

Prisoners of War

In such battles as occur in this war it inevitably happens that many men are taken prisoners. A regiment may be in an exposed position with orders to hold the place at all costs, and may do so with telling effect, until the enemy has pushed by on every side and completely enveloped the place. That regiment, by holding out, has hampered and delayed the enemy, has broken the advance, thrown it into confusion, and gained precious time in which our own troops can take up and hold new positions. Cut off, surrounded, perhaps with ammunition all gone, what is that regiment to do? The enemy may, and sometimes does, keep out of reach and pulverize the position at leisure with high explosives, or, after a terrible demonstration of what they can do, may call on the men who are left to surrender. There is nothing else for them to do. In this war bodies of men are cut off, enveloped, and made prisoners every day on both sides. It happens inevitably, and the bravest of troops and the best of men may be made prisoners expressly because they have been assigned the most dangerous of tasks, or through having pierced deepest into the enemy's onrush.

A force is sometimes engulfed bodily under such conditions that continued resistance is not even a matter of choice. The force, as such, has been obliterated; what remains of it consists of men wounded, exhausted, unarmed; the battle has swept over, around, and past them. They have done their utmost to the last ounce of their energy, and they remain on the field part of the spoils of war. It had to be. It is frequently the fate of men who stand fast while there is a shot to fire.