Andersonville

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE • GEORGIA

SAFETY NOTE

You are in an area where natural conditions can be hazardous. Wear shoes to protect yourself from sandspurs that grow wild in the grass. Also, be wary of poisonous snakes and poison ivy. Please do not climb on fences, earthworks, and monuments.

ADMINISTRATION

Andersonville National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Andersonville, GA 31711, is in immediate charge. The park, which includes the national cemetery and the prison site, is 9 miles northeast of Americus on Ga. 49. It is being developed as a memorial to those soldiers who have been prisoners-of-war in our Nation's conflicts.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

National Park Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Andersonville Prison Camp, August 17, 1864

Andersonville, or Camp Sumter as it was known officially, was the largest of several Confederate military prisons established during the Civil War. It was built in 1864 after Confederate leaders decided to move the large number of Federal prisoners in Richmond to a place of greater security and more abundant food. During the 14 months of its existence, more than 45,000 Union soldiers were confined here. Of these, more than 12,000 died from disease, malnutrition, overcrowding, or exposure.
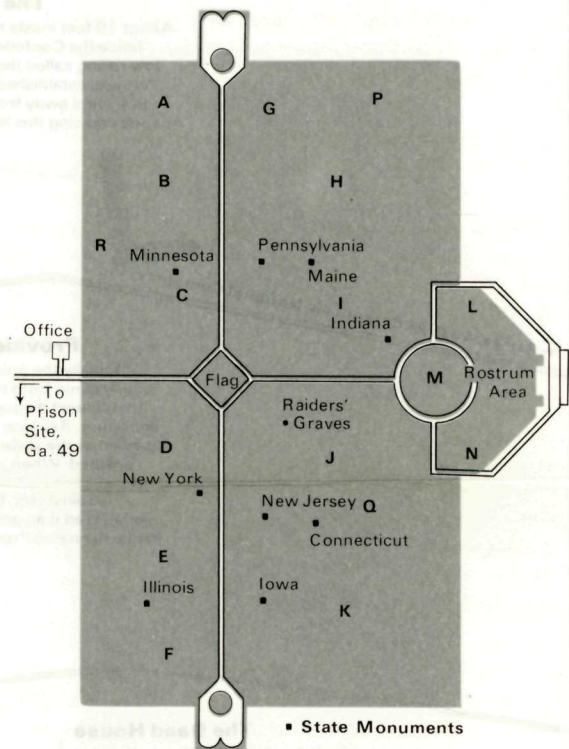
The prison camp originally comprised about 16½ acres of land enclosed by a 15-foot-high stockade of pine logs. The stockade was enlarged in June 1864 to enclose an area of 26½ acres. The prison proper was in the shape of a rectangle 1,620 feet long and 779 feet wide. Sentry boxes were placed at intervals along the top of the stockade, and inside, about 19 feet from the walls, was the "deadline," which the prisoners were not to cross. A branch of Sweetwater Creek flowed through the prison yard, dividing it roughly in half. This stream supplied water to most of the prison. Two entrances, the North Gate and the South Gate, were on the west side of the stockade. Forts, equipped with artillery to put down disturbances within the compound and to defend against attack, stood at each outside corner.

The first Union prisoners were brought to Andersonville in February 1864. Approximately 400 more arrived each day during the next few months, and by the end of July some 31,678 men were confined in a prison originally built for 10,000. The largest number held at any one time was more than 32,000, in August 1864. Handicapped by deteriorating economic conditions, an inadequate transportation system, and the necessity of concentrating all available resources on its army, the Confederate government was unable to provide adequate housing, food, clothing, and medical care to the Federal captives. These conditions, along with a breakdown of the prisoner exchange system, created much suffering and a high mortality rate.

In September 1864, when Gen. William T. Sherman's Union forces occupied Atlanta and Federal cavalry columns threatened Andersonville's security, most of the prisoners were moved to camps in South Carolina and eastern Georgia. From then until April 1865, the prison was operated on a smaller basis. When the war ended, Capt. Henry Wirz, the Andersonville commandant, was arrested and charged with conspiring to "impair and injure the health and destroy the lives . . . of federal prisoners" and with "murder, in violation of the laws of war." Apparently there never was such a conspiracy, but public anger and indignation in the North over conditions at Andersonville demanded appeasement. Wirz was tried and found guilty by a military tribunal. He was hanged in Washington, D.C., on November 10, 1865.

In the years after the war, Andersonville prison gradually rotted away. In 1890 the site was purchased by the Georgia Department of the Grand Army of the Republic, a patriotic society composed largely of former Union soldiers. Seven years later the property was transferred to the Women's Relief Corps, an auxiliary of the G.A.R., which in turn gave it to the U.S. Government in 1910. The area was administered by the U.S. Department of the Army until 1970, when it was designated a national historic site and made part of the National Park System.

• State Monuments

ANDERSONVILLE NATIONAL CEMETERY

Many of the early national cemeteries were established at or near Civil War battlefields, or near military hospitals set up hurriedly to meet the exigencies of war. No such circumstances dictated the location of Andersonville National Cemetery. The initial interments, more than 12,000 of them, were of those who had died in the nearby prison camp.

Andersonville National Cemetery was established on July 26, 1865. By 1868 additional interments of Union soldiers previously buried in other Confederate cemeteries in Georgia had brought the total burials to 13,669. Today the cemetery is composed of 17 sections—A through R (there is no section O). Sections E, F, H, J, and K contain the remains of most of those who died in the prison camp. Set apart from the other interments, in a small rectangular plot in section J near the flagpole at the main gate, are the graves of the six "Andersonville Raiders," ringleaders of a group of thieves and murderers who preyed upon fellow prisoners until these men were arrested and executed on July 11, 1864.

ANDERSONVILLE PRISON SITE

Information Station

Escape Tunnels and Wells
Prisoners dug many tunnels in their attempts to escape confinement. Nearly all of the men who made it outside were recaptured and returned to the stockade. Not all of the holes in this area are escape tunnels, however; many are the remains of wells dug by Federals searching for fresh drinking water.

Parking Area

Tour Road

Earthworks

The Stockade
The outer row of concrete posts marks the location of the stockade fence. It was built of 20-foot pine logs sunk 5 feet into the ground.

The Deadline
About 19 feet inside the stockade fence the Confederates built a low railing called the "deadline." This was established to keep the prisoners away from the walls. Anyone crossing this line was shot.

Rifle Pit

← To Ga. 49 & Andersonville National Cemetery

Providence Spring
Initially the prison's only water supply came from the small stream that flowed through the stockade enclosure. Because the stream also served as the sewer, it was quickly polluted. When a spring of good water appeared at this point after a rainstorm, Union prisoners considered it an act of providence, hence the name Providence Spring.

North Gate

Parking Area

The Dead House
Men who died in the stockade were removed to a small house built of tree branches outside the South Gate. From there they were carried by wagons to the cemetery for burial.

The Star Fort
This earthwork, along with several others around the perimeter of the stockade, was constructed to quell disturbances inside the prison and to guard against Union cavalry attacks

South Gate

Stream

N

Tour Road

Hospital Site
The prison hospital was a small, stockaded structure fitted out with tents for sick prisoners. Because of the Union blockade of Southern ports, shortage of transportation, and great demands on existing supplies, few medicines were available. As a result, Confederate doctors could do little to alleviate patients' suffering.

Earthworks

Key to Commemorative Monuments
A Wisconsin
B Turner
C Clara Barton
D Women's Relief Corps
E Rhode Island
F Massachusetts
G Michigan
H Ohio
I Tennessee