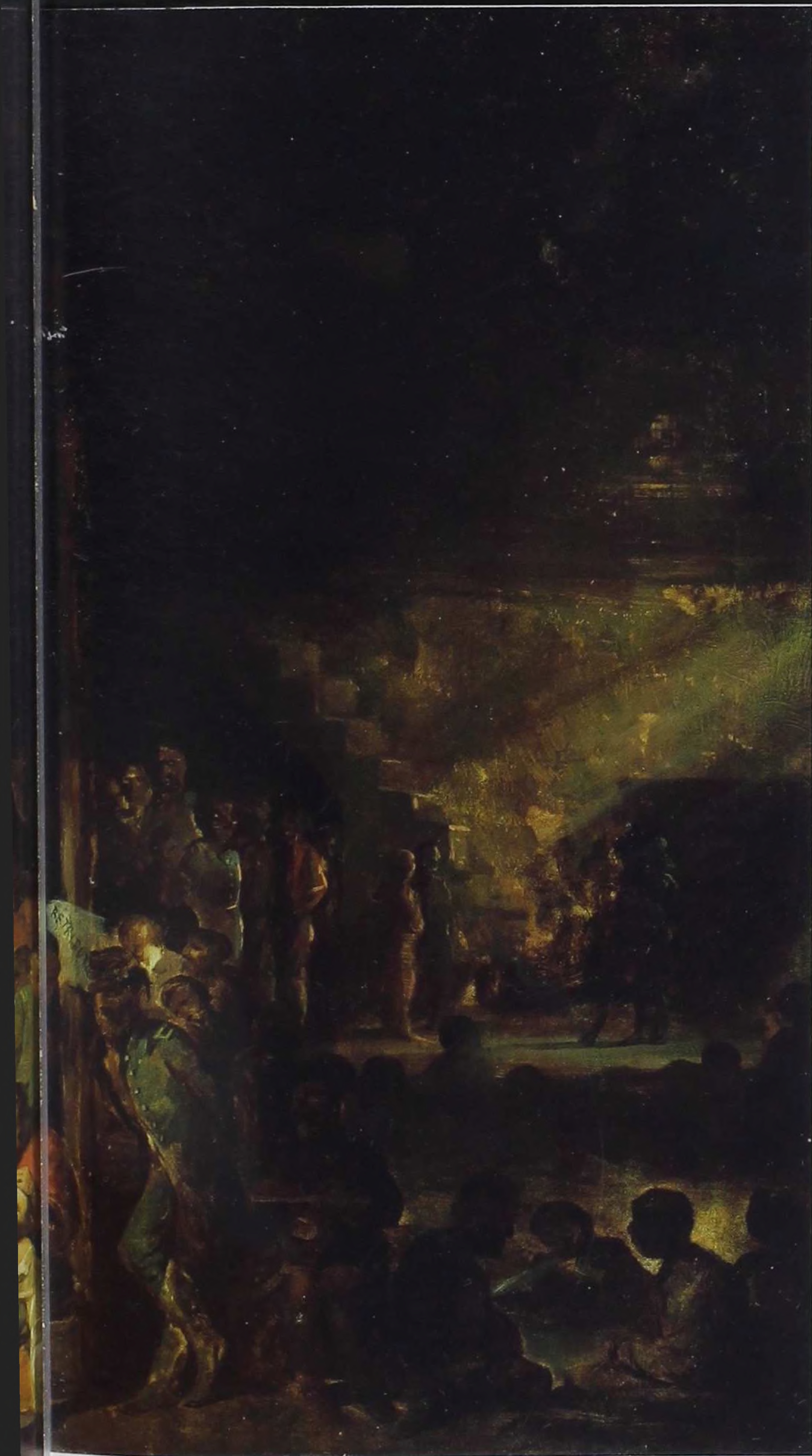




*Libby Prison, 1863* (oil on canvas), by David Gilmour Blythe.  
Iowa troops were held captive in this Confederate prison.





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*It was a story as old as Cain and Abel—the cruelty of one brother to another in Civil War prison camps. The names of the camps—Macon, Cahaba, Charleston, Belle Isle, Libby, Rock Island, and worst of all, Andersonville—left indelible marks on prisoners' souls and generated anger and bitterness for generations after the war.*

# *Thy Brother's Keeper*

## Civil War Prisons

*by Timothy Walch*





*Libby Prison, 1863* (oil on canvas), by David Gilmour Blythe. Iowa troops were held captive in this Confederate prison.

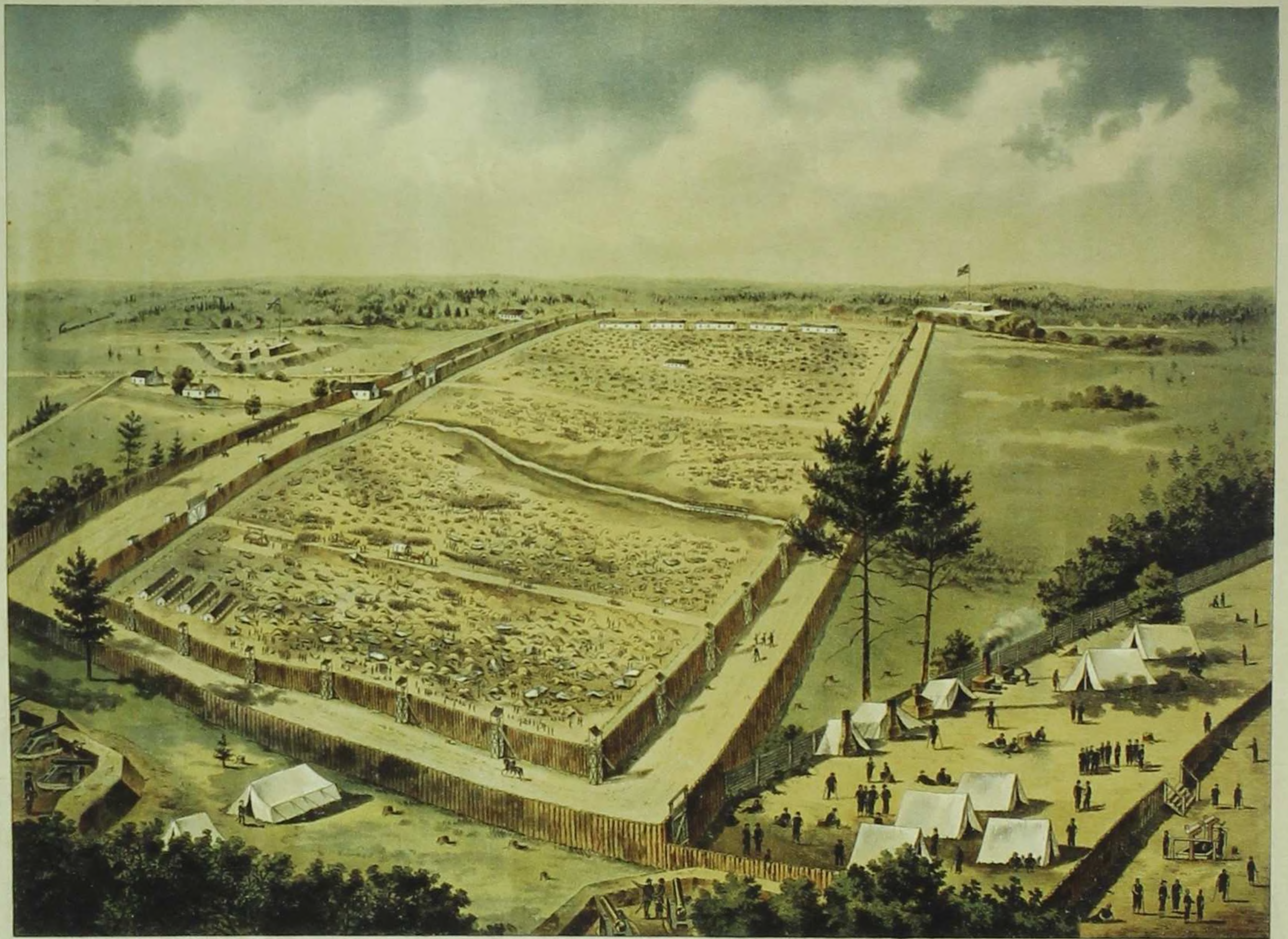
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## *Thy Brother's Keeper* Civil War Prisons

by Timothy Walch





BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF ANDERSONVILLE PRISON FROM THE SOUTH-EAST.

1882 LITHOGRAPH, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

— Part 1 —

## MacKinlay Kantor's Prison-Camp Novel Still Resonates Today

**A**ndersonville. More than 150 years after the end of the Civil War, this word still evokes acts of brutality and inhumanity.

A camp for captured Union prisoners, Andersonville was situated about a hundred miles south of Atlanta, Georgia. Although it was in operation for little more than a year, the squalid conditions in the camp came to define the very horror of wartime captivity. It opened in February 1864 and by June, it held 26,000 Union soldiers—more than twice its intended capacity. By the time it closed in May 1865, the camp had detained over 45,000 Union prisoners, of whom 13,000 died as a result of their incarceration.

Not surprisingly, as time passed, memories of Andersonville did not abate but remained in the American consciousness for generations. Numerous memoirs of the camp were written by veterans, and these accounts of cruelty were among the many war stories told and retold at Grand Army of the Republic reunions and other gatherings.

As a young boy growing up in Webster City, Iowa, Benjamin MacKinlay Kantor heard many Civil War stories, and he later acknowledged them as inspiration for several of his novels. He wrote a number of books about war and battle, but it is *Andersonville*, published in 1955, which is generally considered his finest work.

That this Iowa native believed that *Andersonville* would be an important book is evident in how he approached the subject. He may have been inspired by the stories of old veterans, but he was unwilling to be guided by these sources alone. *Andersonville* was a work of fiction but also a manifestation of 40 years of general reading on the war and 25 years of research on the prison camp itself. Kantor was not shy about claiming that he had written “an accurate history of the Andersonville prison.”

In the manner of a scholar, Kantor had immersed himself in research on the prison camp and read dozens of memoirs, diaries, letters, and accounts of the war. His novel concludes with a bibliography of 85 sources,



most of them first-hand accounts of captivity at Andersonville. He acknowledged the assistance of dozens of librarians and historians, including William Petersen and Mildred Throne at the State Historical Society of Iowa. It was this level of diligence that gave Kantor's work greater veracity than the typical historical novel.

But there was more to the book than research—it also was something of a quest. In an essay in the *New York Times Book Review*, Kantor emphasized that writing *Andersonville* was profoundly spiritual. In particular, he vividly described a ghostly experience as he walked the prison grounds one February morning in 1953: "They had come to tell me that there must be no compromise," Kantor wrote of the soldiers who had lived and died at the camp. "I had invoked their name and thought for nearly 25 years; they were thronging at last to force me to the task." This vision of men marching towards him across the prison yard had prodded and sustained him in his years of work.

Kantor finished the book 90 years to the day after the prison was closed. "I am grateful to those many boys I heard walking toward me in the rain in that dark February 5-o'clock-in-the-morning," he wrote in the final sentence of his essay. "I hope that I have kept the pledge they seemed [to be] extracting; and that they and others will approve."

Given this hope, Kantor must have been gratified by the early reviews. The first appeared in the *New York Times* on October 27, 1955. "This is a tremendous novel on a tremendous theme," wrote Charles Poore, a regular reviewer in the *New York Times*, "for this is a story that is part of the national heritage, leading us toward the Lincoln ideal of malice toward none and charity for all." Poore was quick to note that *Andersonville* did not quite rank with Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, but it certainly was "a magnificent companion piece for Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*."

The review in *Time* magazine on October 31 was equally enthusiastic. The anonymous reviewer noted that this was Kantor's third Civil War novel, but this one, "massively researched," was different. The book would "give Civil War fiction buffs their greatest hour since *Gone with the Wind*."

It is not clear from Kantor's papers or memoirs what he thought of having his magnum opus compared to *Gone with the Wind*. Published in 1936, Margaret Mitchell's novel was not generally considered a measure of greatness; it certainly wasn't a work of scholarship. In fact, many readers considered *Gone with the Wind* nothing more than frothy melodrama. And yet Mitchell's novel had been a best seller and the winner of the Pulitzer Prize—accolades Kantor would gladly accept for *Andersonville*.

In fact, the Book-of-the-Month Club chose Kantor's book as its main selection for November 1955. The following year it received the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

Certainly Kantor also must have taken great satisfaction in the review by Henry Steele Commager, professor of history at Columbia University. There, on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review* on October 30, Commager wrote, "Out of the warp of history

Mr. Kantor has woven with the stuff of imagination an immense and terrible pattern, a pattern which finally emerges as a gigantic panorama of the war itself." High praise, and the next sentence must have brought a smile to Kantor's lips. "Out of fragmentary and incoherent records, Mr. Kantor has wrought the greatest of our Civil War novels."

Other reviews followed, each one just as laudatory. The *Saturday Review* considered *Andersonville* "Kantor's finest [book]. . . . Its compelling and crucial moods of tragedy, suffering and heroism . . . make it one of the most moving novels of our time." The *Atlantic Monthly* called it a novel "written with truth and power." "No one who reads it will ever forget it," said the

*Christian Science Monitor*. Bruce Catton, the preeminent popular historian of the Civil War, who had just won the Pulitzer for *A Stillness at Appomattox*, reviewed *Andersonville* for the *Chicago Tribune*. He referred to Kantor's book as "without question" the best Civil War novel he had ever read.

But would *Andersonville* be accepted into the canon of Civil War scholarship? Kantor had made a point of highlighting his research at the back of the book; surely he hoped that his bibliography would win him a certain measure of respect from the academic community.

Unfortunately, the two major scholarly journals of American history, the *Mississippi Valley Historical Re-*



Iowa author MacKinlay Kantor





A rare photograph of Andersonville, August 17, 1864. On a morning decades later, Kantor walked the site before dawn.

*view* and *American Historical Review*, did not review his book. To be fair, it is not clear if review copies were sent to these journals. It is quite possible that World Publishing never gave much thought to reviews by academic journals.

*Civil War History*, however, did review Kantor's book. Published at the University of Iowa, *Civil War History* commenced publication in January 1955, just as the nation was gearing up for the centennial of the Civil War. It was a different type of publication, one intended to bring together scholars, enthusiasts, and collectors in a common study of this great conflict. The journal published a wide range of articles, even an occasional poem. Most important, the new journal made a point of reviewing Civil War fiction. As a novel based on historical research, *Andersonville* was a logical candidate to receive significant attention.

And that it did in the December 1955 issue. In the opening sentence, reviewer Carl Haverlin made it emphatically clear that "*Andersonville* is a great novel," and then inferred that the book might well become the American *War and Peace*. "It is a work of real magnificence," he concluded, "and we are grateful to [Mr. Kantor] not only for a first rate achievement in fiction, but also for a cleansing of pride and prejudice long overdue."

No small praise indeed coming from an academic journal. And yet it should be noted that Haverlin was not a scholar; he was, in fact, a Civil War collector and enthusiast. Although he was a man of great achievement in the broadcast industry, he had not finished

high school and had no pretensions of scholarship. He knew what he liked and he was mightily pleased by Kantor's new book.

*Andersonville* sold over 220,000 copies in bookstores in its first year, plus tens of thousands through the Book-of-the-Month Club. Historians must have realized that this book, with plaudits from Commager and Catton, would dominate the public's knowledge of the Civil War for the foreseeable future. Certainly as the nation approached the centennial celebrations of the Civil War in 1961, *Andersonville* would loom large on library reading lists.

One historian—indeed a very prominent historian—could not let the book stand without his own assessment. William B. Hesseltine was a widely respected professor of history at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the author of a scholarly history of Andersonville. He reviewed Kantor's novel in the spring 1956 issue of *Georgia Review*. Even though the quarterly had only a small circulation, Hesseltine's commentary must have reverberated within the historical community. His assessment of Kantor's work would carry weight in academia and, no doubt, influence decisions on assigning the book for college courses on the Civil War.

For Hesseltine, Kantor's research was unfortunately inadequate and *Andersonville* was little more than a rehash of the "propaganda" that had appeared after the war. Kantor's "excessive cast of conventional char-



acters," he wrote, was little more than stereotypes that might "fulfill the apparent formula for a best-selling historical novel," but it made for poor history.

What bothered Hesseltine the most was that the tragedy was not set into the larger panorama of the war itself. Kantor's "failure," he wrote, "is not alone a failure to evaluate his evidence critically, not alone his willingness to perpetuate the official propaganda and the Southern stereotypes. His failure is the failure to see the greater tragedy of which Andersonville was a lesser part." The book was too large and the canvas was too small as far as the professor was concerned.

Hesseltine acknowledged that *Andersonville* was fiction intended for a popular audience. "The novel is nothing more than a literary form," he wrote, "differing only in form from drama, the epic, or the monograph. The results of historical research may be cast in [any] of these forms, but the selection of one of them does not exempt the writer from the canons of scholarship."

Hesseltine saved the coup de grâce for the end: "Had *Andersonville* been written as a [scholarly] monograph its perversity would have been immediately apparent. Its errors and its inadequacies should not be allowed to hide behind the literary form in which it appears." He concluded with the hope that a new-found interest in the Civil War might bring forth new scholarship so that books like *Andersonville* could be forgotten.

**B**ut *Andersonville* was not forgotten. It has sold tens of thousands of copies over the past half-century. The book was most recently redesigned in 1993 in both a paperback edition and a library binding by Penguin Books in New York.

The contemporary appeal of *Andersonville* is impressive and is evident in the reviews by readers on Amazon.com and other Web sites. Of the 42 reviews recently available on Amazon, for example, 32 customers gave the book five stars—the highest possible score.

"This is one of the most remarkable books that you will ever experience," writes one customer. "I agree with most readers that *Gone with the Wind*, *The Killer Angels*, and *Cold Mountain* are five-star novels, but *Andersonville* is on another level. Thirty stars, perhaps." Other reviews are just as effusive and compare Kantor to prize-winning writers such as Cormac McCarthy. What makes these and other reviews so impressive is that they come from passionate readers today, nearly six decades after the book first appeared. It seems that

*Andersonville* will continue to have an impact on our popular understanding of the Civil War in general and prisoners-of-war in particular.

The appeal of *Andersonville* and other historical novels has given some historians reason to consider the impact of fiction on our understanding of the past. In a thought-provoking book published in 2001 and titled *Novel History: Historians and Novelists Confront America's Past (and Each Other)*, historian Mark C. Carnes compiled contributions by historians and by novelists such as Gore Vidal, Jane Smiley, Larry McMurtry, and William Styron.

"Historians and historical novelists do many of the same things and in much the same way," notes Carnes in his introduction. "They aspire to represent the past truthfully and yet know that their representations cannot be 'truthful,' 'objective,' or 'accurate' because logical clarity is incomparable with human affairs.

"But the differences . . . are profound," Carnes adds quickly. Although both historians and historical novelists conduct research, they look for different things and aspire to different goals. "Historians are unalterably enslaved by facts, the essence of their discipline." Novelists use facts as a starting point and seek to capture "the feel, the sensation, the aesthetics of a historical moment." Both have noble goals for their understanding of the past, but these goals are not mutually inclusive.

Granted, there is a measure of interdependence between the historian and the historical novelist. "Historians need the novelist's guidance on the workings of the emotions and imagination," Carnes remarks. "Novelists need the historian's discipline to anchor the imagination to fact. The joining of these perspectives is not accomplished in the oxymoronic historical novel, in which fiction has been infused with historical detail. In novel history, however, the fragmentary and fossilized facts of the historical record are reanimated with imaginative meaning and aesthetic truth."

And that may be the genius that is *Andersonville*. Readers continue to relate to the multitude of characters, to the humanity of the conflict, and to the tragedy of incarceration in a time of war as reflected in Kantor's work. "If you have ever lost a friend or family member in a war," wrote one customer on Amazon, "this story will be painful. It is emotionally charged (forgive the cliché) to the highest possible point." It seems clear from readers' perspective today that Iowa author MacKinlay Kantor did justice to the pledge he had made to those ghostly soldiers on that February morning so long ago. ❖





ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL MUSEUM

Guards and prisoners line up for roll call in the Northern prison camp at Rock Island. The United States Colored Troops guarded the camp along with white soldiers.

— Part 2 —

## Was Rock Island the Andersonville of the North?

Not much remains of the Rock Island Barracks, one of the largest Civil War prisons in the North. Located on an island in the Mississippi River, between the Iowa town of Davenport and the Illinois town of Rock Island City, the camp once held thousands of Confederate prisoners-of-war. Today there are a few historical markers and a cemetery of some 2,000 graves.

What lives on, however, is a persistent myth of cruel and unusual treatment at Rock Island. As late as 1999, *Civil War News* published an article that castigated Rock Island as “the Andersonville of the North,” unfairly linking the two prisons as hellholes of inhumanity. Statistics bear out the fact that the mortality at Rock Island was 16 percent, far lower than at all but one Union prison—and nowhere close to the horrendous death rate at Andersonville of more than 33 percent and at any of the other Confederate prisons.

So what accounts for the myth? It all goes back to the personalities of the Union officers who administered the prison system as a whole and Rock Island in particular; a slow government response to a smallpox epidemic; the passion and bias of a local newspaper

editor with Southern sympathies; and the words of a best-selling 20th-century author.

Early in the Civil War, prisoners were exchanged by both sides on a regular basis; there was little need for long-term prison camps. But the system broke down in the spring of 1863, and both sides scrambled to establish more facilities to hold thousands of prisoners of war.

The island prison was established in July 1863 by orders of Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs. Much of Rock Island was still owned by the federal government (the rest by the Illinois town of the same name). Supplies of coal and timber were nearby, and the town was on a rail head.

Meigs ordered that “barracks for the prisoners on Rock Island be put up in the roughest and cheapest manner, mere shanties, with no fine work about them.” The result was a 12-acre complex that comprised 84 barracks surrounded by a 12-foot wooden fence with a catwalk for guard patrols. The prison was still not finished when Confederate prisoners began arriving in early December. By the end of the month there were nearly 6,000.



Conditions were primitive at best. Many of the prisoners arrived at Rock Island malnourished and threadbare, but the commissary general of prisons, Colonel William Hoffman, was not inclined to provide anything more than the minimum in provisions. By the end of February, pneumonia, diarrhea, and smallpox had claimed nearly 700 lives, those of guards as well as prisoners. Yet in spite of the crisis, there was no effort to stanch the influx of new inmates.

But the Union was not indifferent to the fate of the prisoners. In February 1864, Assistant Surgeon General A. M. Clark investigated camp conditions, quarantined those infected, and vaccinated those still healthy. A hospital was constructed in April to care for those with chronic and infectious diseases. By July the crisis had passed and a measure of normality emerged. Still, the number of prisoners increased to 8,600, close to the capacity of 10,000.

In the crowded camp, prisoners found various ways to fill their long days. There was a library with books and tracts, and religious services were held regularly. Some prisoners made trinkets from river mussel shells to trade for soap, tobacco, and other necessities. A select number worked for ten cents a day on camp improvements. Still others plotted and schemed to escape, though only 41 prisoners succeeded.

Another way for prisoners to "escape" was to forsake their allegiance to the Confederacy, pledge allegiance to the United States, and enlist in the Union army. Of an estimated 150,000 prisoners in all Union prisons, fewer than 10,000 chose this option. It is interesting to note that about 3,000 of the men who did enlist had been incarcerated at Rock Island.

**R**ock Island Barracks was controversial almost from the arrival of the first prisoners. Although the barracks were on federal land and isolated, that did not mean that people were not curious about what was going on behind those 12-foot walls. The situation was rife with rumors, particularly during the horrible winter of 1863/1864 as hundreds of prisoners took ill and died. Adding to the problem was the reclusive prison superintendent, Colonel Adolphus J. Johnson. Johnson was not one to communicate with the civilian population, and that made matters worse.

Into this information void stepped J. B. Danforth Jr., the editor of the *Rock Island Argus*, a Democratic newspaper. Danforth was no friend of the military in general or Colonel Johnson in particular. As news of the high mortality rate reached the general population in January, Danforth called for improvements in the

prison medical facilities. When the epidemic passed, he turned to the general treatment of prisoners. By June, after prisoner rations had been reduced across the nation, he was publishing outrageous and undocumented stories of the "deliberate" murder of prisoners at Rock Island. And yet through all of this, Colonel Johnson held his tongue; he had nothing to say to this unpatriotic newspaper editor.

On November 21, 1864, Danforth published an extensive account of life on Rock Island largely based on the testimony of former prisoners who had forsaken their allegiance to the Confederacy and pledged to serve in the Union army—but were still in the Rock Island barracks months later. No longer prisoners, they were still being held. It is no surprise that many of them lashed out at Johnson and their former captors.

**D**anforth had a field day with this new material. He wrote that these former prisoners were being systematically starved to death, given little more than a piece of bread and a sliver of meat each day. He further speculated that disease was rampant on the island, so much so that scurvy patients had to be isolated. "It is a shame that in this enlightened age of the world," he lamented, "our own countrymen should be confined in a pen, fed on such scanty and improper food and reduced down almost to starvation point until disease and death ensue."

It was a horrible indictment, but Danforth had more to say. He held the Lincoln administration in general and Johnson in particular accountable. "If done by order of the administration," he wrote, "it is a shame and a disgrace to the party in power. If done by the officers in charge of the prison, it is a shame and a disgrace to them. There is no excuse for this deliberate torture of human beings and the hand that does it or the heart that prompts it is hardened against the common instincts of humanity." With the sweep of a pen, J. B. Danforth condemned all who had anything to do with the Rock Island prison as little more than war criminals.

That was it for Adolphus Johnson. He had suffered through rumors and indignities in the *Argus* for months withholding comment, but this story was outrageous and Johnson was furious. Against his better judgment, he responded in defense of his president and his own tenure as the sole superintendent at the prison. He lashed out that "it would be difficult to imagine it possible to put together a greater amount of error [or] misrepresentation."

Superintendent Johnson then went on to defend



the policies of the Lincoln administration and the commissary general of prisons, as well as himself, by noting the equity in the distribution of rations to the prisoners and the guards on Rock Island. He articulated the funds spent on numerous sundries for the prisoners and the liberal policy of allowing friends and relatives to send clothing and other personal items to those in prison. "You seem to be in doubt as to who belongs the treatment of prisoners at this depot," he wrote sarcastically. "I will enlighten you. The treatment of them here and all issues [related] to them, are made in strict accordance with orders from the War Department."

This was more than an adequate defense, but Johnson seemed to be caught up in a moment of both patriotism and pique. Before ending his letter, he slipped into a diatribe against Danforth and his ilk. "If discretionary power rested with me," wrote Johnson, "I would arrest and confine the known sympathizers with the rebellion, residing in Rock Island and Davenport, and quite a large number would be quickly added to our list of prisoners, and those communities would be relieved from a more dangerous element than open rebels in arms."

In turn, Danforth portrayed himself as something of a crusader for a free press. "We think we know our duty as a public journalist," he wrote, "and we propose to do it without intimidation from anybody. The acts of Mr. Lincoln and of all public officers, Col. Johnson included, are proper subjects for fair and impartial criticism and we propose to allude to them whenever the public good requires it." After slinging mud at those responsible for the prison, Danforth wrapped himself in the Constitution and moved on to other issues.

After the war ended in April, the prison closed in July and the army bought the property for an ordnance arsenal. The barracks were torn down and all that remained of the legacy of incarceration were the graves of 1,960 prisoners and 171 guards, all victims of disease. His reputation in tatters, Adolphus Johnson retired from the military in 1866, worked in Chicago, and eventually returned to his home state of New Jersey, where he became a county jail warden. He died a bitter man in 1893.

J. B. Danforth continued as editor of the *Argus* for three more years; as late as 1867, a year after Johnson had retired and left the area, the irascible editor published a fresh attack on the prison's legacy. But Danforth seemed to be losing interest in his paper and sold it in 1869. He returned as a part owner in 1872, but found that the editorial philosophy had changed. He

revived an opposition paper and served as its editor until 1891, when he left Rock Island for good. He died in 1896 in San Jose, California.

**T**he contretemps over the conditions at the Rock Island prison might have faded away after the passing of Johnson and Danforth. Certainly the charges were all based on innuendo and rumor. So what accounted for the continuing myth that Rock Island was the "Andersonville of the North"? It most likely comes from an Atlanta housewife named Margaret Mitchell, who skyrocketed to fame as the author of the blockbuster *Gone with the Wind*. A third of the way through the novel, Rhett Butler learns that Ashley Wilkes had not been killed in battle but was imprisoned on Rock Island.

"In their first joy," novelist Mitchell wrote of Melanie Wilkes and Scarlett O'Hara, "they could think of nothing except that he was alive. But, when calmness began to return, they looked at one another and said 'Rock Island!' in the same voice they would have said 'In Hell!' For even as Andersonville was a name that stank in the North, so was Rock Island one to bring terror to the heart of any Southerner who had relatives there."

Mitchell repeated many of the rumors that had swirled around Rock Island during the war. "At no place were the conditions worse than at Rock Island," she wrote. "Food was scanty, one blanket did for three men, and the ravages of small pox, pneumonia and typhoid gave the place the name of a pesthouse. Three-fourths of all the men sent there never came out alive."

It was powerful prose but poor history.

Although Mitchell's material on Rock Island filled about two pages in a novel of over a thousand, her attack became conventional wisdom as the public consumed *Gone with the Wind*, first as a novel and then as a film.

"In truth, [Rock Island] was not a pleasant place," writes Benton McAdams, an expert on the prison camp. But it was not Andersonville: "Most of the suffering was not the result of policy and inhumanity but rather of accident, incompetence, and the inability to cope with a war larger than any the nation had ever before endured. . . . The parallel between Andersonville and Rock Island"—what both J. B. Danforth and Adolphus Johnson would have to agree on—"is that men died."

Beyond that, Margaret Mitchell was wrong. ❖





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Libby Prison, in Richmond, Virginia, August 1863. The huge structure had served as a warehouse until the Confederacy used it to hold Union troops, including Iowans.

— Part 3 —

## Iowans Imprisoned

Thousands of Iowans suffered in Southern prison camps, and few of them forgave their captors or forgot their experiences. Their written records run the gamut from unpublished diaries created surreptitiously during incarceration to published memoirs written long after the end of the war. These prisoners of war were determined that their sacrifices be remembered.

Iowans captured at the Battle of Shiloh, on April 6 and 7, 1862, wrote some of the earliest prison accounts. For example, Joseph B. Dorr, quartermaster of the 12th Iowa, was asked by his superiors for a report of his incarceration shortly after his parole and return at the end of May. Dorr had kept a daily diary in prison that he used for his report and for a brief account in the *Missouri Republican* on June 18, 1862.

There is little in Dorr's diary that is dramatic. Nearly two weeks after Shiloh, Dorr and his fellow prisoners were, frankly, bored. "Nothing of interest to enliven our confinement," Dorr recorded, "so we make our own amusement. We play ball, pitch quoits, read, sing and walk." Another day he noted, "I have varied

my amusements for a few days by making a couple of flower vases for little four year old Jennie at home." The most passionate commentary focused on the paucity of rations and rumors of parole.

John W. Gift was captured on April 6 and then carted from one prison camp to another over the next several weeks—from Memphis to Jackson to Mobile to Macon to Libby Prison in Richmond. Released after several months in prison, he returned home to Delphi, Iowa, where a banquet was held in his honor. Like Dorr, Gift found captivity to be more frustrating than dangerous. The putrid food, the frequent transfers, the boredom are all evident in his remarks. Not surprisingly, he documented the regular efforts by Union soldiers to escape. He also mentioned an incident that would become more common as the war progressed and incarcerations lasted longer. "Some of our officers had overheard the [Confederate] Corporal telling the guard that he would give him five dollars for the first Yankee he shot," said Gift. "I don't know whether the guard got his money or not."

Edward M. Van Duzee reported a collective act





Men of the 19th Iowa Infantry in New Orleans on July 24, 1864, shortly after their release from the stockade at Camp Ford near Tyler, Texas. The prison stockade covered 16 acres. The largest Confederate prison camp west of the Mississippi, it had one of the lowest mortality rates of any Civil War prison.

of resistance in an Alabama prison. On July 4, prisoners celebrated Independence Day, complete with speeches critical of the Confederacy. When ordered to end the insubordination, the prisoners rushed up to the front and and shouted three cheers for the Red, White and Blue. "Thus ended our Fourth of July celebration," wrote Van Duzee, "in a rebel prison, in the heart of the Confederacy, in 1862."

On May 18 Second Lieutenant Luther W. Jackson wrote in his diary, "Six weeks ago to-day I was taken prisoner. . . . I hoped to have been exchanged before this, but we are still here . . . Our Government don't do right to leave us here to linger out a miserable existence when they have so many prisoners to exchange us for . . . I am mad to-day . . . I want to get out!" Jackson's last entry is on June 1. He died of unspecified causes at Macon nine days later.

F. F. Kiner was also captured at Shiloh. In 1863 he published *One Year's Soldiering* documenting the treatment of more than 200 officers and soldiers of the 14th Iowa during 18 months of confinement. In the first few weeks the food was "reasonably good," and the numerous opportunities for recreation were "very beneficial to our health, and gave relief to our minds by drawing them away from our condition as prisoners, and from the anxious hearts at home."

As the number of captives increased, "things became worse and worse with us," Kiner wrote. "The nights were always cold, and having no covering, the poor soldiers began to get sicker, and diseases got more fatal." "We furnished nurses of our own men to wait upon the sick."

The food was abysmal. "The meat was thrown out upon the ground and literally crawled with maggots. . . . [They] were of the largest kind; perhaps I should call them skippers, for they could skip about and jump several feet at one leap; from their size I judged the climate agreed with them." Weevils and maggots floated

in the soup "like clever sized grains of rice." He added, "Thus have we spent our time in prison, living upon what any decent man or woman in the North would feel ashamed to offer to a dog."

Of his captors, Kiner gave them both credit and criticism. "Some of the men who guarded us were kind hearted and showed much sympathy, often pleased with having an opportunity to talk with us." He was surprised by the guards' general lack of education and the widespread illiteracy, and he had great contempt for the inhumane treatment for even the smallest offense. After documenting brutal torture and punishment, Kiner wrote: "When I have stood and seen them thus abuse our men day after day, and hour after hour, . . . it has made my blood boil for revenge."

In the years after the war, as Civil War veterans petitioned Congress for pensions, men who had been captive wrote and published memoirs in an effort to win compensation for their extraordinary service. The impetus to compile and record Southern atrocities continued well into the 20th century. As former prisoners reached the ends of their lives, they acquired a renewed interest and determination to record their experiences for future generations. Periodic regimental reunions also encouraged veterans to put pen to paper.

Erastus B. Soper was a veteran of the 12th Iowa Infantry. Beginning in 1885, he devoted nearly 20 years to gathering the testimonials of his comrades for a history of Company D. One such testimonial was by Allen M. Blanchard, who recounted for Soper, "The wounded dreaded to be sent to a rebel hospital where it was said that amputation followed the slightest pretext, so as to decimate the Union ranks. My wound had not bled much and was now well stanchd, but my shattered coat sleeve gave me away most hopelessly. I found a fellow prisoner about my size who had