

Andersonville

National Historic Site
Georgia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide



"It is terrible trying to live here."

John Ransom, 9th Michigan Cavalry

Andersonville, or Camp Sumter as it was known officially, was the largest of many Confederate military prisons established during the Civil War. It was built in early 1864 after Confederate officials decided to move the large number of Federal prisoners in and around Richmond to a place of greater security and more abundant food. During the 14 months it existed, more than 45,000 Union soldiers were confined here. Of these, almost 13,000 died from disease, poor sanitation, malnutrition, overcrowding, or exposure to the elements.

The prison pen initially covered about 16½ acres of land enclosed by a 15-foot-high stockade of hewed pine logs. It was enlarged to 26½ acres in June 1864. The prison proper was in the shape of a parallelogram 1,620 feet long and 779 feet wide. Sentry boxes, or "pigeon-roosts" as the prisoners called them, stood at 30-yard intervals along the top of the stockade. Inside, about 19 feet from the wall, was the "deadline," which the prisoners were forbidden to cross upon threat of death. A branch of Sweetwater Creek flowed through the prison yard. This stream, called Stockade Branch, supplied water to most of the prison. Two entrances, the North Gate and the South Gate, were on the west side of the stockade. Eight small earthen forts located around the exterior of the prison were equipped with artillery to put down disturbances within the compound and to defend against feared Union cavalry attacks.

The first prisoners were brought to Andersonville in February 1864. During the next few months approximately 400 more arrived each day until, by the end of June, some 26,000 men were confined in a prison area originally intended to hold 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 need to concentrate all available resources on its army, the Confederate government was unable to provide adequate housing, food, clothing, and medical care to their Federal captives. These conditions, along with a breakdown of the prisoner exchange system, created much suffering and a high mortality rate. "There is so much filth about the camp that it is terrible trying to live

here," one prisoner, Michigan cavalryman John Ransom, confided to his diary. "With sunken eyes, blackened countenances from pitch pine smoke, rags, and disease, the men look sickening. The air reeks with nastiness." Still another recalled, "Since the day I was born, I never saw such misery."

When Gen. William T. Sherman's Union forces occupied Atlanta on September 2, 1864, bringing Federal cavalry columns within easy striking distance of Andersonville, Confederate authorities moved most of the prisoners to other camps in South Carolina and coastal Georgia. From then until April 1865, Andersonville was operated on a smaller basis. When the war ended, Capt. Henry Wirz, the camp's commandant, was arrested and charged with conspiring with high Confederate officials to "impair and injure the health and destroy the lives . . . of Federal prisoners" and "murder, in violation of the laws of war." Such a conspiracy never existed, but public anger and indignation throughout the North over the conditions at Andersonville demanded appeasement. Tried and found guilty by a military tribunal, Wirz was hanged in Washington, D.C., on November 10, 1865. (Today a monument honoring Wirz, erected by the Georgia Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, stands in the town of Andersonville.)

Andersonville prison ceased to exist when the war ended in April and May 1865. Some former prisoners remained in Federal service, but most returned to the civilian occupations they had before the war. During July and August 1865, Clara Barton, a detachment of laborers and soldiers, and a former prisoner named Dorence Atwater, came to Andersonville cemetery to identify and mark the graves of the Union dead. As a prisoner, Atwater was assigned to record the names of deceased Union soldiers for Confederate prison officials. Fearing loss of the death record at war's end, Atwater made his own copy of the register in hopes of notifying the relatives of the more than 12,000 dead interred at Andersonville. Thanks to Atwater's list and the Confederate death records captured at the end of the war, only 460 of the Andersonville graves had to be marked "unknown U.S. soldier."

Above: Living along the "deadline." Andersonville prison camp, 1864.



Handmade shirt and trousers worn by Sgt. Nathan P. Kinsley Co. H, 145th Pennsylvania Infantry, while confined at Andersonville, 1864-65. Kinsley's photograph lies on top.

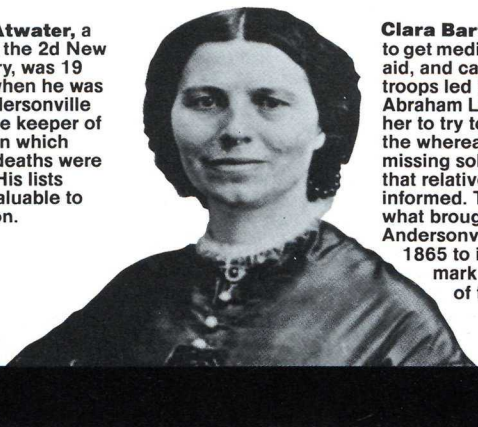
The prison site reverted to private ownership in 1875. In December 1890 it was purchased by the Georgia Department of the Grand Army of the Republic, a Union veterans organization. Unable to finance improvements needed to protect the property, this group sold it for \$1 to the Woman's Relief Corps, the national auxiliary of the G.A.R.

The Woman's Relief Corps made many improvements to the area with the idea of creating a memorial park. Pecan trees were planted to produce nuts for sale to help maintain the site and States began erecting commemorative monuments. The WRC built the Providence Spring House in 1901 to mark the site where, on August 9, 1864, a spring burst forth during a heavy summer rainstorm—an occurrence many prisoners attributed to Divine Providence. The fountain bowl in the Spring House was purchased by funds raised by former Andersonville prisoners.

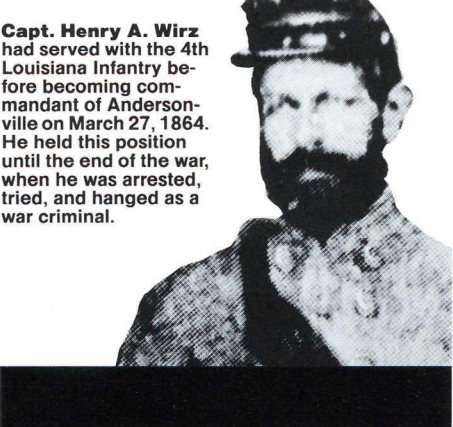
In 1910 the Woman's Relief Corps donated the prison site to the people of the United States. It was administered by the War Department and its successor, the Department of the Army, through 1970, when it was made a national historic site. The National Park Service took over administration on July 1, 1971.



Dorence Atwater, a member of the 2d New York Cavalry, was 19 years old when he was sent to Andersonville and became keeper of the books in which prisoners' deaths were recorded. His lists proved invaluable to Clara Barton.



Clara Barton's efforts to get medical supplies, aid, and care for the troops led President Abraham Lincoln to ask her to try to ascertain the whereabouts of missing soldiers so that relatives could be informed. This was what brought her to Andersonville in July 1865 to identify and mark the graves of the dead.



Capt. Henry A. Wirz had served with the 4th Louisiana Infantry before becoming commandant of Andersonville on March 27, 1864. He held this position until the end of the war, when he was arrested, tried, and hanged as a war criminal.

Civil War Prison Camps

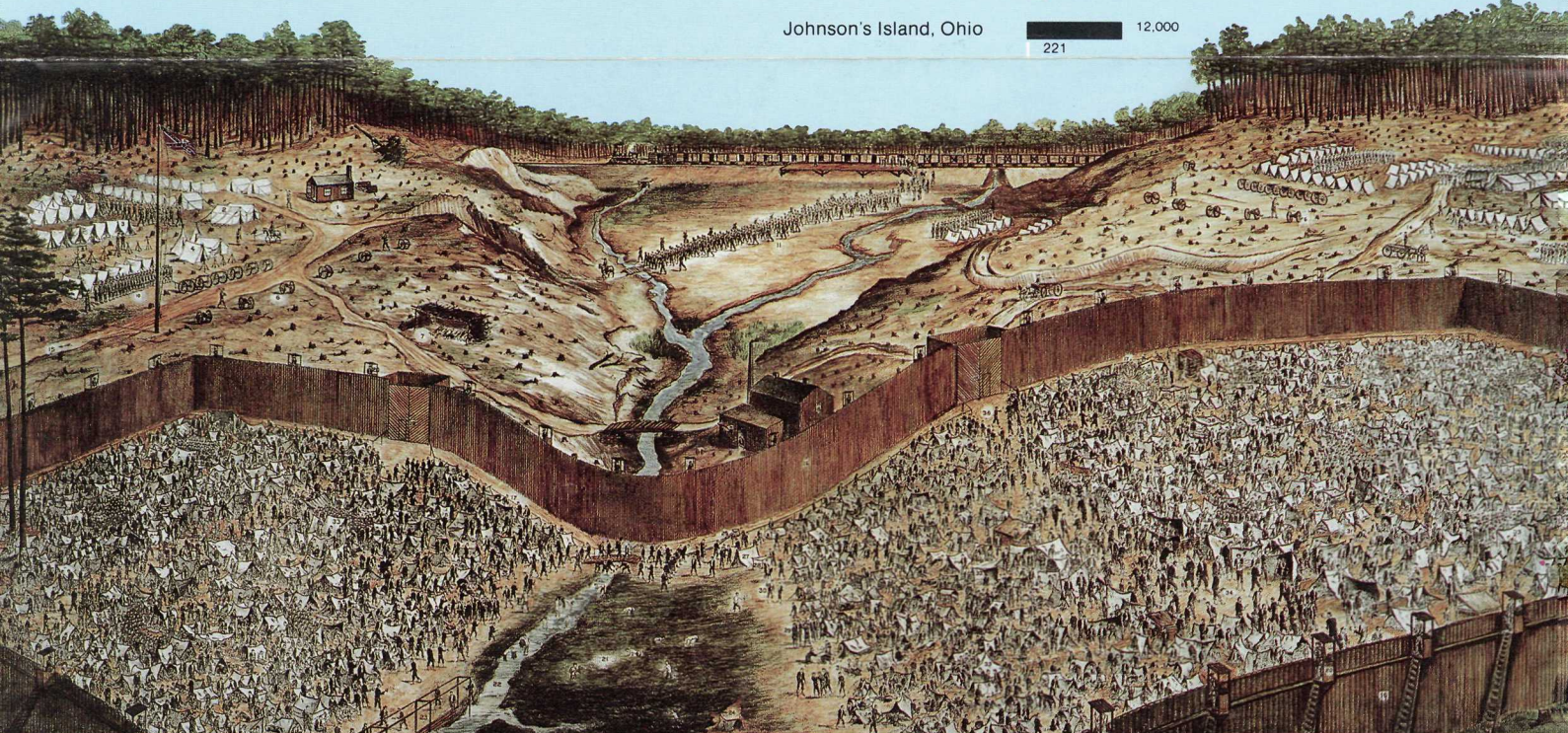
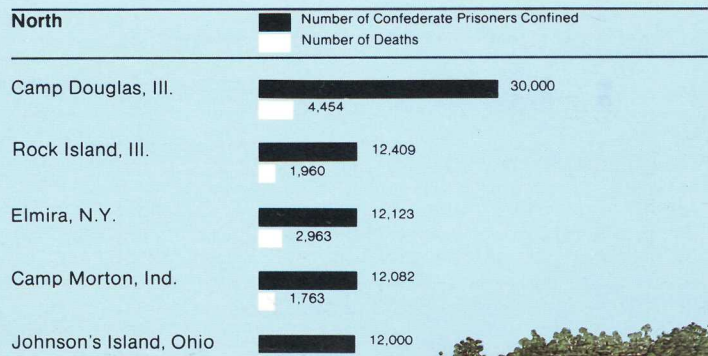
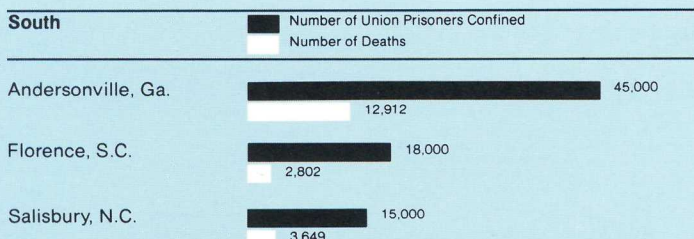
During the Civil War, both Union and Confederate authorities had to deal with thousands of prisoners and to find ways to care for them. Neither side expected a long conflict or the eventual need to care for large numbers of prisoners. In the South, Union prisoners were housed at first in old warehouses and barns. As the number of prisoners increased, however, special prison camps were built. Most were in the Andersonville style, depicted in the lithograph below by former inmate Thomas O'Dea, with pine logs enclosing an open field. These camps were numerous and located in such places as Florence, S.C., and Millen and Andersonville, Ga., to name just a few. Federal officials converted many of the Union camps of instruction into prisons. A stockade was placed around such camps as Butler,

Ill., Elmira, N.Y., and Chase, Ohio, to provide security. Some Confederate prisoners were kept at forts like McHenry at Baltimore, Md., and Warren in Boston Harbor, Mass.

Of the more than 211,400 Union soldiers captured by Confederate forces, 30,208 died in prison camps. Union forces captured 462,000 Confederates, including those belonging to the armies surrendered at the war's close. Of these, 25,976 died in prison camps. (The mortality rates for some of the more prominent prison camps North and South are shown in the graph below.) Most deaths occurred in the latter part of the war. Between August 1862 and November 1863 captured men were either exchanged or paroled on their oath of honor not to

reenter their armed forces. This allowed the captured men to return to camps of instruction as non-combatants, but more importantly the conquering army did not have to provide for the prisoners' needs. By October 1863, however, much disagreement over the exchange system had arisen and it soon ceased to function altogether.

The most common problems confronting prisoners both North and South were overcrowding, poor sanitation, and the lack of a proper diet. The confined soldiers suffered terribly. Mismanagement by prison officials, as well as by the prisoners themselves, brought on additional hardships. The end of the war saved hundreds of prisoners from an untimely death, but for many it was already too late.



Andersonville

A Special Place

Andersonville National Historic Site is unique in the National Park System as the only park to serve as a memorial to all Americans ever held as prisoners of war. The Congress stated the purpose of the park in the authorizing legislation: "to provide an understanding of the overall prisoner of war story of the Civil War, to interpret the role of prisoner of war camps in history, to commemorate the sacrifice of Americans who lost their lives in such camps and to preserve the monuments located" within the site.

The prisoner of war experience is one few men and women are able to share. It is neither dishonorable nor heroic to be taken prisoner. Capture is usually an accident, part of what has come to be called the "fortunes of war." Often it comes as a complete surprise and is frequently accompanied by injury. Usually the confinement is painful and all too often fatal. In war, not everyone can be lucky. Some must lose. Those taken captive are part of the unlucky—soldiers of misfortune.

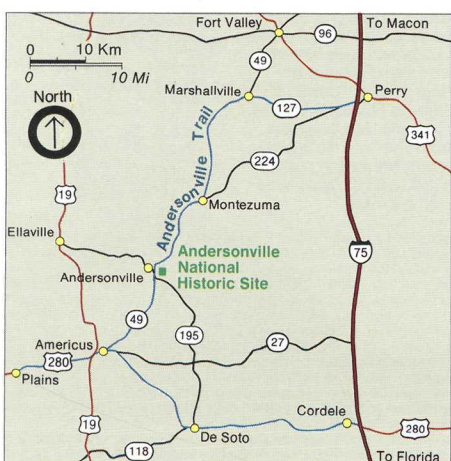
Conditions confronting and treatment accorded prisoners of war have varied throughout history and are affected by such factors as climate and geography, a nation's concept of the armed forces, its view of reprisals as a "legitimate" activity of war, its acceptance or rejection of international covenants on the rights of human beings, and something as simple as the whim of individual captors. Modern interpretations require that prisoners of war shall be treated with humanity and that they shall not be punished for the "crime" of belonging to the armed forces of the enemy. History, however, has taught that the concept of what is "humane treatment" varies with different nations and cultures.

Americans as POWs have faced many tribulations since the Revolutionary War. Some were more unlucky than others. POWs have lived for months and years with a crushing sense of doom, seeing their comrades dying from disease, starvation, exposure, misguided bombardments, lack of medical care, and mur-

der by firearm, bludgeon, bayonet, and sword. They have faced forced marches on bare subsistence rations or none at all while exposed to intense heat or cold, brutalized along the way and left to die if too injured or ill to keep up. They have been victims of such war crimes as torture and mutilation, beatings, and forced labor under inhumane conditions. POWs have been targets of intense interrogation and political indoctrination. They have often faced the most severe privations because their captors had not been prepared or had but the barest rations for their own men. Prisoners of war have always had a miserable time.

Of the 142,227 Americans captured and interned as prisoners of war during World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam, and the Pueblo Incident, 17,026 died while in captivity, 21 refused repatriation, 1 is still officially classified as a POW, and 125,171 were returned to U.S. military control. As of January 1, 1986, Veterans Administration records show that 83,430 former POWs are still alive.

The Georgia Monument in Andersonville National Cemetery honors all American prisoners of war.



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 prison site, exemplifies the grim life suffered by prisoners of war, North and South, during the Civil War. Here, however, the harshness of war is tempered by a landscape of beauty which raises the hope that reason and harmony may still prevail in the affairs of men.

We suggest you begin your visit at the visitor center. Uniformed Park Service interpreters will answer your questions and provide you with information. The visitor center contains exhibits on Andersonville prison, the national cemetery, Civil War prisons in general, and the systems of exchange and parole used during the war. There is also a 12-minute slide program and a relief map showing both historical and modern features of the entire park. A variety of informational sales publications are available to 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. Camping is not permitted in the park, but picnicking is allowed in the designated area.

Andersonville National Cemetery, established on July 26, 1865, continues to provide a permanent resting place of honor for deceased veterans. The initial interments—12,912 of them—were of those who had died in the nearby prison camp and are contained in sections E, F, H, J, and K. By 1868 more than 700 additional interments in sections B and C of Union soldiers who had died in hospitals, other prisoner of war camps, and on the battlefields of central and southwest Georgia brought the total burials to 13,699. Of these, more than 500 are unknowns. Today the cemetery is composed of 17 sections, A through R (there is no section O), and contains more than 16,000

interments. The sections are arranged in four quadrants separated by the cemetery roads. Please be respectful of graves and of funerals that might be in progress during your visit. Records of Civil War burials and subsequent interments are located at the visitor center.

Help us preserve the 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 the valuable historic resource. 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.**

For Your Safety You are in an area where natural conditions can be hazardous. Wear shoes to protect yourself from sandspurs which grow wild in the grass. Also be wary of snakes, poison ivy, and fire ants (characterized by red sandy mounds) which have a painful sting. Please do not climb on monuments, fences, or earthworks. Park roads are narrow, winding, and intended for leisurely enjoyment. Be alert and observe posted traffic regulations.

Andersonville National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Rt. 1, Box 85, Andersonville, GA 31711, is in immediate charge.

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