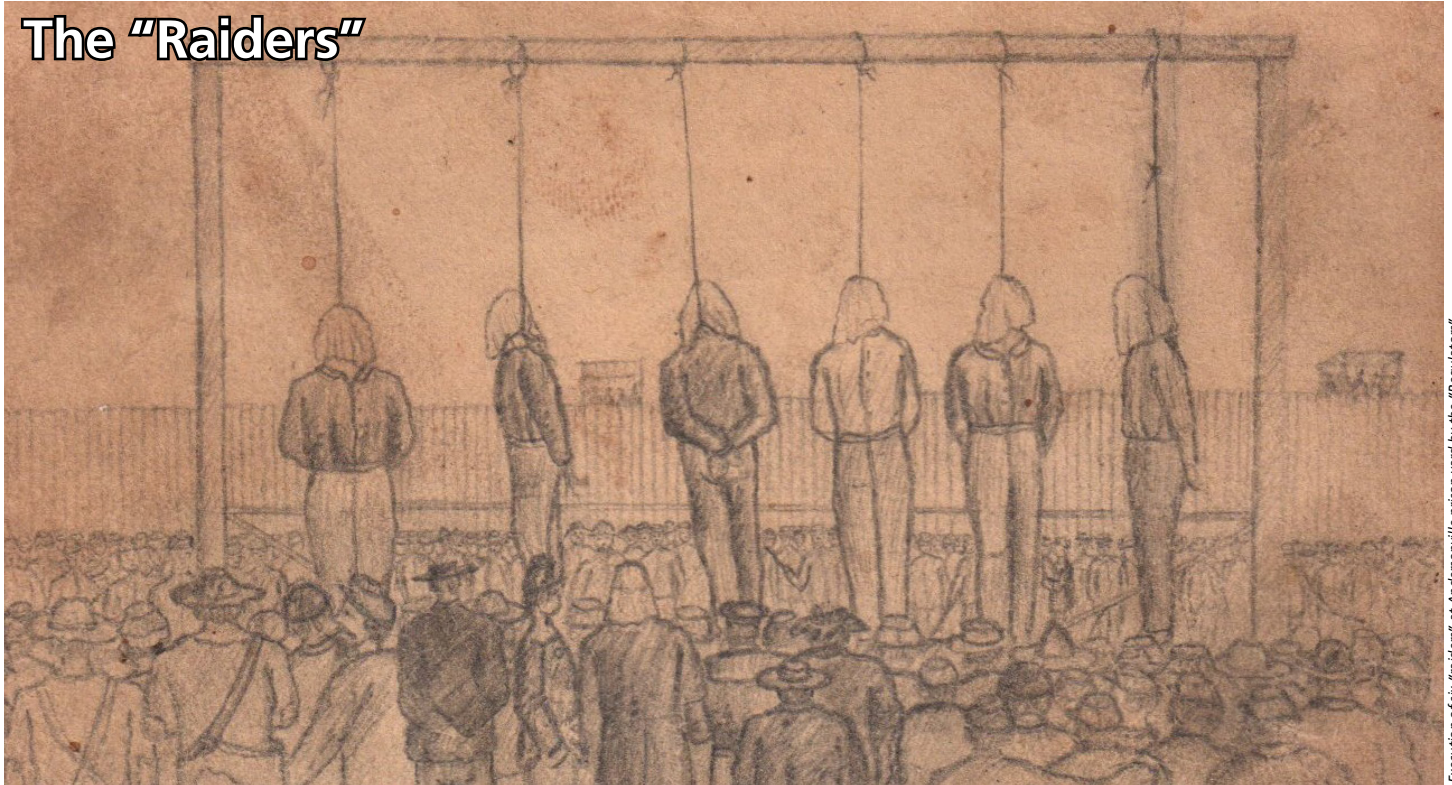




The "Raiders"



Execution of six "raiders" at Andersonville prison yard by the "Regulators"
Morgan Family Collections/The Diary of Philip Morgan, 100th NY

Isolated from the thousands of prisoners' graves stand six headstones. These headstones identify the resting places of the Raiders. Who were these men and why were these six, out of the thirteen thousand who perished at Andersonville, buried separately?

Crime and Regulation

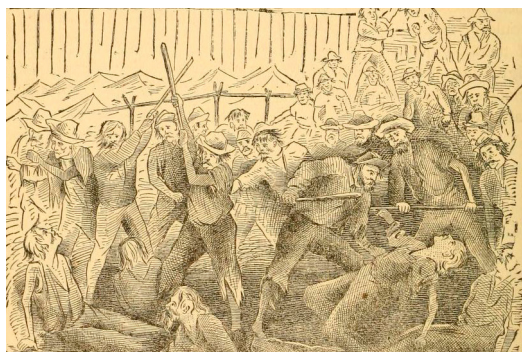
By the middle of June 1864, Camp Sumter Military Prison at Andersonville held more than double its intended capacity: over 21,000 United States soldiers. Stealing personal items and random acts of violence within the prison population began increasing as more men arrived. As within any city population, crime ranged from petty theft to assault. These criminals had many nicknames, including "camp-robbers," "marauders," and

"desperadoes." Soon, they were commonly identified as "raiders." They operated both as individuals and in groups. By the end of June, stories emerged that the Raiders committed crimes boldly, in daylight. Rumors included stories of raiders outright murdering other prisoners. The criminal activity fueled fear within the camp and Confederate authorities failed to set up any form of regulations or law enforcement inside the stockade.

Criminals Targeted

During the final weeks of June, an organized group identified as "The Regulators," approached Confederate authorities about dealing with these criminals. Both the Confederate authorities and the camp population supported a creation of a "police force" with intentions of punishing crime within camp. The Regulators had permission from the Confederate authorities to enforce laws within the camp. Beginning June 29th and extending through July 1st, with the

permission of Gen. John Winder, the Regulators hunted and arrested accused Raiders. At least 75 men were arrested and held outside the stockade wall as a means of protection from other prisoners while they awaited trial. Some prisoners claimed as many as 150 soldiers were originally arrested. Other prisoners, many identified as members of the Regulators, assumed the roles of judge and jury. The proceeding court-martial took place over the first several days of July.



From Andersonville, by John McElroy

"Midnight Attack of the Raiders"



Turner Pictures/Andersonville, 1996

The movie *Andersonville* continues to shape many people's perceptions about crime in Andersonville.

Punishments

The court-martial found many guilty and issued various punishments based on offenses. On July 9th, some of the accused soldiers were released back into the camp by way of “running the gauntlet.” As these soldiers entered back into the camp, they were forced to run between two lines of prisoners holding sticks and clubs. As they ran through the gauntlet, the prisoners beat them. At least one of the punished died because of the wounds received in this manner. The court martial found six men guilty of crimes punishable by hanging. Two days later, on July 11th, the Confederate authorities permitted members of the “Regulators” to gather lumber and build a gallows for an execution.



“The Gallows” by Robert K. Sneden, 40th NY

Virginia Historical Society

Captain Wirz delivered the six men, the most notorious of the Raiders, to the Regulators for their execution. Prisoners remembered how the Catholic priest in attendance, Peter Whelan, asked for mercy on behalf of the six. Wirz declared it was not in his power to stop the hanging. Right before the hanging, the rope of one of the six broke and he fled into the crowd. He was quickly recaptured and returned, allowing for the execution to proceed as planned. That afternoon, these Raiders hanged to death. They were buried in the cemetery, isolated from the other 3,100 who were buried in the cemetery at that time. The events of this “day of unusual excitement,” in the years following the Civil War became a focal point of prisoners’ memoirs.

“Today I saw six victims hung for murdering their fellow prisoners. They are the first ones I ever saw hung. They call them raiders. One rope broke.”

*Samuel Melvin
1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery
July 11, 1864*

Raiders Remembered

The story of the Raiders, their hanging, and their isolated graves evolved into one of the most-told stories of Andersonville. Historians know little about the trial, the accused, and the prosecutors. Most of what we know about the Raiders comes from prisoner diaries and memoirs; no records exist of the trial. Early prisoner accounts make note of the day as an execution, remarking how the execution served as a lesson to the camp. Until Wirz’s trial in late 1865, little was written about them. In 1865, when prisoners began publishing accounts of their captivity experience at Andersonville, the story of the Raiders made only minor appearances. As the prisoner memoirs became more popular in the 1870s and 1880s, the stories about the Raiders evolved into dramatic accounts of battling gangs with evil characterizations

of the Raiders and heroic portrayals of the Regulators. Soldiers’ accounts often confused names and descriptions of both the Raiders and the Regulators. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, historians portrayed the Raiders as villains, basing this aspect of the Andersonville story almost entirely on later accounts. Literature and film using these misunderstood accounts continue to shape modern perceptions of the Raiders. New research using primary sources reveals little about the Raiders except that they were tried and hung and now rest in separate graves at Andersonville National Cemetery. Questions surround even the identities of the six buried in the cemetery. In 1864 their alleged crimes set them apart. Today these isolated, but not forgotten, six graves allow visitors to meditate on dishonor, desperation, and justice.



The six executed Raiders were buried slightly apart from the main burial trenches: John Sarsfield 144th NY; William Collins, 88th PA; Charles Curtis, 5th RI; A. Munn, US Navy; and W.R. Rickson, US Navy

NPS/E. Goetsch