

George Friend Fowlkes
Rock Island Barracks
December 1863 – July 1865

During the Civil War, the Union operated 21 prison camps to house captured Confederate soldiers. Rock Island Barracks was one of the prison camps. During the twenty months the prison existed, 12,129 Confederate soldiers were imprisoned at the camp.

In December 1863, over 5,000 captured Confederate soldiers arrived before the camp was ready. There weren't enough blankets or clothes for everybody. Winter was colder and more harsh than usual that year.

Even worse, there wasn't a hospital. Healthy soldiers had to live with those who already had variola or smallpox. Disease spread. Many prisoners and guards died. Most died from smallpox, pneumonia, or dysentery (severe diarrhea). After camp officials improved conditions, fewer men died. Two thirds of the deaths happened in the first eight months.

George Friend Fowlkes originally enlisted on February 2, 1862. As a member of Company K of the Third Arkansas Cavalry, he was captured at Dandridge, Tennessee on December 12, 1863. He was originally sent to Camp Chase, Ohio. He was transferred to Rock Island Barracks and arrived on December 31, 1863. He died of smallpox or variola on March 15, 1864; two months shy of his 19th birthday. Like his fellow casualties, he's buried in the Confederate Cemetery. You can use the image on this page or visit Martin's grave and copy the inscription on the headstone in the space provided on this paper.

