

The Immortal 600



Dr. James Hughes, the first cousin of my daughter-in-law's 5th great-granddaughter, was a captain in the 44th Virginia Regiment during the Civil War. He was captured in May of 1864 at the Spotsylvania Courthouse and subsequently became a pawn in what has arguably been deemed the most shameful event of the war.

In June of 1864, the city of Charleston SC was under siege from Union artillery. In an attempt to silence those guns, the Confederate Army imprisoned five Union generals and forty-five Union officers in the area being targeted by the North, in effect using them as human shields.

This so infuriated the North that in retaliation, they brought 50 Southern officers from the prison at Fort Delaware and positioned them in front of the Union position on Morris Island, at the entrance to Charleston Harbor, to be used similarly as shields from bombing. When the South sent 600 more prisoners to Charleston to relieve overcrowding at Andersonville, the North again responded by bringing 600 more of their prisoners. This group became known as the "Immortal 600" and James Hughes was counted among that number.

Because the prisoner exchange program between the sides had been effectively cancelled due to perceived inequities, there was little hope for these prisoners other than to wait out the

course of the war, defenseless against the bombs, diseases, and lack of food or medical care.

This stalemate continued until an outbreak of yellow fever in Charleston forced the North to move their prisoners outside of the city limits. The 600 were transferred to Fort Pulaski and found to be in dismal condition. Most had dysentery and scurvy; many were so weak they could not rise from their cots. Thirteen died while at Fort Pulaski, most from dehydration. Another 25 died upon their transfer back to Fort Delaware.

The Immortal 600 were lauded as heroes of the South for their refusal to take the Northern Oath of Allegiance under duress.

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