

VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI, JULY 9 A. D. 1863.

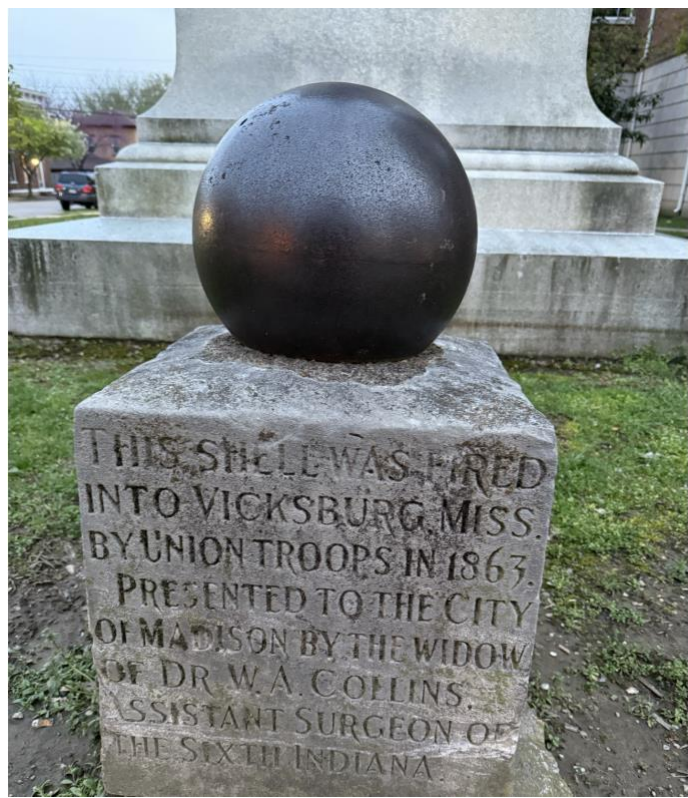
TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN, KNOW YE THAT:
I *W. G. Gray* a *Private* of *Co. 3* Reg't
Illinois Vol., C. S. A., being a Prisoner of War, in the hands
of the United States Forces, in virtue of the capitulation of the City of Vicksburg and its Garrison, by Lieut. Gen. John C. Pemberton, C. S. A., Commanding, on the 4th day of July, 1863, do in pursuance of the terms of said capitulation, give this my solemn parole under oath—

That I will not take up arms again against the United States, nor serve in any military, police, or constabulary force in any Fort, Garrison or field work, held by the Confederate States of America, against the United States of America, nor as guard of prisons, depots or stores, nor discharge any duties usually performed by officers or soldiers against the United States of America until duly exchanged by the proper authorities.

W. G. Gray

Sworn to and subscribed before me at Vicksburg, Miss., this *10* day of July, 1863.

J. H. Allen *10* Reg't *Illinois* Vols.,
Captain AND PAROLLING OFFICER.



<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/maps/vicksburg-animated-map>

"You boys got coffee?"

Imagine dawn on the morning after Siege of Vicksburg had ended. For 47 days the city had been pounded by artillery and cut off from supplies. Men had lived in trenches, rifle pits, caves dug into hillsides, and under a constant rhythm of hunger, heat, disease, and fear. Then suddenly—silence.

About 30,000 exhausted Confederate soldiers under John C. Pemberton emerged to be paroled by the army of Ulysses S. Grant.

Picture it:

The July air along the Mississippi was already thick and heavy. Sweat ran before the sun was even fully up. Dust hung over the roads and trenches where thousands of boots had worn the earth bare. Blue-coated Union soldiers watched from their lines while gray-clad Confederates slowly climbed out of works they had defended for weeks.

Not marching proudly anymore.

Just walking.

Many had uniforms hanging loosely on bodies that had grown thin from half-rations. Some coats were torn beyond recognition. Shoes had worn through. Faces were unshaven. Eyes were sunken. A few men limped. Some leaned on friends.

And then something strange happened:

The fighting simply stopped.

Men who had been trying to kill each other the day before could now stand only a few feet apart and actually see one another. They discovered the enemy looked very much like themselves— young farmers, laborers, fathers, immigrants, boys who missed home.

There were awkward moments. Silence. Curiosity.

Then perhaps:

"How long were you fellows living on that?"

"Peas mostly."

"You boys got coffee?"

Coffee became almost legendary. Confederate soldiers often traded tobacco for Union coffee. Imagine thousands of tiny human exchanges occurring all along the lines.

A Union soldier later recalled feeling less triumph than pity.

Because victory did not look like glory.

Victory looked like hungry men stacking rifles.

Imagine the sound as thousands of muskets were surrendered: metal clinking, wood striking wood, one after another after another until the piles became enormous. A war that had consumed lives and identities narrowed down to a simple act:

"Lay down your weapon."

For some Confederate soldiers, there was humiliation. They had fought hard and lost. Some likely cried quietly. Others stared blankly.

For Union soldiers there was satisfaction—but perhaps also surprise. The terrible enemy that newspapers described as monsters looked instead like worn-out men emerging from dirt and smoke.

And over everything was the strange symbolism of the date:

July 4, 1863.

Eighty-seven years after the Declaration of Independence, one of the greatest victories of the war arrived on the nation's birthday.

Yet if you had stood there among those 30,000 men, you might not have felt triumph first.

You might have felt relief.

No cannon today.

No sharpshooter watching your head.

No assault coming.

Just heat, dust, hunger, exhaustion—and the realization that you were still alive.

For many men on both sides, that may have felt like the greatest gift imaginable.