



The Horrors of Andersonville: Life and Death Inside a Civil War Prison (Exceptional Social Studies Titles for Upper Grades)

Catherine Gourley

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The Confederate prison known as Andersonville existed for only the last fourteen months of the Civil War - but its well-documented legacy of horror has lived on in the diaries of its prisoners and the transcripts of the trial of its commandant. The diaries describe appalling conditions in which vermin-infested men were crowded into an open stockade with a single befouled stream as their water source. Food was scarce and medical supplies virtually nonexistent. The bodies of those who did not survive the night had to be cleared away each morning. Designed to house 10,000 Yankee prisoners, Andersonville held 32,000 during August 1864. Nearly a third of the 45,000 prisoners who passed through the camp perished. Exposure, starvation, and disease were the main causes, but excessively harsh penal practices and even violence among themselves contributed to the unprecedented death rate. At the end of the war, outraged Northerners demanded retribution for such travesties, and they received it in the form of the trial and subsequent hanging of Captain Henry Wirz, the prison's commandant. The trial was the subject of legal controversy for decades afterward, as many people felt justice was ignored in order to appease the Northerners' moral outrage over the horrors of Andersonville. The story of Andersonville is a complex one involving politics, intrigue, mismanagement, unfortunate timing, and, of course, people - both good and bad. Relying heavily on first-person reports and legal documents, author Catherine Gourley gives us a fascinating look into one of the most painful incidents of U.S. history.

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