



Figure 1: A prisoner of war cover censored with a triple-circle handstamped censor's examined marking.

Aaron Huggins—A Galvanized Yankee

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

The eye-catching prisoner of war cover in Figure 1 is franked with a U.S. Scott 65, three-cent rose, tied by a Rock Island, Illinois, duplex cancel dated February 10, 1864. It is addressed to Sallie Huggins, New Middleton, Illinois, from Aaron Huggins.

At left is an unusually clear strike of the triple-circle censor's examined "Approved/Prisoners Letter/Rock Island Barracks, Ill./Capt. A.D. Collins," CSA catalog¹ Type A, which was used only from January to February 1864. This is one of the most attractive and scarcer of the handstamped censor markings. Most censor markings were manuscript. Only the North had handstamped censor markings, either applied at the prisons or by provost marshals. Not all flag of truce mail bears a censor marking.²

Confederate prisoners are shown standing outside Rock Island barracks for roll call circa 1863, as shown in Figure 2. The prison for Confederate soldiers at Rock Island is shown in Figure 3 from an 1864 artist's perspective. Rock Island was one of the largest and most notorious Union prison camps during the war. It was opened in December 1863. An Act of Congress

established Rock Island Arsenal on an island in the Mississippi River between Davenport, Iowa, and Moline, Illinois.

A prison camp for Confederate prisoners existed there from December 1863 to July 1865. The prison consisted of 84 wood-framed barracks surrounded by a 12-foot high fence. Barracks and out buildings were also provided for the Union guards, headquarters buildings and a hospital complex.

Although figures vary according to sources quoted, one resource reveals that a total of 12,192 Confederate prisoners were held at the camp with 8,954 the highest number held at any one time. A total of 1,964 prisoners died there and are buried in the Confederate cemetery.³

Aaron E. Huggins enlisted as a private in Company K, 4th Regiment, Georgia State Troops on October 25, 1861. He mustered out in April 1862 and then enlisted as a private in Company C, 34th Regiment Georgia Infantry on May 13, 1862. Military records indicate that he was from Newnan, Georgia.

In a military report dated January 15, 1865, he is shown absent without leave with the notation "Dec

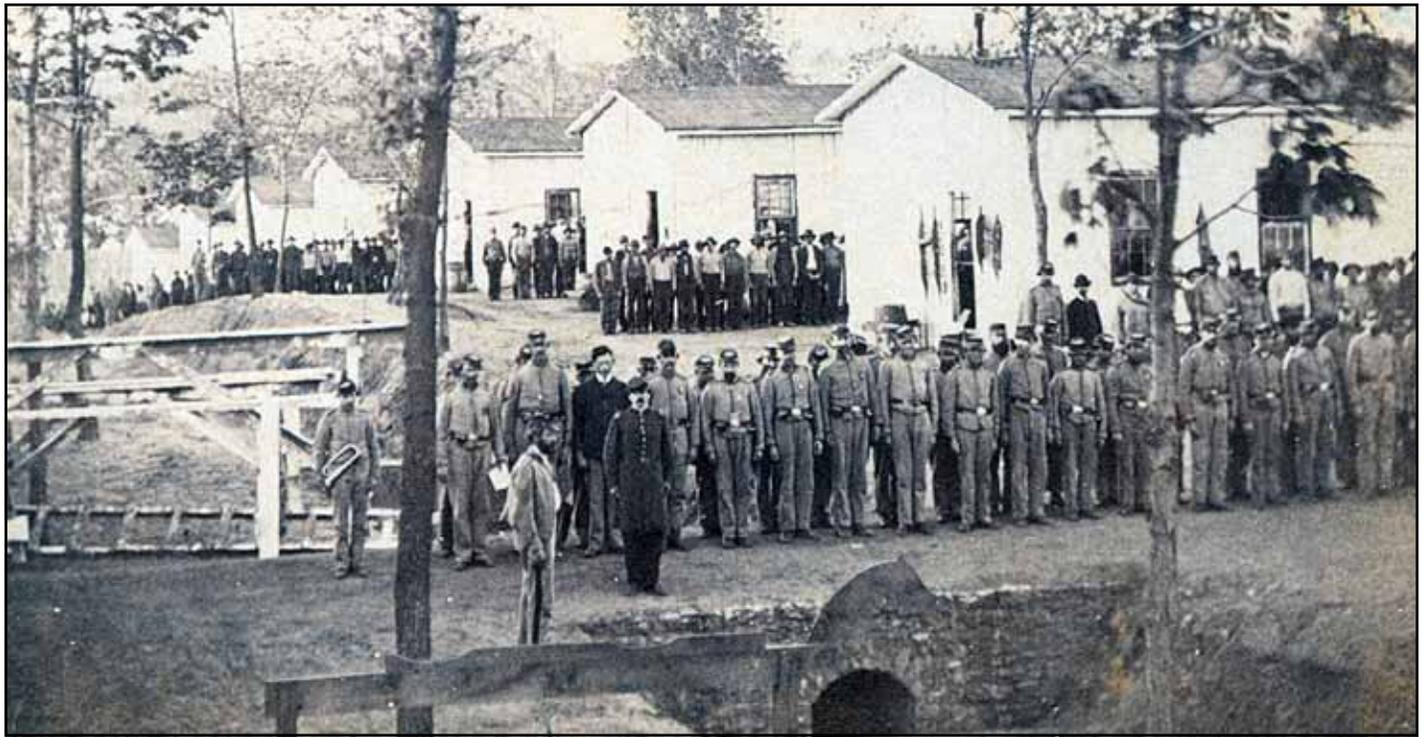


Figure 2: Confederate prisoners at roll call, Rock Island Barracks, December 1863.

16/64⁴ Captured without any effort to get out the enemy at Nashville” (Figure 4).

Huggins was also on a list of prisoners of war paroled earlier in the war at Vicksburg, Mississippi, on July 8, 1863, after being captured July 4, 1863.

In another report, is noted, “Claims to have been loyal. Enlisted to avoid conscription. Deserted to avail himself of Amnesty Proclamation” (Figure 5).

Huggins signed the oath of allegiance to the U.S. government on January 1, 1865, and mustered into the 6th Regiment U.S. Volunteer Infantry at Camp Douglas, Illinois, on April 3, 1865.

Among the most interesting records is a letter (Figure 6) written by Huggins on January 2, 1865, from Camp Douglas Prison, where he was apparently transferred from Rock Island.

Huggins says, in part:

I was enlisted in the Rebel [army] on the 12 May, 1864, in Coweta County Georgia; at the time of my enlistment the greatest excitement prevailed throughout the county, and like so many misguided men I drifted into this Rebellion without being aware of the great wrong I was committing.

I would further represent that I deserted the Rebel Service and voluntarily surrendered myself to General Thomas’ Army at Nashville Tennessee on the 16 December 1864 in order to avail myself of the Amnesty Proclamation. I do not desire to be returned South in exchange, but respectfully ask that permission be granted me to take the Oath of Allegiance to the United States and again enjoy the privileges of an American Citizen.

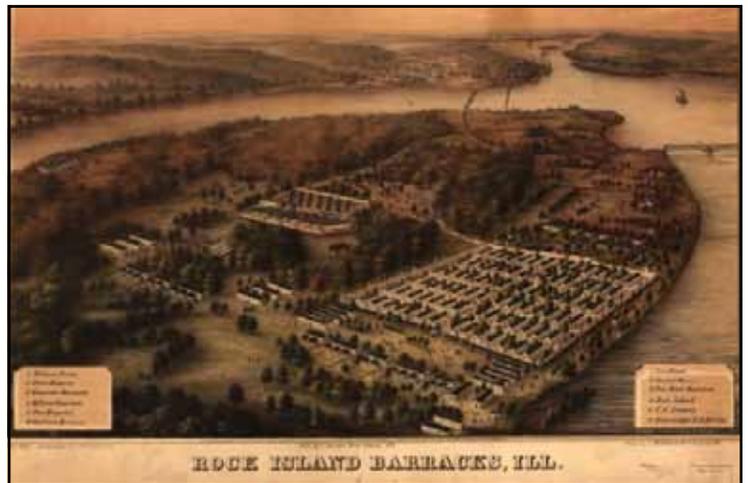


Figure 3: A detail of an 1864 Rock Island Prison perspective drawing by J. McKittrick & Co., St. Louis. (Library of Congress)

Essentially, he declares that he has had an epiphany and thus desires to become a “Galvanized Yankee.” Both Confederate and Union service records bear out his story.

U.S. military records show that he mustered into the 6th Regiment U.S. Volunteer Infantry at Camp Douglas, Illinois, on March 31, 1865, although some records show early April dates. He signed on for three years and served in Nebraska Territory after the war (Figure 7).

Not everyone is familiar with the term “Galvanized Yankee,” but Huggins is the very definition. These were former Confederate prisoners of war who swore allegiance to the United States and joined the Union

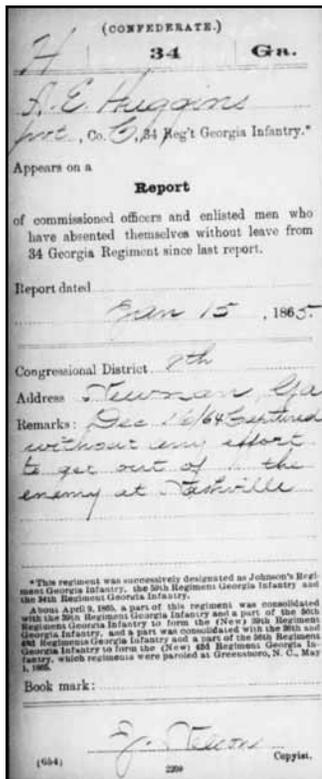


Figure 4: Military record showing that Huggins was captured 'without any effort to get out of the enemy at Nashville.'

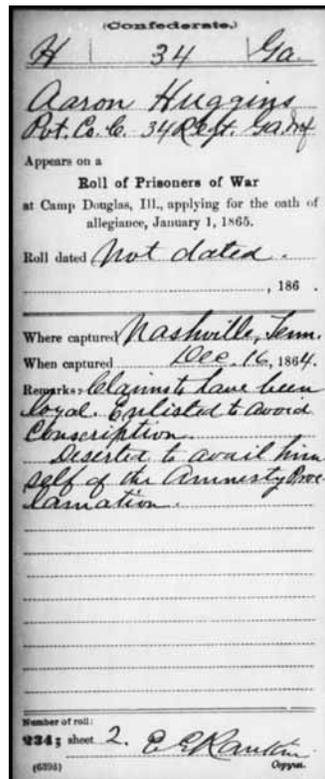


Figure 5: Military record in which Huggins claims to have been loyal, enlisted to avoid conscription, and deserted to avail himself of the Amnesty Proclamation.

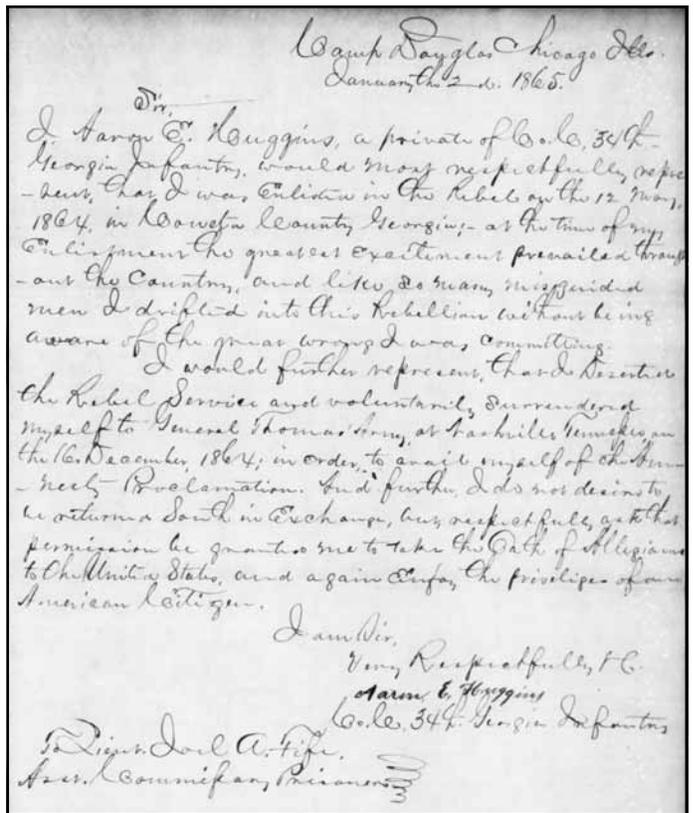


Figure 6: Huggins signed letter explaining that he has 'seen the light' and wishes to join the Union Army.

Army. Approximately 5,600 former Confederate soldiers enlisted in this manner and were organized into six regiments of infantry between January 1864 and November 1866.

Of those, more than 250 had begun service as Union soldiers, were captured in battle, and then enlisted in Confederate regiments to escape the horrors of prison. They surrendered to Union forces in December 1864 and were held by the United States as deserters, but were saved from prosecution by enlisting in the 5th and 6th U.S. Volunteers.⁵

The term galvanized has also been applied to former Union soldiers enlisting in the Confederate Army, including the use of Galvanized Yankees to designate them. At least 1,600 former Union prisoners of war enlisted in Confederate service in late 1864 and early 1865, most of them recent German or Irish immigrants who had been drafted into Union regiments.

Endnotes

- 1 Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, editors, *Confederate States Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 U.S. Army Rock Island Arsenal. <http://civilwaralbum.com/misc4/rockisland1.html> Accessed July 12, 2017.
- 4 Some records show the capture date as December 15, while others show December 16, 1864.
- 5 "Galvanized Yankees," Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galvanized_Yankees Accessed October 1, 2017.

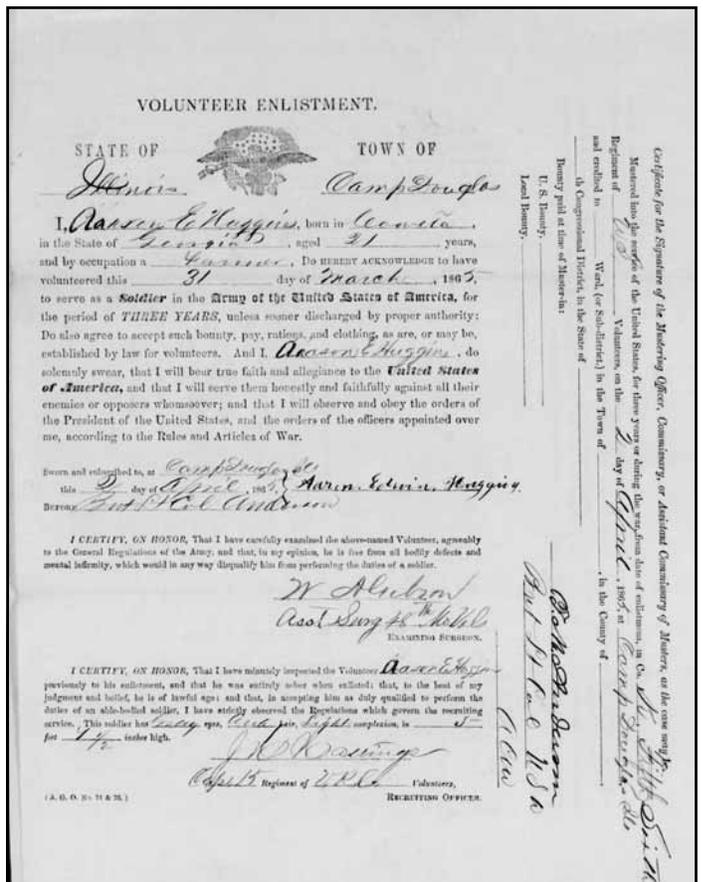


Figure 7: U.S. military record showing Huggins as a member of the 6th Regiment U.S. Volunteer Infantry, enlisted at Camp Douglas March 31, 1865, for a period of three years.