



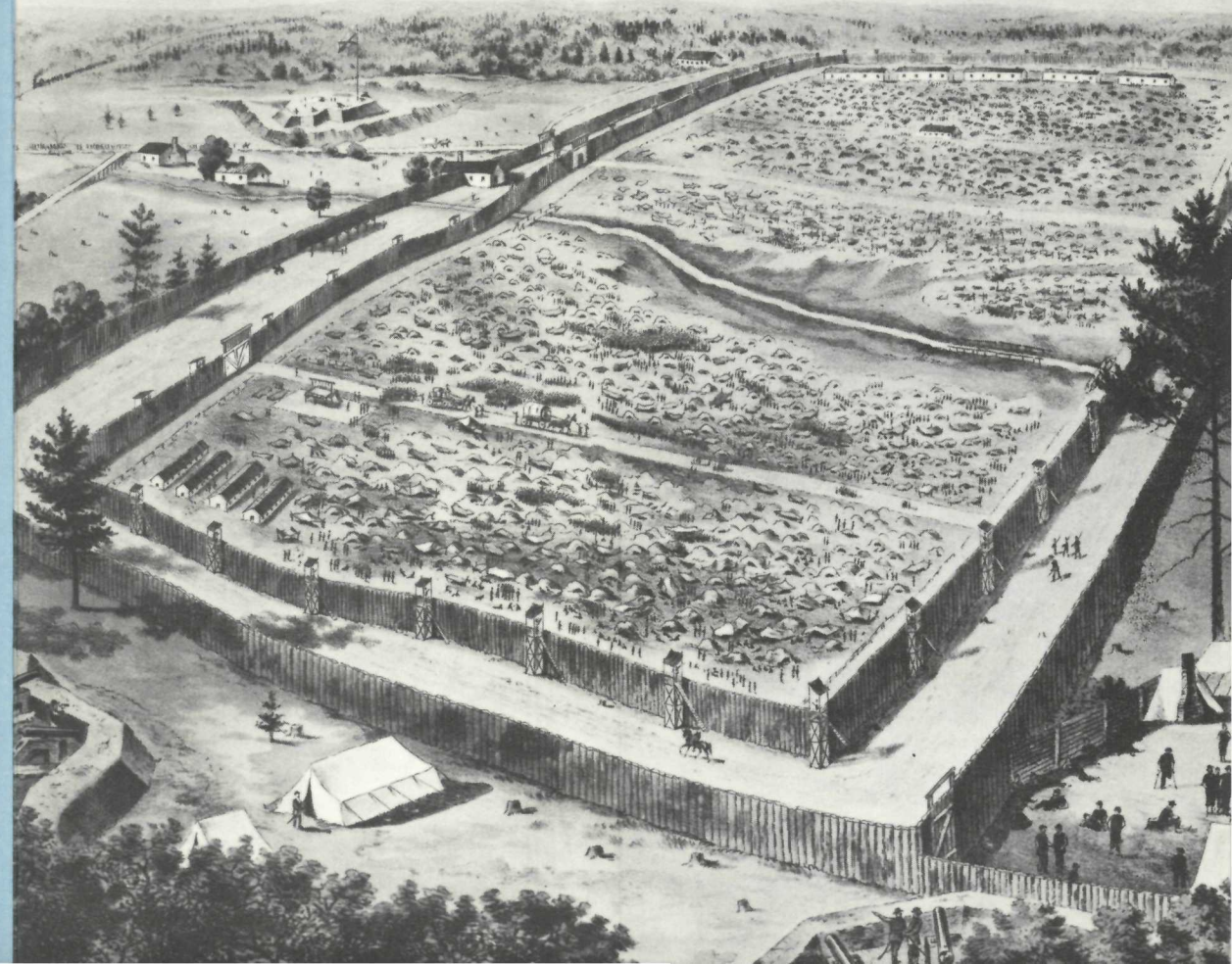
andersonville

“About midnight the train stopped, and we were ordered off.... Five hundred weary men moved along slowly through double lines of guards. Five hundred men marched silently towards the gates that were to shut out life and hope for most of them forever. A quarter of a mile from the railroad, we came to a massive palisade of

great squared logs standing upright in the ground. The fires blazed up and showed us a section of these, and two massive wooden gates, with heavy iron bolts and hinges. They swung open as we stood there and we passed through into the space beyond. We were in Andersonville.”

John McElroy, Co. L, 16th Illinois Cavalry.

Birdseye view of Andersonville Prison from the southeast. Lithograph by J.W. Morton, Jr., 1890.





Andersonville prison

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 early 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 upon threat of death.

A branch of Sweetwater Creek flowed through the prison yard. 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. Small forts equipped with artillery to put down disturbances within the compound and to defend against attack stood at each outside corner.

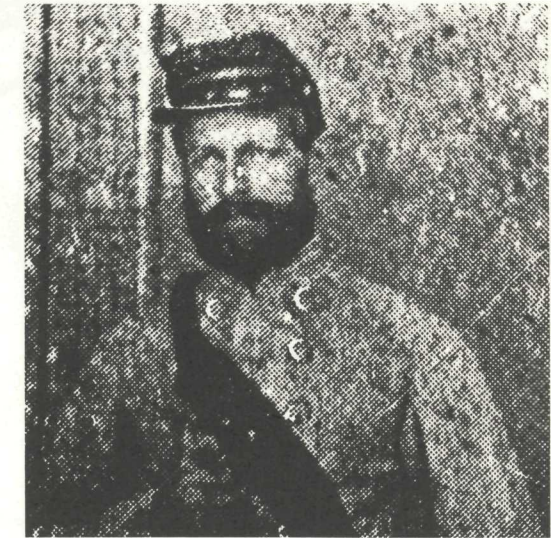
The first Union prisoners were brought to Andersonville in February 1864. Approximately 400 more arrived each day during the next few months, and by the end of July some 31,678 men were confined in a prison originally built for 10,000. The largest number held at any one time was more than 32,000, in 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.

"Since the day I was Born," one prisoner later recalled, "I never saw such misery." Still another, Michigan cavalryman John Ransom, confided to his diary: "There is so much filth about the camp that it is terrible trying to live here.... With sunken eyes, blackened countenances from pitch pine smoke, rags, and disease, the men look sickening. The air reeks with nastiness."

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

Capt. Henry Wirz



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 1891 the site was purchased by the Georgia Department of the Grand Army of the Republic, a patriotic society composed largely of former Union soldiers. About six years later the property was given 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.

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.

Note: In the cemetery portion of the map at the right, State monuments are indicated by small black squares (•) and the State name.

About Your Visit

Andersonville National Historic Site is 10 miles northeast of Americus on Ga. 49. The 475-acre park, consisting of the national cemetery and the prison site, exemplifies the grim life suffered by prisoners—North and South—during the Civil War. The unique value of Andersonville is that here the harshness of war is tempered by a landscape of beauty which raises the hope that reason and harmony can still prevail in the affairs of men.

We suggest you begin your tour at the visitor center. Uniformed Park Service interpreters will answer your questions and provide you with historical information. A variety of informational sales publications will help you understand the role of Civil War prison camps. Schedules of daily activities and special events during the year are posted at the visitor center. Note that the park is open only during daylight hours. Park gates are locked at night. No camping is permitted, but picnicking is allowed in designated areas.

Andersonville National Historic Site continues to serve as an active cemetery for veterans who have honorably served their country. Please be respectful of graves and funerals that might be in progress. Records of Civil War and subsequent burials are located at the visitor center.

Please...

Help us preserve this park for the enjoyment of this and future generations. Stay on the roadways and do not park on grassy areas. The earthworks are fragile and climbing on them destroys them. Do not disturb the plants, animals, monuments, buildings, relics, and artifacts within the park. The possession and use of metal detectors on park grounds is prohibited.

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.

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

