



History of Andersonville Prison

Ovid L. Futch

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In 1863, the Confederacy was compelled to relocate the concentration of prisoners of war in Richmond to a less vulnerable site. Not only was the importation of supplies for the prisoners taxing an overburdened transportation system, but the Richmond government needed every available soldier at the front and could not spare troops to guard the prisoners.

It was necessary, therefore, to move the Northern prisoners far into the interior, and the Confederate Secretary of War ordered Wapt. W. Sidney Winder to Georgia to find a suitable place for a camp. After meeting some local resistance, Winder (later commandant of the prison) selected a site in Sumter County north of Americus, in southwestern Georgia. Captain Richard B. Winder (Sidney's cousin) was appointed quartermaster, with orders to build a stockade and arrange for maintenance.

Five hundred prisoners arrived at Andersonville in February 1864, the first of 32,000 men to be imprisoned there before the camp was closed by Federal forces in April 1865. Most of the prisoners suffered greatly--and 13,000 of them died--because of poor organization, meager supplies, the Federal government's refusal to exchange prisoners, and often the cruelty of men and a government engaged in a losing battle for survival. Why was this squalor, mismanagement, and waste allowed at Andersonville? Looking for an answer, Ovid Futch cut through charges and countercharges that have made the camp a subject of bitter controversy. He examined diaries and first-hand accounts of prisoners, guards, and officers, and both Confederate and Federal government records (including the transcript of the trial of Capt. Henry Wirz, the alleged "fiend of Andersonville"). Having sifted the evidence, Futch has determined the conditions that existed at Andersonville, how they were dealt with, and who was responsible.

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