
Civil War Poem

Warren L. Chadwick

These stanzas are from a long poem written by Private Warren L. Chadwick of the Union Army describing his experiences as a prisoner of the Confederate Army.

It was on the fourth of August,
Eighteen Hundred Sixty-two,
When I joined the Union Army
And donned a suit of blue.

I left my friends and pleasant home,
For to save my nation's life,
I bid my neighbors all farewell,
To engage in mortal strife.

I was captured September eighth
Eighteen Hundred Sixty-three;
A place called Limestone Station
in the State of Tennessee.

We was in the fight from early morn
Until four o'clock that day
By the rebs were then surrounded
And to prison marched away.

Stowed in box cars for Richmond
With rebel guards at every door,
We got nothing more to eat then
For Thirty five hours or more.

The bread they gave, it gagged us,
Being shortened with vile grease
Which as by some freak of nature
Had out lived its natural lease.

We tasted the meat and tasted,
Saying let majority rule
For all were soon of the opinion
and ready to swear it was mule.

Our blankets now being taken
And our money being gone
We were transferred to Belle Island
Down hearted and forlorn.

There ten thousand men was huddled
Moving about so gaunt and lean
And all starving to death by inches,
Such a sight not often seen.

Comrads starving, dying, dying,
By numbers both day and night,
While breathing skeletons move around
Each other to affright.

You ask what did we have to eat
In Belle Island prison pen,
One pail of bony beef a day
To a squad, one hundred men.

In speaking now of body lice
In order to give them rout,
I took my clothes off every day
And turned them inside out.

There up and down along the seams
Of shirt, pantaloons, and blouse,
I killed them by thousands every day
the blood thirsty, gray back louse.

The rebel war has long been over,
Twenty years and more has gone by
Yet in thought I keep my comrads,
Who on Belle Island lie.

Kind friends should you read these lines
Long after I'm in my grave
Please give to me a passing thought,
Who suffered thus your homes to save.