

The Andersonville Prison Camp

Brief Overview

The Andersonville Prison Camp was located in Andersonville, GA. To most, it was arguably Auschwitz in Georgia. Founded in 1864, it was an approximately 16 acre field where Union soldiers, captured in battle, were sent to rot and die.

The Camp

Located in Andersonville, Georgia, this was one of the worst places for a Union soldier to be. Under the command of Henry Wirz, over 45,000 Union soldiers were forced into captivity here. It started out as a rather nice place that was sanitary and had good food. However, as soldiers began piling in, it became the cesspool that we know today.

Andersonville Prison was a 16.5 acre prison with a 15 foot palisade surrounding its perimeter. Later, in late 1864, it was expanded to nearly 25 acres to house the incoming prisoners. In the palisade were watchtowers, where any Union soldiers trying to escape incarceration were shot down. There were two entrances on the West wall, called the North and South Entrance. It was in these two entrances that soldiers were to face their worst nightmares.

One of the main problems surrounding the camp was the lack of sanitation and food. The camp was very undersupplied, and food, utensils, or medical supplies to keep up with the tens of thousands of Union soldiers was scarce. Even the Confederate soldiers commandeering the prison were partially forced into starvation, but the prisoners got the lower end of the stick. Many would shrivel up to nothing more than skin and bones. As one prisoner, Robert H. Kellogg said, *“Before us were forms that had once been active and erect;—stalwart men, now nothing but mere walking skeletons, covered with filth and vermin.”* The lack of food supplies lead to vitamin C deficiency, or scurvy, in many of the soldiers. This was one of the main causes of death, as well as other diseases spreading like wildfire in the cramped quarters, such as dysentery and diarrhea. Many of the men caught these diseases by drinking from the rancid water in the small creek that ran through the camp. In fact, over 28% of prisoners died from diseases or other causes. The conditions steadily fell downhill until the prisoner’s liberation in 1865.

Disease wasn’t the only cause of death, though. A small group called the Raiders were another main cause of death. They believed that if they were to survive, they had to take what was theirs. They ran around, usually with clubs, and killed other prisoners. After their victims were dead, they pillaged their belongings and stole whatever could be useful for survival. Another group of men, called Regulators, rose up and killed many of the Raiders. The

remaining were put into a makeshift jury and were sentenced to stocks, ball and chain, and for 6 Raiders, being sent to the gallows, a place where people are hung.

The Liberation

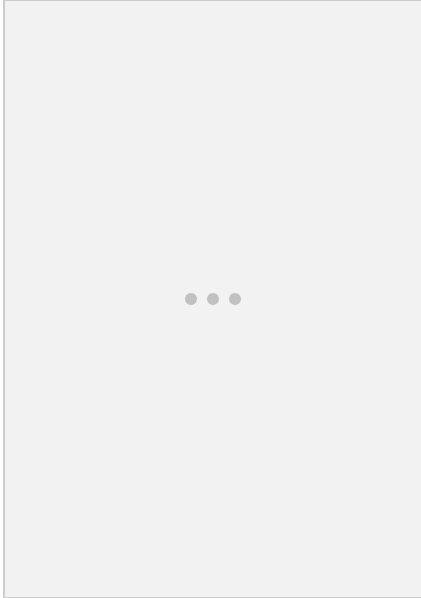
As you probably expected, due to the fact that it was in Georgia, the camp was in the CSA. If it was in the CSA, it was run by Jefferson Davis. Many times, the camp came close to liberation during specific points in the war. Multiple times, Henry Wirz and other Confederate leaders, such as Jefferson Davis, agreed to parole certain prisoners to go to President Lincoln and beg for a surrender. Many times, Lincoln refused.

The camp also came close to liberation during Sherman's March to the Sea. After his Atlanta Campaign, when he burned down Atlanta, Sherman marched to Savannah, burning everything in his path. He eventually ran into Andersonville. He didn't liberate any prisoners, but the conditions were strictly improved. It eventually led to liberation in 1865, see below.

The Cemetery

Not too far away from the camp itself is a massive cemetery. Here, the remains of the dead prisoners are buried. The Andersonville Cemetery is the final resting place for 13,000 people who died in miserable conditions. Now, however, it contains about 20,000 final resting spots. Why? Over time, many people who gave their lives during multiple wars, such as the World Wars. It also contains 6 graves set apart from the others, the graves of the aforementioned Raiders. Nowadays, about 120 people are buried here each year.

Aftermath-Today



Finally, in May of 1865, Andersonville was

captured, and all of the surviving prisoners were liberated. The commander, Henry Wirz, was immediately tried for his actions. He was the only Confederate or Union general charged for war crimes and hung for their crimes. Despite all of his pleas and his proof of trying to get better conditions for prisoners, he was still found guilty.

Of the 45,000 prisoners sent to Andersonville, only 71% of them lived to tell the tale. In 1890, Georgia bought the track of land, and in 1910, it was bought by the federal government. Many changes then occurred, including it becoming a National Park and having the National POW museum open in 1988.

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"[I] walk around camp every morning looking for acquaintances, the sick, &c. Can see a dozen most any morning laying around dead. A great many are terribly afflicted with diarrhea, and scurvy begins to take hold of some. Scurvy is a bad disease, and taken in connection with the former is sure death. Some have dropsy as well as scurvy, and the swollen limbs and body are sad to see."

-John Ransom

"Scurvy breaking out in my mouth, and skin generally disordered. Frightened!"

"All very sick - almost helpless."

-Anonymous

"Can see the dead wagon loaded up with twenty or thirty bodies at a time, two lengths, just like four foot wood is loaded on to a wagon at the North, and away they go to the grave yard

on a trot. Perhaps one or two will fall off and get run over. No attention paid to that; they are picked up on the road back after more. Was ever before in this world anything so terrible happening? Many entirely naked.”

John Ransom

“Within the circumscribed area of the stockade the Federal prisoners were compelled to perform all the functions of life, cooking, washing, the calls of nature, exercise, and sleeping...[A] considerable breadth of land along the stream...was low and boggy, and was covered with the excrements of the men and thus rendered wholly uninhabitable...The pines and other small trees and shrubs...were in a short time cut down by the prisoners for firewood, and no shade tree was left in the entire enclosure of the stockade...[T]he Federals constructed for themselves small huts and caves and attempted to shield themselves from the rain and sun, and night damps and dew...The irregular arrangement of the huts and imperfect shelters was very unfavorable for the maintenance of a proper system of police.”

Joseph Jones

“No improvements in our condition - terrible coughs and cramps in the bowels, verging on to chronic diarrhea and inflammation of the bowels.”

Eugene Forbes

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<http://andersonville01.weebly.com/index.html>

<http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/warfare-and-logistics/warfare/andersonville>

<http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/warfare-and-logistics/warfare/andersonville.html>

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