The Johnson-Gilmor Cavalry Raid Around Baltimore, July 10-13, 1864

Eric J. Wittenberg

Savas Beatie
California

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989 Governor Drive, Suite 102,
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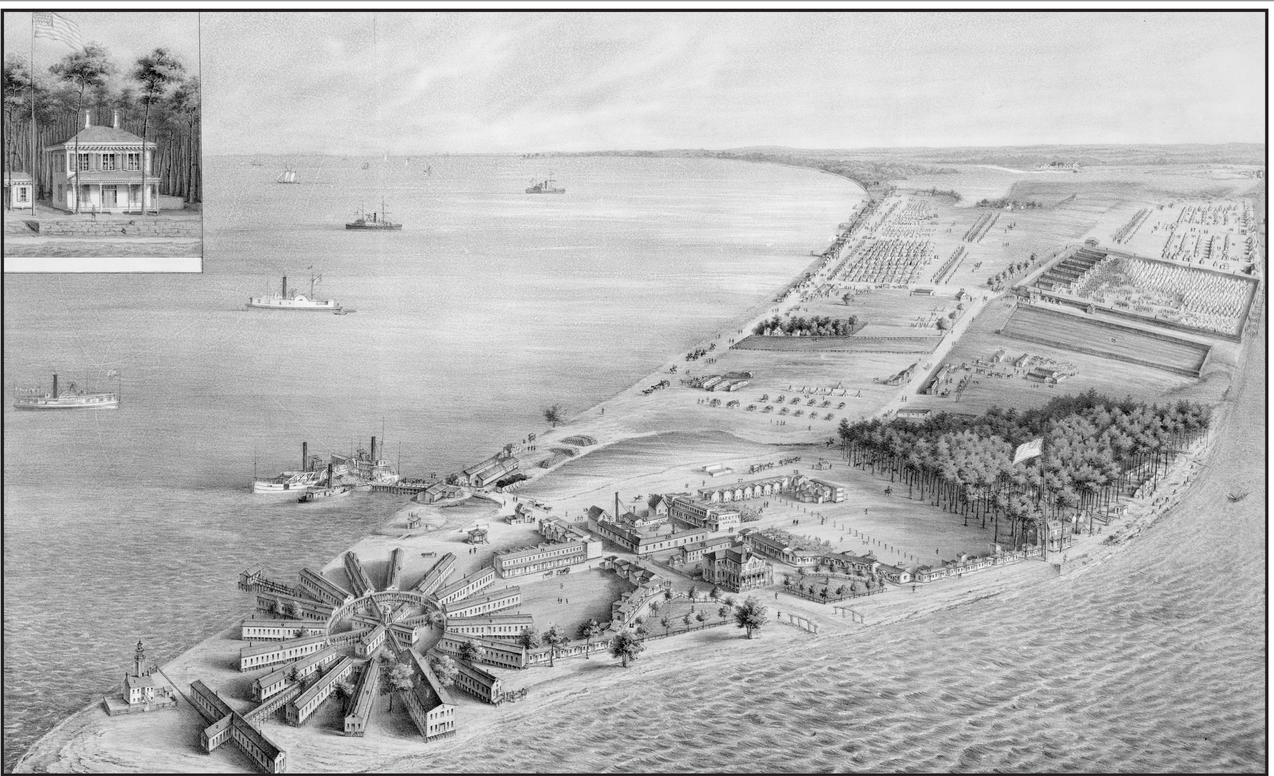
This work is respectfully dedicated to the memory of the brave soldiers of both sides
who squared off during Jubal Early's advance on Washington, D.C.,
and in particular to the memory of those men who gave the last
Full measure of their devotion along the way.



The military complex located on Point Lookout as it appeared in 1864. *Library of Congress*

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PREFACE

I BECAME interested in Jubal A. Early's July 1864 strike on Washington during my first visit to the Monocacy battlefield in the spring of 1992. In those days, there was no visitor's center and no interpretation on the battlefield other than the monuments erected by the veterans. I had to figure it out for myself. Learning about this fascinating little campaign became a priority for me.

I read everything that I could get my hands on—which was very little in those days. I wrote an article on the battle, my second publication on the Civil War, as a means of teaching myself the details of the battle. Writing about people and events has always helped me learn more about them.

Along the way, I learned about a fascinating sidebar to the campaign, something I had never heard before. When I mentioned it to others, I quickly learned that few of my acquaintances had heard of it, either. In the summer of 1864, Gen. Robert E. Lee helped devise a scheme to try and free nearly 15,000 Confederate prisoners of war being held at Camp Hoffman at Point Lookout, Maryland. The overcrowded prison camp sat on a narrow 15-mile-wide peninsula jutting into the Potomac River. Lee's scheme involved a combined amphibious landing and an overland expedition by a brigade of cavalry under Brig. Gen. Bradley T. Johnson of Maryland.

A second column of 150 troopers under Lt. Col. Harry Gilmor of the 2nd Maryland Cavalry Battalion would branch off to create mischief that included menacing Baltimore, raiding the Philadelphia, Baltimore & Wilmington Railroad, and destroying important bridges. President Jefferson Davis approved the plan and set the military machine in motion.

For a host of reasons, the bold scheme has been largely overlooked by history. When it is mentioned at all, it is relegated to a paragraph or two, or in some cases a brief chapter buried in a study of a much larger topic. My hope is that *The Johnson-Gilmor Cavalry Raid Around Baltimore, July 10-13, 1864* corrects this oversight.

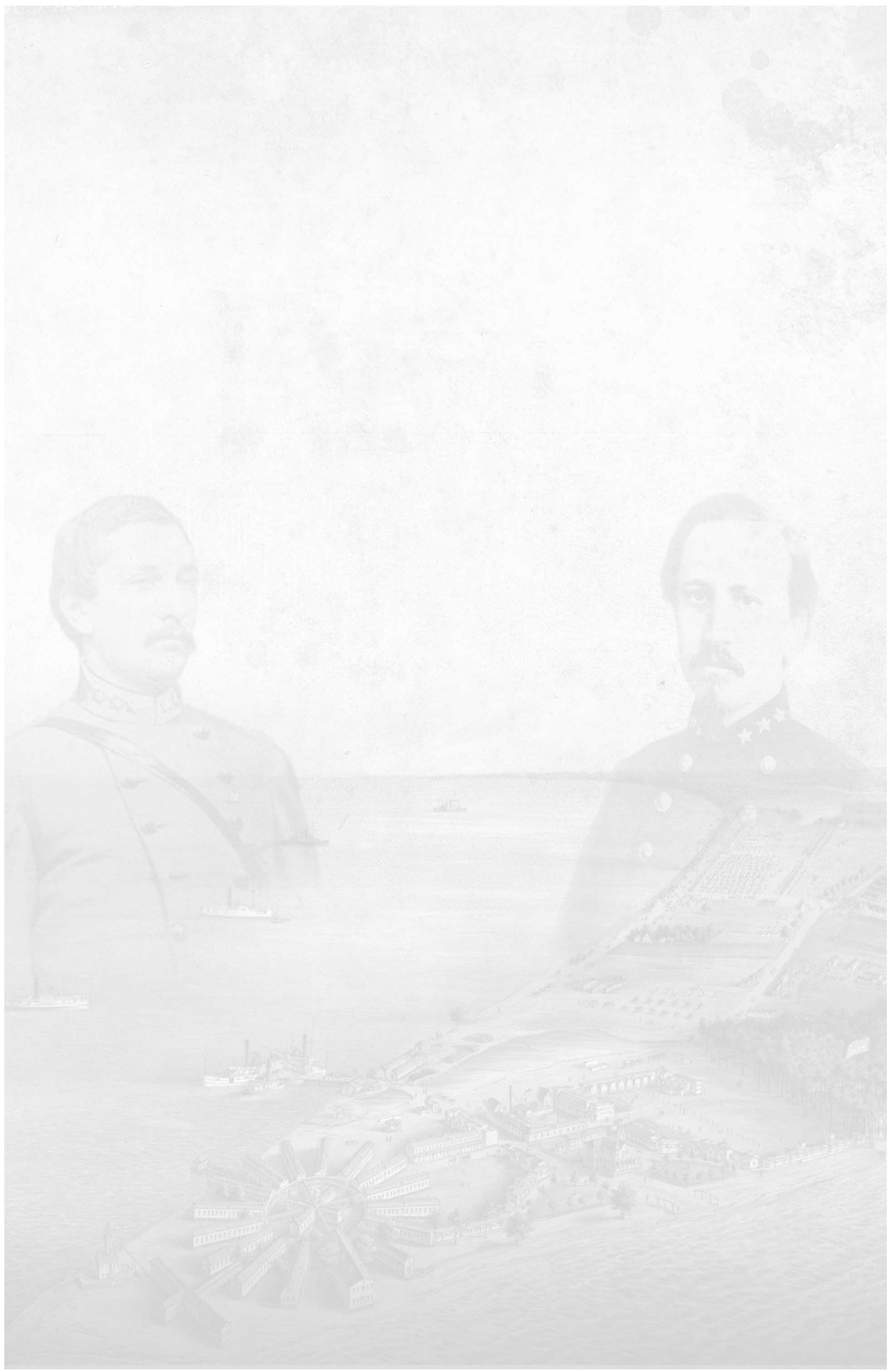
Acknowledgments

I have many people to thank for their contributions. Sam Beeghley gathered important source material for me in Westminster, Maryland, which was visited by the raid. My friend and co-author David A. Powell obtained other primary source material for me, as did Kimberly Schwatka. Mark Wade, the go-to source for everything Confederate Maryland, delved into his substantial library to provide me with valuable source material. Once again, Edward Alexander has graced my work with his excellent maps, which only add to my ability to do this story justice, and Nancy Hale did a copy edit on the first galley.

When I fell ill, Jon-Erik Gilot stepped in and helped with a careful final reading and edit. This could not have been finished without him and the patience of my publisher. Thank you both!

This is my thirteenth book with Savas Beatie, which provides me with a wonderful outlet for my work. Special thanks to Theodore P. Savas and his staff for the opportunity and for making my work better. Ted's new Battles & Leaders of the Civil War Series is perfect for a work like this.

Finally, and as always, I am grateful to my wife, best friend, travel companion, and proofreader Susan Skilken Wittenberg, without whom none of this would be possible. Thank you for your unflagging support. I could not do what I do without you.



Chapter 1

The Point Lookout Prisoner of War Camp

POINT LOOKOUT is the southernmost tip of the peninsula formed by the confluence of the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay, located in St. Mary's County, Maryland. This narrow point of land juts into the Potomac River at a spot where the body of water is fifteen miles wide.

The place has a long history. Capt. John Smith, the famed English explorer who later became the first governor of the Jamestown Colony, landed there in 1608. Smith surveyed the area and reported his findings to the King of England, calling special attention to the lush countryside and abundant fisheries.[1]

The first permanent settlement in Maryland, St. Mary's City, was founded in 1634 not far from Point Lookout. Point Lookout became part of St. Michael's Manor, one of the primary holdings of Leonard Calvert, the leader of the new

1 Robert L. Loeffelbein, "Point Lookout Prison: The Truth Beneath the Ruins," *Maryland Magazine* (Spring 1982), 12.

colony of Maryland and its first proprietary governor. British forces raided it during the Revolutionary War. During the War of 1812 it received the name Point Lookout in recognition of the important role it played in monitoring the movements of British warships. Its capture by the British, who defeated outnumbered militia forces there, led to the burning of Washington—and the White House—in 1814. President James Madison and his secretary of war, John Armstrong, Jr., received heavy criticism for allowing Point Lookout to fall into British hands.[2]

The location became a popular vacation spot in the 1850s because of its sandy beaches and good fishing. A settlement of several hundred beach cottages and a lone hotel sprang up as a result. Wealthy men such as Cyrus B. McCormick, inventor of the threshing machine, and Roger B. Taney, the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, owned cottages there.[3]

In 1857, William C. Johnson purchased 400 acres of land at Point Lookout to build a seaside resort, but he never completed the project due to financial difficulties. In 1862, Baltimore resident William H. Allen purchased the land from Johnson, knowing that the United States government was considering using the area for a hospital and a prisoner of war camp site. Johnson took back a mortgage and gladly rid himself of such a large financial burden. Allen hoped to make a profit by offering it to the War Department for use as a military hospital in July 1862. Given that local residents held strong secessionist sentiments, this was a daring ploy.[4]

2 Ibid.

3 Edwin W. Beitzel, *Point Lookout Prison Camp for Confederates* (Leonardtown, MD: St. Mary's Historical Society, 1983), 103.

4 Loeffelbein, "Point Lookout Prison," 12-13. Union soldiers occupied nearby Leonardtown Court House, the county seat, from 1861-1865, and

The heavy casualties suffered by the Union armies in the spring of 1862 necessitated the construction of new military hospitals, and Point Lookout seemed like an ideal location for one. In addition to its isolated location, there were plenty of fresh breezes and it had good access for shipping. Surgeon General William A. Hammond had the land inspected and on June 5, 1862, reported to Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs that the existing structures could accommodate 1,500 men with plenty of room for expansion. The War Department purchased the land.[5]

Construction of the new hospital began under the supervision of Capt. L. C. Edwards. The facility had an extraordinary design intended to give patients the benefit of its open-air construction. The building closely resembled the spokes of a wagon wheel with sixteen wards extending out from the center hub. Each ward had thirty-six feet of open space between the other, allowing beneficial fresh air and sunshine to enter. When completed, the hospital had 1,400 beds for the wounded and the sick. In order to guard against the threat of fire, the hospital design included a 20,000-gallon water reservoir that could flood the hospital building if it became necessary to snuff a blaze.

A circular corridor about eight feet wide by 100 feet in circumference connected the wards. Four buildings in the shape of a cross, including a chapel, a kitchen, a library, and storage facilities, made up the central hub of the wheel. More than fifty other buildings sprang up to support the hospital, including surgeons' quarters, a smallpox isolation ward, the commandant's residence, the provost marshal's office, a

---

they arrested many locals for maintaining Southern sympathies, including a number of women, all of whom were housed at Lookout Point.

5 William A. Hammond to Montgomery Meigs, June 5, 1862, RG 112, War Records, Surgeon General's Office, Letter Book 31, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC ("NARA").

WILLIAM A. HAMMOND

Surgeon General of the United States
and namesake of the Hammond General Hospital at Point Lookout.

Library of Congress

laundry facility, a bakery, and other similar structures. Hammond General Hospital received its first allotment of patients on August 17, 1862. A contingent of twenty-five Sisters of Charity from Baltimore arrived to help care for the sick men.[6]

* * *

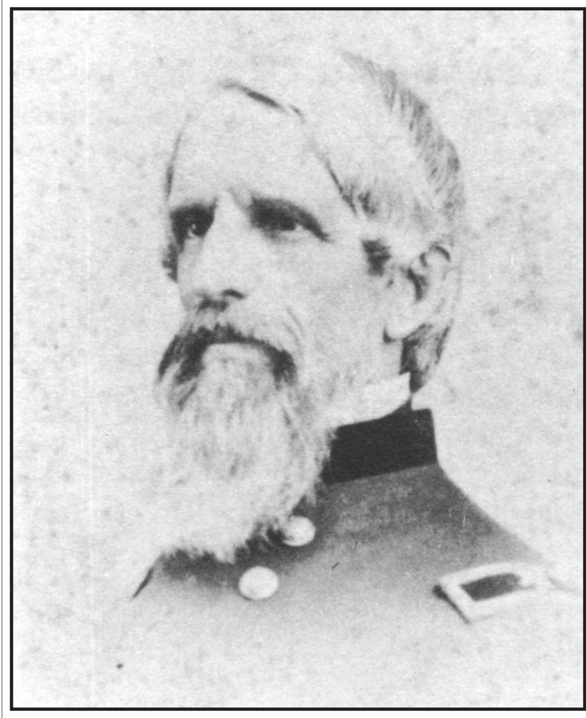
By 1863, the War Department also had a great need for new prisoner of war camps. Until then, regular exchanges of prisoners were made pursuant to the Dix-Hill Cartel. This formal system, developed in July 1862, established protocols for conducting such exchanges and was named for Union Maj. Gen. John A. Dix and Confederate Maj. Gen. D. H. Hill, the officiers who negotiated its terms. Pursuant to the cartel, a scale was established to set equivalents for captured officers to be exchanged for fixed numbers of enlisted men based on the officer's rank; agents for each side were appointed to conduct those exchanges.[7]

The cartel broke down when the Confederacy classified African-American prisoners as runaway slaves and not as soldiers. President Abraham Lincoln issued General Orders 252 on July 30, 1863, suspending the cartel until the Confederate government changed that policy and treated black soldiers the same as white soldiers. Northern prison camps quickly filled to capacity.[8]

6 Richard H. Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital: The North's Largest Civil War Prison* (Middletown, DE: Coastal Books, 2014), 11-12.

7 The War of the Rebellion: *A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1889), Series II, vol. 4, 266, hereafter cited as *OR*. All references are to Series I unless otherwise indicated.

8 Roy Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953-1955), 6:357.

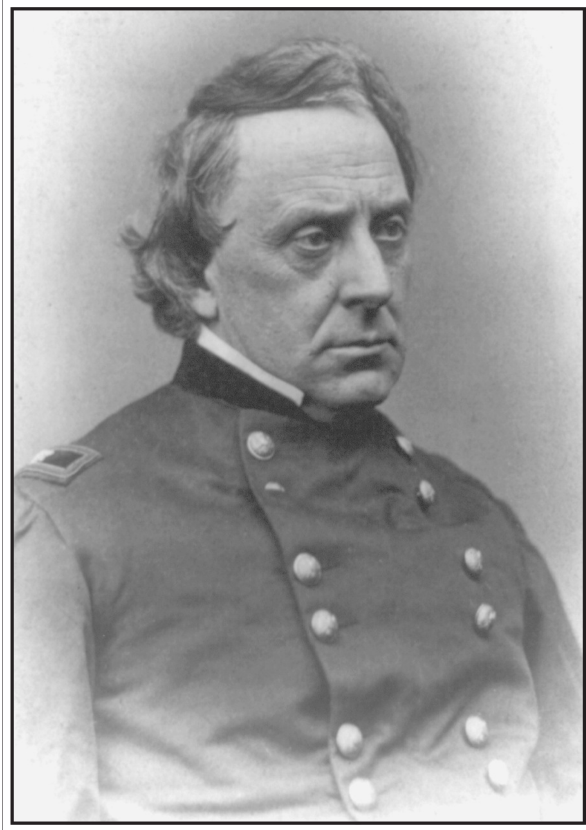


COLONEL WILLIAM HOFFMAN

Commissary of Prisoners for the U.S. Army and the namesake of Camp Hoffman prisoner of war camp at Point Lookout. *USAHEC*

Construction of the prison camp commenced about the same time as construction of the hospital. The camp was named Camp Hoffman, after Col. William Hoffman, the Commissary General of Prisoners for the U. S. Army. It was designed to hold 10,000 men. Gilman Marston, a brigadier general, was assigned to be the camp's first commandant.[9]

9 Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University,1964), 312.



GILMAN MARSTON

The first commander of Camp Hoffman.

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Marston was born on August 20, 1811 at Orford, New Hampshire, raised on a farm, and taught school to finance his education at Dartmouth. He graduated from Harvard Law School in 1840 and practiced law in Exeter, New Hampshire before being elected to the state legislature in 1846. He would go on to win reelection a dozen times through 1889, serve at two state constitutional conventions, and sit in the U. S. Congress three times (from 1859-1863 and 1865-1867). He

was offered an appointment as governor of the Idaho Territory in 1870, but refused and served instead as U.S. Senator for four months in 1889.

The lawyer-politician also played a major role in the war. In May and June 1861 Marston recruited the 2nd New Hampshire and led it at Bull Run that July. During the Peninsula Campaign of 1862 his regiment was part of Joe Hooker's division, and at Fredericksburg was assigned to Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Sickles' division. Marston was promoted to brigadier general that November 29, but was relieved of duty prior to Chancellorsville and ordered to report to Maj. Gen. Samuel P. Heintzelman, the commander of the defenses of Washington, D.C. It was after the Battle of Gettysburg that Marston assumed command at Point Lookout, a position he would hold until the spring of 1864.[10]

By the third week of August 1862, Hoffman (the commissary of prisoners) had sent 1,300 Confederate and political prisoners to Point Lookout. The stockade was still incomplete by the time these men arrived; guards armed with bayonets on their rifle-muskets formed a human wall to keep the prisoners inside. Despite these crude arrangements, and probably because of the camp's remote location at the end of a peninsula surrounded on three sides by water, only a handful of men tried to escape. None of them did so successfully.[11]

10 Marston's wartime service did not end at Point Lookout. Just prior to the 1864 Overland Campaign, he took command of a brigade in the XVIII Corps of the Army of the James and participated in the unsuccessful attacks at Cold Harbor in June. After light duty in eastern Virginia and a receipt of thanks from the New Hampshire legislature, Marston did routine duty until his resignation soon after Appomattox. He died on July 3, 1890, and is buried in Exeter, New Hampshire. Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 312.

11 Beitzel, *Point Lookout Prison Camp*, 21.

Eventually, a twelve-foot tall stockade enclosed an area of about twenty-three acres. Guards walked their posts on a platform outside the stockade wall, with each guard post located forty feet apart, with a shelter every 100 or so feet to duck under in case of rain. A six-inch trench marked the deadline fifteen feet inside the wall. No one dared approach the line for fear of being shot. The camp was laid out into ten streets, each twenty feet wide, lined on either side by tents. The prison population was split into ten divisions, with ten companies per division. Each company consisted of 100 men, meaning each division consisted of 1,000.

As the camp's population swelled with the end of the exchange cartel, additional companies and divisions were formed. One Union sergeant commanded each division, with two Confederate sergeants in command of each company. The Company Sergeant called the roll, made sure the prisoners kept their surroundings tidy, and reported any men who were in the hospital or otherwise missing. The other was a Sick Sergeant, who, after morning roll call reported which prisoners were sick and drew the rations for those too ill to walk to the cook house.[12]

The prisoners lived in old Army tents that had been cast off after use in the field, meaning Point Lookout was the only Union prison camp that housed its prisoners in tents year-round. The unfortunate result was constant exposure to the elements.[13]

"We were put in Sibley tents, which were round with a pole extending from the top to an iron tripod, the pole fitting in the top of the tripod," described former prisoner B. T.

12 Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*, 19-24.

13 The original plans for the camp included wooden barracks, but Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton rejected the plan, insisting that the prisoners should instead be housed in castoff tents. Stanton never stated the reasons behind his decision.

Holliday. "These tents had been used by the army and had seen so much service that they would leak and we spent a very uncomfortable time."[14]

"Our tents were miserable affairs, being full of holes and very rotten," confirmed another former prisoner named James T. Wells. "They were of the Sibley pattern and into each one of these 16 men were crowded. In order to lay down at night, the men were compelled to lay so close together as to exclude sleep."[15]

The tents had a diameter of eighteen feet, and as many as eighteen men occupied each one. "We were packed like sardines in a box," recalled Holliday. "When we wanted to turn over in the night, the signal was given to turn, and all made the turn from necessity."[16]

On February 26, 1864, a detachment of 753 soldiers from the 36th U. S. Colored Infantry—all of them African-American soldiers—began doing guard duty at Camp Hoffman. These men replaced white soldiers who were returned to duty with the Army of the Potomac. "It was a bitter pill for Southern men to swallow and we felt the insult keenly," admitted Holliday. "They were impudent and tyrannical and the prisoners had to submit to many indignities."[17]

As Holliday later observed, the white prisoners resented being guarded by former slaves and did not hesitate to say so. The hostility of the black soldiers, in turn, was understandable given their circumstances in life thus far,

14 B. T. Holliday, "Account of My Capture," Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

15 James T. Wells, "Prison Experience," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 52 vols. (Richmond: Southern Historical Society, 1902), 7:327.

16 Holliday, "Account of My Capture."

17 Ibid.

and their current duty assignment. As they often told the Confederate prisoners, “The bottom rail is now on the top.”[18]

The addition of the black soldiers acting as guards only added insult to injury for the prisoners. On July 1, 661 green troopers of the 5th Massachusetts Dismounted Cavalry (Colored) relieved the 36th U.S.C.T., which in turn reported for duty in the field. These men of the 5th regiment were inexperienced and their camp was established outside the perimeter of the stockade in a vulnerable and isolated position, leaving them exposed should an attempt be made to liberate the prisoners.

The influx of prisoners brought smallpox to the camp, along with chronic diarrhea, dysentery, typhoid fever, typhus, scurvy, and all sorts of skin rashes, all of which were common in prison camps of that era. In 1866, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton would report that the death rate at Lookout Point was 25%, although more recent figures indicate a much lower death rate of 6.7%.[19]

* * *

By the spring of 1864 the command structure around Point Lookout was in flux. When the prison camp first opened it fell within the jurisdiction of Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, the commander of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina with headquarters at Fortress Monroe in Virginia. In late April of 1864, Brig. Gen. Edward Winslow Hincks, the

18 Bradley M. Gottfried and Linda I. Gottfried, *Hell Comes to Southern Maryland: The Story of Point Lookout Prison and Hammond General Hospital* (Fairfield, PA: Turning Point Publishing, 2018), 74.

19 Loeffelbein, “Point Lookout Prison, 12, 14. The precise number is not known, but it is believed that 3,000-4,000 prisoners died there. For an exhaustive history of life in Camp Hoffman, see Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital*.

EDWARD W. HINCKS, brigadier general, was Benjamin Butler's choice to serve as the second commander of Camp Hoffman.

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commander in charge of the District of St. Mary's headquartered at Point Lookout, was transferred to serve with Maj. Gen. William F. Smith's XVIII Corps of the Army of the James. Colonel Alonzo G. Draper replaced Hincks. Draper was promoted to brigade command that June, so Butler reassigned Hincks to command at Point Lookout on June 30. The merry-go-round command changed again in early July when Point Lookout was transferred out of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina and assigned to the District of Washington.[20]

Secretary Stanton, meanwhile, against the wishes of General Butler, decided to replace Hincks with Brig. Gen. James Barnes. The West Point graduate was a classmate of Robert E. Lee who had been lightly wounded commanding a V Corps division at Gettysburg. Barnes was not yet ready to return to duty in the field, so the camp seemed like a good spot to drop him while he finished recuperating.[21]

20 Hincks had been badly wounded at Antietam on September 17, 1862, and was just returning to duty in the field for the first time when Butler ordered him to report to Smith.

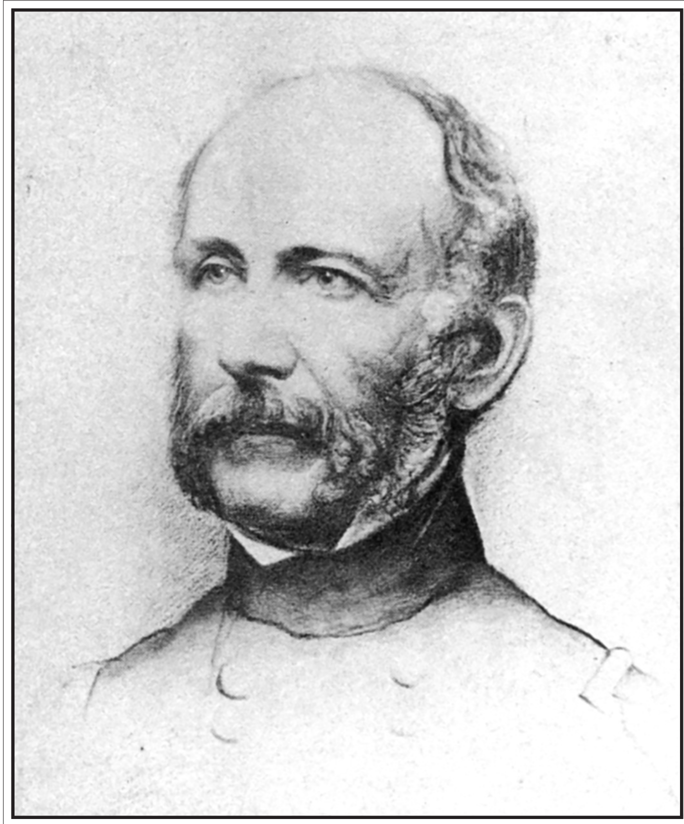
21 Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 20-21.

James Barnes was born in Boston, Massachusetts on December 28, 1801. He graduated from the Boston Latin School and eventually secured an appointment to West Point. He graduated with Lee in the class of 1829 a few slots below him in the 5th position. The engineer served as an instructor at West Point until he left the Army in 1836 to work as a civil engineer for railroads in New York, Massachusetts, Virginia, North Carolina, and in the Midwest. Barnes found it intolerable to sit on the sidelines with civil war breaking out and was appointed colonel of the 18th Massachusetts in July 1861.

Barnes served well with the Army of the Potomac in the Washington defenses and in the field during the 1862 Peninsula Campaign. He led a brigade at Antietam, earned a brigadier's rank that November, and fought at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville leading a brigade in Morell's division of the V Corps. He was temporarily placed in command of a division after Chancellorsville, but did not perform well at Gettysburg at that level, where he seems to have lost control of his troops. As noted earlier, he was wounded during the Pennsylvania battle and although not fully ready for the field, was assigned to garrison and prison duty. Unbeknownst to Barnes, he would remain there for the balance of the war.[22]

Ben Butler's protests notwithstanding, James Barnes arrived at Point Lookout on July 6. Hincks, who was unaware of the unfolding command situation and ailing from illness and wounds of his own, arrived at Point Lookout the next day

22 On March 13, 1865, Barnes was breveted major general of volunteers for "Meritorious Service during the Rebellion" and mustered out of service the following year. In 1868, he was appointed to a commission to investigate the building of the Union Pacific Railroad and telegraph line. He died in Springfield, Massachusetts, on February 12, 1869, and was buried in Springfield Cemetery. Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 21.



BRIGADIER GENERAL JAMES BARNES

His Gettysburg wound was a chance to shuttle Barnes into prison service while he recovered. He was the commander at Camp Hoffman during the Johnson-Gilmor Raid.

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only to receive orders to report back to the nation's capital for duty in the adjutant general's office. Because his various ailments, Hincks would also never serve in the field again.[23]

23 See *OR* 33, 1930-931; 37, 1:163-167; 40, 2:540, 597; and 3:18, 30, 59, 70-71.

By the summer of 1864, about a year after the prisoner exchange cartel had ended, nearly 15,000 men occupied the POW pen, earning Camp Hoffman the unhappy title of "the Andersonville of the North." The fortifications around Hoffman were still not completed, which only complicated the task of the small detachment of inexperienced black troops assigned to defend the thousands of prisoners.[24]

The camp's fluctuating command structure, limited fortifications, and inexperienced guards, coupled with General Barnes' fragile health, made for a potentially toxic combination if the Confederates could find a way to seriously test Point Lookout.

And that was precisely what they intended to do.

24 Beitzel, *Point Lookout Prison Camp for Confederates*, 54.