also the controlling aspects of space.

\textsuperscript{165} Tyler-McGraw, \textit{At the Falls} 156.

\textsuperscript{166} Cavada, \textit{Libby Life}, 138-139.

\textsuperscript{167} Chamberlain, “Scenes in Libby Prison,” 361.
Rose and his men gained access to the forbidden space of Libby’s basement and carried out their rebellious digging. Logic necessitated that the digging crew complete their work at night. This fact in turn dictated that Rose and his workers free themselves from the confinement of Libby’s upper two rooms; a nerve-racking task since Confederate guards outside of Libby had orders to shoot any prisoner who moved particularly close to the windows. Rose, however, exploited the fact that no Southern guards occupied the cook room situated in the middle of Libby’s ground floor.168

Prisoners readily accessed to a chimney in their designated sleeping quarters and knew that its flue led down into the unguarded cook room. Thus, prisoners constructed a rope ladder, hung it down the chimney, and made their final descent into the cook room through the fireplace. Once in the kitchen, Rose’s men passed through openings in the fireplace’s floorboards, removed its bricks, and entered the cellar where the digging commenced. Colonel Rose organized a work party of fourteen officers who alternately dug the tunnel with chisels and spittoons, guarded its work by night, and concealed their entrance to the cellar with a tightly fitting board by day. Some Union officers, Captain Johnson of Kentucky, for example, feigned escape and lived permanently in the cellar in order to work on the project. The inmates successfully accomplished their digging. However, their first attempt at freedom failed since the tunnel opened short of the

warehouse yard and near a Confederate sentinel’s beat. Despite this setback, Union workers reached the vacant yard on February 9 and initiated their exit.\(^{169}\)

Prisoners rejoiced that the tunnel’s route to freedom exceeded the men’s expectations for success. Rose and those inmates privy to the secret tunnel plot intended for a certain number of men to escape each night for three nights so as not to severely alter roll call. However, word of the project spread quickly among inmates, and soon nobody could tell how many men escaped.\(^{170}\) Federal prisoners fled captivity from 7:00 p.m. until 5:00 a.m. in parties of two or three, pending only one disruption. Inmate Frank Moran recalled a shout around midnight that warned of coming guards. This alarm intimidated men who attempted escape, and Moran expressed ire at whoever caused “a rumor which was swiftly spread through the crowded prison by one of those ‘panic strikers’ that, like the theater idiot who screams ‘Fire!’ and the young man who ‘didn’t know it was loaded,’ [who] is always with us.”\(^{171}\)

Despite this false alarm, 109 Union inmates escaped, and their comrades gloried in the almost comical factors that permitted the break out. In hindsight, Federals mocked Confederate ignorance of the tunnel’s construction by stating that work parties completed the exit route amid sentinels’ hourly cries that “all is well.”\(^{172}\) Similarly, Emeric Szabad

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noted the irony of the fact that Union men tunneled out of Libby at the same time that, “high-felutin orations were being made in Richmond in honor of the gallant escape of the Confederate General Morgan.” Union prisoners resented the fact that the Richmond press credited Morgan for inspiration of the Yankees’ brilliant tunnel escapade and sought to claim ownership of their deeds. Thus, Frederick Bartleson noted, “The idea was suggested by Morgan, say the papers, as if tunneling has not been the most obvious and common mode of escape since prisoners were created.”

Not only did Union prisoners claim the success and idea to tunnel as their own, they also viewed their escape as retribution for Confederates’ unwarranted pillaging of their boxes. Many Union men noted that escapees slipped directly past vigilant sentinels, stationed no more than 25 feet apart, and into the warehouse yard where Southern authorities stored boxes from the North intended for Libby inmates. Thus, many Federals noted that Confederates ignored the commotion in the warehouse yard because they assumed that fellow Rebel soldiers or civilians ravaged the Yankee property in the night. Bartleson forcefully voiced approval of his comrades’ revenge for Confederate soldiers’ depriving Union inmates of much needed provisions by stating, “I am

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176 For accounts of this nature, see Beszedits, *Diary in Libby Prison*, 96, and Bartleson, *Letters from Libby Prison* 39.
accustomed to say it was a righteous retribution for their mean pillaging of our boxes, and that the hand of God was in it.”

Union escapees did not rely on God alone to aid the success of their escape. Federal fugitives also received the help of Southern civilians sympathetic to the Union cause, or at least to the plight of prisoners of war. When Captain John F. Porter of the 14th New York Cavalry and his comrades reached the vicinity of the Chickahominy River, a number of friendly Negroes informed the escapees of Turner’s guards’ whereabouts and provided the Union men with food. Porter furthermore noted that Richmonders of all classes aided Federal escapees, that Unionists cared for the sick fugitives, and that these efforts helped the feeble men reach Union lines.

One staunch Richmond Unionist in particular regretted that she could not do more to aid Federal escapees. Elizabeth Van Lew forcefully opposed slavery and supported the Union cause by serving as a Federal spy while residing in Richmond. Miss Van Lew also made several trips to Libby to aid Federal captives throughout the war. Van Lew flattered Confederate officials to receive a permit to enter Libby Prison on a daily basis and unknowingly bring Union men food, books, and supplies. Van Lew continued her service by making Confederate authorities believe that she was a harmless, crazy woman who dressed strangely and habitually wandered the streets muttering incoherently.

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“Crazy Bet,” as fellow Southerners dubbed her, strategically planned to aid Union fugitives on the night of the tunnel escape, but an unexpected personal situation prevented the full effect of her service. Van Lew successfully helped furnish the tunnel’s escapees with directions towards Williamsburg and the Federal lines. She also had a habit of hiding prison runaways in her mansion in the past. However, on the night of the tunnel escape, Elizabeth’s brother, a conscript into the Confederate army, deserted and hid in one of Elizabeth’s many safe houses. Elizabeth went to visit her brother and was consequently unable to hide runaways in the room she prepared for them in her mansion. Van Lew, who feared that vigilant Confederate authorities would discover her brother and recapture the new Union escapees, recalled that, “We were greatly distressed on account of the prisoners. We knew there was to be an exit, had been told to prepare, and had one of our parlors - or rather end room - had dark blankets nailed up at the windows… so we were ready for them.” Despite Elizabeth’s preparedness, her house servants turned fugitives away upon their arrival for fear of hiding Union men in Van Lew’s absence. The men subsequently sought other safe houses and Van Lew met them the next day.  

Union prisoners noted the escape’s negative reflection on Confederate authority in the tunnel’s immediate aftermath and professed satisfaction with the Richmond press’ ironic admiration for the Yankee escapade. Richmond’s journalists heavily criticized Winder’s ignorance of the tunnel plot, and his allegations that Libby’s guards were not to blame for the matter. The Richmond Whig harshly editorialized about the presence of, “a

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180 For information in this paragraph about Van Lew’s Unionist sentiments, relationship and aid to Libby inmates, and situation on the night of the tunnel escape, see David D. Ryan, ed., *A Yankee Spy in Richmond: The Civil War Diary of “Crazy Bet” Van Lew*. (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1996), 12-13 and 59-62
big odoriferous rat” in Libby and further complained that Winder’s, “nose must have
been clogged up not to have smelled it.” These comments directly reveal civilians’
lack of confidence in Libby Prison’s administration and the guards’ ability to safeguard
the city from the prisoners’ threat.

Federal inmates delighted in their comrades’ success and took pride in the power
that the escape temporarily granted them. Frederick Bartleson noted on February 11 that
the tunnel escape was, “very mortifying to [Confederate] officials, and the Examiner says
it is a discredit and a disgrace to the Confederacy.” Similarly, Richmond’s journals
ironically dubbed the Union escape as the greatest feat since John Hunt Morgan tunneled
out of the Ohio Penitentiary and, according to Emeric Szabad, gave Union prisoners,
“credit for their masterly conduct and indomitable perseverance. It is the first praise we
have received in Richmond.” While prisoners enjoyed the relatively short-lived praise
that they received from the press, Union inmates knew that the Richmond citizenry still
abhorred their presence.

The fact that only 53 Union prisoners reached Federal lines dampened the
prisoners’ jovial attitude. Confederate guards and the Richmond press seemingly had
the last laugh since the papers contained numerous articles detailing how savvy
Confederate civilians or loyal African-Americans outwitted the dense Union fugitives.
Despite Union soldiers’ reports that Richmond papers praised their handiwork, the
Richmond *Enquirer* downplayed the significance of the Yankee escape when compared

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to Morgan’s feat and opined that the unimaginative Federals stole their tunnel idea from the brilliant Morgan. On February 12, the *Enquirer* reported that the Yankee escape:

> does not exceed in glory or secrecy the escape of John Morgan from the Ohio Penitentiary, and yet, neither the connivance or carelessness of sentinels or others have received any credit from Morgan or his historians, Yankee or Southern. It is most probable, in fact, that this distinguished general is, more than anybody else, responsible for the success with which Streight and his chums made their exit from the Libby. The experience and example of the one was an admirable lesson for the other.\(^\text{185}\)

Southern writers doubted not only the Yankees’ ingenuity, but also exhibited skepticism about the fugitives’ ability to make it to safety. On February 11 and 12, the Richmond *Sentinel* stated that it was “hardly probable that many of them [Union escapees] will succeed in getting off entirely,” and happily reported the capture of nineteen prisoners due to, “our cavalry scouring the country in every direction.”\(^\text{186}\)

Richmond’s newspapers printed numerous reports of the Confederate cavalry’s ability to recapture Union officers. However, journalists took special pride in printing stories about how loyal Negroes and crafty Southern civilians fooled Union men back into captivity. On February 12, the Richmond *Enquirer* printed a story about an unfortunate Union officer on the run who encountered “an American citizen of African descent” working in a potato patch. The paper reported that the perceptive Negro suspected that the fleeing man was a Union escapee because of the man’s blue garments. After the field hand asked the suspected escapee where he was going, and the Union man replied nowhere, the *Enquirer* reported that:

> …the darkey, with courage and patriotism worthy of immortality, brought his hoe to a ‘charge’ and responded, “Yes you is, dough –you done broke out of one o’

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\(^{185}\) *Enquirer* (Richmond) 12 February 1864.  
\(^{186}\) *Sentinel* (Richmond) 11 February 1864 and 12 February 1864.
dem prisons — come along — you got to go wid me.” He marched him to the house, handed him over to his master, and returned to his potato patch, covered with glory. The Yankee arrived [at Libby] under due guard, yesterday morning.\textsuperscript{187}

According to Richmond papers, Union officers also suffered recapture at the hands of witty youths or on accord of their own weakness or foolishness. The Richmond \textit{Whig} printed a report on February 15 about two Union officers’ capture in Hanover County, approximately twelve miles from Richmond. The paper stated that two “lads,” Simon Cullen and Walter Sydnor, discovered the two Yankee fugitives near a swamp while out horseback riding. The boys demanded that Union men surrender because the boys suspected that the blue clad strangers were Union runaways. After the Union men inquired about the boys’ identity, Cullen stated that they were part of Jones’ cavalry and demanded that the Yankees come with them or take the consequences. The boys ordered the Union men to march in front of them, and the paper stated that:

The Yankees reluctantly complied with this mandate, and were conducted by the two \textit{unarmed} youths to Mr. Snyder’s house, where they were turned over to a member of the Hanover Troop, who happened to be present. When the Yankees were told that the boys were unarmed, and that young Cullen was not attached to the cavalry, they professed to be very much chagrined…. The prisoners were brought back to the city and delivered to the officers at the Libby.\textsuperscript{188}

The same Richmond \textit{Whig} article that detailed how harmless Southern lads outwitted the nervous escapees also printed an account of how one Yankee’s foolishness led him to recapture. On February 15, the \textit{Whig} described an aberrant Union escapee, who somehow obtained a musket, walking along Richmond’s towpath near the canal. An unarmed Confederate civilian approached the Yankee and inquired about news from

\begin{footnotes}
\item[187] \textit{Enquirer} (Richmond) 12 February 1864.
\item[188] \textit{Whig} (Richmond) 15 February 1864.
\end{footnotes}
Richmond, at which point the Federal runaway leveled the musket at the innocent bystander. Confederate soldiers witnessed the affair, unbeknownst to the Union man, and the stealthy Southern soldiers followed the fugitive as he marched on, and eventually overtook and recaptured the escapee. Similarly, the Richmond *Examiner* printed an account of bumbling Union escapees who attempted to make their getaway by boat on the James River. The clueless Union men lost their way in the dark and accidentally grounded their boat near Appomattox. At this point, the men surrendered themselves to Confederate troops in the vicinity thus giving in to hunger, exhaustion, and cold.

These stories hint that Southerners believed that Yankees lacked the common sense necessary to successfully complete their escape. Southern journalists demonstrated Confederate civilians’ superiority in wit, patriotism, and endurance through their recapture stories. Confederate journalists asserted its soldiers and civilians’ superiority over the rebellious Federals in print. Libby Prison’s guards, on the other hand, had to reassert their authority over the inmates by instituting numerous, excruciatingly mundane, forms of punishment. Prison guards responded to civilian demands for tighter security at Libby by installing a system of ropes and pulleys at the staircases which prison officials controlled in order to ensure Federal captives confinement to Libby’s upper two rooms.

A few Federal inmates suffered death or injury at the hands of anxious Southern guards in the escape’s aftermath. Confederate guards feared that Federal inmates would

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189 Ibid.
190 *Examiner* (Richmond) 13 February 1864.
make more escape attempts and eagerly followed through on their orders to fire at
Yankees who neared the prison’s windows. Emeric Szabad recalled that Winder ordered
Confederate soldiers to place iron bars over the windows and prohibited inmates from
looking out. Szabad’s account suggests that Southern guards took pleasure in
reprimanding Union prisoners with gunfire since he recalled how Libby’s guards,
“according to orders, which they rather like to obey, will fire at you when you least
expect it. The other day, one of the prisoners standing in the sink, and not at all intending
to look out, had his ear grazed by a bullet.”  

Anxious Confederate guards often interpreted any motion near windows as
threatening. J. W. Chamberlain commented on guards’ redoubled vigilance and noted
that, “we hardly dared look out the window for fear of being shot at.” Similarly,
another Union inmate recalled how a Confederate guard shot an innocent fellow prisoner
in the head while the man read the paper ten feet inside of the window. The Federal
storyteller dubbed the shooting, “unprovoked and wanton murder” and expressed disgust
at how the “cowardly miscreant” guard, “fired the shot while he was off duty, and from
the north sidewalk of Cary Street. The guards used to gun for prisoners’ heads from their
posts below pretty much after the fashion of boys after squirrels.”

194 The author of this piece is Confederate soldier, James M. Germond of the 18th Virginia Heavy Artillery. In his article, “Shooting into Libby Prison: A Denial by One of the Guard,” Germond refutes the Union soldier’s account quoted in the text. Germond asserts that fellow Confederate soldier, Charles Weber, accidentally shot Captain Forsythe of the 10th Ohio regiment when Weber’s hammer slipped on his gun causing the weapon to discharge on the cold February morning. Germond assures the reader that Weber took blame for his carelessness. For a complete account of this situation, see James M. Germond. “Shooting into Libby Prison: A Denial by One of the Guard.” In *The Century* Vol. 39, Issue 1 (Nov. 1889). [compilation online]; available from [http://www.mdgorm.com/Prisons/century_Nov_1889.htm](http://www.mdgorm.com/Prisons/century_Nov_1889.htm); Internet; accessed 9 March 2006.
Sporadic gunfire frightened Union inmates at Libby, however, Confederate guards systematically interrupted inmates’ daily lives as punishment, thus increasing the unbearable nature of the Federals’ prison experience. Frederic Cavada, Frederick Bartleson, and J. W. Chamberlain expressed angst at the fact that Turner’s new security measures caused Southern guards to intrude on inmates at inconvenient times. Cavada recalled that Turner subjected inmates at all hours of the night to, “an endless ordeal of roll calls,” while Chamberlain lamented that it was, “nothing strange to have roll call by name, which was a very slow and tedious affair, occupying several hours.”195 Similarly, Bartleson griped on February 17, 1864 that, “The guards last night and tonight are visiting the prison every hour and examining the bars of the windows and walking through the rows of sleeping officers.”196 Prisoners disdained guards’ behavior because it undermined what autonomy Union inmates had inside Libby’s walls. Federal inmates were accustomed to Confederate guards patrolling the prison from outside not invading their personal quarters. Union inmates presumably found the inevitability of sporadic roll calls and Southern guards patrolling inside Federal space more difficult to bear than guards randomly shooting inmates. Southern guards’ new security measures inside the prison served as both punishment for escapees’ insubordination and helped quell thoughts of attempting escape.197


196 Cavada, Libby Life, 174 and Bartleson, Letters from Libby Prison, 45,

197 Here I am invoking Foucault’s assertion that punishment’s effectiveness results from its inevitability, not from its visible intensity, and that security measures are intended not to punish the offence, but to supervise the individual, to neutralize his dangerous state of mind, to alter his criminal tendencies, and to continue even when this change has been achieved. See, Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 9 and 18.
Despite the Confederates’ reassertion of control, Union inmates still defiantly mocked Southern authority in their writing and waited for an opportunity to undermine Confederate power. Confederate security measures continued into March of 1864 and Union inmates ridiculed their practice. Turner and his guards continued their rigorous inspections of the prisoners’ quarters at two-hour intervals into March. This practice undoubtedly irritated Cavada, who satirized, “when our distracted little Commandant now comes into our rooms, he keeps his knees well together,—it is necessary to be very cautious,—some of us might slip out between his legs!”

Although Turner successfully controlled Union inmates’ ability to flee following the tunnel escape, his security measures did not relieve his feeling that the threat of escape remained. In early March of 1864, Federal cavalry capitalized on Turner’s fear and drove him to desperate measures to prevent prisoners’ rebellious activity.

Yankee inmates at Libby Prison and Belle Isle deplored the steadily declining condition of their captivity. Unionist Elizabeth Van Lew was well aware of the prisoners’ plight and dedicated herself to ensuring that the Union Army officials heard of Richmond’s atrocious prison conditions and took action to liberate Union captives. Van Lew wrote a letter to Union General Benjamin Butler around the time of the tunnel escape advising him of Confederate authorities’ intention to remove Richmond’s prisoners of war to Georgia on account of the city’s degraded conditions. Van Lew feared the harsh repercussions that Union inmates would suffer from this decision and urged Butler to raid Richmond with no less than 30,000 cavalry with the support of 10,000-15,000 infantrymen in order to free the prisoners before their forced evacuation.

198 Cavada, Libby Life, 192.
Butler agreed with Van Lew’s concerns and petitioned Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and President Lincoln for approval. Lincoln frequently received reports of atrocious prison conditions in Richmond from various information channels, letters from prisoners of war protesting their condition, and, more recently, Lincoln heard personal accounts from Libby’s recent escapees detailing the horrors of the prison.

Lincoln readily assented to the liberation plot and summoned Brigadier General Judson Kilpatrick to discuss the practicality of conducting such a raid. Kilpatrick reported from reliable sources that the Confederates guarded Richmond with a mere 3,000 local militia and some field batteries. The only other defense the city had was the presence of no more that 1,500 Confederate cavalry stationed between Fredericksburg and Richmond.

Major General George G. Meade, Commander of the Army of the Potomac, felt that Richmond’s defenseless circumstances warranted, “a rapid and secret movement [so] that Richmond might be carried by a coup de main, and our prisoners released before reinforcements from either Petersburg or Lee’s Army could reach there.” The raid commenced on February 28, however, Confederate troops quickly thwarted the attempt by March 4 and killed Colonel Ulrich Dahlgren.

The raid’s execution frightened Richmond civilians and Libby Prison guards to a considerable extent. Frederick Bartleson’s diary entry of February 27 indicates the beginning of Confederate guards’ fear of Kilpatrick’s impending advance. Bartleson


202 Ibid.
noted that prison guards summoned Union inmates not for routine roll call in the morning, but for an unusual search for concealed weapons. Bartleson recalled that the five-hour search left all inmates without “all large knives, files, saws, hatchets, etc.”203 Cavada similarly noted how prisoners suspected Union military activity nearing Richmond since they could not obtain the daily papers and witnessed Confederate soldiers and home guard members march to the battlefront past Libby’s windows. Cavada further noted that Confederate authorities raised the stairs from prisoners’ quarters to the first floor, stationed an armed guard at the staircase’s opening, and reiterated the order for sentries to shoot anyone who touched the prison bars or approached the windows. Cavada recalled that prisoners questioned the impetus for these measures until inmates learned “through some of the Negroes who swept the prison, that General Kilpatrick, with a brigade of cavalry, was within a few miles of Richmond, [accordingly] the true cause of these startling preventive measures was at once apparent to us.”204

Neal Dow’s March 1 diary entry and Frederick Bartleson’s recordings of March 1 and 2, 1864 confirm the fact that the Union cavalry threat disquieted Confederate guards and caused them to fire their weapons in defense as a first resort. Dow recalled how the strict window directive and guards’ anxiety hurt the Confederate authorities before Union inmates since, as Dow recalled, “The order about shooting has borne first fruit! One of the Rebels put his head out of a window, and the guards shot him by mistake for one of

203 Bartleson, Letters from Libby Prison, 52-53.

204 Cavada, Libby Life, 194-195.
This mishap presumably occurred as a direct result of the fact that March 1 saw, in Bartleson’s words, “great excitement in the city, and that Kilpatrick [was] within six miles.” These facts led to Confederate authorities’ reiterating the order on March 2 that warned inmates that Confederate guards would shoot them if they neared Libby’s windows. This order, according to Bartleson, “indicated to us [inmates] that, for some reason or other, unusual vigilance was to be exercised.”

Confederate authorities indeed exercised unusual vigilance by sporadically firing bullets into allegedly innocent captives and simultaneously threatened all inmates’ lives with gunpowder. Neal Dow’s diary provides testimony to the fact that Confederate guards’ anxiety remained in the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid’s aftermath. On March 5, Dow noted that Confederate guards shot Lieutenant Hammond of Western Virginia in the ear when his back was to the window. Southern guards shooting innocent inmates caused Dow to chide Confederate authorities for “being mad with rage” and failing to see that, “they are converting all Federal officers into relentless personal enemies. I have seen sentinels at the building opposite, looking eagerly up at the windows in the hope to get a shot at a soldier.”

Dow’s diary entry for March 6 also reveals the personal animosity that Union men harbored for Major Thomas Turner. In this instance, Turner harshly reprimanded a

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205 Byrne, “General Behind Bars,” 74.

206 Both quotations found in Bartleson, Letters from Libby Prison, 75. Bartleson further notes that Confederate guards at Castle Thunder also became trigger happy on account of Kilpatrick’s presence. On March 2 Bartleson noted that a Confederate detective went into Castle Thunder to investigate an instance of a Union prisoner throwing bread at a Southern guard. After the detective finished his investigation, he stuck his head out of a window to report to the Southern guards, at which point an anxious guard mistook the detective for a Union man, shot, and presumably killed him.

207 Byrne, “General Behind Bars,” 75.
Confederate guard for failing to do his duty and shoot a Union man who defiantly looked through the iron bars on Libby’s windows. Dow recalled how the insubordinate guard defiantly stated that he “shall do no such work as that,” handed Turner his gun, and challenged Turner to kill the Union offender. Turner’s malicious attitude evidences the tense relationship between guards and inmates at Libby and speaks to General Winder’s drastic decision to mine Libby Prison out of fear that the Union cavalry raid would succeed.

Circumstances in Richmond in early March of 1864 undoubtedly caused Confederate guards to feel a loss of control over Libby inmates. As Kilpatrick and Dahlgren’s men approached the city, visions of escape or a general prisoner uprising haunted General Winder and Libby’s guards. As Union cavalry got within five or six miles of Richmond, Confederate authorities feared, and Neal Dow later confirmed, that Federal inmates might be signaling to Union sympathizers in Richmond and that these men might revolt in support of the Union raiders. As a result, Confederate officials reasserted their authority by instituting a policy of terror, which entailed a punishment that far outstripped the severity of inmates’ potential crimes, and raised Union inmates’ awareness of Confederate officials’ sovereignty. Specifically, Winder liberally exercised his order from Confederate Secretary of War, Judah P. Benjamin, to prevent

208 Ibid., 76.

209 Ibid., 73. Particularly, see footnote number 46.

210 In this instance I am invoking Foucault’s discussion of torture to describe the mental torture that the Confederate mine caused Union inmates to experience as they debated the mine’s existence. Foucault contends that what maintains the practice of torture sometimes is, “not an economy of example, in the sense in which it was to be understood at the time of the ideologues (that the representation of the penalty should be greater than the interest of the crime), but a policy of terror: to make everyone aware...of the unrestrained presence of the sovereign. The public execution [in this case, potential mass execution] did not re-establish justice; it reactivated power. See Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 49.
Union escape attempts by mining Libby Prison, filling the hole with a massive amount of gunpowder, and threatening to blow up the prison if inmates attempted to escape.\textsuperscript{211}

Union inmates J. W. Chamberlain, Frederick Bartleson, Neal Dow, and Frederic Cavada remained skeptical of the Confederate threat at first. However, different sources later confirmed each man’s worst fears that Southern officials accessed the space that Union inmates utilized just a month earlier to gain freedom and used this space to threaten Federal lives. Chamberlain recalled that one of Libby’s officials “very coolly informed of the prisoners that 1,000 pounds of gunpowder had been placed under Libby, and in case any attempt was made to break out, the prison would be blown up” once word of the Union cavalry threat reached Southern officials.\textsuperscript{212} One of the Negroes who swept Libby Prison relayed similar information to Bartleson, who questioned the mine’s motives. The prison worker informed Bartleson that Confederate authorities dug into the ground room and under the cook room on March 1 and suggested that guards placed 1,000 pounds of gunpowder there. Bartleson acknowledged that Confederate authorities recently engaged in suspicious activity, and nervously speculated:

\begin{quote}
\ldots whether it is merely designed to hold it over us as a rod of terror, or whether they have deposited it there as a place of safe deposit, or whether it be designed to blow us up rather than allow us to be released by our forces, we are left to conjecture. It is incredible that men could resort to such a desperate measure. The steps having been taken away from the dining room leaves us in a terrible condition in the event of a fire breaking out. Hundreds will be killed in a rush and by precipitating one another upon the floor below. So it may be imagined that our condition here is far from being enviable.\textsuperscript{213}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{211} Benjamin did not condone mining Libby Prison, but Winder felt that Benjamin’s orders to prevent escape under any circumstances justified the mine. For Winder’s orders, see Jones, Rebel War Clerk’s Diary, 164.

\textsuperscript{212} Chamberlain, “Scenes in Libby Prison,” 364.

\textsuperscript{213} Bartleson, Letters from Libby Prison, 76.
Dow heard word of the mine from a reliable source that presumably would have quelled Bartleson’s skepticism and heightened his fear regarding the mine. Dow reported that the Reverend William A. Smith of Randolph Macon College visited Libby after speaking with Confederate Agent of Exchange, Robert Ould. Smith reported to the prisoners that they were “sleeping on a volcano” and that Confederate authorities could “blow you to atoms” if they chose.214 Despite reliable information regarding the mine, not all of Libby’s inmates knew of the impending threat at the time of the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid.

Cavada’s experience gives testimony to the fact that Confederate authorities successfully kept some inmates ignorant or skeptical of the mine’s presence until after the raid’s failure, a technique that undoubtedly raised the ire of many inmates and simultaneously elicited fear of Confederate authorities. Cavada noted that Richmond papers confirmed the mine’s existence by reporting “that measures ‘not necessary to mention at present’ had been taken by Major Turner to thwart the proposed liberation of the officers in the Libby Prison, by General Kilpatrick, in case of his capturing the capital. Indeed, some of the prison officials, after the retreat of the raiders, made no secret of it.”215 This late information presumably served as a reminder to inmates that Confederate authorities ultimately controlled their fate.

214 Byrne, “General Behind Bars,” 75.
215 Cavada, Libby Life, 196.
Union inmates definitely opposed the mine’s existence and undoubtedly professed disappointment at the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid’s failure. Richmond civilians, on the other hand, exhibited mixed feelings regarding the mine, utterly feared the raid’s repercussions in the aftermath of its failure, and desired harsh physical punishment for Dahlgren’s captured raiders. Confederate War Clerk, John B. Jones, downplayed the Union cavalry threat since he felt that Richmond could “in a few hours, muster enough men to defend the city against 25,000.” Accordingly, Jones disagreed with Winder’s decision to mine Libby Prison, not only because he denied the raiders’ imminent threat, but also because he deemed the secretive act a violation of prisoners’ rights. Jones recalled that he did not know if Libby’s officials informed inmates of the mine, and he argued with Winder over the matter stating that, “I told Capt. Winder it could not be justifiable to spring such a mine in the absence of [inmates’] knowledge of the fate awaiting them, in the event of their attempt to break out, because such persons are not to be condemned for striving to regain their liberty. Indeed, it is the duty of a prisoner of war to escape if he can.” Jones’s reflections confirm that able prisoners’ natural reaction to their captivity is to attempt to defy their subordination and return to the familiar state of freedom.

216 Frederick Bartleson, for one, was disgruntled by the Richmond newspapers’ reports of the Union cavalry’s failure. Bartleson complained in his March 4 diary entry that, “If no more has been done that the Richmond papers admit, this thing has proved a dead failure. If it was intended as a release of the prisoners here, it was not carried on with enough fight; as it would seem that our force did not engage in any very serious encounter, and appeared to be scouting about more than anything else. It is about time that the blathering simpletons who talk about taking Richmond with cavalry, and who then think they enhance their reputations for sagacity and boldness, ceased imposing upon the authorities at Washington. But it is too soon to form an opinion as to their affair. We must learn our own version before we can decide.” See, Bartleson, Letters from Libby Prison, 77.

217 Quotes in this paragraph are respectively found in Jones, Rebel War Clerk’s Diary, 162 and 164.
The majority of Richmond’s citizens, however, did not agree with prisoners’ alleged right to escape, especially since prisoners’ freedom would endanger the lives of innocent civilians, particularly women and children.218 Southerners justified Winder’s decision to mine Libby in the raid’s aftermath and vociferously argued that the action was humanitarian and appropriately preventative. Richmonders felt that the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid posed an imminent threat to Richmond and its civilians since the Union raiders aimed to burn buildings, murder President Davis and members of Congress, release and arm prisoners, and subject the city and innocent women and children to indiscriminate pillage, rape, and slaughter. The fact that Libby officials discovered concealed weapons on prisoners on February 27 proved prisoners’ intended involvement in the malicious plot. Accordingly, Southern investigators into the incident felt that inmates should suffer as a whole, not on an individual scale, for the crime if any one of them attempted escape. Thus, Southerners contended that:

the means adopted were those of humanity and prevention rather than execution. The Confederate authorities felt able to meet and repulse Dahlgren and his raiders if they could prevent escape of the prisoners. The real object was to save their lives and those of our citizens. The guard force at the prison was small, and all the local troops in and around Richmond were needed to meet the threatened attack…. The conscience of the enlightened world and the great law of self-preservation will justify all that was done by our country and her officers.219

The aforementioned Southern sentiments speak to the fact that the raid’s threat undoubtedly inspired immediate fear among Richmond’s civilians since the escape of

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218 Unsurprisingly, Elizabeth Van Lew disagreed on moral grounds with Winder’s decision to mine Libby prison and provocatively suggested that the mine’s explosion would have turned Richmond civilians against their own government. Van Lew wrote, “The people, who could put powder under a building filled with helpless prisoners, with the intention of launching them into eternity in certain contingencies, in a part of the city too thickly populated at the time, would scarcely scruple to manufacture mental power from the pocket of a dead prisoner to inflame their own people.” See, Ryan, ed., A Yankee Spy in Richmond, 73.

219 Information in this paragraph and quotation drawn from O.R. Series II, Vol. 8, 343-344.
thousands of Union prisoners of war in support of Union cavalry would have
overpowered the city’s defenses. However, the above passage, when taken into
consideration with Jones’s lack of concern, hints that a number of Southerners tended to
minimize the raid’s immediate threat, overexaggerate its destructive potential, and
boastfully emphasize Richmond’s military strength in the aftermath of its failure.

Southern civilians’ and guards’ fears transformed into anger in the midst of the
Union failure once Confederate authorities discovered Colonel Dahlgren’s controversial
orders. After Confederate troops killed Dahlgren, they recovered orders to his men
which stated the intention to release Richmond’s prisoners, from Belle Isle first, then
proceed into Richmond, “destroying the bridges after us and exhorting the released
prisoners to destroy and burn the hateful city; and do not allow the rebel leader Davis and
his traitorous crew to escape.” Dahlgren further instructed his men to burn everything of
use to the Rebels including mills, Richmond’s canal, and boats. Dahlgren continued, “the
bridges once secured and the prisoners loose and over the river, the bridges will be
secured and the city destroyed… and Jeff Davis and his cabinet killed.”

Dahlgren’s orders inspired debate between Union and Confederate officials
regarding their authenticity. Kilpatrick and Meade denied not only granting Dahlgren
approval to burn Richmond and kill Davis and his cabinet, but also the fact that Dahlgren
announced such orders to his raiders. Similarly, Captain John Mitchell of the 2nd New

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York Cavalry who rode with Dahlgren, alleged that Dahlgren did not publish these directives to his men.\textsuperscript{221} Regardless of Union officials’ denial and denunciation of Dahlgren’s orders, the Richmond \textit{Sentinel}, \textit{Whig}, and \textit{Enquirer} printed Dahlgren’s recovered orders verbatim and accordingly inspired civilians’ anger and anxiety.\textsuperscript{222} Richmond civilian Sallie Putnam recalled that the Union raid was so unexpected and ended so quickly that many civilians “were scarcely aware of our danger until it was over.” Putnam wrote that she was unsurprised to hear that the enemy denounced Dahlgren’s papers as forgery and fearfully noted that, “what might have been was so terrible to reflect upon that it awakened grateful prayers to a merciful and protecting Providence,” and angrily, yet boastfully, commented on, “the ease with which the invading force was scattered and repulsed, the signal failure of every part of the combination, give evidence to the cowardly fear which must always possess those whose purposes are guilty, and the strength which nerves the arm when the design is founded in right.”\textsuperscript{223} Putnam’s writing lends the South an air of moral, and therefore, military superiority in defeating malicious purposes and defending the South’s honorable cause.

Richmond’s newspapers similarly emphasized the catastrophic nature of Dahlgren’s failure and became a public forum for the issue of how to treat the horde of captured Union demons that followed Dahlgren. On March 8, the \textit{Enquirer} emphasized the Union’s acknowledgement of its own military frustrations by printing an account

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid. See Judson Kilpatrick to F. C. Newhall 16 March 1864, 176; General George Meade to General Robert E. Lee 17 April 1864, 180; and Report of Captain John F. B. Mitchell 15 March 1864, 197.

\textsuperscript{222} For a reprint of Dahlgren’s orders, see \textit{Sentinel} (Richmond) 5 March 1864, \textit{Whig} (Richmond) 5 March 1864, and \textit{Enquirer} (Richmond) 8 March 1864.

\textsuperscript{223} For Putnam’s quotations, see Putnam, \textit{In Richmond During the Confederacy}, 283.
from the New York *Herald* of the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid’s failure and botched attempt to liberate Richmond’s prisoners. The *Herald* journalist found it irritating that Richmond, “has so many times been just within our reach, and slipped from us like the fruits that vexed the soul of Tantalus,” despite the fact that Southern forces “feebly defended” the city. The March 16, 1864 *Sentinel* capitalized on Union misery and Southern superiority by depicting the raid as so “absurd in conception” and “contemptible in execution,” that it was unimaginable that Kilpatrick actually thought it would succeed. The paper further stated that Dahlgren’s orders “prepared his men for desperate endeavors” which ultimately left the men thoroughly whipped and Dahlgren killed. Finally, the *Sentinel*’s journalist emphasized that the Union raiders “failed in every purpose” and stated that, “their cowardice was, indeed, their protection, and was lucky for them; for it kept us from getting a grip on them, which we would have done had they stood a little better.”

The Richmond press thoroughly degraded the Union raiders and cast them as immoral, vicious heathens who intended nothing but harm for Richmond’s civilians. The Richmond *Sentinel* feared the disaster that Union prisoners would have caused in the city if the raiders successfully released them. The paper opined that “murder, arson, rape, and robbery” would have been rampant, and accordingly held Lincoln and his officers “morally… guilty of crime.” Most poignantly, perhaps, the journalist overemphasized the raid’s failure by depicting the thwarted attempt as a Union declaration of war on its own men. The *Sentinel* stated that the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid was, “war against women

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224 *Enquirer* (Richmond) 8 March 1864.
225 *Sentinel* (Richmond) 16 March 1864.
and children and against those very Yankee prisoners concerning whose rations they affect so much hypocritical concern.”

The failed raid indeed left Richmond’s prisoners stranded in undesirable conditions and elicited debate about what to do with the captured raiders who rode with Dahlgren. Confederate officials jailed Dahlgren’s raiders in Libby Prison while they debated the captured men’s fate. Frederick Bartleson recalled the arrival of the first wave of captured raiders and his account reveals that the men’s presence made Richmond’s civilians extremely nervous. Bartleson wrote on March 2 that Confederates brought about 50 Union captives to Libby and that throngs of “well-dressed-looking gentlemen, curious Negroes, staring little boys, and several well-dressed ladies” accompanied the procession. Furthermore, Bartleson stated that he, “observed too, at several times during the day, little knots of citizens viewing the prison, very earnestly engaged in conversation and pointing to the prison.”

The Union raid undoubtedly frightened Richmond’s civilians, but Dahlgren’s orders inspired a desire among Southerners to exact revenge on the Federal captives. Sallie Putnam angrily penned that Dahlgren’s documents revealed, “a plot so murderous in intention, that many persons in the Confederacy thought the prisoners taken in this adventure should not be accorded the usual privileges of prisoners of war, but should be turned over to the state authorities to be dealt with as thieves and murderers, and subjected to the unusual punishment of felons.” Putnam further cited the mining of Libby Prison as just retribution and an effective deterrent against Federal escape.

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226 Ibid., 5 March 1864.

227 Bartleson, Letters from Libby Prison, 75-76.
attempts, despite the fact that she doubted that Libby’s officials would use it.\footnote{228} Similarly, the Richmond \textit{Enquirer} advocated hanging the Union captives and argued that if, “we persist in extending to these freebooters the rights due to regular prisoners of war, we shall have to endure periodical outrages of the character lately inflicted upon us,” namely future raiders’ attempts to liberate prisoners and constant escape endeavors.\footnote{229}

By mid-March 1864, Richmond’s civilians and military officials felt that the city could no longer afford to house enemy captives for fear of what might happen to the vulnerable Confederate capital if Yankee inmates succeeded in completing a mass escape or if Union raiders liberated them. The Federal tunnel escape inaugurated the beginning of forced prisoner evacuation to Georgia. John B. Jones approved of the action and voiced optimism that the prisoner removal might relieve the city’s woes. Jones wrote on February 15 that, “we are now sending 400 Federal prisoners to Georgia daily; and I hope we shall have more food in the city when they are all gone.”\footnote{230} Civilian hope for food turned into desperation for security after the Union cavalry raid failed. Libby Prison inmate, Frank Moran, indicated civilian fear of Federal inmates at Libby and subsequently became a victim of compulsory removal to Andersonville. Following the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid, Moran recalled, “there were a number of spectacular escapes from Libby, and after the Dahlgren raid of 1864, which was designed to free the prisoners, Libby was largely abandoned in favor of prisons further to the South.”\footnote{231}

\footnote{228}Putnam, \textit{In Richmond During the Confederacy}, 282.

\footnote{229}\textit{Enquirer} (Richmond) 5 March 1864.

\footnote{230}Jones, \textit{Rebel War Clerk’s Diary}, 152.
General Winder desired to send Union inmates to Andersonville, Georgia because of its secure location, Libby’s inadequate guards, and civilian gripes about sharing Richmond’s scarce provisions with captives, at whom the civilians gazed nervously through their backyards.\(^\text{232}\)

Federal inmates abhorred their condition in Libby Prison, however, they preferred the confines of Libby to the Confederates’ decision to remove them from the warehouse. In May of 1864, Dahlgren’s former raiders tired of withstanding severe depravations, and attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to destroy the prison by fire.\(^\text{233}\) Ultimately, the Federals’ past defiance coupled with the threat of future Union raids caused Confederate officials to order the removal of all of the approximately 1,000 officers in Libby Prison to Georgia as a war measure to prevent Union troops from liberating the prisoners.\(^\text{234}\)


\(^{233}\) Parker, *Richmond’s Civil War Prisons*, 64.

\(^{234}\) Christian, *Richmond: Her Past and Present* 249.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This examination of periods in Camp Chase’s and Libby Prison’s histories reveal that the Civil War’s political currents and military operations created intimate connections on the Union and Confederate home fronts between civilians and prisoners of war, and influenced prison administration and prison reform. Many historians briefly acknowledge the interactions between prisons and home-front events, however, scholars do not provide meaningful analysis of these events and instead focus on prisoner privations, psychosis, or the failed exchange system. These interpretations, while valid, isolate prisons from the war’s larger context and fail to question how the war’s military events, political undercurrents, or civilian attitudes influence prison administration, or how the prisons’ management, prisoner activity, and prisoner of war crisis affected local climates. This examination of Camp Chase and Libby Prison clearly demonstrates how political opposition, prisoner escape attempts, and military campaigns that occurred in Columbus, Ohio in 1863 and Richmond, Virginia in 1864 encouraged prisoners to engage in rebellious behavior, which subsequently heightened prison guards’ paranoia and elicited civilian outcries for tighter control over prison operations or removal of prisoners from their backyards.
Camp Chase’s history, especially in September, November, and December 1863, clearly illustrates that the Northern home front directly affected the ideologies of Union guards and Confederate inmates. As an embodiment of the Union cause, Camp Chase became a location where the government’s opponents and proponents engaged in political battles. The dispute between State and Federal officials in the facility’s early years over where the ultimate power over Camp Chase rested led to uncertainty regarding how to deal with the multitude of Confederate captives who flooded the prison in July 1863. The Peace Democrat movement, represented most prominently by Clement Vallandigham and the Copperhead Conspirators, blatantly questioned Union authority and opposed Federal policies. It also inspired prisoners to attempt to escape confinement. Union guards’ severe reaction to unruly Confederate activity signified that they were uncomfortable with their power being questioned and attempted to control the situation and reassert their own authority, which the Federal government backed. Home-front events that affected Camp Chase were highly politicized due to the city’s distance from the battlefront and the strong presence of Peace Democrats in Columbus, Ohio.

Conversely, Richmond’s status as the Confederate capital and position as a strategic Union military target created a situation where prisoners and civilians competed for scarce resources, and prisoners tunneled out of Libby Prison to escape their depravity. Similarly, the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren cavalry raid made Libby’s authorities fear prisoner resistance, inspired guards’ implementation of drastic disciplinary measures, and elicited civilian outrage, mockery of failed prisoner escape plots, and cries for prisoners’ removal from Richmond.
Libby Prison provides a unique opportunity to examine how civilians interacted with the prison in the Confederate capital. Richmond’s civilians were accustomed to threatened Union raids, however, natives of the Confederate capital never approved of Union prisoners’ presence in their backyard and feared the possibility of the chaos and destruction that would occur if a raiding party succeeded at liberating the inmates. In 1864, Richmond civilians suffered from the Confederacy’s lack of resources and knew that the Southern army was incapable of defending the city from any formidable Union attack because of the fact that old men, young boys, or men ineligible for regular Army service composed the home guard and guarded the prisons. Therefore, Richmond civilians took pleasure in exaggerating failed prisoner escape attempts and the thwarted Union cavalry raid of March 1864 in an attempt to prove the South’s capability of defending the capital. Richmond’s civilians, particularly newspaper editors, made a mockery of the tunnel escape and the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid’s failure despite the city’s obvious internal decline and military vulnerability. Ultimately, Turner’s decision to mine Libby Prison and civilian calls for the prisoners’ removal from Richmond underscore Southern authorities and civilians’ fear of the threat that Union prisoners posed to Richmond’s security. These factors further reveal that home-front events caused Confederate officials to take direct action to quell prisoners’ attempts at rebellion and compensate for inadequate manpower.

This examination of Camp Chase’s and Libby Prison’s history points to a number of larger questions for further inquiry. Because of the lack of Confederate inmates’ writings in the case of Camp Chase, the question of how Rebel prisoners viewed their resistance remains open. Did they see escape attempts as a means of fighting Federal
authority in relation to the cause for which they enlisted, or did their imprisonment make their struggle simply a quest for personal liberation? The Copperhead Conspiracy certainly challenged Union authority and encouraged prisoners to disrupt the balance of power in the prison camp. However, direct Confederate insights on this matter and other escape attempts are lacking.

Similarly, the lack of accounts from Confederate guards at Libby Prison creates a void in the research on the prison. Questions remain regarding how military and civilian guards at Libby viewed their assigned post and inmates’ allegations of suffering. Additionally, questions remain open pertaining to guards’ knowledge of the tunnel’s excavation, and how guards interpreted their orders and responded to heightened tensions that the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid created between inmates and guards. The tunnel escape and Union cavalry raid led to a number of Union inmates’ deaths or injuries and inspired authorities to mine Libby Prison to elicit inmates’ compliance and compensate for the dwindling number of guards, however, a well-rounded portrait of the prison’s atmosphere remains incomplete without guards’ perceptions.

Finally, Camp Chase’s and Libby Prison’s stories demonstrates how their respective locations in Columbus, Ohio and Richmond, Virginia affected prisoner activity and prison reform. The question remains, however, if this relationship is true at other Northern and Southern prison camps. Since the war affected Northern and Southern cities by direct battlefield conflict, opposition, and/or support of the Union and Confederate causes, or both, it is likely that events on the respective home fronts influenced operations at other prisons. While this examination of Camp Chase and Libby Prison leaves these issues open to question, it clearly illustrates that power over a prison
camp is negotiable, and that prisoners jockey with prison guards for power by resisting their subordinate position, instilling insecurity in prison guards through resistance, and attempting to win back their liberty.
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