"IF THIS WAR DOES NOT MAKE A MAN OF ME NOTHING WILL": THE LETTERS OF GEORGE F. RUNYON, CONFEDERATE PRISONER OF WAR

Julie Doyle and John David Smith

Thousands of men lived in military prison camps during the Civil War. While conditions varied from prison to prison, soldiers from both sides of the Mason-Dixon line endured high rates of illness and death almost comparable to the most heinous battlefield conditions. Problems of sanitation, overcrowding, and inadequate provisions for food and shelter generally characterized the Civil War prison-camp experience. In addition to physical deprivation, captive Union and Confederate soldiers experienced isolation from family and friends that generated as much distress as the physical discomforts of prison life.[1]

The letters of Kentuckian George F. Runyon, a Confederate private and prisoner at Chicago's Camp Douglas for eighteen months, provide an insightful, personal view of life within a military prison. Writing to his family in Mason County, Kentucky, Runyon described camp

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1 Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Their Experiences* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988), 44. On Civil War prisons, see William B. Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1930); Hattie Lou Winslow and Joseph R. H. Moore, *Camp Morton, 1861-1865, Indianapolis Prison Camp* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1940); William B. Hesseltine, ed., *Civil War Prisons* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1962); and Philip Raymond Shriver, *Ohio's Military Prisons in the Civil War* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press for the Ohio Historical Society, 1964). The most thorough recent study of a Civil War prison is William Marvel, *Andersonville: The Last Depot* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

conditions and related both his primary concerns as a captured soldier and his uncertainty about the future. Runyon's letters yield vital, firsthand information about the military-prison experience in the Civil War.

Born in Mayslick, Kentucky, in 1842, Runyon enlisted in Company F, 2nd Regiment Kentucky (Confederate) Cavalry on 9 September 1862. This regiment, which later became the 3rd Kentucky Cavalry, served under the command of the legendary General John Hunt Morgan and participated in successful raids through Kentucky and middle Tennessee in 1862 and 1863. According to historian James A. Ramage, the 2nd Kentucky, Morgan's first regiment, always remained "his favorite." It played a prominent role in Morgan's famous June-July 1863 raid into Indiana and Ohio. On 5 July 1863, while the bulk of Morgan's men established a skirmish line on the outskirts of Lebanon, Kentucky, Runyon and other troopers engaged the enemy at tiny Woodburn, a crossing of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad southwest of Glasgow, Kentucky. During that fight, Union cavalrymen captured four Confederate troopers, including Runyon. Detained briefly at a military prison in Louisville, Runyon spent a short time at Camp Morton in Indianapolis, a federal prison camp located at the state fairgrounds. Transferred to Camp Douglas, on Chicago's south side, in August 1863, Runyon remained there until his removal to Point Lookout, Maryland, another federal prison, where he was released on 21 May 1865.[2]

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2 U. S. War Department, George F. Runyon Compiled Military Service Record, Record Group 109, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D. C. (hereafter Runyon Compiled Military Service Record); James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 514; James A. Ramage, *Rebel Raider: The Life of General John Hunt Morgan* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 151, 164; *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (New York: Arno Press, Inc., and Crown Publishers, 1978; originally published in 1891), Plate CXXXV-A; *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, (128 vols; Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Ser. I, Vol. XXIII, pp. 820-21.

Erected in September, 1861, Camp Douglas served initially as a mobilization and rendezvous camp for Illinois volunteers. Senator Stephen A. Douglas, who died in 1861, donated forty-two acres for the camp, which was located on Chicago's outskirts, near Lake Michigan on prairie lands north of the original University of Chicago grounds, between Cottage Grove Avenue and Forest Avenue. Approximately 25,000 Union troops received their training at Camp Douglas, with the last of thirty-one volunteer units commissioned there in February 1862. A month after the fall of Fort Donelson (15 February 1862), Camp Douglas was converted into a military stockade, and the prison received its first Confederate inmates a month later. Over the course of the war, the prison had several commandants: Colonel Joseph H. Tucker, Colonel James A. Mulligan, Colonel Daniel Cameron, General Joseph Ammen, Captain John C. Phillips, Captain J. S. Putnam, Colonel Charles V. De Land, General William W. Orme, and Colonel Benjamin J. Sweet. The prison eventually housed over 30,000 captured soldiers. It gained national attention in November 1864 when a handful of men were charged with conspiring to free Confederate prisoners, incite a rebellion in Chicago, and establish a "Northwest Confederacy." The modern student of the "Camp Douglas Conspiracy," historian Frank L. Klement, concludes that the plot was "a fantasy passed off as fact, a travesty of justice, a political stratagem made respectable by historians."[3]

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3 William Bross, "History of Camp Douglas" (paper read before the Chicago Historical Society, 18 June 1878) in Mabel McIlvaine, ed., *Reminiscences of Chicago During the Civil War* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley and Sons, 1914), 161-194; John M. Copley, *A Sketch of the Battle of Franklin, Tenn., with Reminiscences of Camp Douglas* (Austin, 1893); Lewis B. Clingman, "History of Camp Douglas" (MA thesis, De Paul University, 1942); Joseph L. Eisendrath, Jr., "Chicago's Camp Douglas, 1861-1865," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 53 (1964): 37-63; E. B. Long, "Camp Douglas: 'A Hellish Den?'" *Chicago History* 1 (1970): 83-95; George Levy, *To Die in Chicago: Confederate Prisoners at Camp Douglas, 1862-1865* (Evanston: Evanston Publishers, 1994), 4; Arthur Charles Cole, *The Era of the Civil War, 1848-1870* (Springfield, 1919), 310-11; Frank L. Klement, *The Limits of Dissent: Clement L. Vallandigham & the Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970), 271n; and *Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and*

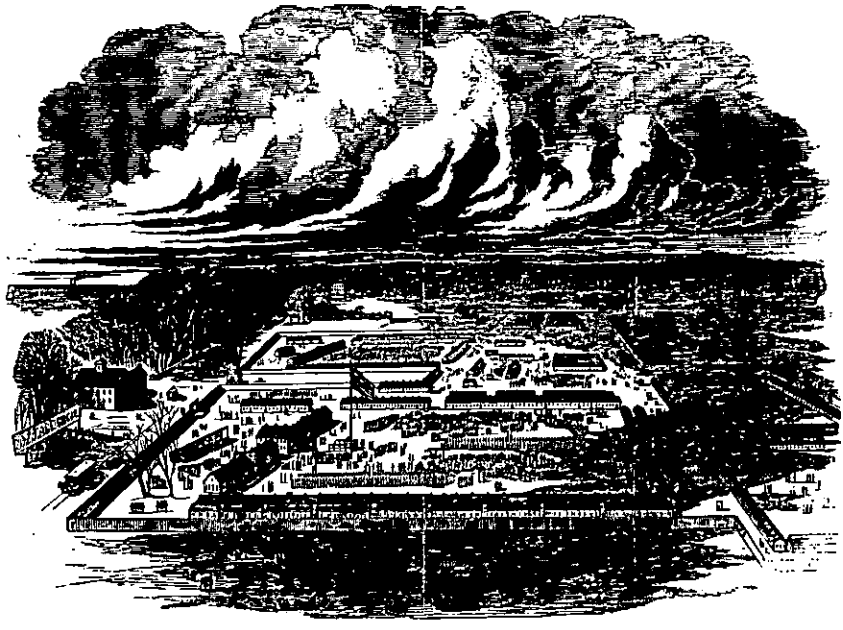
Camp Douglas's prisoners were incarcerated in single-story, elevated, wooden-slab barracks, approximately ninety by twenty-four feet, mounted on four-foot posts. Each building contained a kitchen and enough three-tiered bunks for between 125 and 150 men. The camp included a hospital, parade ground, officers' quarters, and observation and watch towers across from the main gate. Enclosed by a fourteen-foot-high board fence, thirty sentries routinely patrolled the grounds. Though seemingly commodious and comfortable by dingy Civil War prison standards, life nevertheless was dreary in any military prison, including Camp Douglas. Significantly, the prison served as a major source of recruits for those six thousand "Galvanized Yankees"—Confederate prisoners who gained their freedom by joining the Union Army and serving in frontier posts in the West. In fact, six of the ten companies of the 6th United States Volunteers—the last of the regiments of "Galvanized Yankees"—were recruited from Camp Douglas's prison pens.[4]

Confederate prisoners like George Runyon, however, who elected not to join the U. S. Army in exchange for freedom, awaited the outcome of the war in Chicago. They had only themselves and their guards for company. Visitors were usually limited to relatives of the seriously ill. As a result, mail was a highly prized commodity. Even letters, however, were censored and restricted, as Runyon indicates in his correspondence. Nonetheless, his letters still manage to depict some of the physical hardships and psychological challenges typical of conditions in Civil War prisons. Writing to his mother, Mary G. Runyon, and his brother, David Runyon, in Mason County, Runyon communicates his thoughts about Camp Douglas, imprisonment, and the meaning of the war on his present and future.[5]

Treason Trials in the Civil War (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 217.

4 Eisendrath, "Chicago's Camp Douglas, 1861-1865, "pp. 37-41; Dee Brown, *The Galvanized Yankees* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 1-2, 143, 147.

5 Eisendrath, "Chicago's Camp Douglas, 1861-1865, " p. 45.

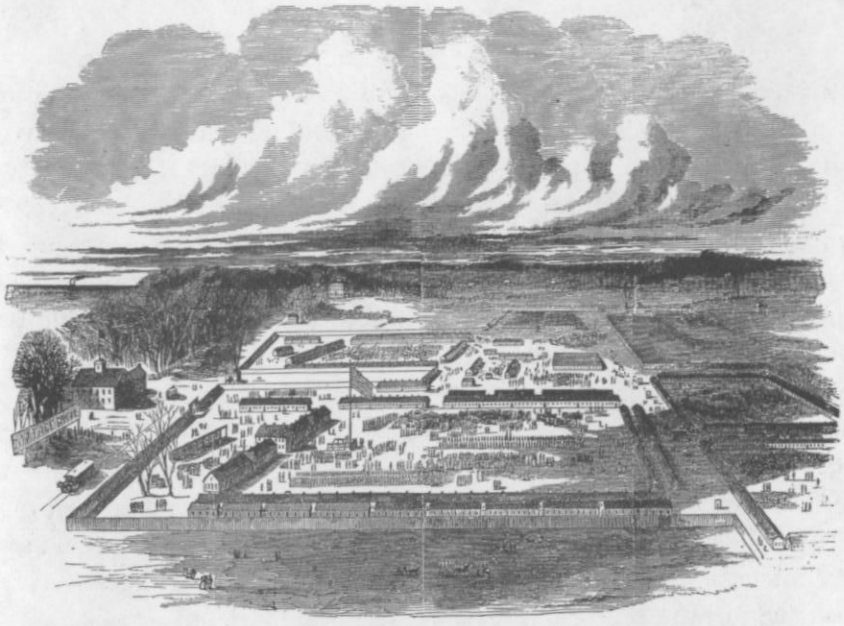


A View of Camp Douglas from Harper's Weekly
Special Collections Library, Duke University

This article publishes George Runyon's letters from Camp Douglas in "near literal" editorial form. In order to retain the intellectual integrity and flavor of Runyon's original prose, including his spelling and abbreviations, these letters appear with few emendations. Most spelling errors have been retained. For clarity's sake, however, some incorrectly spelled words appear in square brackets following the original spelling. A few letters, words, and phrases have also been inserted in square brackets. First letters of sentences have been capitalized. Periods and commas have been added when necessary for clarity. Otherwise, the letters appear exactly as Runyon composed them. They appear here with the kind permission of Mrs. J. Ed Parker III of Lexington, Kentucky.

Camp Morton, Ind. August 10 '63
Dear Mother:

I recved your kind and wellcome letter last week but could not answer it on the account of not having paper and stamps. I am very



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Camp Morton, Ind. August 10 '63
Dear Mother:

I recved your kind and wellcome letter last week but could not answer it on the account of not having paper and stamps. I am very

well at present but had a severe cold which I have gotten over. I slep one month with no blanket over or under me. The ten months that I spent in active service did not seeme as long as this one month that I've spent in prison. I was in prison one month before I got a letter from any of you. Bro. Mike and Dan did not get to see me only through the crack in the fence. I got all the cloth that Gen. Burnside would allow.[6]

I have a very fine Bible which Mrs. Green sent to me wich I promise to read. I have not answered Fanny's letter yet. Ma the orders concerning letter writing will not allow me to write you a long letter. If you [send] another letter as long as the one you did write it will not be examined but torne up. You must write the length of this one. We cannot write to any body but Mother, Father, Wife, Sister or Bro. So you can tell my friend[s] that I can not write to them. The mails are so large all read[y] is the reason for such orders. Ma as much as I want to see you it is no use for I can not come home now. But through the mercies of Kind Providence I hope to be permited to return to you again. I have had better helth than usual since I've been in the [prison]. I was sick for a while in March but not long. I suppose that you herd Capt. Raggen was dead. He died from a wound in the arm which he recved at Milton. His arm was take[n] off we thought that he would get well but [he] did not. I must close my letter as it is about as long as they allow. Give my best love to aunt Peggy, Eve, Mae Smith, all of the dark[ies].

Love to aunt Syble, Mrs Scott, Miss McGee and Mrs. Frank, all of my friends. Remember me to Ruth and all of the children. Tell all my friend[s] to write. Write short letter[s]. Give my love to all of the girls. Tell them that I will write some thing for them next time.

Good by. Love to all and your self from

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6 In March 1863, General Ambrose E. Burnside, with headquarters in Cincinnati, assumed command of the Department of the Ohio, a vast area including Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, the Cumberland Gap, and all of Kentucky east of the Tennessee River. See William Marvel, *Burnside* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 222.

Your affectionate
Son

Direct your let[ters] to me
A prisoner of war
Camp Morton Ind.

Camp Douglas Ills. 27th [August] 1863
Bro. Dave:

I wrote to you as soon as I arrived here for my clothing wich I am suffering for. The weather has been unusualy cold for this month. The weather is as cold as latter part of September and October. The prison is on the Lake and the winds whistle through the camp all the time.

I want another blanket. I would have written before for one but expected that they would issue us blankets but they have not. I have not slept warm since I been here. I cannot stand it any longer. The one that I received was heavy enough but not long or wide enough. You know something of the climate here so you can judge how sleeping goes with one blanket. Send the blanket by express as soon as possible or telegraph to Mr. Warden to send me one from town. I am not entirely well yet but am able to go about but If I do not get more clothes and blankets I will be very sick again.

I like this camp very much better than any other I've been in with the exception of the climate up here and Lake breeze. There are 84 acres inclusive wich gives us ample room for exercise. There is any thing you can want in the prison in the way of eatibles. I have not gotten but 2 dollars of my money yet.

Tell A. Runyon to write to me and all of the boys that I will write to all them as soon as I get stamps and paper. There are no restrictions as to writing only not to write any thing that is contraband.[7] I can write to any body that I want to at present. Tell

7 The envelopes that contained Runyon's letters bear the imprint of Camp Douglas's censor. The censor examined the letters written by imprisoned soldiers for any political content, which was excised if necessary. See Eisendrath, "Chicago's Camp Douglas, 1861-1865," p. 45.

all my friends to write immediately. I will answer all. Tell Hiram Pearce that I do not know whether I can ever forgive him for negligelnce] in not writing long ago that I do not intend to send him word any more to write as it seems that he does not want to. Give my love to sister Sallie, Ella, Bro. Mike, Asa B. Tell them to write. I will tell him about Pelham. Tell A.R. and all of the boys in the store to write immediately. Love to Sister Hess, Mrs. Payne, Tom and Will. Also my regards to Miss Park and all of my acquaintainces. I would like to come home on payroll of honor and spend this winter. I hope that I will be exchanged before winter sets in for I believe that I would freeze to death up here.[8] Have no newls] to write. Some time when I feel like writing I will give an account of all the boys from Mason County. Write soon and often any thing to make the time pass like any away fast. Love to all. Good by.

Your brother and [?]
Geo. Runyon

PS Direct letter to
me Camp Douglas
3 Ky Cav. co F Prisoner of War

Camp Douglas, Ills. August 30 [1863]
Dear Mother:

I received your letter that was directed to Camp Morton. It was forwarded to me here. I would have written to you before but did not have the stamps. I like this camp better than any other I've been in. With the exception of the climate. It is very cold up here now. Thare was a big frost this morning and the winds from the lake are continualy howling throughh] camp.

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8 From July 1862 to July 1863, Union and Confederate authorities followed a man-for-man prisoner exchange policy. Prisoners were paroled on the condition that they would not return to active duty until a formal exchange took place. Then they could fight again. Union leaders halted the exchange of prisoners in 1863, responding to the Confederacy's threat to reenslave or execute captured black soldiers and because of abuses of the parole system. Exchanges did not resume until January 1865. See Marvel, *Andersonville*, 25-26, 41, 43-44.

Thare was none of the Mayslick boys captured on this trip. Sandford Mitchell, Walter Matthews, Edward Hard, Milton Mitchell, Thos. Laythram, Alfred Cancelor, Alexander Duke and little Johny Kemper were not on this trip at all. The last time that I saw them they were all very well. They were in Tenn. and all of my company got out but five. You do not know any of the others. I have no news to write so I will close. I will write again in a few days. The lady that gave me the Bible lives in Maysville. Any one that wishes can write to me so [long as] they do not write contraband in there letters. Give my love to all my friends. Direct your letter to me Camp Douglas Chicago Ills. co F 3 Ky Cav. Write [as] soon [as] your in [the] house. From your affectionate

Son

Camp Douglas Ills. Sept. 7th 1863
Dear Mother:

According to promise I will attempt to write you a short letter. I am quite well at present and hope to have my health as long as I am in prison. I have recved all neccessary clothing to make me comfortable. I think that I am fixed as well as I could be under presant circumstances.

I would like to spend this winter at home but you know that it is imposible.

So long as I was of service I was contented to stay away but to be shut out from the world is quite a different life from being in active service. I have seene a great deal of the country since I joined the army, which I have been benefited by, and a great many kinds of people.

My health been unusualy good since I left home. Oh how I wish that I could see you and give an account of myself. I think that I could interest you for a while.

But I suppose that I will have to put visits home off for a while. At ene [any] rate I hope that it will not be long. If I was to get home I would consider it of some importance. I know of no news to write so

I will promise to write agin soon. Love to every body. Write soon. Tell all the news in haste.

From your son

Geo. Runyon

PS Direct your letters to me co F 3 Ky Cav.

Camp Douglas Chicago Ills.

Prisoner of War

Camp Douglas Sept. 30 '63

Dear Mother

I would [have] writen before but I had no stamps. I am verry well at present. I have writen eight letters to you since I've been in prison. I wish you would not write so much about my behavior. You must imagine that I am as bad as the Devil himself. All I have to say is that I am better off in the army than I would be about Maysville or Mayslick. If this war does not make a man of me nothing will. I do not expect ever to make Mason County my home. I can assure you that I am a different youth than what you think I am. Now do not continualy write what I ought to do or what dangers and temptations that are around me. [I] see them all and [am] fully aware what to do. I wish I could see you to have a talk with you to tell you my views and plans. When this war is over thare will be the finest offerings for young men thare ever has been. It depend[s] verry much whare I am when this war ends whether I will come directly home or not. It has been some time since I recved a letter from you. You want me to send an order on Mr. Burgess, I must consider the matter before I can. I do not think that you ought to ask me to do so. I have writen to Bro. Mike. If I do not get home that what little I got goes to Fannie. Our orders are such here that I can not write such a letter. I would like to. I will write again soon. I expect to be removed from here soon. I will let you know when. I give love to evry body. Tell some of them to write. Write soon. Good bye. I am your affectionate son

George

Camp Douglas Oct. 4th 1863

My Dear Mother

I am so cold that I can hardly write. You said that you had received but two letters from me. Perhaps they were to long as thare restrictions as to the length of letters we are allowed only to write two pages of this paper. You wanted to know how the wether uses me. Bad enough. The winds from the lake continualy howling through camp and some times you have to hold your breth it blows so hard. I wrote you a discription of my prison wich if you did not get it must be contraband. We are divide[d] in to regiments, companys, companys into messes. Thare are eight in my mess. We take time about by two to cook for the mess. This is my day. I have been asked two or three times since I sat down to write to you if I was agoing to cook to day. Although I have cooked more or less the last year I can't say that I am fond of cooking. But wen it comes to eatting I can do my share. You must have verry little ide[a] of a prison life from the way you write. We have [a] long cook house with tables on both sides and benches to sit on. Now a bout my bed room, if bed room it may be called. There are over a hundred assigned to one barax. On each side of the barax are a row of bunks, three tiers high. I ocupy a top bunk. Thare is at this moment so much nois[e] that I hardly know what I am writing. It continues all day an[d] untill night.

I received the letter you spoke of and I answered it. I do not think you ou[gh]t to call on me under circumstances. I will now close my letter hoping to here from you soon. No more at present. Good by from your son.

George F. Runyon

co. F 3 Ky. Cav. I send an order for twenty five dollars

Camp Douglas 14 October 1863

My Dear Mother,

I received your two letters to day. They finde me in excelent helth. I think if I am careful I will have my helth. Sister Mary Ester came to see me last Monday. She thought I looked verry well considerable better than I did before I left. I certainly am not as fleshy as I was when I was captured. I think if I am fortunate enough to escape any

accident during this war that I will be greatly benefited by my life in the army. I do not think that you ought to ask me [to] do so much for you. I am making nothing now so I think it hard to have to give you what little I have. You can rest assured that if I was fixed so I could make any thing that you should share it with me. And if I am spared and am able to do any thing after this war that you shall not want as long as I have. I have again repeted what I have said before. It is my aim to [do] all I can for you and as soon as I can so do not trouble me further as you must know that it makes me feel unpleasant. You must remember that you have another son in a better fix at this time than I am. Ma I think I have done enough promising to do more hereafter. About the things that you left at the store for exchange was 1 hoop skirt-$1.50cts 12 yds chintz 25cts. I do not remember about the belt. I must close. Love to all. Tell Aunt Peggy and sister Mary that they are indebted two letters to me. Good By from your son

George Runyon
co. F 3 Ky. cav. Camp Douglas
Chicago Ills.

Camp Douglas March 29 '64
Dear Mother:

I received your letter of the 22nd and embrace the first opportunity of answering your letter. It was the first letter I received from you since you got home. My health is excelent it has never been so good. I have gained considerable flesh in the last few months. I think I have been grately benefited since I left. I have read my Testament every day since Christmas. Today I will finish the last Book of John. So I will soon be through the Testament. I will then commence the Old Test.

We are only allowed to write one page of note paper. You will be allowed to write two and only evry thirteen days. I read the Prince of the house of David[9] which was very interesting. I plainly see that you

9 Here Runyon refers to J. H. Ingraham, *The Prince of the House of David; or,*

have verry little ide[a] of my prison life. I can not discribe it to you. I must close. Love to all. Write soon. No more from your son.

G.F. Runyon

George Runyon's letters illustrate several features of the experiences of Confederate prisoners at Camp Douglas—the mental uncertainty, physical discomfort, and dependency on family support experienced by prisoners of war. Above all, his letters demonstrate the importance of correspondence to imprisoned soldiers. According to historian E. B. Long, Union officials placed few restrictions on mail for Confederates held at Camp Douglas. "Most of the time," he explains, "packages from the outside were allowed to be received by the prisoners and letter writing was permitted, although limited to one a month and heavily censored." This was important because sending and especially receiving mail played a vital role in the maintenance of morale. Letters served as the prisoner's chief means of contact with his loved ones and provided a source of news and entertainment. Runyon's persistent requests for his family and friends to write more often reflected his need to overcome the sense of isolation that characterized prison life. Despite censorship and restrictions on the length of letters, these written communications helped to bridge the distance between Runyon and his family. They connected—at least symbolically—his former civilian life in Kentucky to his life as a soldier and prisoner of war in Chicago.[10]

Runyon's letters, quite surprisingly, portray Camp Douglas in a generally positive light. His comments run completely counter to mainstream scholarly images of the nightmare conditions that supposedly existed in most Civil War prison camps. They are all the more significant also because Camp Douglas, like other Civil War prisons, had a high death rate. Over four thousand Confederate soldiers died there—about one fatality for every eight prisoners. Conditions at Camp Douglas became more grim over time. Sir Henry

10 Long, "Camp Douglas: 'A Hellish Den?,'" 92.

Confederate Prisoners at Camp Douglas from Harper's Weekly
Special Collections Library, Duke University

Morton Stanley, the African explorer, was held there following his capture at Shiloh in April 1862. He remarked that:

> Our prison-pen was a square and spacious enclosure, like a bleak-cattle-yard, walled high with planking, on the top of which, at every sixty yards or so, were sentry-boxes. About fifty feet from the base, and running parallel with it, was a line of lime-wash. That was the deadline, and any prisoner who crossed it was liable to be shot.

As time wore on, conditions at Camp Douglas deteriorated. Men suffered terribly from dysentery, typhus, scurvy, and other diseases, Stanley said. He added:

> In our treatment, I think there was a purpose. If so, it may have been from a belief that we should the sooner recover our senses by experiencing as much misery, pain, privation, and sorrow as could be contained within a prison; and, therefore, the authorities rigidly excluded every medical, pious, musical, or literary charity that might have alleviated our sufferings. . . . Left to ourselves, with

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> absolutely nothing to do but to brood over our positions, bewail our lots, catch the taint of disease from each other, and passively abide in our prison-pen, we were soon in a fair state of rotting while yet alive.[11]

In June 1862, Henry W. Bellows, president of the U. S. Sanitary Commission, underscored the poor conditions that had developed at Camp Douglas. In his opinion, "the place is as desperately circumstanced as any camp ever was, and that nothing but a special providence or some peculiar efficacy of the lake winds can prevent it from becoming a source of pestilence before another month has gone over our heads." Exposure, foul water, poor drainage, improperly designed latrines, and overcrowding rendered Camp Douglas a nightmare. Bellows described its "soil reeking with miasmatic accretions, of rotten bones and the emptyings of camp kettles"—conditions that collectively were "enough to drive a sanitarian to despair."[12]

Although quite severe, such conditions typified U. S. Army prison camps. Long concludes that, compared to other Civil War military prisons, "Camp Douglas was worse than a few and better than some." Runyon, however, complimented the abundant food, the ample space for exercise, and his own good health. Similar to the rations provided to Union soldiers, meals at Camp Douglas consisted of daily allowances of beef or pork, bread, and hominy, rice, or beans. In addition, each prisoner received issues of bacon, molasses, coffee, tea, sugar, pepper, soap, and candles. These rations compared favorably to those allotted Confederate troops in the field. But though Runyon proclaimed that there was "any thing you can want in the prison in the way of eatibles," he protested that blankets were a rare commodity. Complaints about the cold weather, especially the brisk winds blowing off Lake Michigan, appear often in Runyon's letters. This physical discomfort was increased by the monotony and lack of privacy that typified army life in general and military prison life in

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11 Ibid., 94, 83, 86.
12 Ibid., 86, 88.

particular. These conditions, though, varied little from what Runyon had experienced in the field as a Confederate cavalryman. No soldier, however, was prepared for the isolation and the sense of disconnection that prison life engendered. As Runyon wrote, "to be shut out from the world is quite a different life from being in active service." His frustration with his mother's apparent inability to understand the true nature of his prison experience demonstrated the wide gap in understanding between the imprisoned soldier and the civilian.[13]

Although Runyon wrote little about the daily routine of prisoners at Camp Douglas—Yankee censors edited his correspondence—their lives were highly regimented. The day began at sunrise with reveille, followed by breakfast, and then roll call in front of the barracks. After dinner at noon, the prisoners engaged in a work detail. At sunset, they returned to their quarters for free time until tattoo at 9:00 P.M. On Sundays a full inspection was usually added to this schedule, as well as religious services in the prisoners' barracks conducted by their own chaplains. For Runyon at least, this routine enabled him to overcome the psychological and emotional shock and stresses and strains of imprisonment.[14]

Despite the rigors of daily prison life at Camp Douglas, Runyon nonetheless remained optimistic about his future. Attempting to assuage his mother's apparent doubts that he was capable of acting responsibly, Runyon insisted that "I am a different youth than what you think I am" and that "If this war does not make a man of me nothing will." Like some men in all wars in every age, he believed that his experiences as a soldier had matured him, making him more aware of the "dangers and temptations" that pervaded the world. A survivor, Runyon coped with the harsh realities of prison life and grew during his confinement. Imprisonment never restricted Runyon's

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13 Ibid., 91; Eisendrath, "Chicago's Camp Douglas, 1861-1865," pp. 45-46. For other positive assessments of conditions by firsthand observers at Camp Douglas, see Long, "Camp Douglas: 'Hellish Den?,'" 89, 92.

14 Eisendrath, "Chicago's Camp Douglas, 1861-1865," pp. 43-44.

ability to look ahead. This enabled him to reassure his family of his well-being and to sustain his own morale. Asserting that "When this war is over there will be the finest offerings for young men there ever has been," Runyon expressed optimism for his future and, quite possibly, for the war-torn Commonwealth of Kentucky.

On 21 May 1865, after his release from Camp Douglas, Runyon took the oath of allegiance to the United States and thus began his life anew. The U. S. government dismantled Camp Douglas in November 1865 and sold its property. Though it had grown by fits and starts (ultimately the compound had 158 buildings) and suffered from chronic mismanagement, the stockade ranked as one of the oldest and most used prison camps. Although no physical traces of the prison remain, George Runyon's letters provide valuable glimpses into a Kentucky Confederate soldier's perspective of life as a prisoner of war. His correspondence suggests that Runyon's incarceration hastened his maturity and prepared him for the new challenges of the post-Civil-War world.[15]

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15 Runyon Compiled Military Service Record; Eisendrath, "Chicago's Camp Douglas, 1861-1865," p. 46.