

Dreary days, poor food precede Thanksgiving in Confederate prison

In 1863, when President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation designating the last Thursday of November as Thanksgiving Day, the news about the holiday didn't reach Andersonville Prison in Georgia.

For one of the Union Army prisoners there, the last days of that month were very much like one another. Private Asbury Stephen, who settled in Solsberry after the war, left a diary of that time.

For the prisoners, the quality of the day was measured by what and how much the prisoners were given to eat. A week before Thanksgiving Stephen wrote tersely: "Rained in the night. Got up very early. Got breakfast of bread, beans, and molasses. Still rain. Cooked rice for dinner. Bread and beef for supper. No men going out today but all gloomy. Late got some rain."

Nor was the following day any better. The private reported that he and the others had beef soup and bread for breakfast, a menu that he pronounced "very poor . . . No salt." Dinner was composed of meal, beef, rice and molasses, items that appeared monotonously among the rations.

As the holiday that Stephen was unaware of approached, the food fare worsened. On Nov. 20, the soldier wrote in his diary:



Looking back

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"Got breakfast of bread and molasses. Still the rain come slowly down and all the world looks sad and dreary. Got dinner of rice soup and salt. Still cloudy. Talk of some more Yanks going out tonight but failed. Rations short for today. Got none. Short living and all very weak."

Terse as Stephen's entries were, cold, damp and poor diet began to tell upon him, and his depression was expressed in thoughts of home and family. On the Monday before Thanksgiving his diary notation said: "No breakfast and no sign of any soon. 8 o'clock and none yet. Still cloudy and dreary. Got our back rations and had dinner of bread and rice soup. Later gothardtack and molasses. Traded for salt and had no supper. Waited till morning. Dreamed of home and baked goose — all vanity."

Talk of home may have eased his homesickness. Stephen noted that he chatted with S. McCoy of "Home and the gals." But he was

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