

Sergeant Martin Simms
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. It didn't have 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.

Sergeant Martin Simms was one of the men who died from smallpox. He died in February 1864 a month after arriving at the camp. 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.

