

THE TRUTH CONCERNING CAPT. HENRY WIRZ AND ANDERSONVILLE POW CAMP

The Americus camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) organization hosted an annual Memorial Service for Civil War Andersonville Prison Commandant Capt. Henry Wirz on Sunday Nov. 9. The musical group, "A Joyful Noise," from Leesburg, played and sang Southern Confederate songs and Gospel Hymns from 2 to 3 PM followed by a formal memorial service. The public was invited to join SCV and pay tribute to a Southern hero and martyr.

The guest speaker was James W. King, camp commander of the Albany Georgia SCV Camp 141 Lt. Col. Thomas M. Nelson-Nelson's Rangers. Confederate Reenactors "The Muckalee Guards" provided Honor Guard duties during the Service.

When the War Between the States (Civil War) ended in 1865, Capt. Wirz was paroled. However, shortly thereafter, he was arrested and carried to Washington, D.C. where he was placed in the Old Capitol Prison. **His trial before a military tribunal lasted several months, and included the perjured testimony of a Yankee soldier, Felix Oeser, who was a deserter from the 7th NY Regiment, who falsely claimed to be Felix de la Baume, a great nephew of Marquis Lafayette of American Revolutionary war fame. For his false testimony against Capt. Wirz, he was given a position with the U.S. Dept. of the Interior. It was later learned that this key witness whose perjured testimony contributed considerably to the conviction had never been at Andersonville. The vast Majority of defense witnesses for Capt. Wirz were not permitted to testify. Many historians call his trial a farce and travesty of justice. After the war in**

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1908, James Madison Page, a Michigan cavalryman, who had been a POW at Andersonville, wrote a book completely exonerating Wirz.

Capt. Wirz was falsely convicted of murdering 13 Union prisoners at Andersonville, **although neither a single body, nor even the name of any of the 13 was ever produced.** He was also falsely convicted on a second charge of conspiracy with high ranking members of the Confederate government to create the conditions that caused the high death rate. Wirz was made a scapegoat for the South. On Nov. 10, 1865, Capt. Wirz was hanged in the yard of the Old Capitol Prison. He declared his innocence to the end. The night before the hanging he was offered a commuted sentence if he would implicate Confederate President Jefferson Davis as a conspirator for Andersonville deaths. Wirz was an honorable man and would not lie to save his life.

After the hanging, the barbaric Yankees cut off his head and arms and other body parts, and exhibited them about the country. It took Capt. Wirz's attorney, Louis Schade, four years to collect enough body parts to have a Christian burial in Mount Olivet Cemetery in Washington.

The highly biased Northern version of Andersonville Civil War Prison (POW) Camp is well known however the true facts concerning Andersonville are not well known. The government of The Confederate States of America issued an order that a large POW prison should be constructed in early 1864 to alleviate crowding in existing camps in the South. The requirements were that it be constructed at a location further South away from the battle front and should be a

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healthy location with plenty of pure water, a running stream, close to grist and saw mills and if possible have shade trees. The location selected was in South Georgia in Sumter County and was officially named Camp Sumter although it became known as Andersonville. It was constructed to house 10,000 Union POW's however numbers increased to as high as 45,000 due to a policy by the Lincoln administration to discontinue exchanges.

The average death rate at other POW camps in the South was about 9% as compared to 12% for POW camps in the North where Confederate POW's were incarcerated. In contrast the death rate at Andersonville was approximately 29% due to causes beyond the control of Confederate authorities and was unintentional. Also in contrast were the similar death rates at several Northern POW camps notably Elmira New York and Camp Douglas Chicago where the high death rates have been proven to be intentional. The U.S. Senate and House passed a joint resolution, SR97, stating the intent to kill Confederate POW's by starvation, disease, and exposure to inclement weather.

It is a well-known fact that the victor of a war writes the history from a biased perspective. Immediately after the end of the war absurd war crimes claims were made by Northern politicians, military authorities, newspapers, periodicals, and citizens that the decisions and conditions that caused the human disaster at Andersonville were intentional on the part of Confederate authorities. Demands for War Crimes Trials were made and the Commandant of Andersonville POW camp, Capt. Henry Wirz, was arrested, tried, and convicted in

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a farce trial by a military tribunal who had predetermined that a conviction would result. No War Crimes Charges against Northern POW commandants were ever made and no Northern POW camp has ever been enshrined by the U.S. Government as a memorial to Confederate POW's. Only Andersonville in the South has been enshrined and it has become a memorial to American POW's of all wars that have involved American veterans.

In defense of the Confederate government and Confederate prison officials in regards to Andersonville, a response was made in 1876, by the Southern Historical Society, consisting of 9 points that place the blame for deaths and suffering at Andersonville totally on Northern politicians and military authorities. Specifically President Lincoln, Sec. of War Stanton, Asst. Sec. of War Dana, and Gen. Grant shoulder the blame as noted in the following 9 points.

1. It is not denied that great suffering and mortality occurred but it was due to circumstances and conditions beyond CSA control.

2. If the death rate be adduced as "circumstantial evidence of barbarity" the rate of Confederate deaths was higher in Northern POW camps where there was an abundance of food, medicine, and shelter.

3. The Union POW's were given the same rations as Confederate guards and soldiers and equal treatment in hospitals as required by the CSA government and the death rate of CSA guards was the same as POW's. The Northern Federal government did not have this humane policy.

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4. The exchange of prisoners was refused by the North before the issue of black Union POW's became an issue.

5. The CSA government requested that Northern doctors and medicine be sent to treat Northern POW's and the request was denied.

6. The CSA tried to buy supplies including bowls and other utensils to use in feeding the POW's. They offered to pay with cotton and gold but the offer was refused by the Lincoln administration.

7. The Federal Government under President Lincoln made medicine contraband causing suffering and death of Union POW's and all Southerners military and civilian.

8. Prior to the period of greatest mortality the CSA authorities offered to release the Andersonville POW's without exchange but the offer was not accepted by the Lincoln Administration who was told by CSA authorities "we cannot feed or care for them-just come get them". Sherman's barbaric war crimes in Georgia consisting of stealing, destroying, and burning made food and supplies even scarcer and increased suffering and mortality.

9. The Northern press was furnished lies and propoganda by Union Sec. and Assistant Sec. of war Stanton and Dana claiming deliberate cruelties and war crimes by the South. The control of Northern POW camps was transferred by Stanton and Dana to vindictive partisan criminal elements and deliberate war crimes of cruelty, torture, and murder were committed against Confederate POW's as proven by a joint resolution of the U.S. Senate and House SR97.

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Final proof that the human disaster at Andersonville was virtually 100% the fault of the Lincoln Administration comes from statements by Confederate Col. Ould who was in charge of arranging prisoner exchanges and Union Assistant Secretary of War in the Lincoln Administration Charles A. Dana. Col. Ould is quoted as saying "My government instructs me to waive all formalities in this matter of exchange. I need not try to conceal from you that we cannot feed and provide for the prisoners in our hands. We cannot half feed or clothe them. You have closed our ports till we cannot get medical stores for them. You will not send us quinine and other medicines, even for their exclusive use. They are suffering greatly and the mortality is excessive. I tell you all this plainly, and still you refuse to exchange. What does your government demand? Name your own conditions and I have authority to accept them. **YOU ARE SILENT! GREAT GOD, CAN IT BE THAT YOU PEOPLE ARE MONSTERS?** If you will not exchange, I will give you your men for nothing. I will deliver ten thousand Union POW's at Wilmington. I will deliver five thousand here. Come and get them. If your government is so damnably dishonest to want them for nothing, you shall have them. You can at least feed them and we cannot."

Post-War in the New York Sun Newspaper Dana wrote "CSA authorities and especially Jefferson Davis ought not to be held responsible for Andersonville. We were responsible ourselves for the continued detention of our captives in misery, starvation and sickness in the South".

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In 1906 former Confederate General Stephen D. Lee charged the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) organization with the duty to defend the honor of the South and the Confederate Soldier:

“To you, Sons of Confederate Veterans, we will commit the vindication of the Cause for which we fought. To your strength will be given the defense of the Confederate soldier's good name, the guardianship of his history, the emulation of his virtues, the perpetuation of those principles which he loved and which you love also, and those ideals which made him glorious and which you also cherish. Remember, it is your duty to see that the true history of the South is presented to future generations.”

James W. King is commander of Albany Camp 141 Lt. Col. Thomas M. Nelson-Nelson's Rangers of the Sons of the Confederate Veterans organization and assists the Americus SCV camp in promoting the annual Wirz memorial service at Andersonville Georgia.