

**ANDERSONVILLE
AND OTHER WAR-
PRISONS**

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Andersonville and Other War-prisons by Jefferson Davis

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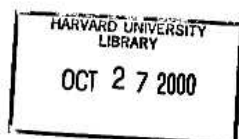
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ANDERSONVILLE

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I.

SOME eminent citizens of the North, who were furthest removed from the class known as "Southern sympathizers" during the war between the States, but who desire to know the whole truth, have requested me to write an article, to appear in some periodical published in the North, on the subject of "the prison at Andersonville, Ga." The invitation is accepted, both as to the subject and place of publication, from a wish to vindicate the conduct of the Confederacy, and because the proposed channel is that which will most assuredly reach those who have generally seen but one side of the discussion.

Civilization in its progress has mitigated the rigors of war among enlightened nations, and most prominent of these humane manifestations is the introduction of cartels for the exchange and parole of prisoners.

Early in the war the Confederacy sought and obtained the adoption of such cartel; by whom, how, and why it was violated will, in the course of this article, be shown, as a part of the subject of the Andersonville prison.

When the United States authorities refused to fulfil their obligation to continue the exchange and parole of prisoners, the number of Northern captives rapidly accumulated beyond the capacity of the prisons at Richmond, and also beyond the ability of the commissariat to supply them. In the absence of any prospect of relief from these embarrassments the removal of the prisoners became necessary.

A large part of the food for our army in Virginia was drawn from

* FROM BELFORD'S MAGAZINE

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the more southern and southwestern States, and the means of transportation were limited and diminishing. The place to which the prisoners should be removed had to be chosen and prepared. Andersonville, Ga., was selected, after careful investigation, for the following reasons: it was in a high pine-woods region, in a productive farming country, had never been devastated by the enemy, was well watered, and near to Americus, a central depot for collecting the tax in kind, and purchasing provisions for our armies. The climate was mild, and, according to the best information, there was in the water and soil of the locality "no recognizable source of disease."

A stockade was constructed of dimensions adapted to the number of prisoners who might probably be confined there. It was on a hill overlooking the valley of the Sweet Water, a tributary of which stream flowed through the prison inclosure. For a full description, illustrated by a map, reference is made to the exhaustive work entitled "The Southern Side; or, Andersonville Prison," by R. R. Stevenson, M.D., Surgeon of Military Prison Hospital, etc.

Persistence by the United States in the refusal to observe the cartel caused so large an increase in the number of the captured sent to Andersonville as to exceed the accommodation provided, and thus to augment the discomfort and disease consequent on their confinement. It has been offensively asked, why was not the contingency provided for? to which I answer that a selfish policy, which for an indefinite time would leave in captivity their countrymen, who, at the call of their Government, had volunteered to fight its battles, marked a degree of cold-blooded insensibility which we had not anticipated.

Without entering into details, the difficulties encountered in the care of the large and, in the latter part of the war, ever-increasing number of prisoners, may be briefly enumerated thus:

1. The exceptionally inhuman act of the North, declaring medicines to be contraband, to which there is but one, if indeed there be one, other example in modern war.
2. The insufficient means of transportation and the more inadequate means of repairing railroads and machinery, so that, as the war continued, the insufficiency became more embarrassing.
3. The numerical inferiority of our army made it necessary that all available force should be at the front; therefore the guards for prisons were mainly composed of old men and boys, and but a scanty allowance of these.
4. The medical officers were not more than were required with the troops, and contract physicians disliked the prison service, among

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other reasons, naturally, because of the impossibility of getting the proper medicines.

Our accomplished and diligent Surgeon-General did much to supply this want by substitutes extracted from the plants and trees of the South ; but these, though possibly as good, would, like other substitutes, be less confidence-inspiring.

5. The food was different from that to which most of the prisoners had been accustomed, particularly in the use of corn meal instead of wheat flour. Of the latter it was not possible, in 1864, to get an adequate supply at Andersonville.

It was not starvation, as has been alleged, but acclimation, unsuitable diet, and despondency which were the potent agents of disease and death. These it was not in our power to remove. The remedy was with those who, unlike King David, commenced their lamentation after the end had come. The remedy demanded alike by humanity and good faith was the honest execution of the cartel.

When it was decided to locate a prison at Andersonville, General Howell Cobb was in command of the district of Georgia. He was a man of large capital, invested in planting and farming, of generous and genial temper, so much so that all who knew him will readily believe that if the prisoners within his command had been suffering for want of food he would have supplied them gratuitously with such articles as his plantation produced. Thus probably arose the report that he had sent provisions to the prisoners, and it probably got wider circulation as confirmation of the starvation theory.

Statements from gentlemen of high standing, and who speak disinterestedly of what they know, are submitted as conclusive on the question of *quantity* of food at Andersonville prison.

It is not only requisite that enough of some kind of food should be furnished ; it is needful that the power to use and assimilate it should exist. Of this I have personal experience. During the first year of my imprisonment at Fortress Monroe I was reduced to little more than a skeleton under the needless privations inflicted by that heartless vulgarian Brevet-General Nelson A. Miles. He was, at the time of my imprisonment, selected to supersede Colonel Joseph Roberts, an educated soldier, whose regiment had been the garrison of Fortress Monroe in the latter part of the war. Why was this officer deemed competent to command the post in war, but not in peace ? My acquaintance with both would suggest the answer—a gentleman was not suited to the cruel purposes of E. M. Stanton, then Secretary of War.

Let us now consider the laws and orders in relation to prisons, and

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how they were administered. General John H. Winder was graduated at the United States Military Academy in 1820, and, with a brief interval, served in the United States Army until he resigned in 1861.

During the war with Mexico he was distinguished by gallantry in battle, for which he was twice brevetted. His character and his lineage precluded the supposition of cruelty to the defenceless. He was, for a time, the Provost-Marshal of Richmond, and supervisor of prisons thereabout. His conduct in these positions was in keeping with his reputation, that of a man neither humble to the haughty nor haughty to the humble. When the great body of the prisoners were sent to Georgia and the Carolinas, General Winder was ordered there to exercise a general supervision; he was selected, among other reasons, because of confidence in his kindness to prisoners, as specifically stated by James A. Siddon, then Secretary of War; Jefferson Davis; S. Cooper, Adjutant-General, who had been a cadet with General Winder; and George W. Brent. On pp. 205-8 "Southern Historical Papers," the full text will be found from which these extracts were made:

"SABOT HILL, Dec. 29, 1875.

"MR. W. S. WINDER :

". . . I had, privately and officially, the fullest opportunity of knowing his [General John H. Winder's] character, and judging his disposition and conduct toward the Federal prisoners; for those in Richmond, where he was almost daily in official communication with me, often in respect to them, had been some time under his command before, in large measure from the care and kindness he was believed to have shown to them, he was sent South to have supervision and control of the large number there being aggregated. . . . I thought him marked by real humanity towards the weak and helpless—such as women and children, for instance—by that spirit of protection and defence which distinguished the really gallant soldier.

"To me he always expressed sympathy, and manifested a strong desire to provide for the wants and comforts of the prisoners under his charge. Very frequently, from the urgency of his claims in behalf of the prisoners, while in Richmond, controversies would arise between him and the Commissary-General, which were submitted to me by them in person for my decision, and I was struck by his earnestness and zeal in claiming the fullest supplies the law of the Confederacy allowed or gave color of claim to. This law required prisoners to have the allowance provided for our own soldiers in the field, and constituted the guide to the settlement of such questions.