

CORRUPTING HUMANITY: THE MORALE AND PHYSICAL  
WELL-BEING OF CIVIL WAR POW's IN TEXAS

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by

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## ABSTRACT

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Between June 1863 and May 1865, almost seven thousand Union prisoners were held in two Confederate prisoner of war camps in Texas: Camp Groce near Hempstead, Texas, and Camp Ford near Tyler, Texas. While both camps had their share of misery, Camp Ford was considered a “model camp” and had one of the lowest death rates of any Civil War prison. Camp Groce, in contrast, was a site of immense suffering and a death rate that would make it one of the deadliest camps on other side throughout the war. Between the two camps, death rates ranged from 3.86% to nearly 30% in less than a two year period, despite their similarities in size, structure, and development. What role did the outside environment, as well as the internal conditions, play in survival? This thesis will explore the history and conditions of Camp Groce and Camp Ford, and contrast the internal and external effects that influenced morale and the rate of survival in each camp. In doing so, I will focus on five primary factors:

- 1.) The effect of the natural environment on the physical and sanitary conditions, including the availability of fresh water, abundance of vegetation, and access to resources
- 2.) The effect of the local, or non-natural environment, on morale and overall health, including interactions with nearby townspeople, frequency of commerce, and access to medical care
- 3.) The consequences of having a harsh Confederate camp commander versus one with a more benevolent attitude towards the prisoners

- 4.) The role the Union officers played in establishing not only discipline, but also in providing order and structure to an otherwise chaotic environment
- 5.) The impact of daily activities on the spirit of the prisoners, including not only the necessary work, but also recreational activities

A comparison will also be made between the Texas camps and two of the most well-known, and much larger, prisoner of war camps in the east: Elmira Prison, a Union prison in New York, and Andersonville Prison, a Confederate camp in Georgia.

The research for this thesis has been taken predominately from a variety of original sources, including diaries, personal letters, testimony, and military records that will make up the bulk of the primary sources. Secondary sources have been utilized for basic information, including works by historians such as Ovid L. Futch, Michael P. Gray, and William Best Hesseltine. A treasure trove of unpublished personal letters and accounts of Camp Ford were located at the Smith County Historical Society in Tyler, Texas. In addition, a host of government records and newspapers from the time period are accessible online and contain a wealth of information. Research was also conducted among the libraries of Sam Houston State University, Baylor University, and Texas A&M University, as well as numerous other online databases. Finally, descendants of the Camp Groce commandant, Colonel Clayton C. Gillespie, and other Civil War prisoners of war, have provided unpublished, personal writings and family accounts of their ancestors.

The historiography of Confederate prisoner of war camps in Texas is a subject matter that has not been researched extensively, nor written on substantially. There are only two known publications that provide any extensive account of the history of Camp Groce or Camp Ford: *The Last Prison: The Untold Story of Camp Groce CSA*, by Danial

Francis Lisarelli (1999), and *Camp Ford CSA: The Story of Union Prisoners in Texas*, by F. Lee Lawrence and Dr. Robert Glover (1964). Both provide a comprehensive telling of the historical facts; however, neither provides an interpretive discussion of the elements affecting the camps, nor add to the overall historiography of the dissimilarities of the prisons, and the long term consequences. In addition, few publications (*Civil War Prison: A Study in War Psychology* by Hesseltine (1930) being one of the few exceptions) have ever examined the entire prisoner of war system, both North and South.

Although at least one prior thesis has dealt with the subject of Camp Ford (Amy L. Klemm, *Wigwam Metropolis: Camp Ford, Texas*. October 1996), I am unaware of any paper or publication that has discussed or compared both camps. Once completed, my thesis will be the first in-depth analysis of both prisoner of war camps in Texas, as well as the first to create a compare and contrast with other camps based upon the five previously mentioned factors.

Keywords: Civil War, Camp Groce, Camp Ford, Andersonville, Elmira, Natural environment, Prisoner of war, War psychosis, Wartime self-care, Texas, Hempstead, Tyler.

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I especially thank my wife, Sharon, for her encouragement and support when I made the decision to return to academia after an over twenty year absence to pursue the subject that has always been my first love, history. Along with my children, she gave me space when I needed to read and write, and listened for hours (or at least pretended to) to my ramblings about Civil War prisons, and whatever else I ran across in my studies. Finally, I would like to thank my employees who tolerated my absence and worked through the distractions of having a boss who, at times, was more focused on completing his master's degree than he was on the daily workings of the company.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction and Background**

Near a trickling creek in Waller County, Texas, where today the silence is interrupted by passing cars on the nearby highways, lies the remains of Camp Groce. Largely forgotten and generally unnoticed today by the public, Camp Groce was the first permanent Confederate prisoner of war camp located west of the Mississippi River. Between its establishment in June of 1863, until the last prisoners were paroled in December, 1864, the camp was the site of disease, despair, cruelty, and the deaths of over 200 Union soldiers, sailors, and civilians. Almost 185 miles to the northeast of Camp Groce, near the city of Tyler, Texas, is the site of Camp Ford, the largest Confederate prison camp west of the Mississippi. Today well marked and maintained by the Smith County Historical Society, Camp Ford housed over 6,000 prisoners between July, 1863, and May, 1865, in conditions considered favorable in comparison not only to Camp Groce, but also to the more infamous prison camps in the east. While both camps certainly had their share of misery, Camp Ford was considered a “model camp” and had one of the lowest death rates of any American Civil War prison. In contrast, during the latter period of Camp Groce’s operation, the death rate would soar to nearly 30%, rivaling the prison camps at Elmira and Andersonville, generally regarded as the two deadliest prisons of the war. With the two Texas camps being relatively close in proximity, under the same Confederate command and supply structure, and at times, housing the same prisoners, why were the overall conditions, morale, and frequency of illness and death so different between them? What role did the outside environment, as well as the internal conditions, play in survival?

Equally intriguing, why have Camp Groce and Camp Ford, with their unique characteristics and parallels to their counterparts east of the Mississippi, been largely ignored by historians and scholars alike in the vast sea of Civil War prison historiography?

In examining the distinctions between the two Texas camps, and the eventual comparison to the larger camps in the east, a few common characteristics became self-evident. Almost all camps were located far from the field of battle, making their proximity to combat mostly a non-factor until their liberation by advancing armies in the final stages of the war. All camps struggled with disease and issues surrounding poor sanitation. Along with providing proper medical care, all camps faced the same basic issues of providing adequate food, clothing, and shelter for the prisoners. While both sides publicly acknowledged that prisoners deserved a reasonable level of comfort and care, the systems in place broke down under crowded conditions, leaving the prisoners at the mercy of the elements and poor management. And yet with so much commonality amongst the various prisons, the likelihood that any one particular prisoner would survive his ordeal varied greatly from camp to camp, leaving us with the simple question of why. Upon further examination, five primary factors arose that deserve the most consideration for their impact on prisoner attitude, morale, and survival: First, the effect of the natural environment on the physical and sanitary conditions, including the availability of fresh water, abundance of vegetation, and access to resources. Second, the effect of the local, or non-natural environment on morale and overall health, including interactions with nearby townspeople, frequency of commerce, and access to medical care. Third, the consequence of having an unsympathetic camp commander versus one with a more benevolent attitude towards the prisoners. Fourth, the role officers played in establishing not only discipline, but also in

providing order and structure to an otherwise chaotic environment. And finally, fifth, the impact of daily activities on the spirit of the prisoners, including not only the necessary work, but also recreational activities such as music, crafting, games of chance, and even baseball.

As we examine each of these factors, it is important to acknowledge that a prisoner's personal approach to his incarceration had a lasting impact on his chances of survival. Such approach not only included a POW's overt actions to improve his conditions, but also his state of mental well-being that either encouraged him to press on, or discouraged efforts to help himself, instead resigning him to his fate. The old adage that "if a man believes he is going to die, he will probably find a way to do so" unfortunately often rings true with prisoners of war. Such realities of prisoner attitudes may help us to understand why some men endured their incarceration for extended periods of time, while others withered away within weeks of entering a camp. In *Nature's Civil War* (2013), historian Kathryn Shively Meier tackles this issue of soldier's looking out for themselves. Throughout their period of military service, Civil War soldiers practiced what Meier called "self care" in order to survive. This practice included foraging for additional food, improving their shelter, tending to their own medical and sanitation needs, and exploiting nature to their advantage. While her book is limited to the study of soldiers in Virginia in 1862, her narrative on the healthiest soldiers practicing self-care resonates throughout the entire Civil War experience, including life as a POW. Simply put "soldiers were confronted with a dire choice: accept responsibility for their own bodies or succumb to illness and possibly death." Self-care required individuality, and "those who remained physically healthy were also mentally healthy."<sup>1</sup> Mental health is admittedly more difficult

to quantify that physical health. Letters home and post-war recollections do not often paint an accurate picture of a soldier's actual mental state during imprisonment, but nevertheless help historians to understand prisoner attitudes. The concept of self-care as it relates to physical and mental health will be seen throughout our analysis of the five factors.

### *Historiography of U.S. Civil War Prisons*

Our collective fascination with the American Civil War has understandably focused on battles, the great armies, and the individuals who went above and beyond in the face of danger. With their tales of heroism and tragedy, patriotism and causes, military conflicts and the decisions and events surrounding them have dominated the war's historiography since its final days in 1865. In contrast, the less glamorous narrative of Civil War prisons has received considerably less attention from historians, as well as the general public. As Andersonville survivor Ezra Ripple would comment in his 1902 memoir, "we would all sooner listen to a description of a grand battle where all the bravery and dash of trained soldiers in assault and defense is portrayed in the most vivid and glowing colors than to a tale which has little in it but that which is revolting, sickening and sorrowful."<sup>2</sup> Even less has been written about the camps west of the Mississippi. While one can easily find a litany of books written on the more infamous prisons of the east, such as Andersonville, Libby, Elmira, Camp Douglas, and Rock Island, there are only two known publications that provide any extensive account of the history of Camp Groce or Camp Ford: *The Last Prison: The Untold Story of Camp Groce CSA*, by Danial Francis Lisarelli (1999), and *Camp Ford CSA: The Story of Union Prisoners in Texas*, by F. Lee Lawrence and Dr. Robert Glover (1964). While these micro-monographs both provide a comprehensive telling of the historical facts, especially Lisarelli's book with its profusion of dates, names,

number of prisoners, and their respective fates, neither rise above being anything more than a narrative-driven timeline of events. Neither provide an interpretive discussion of the elements affecting the camps, or any sort of analytical discussion as to why the varying forms of treatment and care occurred. Such publications also fail to contribute to the larger historiographical picture of Civil War incarceration by limiting their narrative to a single camp, instead of comparing and contrasting the similarities and dissimilarities with other prisons on both sides. Few works by other authors make any reference at all to Camp Groce and Camp Ford, and even then only in passing with a general comment as to their location. Historian Charles W. Sanders, Jr. is one of the few to mention them by name in his book *While in the Hands of the Enemy* (2005); however, even after acknowledging them as “major installations in the trans-Mississippi theater,” he summarily dismisses their importance to his narrative of laying blame for prison atrocities on poor government, and says they will be “addressed only in passing.” Other than this casual mention in his introduction, Sanders does not reference them again in his lengthy 316 page book.<sup>3</sup>

Even with the considerable volume of books written about the eastern prison camps, or the prison system as a whole, few attempt to compare the conditions from one camp to the next, or provide an explanation for the various degrees of suffering seen throughout. A rare early exception would be William Best Hesseltine’s groundbreaking work *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* (1930) that ninety years later remains one of the few publications to attempt to examine the entire prisoner of war system, both North and South. Hesseltine was trying to explain the wartime “psychosis” that allowed both sides to believe the worst in the other when it came to the treatment of prisoners. The antagonism such “psychosis” created inspired a desire for revenge, and justified the

mistreatment of prisoners in each side's care. While his work does make some direct comparisons between camps, Hesseltine's primary focus was on explaining how post-war opinion was affected by propaganda, prisoner accounts, and the psychology of war. He avoided any discussion of why the camps were different, and ignored determining factors. Thus, a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the dissimilarities of the prisons, and how all parties were affected, remained elusive. Hesseltine did encourage other historians to take a broad approach to prison history; however, few in the decades to come followed his lead. *Portals to Hell: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (1997) by amateur historian Lonnie Speer was the first attempt in over sixty years to provide an overall review of all Civil War prisons. While the lengthy publication succeeds in providing a summary of nearly all camps, including the rare mention of Camp Groce and Camp Ford, the work fails to address problems within the prison system, and once again does not provide any analytical discussion of what factors separated one camp from another.

Micro-monographs such as *The Business of Captivity* (2001) by Michael P. Gray about the Elmira Prison, and *History of Andersonville Prison* (1968) by Ovid L. Futch, have dominated prison historiography in the decades since the war and have provided a valuable, albeit limited, snapshot of individual prisons. While certainly an important resource, such works typically have not interpreted each camp's role in the larger prison system, nor have they addressed the much needed comparison with other prisons. One minor exception would be John K. Derden's *The World's Largest Prison: The Story of Camp Lawton* (2012) which intertwines the micro-narrative of Camp Lawton with the broader places and events in Georgia, including its connection to Andersonville, Macon, Savannah, and the impact of Sherman's March. The work also embraces the synthesis of

archaeology and history by documenting the archaeological “discovery” of the camp in 2010.

Over the last two decades, the micro analysis that had been so prevalent started giving way to more and more works focusing on the macro level of prison historiography. While not exactly following the lead of Hesseltine, these macro-monographs take a broader brush to Civil War POW experiences by focusing on environment, governmental policy, sanitation, collective memories, and cultural aspects, just to name a few, among a group of camps or across the prison systems. *Crossing the Deadlines: Civil War Prisons Reconsidered* (2018), a collection of nine essays compiled and edited by Michael P. Gray, tackled such diverse topics as religion, environment, disease, black prisoners, dark tourism, archaeology, and memories, on a broad scale. In his essay, *Nature and Prisons*, Evan A. Kutzler argues that the study of environmental history is crucial to the wider study of prison policy and management as its consideration takes the study “beyond the question of whose prisons were more wretched” questioning “not management versus mismanagement, but one environmental choice versus another.”<sup>4</sup> In a later chapter entitled *Civil War Prisons, Memory, and the Problem of Reconciliation*, Benjamin G. Cloyd cautions historians that modern attempts to recast prisons in a more central Civil War role via soldier’s memoirs must acknowledge that sectional hatred, lingering hostility, and racial recriminations clouded post-war recollections.<sup>5</sup> Furthering his emphasis on the environment experienced by POW’s, Evan A. Kutzler in his recent work, *Living by Inches* (2019), examines prisoner experiences, both North and South, through their basic senses of smell, hearing, taste, and touch, and the subsequent reactions to their environment. The work “prioritizes imprisoned voices,” while conceding that prisoner experiences were both collective and individual.<sup>6</sup>

In doing so, Kutzler intertwines both the public and private aspects of prison life by showing that issues such as sanitation and lice were prevalent across all camps.

Books such as *War Stuff* (2018) by Joan E. Cashin, while not focusing specifically on Civil War prisons, nevertheless addressed the constant struggle for resources by both soldiers and civilians. She writes “most of the warriors of both armies – blue and gray – privileged their own needs over everything else.”<sup>7</sup> This self-preservation extended into all aspects of life, including one’s time as a prisoner. Similarly, *Embattled Freedom* (2018) by Amy Murrell Taylor, focused on the struggles of African Americans in slave refugee camps, but also raised comparisons to soldiers languishing in prisons. Like refugees, POW’s were stripped of life’s most basic needs, often reducing survival to the individual rather than a collective endeavor. Food, shelter, clothing, et al, became essential to “achieving a metaphoric place in freedom,” as well as survival, for both refugee and prisoner.<sup>8</sup> In the simple task of finding a place to live, refugee experiences become relatable to prisoners at Andersonville, desperately trying to find and maintain their small patch of ground in a combative sea of humanity.

Continuing the macro theme, *While in the Hands of the Enemy* (2005) by Charles W. Sanders, Jr. looks at the prison systems as a whole on both sides to determine who was collectively at fault for the high death rates. Saying he is confronting “the last bastion of revisionist Civil War historiography,” Sanders challenges the “stubborn refusal of scholars” to lay blame for the suffering and atrocities squarely on the shoulders of the leadership within the Union and Confederate governments.<sup>9</sup> While the work is successful in painting a broad picture of bureaucratic incompetence and willful neglect on both sides, it ignores much of the personal aspects of survival and everyday prison life, and places



little to no blame on the commandants and guards at individual prisons. In *Haunted by Atrocity* (2010), Benjamin G. Cloyd follows the post-war evolution of memories, remembrances, and observances of Civil War prisons. Looking at prisons on a broad scale on both sides, the book shows how the camps took on different meanings and purposes for different groups, whether Yankee, Rebel, or emancipated African Americans. By his own admission, Cloyd focuses primarily on Andersonville, and yet still manages to create a macro study by analyzing the collective memories across regional and racial lines. The study of Civil War prisons must be part of a usable past, instead of just a controversial snapshot. He laments that “the attraction of the Civil War as a national fairy tale continues to overshadow the need to confront more honestly the tragedies of American history.”<sup>10</sup> In *The Yankee Plague* (2016), Lorien Foote integrates the collapse of the Confederate prison system with the collapse of the Confederacy as a whole, and details the effects that thousands of freed Yankee prisoners had on the South and its people. In doing so, Foote goes beyond the usual narrative on the Civil War prisons to show their place and impact on the war, and the competing sides, in their entirety.

With the current trend in Civil War historiography shifting from a micro to a macro approach, the question becomes where do we go from here. Recent works have tended to focus on the personal experiences of soldiers, comparisons of conditions to lay blame, or the governmental policies and management that impacted the system as a whole. What historians have failed to do, however, is merge these various approaches together to create a more comprehensive examination of the prisons. My approach in this thesis is attempting to do just that, by examining not only policy, management, personal experiences, and individual efforts, but also environmental factors that were often beyond the control of the

inmates and their keepers. In doing so, I will be taking a hybrid micro/macro approach that will look at individual prisons, but consider broad factors that are applicable across the entire system. The purpose of this thesis is not to pass judgment, make excuses, or to lay blame for the suffering that occurred upon one side or the other, or at the feet of any one particular individual, group, or event. In addition, this work is not simply a tale of two camps west of the Mississippi, but instead a comparison of multiple camps that vary greatly in size, location, and management. Thus, the goal of this paper is threefold: 1.) to shed light on the long overlooked Texas camps and show that their examination is a valuable component of the overall historiography of Civil War prisons, 2.) provide a framework for historians to objectively examine Civil War prisons by using the five factors discussed herein, and 3.) contribute to the broader historical narrative by encouraging comprehensive comparisons of prisoner of war camps to seek out answers for why personal experiences and chances of survival varied so much from one prison to another. In doing so, we can utilize the micro-monographs of individual prisons in the larger macro context of civil war incarceration, without narrowing our scope to just one set of environmental, political, or personal factors; and perhaps create from our study of Civil War prisons a usable past that Hesseltine, Cloyd, and so many others have sought out.

### *Civil War Prisoner Exchange System*

When the Civil War started in April of 1861, the idea that either side would need large facilities for prisoners, or an extensive supply network to care for them, was generally not up for consideration. Military practice in the mid-nineteenth century prescribed that prisoners of war were to be exchanged, or released on parole to be exchanged at a later date, as soon as possible after a battle. A paroled soldier was prohibited from returning to

active duty until formally exchanged. In practice, the system was certainly not without its flaws as the logistics of exchanges were often left up to the individual commanders after a conflict. Nevertheless, the strategy served its purpose by alleviating both sides of the responsibility of caring for large numbers of enemy combatants for an extended period of time. In July of 1862, Union General John A. Dix and Confederate General D.H. Hill negotiated the Dix-Hill Cartel, an agreement that “codified” the practice already in place between the two newly minted enemies. Under the agreement, prisoners were to be immediately exchanged according to their rank. Thereafter, any excess prisoners were to be paroled within ten days of capture after taking an oath not to rejoin their units until officially exchanged. For the next six months, the cartel held, and prisoners were regularly exchanged with little controversy. However, by early 1863, the system that seemed so simple in practice was beginning to crumble under practical concerns and political ideologies.

As historian Benjamin G. Cloyd points out, two primary issues “destroyed the supposedly permanent exchange process.” First, soldiers released on parole were often left in that state of limbo for considerable periods of time while awaiting exchange. Camps of non-fighting parolees consumed valuable resources, while many soldiers took advantage of the system to avoid future combat. This loss of much needed men and supplies, especially for the South, forced both sides to return paroled prisoners to active duty prior to an official exchange, eroding the good will of the cartel. As a practical matter “both the Union and Confederacy valued financial gain and military expedience more than prisoner’s lives,” much to the detriment of future captives. Second, as the war entered its third full year of hostilities, the Confederacy’s refusal to exchange/parole black soldiers and sailors

broke down what was left of the cartel agreement. By mid-1863, large numbers of African Americans were enlisted in the Union army, and following the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation earlier that year, slavery had become a moral rallying point for the North.<sup>11</sup> For a Southern Confederacy built upon racial inequality and slavery as the cornerstones of their existence, the idea of “exchanging a black man for a white man implied an inherent equality” that was simply unacceptable.<sup>12</sup> By the end of 1863, the exchange process had broken down almost in its entirety. Even in the latter part of 1864 when it was apparent to both sides that the conditions in POW camps were detrimental to those unfortunate to be there, officials such as General Ulysses Grant justified the lack of exchanges, “It is hard on our men in Southern prisons not to exchange them, but it is humanity to those left in the ranks to fight our battles . . . if we commence a system of exchange which liberates all prisoners taken, we will have to fight on until the whole South is exterminated.”<sup>13</sup>

As large numbers of prisoners began to accumulate, neither side was realistically prepared for what was to come. Both sides scrambled to find former military camps, warehouses, islands, and any other places that were available, whether adequate or not, to house the captives. While the North eventually created at least a basic working system, aided by the Commissary Department and the U.S. Sanitation Commission, to house and care for the prisoners, and provide basic needs via a series of private contracts, the South never seemed to get its collective act together. A tangled bureaucracy and a lack of effective leadership hampered Confederate efforts to adequately care for their prisoners, with little effort made to improve the system throughout the remainder of the war. While Southern apologists have attempted to blame the conditions in Confederate prisons on Northern policies that placed their soldiers in such care, and a lack of adequate supplies

throughout the South, historians such as Cloyd and Kutzler have argued that the South was at best grossly negligent in their duty to care for their prisoners. Cloyd comments that while “some sympathy for the Confederacy’s slow reaction to the need for a well-defined prison system is legitimate . . . it remains inexcusable, even sinister, that, despite the momentum of war against it, the Confederacy never bothered to address the exigencies of prisoners of war.”<sup>14</sup> Kutzler argues that “prison sanitation was never a high priority” in the South as they exhibited a “neglect of responsibility” to care for their prisoners.<sup>15</sup> And yet as we will see, in the Trans-Mississippi Department of the Confederacy, the South was capable of running a camp that focused on sanitation, adequate supplies, and at least a basic level of care for their captives. Camp Ford defies the stereotype of Southern prison camps with a remarkable death rate of less than 3.5% until overcrowding in mid-1864 created conditions to the detriment of the beneficial attributes of the camp.

The effects of the breakdown of the prisoner exchange system are immediately apparent to even the most casual observer of history. The number of prisons increased on both sides, the number of soldiers incarcerated for long periods of time skyrocketed, and the death rates of inmates rose dramatically. For most soldiers, staying on active duty to fight yet another battle was now preferable to being captured. The raw numbers tell the story as well. As economists Dora L. Costa and Matthew E. Kahn (who specialize in economic history and environmental economics respectively) point out in their longitudinal data study “Surviving Andersonville: the Benefits of Social Networks in POW Camps” (2007), while only 4% of soldiers captured prior to July 1863 died in captivity, the number leaps to 27% for those captured post July 1863.<sup>16</sup>

## **Chapter II**

### **Prisoners of War in Texas**

The men that would soon be incarcerated at Camp Groce, with many eventually finding their way to Camp Ford, came from two primary fields of combat. From the Battle of Galveston in January of 1863 came soldiers and sailors from the U.S.S. Harriet Lane and from states as far away as Massachusetts and Maine. A naval skirmish near Sabine Pass that same month would result in the capture of hundreds of prisoners from the U.S.S. Morning Light and the U.S.S. Velocity. From the Harriet Lane and the Morning Light, thirty-nine African American sailors were captured and took a different path to confinement than their white counterparts. The Second Battle of Sabine Pass in September of 1863 would add dozens more soldiers and sailors from the U.S.S. Clifton and the U.S.S. Sachem to the prison in Hempstead.<sup>1</sup> However, before reaching Camp Groce, all prisoners, black and white, passed through the prisoner of war compound in Houston, Texas. Located in the downtown area on the banks of Buffalo Bayou, and always considered as a temporary facility, the two cotton warehouses that made up the compound were the oldest Civil War prison camp in Texas. Today, a lone historical marker denotes the site that is mostly forgotten on land now occupied by the downtown campus of the University of Houston.

It was during this first stop on the road to confinement that captured African American sailors and soldiers were separated from their fellow prisoners. Instead of confinement, many blacks captured during the war were sold into slavery, or summarily executed. However, all thirty-nine of the black sailors captured in Galveston and Sabine

Pass were transferred to the state penitentiary in Huntsville, Texas, enduring two years of hard labor until their release in June of 1865. While on work detail in the city of Houston, black prisoners drew the attention of Houston mayor William Anders, who complained to Confederate commanders “the Yankee Negroes are now freely ambulating within our city” and “numerous complaints of our best citizens have been made to the authorities, and it seems that the whole community is alarmed.” Anders primary concern seemed to be that their “most evil influence is exerted by those Negroes, who, most of them, are intelligent, shrewd and capable to read and write, and try to obtain a mastery over our slave population.”<sup>2</sup> Despite experiencing their share of harsh treatment and desperate conditions, records show that only one African American Union prisoner died in Texas during the Civil War, 3<sup>rd</sup> Class sailor James Sashia of the USS Morning Light.<sup>3</sup>

*Camp Groce CSA – Hempstead, Texas*

On a mostly flat creek bottom approximately two miles east of Hempstead, Texas, Camp Groce was established in June, 1863 as a Confederate prisoner of war camp to house the aforementioned Union soldiers and sailors captured at the Battle of Galveston and the naval engagements near Sabine Pass. Originally established by the Texans as an instructional site for Confederate recruits in 1862, the camp was located on a portion of the Liendo Plantation, a sprawling three thousand plus acre farm owned by Leonard Waller Groce, who lived in a large, colonial style mansion built by slave labor in 1853, and located about a mile to the northeast of the camp. Groce, who is often credited with bringing the first cotton gin to Texas in the 1820’s, was a former Colonel in the Texas army and an ardent Confederate supporter who contributed nearly all of his fortune to the cause.<sup>4</sup> Less

than a year after it opened, “Camp Liendo,” as it was called at the time, was abandoned by the Confederates after they realized the site was unsuitable for habitation.

A few months later, the first Union prisoners arrived from Houston at the newly named Camp Groce. Lieutenant Colonel Augustine J.H. Duganne of the 176<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry, who would also later spend time at Camp Ford, described the camp, upon arrival in the summer of 1863, as consisting only of “four stacks of barracks . . . built upon grounds a little higher than the (nearby) railroad grade” with “another line of barracks running nearly parallel to ours, at a distance of one hundred yards or more” for the guards who were “under the command of a fat officer known as Captain Buster.” The entirety of the camp was surrounded by “a tract of wild country, wood, swamp, and prairie, stretched for miles.”<sup>5</sup> Duganne fails to mention any walls or other man-made barricades around the camp, and by all accounts there were none at this time. As local authority Danial Lisarelli explains “with Camp Groce being in such an isolated location, the likelihood of escape was very small . . . sometimes they (the prisoners) were left almost unattended by the guards, especially when there was a race at the nearby fairgrounds.”<sup>6</sup>

By early fall, the number of prisoners had swelled to over four hundred sailors, soldiers, and civilians, the latter being comprised of contract teamsters and those suspected of Yankee sympathies. With only approximately two hundred Confederate soldiers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Texas State Troops to guard the camp, the decision was made to erect a wall in October of 1863. Generally described as twelve feet high, with two gateways, catwalks and guard posts, the newly enclosed stockade comprised an estimated two and one half acres.<sup>7</sup> Other accounts, such as that of Assistant Paymaster John Read, described the wall as fifteen feet high with sentry boxes for guards every fifty feet. From these



perches, guards were instructed to “shoot any coming within an imaginary distance of ten feet of the fence.”<sup>8</sup> Such a structure would have had a deleterious effect on the psyche of the captives as the camp-like atmosphere was stripped away, leaving in its place a stark reminder that one was in fact a prisoner. During this first year of operation, Camp Groce was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John Sayles and Major James W. Barnes. Colonel Charles C. Nott of the 176<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry described Sayles as “a man of few words, very quiet, very kind, and rarely gave an order that did not effect an improvement,” and Barnes as “a man of great general information, and so far as we were concerned, in every thought and word and deed a perfect Christian gentleman.”<sup>9</sup> As many prisoners would discover in the coming year, the disposition and consideration of the camp commanders would have a lasting impact on the conditions of the camp, and the welfare of its unfortunate inhabitants.

Less than two months later, Confederate Lieutenant General Edmund Kirby Smith, Commander of the Department of the Trans-Mississippi, issued an order for all prisoners to be transferred out of Camp Groce, and north to Tyler, Texas. The enlisted men would soon thereafter be sent to Shreveport, Louisiana, and paroled. The officers, however, were to remain in captivity at Camp Ford.<sup>10</sup> During the brief respite between December 1863 and May 1864, the stockade at Camp Groce remained a virtual ghost town. The recess ended, however, after nearly six months when almost two hundred Yankees captured at the Battle of Calcasieu Pass, about half of which were sailors from the U.S.S. Granite City and the U.S.S. Wave, arrived in Hempstead. Camp Groce was now under the control of a new commander, Colonel Clayton C. Gillespie of the 25<sup>th</sup> Texas Dismounted Cavalry, who John Read said “caused all suffering in his power.”<sup>11</sup> Under Gillespie, conditions would

deteriorate, and the death rate would rise dramatically. When five hundred additional prisoners arrived from Camp Ford in August of 1864, they found that those who had the misfortune to be at Camp Groce over the prior four months were “half-naked . . . as they crawled about in the muddy, lice and flea-filled camp” while others “lay helpless in camp, covered in their own filth and no one willing or able to attend to them.” Mosquitos were “breeding freely in the pit between the walls” and “the wells were filled with filth, rendering them useless.”<sup>12</sup> For many, however, the worst was yet to come.

In September of 1864, a yellow fever epidemic would force Camp Groce to be evacuated. Over the next two months, over six hundred prisoners would be marched nearly fifty miles to makeshift camps appropriately named Camp Gillespie near Bellville, Texas, and Camp Felder near Chappel Hill, Texas. At each camp, no shelter was provided for the prisoners. At Camp Felder, numerous sheds were available for housing; however, Colonel Gillespie made the decision to shelter their horses in them instead. This blatant disregard for human life typified the command of Gillespie, and created a dark image of him that would rival the worst tales of any prison commandant on either side. Yankee prisoner, Acting Ensign Franklin J. Latham would later describe the suffering at Camp Felder: “The daily number of deaths was 4 or 5, and when it rained 6 or 7. The scene was horrible. Living skeletons perishing, some with scarcely a rag to cover them; some insane yelling day and night till death relieved them; some anxiously clinging to life; others despairing and wishing they should die.”<sup>13</sup> When the survivors had their homecoming at Camp Groce in November, one hundred twenty, or almost twenty percent, of the prisoners who left in September did not return.<sup>14</sup>

With conditions worsening, and the realization that they could no longer properly care for the remaining prisoners at Camp Groce becoming more apparent, the Trans-Mississippi Department of the Confederacy was eager to arbitrate an exchange. The negotiations, however, were hindered by the Confederacy's reluctance to trade Yankee sailors for Confederate soldiers, instead of Confederate sailors. Unlike the ongoing issue of the Confederacy not wanting to exchange black prisoners for white soldiers, the issue of soldiers for sailors could be resolved in the spirit of the old exchange system when the right personnel became available. After several months, a compromise was reached in which the soldiers at Camp Groce would be exchanged for Confederate soldiers captured at Fort Gaines, Alabama, and the Union sailors would be exchanged for members of the Confederate Navy captured at Mobile Bay, Alabama. On December 2, 1864, news of the pending parole and exchange reached Camp Groce.<sup>15</sup> Within three weeks, the camp would be empty.

*Camp Ford, CSA – Tyler, Texas*

Known as Camp Hubbard, Box Springs Camp, Gum Springs Campground, Pine Springs, and simply the “camp at a spring northeast of Tyler on the Marshall Road,” the area later known as Camp Ford was established in 1862 as a training camp for Confederate conscripts, before becoming a prisoner of war camp in July of 1863. Unlike Hempstead, the nearest town to Camp Groce, Tyler, Texas, was a significant manufacturing and administrative center for the Confederate army of the Trans-Mississippi Department. The Tyler Ordnance Works was the largest producer of small arms ammunition for the Confederacy west of the Mississippi River, producing over 2.6 million rounds between 1863 and 1865. The Tyler Arsenal produced over 2,200 rifles. The Confederate medical

laboratory located at Headache Springs three miles east of Tyler produced herbal medicines and whiskey, packaged with Confederate States' labels. Saddles, wagons, and harnesses were made at the Quartermaster Depot just outside of Tyler. With an extensive military presence, and an abundance of accessible supplies, Tyler was an obvious alternative to the make-shift facilities temporarily housing prisoners in Shreveport, Louisiana.<sup>16</sup>

The camp was named for Confederate Colonel John Salmon "Rip" Ford, somewhat of a frontier Renaissance man, who practiced medicine, studied the law, ran a newspaper in Austin, was elected to the Texas legislature, served as a Texas Ranger, and fought in both the Texas Revolution and the Mexican-American War. In May of 1865, he would lead his troops to victory at the Battle of Palmito Ranch, generally regarded as the last battle of the Civil War; but for now, he was assigned the task of training new recruits at the camp that would soon bear his name.<sup>17</sup> The first Union prisoners began arriving at Camp Ford, which was now under the command of Captain Stanley M. Warner, in the latter part of July, 1863. Little is known of Captain Warner's career, or his short-lived command at the camp. Guilty of an action "being so flagrant, requiring immediate action, and it being impractical to order a General Court Martial," Captain Warner was demoted, conscripted, and generally lost to history.<sup>18</sup>

Between July and October, 1863, Camp Ford housed less than fifty Union prisoners in an open area with no barricades. A local woman, Mittie Marsh, complained to her husband in an August 30, 1863, letter: "the yanks do just as they please I think, three of them came here last evening . . . in search of something good to eat." In November, 1863, over four hundred fifty new prisoners, being a mix of Union sailors from the U.S.S. Queen of the West and the U.S.S. Diane, as well as soldiers captured at Fort Brashear, Louisiana,

during the Bayou Teche Campaign, were introduced to the camp. With a prison population of approximately five hundred Yankees now being guarded by less than eighty Confederate militia, the locals' fear of calamity increased dramatically. With obvious concern, Mittie Marsh explained "all of the Yankey prisoners were about to make their escape . . . going to unarm the guard and go from camps to Tyler . . . get plenty of guns and ammunition and horses . . . and take the negroes and all leave but fortunately their plan was discovered."<sup>19</sup> In a November 15, 1863, letter to her son, Sarah Carter feared the Yankees "have threatened to run over the guards, seize their arms and kill without regard to age or sex."<sup>20</sup> Kate Stone, a refugee from Louisiana who compiled one of the most well-known journals of the Civil War by a Southern woman, lamented "a number of prisoners escaped the other day, and the townspeople are very apprehensive of their burning the town . . . alone as we are tonight, I feel a little afraid of the escaped Yankees."<sup>21</sup> With growing concerns, the decision was made in late 1863 to erect a stockade around the camp, built primarily by local slaves volunteered by their anxious owners. Captain John W. Greene of the 26<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry would in the post-war years sarcastically decry the necessity of such a wall to confine prisoners who were so far from home, "in about ten days their work was completed . . . and with the *unarmed* prisoners now securely confined, the people of Tyler were relieved of their fear."<sup>22</sup> In an ironic twist of fate, Captain Greene and his fellow soldier, Lieutenant John A. Whitsit, would successfully escape from Camp Ford on Christmas Eve, 1863, while on a work detail outside of the stockade to gather wood.

With stockade walls estimated from fifteen to twenty feet high, and encompassing approximately four acres, upon initial inspection Camp Ford would have looked very similar to Camp Groce. The outward appearance, however, is where the similarities ended.

Camp Ford was comprised of ten-foot long cabins for officers, with smaller A-shaped structures called “shebangs” for the enlisted men. Upon Colonel Duganne’s arrival, he promptly hired two Kansas prisoners for one hundred Confederate dollars to “rear me a palatial mansion twelve feet by ten inside, with a good stone fire-place, and a substantial clay chimney.”<sup>23</sup> While nearby forests supplied a considerable amount of wood for construction and campfires, perhaps the most significant feature of the camp was a flowing spring, diverted into separate reservoirs for drinking and bathing. Captain Amos Johnson, the self-appointed “Commissioner of Aqueducts,” maintained the reservoirs and insured the availability of a healthy water supply. In early 1864, Union officers laid out the plans for what came to be known as “Ford City,” a town within the stockade comprised of named streets, a camp mess, workshops, a bakery, and even a public square.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the early portion of its existence as a prisoner of war facility, Camp Ford was under the command of Colonel Robert T.P. Allen of the 17<sup>th</sup> Texas Infantry. A military instructor and Methodist minister prior to the war, Allen was described as kind, liberal in his discipline, and was said to have “never doubted the honor of his prisoners.” In May of 1864, he was replaced by Colonel Thomas Scott Anderson, who was almost his polar opposite. An attorney and Texas Secretary of State prior to the conflict, Anderson was characterized as “a bitter secessionist, of the demonstrative sort” who “speedily contrived to become obnoxious to many Federal officers and men.”<sup>25</sup> He encouraged the guards to shoot any prisoners who cursed at them, attempted to escape, or just wandered too close to the barricade, and would allow atrocities to occur under Lieutenant B.W. McEachern, considered the tyrant of Camp Ford.

In the Spring of 1864, the Union began its Red River Campaign to destroy the Confederate army of Lieutenant General Richard Taylor in Louisiana, capture Shreveport, rally pro-Union locals, and sever Texas from the rest of the Confederacy. Despite being outnumbered two to one, and at times as much as five to one, the Rebels would win a series of battles across Louisiana, thwarting Union objectives and capturing thousands of Yankee prisoners along the way. In April of 1864, an influx of over 4,000 prisoners from the Battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill swelled the population of Camp Ford to dangerous levels. On April 15<sup>th</sup>, Kate Stone confirmed “three thousand prisoners will arrive here tonight to be guarded with their companions in misery at the conscript camp.”<sup>26</sup> Overcrowding placed an undue burden on the availability of supplies, and physical space, resulting in a lack of adequate housing, starvation, and unsanitary conditions. Enlarging the stockade did little to alleviate the suffering. Writing years later of the conditions, Colonel Nott said “our number swelled from a hundred officers, to forty-seven hundred and twenty-five officers, soldiers and sailors . . . then followed a quarter of a year of loathsome wretchedness, beside which, the squalor and vice of a great city’s worst haunts appeared . . . the healthy character of our camp changed in a single week.” He further lamented “the friendless sick lay shelterless on the ground around us” and “we walk over the dying and the dead, whenever we moved, and saw and heard their miseries through every hour.”<sup>27</sup> Confederate Surgeon F.W. Meagher would confirm in a June 1864 report on the overcrowding in the camp, “the enclosed ground is entirely too small for the number of men . . . and it would be impossible to make them healthy in such a crowded condition . . . the filth and offal” creates a “horrible stench” while “a great number of the enlisted men have no quarter nor shelter, and have to sleep out on the ground with not even a blanket

to cover them.”<sup>28</sup> On June 14<sup>th</sup>, Kate Stone would make one last comment on the condition of the camp, “the prisoners are in a most pitiable condition, perfectly destitute. Some have only a blanket to wear and others only one garment. There is much sickness and death among them and the authorities are powerless to get clothes for them.”<sup>29</sup>

In late April of 1865, news of General Robert E. Lee’s surrender at Appomattox finally reached Camp Ford. Despite an increase in escape attempts, and the inevitable ending of hostilities, the camp continued to operate. On the night of May 14, 1865, the majority of the guards abandoned their posts, and the prisoners awoke the next morning to find the gates open. Due to chaos and looting in Tyler, and with the expectation that an official parole would soon be realized, most of the prisoners remained in the stockade for their own protection, but ventured freely outside of its walls when they so desired. Sergeant Arthur E. Gilligan of the 8<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry would record in his diary on May 15, 1865, “the guards have all deserted, but Sweets men and they are all drunk, Officers and all. In the evening the band got together and went to headquarters and Played to the Rebs and our officers. The whiskey was passed around and I partook Freely.”<sup>30</sup> On May 17, 1865, the last remaining prisoners left Camp Ford for Shreveport and freedom.<sup>31</sup> Sergeant Gilligan likely spoke for most prisoners heading north when he wrote “today we . . . crossed the Texas line. I hope I shall never have an occasion to cross it again.”<sup>32</sup> At least one prisoner, however, the well-written Colonel Duganne, would look back on his years at Camp Ford with fondness “the bond of mutual loyalty – the golden link of patriotism – will be brightened when we shall look back upon Camp Ford, by beams of Friendship, Love, Trust – and that greatest of all which is Charity.”<sup>33</sup> Captain Samuel A. Swiggett of the 36<sup>th</sup> Iowa Infantry was the last prisoner to leave the



stockade. Years later, he would recall “I will not attempt to describe my feelings as the final exit was made; suffice it to say that it was one of the happiest moments of my life.”<sup>34</sup>

*Comparison of Death Rates between Camp Groce and Camp Ford*

The stark contrast between Camp Groce and Camp Ford can be seen in the writings and personal accounts of those who were there, but can also be found in the raw statistical data of survival in the two camps. Confederate records are notoriously incomplete; however, extensive research by Danial Lisarelli has established accepted prisoner numbers for Camp Groce. During the first period of confinement in Camp Groce in 1863, 20 of the known 427 prisoners died, for a death rate of 4.68%. However, when conditions and command changed at the camp during the second period in 1864, the death rate jumped dramatically to 29.6%, as 201 of the known 678 prisoners perished. Combined, both years give Camp Groce a death rate of 20.0% (221 deaths out of 1,105 total prisoners), which is comparable to the rates seen at Andersonville and Elmira, generally regarded as two of the deadliest camps in the east.<sup>35</sup> What changed between the short one year period from 1863 to 1864? What factors lead to an almost 530% increase in the death rate?

In comparison, while the prisoner numbers at Camp Ford have never been conclusively determined, consensus is that between 232 and 286 prisoners died out of an estimated 6,000 total inhabitants, for a death rate of approximately 3.86% to 4.78%. From this group, an estimated 183 prisoners passed away during the period of May to October, 1864, when the population was at its highest, being 63.98% to 78.89% of the total number of deaths in the camp.<sup>36</sup> With a command structure and outward appearance so similar to Camp Groce, why was the overall death rate of Camp Ford one of the lowest of any Civil

War prison in the country? What conditions lead to the dramatic increase in deaths for the six month period of 1864?

## Chapter III

### Five Factors - Survival in Texas

To begin understanding why the death rates at Camp Groce and Camp Ford were so different from one another, we will now turn our attention to the five factors discussed in Chapter One, being: natural environment, non-natural environment, camp commanders, imprisoned officers, and activities available. In analyzing the Texas camps, we will address each factor in the order given; however, in our later discussions of Elmira and Andersonville, the factors will be addressed in the order in which they seem most appropriate to the overall discussion of each camp. Not all camps are the same, and consequently we will see that each factor did not necessarily have the same effect, whether positively or negatively, on the prisoners in each facility.

#### *Effect of the Natural Environment*

Naturalist John Muir once said “In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks.” While many would accept this quote as a positive expression, Muir does not say that what one receives from nature is always welcome, only that it is more than one expects to find. Nature is life, but it is also death. In the nineteenth century, man depended on his natural surroundings for survival, even more so than we do today. Lack of a fresh water supply could lead a homesteader, or an entire town, to extinction. Failure to understand weather cycles, soil conditions and natural predators could cause the loss of one’s food supply, and certain death. Civil War soldiers on both sides, who cleared timber for fortifications and shelter, and who foraged for food outside of their allotted rations, understood the role that nature played in their very survival. In *Nature’s Civil War*, Meier

defines nature/natural environment as “non-human, non-manmade ecological, meteorological, and topographical phenomena, including the related set of weather, seasons, and climate, as well as air, water, terrain, insects, animals, and plant life.”<sup>1</sup> In general terms, environmental history is the “study of the changing relationships human communities develop with nonhuman nature over time and place.” Consequently, environmental histories of the Civil War then must examine “nature’s active role in the conflict as well as the war’s effects on both ecological systems and American’s relationships with the natural environment.”<sup>2</sup> Man’s very survival is affected by the natural environment around him, but the way he uses nature to his advantage will also impact the environment not only for himself, but others as well, including potentially generations yet to come. This is certainly the case for Civil War soldiers whether in the field or as a prisoner of war. In examining the effects of the natural environment on a POW’s chance of survival, I will follow the definition laid out by Meier, with an appreciation of the role of environmental history, to establish parameters for the analysis. Nature would present itself as a vital part of the lives of those at Camp Groce and Camp Ford in distinctive ways that had a direct effect on the rate of survival. Prisoners learned through self-care to use nature to their advantage whenever possible, but were also acutely aware of the disadvantages that nature could impose on their very survival.

Despite the area of Camp Groce being deemed unsuitable for the training and quartering of their own soldiers, the Confederates did not have any such reservations in using the site for the housing of prisoners. The nearby creek, which ironically today is called Clear Creek, was described as sluggish, stagnant, muddy, and generally unfit for consumption. The creek served as a latrine, a place to bathe, and at times, the only source

of drinking water. Two wells were located within the campsite; however, by the time the site reopened in 1864, the only well inside the stockade had caved in. After the war, in hearings before Congress, John Read testified that access to the creek was often denied, leaving “at early morn . . . a rush to get what water had oozed into the old well through the night, and this being very little, many sick men suffered for water to cool their parched lips.”<sup>3</sup> Exposure to the contaminated water caused dysentery, and the low lying area near the creek became a breeding ground for mosquitos, which undoubtedly contributed to the yellow fever epidemic in 1864.

In contrast, the lack of fresh water at Camp Ford was rarely, if ever, an issue of concern. The spring that flowed through the camp was described by one prisoner as “a wonderful one . . . it gushes out of the clay-bank, cool and crystalline . . . it is impregnated with iron and sulphur, and the water is a perpetual tonic.”<sup>4</sup> While the enthusiasm of this soldier may be attributed to the fondness of post-war memories, the source of water was certainly an asset to the camp, and one that received very little criticism either in recollections or accounts from the time. Care was also taken by the prisoners at Camp Ford to maintain the quality of the water. Colonel Duganne proudly remembered “we have several wooden reservoirs, to which the prisoners resort for washing purposes. The upper one contains our drinking water. It threatened failure once, but Northern ingenuity sank the reservoirs and guaranteed perennial supplies.”<sup>5</sup> By all accounts, the quality and availability of fresh water did not diminish during the period of captivity, as the stream remained a reliable source. While dysentery did afflict a number of prisoners at Camp Ford, those suffering from it never reached the levels seen at Camp Groce, despite the dramatic increase in the population at the Tyler site in 1864. The very presence of the fresh

spring flowing directly through the camp was an obvious environmental advantage for the inhabitants of Camp Ford over their counterparts at Camp Groce. However, their proactive measure to insure the quality of the water via a series of constructed reservoirs demonstrates how the prisoners at Camp Ford practiced self-care to turn the existing natural element to their long-term advantage.

The countryside surrounding Camp Groce was part prairie, part swamp, with groves of trees and thickets throughout, but not of the quantity that would lead one to call it a forest. Corporal Aaron T. Sutton of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry would characterize it as “generally poor; yellow sand mostly.”<sup>6</sup> In 1863, prisoners were frequently allowed to venture into the surrounding area to cut wood, gather clay, and forage for whatever they believed was edible, or had medicinal value. Quantity was almost always in short supply. One item that was readily available, however, was the leaves of a half bush, half tree, that the prisoners called yapon or yippun (today it is known as yaupon). It grew in large quantities near the creek and up to the borders of the camp, and was made into a tea “which was said to taste wonderfully.” One soldier admitted, however, that “it was said that it caused certain unpleasant medical effects, and one young gentleman, who had once taken a mug full, averred that he shortly thereafter felt a burning sensation in that part of his body where he supposed (erroneously) was his stomach.”<sup>7</sup> Yet another found it to be “an excellent substitute for tea . . . how luxuriously it titillated my palate.”<sup>8</sup> Being a species of holly used primarily by Native Americans in purification rituals, yaupon contained caffeine, had no substantial nutritional value, and was known to induce vomiting (hence it’s Latin name *Ilex Vomitoria*). It’s use likely had more of a detrimental, rather than a beneficial, effect on a prisoner’s physical health. However, as it was perceived as a

medicinal tea that may have reminded one of home, yaupon contributed to the improved mental health of those who regularly drank it. When one did venture outside of the camp in the early months of operation, whether looking for yaupon or other “necessities,” they had to avoid “copperheads, rattlesnakes and hooded vipers” which inhabited the “swampy neighborhoods of Camp Groce.”<sup>9</sup> In 1864, when Colonel Gillespie obtained command of the camp, prisoner treks outside of the stockade were restricted, and eventually stopped all together. Unable to supplement their meager rations, or gather wood to be used for shelter and campfires, the prisoners suffered, both mentally and physically, and the conditions within the camp quickly worsened.

Camp Ford was located on a hilly Texas prairie, in close proximity to forests of pine, ash, hickory, and hollywood. In addition to the spring running through the stockade, Ray’s Creek flowed freely to the southeast of the camp. Access to the surrounding area was allowed throughout the life of the camp, especially in 1863, and early 1864, while under the command of Colonel Allen. With such access, usually under supervision of the guards, the prisoners were able to gather enough timber to construct the log cabins and mess halls that improved the quality of life, and became a lasting characteristic of Camp Ford. As the number of escape attempts increased, foraging parties were more limited, and under a heavier guard detail, but still continued. Wild hogs, foxes, deer and rabbits roamed the surrounding area, providing an occasional supplement to the rationed diet of the prisoners. With convenient access to water, supplies, and fertile soil, gardens of “corn, rye, lettuce, sweet potatoes, water-melons, beans, peas, cabbages, and red peppers” were planted.<sup>10</sup> Captain William McKinney of the 19<sup>th</sup> Kentucky Infantry would in a May 1864 diary entry relish in the enjoyment of a “nice mess of sallad from garden planted since our

arrival.”<sup>11</sup> With the dramatic increase in population in 1864, food and supplies were in shorter supply, but still, when the population was paroled in 1865, there were gardens remaining, yet to be harvested. This level of access to the outside world was unparalleled among Civil War prisoner of war camps. By taking full advantage of what nature provided, and the opportunities presented by their keepers, the inmates at Camp Ford improved their chance of survival by doing the simple things they would have likely done at home: hunting, foraging, and farming.

While the area around Camp Ford was not plagued by the number of deadly snakes that frequented Camp Groce, the prisoners near Tyler were afflicted by centipedes, scorpions and tarantulas. According to one account, a soldier died from a tarantula bite on his neck that “swelled tumorously.”<sup>12</sup> Lice, rats and other vermin were prevalent at both sites throughout. Even under the best of conditions, there were constant reminders that nature could be harsh and detrimental to one’s health.

Both camps suffered from the Texas heat, and occasional winter cold snap, with few distinctions. Those serving at Camp Ford did enjoy slightly less humid conditions and more seasonable weather in the Piney Woods, than their counterparts at Camp Groce who labored a little more than a hundred miles from the Gulf Coast. However, the effect of the weather on the differing conditions of both camps was not a significant factor. Prisoners writing about their time at either camp do mention the weather, especially the heat, throughout their commentary and recollections; however, it is never presented as a primary concern. This may be due to the fact that, except for a few brief periods, shelter was available at both camps to provide some relief from the elements. The one major exception is during the yellow fever trek from Camp Groce in 1864 when prisoners suffered under



the heavy rains of a Texas Fall, while the Rebel horses remained warm and dry nearby. As they made their way slowly back to Camp Groce from the makeshift Camp Felder, the prisoners were forced to march over muddy roads that were impassable to the wagons, “here and there one would find a prisoner stuck in the mud, nearly naked, sick with fever and dysentery, trembling in the cold November rain.”<sup>13</sup> As historian Lisa M. Brady points out in her 2012 article “From Battlefield to Fertile Ground: The Development of Civil War Environmental History,” the necessity of large armies by both sides “accelerated the development of diseases that thrive on human hosts,” due to the fact that “war represents not only a breakdown of human social and political relations but also the disintegration of the existing environmental order.”<sup>14</sup> Once the advantageous elements of the environment are either exhausted or otherwise no longer available, prisoners of war must rely on the existing social order for survival. If that deteriorates, as Brady suggests it often does in war, then one is left only with self-preservation in a chaotic environment. As we will see in our later discussion of the prison at Andersonville, a near complete collapse of the environmental and social order lead to rapid decline in both physical and mental health, and consequently death on an enormous scale.

#### *Effect of the Local, Non-Natural Environment*

Like many Civil War prisoner of war sites, both Camp Groce and Camp Ford were located in close proximity to a thriving civilian community. The interactions that the captives would have with the local citizens, would have a lasting, positive effect on their morale, physical well-being, and rate of survival. The cessation of such interactions at Camp Groce would have an equally negative effect as well. Townspeople, whether ardent secessionists, closeted Union sympathizers, or more often, somewhere in between, engaged

in commerce with the prisoners, provided medical services, brought religion to the camps, and, in the case of Camp Ford, visited solely as a social call. Regardless of their reasons for interaction, the role played by locals had a significant impact on life in the camps.

Hempstead, Texas, was founded in 1856, at the projected stopping point of the Houston and Texas Central Railway. Linked directly to Houston and the Gulf Coast by rail, Hempstead would become a commercial hub, as well as a distribution center for goods heading north and west into the interior of Texas. When Camp Groce opened in 1863, the citizens of Hempstead wasted little time in initiating commerce with the prisoners. Allowed by camp commander Major Barnes to trade in Confederate currency, the Yankees “procured Java coffee at \$10 the pound . . . tea at \$20.00 the pound, molasses at \$5.00 the gallon, and vinegar at fifty cents,” and could occasionally purchase “sweet potatoes, eggs, butter, milk and poultry, at comparatively reasonable prices.”<sup>15</sup> A Union lieutenant was so pleased with the commerce allowed by his captors that he wrote to his superiors, requesting they offer the same treatment to their prisoners, “they have furnished us on our credit the currency of the country sufficient for our wants (our money not being allowed to circulate) have sent us books and papers, and have procured for us all the comforts the country affords, that our situation permits us to enjoy.”<sup>16</sup> While it is not unusual for locals to have engaged in commerce with prisoners at the various camps throughout America, the frequency and quality of the business being conducted at Camp Groce exceeded the norms. Whether or not the citizens of Hempstead traded so frequently with the prisoners out of a sense of guilt, or just a desire for profit, is undeterminable. Accounts of the trading are decidedly one-sided and come almost in their entirety from the letters, journals, and post-war memoirs of the Yankee prisoners. Contemporaneous writings and recollections from

the citizens of Hempstead during this period remain elusive to historical researchers, and the only local newspaper in existence at the start of the conflict, the Hempstead Courier, appears to have ceased publication prior to the opening of the camp in 1863. When the site was preparing for evacuation to Camp Ford in December of 1863, prisoners were encouraged to sell as much of their possessions as possible in order to eliminate encumbrances for the march, leaving one to imagine how much property at least some of the prisoners had been able to acquire. Having somewhat of a “Groce garage sale,” Colonel Duganne described the subsequent flurry of sales “the rebel guards, with outside customers, were anxious to relieve the Yankees of any superfluous clothing or other articles . . . our sailors and soldiers displayed their goods upon the sand, while rebels clustered eagerly . . . to cheapen and buy at bargains whatever was exposed for sale.”<sup>17</sup> While Camp Groce did occasionally get local visitors who were just curious to see a Yankee, the overwhelming majority visiting in 1863 were there to engage in commerce.

During this first year of captivity near Hempstead, while Confederate records were not regularly kept, it is known that medical services were provided. Imprisoned Union Surgeon J.W. Sherfy shared duties with a Doctor Roberts of the Confederate service. Described by a prisoner as “excellent and faithful surgeons,” they maintained an office outside of the stockade and visited the prisoners twice daily, distributing prescriptions in the evening.<sup>18</sup> When a small hospital constructed within the walls of the stockade proved to be deficient, a portion of the old Hempstead Hotel was commandeered for a second hospital for sick prisoners and guards alike. The hotel hospital was operated by a Northern woman, who openly wore a “star and stripes” pin while performing her duties, and touched at least one soldier with her sympathies and genuine despair for the deaths of both Yankees

and Rebels, as she performed “her duties as a Christian woman . . . in a spirit of kindliness that is worth more than medicine.”<sup>19</sup>

Shortly after their arrival at Camp Groce in 1863, the Union prisoners were informed that religious services would be regularly provided, just outside of the walls of the stockade, by Andrew Jackson McGown, a Presbyterian minister and former soldier in the Texas Revolution. As one captive fondly recalled of Reverend McGown, “he visited us in our quarters, ministered to our sick, and was always one of our most welcome visitors.”<sup>20</sup> Although there is no record of any ministers officiating at the funerals of lost prisoners, services were performed by their fellow captives, with mention of at least one funeral being attended by local citizens. When Ariel Ives Cummings, Surgeon of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts Regiment and a Freemason, passed away on September 9, 1863, the good doctor was laid to rest with a ceremony attended by Masons, both from Camp Groce (prisoners and guards) and from the local community, that included all of the ritual clothing, practices, and accompaniments expected of the organization.<sup>21</sup> This extraordinary show of support from local citizens in honoring a fellow Freemason furthered the impact that personal interaction had on the mental health of the prisoners. Being so far from home, in conditions that were unimaginable prior to the war, prisoners on both sides took solace from the smallest acts of compassion, contrition, empathy, and comradery that they received from their captors and those they encountered in their new environments.

Despite the Spartan conditions at Camp Groce, morale was high in 1863. The freedom to improve their conditions, and socialize with the locals, made an expectedly bad situation more acceptable. “We were our own masters, to a great extent, being allowed to range quite freely over surrounding localities . . . we read, played chess, or sunned ourselves

or gossiped by the fire, like favored guests in the rural districts” recalled Colonel Duganne.<sup>22</sup> This freedom, and the benefits received from it, both physical and mental, would dramatically change when the camp re-opened its wooden doors in 1864. With a new commander came new rules, all to the detriment of the prisoners. Local merchants were no longer allowed to sell food and other supplies to the detainees. Prisoners were denied access to the nearby creek. The lone Union doctor in the camp was prevented from leaving the stockade to forage for medicinal herbs and barks. The Confederate doctor that tended to the camp in 1863 was gone, leaving only a local physician “who usually was too intoxicated to stand alone.” With rebel soldiers occupying most of the beds at the Hempstead Hotel, a new hospital was designated for the Yankees in the attic of an old church, accessible only by a rotten ladder that led to the death of “one poor fellow” who “fell in his weakness and was killed, having broken his neck.” John Read would later testify of the condition of the new hospital “this room, packed closely with men low with diarrhea and the most loathsome diseases, lying in their own filth, left to care for themselves, soon became a place of corruption” as “those dying were robbed of their clothes, and carried out, many at a time, in mule carts, and buried on the prairies.”<sup>23</sup> During this final year of Camp Groce, prisoner morale would deteriorate, and the death rate would increase more than five-fold. Some of this misery can admittedly be attributed to the yellow fever epidemic that swept the camp in 1864. However, the malnutrition, lack of access to medical care, low morale, and poor treatment while on the trek away from Camp Groce to avoid the fever, certainly added to the severity of the epidemic and the rising death toll. As Read would comment in his closing statements to Congress, “no epidemic

prevailed at any time more than that endangered by filth and neglect . . . the prisoners died victims to low and short diet, neglect, exposure, and abuse.”<sup>24</sup>

To the northeast, Tyler, Texas, was founded in 1846 as the county seat of Smith County, and soon became a leading commercial and shipping hub for the region. Already the site of an arsenal, supply depot, and regional headquarters for the Trans-Mississippi Department of the Confederacy, Tyler was an obvious site for a prisoner of war camp as well. The citizens of Tyler, however, were not immediately accepting of their newfound Yankee neighbors. Diarist Kate Stone found the Yankee prisoners to be “detestable creatures . . . impudent too . . . it does seem like they ought to be hanged.”<sup>25</sup> A local guard, Elbert Williams, expressed his displeasure in an 1863 letter “they are the sorriest looking men I ever saw in all my life . . . they look dirty and lousey. I don’t like their looks a bit. I had no talk for them – they look too mean.”<sup>26</sup> After the panic over a mass escape subsided with the construction of the stockade in November, 1863, the residents of Tyler warmed up to the Camp Ford prisoners, seeing them as a source of commerce, social amusement, and perhaps even romance.

Commerce in and out of Camp Ford flowed freely in 1863, and even into the overcrowded period of 1864. As in the early days at Camp Groce, local merchants frequently visited the camp to sell produce and other basic supplies. However, unlike at Camp Groce, certain prisoners were also allowed to leave the stockade, unguarded. Union officers were granted one day paroles to go into Tyler and the surrounding area to purchase or trade for necessities. On one such trip in 1863, Colonel Nott and a fellow officer acquired a pumpkin, sweet potatoes, dried peaches, cider vinegar, eggs, a chicken, and sumach, which when combined with supplies already in camp, led to a New Year’s Day

dinner for fourteen men, complete with waiters.<sup>27</sup> Industrious prisoners at Camp Ford were soon turning out an extraordinary amount of products for sale or trade to the locals. A partial list gathered from various sources includes axe handles, baskets, candles, chairs, chessmen, crockery, cigars, straw hats, musical instruments, pipes, rings, soap, tables, toy boxes, wooden utensils and plates, wash boards, combs, dominoes, dice, checkers, sleeve buttons, door mats and salt cellars! Such production, not only in quantity but also in diversity, was uncommon in Confederate prisoner of war camps, and puts Camp Ford in comparison to its much more densely populated counterparts in the east, such as Elmira prison in New York, where items being produced were in such demand that they “attracted mail orders from friends north and south.”<sup>28</sup> It is important to note, however, that there is no evidence that the commerce being conducted in and around Camp Ford had any significant impact on the local economy. While it is certainly true that a few local merchants and farmers profited from trade with the prisoners, such commerce had been regularly conducted with the substantial Confederate military presence already in the area prior to the opening of the prison. The output of products being generated by the Yankees was impressive in both quantity and diversity; however, the volume was affected by the limited resources available. At no point during the tenure of Camp Ford is there evidence that the inmates enjoyed a monopoly over any particular product, or that they affected the supply and demand for such items in any significant way.

While only a few fell under suspicion in Hempstead, Tyler appeared to have a fair number of Union sympathizers throughout the area. Kept in a small log cabin called the “wolf pen” just outside of Camp Ford until their eventual transfers and trials, suspected Yankee sympathizers interacted with prisoners who would take turns being late to roll call

in order to get sent to the same confinement. Prominent local citizens George W. Whitmore, a former state legislator, and George Rosenbaum, a former district attorney, were suspected of conspiring with the Union, and were housed at Camp Ford for nearly eight months before being released in November, 1864. They were admirably described by one prisoner as “noble-hearted Texans, who refused to bow the knee to (Jefferson) Davis.”<sup>29</sup> Others suspected of sympathizing did not fare so well. Kate Stone recorded on May 18, 1864, “There was a terrible tragedy enacted here today. Three men, noted Jayhawkers, were taken out of the jail and just out of town and hanged by mob law. It is horrible and makes one shudder to think of it, though it is said they richly deserved their fate.”<sup>30</sup>

The medical treatment provided at Camp Ford was, by all accounts, superior to that experienced at Camp Groce. Even during the period of overcrowding, when disease and unsanitary conditions were common, the death rate remained low. Hoping to quell a small pox outbreak in March of 1864, a hospital was constructed just outside of the stockade in order to quarantine those infected. Under the care of yet another drunk Confederate doctor, many prisoners who had not been previously vaccinated, died nonetheless. Seeing the need for improved care, a second hospital was built in the summer of 1864, and was manned by Union volunteers with prior medical experience. Despite free flow of commerce in and around the camp, the hospital was woefully low on sanitary supplies, medicine, and nutrition. In addition to small pox and the seemingly ever present dysentery, prisoners commonly suffered from scurvy, “sore eyes, a condition most likely brought on by Vitamin A deficiency and manifested by sudden temporary blindness lasting several days,” and the “itch,” which was readily cured by a mixture of grease and sulphur.<sup>31</sup> As with all prisoner



of war camps in both the North and the South, food rations, clothing, and medicines of all kinds were almost always in short supply. Officially, food and most other supplies were provided and paid for by the respective Union and Confederate governments, although as we have seen, diets were supplemented by foraging, trading, and other means of self-care. Shortages, and who was to blame, have been a favorite topic of Civil War historians for decades, with little room for agreement between Southern apologists, Northern supporters, and those who seek common ground for the truth. As previously discussed, the historiography of Civil War POW camps needs to move beyond the basic elements that are common to almost all camps, and the blame/excuses that seem to accompany them, and instead develop a more objective and critical analysis of specific conditions and what really differentiated one camp from another.

While there are very few accounts of locals visiting Camp Groce for purely social reasons, Camp Ford had an overabundance of visitors, especially the ladies of the community, who frequented the camp for social, humanitarian, and by some accounts, romantic interests. While some visitors certainly made their way to Camp Ford just to “see a Yankee,” many of the ladies in the community of Tyler took an active interest in the foreign invaders. Most were brought to the site by Mrs. Allen, the wife of the camp commander, Colonel Allen, and were entertained with conversation, music, dancing, and poetry readings by the Union prisoners. At least one prisoner suspected there was a number of “loyal Union dames and maidens among them too; as we discovered from time to time.” As a Yankee fiddler, Captain May, played “Sounds from Home,” the music would “draw the tears from eyes of the rebel ladies.”<sup>32</sup> Officers allowed to leave the camp on temporary parole often made visits to the local Southern damsels as well. Confederate prison guard

Riley Tunnel lamented that the prisoners were allowed too much liberty and that Union officers departed from “the camp almost at will . . . occasionally they returned with bouquets.” Perhaps showing a hint of jealousy, he continued “several of the Tyler belles visited the officers with gifts of flowers and sweetmeats . . . one of the officers had a flair for poetry and traded poems with several of the young ladies of Tyler.”<sup>33</sup> Yet another guard, Mart Fraley, expressed, in a letter to his cousin in November of 1863, concern and distaste for the attention paid to the prisoners “ther is some fine looking women in this country as any you ever saw in life. But I cant keep from hating them to save me. They think they ar plum abuse a soldier and they will sell those infernal yanks anything before they will us. I rather think if I stay her much longer I shall be outs with all the women . . . one mile from this place where ther is two verry fine looking girls and one of them is engaged to a yankey prisoner her.”<sup>34</sup>

Both Colonel Nott and Colonel Duganne in their post-war writings make mention of one special visitor to the camp, local poetess Mollie Moore. Described by Nott as “one of those girls men are a little afraid of, and that other girls do not like,” she became a favorite of the prisoners, despite her staunch rebel sympathies. A Lieutenant Pearson took a special interest in Ms. Moore and begged her for autographs and copies of poems, which was answered with a disapproving letter that she later said she could not resist the temptation to write.<sup>35</sup> Colonel Duganne also took an interest in Mollie, frequently trading poetry with her, sparring over her rebel devotion, and writing several pages about her in his post-war accounts. Describing the “Texan Sappho” as “a young, sharp, self-possessed, pale-faced, Jane Eyre sort . . . whose thin lips could curl with bitterness, and whose pale-blue eyes might kindle to white heat under strong provocation,” Duganne, like others in

the camp, were certainly impressed, if not taken, by the Southern poet.<sup>36</sup> Post-war, Mollie would have a long career as a poet and newspaper editor, and would marry a Confederate veteran, Major Thomas Edward Davis, in 1874.

Camp Ford, like all prisoner of war sites, certainly had its share of death, misery and despair; however, its inhabitants also enjoyed a level of social interaction with the civilians of the area that was unheard of in most Civil War camps. Guard David Thomas Phanes, in a letter to his wife, Mary, in August, 1863, believed that many of the prisoners were content in saying “I understand that some of them says that they are willing to stay here until peace is made.”<sup>37</sup> Conditions changed, of course, when the population of the camp swelled the next year, and Colonel Allen was replaced as commander. The departure of Colonel Allen also meant the departure of his wife, and thus there were few, if any, subsequent visits from the local ladies. The crowded conditions “deprived” Camp Ford “of the country-village characteristics which formerly distinguished it,” as it became “a community of strangers to one another.”<sup>38</sup> Interactions with the outside world create a connection with the homes they left behind, and aid in improving the mental well-being of the prisoners. Conversely, losing contact with those outside of the camp created an ever-increasing sense of isolation that fostered loneliness and despair. Dora L. Costa and Matthew E. Kahn’s empirical study on the benefits of social networks in POW camps (specifically Andersonville) showed that survival rates were higher for prisoners with ten or more friends, as opposed to those with fewer social interactors. As the population of a camp increased, one would need more friends to offset the rising mortality rates; however, if the overcrowding became extensive, “the accompanying increase in friends could not compensate for the deterioration in camp conditions.”<sup>39</sup> Simply put, social interaction with

friends, and individuals with which a prisoner felt a common bond, improved mental health, and consequently physical health, and increased one's chance of survival. This improvement in psyche and spirit, however, had its limitations, and could be offset by rapidly worsening conditions within a camp. Costa and Kahn's study is a fascinating and welcomed approach to the analysis of POW survival, integrating environment, socioeconomic and ethnic status, self-care, mental health, and physical well-being into a data set that aids historians in understanding the value of social interactions within the camps.

### *Consequences of the Management by Camp Commanders*

While all of the five factors are equally important to our understanding of what affected prisoner morale, physical well-being, and chance of survival, only one factor presents the opportunity for a single individual to have an immediate and lasting effect: the role played by the commanders of the respective camps. Nowhere is the contrast more distinct than at Camp Groce when comparing the two separate periods of confinement. The commander in 1863, Major Barnes, was by all accounts a kind and honorable man. He issued the prisoners Confederate money on lines of credit, promoted commerce with outside vendors, allowed travel outside of the camp to gather wood and forage for food and medicines, and provided medical care comparable to what was received by his own men. For Thanksgiving, 1863, Barnes allowed prisoners to purchase turkeys, chickens, ham, and beef, for the celebration. In an interview with the *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph* after the camp was emptied, Barnes, now a Lieutenant Colonel, believed that the prisoners "appear to have been entirely satisfied with their treatment, and to have a much better idea of the

rebels than they had before they came here.”<sup>40</sup> The death rate during his tenure at Camp Groce was 4.68%.

The difference between 1863 and 1864 at Camp Groce is night and day. Colonel Gillespie, the new commander in 1864, was a former prisoner of war himself, having spent less than six months at Camp Douglas in Illinois. Gillespie was a Methodist minister before and after the war, displaying his religious beliefs as both a writer and editor of the *Texas Christian Advocate* and the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*. His actions at Camp Groce, however, were decidedly un-Christian. He “openly avowed his intention to maltreat prisoners, as proved by the confession of his own subordinate officers” and “wished to retaliate upon us (the prisoners) for alleged mistreatment of confederates in northern prisons.”<sup>41</sup> He stopped commerce with outside vendors, limited trips to the creek to once per week, and halted all foraging for medicine, food, and supplies. All papers were seized from the prisoners, the delivery of milk and eggs was ended, and stockade openings were closed, preventing the fresh flow of air. He increased use of the “ball and chain” for punishment, as well as the new practice of “bucking,” a tortious act that entailed placing the hands in irons, then pulled down over the knees, with a stick thereunder to prevent movement. Prisoners suffering such punishment could neither stand nor walk.<sup>42</sup> During the yellow fever evacuation and trek of Fall, 1864, there “was no shelter and the mortality was great” as prisoners were forced to drink from a creek where horses and cattle had bathed, leaving the water “slimy and offensive.” Those who died “were buried like dogs, and often a corpse lay for several days unburied in the camp.” Gillespie “kept all prisoners sick and dying in the open air . . . when shelter was at hand . . . prevented any alleviation of the prisoner’s sufferings” and “punished all by his orders.”<sup>43</sup> On Thanksgiving, 1864,

the men were confined in the stockade and “feasted” on “potato pancakes for breakfast and sweet potato stew for dinner.”<sup>44</sup> After the war, Colonel Gillespie was an editor for multiple newspapers, briefly joined the Ku Klux Klan, and became an advocate for the temperance movement, earning the moniker “Grape-vine Gillespie.”<sup>45</sup> He would be active in Texas politics, serve on the Galveston School Board, and eventually defect to the Republican Party, much to the displeasure of his fellow ex-Confederates. Described by his political contemporaries as “a brutal scoundrel . . . a foul blot on the ministry” and “outside of the pale of gentlemen,” Gillespie was regarded throughout the remainder of his life as a man with “no fixed principles upon any subject” who “was at all times ready for a carouse, or worse.”<sup>46</sup> The death rate during his tenure at Camp Groce was an astonishing 29.6%. Assessments of any person in a position of authority during wartime must be analyzed carefully with due consideration to the fact that those under his command may have had a biased recollection or a desire for revenge. Gillespie did not leave behind any known journals, letters, or other contemporary writings that would allow us to see his side of the story during his time as commander. His post-war writings were religious in nature due to his job as editor of Christian newspapers, and make no reference to his days in the Confederate army. Thus we are left to our own interpretations based on an admittedly one-sided account of the events and the commander’s intentions. While Gillespie may not have been the cold, unfeeling, devil incarnate that John Read and others describe him to be, there is ample evidence that his actions at Camp Groce to restrict access to clean water, supplies, and the outside world, had a direct impact on the increase of the death rate during his tenure. In a later chapter, we will return to Colonel Gillespie to see what place in history he may

or may not deserve in comparison to the man who, deservedly or not, became the face of Civil War prison atrocities, Captain Henry Wirz of Andersonville.

Camp Ford also operated under two primary commanders, and while they certainly differed in their approach to the prisoners, their contrast is not as stark as those who oversaw Camp Groce. Colonel Allen was regarded as a benevolent man, who provided gifts of fresh food to the Union officers, and was “always regarded to be conscientious, and was, moreover, an educated gentleman.”<sup>47</sup> A prisoner recalled that Colonel Allen “did everything within his power to make his prisoners comfortable.”<sup>48</sup> His wife, Julia Allen, was beloved by the prisoners and remembered fondly as one who “cheered the despondent and comforted the weak, and for the sick, showed that beautiful solicitude that no one save a Christian woman can evince.”<sup>49</sup> Colonel Duganne described Mrs. Allen as “an angel at her husband’s side” whose “acts of kindness to Federal prisoners were neither few nor far between.”<sup>50</sup> On Christmas day, 1863, Colonel Allen and his wife invited the Union officers at Camp Ford to dine with them at their quarters. Lieutenant Colonel Joseph B. Leake of the 20<sup>th</sup> Iowa Infantry recalled “the Colonel was as courteous and as hospitable, the conversation was free and unrestrained as if we had been a party of his best friends invited to his own home.”<sup>51</sup> Allen’s removal as commander in May, 1864, was attributed, by at least one Union officer, to complaints made by some residents of Tyler about the Colonel’s generous nature, saying “the inhabitants were poor, ignorant and narrow-minded, and viewed, with angry ill-will, the liberality of Colonel Allen.”<sup>52</sup> Allen served as superintendent of the Kentucky Military Institute after the war, and drowned in the Kissimmee River in central Florida in 1888.<sup>53</sup>

Colonel Anderson replaced Colonel Allen in May, 1864, and immediately implemented a stricter, more militaristic regimen. While commerce was allowed to continue, paroles into the town and surrounding countryside were ended. Visits by the local ladies stopped as well; however, this was mostly due to the absence of Mrs. Allen. As escape attempts increased, Colonel Anderson issued orders to shoot any prisoners attempting escape, or otherwise being disruptive. On May 22, 1864, a guard shot and killed a prisoner who had allegedly cursed at him.<sup>54</sup> Whether to establish fear, or just due to Southern indifference, Colonel Anderson allowed a female slave to be whipped “out into the view of the Northern men” and forced to expose “all her person from the shoulders downward to the flogging.”<sup>55</sup> Punishments for a variety of offenses resulted in one being tied up by their thumbs, being forced to stand on a barrel for hours, or being placed in “dungeons” only ten feet by twelve feet and partially underground, covered with planks and driven full of spikes. Union soldier Calvin Hutchinson described the latter as a “case of systematic murder.”<sup>56</sup> Punishments were common in Civil War prisons for those who attempted escape, were guilty of a crime, or just generally disruptive; however, the degree and frequency must be independently considered. Minor offenses usually resulted in just the loss of rations, while more significant infractions warranted a stronger punishment that differed from camp to camp. Looking through the prism of history, we must also be careful not to apply twenty-first-century sensibilities to nineteenth-century practices. Thus in analyzing Colonel Anderson’s management of the camp, what is significant is not the fact that punishment occurred, but rather the increase in the number of punishments and the severity of each based upon accepted practices at the time. With punishment by all accounts being few and far between, and mild in their application, under Colonel Allen,



the sudden increase under Colonel Anderson of harsher punishments must have had a jarring effect on the prisoners, directly impacting their mental well-being and morale. Retaliation against one's enemy to deter and prevent future bad acts was a commonly accepted practice in nineteenth-century warfare in order to safeguard the "civilized usages of war." Reasonable punishment fell under this broad umbrella; however, such punishment as retaliation for a committed wrong had to be carried out within an undefined acceptable parameter. All participants on both sides had to avoid allowing retaliation to create "a savage war where there was no restraint on violence . . . where both sides unleashed the darkest side of human passions."<sup>57</sup> Captain McKinney would record in his diary during Anderson's tenure "Yankee found shot dead in the woods" and "enlisted man of 130<sup>th</sup> Illinois killed in cold blood by sentinel," while another "tied up by the wrists for forging a pass." On July 15, 1864, McKinney recorded in his diary the only known reference to violence among the inmates with the casual passage "two deaths – one killed by a mess mate."<sup>58</sup> While the actions of Colonel Anderson certainly had a negative effect on the morale and well-being of the prisoners, it is important to note that his tenure did overlap the period of the most deplorable conditions at Camp Ford, when the population swelled to well over four thousand inhabitants, leading to shortages in housing, food, medicine, and supplies in general. Sixty-three to seventy-eight percent of those who died at Camp Ford did so during this period; however, as described earlier, under the commands of both Colonel Allen and Colonel Anderson, the overall death rate remained low at 3.86% to 4.78%. After the war, Colonel Anderson relegated himself to a quiet life in Eagle Lake, Texas, and died there on September 25, 1868, still a young man in his early 40's.<sup>59</sup>

### *Role of Imprisoned Officers*

Morale plays a vital role in survival, especially when one is surrounded by harsh conditions. The presence of officers in a camp could bring organization, a return to military order, and a feeling of comradeship to replace the “every man for himself” mentality that prevails when men are left to their own accord. Civil War officers were typically older and more educated than the enlisted men, with many having formal military training. While their presence alone could not guarantee survival, the importance of the role they played in keeping morale high, and death rates low, cannot be overlooked. Costa and Kahn’s study on social networking in POW camps revealed that a 10% increase in the number of officers (defined by them as a rank of sergeant or higher) had a correlating 1.2% increase in the rate of survival.<sup>60</sup>

Camp Groce was initially populated by only the enlisted soldiers and sailors from the Texas battles. When the officers arrived from Houston and Huntsville shortly thereafter, they found “a listless despondency” amongst the enlisted men. The productive Yankee “becomes dejected and then sick” when faced with idleness. Convinced that “those were happiest who were busiest,” the newly arrived officers implemented work details for chopping wood, construction and maintenance of shelters, cooking and clean-up duties, et al.<sup>61</sup> Morale improved as idleness decreased; however, despite the actions of the officers to improve the camps overall condition, they could still not prevent the inevitable illnesses that accompany captivity in a less than ideal environment. Colonel Duganne reluctantly admitted “with the sick and dying constantly in our midst . . . a mental despondency began to” once again “prey upon many who were not physically ill.”<sup>62</sup> The officers present at

Camp Groce in 1863 would soon find themselves transferred to Camp Ford, where they would improve upon their prior actions, making “Ford City” a virtual model camp.

When Camp Groce reopened in 1864, harsh conditions imposed under Colonel Gillespie certainly had an impact on the mental and physical well-being of the captives; however, accounts also indicate a lack of control by the handful of Union officers who were present. When transferees arrived from Camp Ford a few months later, one soldier found that “the whole camp had settled down to a kind of indifference and appeared not to care what became of them.” He later found his bunkmate crying, with lice “actually eating at his bed-ridden sores . . . he was always so clean and neat” before, but now “had not been able to rid himself of them and no one had been able to assist him.”<sup>63</sup> Morale remained low, and sickness and death became commonplace until the camp closed in December, 1864.

While Camp Ford certainly had its advantages over Camp Groce as we have already seen, the role played by the imprisoned officers left an indelible mark on the camp that should not be overlooked when examining prisoner of war facilities. Colonel Nott, upon first arriving at Camp Ford from Hempstead in 1863, described the enlisted men already there as “poor” and having “no supplies to sell . . . they lived on rations.” The officers found their inaction to be unacceptable and “rated them soundly about their condition” and “lectured them severely” for not attempting to improve their situation.<sup>64</sup> Work details, sanitation removal, foraging parties, and other necessary roles were established and functioned on a daily basis, much as they would have been in a Union camp out in the field. Officer’s quarters, usually consisting of larger, log cabins were constructed separately from the smaller shelters of the enlisted men. Mess halls were established for officers and the

enlisted. “Ford City” soon took shape as the officers laid out plans for a village-like community within the stockade. Streets were named (Park Row, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Shin Bone Alley, and Broadway, to name a few) and sites designated for gardens, a bakery, work shop, meeting hall, park square, and even a baseball field. With access to “half-dozen axes and hatchets, three spades, a dull saw, and our jack-knives” the men “contrive to multiply tools, erect machinery, and establish manufactures, agriculture, and the mechanical arts.”<sup>65</sup> Industry thrived and a multitude of items were produced for camp use, as well as for trade or sale to the locals. Prisoner Charles Edwards Stearns in a February, 1865, letter to his wife, proudly proclaimed “we have made over 3000 pies which we sold at 25 each and lots of crackers.”<sup>66</sup> The structure, formality and lack of idleness improved morale, and sickness remained low.

This would all change, however, when the population swelled to several thousands in 1864. Many of the new soldiers were forced to sleep with only “the cold ground for a bed and God’s blue sky for a covering.”<sup>67</sup> The idyllic charm of the pseudo village of Ford City was lost overnight, and conditions would never be the same. Order, work responsibilities, and sanitation became harder to manage, and the camp was described “as having maggot infested piles of garbage throughout the interior.”<sup>68</sup> The military and day-to-day structure created by the Union officers broke down as the population continued to increase. Morale declined, and sickness and death steadily increased. As previously mentioned, it was during this period that the overwhelming majority of deaths occurred at Camp Ford. It is interesting to note, however, that the death rate declined after October of 1864. Although there are few accounts describing any changes in conditions from November 1864 until closure in May of 1865, the decrease in the number of deaths during

that period could lead one to conclude that the officers were able to reestablish a certain level of camp control, especially in light of there being no known improvements in food rations, availability of supplies, camp population, Confederate command, or overall condition of the facility.

### *Impact of Activities and Amusements*

Activities at Camp Groce were limited to the necessary work and commerce in 1863, and acts simply to survive in 1864. Those of an extracurricular nature are, by the known accounts, almost non-existent. As previously mentioned, religious services were allowed during the first year of operation, and while there are a few accounts of chess playing, reading and basket making, activities of a purely recreational nature were scarce. As one officer bemoaned “prisoners have nothing to do but to eat.”<sup>69</sup> During the dreadful season of 1864, survival, planning escape, and burying the dead were the predominate activities.

Like we have seen throughout, when it came to extracurricular activities and the effect they had on the spirit of the prisoners, Camp Ford was almost the polar opposite of Camp Groce. For the Union captives held in Tyler, a number of activities were available “while the quiet one re-read or studied a few old books, played chess, or talked; our athletes practised at parallel bars and turning poles . . . our music-lovers met for rehearsal; and our dancing-men waltzed and quadrilled.”<sup>70</sup> Colonel Duganne would fondly recall that the Northerners would “meet in harmony, with a violin, two banjos and a triangle” filling the camp with the sounds of such popular songs as “Glory Hallelujah,” “Massa’s Runn’d Away,” and “Rally Round the Flag Boys.”<sup>71</sup> Sergeant Gilligan recorded in his diary “some play baseball, chess, checkers and all those kinds of games. I am going to get a fellow to

teach me French.” He later lamented that “while I was asleep someone came in and stole my flute,” followed by the more amusing comment of “some boys have pet squirrels.”<sup>72</sup> Games of all sort were played, including cricket, quoits (a type of ring toss), and baseball. While the latter was certainly practiced at the Houston compound and perhaps even at Camp Groce, it is likely that Camp Ford was the site of the first full baseball game, complete with a designated field, to be played in Texas. Gymnastics, wrestling competitions, and gambling also became common forms of entertainment. The most popular game of chance was Keno, which sometimes included even the guards. Gambling may have occurred with other activities, even the otherwise friendly game of baseball, as Private John Kennedy of the 77<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry wrote in his diary on April 15, 1865, “I snatched a game of ball today for \$20 a side.”<sup>73</sup> For quieter men such as Colonel Duganne “social converse was . . . our chief enjoyment . . . there were many strong intellects among my comrades, with whom it became interesting to discuss both men and books.”<sup>74</sup>

The thriving industry at Camp Ford also provided forms of recreation not often seen at other prisoner of war camps. Men baked, turned lathes, made soap, sewed clothing, and produced a variety of products. Corporal Aaron T. Sutton would become the camp barber charging “ten cents for a hair cut, ten cents for a shave and twenty-five cents for a shampoo.”<sup>75</sup> Perhaps the most impressive accomplishment of any particular soldier, however, was the creation of the camp newspaper, “The Old Flag,” by Captain William H. May of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Connecticut Volunteer Infantry. Turning out at least three issues in February and March of 1864, all created by hand with a steel pen on unruled paper, May functioned as editor, printer, publisher and distributor of the little publication. Each issue would contain news and issues of the camp, poetry, artwork, and even paid advertisements

from other prisoners, but its primary purpose was “to contribute as far as possible towards enlivening . . . life at Camp Ford – and to cultivate a mutual good feeling between all.”<sup>76</sup> Only one copy was made of each issue, which was then sold to the inmates who circulated it “from hand to hand until every prisoner had read the copy . . . having reserved the right to the return of the paper, May ended up in final possession of his creation, somewhat shopworn but still legible.”<sup>77</sup> Captain May successfully smuggled his original works and printing tools out of Camp Ford during his release, and reprinted the issues in the following years for posterity.

Even under the watchful eye of the more restrictive Colonel Anderson, who took over as commandant midway through 1864, the prisoners continued to enjoy a considerable level of freedom when it came to extracurricular activities. In July of 1864, Anderson gave permission for an Independence Day celebration within the stockade, complete with patriotic speeches, music, and a newly constructed grandstand. Colonel Duganne composed a new poem for the occasion. As Captain Swiggett later recalled, the festivities broke up when “one of the men . . . got so excited that he took off his red shirt and raised it on a pole, amid the cheers, hoots and yells of those about him,” prompting the guards to put an end to the gathering “giving as a reason that we had flown the American flag.”<sup>78</sup>

Religious services were regularly held at Camp Ford, with encouragement and approval by Confederate camp commander, Colonel Allen, a pre-war minister. In addition to interdenominational Sunday services conducted by Union ministers and a Confederate chaplain, funeral rites and baptisms were also performed as “a number of backsliders were reclaimed.” To those who had been raised with a Christian upbringing, the assurance of their “religious faith was a great consolation in time of adversity, and a stirring appeal to

others to have faith.”<sup>79</sup> Other than the aforementioned visitations by Presbyterian minister, Andrew Jackson McGown, during the early months of operation, no other religious services, or visits by members of the clergy, occurred at Camp Groce during either period of operation. Under the command of Colonel Gillespie, himself a Protestant minister, almost all contact with the outside world would cease, including, as far as the available historical record shows, visits by well-meaning local pastors as well.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Comparison to Eastern Prison Camps**

It is easy to recognize that Camp Groce and Camp Ford are different from the prison camps located east of the Mississippi. Camp Groce housed only a total of 1,105 prisoners, with no more than 600 to 700 at a time; Camp Ford was occupied by a total of about 6,000 prisoners, and at times held as little as less than 100. In the east, the prisons tended to be larger in scale and population, with places such as Andersonville (45,000), Elmira (12,000), Camp Douglas (30,000), and Belle Isle (28,000) leading the way. Camp Groce and Camp Ford received their prisoners in large groups at definable points in time, resulting in a more cohesive prison population that was familiar with one another through geography, military units, and experiences. Facilities in the East tended to have a constant flow of POW's in and out of the prisons over their lifetime, creating a more divisive and unfamiliar population. Camp Groce and Camp Ford were under the control of the Confederate Department of the Trans-Mississippi, which had a comparatively uniform system of management. Andersonville, Libby, Belle Isle, and other Rebel locations in the East were under a more haphazard Confederate bureaucracy that did not unify under one department or commissary general until late November of 1864, when the war was nearly at its end. And yet, despite these obvious differences, Camp Groce and Camp Ford, when analyzed objectively using the five factors discussed herein, become a representative microcosm of the larger and more numerous prisoner of war camps located throughout the United States and the Confederate States east of the Mississippi. Despite smaller, cohesive populations and a more stable management structure, prisoners at Camp Groce and Camp Ford still

suffered, saw morale rise and fall, and died at alarming rates that at times rivaled, or even exceeded, the deservedly maligned camps in the East. Why were these two little camps in Texas, which at first glance looked so remarkably different than their larger brothers on the other side of the river, so similar in experiences, death rates, and prisoner well-being to their eastern counterparts? It is this simple question that originally led me down the path to what has become the core of this paper. The explanation for why so many died, and why others managed to survive, had to involve more than just the well-worn discussion of rations, overcrowding, and general sanitation. Using the five factors of this work in an objective manner, patterns began to emerge at Camp Groce and Camp Ford that shed light on the varying mental states and physical well-being of the inmates. The question remained, however, whether or not these same factors, when applied to larger camps in the East, would yield similar results and/or provide the same useful perspective.

While a comprehensive study of all POW camps using the five factors would be a welcome addition to the Civil War historiography of military prisons, in the interest of brevity of this paper, the decision was made to analyze and compare just two additional camps. In deciding which two, the much discussed camps in Elmira, New York, and Andersonville, Georgia, begged for comparison. Elmira, with its defined structure, organized system of suppliers, and well-meaning commandants, is comparable to Camp Ford. However, unlike the little camp in Tyler, Elmira would have one of the highest death rates of any camp in the Civil War. Andersonville would become the war's lasting image of pain, suffering, and cruelty with its harsh conditions and poor management that, whether through negligence or ill intent, would accelerate the death rate. The Georgia camp draws

obvious comparison to its much smaller counterpart in Hempstead, and at times seems like an über-example of everything that went wrong at Camp Groce.

*Elmira Prison, USA – Elmira, New York*

Elmira, New York, was founded in 1788 as the Township of Chemung, later changing to the more feminine name that local legend says was either the daughter of a tavern keeper or the daughter of a Revolutionary War general. At the start of the Civil War, Elmira was a sleepy town with a consistent population of slightly less than 10,000 inhabitants. Situated on the New York and Erie Railroad, the Northern Central Railroad, and the Chemung Canal, the town was a crossroads between east and west, north and south, and became a vital center for commerce. With its obvious access to transportation, the town was chosen in 1861 to be the site of a camp for Union soldiers. Broken up into several venues, the area known as Camp Rathbun would eventually become the location of the Elmira prisoner of war camp. Located on a sloping, rectangular field between Water Street and the Chemung River, Camp Rathbun would also encompass an elongated body of water known as Foster's Pond. Perceived as a valuable resource for visiting troops, the pond would become a site of disease and death for those soon to be imprisoned in the camp. Over a period of two years, the military facility would train and house over 20,000 soldiers; however, with the number of servicemen dwindling by 1863, the U.S. Commissary Department tapped the unused barracks as an obvious location to house rebel prisoners. With the prisoner exchange system stalled, Union officials such as General-In-Chief Henry W. Halleck would surmise that "it is much cheaper to feed an enemy in prison than to fight him in the field."<sup>1</sup> Elmira Prison would test this theory.

An inspection of the site by Captain Henry Lazelle, himself a former POW, found Elmira “exceedingly healthful” and the Camp Rathbun site free of “either marsh or standing water . . . which could generate malaria or disease . . . no forms of low fever prevail.”<sup>2</sup> The first Confederate prisoners began arriving at Elmira in July of 1864 and were greeted by a twelve foot high stockade surrounded by over forty sentry boxes that allowed the guards full view of the facility. At first glance, the forty acre camp must have been a pleasant surprise to prisoners transferred from the stockade at Point Lookout, Maryland, and other overcrowded confinements. With fresh grass and tree-lined streets that divided the camp into organized areas, and a supposed source of fresh water in Foster’s Pond, Elmira resembled the conditions found in the early days of Camp Ford. However, while the death rate during any period at Camp Ford never exceeded 5.0% even during the most crowded and harshest conditions, at Elmira Prison 2,961 prisoners out of 12,147 died during its one year tenure, resulting in a death rate of 24.4%, one of the highest of the war.<sup>3</sup> While no two prison camps were ever exactly alike, Camp Ford and Elmira, as we will see, were similar in their structure, leadership, and conditions. With an organized Commissary Department entering into numerous contracts with suppliers to provide food and clothing, one might even make the case that, at least on paper, Elmira was the better choice of the two camps in which to be confined. And yet, despite these favorable conditions, Elmira still had a death rate approximately 410% higher than Camp Ford. What accounts for such a gross disparity between the two camps? What could possibly have gone wrong to earn the idyllic camp on the Chemung River the nickname of “Hellmira?” In analyzing Elmira, I will rely heavily on Michael Gray’s work *The Business of Captivity*, the preeminent micro-monograph for the New York prison.

Let us begin by looking at the factor that perhaps had the most significant impact on survival at Camp Groce and Camp Ford, namely the attitude and approach to management of the camp commandant. While the acts of compassion by Colonel Allen at Camp Ford, and the outward disregard for human life exhibited by Colonel Gillespie at Camp Groce, were deciding factors in the rate of survival at their respective locations, the commanders at Elmira Prison seemed to have had little impact on the overall conditions. Examining and judging the leadership style of any individual in a setting such as a prison, where those he is commanding are in direct opposition to his very presence, is a subjective exercise. Impressions are easily clouded by sympathy for one side or the other, personal ideologies, and twenty-first-century practice; however, basic humanity and compassion should remain relatively constant. Commanders' efforts to keep the prisoners alive were often hampered by shortages, bureaucratic deficiencies, the environment, and things generally beyond their control, and we must certainly take such factors into consideration. Also, death rates alone are not necessarily an indication of ineffective leadership, or a lack of compassion for those under one's care. Discipline, rules, and a rigid structure are necessary elements of any prison, military or civilian; however, a commander should not through his actions, or his negligence, worsen the conditions. Therefore, the objective and most determinative analysis of whether or not a commander was a factor in prisoner well-being and chances for survival is whether their overt actions directly increased or diminished the level of suffering, and whether they were personally negligent in turning a blind eye to suffering.

The first commandant at Elmira was Major Henry V. Colt of the 104<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteers. Having suffered a hernia injury on a forced march in 1862, Major Colt, the

younger brother of the famous revolver maker Samuel Colt, was temporarily physically unfit for duty in the field, and thus the perfect choice for the sedentary assignment of prison commander. Popular with both Union soldiers and Confederate prisoners, Colt would lobby on behalf of relief organizations for entry into the camp, show flexibility when requests were made for increased rations, and promoted fairness. When he left his post as commandant to return to action in late 1864, Colt was given “an ornately designed chalice . . . whittled from a coconut shell, set on a silver stand, and engraved” with a dedication, by the Southern prisoners.<sup>4</sup> Colt’s replacement was Lt. Colonel Stephen Moore of the 11<sup>th</sup> New Jersey Volunteers, who had previously been in charge of Camp Chemung, the nearby facility that housed the Union soldiers who guarded the prison. Like Colt, Moore was unfit for field duty, having suffered a severe case of sunstroke that had impaired his sight, memory, and overall health. Also like his predecessor, Moore was viewed by soldiers and prisoners alike as a decent and fair man, who did what was within his authority to alleviate the suffering of the unfortunate Confederates. Despite the seemingly compassionate attitudes of the two commandants, and their overt efforts to make the prison as livable as possible, Elmira still became a site of suffering and high death rates. Arguably, both could have made the situation even worse had they been of the mindset of Colonel Gillespie, but fortunately for the Rebels, that was not the case. As we shall see, other factors played a larger role in the overall well-being of the prisoners.

Much as we saw at Camp Ford, the organized structure and discipline within Elmira allowed the prisoners time for personal activities and amusements. Inmates crafted trinkets, jewelry, buttons, gloves, tools, and other small items for use and trade. A “market” developed along the main boulevard, complete with a fiddle player, for prisoners to trade

and sell their wares. With the exchange of money prohibited, any necessary items could be traded for the available goods; however, tobacco became the standard currency. As one prisoner, James Montgomery, lamented I “would soon as do without half my rations, as to be without tobacco.”<sup>5</sup> Another prisoner would explain “the tobacco would pacify his stomach for two hours, while the bread would only aggravate it.”<sup>6</sup> Prisoners who volunteered for work details digging trenches, building fortifications, et al, were rewarded with a daily whiskey ration that was often smuggled back into the camp. Alcohol possession and consumption was strictly forbidden within the enclosure, but the flourishing black market insured that drunkenness would be a reoccurring problem.

Confederates scavenged the camp for bone, wood, animal hair, fabric, and any other things that would be usable to craft items for trade within, and for sale to the outside world via mail orders in both the north and the south. Guards partnered with prisoners in the fledgling industry by providing “bits of silver, gold, pearl, and mussel shell” for jewelry, the sale of which would secure the Yankees a share of the profit.<sup>7</sup> Prisoners with skills obtained prior to the war also passed the time with employment as clerks, orderlies, bakers, mechanics, carpenters, and accountants for the Union army. A Louisiana Confederate named William Lambert Campbell used his “fine penmanship” to become a “member of the clerical elite,” a position that awarded him extra camp credit, food, and a warm room. Writing to his sister, Campbell rejoiced “I am in very good health and quite comfortable; I have a nice room and do not suffer from the cold. I do not think there is a prisoner who feels more comfortable than I do.”<sup>8</sup>

After their daily duties were completed, leisure activities were also available to prisoners who sought them out. Inmates played chess and checkers, participated in the

camp band, joined the debating club, and borrowed books from the on-site library established in September of 1864. The good-natured camp commander, Lt. Colonel Moore, inspired by their efforts, secured better instruments for the camp band, and designated a separate hall for Freemason Society meetings.<sup>9</sup> The debating club would swell to over one hundred members, discussing issues of the day, with invites even being made to Union officers, but none accepted.<sup>10</sup> The inclusion of a library and a debate club are indications of how survival meant more than just food, clothing, and shelter. They show that prisoners were concerned about more than just their physical well-being. Intellectual stimulation exposed prisoners to new ideas and differing ideologies, at a time when their fellow citizens were killing one another over human rights, social and political constructs, and geographical and cultural differences. By improving mental health and morale, reading and debate may have had a direct impact on one's physical well-being and their chance of survival. Although no known records exist of which prisoners were members of the debate club, it would be a fascinating micro-study to see the rate of survival for debate participants versus non-participants during the club's tenure at Elmira.

For those more spiritually inclined, regular church services were permitted on Sundays, although no formal church existed. Such commerce and leisure activities not only provided something to keep the inmates busy, but also seemingly improved one's chance of survival not only in acquiring needed items, but also in improving morale. And yet, the dying continued. Union Captain John S. Kidder of the 121<sup>st</sup> New York Volunteers would partner with prisoners for trade and profit. In a letter to his wife in 1864, Kidder rejoiced in that he "have made \$200 since I came here in the ring trade" and that all



involved made money “like fun,” yet nevertheless remorsefully added “the Rebs are dying quite fast from 8 to 30 per day.”<sup>11</sup>

Inmate officers played very much the same role at Elmira as they did at Camp Ford. They organized work details, promoted camp discipline, encouraged leisure activities, cracked down on thieving from other prisoners, and even helped in escapes. When allowed to operate in their position of rank and authority, Confederate officers reduced idleness and improved morale just like their Union counterparts. The significance of this factor is more obvious when the officers were not allowed, or were unavailable, to do their part. As we have already seen in our discussion of Camp Groce, when Union officers were either not allowed to lead, or were otherwise unable to do so, conditions deteriorated rapidly in the Fall of 1864, and the death rate skyrocketed to nearly 30%. This factor will become even more prevalent in our upcoming discussion of Andersonville Prison, a camp comprised entirely of enlisted men.

With so little at this point to explain the high rates of death at Elmira Prison, we turn our attention to the final two factors: the effects of the local, non-natural environment and the effects of the natural environment. During its early years as a military facility, the number of soldiers in the Elmira Camp outnumbered the civilian population, who quickly came to understand the “economic value” of the military presence.<sup>12</sup> Despite the change from an army base to a prison in 1864, the general needs of the inhabitants stayed much the same. Local businesses thrived on the government contracts to provide such basic items as lime, bricks, stationery, lamp wicks, pens, pencils, envelopes, books, hay, and medicinal supplies, just to name a few, to the prison. It was food delivery, however, that not only was obviously the most essential need, but also the most profitable. Quantity

prevailed over quality as an estimated 13,000 barrels of flour and over 2.3 million pounds of beef were doled out to the prisoners over a one year period.<sup>13</sup> During the peak month of consumption in October of 1864, the Union provided “123,734 pounds of fresh beef, 63,530.5 pounds of pork, 242,535 pounds of flour, 17,665 pounds of beans, 8,152.5 (pounds) of rice, and 7,322 pounds of salt.”<sup>14</sup> Vegetables were always in short supply, and the Commissary Department faced the daunting task of not only having to feed the prisoners, but also the thousands of soldiers needed to run the facility.

Citizens on the outside looking in regarded the prisoners as well fed. The *Elmira Daily Advertiser* in a December 1864 editorial provided a favorable view of inmate meals that consisted of “one pound of meat per day, onions, potatoes, and other vegetables” that were enough to make a “rich and savory” soup, accompanied by bread that was “as good as can be found in any bakery of our city.” For the prisoners, however, this exaggerated description of their daily rations was far from the truth. Confederate inmates described their meals as “invariably scanty” meat, with bread “so thin that they could read the *New York Herald* through it,” both accompanied by “quasi soup . . . tasteless . . . nothing more than hot salty water.”<sup>15</sup> Despite the best efforts of the Union, the quality of beef, flour, and other supplies rapidly declined in the early months of the prison’s existence. Self-sufficient prisoners turned to fishing in the Chemung River and Foster’s Pond (until both became polluted), foraging for edible plants, and hunting squirrels, birds, dogs, and just about anything that moved. The large population of rats within the camp became an obvious target, and when properly killed and dressed became worth their weight in tobacco. According to prisoners, the “Chinese delicacies . . . smelt very good while frying” and when cooked over an open flame “a broiled rat was superb.”<sup>16</sup> By 1865, with the United

States in a minor recession, the already insufficient rations were reduced; and yet it cannot be claimed that the prisoners suffered due to a lack of spending by the Union government. During the tenure of the camp from July 1864 to July 1865, the United States spent \$204,784 on Elmira Prison, doubling, tripling, and even quadrupling what was spent on comparative prisons at Camp Morton, Point Lookout, and Camp Chase during that same period. Only one prison, Camp Douglas near Chicago, spent more than Elmira during the war; however, that was over a four year period with nearly double the prison population.<sup>17</sup>

While the prisoners at Elmira were not allowed to engage in commerce directly with the local population, they were allowed to purchase items from Woodman Demorest, the prison sutler. Operating exclusively within the camp, Demorest sold fruits, vegetables, milk, soap, stamps, clothing, et al, at inflated prices. Despite the markups, the sutlership did a considerable business with the inmates, taking in over \$50,000 from Elmira prisoners, and paying only a little over \$1,700 to the prison fund for the right to do so.<sup>18</sup>

Public fascination with the prisoners peaked during the early years as enterprising locals built viewing stands from which the general population could gaze upon the Confederates below. For a few pennies, Elmira citizens could gawk as long as they wished, with refreshments and spyglasses for a closer look provided. One local seemed surprised that despite their “rough appearance,” the Confederates “are generally of good size, and what would be called fair specimens of the race, if they were not Rebels.” As the suffering of the inmates increased over time, curiosity gave way to compassion, or perhaps guilt, as viewers witnessed the daily task of removing the dead, with one commenting that he and his friends “speedily grew melancholy over the spectacle and cut our visit to the top of the tower very short.”<sup>19</sup> While such an unusual activity found its origins in capitalistic

endeavors, the viewing of the prisoners may have lent itself to compassion among the locals for the inmates; however, there is little indication that such feelings led to increased efforts of charity. A Ladies Hospital Aid Society did frequently ask for donations, but their results were minimal. What can be certain, however, is that unlike the locals living near other Civil War camps, or locals supposedly unaware of the atrocities being committed at concentration camps during World War II, the citizens of Elmira were aware of the conditions within the prison, and the suffering that resulted. While public curiosity with the imprisoned strangers was commonplace wherever a camp was located, constructing such an openly invasive public display from which to view them as was done at Elmira constituted what Michael P. Gray referred to as “dark tourism.” This unhealthy preoccupation with those less fortunate would evolve from initial curiosity to harassment over time. Gray writes “dark tourists only hoped to intensify the pain of imprisonment by their nationalistic renditions, readings, singing, and musical playing, as if they were doing their part in reminding the captive audience of their disloyalty.”<sup>20</sup> Prisoner Anthony Keiley of the 12<sup>th</sup> Virginia Infantry would compare the prison to a zoo as the use of the platforms “proposed to turn our pen into a menagerie,” further suggesting that the construction was a joint operation for profit between the local entrepreneurs and the Union army. He would sarcastically add that in Elmira, “patriotism is spelled with a ‘y’ at the end of the first syllable.”<sup>21</sup>

The last non-natural environmental factor to discuss is that of the access to hospitals and proper medical care. At Camp Groce and Camp Ford, their respective periods of inadequate medical service led to an obvious increase in death rates. At Camp Ford, the paucity of needed care was due to a general lack of supplies and personnel. However, at

Camp Groce the decline in service after the camp reopened in 1864 seems to be due to a lack of compassion and concern for the inmates by camp commanders and the Confederate government alike, in addition to the ever-present lack of supplies. At Elmira, six hospitals would be initially built, each containing sixty-two beds apiece. In late 1864, two additional buildings were erected near the existing hospitals, some barracks were converted into convalescent wards, and additional surgeons were brought in. The number of beds and available doctors was never enough, and a sufficient flow of supplies was a constant issue. Colonel Benjamin F. Tracy of the 127<sup>th</sup> U.S. Colored Troops had assumed the overall command of the Elmira Depot (the combined prison and army facilities) in September of 1864. A lawyer by trade, Tracy would prove to be a stickler for rules and following procedures down to the smallest detail. All requisitions for medical supplies now had to pass through the channels of junior officers, who could approve or disapprove of requests with little guidance. Despite the conditions, Superintendent of Army Nurses Dorothea Dix upon visiting Elmira in November 1864 was “highly gratified since prisoners were receiving all necessary care.”<sup>22</sup> Regardless, inmates continued to die at alarming rates from fever, dysentery, scurvy, and pneumonia. A smallpox outbreak in February and March of 1865 would kill more than four hundred, or about 13.5% of all inmates who died during the prison’s existence.<sup>23</sup>

While overcrowding and the lack of adequate medical supplies contributed to the high mortality rate, special mention must also be made of Elmira’s chief surgeon from July to December 1864, Eugene F. Sanger of the 6<sup>th</sup> Maine. Sanger had graduated from Dartmouth and the Jefferson Medical College, served as a brigade surgeon since nearly the start of the war, and was medical director in New Orleans in 1863. Despite his

qualifications for the assignment, Sanger did not want the posting at Elmira and his enthusiasm for the job was accordingly low.<sup>24</sup> Confederate doctors within the camp accused Sanger of incompetence in disciplining his staff, lack of patient care, and even intentional infliction of harm upon his patients. Some accused the chief of allowing non-patients open access to the short supplies of quinine, opium, whiskey, and other drugs that were stored in the dispensary. Confederate Anthony Keiley, who worked as a clerk tabulating the number of daily deaths, would harshly condemn Sanger as “simply a brute” as men were frequently “deliberately murdered by the surgeon, especially by either the ignorance or malice of the chief.”<sup>25</sup> Sanger would be replaced in December of 1864 by Major Anthony E. Stocker, by all accounts a competent surgeon and administrator, but nevertheless the number of deaths would continue to rise each month until the Spring of 1865. After the war, Sanger would have a successful medical practice, and serve as surgeon general of Maine and as president of the Maine medical association.<sup>26</sup>

The final factor to discuss, the natural environment, had perhaps the most impact on the survival of the Rebel prisoners at Elmira. Unlike at Camp Ford and the early days of Camp Groce, the Confederates at Elmira were not allowed to roam outside of the camp to forage for wood, herbs, and items to supplement their diets. This was due in part to the large number of prisoners housed there. However, the primary reason for not allowing passes outside of the camp was the fact that it was located within a substantial urban settlement, and the local citizens simply would not have tolerated tattered Rebels roaming the streets and nearby countryside. In the early months, a scarcity of wood was a constant problem; however, by December of 1864, Colonel Tracy had secured two coal burning stoves for every barrack. With a substantial supply of coal available, this change alleviated

the necessity of scavenging for wood, but at a considerable cost. According to prison records, the camp would use almost 375 tons of coal per month at a cost of over \$4,000 per month, but it was never enough.<sup>27</sup> This newfound source of heat would not relieve the suffering brought on by the winter of 1864/1865.

At Camp Groce and Camp Ford, the most obvious weather-related impact was that of the relentless Texas heat; however, it was not a distinguishing factor between the two camps. In the northern region of Elmira, New York, the role that weather played in the survival of the prisoners was front and center. The Southern soldiers so far from home had never experienced the harsh conditions, nor the level of cold, that can be brought on by a New England winter. In addition, in the Fall of 1864, only 3,873 of the 9,063 prisoners at Elmira were housed in actual barracks. The remaining 57% were camped outdoors, often in “A” shaped tents, which could each house up to five prisoners.<sup>28</sup> Blizzards created a new level of suffering among the inmates, and hampered local efforts to provide food and supplies. On at least two occasions, the temperatures dropped to over fifteen degrees below zero. The common practice of bathing in the Chemung River was now impracticable, and hygiene worsened. Winter clothing was inadequate, with many prisoners having holes in their shoes, if they had shoes at all. Frostbite, gangrene, and pneumonia was pervasive. Keiley would lament that in the winter in New York “anything short of a polar-bear would find locomotion impracticable.” Another prisoner from Texas would cry “if there ever was a hell on earth, Elmira prison was that hell, but it was not a hot one.” Over 2,000 prisoners arrived in the latter months of 1864 directly from North Carolina and Mississippi, with little more than their summer clothing, and very few blankets. Rebel John Opie would later write “imagine if you can . . . one hundred men trying to keep warm by one stove . . . each

morning the men crawled out of their bunks shivering and half frozen, when a scuffle, and frequently a fight, for a place by the fire occurred . . . God help the sick and weak as they were literally left out in the cold.”<sup>29</sup> For the four winter months from November 1864 to February 1865, Elmira Prison saw 1,187 deaths, or 40.08% of the total deaths that occurred during its twelve months in existence. In addition, 49% of all reported illnesses in the camp occurred during that same period.<sup>30</sup> While one can certainly criticize the lack of preparation by Union officials, and the inadequacy of supplies, the deaths and illnesses during this period were exasperated by an environmental condition beyond the control of man. Better planning by the Northerners could have alleviated the degree of suffering; however, no level of preparation could have eliminated the impact of winter on the chance of survival and overall death rate at Elmira Prison.

One additional weather-related event deserves mention when discussing life at Elmira. In March of 1865, torrential rains created what came to be known as the St. Patrick’s Day flood. A “wilderness of water” caused the Chemung River and Foster’s Pond to overflow into the sloping camp. As water inundated the prison yard, guards used rowboats to check on prisoners and transfer the sick to higher ground. The flood destroyed 2,700 feet of the stockade wall, and left behind debris, destroyed barracks and tents, and homeless prisoners. Men succumbed to drowning and illnesses brought on, or made worse, by exposure to the waters. There were 491 deaths in March of 1865, representing over 16% of all that occurred and being the highest single month in the camp’s tenure. Forty prisoners would die on just one day, also the highest for any single day at Elmira.<sup>31</sup>

While the weather certainly impacted the overall conditions at Elmira, the single most significant effect of the natural environment came from the aforementioned Foster’s



Pond, with its prominent location near the center of camp. The rectangular field of Elmira Prison sloped downwards from the Chemung River towards Water Street, with the majority of the camp lying downhill from the elongated pond that stretched nearly the length of the enclosure. The pond was originally perceived as an advantageous source of fresh water, a factor that was crucial to the chance of survival at Camp Groce and Camp Ford. At Elmira, however, Foster's Pond would turn out to be anything but an advantage to the prisoners. Sinks were dug on the downhill side of the pond, which Major Colt immediately recognized as a potential source of disease and contamination. He recommended digging a slough to allow for a freer flow; however, his requests went unanswered. With so little drainage, and so much misuse by prisoners, the stagnant body of water quickly became inundated with waste. Dr. Sanger reported that the pond "receives its fecal matter hourly" and passes "2,600 gallons of urine daily." Concerned with the "putrid matter," Sanger, like Colt, recommended digging a channel between the pond and the river to promote flow. Just like Colt, his requests would be mostly ignored, until a half-hearted attempt was made after several months, and several deaths, too late.<sup>32</sup>

Unlike at Camp Ford with its system of reservoirs and its self-appointed "Commissioner of Aqueducts," virtually no effort was made at Elmira by either the Union officials or the Confederate prisoners to create a reliable, clean source of water for cooking, bathing, and consumption. Instead, Foster's Pond became a breeding ground for filth and diseases. Rains of almost any quantity would cause the pond to overflow, sending its waste downhill into the barracks of the prisoners. In a November 1864 report to the Surgeon General, Dr. Sanger continued his condemnation of the pond which "remains green with putrescence, filling the air with its messengers of disease and death, the vaults give out

their sickly odors, and the hospitals are crowded with victims for the grave.”<sup>33</sup> Lime was frequently poured into the pond to combat the conditions, only adding to the already excessive level of contamination.

In the Fall of 1864, Colonel Tracy proposed a plan to drain the pond he saw as a “continued prevalence of disease and death” into the freer flowing, but uphill, Chemung River. His plan to build an underground system of wooden drainage pipes was priced at almost \$6,000, and the Commissary General William Hoffman balked at the cost. Insisting that the work could be completed at a fraction of the price by inmates, Hoffman also downplayed the necessity of the sluice with the coming onset of winter. A similar sewage system had also been proposed, and rejected, at Camp Douglas in Chicago by Union officials looking to keep costs down. Kutzler argues that such reasoning “echoed the conservative defenders of an older, cheaper individualized system of waste and environmental management,” who disregarded the need to adapt to changing conditions.<sup>34</sup> In doing so, they also disregarded the needs of the imprisoned, and their own duty of care that civility imposes on them in a time of war when attending to prisoners under your control. On his way out of the camp in December of 1864, Dr. Sanger would make one last comment that the pond was still “a festering mass of corruption, impregnating the entire atmosphere of the camp with its pestilential odors, night and day.”<sup>35</sup> With shortages of lumber, inadequate labor, and cost-cutting bureaucrats, the project that Colonel Tracy estimated would take two weeks instead took several months, seeing the final completion of the drainage system in early 1865. However, having polluted the camp for nearly seven of the twelve months it was open, the damage had been done. The deaths of 1,394 prisoners at Elmira, or 47.1% of the total number who lost their lives, were caused by

diarrhea and dysentery, ailments brought on primarily by the unsanitary conditions of the pond.<sup>36</sup>

In April of 1865, despite the recent Confederate surrenders and the pending release of prisoners, Lt. Colonel Moore would begin a makeover of the camp. Sidewalks were finally planked, streets were graded, new sinks were dug, trees were planted, and a flower garden created at the western end of the stockade on the downhill side of Foster's Pond. While Moore was generally regarded as a benevolent commandant during his tenure, his late efforts seem to be more for the purpose of creating a self-serving public image of the prison, rather than for the health and well-being of the prisoners. The ruse seems to have worked. On April 24<sup>th</sup>, the *Elmira Daily Advertiser* praised the newly adorned camp as "a monument of skill, enterprise, and cultivated refinement of the officers in charge of the camp."<sup>37</sup> Although there is no indication that Moore was suffering from any contemporary pressure to improve the image of the camp, either at the local or federal level, it does seem that he was consciously aware and concerned with how the prison would be portrayed post-war. His efforts may have been as much about protecting the image of the Union as it was about protecting himself. Regardless, Elmira would have its place in history as one of the deadliest camps of the war, and become a favorite target of Southern apologists. Elmira Prison would release its last healthy prisoner in July of 1865, and the process of dismantling the camp would begin. Those too sick to be moved remained in the prison hospital until they recovered or succumbed to their illnesses. Although the records show no casualties after July, the last patient did not leave the hospital until September, 1865. In August, a public sale was conducted of almost all that was left, including tools, furniture, general supplies, and the barracks themselves. Even the "deadhouse" which had been used to store

the deceased prior to burial was purchased and relocated by a local for use as a storage shed.<sup>38</sup> After the war, as criticism of the treatment of Union prisoners in the South increased, ex-Confederates would point to the high death rates at Elmira as an example of Yankee cruelty. However, from the Northern perspective, they had made every effort to secure the health of the Rebel prisoners, and were simply thwarted by effects beyond their control. As one newspaper reported in 1864, the caretakers at Elmira were “of a character that reflects the highest credit upon Northern humanity.”<sup>39</sup> Despite these perceptions, Elmira would be linked by Southerners, and in later years historians, to the Confederate prison at Andersonville, Georgia, due to their similar death rates. The statistics alone, however, are where the similarities end.

Like most Civil War prison camps, after the war, the site of Elmira was generally ignored and forgotten by the public. The land would pass back into private hands, and locals would occasionally find relics and human remains during excavations. In 1937, The United Daughters of the Confederacy would erect a memorial in nearby Woodlawn Cemetery to honor those Rebels who never returned to their loved ones from their temporary home in New York. Centennial celebrations in the 1960’s would renew interest in the camp; however, it would take another twenty years before the first monument would be placed at the site. Today, the location of the Elmira Prison is mostly privately owned, with historical markers and remembrances provided by the Chemung County Historical Society and the Friends of Elmira Civil War Prison Camp organization.

*Andersonville Prison, CSA – Andersonville, Georgia*

Andersonville, Georgia, was founded in 1853 as the township of Anderson, being named for John W. Anderson, the superintendent of the Southwestern Railroad that ran

through the area. The U.S. Post Office Department would change the name to Andersonville in 1855 to avoid any confusion with the larger city of Anderson, South Carolina. Never having a population greater than 350, Andersonville was a quiet country hamlet over ninety miles southwest of the state capital at Milledgeville, and a lifetime away from the main events of the Civil War. With the prisoner exchange system in shambles by late 1863, the decision was made to create a new prisoner of war camp in Georgia. Originally named Camp Sumter, after the county in which it was located, the site would soon take on the name of the nearby little town. Unlike the townspeople of Hempstead, Tyler, and Elmira, the locals in Southwest Georgia did not welcome a military facility so close to their isolated community. A local newspaper questioned whether there would be enough guards “to keep these filthy cutthroats from wandering about our kitchens and negro cabins, spreading their loathsome diseases and principles amongst our slaves.”<sup>40</sup> For others, however, their concern was more with the presence of the Confederate soldiers rather than the inmates. As one local rebel soldier writing home to his family suggested “we . . . ar all very much oppose to it knowing what destruction it is to a counetry to send Soldiers to it.”<sup>41</sup>

The first prisoners began arriving at Andersonville in February of 1864 to a stockade that was still under construction. Originally comprised of approximately 16.5 acres, the rectangular camp was surrounded by a fifteen foot wall with multiple sentry boxes located a little over eighty feet apart. Two gates located on the west side of the enclosure provided the only points of ingress and egress, and were heavily guarded at all times. A second stockade wall around the exterior provided an additional layer of security. Through the center of the camp running east to west was a small creek that was a branch

of the ironically named Sweet Water Creek. This murky tributary would serve multiple functions including washing, waste removal, latrine, and throughout much of the life of the camp, the only source of drinking water. The creek and the equally uninviting swampy land on either side of it became an obvious source of contamination and disease. While the condition of the creek draws a natural comparison to Foster's Pond, it must be noted that the inmates at Elmira Prison also had access to the Chemung River and fresh water wells which provided alternative sources for cooking and consumption.

The conditions at Andersonville were unfavorable to survival from the start, and as they worsened over the fourteen months of the camp's existence, the prisoners would at times become their own worst enemies. Meant to hold only 10,000 prisoners, Andersonville would within a few months of its opening see its population rise to over 30,000. Although the camp would eventually be enlarged to about 27 acres, the overcrowding would leave each man with an average of only 33.2 square feet in which to live. Prison officials made no effort to lay out streets, or require inmates to construct their meager housing in rows or any sort of coordinated fashion. This "tragic omission" led not only to an impractical level of disorganization, but also "resulted in a hodgepodge of structures that rendered policing of the prison practically impossible after it became crowded."<sup>42</sup> The suffering was daily, with no periods of reprieve as experienced at the other camps discussed herein. After a January 1865 visit, Southerner Eliza Frances Andrews, an "ardent rebel," would lament "it is dreadful . . . my heart aches for the poor wretches, Yankees though they are, and I am afraid God will suffer some terrible retribution to fall upon us for letting such things happen."<sup>43</sup> Although shoddy Confederate recordkeeping has made it difficult to obtain an accurate count of the number of prisoners

who lived and died at Andersonville, the general consensus is that approximately 13,000 of the 45,000 prisoners perished during its tenure, creating a death rate of 28.8%. While this extreme overcrowding was a direct result of the breakdown of the exchange system and the Dix-Hill Cartel, the Confederacy was slow to respond to the problem. By the time plans were made to build a second large-scale facility near Millen, Georgia (Camp Lawton), after months of inaction and unproductive squabbling, many prisoners were too ill to be safely moved. Many more would die during such transfers to other facilities and upon their eventual release. For others, the effects of Andersonville would linger long after their return home. Private Temolian Tilford of the 8<sup>th</sup> Iowa Cavalry would be captured at the Battle of Brown's Mill in July of 1864, and taken to Andersonville. He would survive the experience and be released with thousands of others in April of 1865; however, his life would never be the same. Although he lived another seventeen years until his passing in 1882 at the age of 39, Tilford was always weak, suffered from a nagging cough, was plagued by nightmares of his experience, and according to his family, simply was not the man he was prior to the war.<sup>44</sup>

Andersonville would have long term effects on not only the physical and mental well-being of its inhabitants, but also on the American psyche of what it meant to be a prisoner of war. Sectional differences would lead to arguments that still go on today over which side treated their prisoners better, with Elmira and Andersonville typically at the center of the disagreements. What seemed to be universally accepted, however, was that in the future society should improve the way prisoners, both civilian and military, would be managed. Care for those in civilian prisons prior to the war was inadequate at best, and has been described as "an era of moral terrorism."<sup>45</sup> Post-war movements from the 1870's

through the Progressive Era of the early twentieth century to reform civilian prisons were likely affected by what was witnessed in wartime camps. Reformers such as Dorothea Dix, who saw first-hand the tragedies at places like Elmira, would campaign for prison reform in the areas of sanitation, rehabilitation, and mental health. The large number of post-war memoirs by incarcerated soldiers, with their sometimes embellished recollections, swayed public opinion as well. Increased awareness, reform movements, and changing perceptions in society are perhaps the true lasting legacy of Civil War prisons. Civilizations are judged not just by their mistakes, but by how they learn from those mistakes and change accordingly in deference to justice, equality, and humanity. Despite lessons learned, however, war tends to bring out the worst in humanity, as we saw at Abu Gharib prison in Iraq in the early twenty-first century, and death and suffering will almost always inevitably occur.

At each of the previous camps discussed herein, while all factors played their part in the rate of survival of the prisoners, there was one particular factor that stood out for each that seemed to have the most significant impact. At Camp Groce, it was the oppressive leadership of Colonel Gillespie. At Camp Ford, it was the eventual overcrowding that ruined the idyllic nature of the camp. At Elmira, it was the festering Foster's Pond that hindered health throughout. With Andersonville, however, it is difficult to point to any one particular factor, event, individual, or condition that was the primary instigator of the suffering. Instead, it was a combination of bad management, poor decision making, appalling conditions, and a wholly unsanitary environment that led to one of the highest death rates of any prison during the war. Andersonville is simply a study in how not to house and treat prisoners. Unlike the camps in Hempstead and Tyler which were under the



auspices of the Confederate Department of the Trans-Mississippi, Andersonville would fall under the control of a jumbled commissary department hampered by bureaucracy and devoid of effective leadership. While the latter certainly had an impact on Andersonville, it is too easy of a path for historians to take to simply dismiss the problems of the camp due to government snafus. Camp Groce and Camp Ford were under the same federal government west of the Mississippi, and yet had decidedly different conditions and death rates. Andersonville is a near “perfect storm” of what can go wrong, checking off all five factors to the detriment of the prisoners, and yet remains today one of the most controversial camps of the war.

As with Elmira Prison, the first of the five factors to discuss will be the role of the camp commandant. However, unlike at Elmira where this factor was one of the least consequential, at Andersonville the attitudes and approach to management by the commandant would be paramount, and create one of the most lasting and controversial legacies of the prison. Heinrich Hartmann Wirz, better known to history as Captain Henry Wirz, was a Swiss immigrant with an interest in medicine who took over as commander of the camp in March of 1864. Forced to leave his native Switzerland in 1848 as a condition of parole for a four year prison sentence, Wirz would find his way to America and find work as a physician’s assistant and plantation overseer in Kentucky and Louisiana.<sup>46</sup> At Andersonville, he would gain a reputation as an uncaring warden who was prone to fits of anger and irrational behavior. Private John McElroy of the 16<sup>th</sup> Illinois Cavalry, who would be a prisoner at Andersonville for eight months in 1864 and would write a four volume account of his time in captivity after the war, would describe Wirz as “a fidgety man” who was “simply contemptible . . . gnat-brained, cowardly, and feeble natured, he had not a

quality that commanded respect from any one who knew him . . . his cruelty” was a result of “a mind incapable of conceiving the results of his acts, or understanding the pain he was inflicting.”<sup>47</sup> To others, he was simply the “Andersonville Butcher,” whose overt malice towards the Yankees heightened the already deplorable conditions at the prison.<sup>48</sup> Separating fact from fiction when it comes to Wirz has been an ongoing battle for historians as Southern apologists sought to rehabilitate his reputation, and perhaps their own, shortly after the war ended. Any commander would have struggled to care for the prisoners under the horrible conditions found at Andersonville. However, what distinguished Wirz from his counterparts at other camps, and what may have ultimately sealed his fate, was his unwillingness to do even the most minor things to alleviate the suffering. He made little to no effort to improve the quantity and quality of the rations provided to the prisoners. He allowed the guards to terrorize the prisoners and commit random acts of murder. He prohibited the flow of supplies into the camp that would have allowed the inmates to build shelters and dig proper wells. He stopped the practice of allowing prisoners to go outside of the stockade to gather wood for cooking. He ignored pleas from prisoners and doctors alike for more hospital space and better sanitation. When Confederate inspector Daniel T. Chandler issued a scathing report on the conditions at Andersonville in 1864, Wirz “ridiculed his manhood and loyalty” to their superiors, and called him “the plaything of cute Yankees.”<sup>49</sup> Perhaps most damning of all, however, was his temperament and blatant indifference to the suffering. Private McElroy would comment “I never saw Wirz when he was not angry; if not violently abusive, he was cynical and sardonic . . . never, in my little experience with him did I detect a glint of kindly, generous humanity; if he ever was moved by any sight of suffering its exhibition in his face escaped my eye.” Unable, even

years later, to comprehend Wirz's attitude, McElroy would question "how a man could move daily through such misery as he encountered, and never be moved by it except to scorn and mocking is beyond my limited understanding."<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Wirz remains a complicated figure. Were the conditions at Andersonville beyond the control of any commander? Was he simply following orders, and if he was, does that exonerate his actions? Was his conduct any harsher than what was expected of a wartime prison commandant, and if it was not, once again does that excuse his management of the camp?

After the war, Wirz would be charged with conspiring to impair and injure the lives of the prisoners, as well as murder "in violation of the laws and customs of war." With an array of testimony against him by Union prisoners and Confederate guards, Wirz was summarily found guilty and sentenced to death. On November 10, 1865, Henry Wirz would be hanged in Washington D.C. in the shadow of the U.S. Capitol, making him the only Confederate officer executed after the conflict for crimes against prisoners of war.<sup>51</sup> He had already been convicted in the court of public opinion, and the judgment seemed inevitable from the outset. Newspapers in the North demanded that "some expiation must be expected for the most infernal crime of the century." Lead prosecutor, Colonel Norton Parker Chipman, would talk of the "treasonable conspiracy" by the South against Union prisoners, and label Wirz one of the "mercenary and heartless monsters" who exhibited "intrinsic wickedness." Historian Benjamin G. Cloyd would comment, "Wirz was no mass murderer but simply an ineffective and callous officer" who "became the personification of Southern brutality."<sup>52</sup> While apologists are correct that the Swiss Captain became the scapegoat for the failings of the Confederacy to care for their prisoners, Henry Wirz was indifferent to the suffering, and carried out overt acts that maintained, if not added to, the

already egregious conditions at Andersonville. While a more benevolent commander would have faced the same problems that Wirz had with supplies, overcrowding, and the incompetent Confederate bureaucracy, simple acts of humanity towards the prisoners might have lowered the degree of suffering, and kept one free from the hangman's noose. However, considering the harsh reality of the four other factors at Andersonville, it is difficult to conceive that even the actions of a kind man, such as Colonel Allen from Camp Ford, would have had much of an impact on the overall death rate.

While Henry Wirz absorbed much of the blame for the conditions at Andersonville, a fair amount of criticism needs to also be laid at the feet of General John H. Winder, who served as commissary general of Confederate prisons in Georgia and Alabama from 1864 to 1865, as well as the Confederate government as a whole. As Wirz's superior, Winder was in charge of requisitioning food, medicine, and supplies for Andersonville, while also controlling the flow of prisoners and personnel. Whether through incompetence or indifference, Winder faltered in navigating the murky waters of the Confederate bureaucracy, and feuded with his fellow officers such as General Howell Cobb, commander of the Georgia State Guard, over logistics. He was reviled by Union prisoners and Confederate inspectors alike. Private McElroy would describe him as "an obscure, dull old man . . . remorseless and cruel" who would brag that he was "doing more to kill off Yankees than twenty regiments at the front." Colonel D.T. Chandler in his inspection report for the Confederate War Department would in August 1864 describe Winder as "very indifferent to the welfare of the prisoners, indisposed to do anything, or to do as much as I thought he ought to do, to alleviate their sufferings." When Chandler recommended a few simple solutions such as draining the swamp and improving rations,

Winder replied “that he thought it was better to see half of them die than to take care of the men.” In July of 1864, Winder would issue a military order that should the Union army get within seven miles of Andersonville, the artillery battery was to “open upon the stockade with grapeshot” to eliminate the prisoners.<sup>53</sup> Historians have struggled to define Winder’s degree of culpability, and the veracity of the claims made against him, even questioning the report of Chandler, a suspected Union sympathizer. However, historian Ovid L. Futch, in his seminal work *History of Andersonville Prison*, argues that even if Chandler was biased, overwhelming evidence suggests that his condemnation of the camp, and Winder, were accurate. Nevertheless, Futch admits that Winder’s “true character was a puzzle to his contemporaries and remains an enigma to historians.” Whether due to incompetence or an intention to inflict harm, Winder’s actions convinced others “that he was devoid of feelings of humanity for the captives.”<sup>54</sup> He was, however, hampered, and at times completely handcuffed, by a Confederate bureaucracy that was devoid of organization and effective leadership, and was preoccupied more with the survival of the government than they were with the treatment of Yankee prisoners. Despite Winder’s complaints about overcrowding at Andersonville, and requests that no additional prisoners be sent, the flow of inmates to Georgia from Richmond continued. Concerned with dwindling resources in the capital and the risk created by having so many prisoners near the ever-closer front lines in Virginia, the Confederate government prioritized survival over humanitarianism.<sup>55</sup> Winder’s repeated complaints of low rations were largely ignored by his superiors who placed concern for Rebel soldiers over Yankee prisoners, and traded petty barbs over the command structure and who was in charge of whom. Post-war Southern defenders have insisted that it was understandable to feed soldiers over prisoners,

especially when rations were in short supply. However, humanity demands that one take care of prisoners under their control who are less capable of improving their own conditions via self-care. Also, while supplies were on the decline in the Confederacy in the latter half of the war, it is not true that food was not available for the POW's. The Army of the Tennessee located within a few hundred miles of Andersonville was by their commander's own account "well supplied with staples procured locally . . . with fresh beef from cattle driven up from Florida." Per Confederate commissary reports, a supply depot in Danville, Georgia, in April of 1865 was said to contain 1.5 million rations of meat and 500,000 rations of bread. Meanwhile, Union troops entering Salisbury, North Carolina, that same month discovered "100,000 bushels of corn, 60,000 pounds of bacon, 100,000 pounds of salt, 20,000 pounds of sugar, 27,000 pounds of rice, 50,000 pounds of wheat, 30,000 pounds of cornmeal, and 100,000 pounds of flour."<sup>56</sup> In early 1865, with the Union army marching through Georgia, Winder would urge his government to parole the prisoners and send them home. The response was a denial of his request, and an order to further reduce rations. All things considered, Winder was not devoid of compassion for his fellow man, but he also did not seem motivated to go beyond what was minimally required of him to manage Andersonville. He made requests for improvements, but rarely followed up on them. He was frustrated by his superiors, but made little effort to cut through the red tape and rectify the problems. A more competent, or inspired, bureaucrat might have been able to make a difference for the prisoners; but Winder was simply not that man. While he would certainly not escape scrutiny during and after the war, unlike his hapless subordinate Captain Wirz, General Winder would escape trial and potential punishment. A little over two months before General Lee surrendered at Appomattox, Winder would die of a heart

attack in South Carolina. The Winder building, a federal office in Washington, D.C. of the United States Trade Representative, still bears his family's name.

Union and Confederate officers imprisoned at Camp Groce, Camp Ford, and Elmira Prison all played a significant role in maintaining order and creating a sense of military discipline within the camps. Their actions reduced idleness, improved morale, and affected the likelihood of survival. Andersonville, however, was comprised entirely of enlisted Union soldiers, and thus the lack of officers would have a negative effect on the rate of survival within the camp. Out of a fear that they would organize revolts, the Rebels separated out the prisoners, sending all Union officers to Macon, Georgia. A few, however, would slip through the cracks. According to Private McElroy, in August of 1864, approximately 200 to 300 officers, who had passed themselves off as enlisted men, were discovered amidst the new prisoners. They were immediately removed and sent to Macon as "it would not do to trust such possible leaders with us another day."<sup>57</sup> Not unexpected, the absence of officers at Andersonville resulted in disorganization, a lack of discipline, violence, and chaos. After a fellow inmate suffering from chronic diarrhea had his pants and underwear stolen while he was trying to clean them, Sergeant Eugene Forbes of the 4<sup>th</sup> New Jersey Infantry was disgusted to admit "our own men are worse to each other than the rebels are to us."<sup>58</sup>

With "a community of twenty-five thousand boys and young men – none too regardful of control at best – and now wholly destitute of government," there simply was no established structure to maintain order.<sup>59</sup> Accordingly, some inmates created violent gangs that harassed, robbed, and murdered their fellow prisoners. The most infamous group was a large contingency that called themselves the "Raiders." Through violence and

intimidation, they acquired food, supplies, and items for trade or sale to the guards, allowing them to become better fed and stronger physically than the other prisoners. As Futch points out, the Raiders were “well-organized and accustomed to brawling . . . better armed” causing many a prisoner to dread “the approach of darkness, for though the Raiders did not hesitate to club, cut, stab, and rob during the daylight hours, they were much more active at night.”<sup>60</sup> In one of the few acts of compassion by Captain Wirz, or perhaps simply as a means to maintain some semblance of order, he responded to the pleas of the terrorized inmates and rounded up the leaders and most violent members of the oppressive group. Searching the campsites of the Raiders, guards would find a cache of blankets, clothing, jewelry, money, cooking supplies, and even buried bodies and skeletons. After trials conducted by their peers, the majority of the Raiders were sentenced to minor punishments; however, the six leaders were executed via hangings carried out by their fellow prisoners in July of 1864. Afterwards, the prisoners would organize a pseudo-police force known as the “Regulators” to, at the very least, prevent rampant criminal activity within the camp.<sup>61</sup> Despite these efforts, Andersonville throughout its existence was a scene of disorganization and undisciplined prisoners. The presence of Union officers would have certainly created a greater sense of order, and perhaps prevented the creation of groups such as the Raiders. However, considering the other factors yet to be discussed, no amount of discipline by Yankee officers could have prevented the immeasurable suffering that occurred within the camp.

While Andersonville had a lack of officers, the camp did contain a handful of prisoners not seen in the Confederate camps in Texas, namely black POW's. Estimates are that sixty to one hundred African American prisoners, most of which were captured at the



Battle of Olustee, Florida, in February of 1864, were confined at Andersonville. Frank Maddox of the 35<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops would remember “they put us to work, pulling up stumps around the stockade, cutting wood, and doing first one thing and then another . . . put to burying the dead . . . helped to enlarge the stockade.”<sup>62</sup> Confederate records, shaky even under the best of conditions, are mostly incomplete when it comes to the period of confinement and disposition of many of the black prisoners. The fate of a few, however, can be determined. Corporal James Gooding of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry would pass away at Andersonville in June of 1864, and was “buried in integrated burial trenches without regard for race . . . the soldiers buried on either side of him were white.”<sup>63</sup>

Like its much smaller counterparts in Texas, Andersonville was located in an open, relatively flat area, surrounded by forest, and with an already present source of water. Likewise, its inmates were subject to the unforgiving heat of a summer in the South. After a comparison of basic conditions, however, the similarities end. Despite an abundance of pine trees near the camp, wood for construction and cooking was always in short supply. A shortage of tools, and access to a sawmill, hampered even the initial construction of the stockade. After the outer walls were completed, almost no effort was made to procure wood with which to build barracks for the prisoners. When lumber did arrive via train from elsewhere, it would “disappear” into the surrounding area, leaving the unfortunate Yankees exposed to the elements. As Lieutenant Colonel Alexander W. Persons, a short term early commander of the camp, would comment upon visiting Andersonville later, “I went into the stockade several times after I was relieved from duty, and I saw no shelter”

but instead “I saw forty or fifty houses springing up outside of the grounds . . . the lumber disappeared in that way.”<sup>64</sup>

When the population of the prison was still at a reasonable level, inmates were allowed to go outside in small numbers to gather wood and forage for whatever else they could find. However, after the population swelled, and escape attempts increased, such excursions became “unworkable” for the prison guards and were halted almost entirely. Unable to gather wood outside on a consistent basis, and with the camp itself completely stripped of vegetation in short order, the prisoners were unable to cook their food, or enjoy the company of a warm fire on a cold Southern night. Prisoners scavenged for wood scraps, secretly traded with guards, and volunteered to take their comrades to the hospital or death house just so they could grab whatever timber they could find on their way back. Private McElroy would recall “when logs were occasionally found or brought back into prison, men tore them to pieces with almost their naked fingers,” and suggested an intention of the Rebels to cause harm for “what else than deliberate design can account for this systematic withholding from the prisoners of that which was so essential to their existence, and which it was so easy to give them?”<sup>65</sup> Like Camp Groce and Camp Ford, nature provided an abundance of resources right outside the prison gates. However, as was seen at Groce during its second tenure under Colonel Gillespie, denying access to such resources hindered survival and appears in hindsight to be little more than an intentional effort to increase the level of suffering.

The most striking feature of the natural environment at Andersonville was the small creek that ran through the center of the camp. Originally perceived as a convenient source of water for the inmates, the creek was mostly unusable from the outset, and would become

over time an almost unbelievable source of contamination and disease, as well as a symbol of the appalling lack of humanity at the prison. The creek was surrounded on either side by a “quaking bog of slimy ooze one hundred and fifty feet wide” upon which one would “sink to the waist.”<sup>66</sup> Infested with maggots at a depth of fifteen to eighteen inches, the 3.5 acre swamp was a hazard from the beginning, becoming a biological nightmare as men defecated and deposited waste throughout.<sup>67</sup> The condition of the creek was not much better. Refuse from the Rebel kitchen located at the high point on the creek flowed through the camp, and Confederate soldiers outside the stockade polluted it with their waste. Rains washed excrement and debris into it, and out of it into the camp. Prisoners used it to wash their lice-ridden clothes, bathe, and as a toilet. The creek was also, unfortunately, often the only source of drinking water. With so little wood available for cooking, inmates were not afforded the “luxury” of being able to boil their water prior to consumption. Prisoners attempted to dig water wells with whatever tools were available, with almost always undesirable results. If one could keep the well from caving in, no small feat with the lack of wood and building supplies, they would soon find it polluted with the seepage from the filthy conditions of the camp. As one prisoner commented in his journal “the well water appears impregnated with sulfur or some mineral, looks blue, and induces diarrhea.”<sup>68</sup> From April to August 1864, the number of deaths would rise from 576 to 2,993 per month, an increase of 420%.<sup>69</sup>

In August of 1864, a strong rain cut a channel beneath a tree stump, and opened up a free flowing spring of fresh water. Seen by the prisoners as a sign of divine intervention after a recent prayer for deliverance, the new source of water was labeled the “Providence Spring” and the “Miracle Spring.” As Private McElroy recalled, “it poured its grateful

flood of pure, sweet water in an apparently exhaustless quantity . . . it seemed as truly a heaven-wrought miracle.” As the Regulators took charge of the spring, “every one was compelled to take his regular turn in filling his vessel . . . and every morning . . . a thousand men could be seen standing in line, waiting their turns to fill their cans and cups with the precious liquid.”<sup>70</sup> The Miracle Spring still flows today from the ground at Andersonville, and tourists are allowed to bottle up a sample to take home with them. However, a sign nearby cautions “water unfit for human consumption” and encourages one not to drink it.

Although the presence of the spring improved a prisoner’s chance of survival during the final eight months of the camp, it did not remove the ever-present danger presented by the contaminated creek and the festering swamp. Death continued to occur on an appalling scale, and prisoners continued to suffer under the harsh conditions due to the lack of shelter, food, and basic protection from the elements. Under such demoralizing conditions, morale among the inmates declined, and many simply resigned themselves to death after giving way to their despondency. A Yankee prisoner who would later die of his own ailments at another prison in South Carolina would write that despite the care given to a fellow inmate, he has “lost all ambition, has given up hope, and desires only to be left alone to die in his filth,” then sadly adds that “these sights can be seen in any part of the camp and are not isolated cases.”<sup>71</sup>

As we have already seen at other locales, the impact of the natural environment on the chances of survival can be mitigated by the effects of the local, non-natural environment. Harsh weather can be countered by adequate housing. A shortage of food and medicinal herbs that can be foraged can be offset by allowing prisoners to trade with local merchants. It is equally true, that the effects of the natural environment can also be

exacerbated by the local, non-natural environment. At Camp Groce, the lone doctor left in the area to attend to the prisoners in 1864 was a drunkard who likely did more harm than good. The make-shift hospital in Hempstead was in such poor physical condition that prisoners were sometimes injured just trying to navigate its corridors. At Andersonville, as with the other factors, the local, non-natural environment would have a detrimental effect on the rate of survival, and the overall morale of its fateful inmates.

Although the structure of the stockade in Georgia was constructed in a similar fashion to those of the other prisons, the camp at Andersonville had a unique feature that added to the suffering: the dead line. Located about twenty feet from the inside walls of the stockade, the dead line was a short fence that ran the entire perimeter of the encampment and created a no-man's land between the main area of the camp and the outer walls. Any prisoner crossing the dead line would be shot without warning, although just approaching the line could prove to be fatal. As Private McElroy recalled, some of the guards were especially "treacherous and brutal" and "killed prisoners under the pretense that they were across the Dead Line, when the victims were a yard or more from the Dead Line, and had not the remotest idea of going any nearer."<sup>72</sup> Inmates were unnecessarily shot for reaching near the line to get the "freshest" water from where the creek entered the camp, or for retrieving items that landed near the barrier. While all camps had a few guards that exceeded their authority and exhibited an unacceptable level of brutality, the sentinels at Andersonville were especially harsh in their treatment of the prisoners. Comprised primarily of Georgia and Alabama state militias, instead of enlisted soldiers, the guards were described as "the worst looking scalawags" and "the off scourings of the South" who were either "boys just large enough to handle a gun, to old men who ought to have been

dead years ago for the good of their country.”<sup>73</sup> Corporal Samuel J. Gibson of the 103<sup>rd</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteers would comment in his journal kept while at Andersonville “the killing of a Yankee by the Rebel Guards is to common an occurrence . . . my heart sickens at such cruelty . . . some of the guards it seems would rather fire than say ‘stand back’.”<sup>74</sup> While discipline by the guards to maintain order and prevent escapes is a necessary condition in any prison, the actions taken by those at Andersonville were excessive. Men “assassinated by the guards” while not even making an effort to escape, nor having transgressed a prison rule, were simply murdered in the eyes of the prisoners, leading one to comment “the slaying of every man there was a foul crime.”<sup>75</sup>

The constant threat of death presented by the dead line added to the already harsh environment of the camp. Food was always in short supply, and rations were sometimes withheld as punishment. When provided, the fare was often less than palatable, undercooked, spoiled, and filled with bugs. David Kennedy of the 9<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Cavalry would write in his diary “only one ration in three days,” and on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July would comment “we draw this evening spoilt beef and maggotly mush alive with worms . . . what a grand dinner for the Fourth.”<sup>76</sup> As Amy Murrell Taylor would comment in her work, *Embattled Freedom* (2018), “war required a continued fight for bodily control and survival against harsh odds” and “food had become a weapon in this war.”<sup>77</sup> While limited opportunities existed at Andersonville for prisoners to exhibit self-care when it came to food, the choices they did make in preparation, cooperation with others, and self-control stressed individuality in an otherwise collective environment.

Inmates fortunate enough to have housing were in the same type of “A” shaped “she-bang” structures found at Camp Ford. Many, however, simply slept out in the open

in niches they had dug out of the hard Georgia soil. Prisoners were clothed in whatever garments they brought with them into the camp, or whatever they could steal from fellow inmates, whether alive or dead. The Confederacy made no effort to provide clothing, and did not allow benevolent or capitalistic outsiders to send in even this most basic of necessities. The lack of proper clothing may have been an intentional assault on the psyche of the prisoners, and not just due to inadequate supplies. Taylor contends that “nineteenth-century Americans believed wholeheartedly that clothing was an important, visible marker of status and social position . . . changeable rather than fixed . . . a highly validating process, a source of self-satisfaction.”<sup>78</sup> Thus a denial of such an element of status demeaned a prisoner, making him less than what he was prior to capture, attacking him as an individual.

In the earliest days of the camp, before the population swelled to unmanageable numbers, prisoners were allowed outside in small groups to forage or trade for whatever they could find. Complaints by locals of the danger presented by roaming Yankees, combined with the dramatic increase to over 12,000 inmates by May 1864, put a permanent end to the practice. Thereafter, trading with guards, locals, or anyone other than the expensive prison sutler was forbidden. Despite the harsh realities of life within the camp, the Confederate government would fail to act to improve conditions, and citizens aware of the camp would turn a mostly blind eye to the suffering. As an editor for the *Daily Richmond Examiner* would cavalierly comment in 1864 “not more than ten or eleven deaths occur per day – supplies can be obtained in abundance, and the situation is not unhealthy.”<sup>79</sup> The locals were certainly aware of the conditions. Ambrose Spencer, a resident of Americus, Georgia, located about fifteen miles from the camp, would comment “the condition of the stockade perhaps can be expressed most aptly by saying that in

passing up and down the railroad, if the wind was favorable, the odor from the stockade could be detected at least two mile away.”<sup>80</sup> Private James E. Anderson, a guard at Andersonville, would even write to Confederate President Jefferson Davis in June of 1864, imploring him to stop the killings and improve conditions as “a soldier, a statesman, and a Christian.”<sup>81</sup>

The most obvious characteristic of the local, non-natural environment at Andersonville that distinguishes it from the other camps is simply its location. Camp Groce was located in Hempstead, Texas, a bustling little town on a key railroad stopping point. Camp Ford was in Tyler, Texas, a local seat of commerce that already housed an arsenal and a military supply depot. Elmira, New York, was at the crossroads of two rail lines and a canal, with a population of almost 10,000 when the prison opened. In all three communities, the locals were not only fascinated by the “visiting” Rebels and Yankees, but also appreciated the available opportunities for commerce and trade. Andersonville, however, presented a sharp contrast. Isolated in rural Southwest Georgia with a population of only a few dozen, the small agricultural community was simply not prepared for, and did not welcome, the change that occurred with the opening of the prison. Locals resisted impressment of their slaves for labor in building the stockade, and gouged Confederate officials on prices for sawmill lumber and other supplies. Likely struggling to provide for themselves during the late stages of the war, the citizens of Andersonville made little effort to take advantage of the capitalistic opportunities presented to them, as the citizens near other prison sites had eagerly embraced. Regional groups such as the Americus Ladies Aid Society would visit the camp in the early months; however, their visits were to satisfy their own curiosities, rather than for benevolent purposes. One young visitor, Miss Haley



Clayton of Americus, Georgia, “was disposed to say ugly things to them & glory at their being captured, and imprisoned,” taking pleasure from their misfortune instead of making an effort to uplift their morale.<sup>82</sup> As the months wore on, and the conditions and smell of death worsened at the camp, the number of visitors dramatically declined. Private McElroy would sharply criticize the failure of those who would normally be expected to exhibit compassion, “the churches of all denominations – except the solitary Catholic priest, Father Hamilton – ignored us as wholly as if we were dumb beasts . . . lay humanitarians were equally indifferent, and the only interest manifested by any Rebel in the welfare of any prisoner was by the Masonic brotherhood.”<sup>83</sup>

The final aspect of the non-natural environment that deserves attention is the hospital and medical services provided within the camp. While no level of care would completely eliminate the presence of disease and prisoners succumbing to such ailments, even a basic degree of sanitation and medical attention appropriate for the time would have had an impact on slowing death’s progress. At Andersonville, as we have seen with just about every other condition, medical care for the prisoners seems to have been almost an afterthought, likely contributing, instead of alleviating, the appalling level of suffering. Atypical of prisons at the time, the hospital was originally located within the walls of the stockade. Drainage from the creek and the contaminated prison sinks passed directly through the hospital grounds. With such easy access, prisoners stole food, bedding, medicines, and supplies with impunity. By May of 1864, the facility had been relocated outside to the southeast corner of the stockade, but the change of scenery did little to improve the level of care. Eventually comprising about five acres, the prison hospital

would by June be in competition for supplies with the newly constructed “Sumter hospital” built nearby for Confederate soldiers.

Always short on medicines, supplies, and capable surgeons, the hospital would become the “chief cause of high mortality at Andersonville.” May 1864 saw 8.2% of all patients admitted to the hospital die from their ailment. By June, the number had jumped to 15.1%. As the population within the prison swelled in late 1864, the hospital had only one doctor for every two hundred patients.<sup>84</sup> Competent physicians, however, were in short supply throughout the south. The Chief Surgeon, Dr. Isaiah White, was described as “gentlemen of fair abilities and attainments;” however, he seemed to be the exception rather than the rule. Private McElroy, who volunteered in and around the hospital to escape the daily horrors of the stockade, would describe the majority of the physicians as a “class of illiterate and unlearning quacks” who sometimes resorted to “country” remedies of reading a verse from the Bible to stop bleeding, or curing “fits” via the killing of a black cat “in the dark of the moon.”<sup>85</sup> Admission to the hospital was regarded by patients as a “death warrant” with estimates of the number of patients who died during “treatment” as high as 76%. Diarrhea and dysentery were the primary causes of death, but scurvy, gangrene, smallpox, and typhoid fever also claimed thousands. Conditions within the hospital were unsanitary and deplorable. With a shortage of beds, patients slept on the ground, often covered in flies and maggots that infested the facility. Frequent amputations led to “hospital gangrene” and infections that the doctors simply did not know how to treat. In an August 6, 1864, letter to General Winder, Dr. White would stress that the unsanitary and deadly conditions at Andersonville were entirely “within the power of proper authorities to correct.” Dr. Joseph Jones, a surgeon and professor of medicine who

inspected the camp in August 1864, agreed that the conditions were correctable. While stressing that the care was due more to carelessness and inattentive attitudes, rather than malevolence, Dr. Jones railed on the Confederate government for their “absence of intelligent organization and division of labor . . . the almost total absence of system, government, and rigid but wholesome sanitary regulations.”<sup>86</sup> On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1864, Dr. Jones would witness patients at the hospital dying at the alarming rate of one man every eleven minutes. His report to the Surgeon General’s Office of the Confederacy would urge changes to sanitation, food quality, and medical practices if “not only for the sake of suffering humanity, but also on account of our own brave soldiers now captive in the hands of the Federal Government.”<sup>87</sup> Despite the recommendations and pleas for help, little would change at Andersonville.

In the Fall of 1864, Dr. White would be promoted to chief surgeon and inspector of all military hospitals in Georgia and Alabama, and Dr. R. Randolph Stevenson would take his place as the head physician at Andersonville. By December, Dr. Stevenson would be removed under suspicion of shady spending practices. A subsequent investigation would reveal that nearly \$100,000 was embezzled by Stevenson during his brief tenure. Regarded as “a poor medical man and no surgeon,” Stevenson’s “gross fraud” would go unpunished due to the demise of the Confederacy prior to the completion of an official report. His replacement, Dr. H.H. Clayton, would see a reduction in patients due to transfers, and a slight improvement in the quantity of food and medical supplies, resulting in lower death rates for the early months of 1865.<sup>88</sup> The damage, however, had been done not only in terms of the loss of lives, but also in destroying the morale and mental well-being of the prisoners who watched their comrades suffer and die on a daily basis.

With so much overt suffering occurring daily at Andersonville, our final effect of activities and amusements on prisoner morale seems almost like an inconsequential afterthought. And yet, even in the conditions that one prisoner would describe as “a human Dead Sea,” distractions from the day-to-day misery of the camp impacted the mental well-being of individual prisoners.<sup>89</sup> While many Yankees seemed resigned to their suffering and eventual demise, others would engage in games of chance with dice, cards, and “chuck-a-luck boards.” Private McElroy would fashion a chess set out of a “soft, white root in the swamp,” with pieces blackened with pitch pine soot. Using a scavenged plank for the board, the game would serve “until our release to distract our attention from much of the surrounding misery.”<sup>90</sup> Others would pass the time writing letters home, entering daily activities in their diaries, and tending to their less fortunate fellow inmates. Mail service was sporadic and expensive for prisoners who had to purchase stationary and stamps from their captors. All mail was censored for negative comments about the camp, or any other information that might be deemed inappropriate. Such screening was a common practice in Civil War POW camps, and thus while letters sent home by inmates are a valuable source for historians, they often do not contain accurate portrayals of the actual conditions within such camps.

With no chaplain or established place of worship, the practice of religion was usually personal, rather than an organized activity. However, some effort was made by inmates to hold prayer meetings and religious services. Held in random spots throughout the camp, attendance was low due not only to the inconsistency, but also because many were too sick or weak to join in. Catholic priests such as Father Peter Whelan, Father John Hamilton, and Father Henry Clavreul, from nearby communities made frequent visits to

the camp, leading “many Protestants and many unbelievers” to convert.<sup>91</sup> Father Clavreul, who would serve Andersonville for over a month before getting sick himself, kept detailed records of the number of men to which he administered sacraments and performed baptisms. From July 15<sup>th</sup> to August 19, 1864, Clavreul would bless 326 prisoners, and perform baptisms on fourteen new converts to the faith.<sup>92</sup> There are no records of men from any other denomination serving the camp, despite the South, and the United States, being a predominantly Protestant country during the mid-nineteenth century.

While these minimal activities certainly played their part in providing prisoners a distraction to pass the time, and at least temporarily improving ones mental well-being, they were in no way comparable to the amusements seen at other camps. There were no bands, markets, debate clubs, and libraries as seen at Elmira. There were no organized religious services and trading with locals as seen during the early period at Camp Groce. And there certainly were no baseball games, dances, visits from local Southern belles for poetry readings, and camp newspapers as was seen at the almost picturesque Camp Ford. Such activities expressed individuality, but also created a collective comradery among the prisoners that was sorely lacking at Andersonville. With little to no activities to build morale and distract from the realities of camp, some would quickly lose the will to live. As Private Lessel Long of the 13<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry would discover, “many stout men would come in her and, after looking at the horrible conditions of things, would sicken and die inside of ten or twelve days.”<sup>93</sup> At Andersonville, the primary activity for most inmates was day-to-day survival. For nearly 30% of those incarcerated, their efforts would be in vain.

As General Sherman's army marched through Georgia in the latter months of 1864, Confederate officials feared an uprising, or worse a rescue, of the inmates at Andersonville. On September 5, 1864, Samuel Cooper, Adjutant General and Inspector General of the Confederacy, ordered an evacuation of Andersonville. Thousands were moved to sites in Savannah, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina, where facilities were lacking and local officials were not prepared for the transfer. Near Millen, Georgia, the Confederacy was scrambling to complete a new prison, Camp Lawton, that would hold over 40,000 men. Opened in October of 1864, the 42 acre camp would eventually house approximately 10,000 prisoners transferred mostly from Andersonville, but would close after only six weeks when Sherman's troops neared the facility. During their short stay, however, at Camp Lawton, prisoners would comment on the improved conditions "we get double the amount of beef that we did at Camp Sumter, and of a great deal better quality," further evidence that the South was perhaps not as devoid of rations as it initially seems.<sup>94</sup> In Charleston, over 400 prisoners transferred from Andersonville "broke loose from the guards, plundered the citizens in the vicinity of the camp for food and clothing, and attempted to destroy the railroad . . . others headed for the woods in a quest to escape."<sup>95</sup> Once free of their captives, the POW's did what so many other soldiers had done throughout the war, resorted to self-care for survival. Soldiers from the South Carolina and Georgia Reserves, men considered too old or infirmed to fight, and boys too young for the front lines, were pressed into service to guard the prisoners at their new locations.

On November 21, 1864, as the Confederacy was in free fall, General Winder was appointed as Commissary General of all Confederate Prisons, creating a central authority to oversee the system, but clearly a tale of too little, too late. As new sites continued to be

threatened by the advancing Yankee armies, thousands of prisoners would be returned to Andersonville in April of 1865, even as Lee was preparing to surrender at Appomattox. For others, the trek to new facilities would be their last. Between October 5, 1864 and February 1, 1865, 3,479 of the 10,321 prisoners transferred from Georgia to Salisbury prison in North Carolina would die at their new home, creating a death rate of 33.7%, higher than what was experienced even at Andersonville.<sup>96</sup> In *The Yankee Plague* (2016), Lorien Foote argues that the Confederate prison system placed a burden on military operations, and was consequently intertwined with its downfall. She adds that the lack of “systematic analysis of how the process of capturing soldiers on the battlefield, transporting them behind the lines, and holding them in prisons near active military operations was connected to military logistics” has created “a gaping hole in the scholarly literature of the Civil War.”<sup>97</sup> In short, as went the prison system, so went the military and the Confederacy. By early 1865, nearly 3,000 Union prisoners had escaped from their makeshift camps and were on the loose in Georgia and South Carolina. A South Carolina newspaper, the *Edgefield Advertiser*, would lament in November of 1864 that the prisoners “seem to be everywhere . . . they actually cover the land like the locusts of Egypt.”<sup>98</sup>

At Andersonville, locals feared a confrontation with the Yankees in the region, “for the horrors of the stockade have so enraged them that they will have no mercy on this country, though they have brought it all on themselves.” Eliza Andrews, feared that Sherman’s army was so eager to avenge the atrocities at Andersonville that “they will spare neither man, woman nor child in all South-West Georgia.”<sup>99</sup> With the Confederate surrenders in April of 1865, the camp would cease operations and the last of the prisoners would be paroled on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. The stockade and surrounding buildings were torn down

over time, and the South endeavored to forget what had happened in this otherwise peaceful corner of Georgia. The North, however, would not let the memories fade. Union officials such as Secretary of War Edwin Stanton would remind Americans of “the enormity of the crime committed by the rebels towards our prisoners” via “a deliberate system of savage and barbarous treatment.”<sup>100</sup> Newspapers would continue to re-print the tales of horror and tragedy for a generation to come, including poems like that about Andersonville prisoner John Whipple which lamented:

In a loathsome fetid prison,  
No covering but the sky,  
Our long lost brother pined, weary months,  
And then laid him down to die.

Afar from the graves of his kindred.  
Where the Northern wildflowers grow,  
*His* grave has been made by stranger hands  
Where no trees will o’er it flow.<sup>101</sup>

While contemporaries and historians alike have debated who was to blame for the atrocities, what is certain is that the locals were well aware of what was happening inside Andersonville, even visiting to witness the horrors for themselves. Transfers of prisoners would lead to yet another group of eyewitnesses who may have felt sympathy, but otherwise turned a blind eye. Georgians such as Eliza Andrews would fain remorse, while maintaining their predetermined level of animosity, “they were half-naked, and such a poor, miserable, starved-looking set of wretches that we couldn’t help feeling sorry for them in spite of their wicked war against our country . . . some of the prisoners had the impudence to kiss their hands at us.”<sup>102</sup>

In the decades that followed the war, the site at Andersonville would go through many phases, with some holding it as a place of reverence, while others wished it could be



forgotten. In January of 1866, just nine months after the end of the Civil War, the area near the cemetery would become the site of a freedman community of ex-slaves where they “honored the meaning of the war, the prison, and the deaths that occurred there.”<sup>103</sup> In October of 1866, the old hospital building would be converted into a freedman’s school, the American Missionary Normal School. For the next several decades, Memorial Day events would be held annually at Andersonville, attended mostly by African Americans and a few Union veterans returning to the site of their suffering. The site, however, was largely ignored by federal officials and the white locals in Georgia. In 1893, in pursuit of increased tourism, the Women’s Relief Corps (WRC) purchased the site of the prison and took over its care. In March of 1910, the WRC would gift the site to the federal government, making Andersonville the first, and only, Confederate prison preserved and maintained by the U.S. government.<sup>104</sup> In 1970, nearly one hundred five years after the closing of the camp, the Andersonville burial site was finally designated as a national cemetery, merging the prison and the burial site into the Andersonville National Historical Site. With the first national military parks being established at Chickamauga, Gettysburg, Shiloh, et al, starting in 1895, the fact that it took another seventy five years to commemorate Andersonville is a testament to our desire to honor and celebrate the perils of battle, while at the same time trying to ignore the atrocities and sins of our POW systems. One speaks to glory, while the other speaks to our lack of humanity. In 1998, Andersonville became home to the National Prisoner of War Museum to honor POW’s from all American conflicts. Creating an “idealized interpretation of the experience of prisoners of war as a celebration of patriotism,” instead of addressing the often hard-to-stomach realities of how humans treat one another in captivity, the museum softens the

experience of Andersonville and makes it more palatable to the general public, which perhaps was the intent of the National Park Service.<sup>105</sup> Merging the events of multiple wars into one POW experience, the museum also ignores the idiosyncrasies of the Civil War that differentiate it from all other U.S. conflicts, and fails to highlight the individual experiences of those at Andersonville and its counterparts across the country. As Benjamin G. Cloyd comments in *Haunted by Atrocity*, today “tourists encounter an idealized rather than actual history . . . Civil War prisons now provoke mere curiosity instead of inspiring cause.”<sup>106</sup> The Andersonville National Cemetery, however, remains today a painful reminder of our past, and a lasting monument to inhumanity, with 13,714 graves of Union prisoners, and 921 marked as “unknown.”<sup>107</sup>

Traveling a short distance to the still tiny town of Andersonville, tourists today can also see a curious marble obelisk, donated in 1909 by the Georgia Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), to the memory of Captain Wirz. The UDC lamented that they had no monuments “to bear witness to the Truth . . . to the brave testimony of Wirtz and the men who died with him.”<sup>108</sup> Lost in the fevered pitch is the irony that in their desire to preserve the “truth,” they were unable to even spell the Andersonville commandant’s name correctly. Nonetheless, forever seeking justification for the sins of the South, the monument as it stands today states that its benefactors erected it to “rescue his name from the stigma attached to it by embittered prejudice.”<sup>109</sup> Father Henry Clavreul, a Catholic priest who attended to prisoners at Andersonville, would comment in later years about Wirz, “I think, that the poor man is no more worthy of a monument now than he was at the time deserving to be hanged . . . his name should be forgotten.”<sup>110</sup>

## Chapter V

### Comparison of All Four Camps

No matter the conditions, the reality is that each and every one of the sites used during the American Civil War were still prisoner of war camps that were just livable at best. Soldiers who may have seen incarceration as a reasonable alternative to fighting soon realized that lying on a sloping, open field at Fredericksburg with bullets whizzing over your head was preferable to starving to death, or slowly withering away due to scurvy and dysentery, at Andersonville. This represents a dramatic shift in the attitude towards surrender and/or capture from the start of the war. Pre-1863, soldiers on both sides were not averse to being taken prisoner since such an event usually led to either an immediate exchange, or a parole that allowed one to stay on the sidelines until a formal exchange could be carried out. As discussed in Chapter One, some soldiers even took advantage of the system to avoid a return to combat. In considering what it meant to be a POW in the Civil War, it is important to understand that nineteenth-century attitudes towards surrender did not necessarily place a stigma on the practice such as it might today. At the start of the war, the acceptance of surrender as a viable option “grew out of inherited notions that surrender helped to distinguish civilized warfare from barbarism” and allowed combatants “to recognize the humanity in their enemy.”<sup>1</sup> Major Robert Anderson would set the standard for surrender, and become a hero in the process, when he relinquished Fort Sumter in April of 1861. As David Silkenat explains in his book *Raising the White Flag* (2019), Anderson’s actions became the prototype for an honorable surrender by first fighting “valiantly until he concluded that both continuing to fight and retreating were untenable,”

and second, negotiating terms of the surrender “so as not to disgrace either himself or his soldiers.”<sup>2</sup> The reality of surrender, however, was not always an honorable endeavor. General Grant’s demand of unconditional surrender at Fort Donelson in February of 1862, and the massacre of surrendered African American troops by Confederate soldiers under the command of General Nathan Bedford Forrest at Fort Pillow in April of 1864, as well as other questionable surrenders throughout, raised the specter of whether or not capitulation was still virtuous. And yet, with the Dix-Hill Cartel still in place as late as Fall of 1863, soldiers preferred prison over the grave as “those captured in battle usually outnumbered those killed.” With the collapse of the exchange system, and the conflict entering a period of what historians have referred to as “hard war” by 1864, surrender became a less than favorable option, both for survival and for honor.<sup>3</sup> As the realities of war moved deeper into the South, Confederates “increasingly equated surrender with ruin and devastation.” Instead of surrendering “for a brief respite of quiet,” Rebels were encouraged to continue “fighting, struggling, dying for the cause of civilization, religion, and good morals.”<sup>4</sup> Despite these shifting attitudes of honor, dignity, survival, and the preference to die in combat fighting for one’s cause rather than wasting away in a prison far from home, over 673,000 soldiers would surrender during the Civil War, a figure nearly equal to the number of soldiers killed during the conflict.

Once the exchange system broke down in late 1863, and long term incarceration became the norm, soldiers’ attitudes toward imprisonment changed accordingly, especially after stories of the conditions at Andersonville, Elmira, Libby Prison, et al, became front page news. The end of the exchange cartel, combined with a shortage of adequate facilities in both the North and the South caused expected overcrowding, and worsened the overall

conditions of the camps. Despite the best efforts of a Colonel Allen at Camp Ford, or the efforts by the Commissary Department to secure adequate supplies at Elmira, sickness and death still occurred, at times on a scale that is unimaginable today. The already poor conditions could also be made worse by the deprivations of a Colonel Gillespie at Camp Groce, or the reckless indifference of a Confederate system from the top down at Andersonville. Notwithstanding their basic similarities, the camps were certainly different in size, conditions, management and, consequently, death rates. Nevertheless, the five factors discussed herein affected each camp in the same way, increasing or decreasing morale and the rate of survival, albeit to varying degrees.

When it comes to the factors affecting one's likelihood to survive, all things are assuredly not equal. While activities and amusements certainly played a role in improving morale and distracting prisoners from the reality of their situation, alone they could do little to prevent the suffering. Music, reading, crafting, and a game of baseball were of little consequence if one was too weak or too sick to participate, or was living in constant fear of being targeted by an apathetic guard who "would like nothing better than to shoot one of the scoundrels just for the fun of it."<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the role played by imprisoned officers also had a limited impact. While the organization and discipline by officers could improve conditions and increase the chance of survival, such actions had a diminished effect when the more dominant factors were not in the prisoners' favor. For example, officers could utilize the natural environment to their advantage by digging sinks to separate out clean drinking water like they did at Camp Ford. However, when the only source of water is polluted almost from the start, and accessible only by crossing a disease-ridden, maggot-filled swamp, any efforts by officers, if they had been present at Andersonville, to improve

the conditions were likely to fail. Despite their best efforts, officers had to watch their fellow soldiers suffer both physically and mentally. Colonel Duganne would dread seeing the emotional degradation of a prisoner, listening to “the feeble sighs of manhood lapsing into infant weakliness” as soldiers who were fearless in battle lie “here now as tremulous and fearful as a girl.”<sup>6</sup>

The local, non-natural environment is the third least, or the third most, significant factor, depending on one’s approach. Access to proper medical care and adequate facilities was crucial to a prisoner’s chances of survival. The well-maintained hospital at Camp Ford in the early months kept the death rate below 4.0%. In sharp contrast, the deplorable conditions and inadequate doctors at Andersonville resulted in the death of an estimated 76% of all inmates that had the misfortune to be admitted to the hospitals. The ability to supplement one’s diet and lifestyle via trade with the locals, had an obvious impact on a prisoner’s well-being. Such assistance and interaction could offset some of the deleterious effects of the natural environment, while also improving morale. We see the immediate and obvious impact of this factor when the prisoners were deprived of interaction with the locals at Camp Groce and Andersonville. Groce becomes the starkest example as the termination of trade in 1864 contributed to the dramatic increase in the death rate that was nearly five times what it had been in 1863 when trade was allowed. As with the previously mentioned factors, the effect of the local, non-natural environment could not by itself prevent sickness and death, but it was significant in alleviating the suffering.

The natural environment and the role of the camp commandants are the two most critical factors in determining the rate of survival, although it is arguable which one has the greatest impact. Access to a reliable source of clean drinking water, as well as wood, food,

and medicinal herbs via foraging, are the most essential elements of survival. However, such liberties can be easily taken away by a strict commander like Colonel Gillespie. Such men could have a direct impact on all of the previously discussed factors, effectively eliminating any advantages to survival that they may have been created. Commandants of a more caring nature, such as Major Colt and Lt. Colonel Moore at Elmira, would make efforts to improve the state of the natural environment by draining the nasty pond, and providing coal stoves to combat the chill. However, neither could control the most basic element of nature, the weather. A harsh New York winter and flooding spring rains would cause the most sickness and death of any contributing factor at Elmira.

By taking all of the factors into consideration, patterns emerge that show not only the significance of each factor, but also how the loss of a critical one can offset nearly all of the beneficial attributes of the others. Camp Ford was open the longest of any of the four camps discussed herein, being in operation for nearly two years from July 1863 to May 1865. For much of the life of the camp, all five factors were decidedly in the favor of the prisoners, resulting in a remarkably low death rate of 3.86% to 4.78%, depending on which set of shaky Confederate records one relies on. These numbers are even more astonishing when you take into account that 63.98% to 78.89% of all deaths occurred during the six month period of May to October 1864 when overcrowding at the prison took its toll on each of the five factors. The rise in population made resources scarce, eliminated outside trading and visits for safety concerns, and created sanitation issues with the water supply and the camp as a whole. Crowded shelters and streets impacted the time and space available for activities, commerce, and amusements to raise morale. Union officers, now grossly outnumbered, struggled to maintain control. If you were to eliminate this six

months of chaos and the additional 3,000 prisoners, and restore the beneficial effects of the five factors, the death rate drops to an unbelievable 1.6% to 3.4% for the remainder of the life of the camp.

Camp Groce is a tale of two camps, and must be broken up into its two periods of operation in 1863 and 1864. From June to December 1863, the prisoners benefited from the five factors and the death rate was a low 4.68%. However, when the camp reopened for operation from May to December 1864, the addition of Colonel Gillespie as commandant made all the difference. By cutting rations, restricting access to the outside world, prohibiting non-work related activities, and exhibiting what can be arguably labeled abject cruelty, Gillespie eliminated nearly all advantages received from the other four factors. As a result, the death rate skyrocketed to 29.6% for the period, making it higher than Andersonville. With all else remaining mostly unchanged, Camp Groce becomes the prime example of how one factor (in this case, the consequences of the camp commander) can have a deleterious effect, and even eliminate, the others. Without Gillespie, the death rate would have likely increased a few percentages due to the yellow fever epidemic of 1864, but not to the level experienced under his arguably criminal indifference.

The prison at Elmira has the unfortunate fate of being linked to Andersonville due to its comparable death rates. Made shortly after the war by Southern apologists attempting to excuse the horrors of the Georgia camp, this connection between the two is undeserving. While it is true that Elmira had an overall death rate of 24.4% during its tenure, the prisoners, unlike at Andersonville, benefited from the five factors. Many, however, were sent to the grave by one of them. The natural environment at Elmira had a greater impact on survival than any of the other four factors, and during two fateful periods, negatively



offset the others. The camp was open for a little over a year from July 1864 to July 1865, and yet the majority of deaths occurred during two natural events: 1.) the harsh New York winter of November 1864 to February 1865 resulting in 40.08% of all deaths that occurred, and 2.) the spring flood of March 1865 resulting in 16.0% of all deaths. If you were to eliminate these two weather events, based on the average number of deaths per month for the other months of operation, the death rate for Elmira would drop to 16.7%.<sup>7</sup> This number would still be higher than what is seen at many camps, due to the effect of Foster's Pond, but considerably lower than Andersonville. What truly separates Elmira from Andersonville, however, is that in the Union camp there was a concerted effort to improve the prisoners' chance of survival. These efforts are rightly subject to criticism, and at times fell far short of what we might consider adequate for the time. Nevertheless, they are a definitive improvement over the bureaucratic incompetence, heartless indifference, and open cruelty exhibited in Georgia.

Of the four camps discussed, Andersonville was the only one that had previously not been a site for the host nation's soldiers. Ill-conceived, out of the way, and still under construction when the first Yankees arrived, the prison had the potential for disaster from its inception. Unlike the other three camps where you can pinpoint one or two distinctive factors to explain the high death rates, Andersonville was a continuous site of suffering and mortality, making it difficult to identify a specific cause. Instead, all five factors contributed to the high death rate of 28.8%, and no improvement in one factor alone would seem to have made much of a difference. With an oppressive commandant, no Union officers to promote order, a lack of activities, poor rations, lack of housing, restrictions that kept the inmates from improving their condition, and a toxic natural environment,

Andersonville was a failure almost in its entirety. While the camp was open from February 1864 to April 1865, the majority of the deaths occurred between July and November 1864 when the prison population peaked at over 30,000. To put that number in perspective, the 27 acre camp at Andersonville (of which 3.5 acres was occupied by the uninhabitable swamp) had a population greater than the cities of Mobile, Alabama, Syracuse, New York, Memphis, Tennessee, and Savannah, Georgia, per the 1860 census. If the nation's largest city at the time, New York, had experienced an epidemic or disaster that resulted in the same death rate as seen at Andersonville, over 234,000 people would have perished.<sup>8</sup> Despite the best efforts of apologists, it is difficult today to justify the conditions or the actions that took place at the camp in Southwest Georgia, located far away from the view of those who were the most responsible for its operation. Considering the negative impact of each of the five factors, it is surprising that the death rate was not actually higher than its appalling mark of nearly 30%. As Sergeant David Kennedy of the 9<sup>th</sup> Ohio Cavalry would comment in his diary kept while at Andersonville, "what a degraded nation to hold prisoners and not provide for their wants."<sup>9</sup>

In summary, while each camp was unique in its size and operation, those who had the misfortune to be imprisoned there were, for better or worse, affected by the five factors throughout their incarceration. Even under the best of conditions, death will occur; however, a comparison of these camps shows that a little compassion and sense of humanity for your fellow man could go a long way to improving morale and the opportunity for survival. Since time and brevity of this paper has limited the analysis to just these four camps, my application of the five factors begs for a more extensive study and comparison to the other prisoner of war camps located throughout the North and the

South. Would the results be the same for a prison located indoors in an urban setting, such as Libby Prison in Richmond, or an outdoor camp located in a metropolitan area such as Camp Douglas in Chicago? Would the same pattern regarding the five factors emerge in a prison that was limited to civilians, spies, and political prisoners, such as Castle Thunder in Richmond? Perhaps more importantly, how would prison operations and the rate of survival been affected if both sides had continued to engage in the prisoner exchange system throughout the war? If the Dix-Hill Cartel had not broken down, and soldiers continued to be exchanged and paroled under the existing system, arguably the need for such large prison facilities as were seen post-1863 would never have materialized. Short-term incarceration while awaiting exchange would still have been affected by the five factors discussed herein, but not on the same scale as was seen in the large, long-term facilities. The effects of the environment, both natural and non-natural, could certainly still affect one's immediate health. The presence of officers and activities to maintain morale would still be important, but in a lessened capacity due to the anticipated quick release. A harsh commandant in charge of prisoners would be the factor most likely to cause immediate harm in a short-term, although allowing such individuals to continue to operate would have potentially endangered the exchange process, and thus likely discouraged by their respective governments. The United States would learn from mistakes made in the Civil War, and adapt accordingly for future conflicts; however, the dark side of human nature still seems to rear its head in times of war as we lose our compassion for our fellow man, seeing them only as the enemy. For those who starved at Andersonville, marched to their deaths at Camp Groce, or drowned in the Spring flood at Elmira, the lessons came too

late, and today are reminders that we should not lose our civility, or corrupt humanity, just to win over our opponent.

## Chapter VI

### Capt. Wirz versus Col. Gillespie

While Captain Henry Wirz of Andersonville is a name forever tied to the sufferings of prisoners of war during America's internal conflict, Colonel Clayton Gillespie of Camp Groce is a name known to few historians, and even fewer members of the general public. Wirz lives in infamy, while Gillespie is almost lost to history. One's life was snuffed out at the end of a hangman's noose as punishment for his war crimes, while the other slipped back into society and lived a full and active life. And yet, the two men both oversaw camps that, while certainly different in size, became sites of immense cruelty and suffering. While the culpability of Wirz has been debated for well over a century, a discussion by historians of the war crimes of Gillespie, and a comparison between the two, is long overdue.

Much of Wirz's reputation centered around his seemingly endless indifference for the suffering he witnessed every day. When he did have an idea for changes that would have benefited the prisoners, he did not push them through to fruition, nor presented them as anything more than a passing thought. Upon his arrival at Andersonville, Wirz complained that the bread being issued was "almost unfit for use and (is) increasing dysentery," but made no changes to the quality. He proposed building two dams to create separate drinking and latrine facilities along the creek; however, a lack of tools and indifference in the plan by his superiors derailed the project before completion. There is no indication that Wirz ever proposed this, or any other plan to improve the condition of the creek thereafter.<sup>1</sup> He would complain of the guards "carelessness . . . inefficiency . . . worthlessness" and comment that each was "on the increase day by day." Nevertheless,

he made little to no effort to promote discipline, or stop the cruel dead line shootings that occurred on a regular basis.<sup>2</sup> Despite the obvious deplorable conditions at the camp, Confederate officials would praise Wirz for his “good sense and energy he has displayed in the management of the prison” and commend him for being “the only man who seems to fully comprehend his important duties.”<sup>3</sup> After the war, regretful, but perhaps still not remorseful Southerners would attempt to redeem Wirz. Eliza Andrews would write, “I do know that had he been an angel from heaven, he could not have changed the pitiful tale of suffering from privation and hunger unless he had possessed the power to repeat the miracle of the loaves and fishes.”<sup>4</sup>

To prisoners like the well-written Private McElroy, Wirz was a foul, bitter, servile, and temperamental man who “was much more likely to kill without warning, than to warn without killing.” However, McElroy also regarded Wirz as one who was not intentionally cruel, but rather “simply contemptible” whose cruelty came from “the ebullitions of a peevish, snarling little temper, united to a mind incapable of conceiving the results of his acts, or understanding the pain he was inflicting.”<sup>5</sup> To those who suffered in the camp, the guilt lay not just with the Swiss commandant, but with the entire Confederacy who failed in their duties and lost their humanity. Wirz was “a petty little Captain made to expiate the crimes of Generals, Cabinet Officers, and a President . . . how absurd . . . upon the narrow shoulders of this pitiful scapegoat was packed the entire sin of Jefferson Davis and his crew.”<sup>6</sup>

To historians such as Ovid L. Futch, Wirz was unqualified for the task and simply a poor choice for the position he held. The much publicized atrocities in Northern newspapers, and a general desire for revenge, combined with the fact that General Winder

by war's end was beyond punishment, made Wirz "the cynosure of northern vindictiveness" and resulted in his "farcical trial."<sup>7</sup> Hesselstine believed that Wirz was doomed by Northern propaganda against the failings of the Confederacy and their "cruelty and suffering unparalleled in the annals of warfare." Described as "the inhuman wretch," "the barbarian," and "the most bloodthirsty monster which this or any other age has produced," by the Northern media, the outcome of Wirz's trial may have been a foregone conclusion.<sup>8</sup> His conviction on nearly a dozen charges, including four murders that occurred in August 1864 when he was away from the camp on sick leave, and his subsequent execution, satisfied the Northern thirst for retribution. While the victorious Union did hold over 1,000 military tribunals for individuals charged with a variety of war crimes, Wirz was the only official convicted and executed for crimes associated with a prison camp. Corporal punishment of ex-Confederates was rare following the war, and there are only a handful of other known executions, including Champ Ferguson, a guerrilla fighter convicted of murdering over fifty captured Union soldiers, and Robert Kennedy, an escaped POW convicted of starting fires at various sites in New York City. The North was ready to move on as concerns of what happened in the war were "displaced by the rapidly recurring political movements" of the day.<sup>9</sup>

Wirz was certainly made a scapegoat for the failings of the Confederacy; however, this does not mean that he was wrongly convicted or undeserving of the fate he received. While he may not have deliberately set out to inflict harm, his gross indifference to the suffering, combined with his foul temper and violent outbursts, certainly made a case for his willful negligence. What is troubling in this tale is that no one else was held accountable for their actions. Perhaps this was simply due to a nation desiring to put the past behind

them. The notoriety and sheer size of Andersonville made it the poster child of Southern prisoner of war camps gone wrong, so the punishment of its commander may have been enough to satiate Northern anger. Unlike his counterparts at other Confederate camps, Wirz was a foreigner, an outsider, who did not talk or act like most Americans. While it is a matter of conjecture, one has to wonder if Wirz was also damned by a play of nineteenth-century bigotry that would not have hindered Gillespie or Dick Turner from Libby Prison. Prisoners and trial participants mocked his strong accent and broken English, and described him as resembling a rodent with dirty features and a repulsive appearance. Hesselstine argues that such biased impressions may have contributed to a wartime psychosis that prejudged Wirz and relegated him to his eventual fate.<sup>10</sup>

For Colonel Clayton Gillespie, a stronger case for punishment can be made due to his seemingly overt cruelty; however, the evidence today is more difficult to track down. Due to the relative obscurity of Camp Groce, there is almost no historical writing on the actions of the Methodist minister during his tenure as commandant. His biography on the Texas State Historical Association website contains inaccuracies and fails to even mention his position at Camp Groce, instead reducing that period of his life to “his regiment was ordered to return to Texas, where he stayed near Hempstead until February 1865.”<sup>11</sup> What we do have, however, is the personal recollections of those who were imprisoned under Gillespie, as well as Congressional testimony by Paymaster John Read. These accounts paint a picture of a man who seemed driven by revenge as he showed not only a blatant indifference to the suffering, but also went out of his way to exasperate the already harsh conditions. By restricting access to all of the beneficial attributes of the factors discussed herein, combined with forced marches during a yellow fever epidemic that saw the horses



sheltered but the men left out in the elements, Gillespie was personally responsible for a death rate six times higher than that of his predecessor. What could make a man of religious conviction, who wrote love poetry to his dying wife, exhibit such blatant disregard for humanity?

Prior to coming to Camp Groce, Colonel Gillespie had not only been briefly a prisoner of war himself, but also endured the death of his brother, Fleming Laurie Gillespie, at the Battle of Champion Hill (Baker's Creek) in May of 1863.<sup>12</sup> These two events undoubtedly had an impact on Gillespie's regard for the Yankees, for as we have previously noted, he avowed retaliation to avenge his fellow rebels' mistreatment at the hands of the North. Did Gillespie always have a bitter disposition that was prone to acts of revenge and cruelty, or was he, like so many others, jaded by the realities of war? Since few accounts of his actions prior to the war are available, we are left to piece together his war psyche from what little evidence can be found. Showing a gentle and remorseful spirit upon the death of his first wife in 1853, Gillespie would write a loving poem, to "the lady of the peach like cheeks . . . our mutual love will bring relief . . . the gentle moon with pensive light shine full upon the slumbering sea; all things repose in nursing night, but I am sad: I am not with thee . . . O loveliest, dearest Caroline, nought else on earth so dear to me, I'd sooner now this life resign, than claim love unblest by thee."<sup>13</sup> While imprisoned at Camp Chase, Gillespie delivered a stirring sermon to his fellow inmates in March of 1863, in which he compared them to the persecuted Hebrews of the Old Testament and insisted that if the "South should ultimately be forced to humble her honor before the hated power opposed to her, she will be ruined forever." Perhaps relieving himself of any blame for

actions yet to come, Gillespie added “the guilt of the immense bloodshed, and woe, and waste of this war, rests upon other heads than ours.”<sup>14</sup>

As previously noted, after the war, Gillespie would be described by his contemporaries as a brute, scoundrel, and less than a gentlemen. Regardless of the image that we can piece together from the minimal evidence, what is known is that during his tenure at Camp Groce, Gillespie acted with deliberate intent to worsen the conditions, lower morale, and increase the level of suffering. These actions were taken not out of necessity for safety, or due to the lack of supplies and support from his superiors, but rather through the overt malice of a commander either bent on revenge, or who simply did not have the capacity for compassion for his fellow Americans from the North. With such damning testimonials from prisoners and Confederate guards, how did Gillespie escape the same fate as Wirz? While his actions may have been more deserving of corporal punishment, three factors helped Gillespie escape without recourse. First, the size, scope, and relative obscurity of Camp Groce did not make it a regular topic in Northern newspapers, nor a target for retribution after the war. While Andersonville is known today by those with even a passing interest in U.S. history, Camp Groce is mostly forgotten, and rarely even appears on the lists of Civil War prisoner of war camps. If the Confederacy had chosen Camp Groce as a primary location for prisoners, and had allowed the population to swell to over 20,000, would we today be referring to the little camp in Hempstead as the “Andersonville of the West,” and would Gillespie have faced a more appropriate fate? Due to its location so far to the west, such an increase, however, was never likely. Second, as was have seen with other larger, more infamous, Confederate camps, after the commandant of Andersonville answered for his actions, the North’s thirst for revenge was satiated as

most in the government and the populace were eager to move on. Finally, and perhaps the most critical factor, the atrocities committed at Camp Groce during the tenure of Gillespie were not witnessed by third parties. With the camp's closure and parole of all prisoners by March 1865, there was no site of suffering prisoners for Union troops to discover. There were no photographs to be taken and distributed throughout the north of emaciated prisoners that more resembled twentieth-century Holocaust victims than Civil War soldiers. By war's end, Captain Wirz could still be found at his post at Andersonville. Colonel Gillespie would be in West Texas, far from the action, and far from the site of his crimes.

## Chapter VII

### EPILOGUE

Despite the described differences between Camp Groce, Camp Ford, Elmira, and Andersonville, one cannot overlook the fact that they were all places of involuntary confinement that left their marks on their unfortunate inhabitants. The camps also, however, left their marks on the nearby communities, as well as the natural environment surrounding them. As with all places directly touched by the tragedy of the American Civil War, the people and the land would take years to heal, with many individuals never fully returning to the attitudes, compassion, and confidence of their pre-war sensibilities. Kate Stone, writing in 1864 with almost a full year of hostilities yet to come, would regrettably say “people do not mourn their dead as they used to . . . everyone seems to live only in the present – just from day to day – otherwise I fancy many would go crazy.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout the North and the South, prisoners of war would return home, many with physical impairments that would affect, and often shorten, their lives; perhaps even more would return with the unseen emotional scars that would never allow them to leave their experiences in the past. Thousands of veterans would pen memoirs, or publish their wartime diaries, as a way to not only bring closure to their experiences, but also for profit and pensions. Such recollections, while a valuable resource to historians today, must be read with an understanding that many were written to sensationalize the experiences for the paying customer, or to further a postwar ideology. In the South, the Lost Cause narrative would create “a deflective memory” that “blamed the Union government and war policies for the suffering,” while ignoring their own failings and “flawed treatment of prisoners.” Northern

condemnation of places like Andersonville would fuel Southern apologists to justify the honor of the Confederate war effort and commemorate the sacrifices made by Southern prisoners at the hand of the Yankees, while ignoring almost all culpability.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, clinging to the Lost Cause also hindered Southern acceptance of their failings on the subject of racial equality as well. Cloyd argues that “the refusal to admit any responsibility for racial atrocities indicated the southern determination to remember the Civil War as a failed revolution to protect white southern rights instead of a successful revolution to recognize African American citizenship.”<sup>3</sup>

The severity of those experiences, and whether or not the prisoner survived to come home at all, were affected by the five factors discussed herein. One can only imagine how much better life would have been at Camp Groce if they had had a reliable source of clean water, or a compassionate commander throughout. Despite having one of the lowest overall death rates of any camp during the war, it is easy to justify that rate at Camp Ford being even lower if not for the terrible overcrowding that destroyed the “idyllic village” in 1864. The historiography of Civil War POW camps has taken on a variety of forms since the publication of Hesselstine’s book in 1930, and yet few works have attempted to look for commonality from one prison to another. This paper has been an attempt to synthesis the various approaches, bridging the gap between micro and macro monographs, analyzing governmental and public policy while not ignoring environment, personal experiences and individual commitments to survival. By doing so, it is my hope that this work helps create a framework to objectively study the camp conditions in order to find patterns related to survival, instead of just summarily laying blame or making excuses. Using the five factors to create an understanding of the prison system that goes beyond the oversimplified

discussions of shortages, sanitation, overcrowding, and bureaucratic failings, historians should continue to examine individual camps, and the personal experiences of the prisoners, but with an understanding that certain factors, such as environment and camp command, are applicable across the entire POW system.

This micro-macro hybrid is the primary approach of this paper, and the recommended usage of the five factors herein. However, one could also utilize the factors on a focused micro scale. To continue advancing Civil War POW historiography, it is also important for us to begin to understand why certain prisoners survived, while others perished in short order. It is horrifying today to realize that almost 30% of the prisoners at Andersonville died, and yet conversely, that also means that nearly 70% survived their ordeal. This cannot be explained by falling back on the safe path of blaming poor conditions and harsh treatment, since all inmates went through relatively the same experiences. The five factors can be used to help researchers separate one prisoner from another, and to analyze why some prisoners had improved morale, practiced better hygiene, or had less exposure to the detrimental aspects of the environment. Admittedly, characteristics such as personal determination, stronger genetic make-up, and just dumb luck, are difficult, if not impossible, to quantify, so a complete picture of why one prisoner survived and another did not is likely beyond our research capabilities. However, future historians could still use the five factors herein on an almost super micro level to ascertain patterns of survival within a certain regiment, or within a specific group based on geographic, ethnic, or socio-economic conditions. Such small scale analysis would be a fascinating, but likely daunting, project requiring examination of the circumstances surrounding each death of a respective group at one particular camp, and then determining

if the patterns discovered ring true in studies of subsequent groups and/or subsequent camps.

After the Union army destroyed what was left of Camp Ford in July of 1865, the site sat largely forgotten, perhaps intentionally, by the locals for nearly one hundred years. Smith County would take ownership of the majority of the land in the early half of the twentieth century, but for public use, not historical remembrance. In the late 1920's, State Highway 271 would be constructed across the Northwest corner of the camp, forever scarring the original footprint of the stockade. For the next several decades, the land remained in private and public hands, seeing the construction of a roadside picnic area in the 1950's near the site of the old spring. The location of the largest Confederate POW camp west of the Mississippi would remain in obscurity until the publication of *Camp Ford CSA: The Story of Union Prisoners in Texas*, by F. Lee Lawrence and Dr. Robert Glover in 1964. Coinciding with Civil War centennial remembrances, the book briefly renewed local interest in the camp; however, the attention quickly faded in the Vietnam era as Americans did not want to be reminded of the wartime suffering of our past. In 1989, Dr. Glover and local attorney, Randal B. Gilbert, would spark new interest in Camp Ford with an extensive essay published in the *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas*. Fresh on its heels, the Camp Ford Historical Association was formed in the early 1990's to raise funds to purchase portions of the site. Camp Ford, today, is a place of quiet reflection. It is a well-maintained historical site, complete with a walking trail, interpretive markers, and recreated "shebangs." Numerous local articles have been written on the camp, and its memories are actively kept alive by the Smith County Historical Society, as well as by local citizens with a keen interest. In 1997, an archeology team from Texas A&M

University explored the site and located original wall trenches, drainage ditches, latrines, house floors, refuse pits, and even all four sides of the original stockade. Today the camp sits at the intersection of State Highway 271 and NE Loop 323, on the northeast side of Tyler. A gas station and convenience store sits across Highway 271 from the camp on the site of the prison hospital. The location of what is left of the original camp cemetery has been obscured and is occupied today by private residences. “Living history” events are held annually at the site by the Tyler Sons of Confederate Veterans.

Camp Groce, in almost expected contrast, is today a site nearly forgotten. Owned almost in its entirety by private entities, the site is comprised of open fields, wooded terrain, and a few manmade structures just south of State Highway 290, and west of Farm to Market Road 359, on the east side of Hempstead. The state historical marker acknowledging “Clear Creek Confederate War Camps” is in the wrong spot, located almost a mile away from the site of Camp Groce itself. In recent years, efforts by Danial Lisarelli and other local enthusiasts, have led to the finding of the final resting places of many of the prisoners, and a few guards, who died either in the camp, or at one of the hospitals in Hempstead. The numbers tell us, however, that several other graves remain undiscovered. In 2019, the Waller County Historical Society finally placed an historical marker (created in 2017) at the site of the discovered Camp Groce Cemetery on the east side of FM 359. While these actions are commendable, the actual site of the Camp Groce stockade remains unmarked and draws little interest, other than the occasional digging by local artifact hunters. Commercial development along Highway 290 threatens the footprint of the camp, and continues today largely unabated by any concerns for historical preservation. During the construction of the FM 359 bypass in 1982, bodies believed to be prisoners of Camp Groce



were discovered, and then unceremoniously reburied in the median between the new roadways. The construction of a Sonic restaurant in recent years just north of Hwy 290 revealed numerous artifacts, including one hole that contained over two hundred Civil War era musket balls. All items found remain in the possession of private collectors.<sup>4</sup> According to the Waller County Historical Society, there are currently no plans to acquire or preserve the actual camp site.

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3. Charles W. Sanders, *While in the Hands of the Enemy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 5.
4. Evan A. Kutzler, et al, *Crossing the Deadlines* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2018), 17.
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6. Evan A. Kutzler, *Living by Inches* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 5, 8.
7. Joan E. Cashin, *War Stuff* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 4.
8. Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 60.
9. Sanders, 5.
10. Cloyd, 182.
11. Cloyd, 6-9.
12. Kutzler, et al, *Crossing the Deadlines*, 109.
13. John K. Derden, *The Story of Camp Lawton* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2012), 20.
14. Cloyd, 12.

15. Kutzler, *Living By Inches*, 47.

16. Dora L. Costa and Matthew E. Kahn, "Surviving Andersonville: The Benefits of Social Networks in POW Camps," *The American Economic Review* 97, no. 4 (September 2007): 1468.

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1. Danial Francis Lisarelli, *The Last Prison: The Untold Story of Camp Groce CSA* (Boca Raton: Universal Publishers, 1999), 5-6.

2. Lisarelli, 77.

3. Lisarelli, 8.

4. Brad Clampitt, "Camp Groce, Texas: A Confederate Prison," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 104, no. 3 (January 2001): 365.

5. J.H. Duganne, *Camps and Prisons. Twenty Months in the Department of the Gulf* (New York: J.P. Robens, 1865), 243.

6. Lisarelli, 17.

7. Lisarelli, 41.

8. John Read, *The Testimony of John Read, Report of the Treatment of Prisoners of War by Rebel Authorities During the War of the Rebellion* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1869), 927.

9. Charles C. Nott, *Sketches in Prison Camp* (New York: John J. Reed, 1865), 113-115.

10. Lisarelli, 54.

11. Read, 928.

12. Lisarelli, 91.

13. Bureau of Equipment and Personnel, *Report of Acting Ensign Franklin J. Latham* (National Archives, Washington, D.C., 1865).
14. Lisarelli, 109.
15. Lisarelli, 116-117.
16. David Stieghan, "The Pine Springs Training Camps: Confederate Activities at the Camp Ford Site Before the Union Prisoner of War Camp was Established, 1861-1863," *East Texas Historical Association* 42, no. 2 (October, 2004): 38, 41.
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21. Kate Stone, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 257-258.
22. John W. Greene, *Camp Ford Prison, And How I Escaped* (Toledo, Ohio: Barkdull Printing House, 1893), 29.
23. Duganne, 329.
24. Amy L. Klemm, "Wigwam Metropolis: Camp Ford, Texas," *East Texas Historical Association* 34, no. 2 (October 1996): 27.
25. Duganne, 408.

26. Stone, 279.
27. Nott, 199-200.
28. Duganne, 415.
29. Stone, 290.
30. Arthur E. Gilligan, unpublished personal diary, May 15, 1865.
31. Dr. Robert W. Glover and Randal B. Gilbert, "Camp Ford, Tyler, Texas – The Largest Confederate Prison Camp West of the Mississippi River," *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas* 28, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 33-34.
32. Gilligan, May 21, 1865.
33. Duganne, 407.
34. Captain S.A. Swiggett, *The Bright Side of Prison Life* (Baltimore: Fleet, McGinley & Co., 1897), 218.
35. Lisarelli, 214-215.
36. Glover and Gilbert, 25; F. Lee Lawrence, "Camp Ford," <http://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qcc15> (April 8, 2018).

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1. Meier, 13.
2. Lisa M. Brady, "From Battlefield to Fertile Ground: The Department of Civil War Environmental History," *Civil War History* 58, no. 3 (September 2012): 308.
3. Read, 927.
4. Duganne, 336.
5. Duganne, 336-337.

6. Aaron T. Sutton, *Prisoner of the Rebels in Texas* (Decatur, Indiana: Americana Book, 1978), 48.
7. Nott, 121.
8. "The Prisoner of War in Texas," *Beadle's Monthly* 1, no. 1 (January 1866): 42.
9. Duganne, 382.
10. Duganne, 376.
11. Howard O. Pollan and Randal B. Gilbert, "The Camp Ford Diary of Captain William Fortunatus McKinney," *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas* 25, no. 1 (Summer 1986): 18.
12. Duganne, 383.
13. Lisarelli, 110.
14. Brady, 313.
15. Duganne, 256.
16. Bureau of Equipment and Personnel, *Letter from Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Frederick Crocker to Commodore H.H. Bell* (National Archives, Washington, D.C., April 21, 1865).
17. Duganne, 285.
18. Nott, 102.
19. Duganne, 290-294.
20. Nott, 113-114.
21. Duganne, 269; Lisarelli, 22.
22. Duganne, 311.
23. Read, 927.

24. Read, 928.
25. Stone, 239.
26. Elbert Williams, unpublished letter dated October 25, 1863.
27. Nott, 153-169.
28. Michael P. Gray, *The Business of Captivity: Elmira and its Civil War Prison* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2001), 79.
29. Duganne, 403.
30. Stone, 283. For those unfamiliar with the border war between Kansas and Missouri, the term “Jayhawker,” as used in this particular context, described anti-slavery, border ruffians from Kansas who opposed the pro-slavery guerillas from Missouri in the 1850’s. Meant initially as a derogatory term, over time the moniker would come to represent anyone from the state of Kansas, and during the Civil War, almost any anti-slavery Yankee from the Midwest. The name would eventually be adopted by the University of Kansas as their mascot in the late 1800’s.
31. Klemm, 33-34.
32. Duganne, 389, 410.
33. Riley Tunnel, interview with Courier Times Telegraph (no date).
34. Matt Fraley, unpublished letter dated November 8, 1863.
35. Nott, 197.
36. Duganne, 411. After the war, Moore would become editor of the *New Orleans Picayune*, write poetry and short stories for various magazines, and publish almost a dozen novels.
37. David Thomas Phanes, unpublished letter dated August 18, 1863.

38. Duganne, 413.
39. Costa and Kahn, 1475, 1482.
40. R.H. Cushing, *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, (December 9, 1863): 2.
41. Read, 927.
42. Lisarelli, 73-81.
43. Read, 928.
44. Lisarelli, 113.
45. Editorial, *Houston Daily Union*, (June 16, 1869):1.
46. N.A. Taylor, *Galveston Flake's Daily Bulletin*, (April 15, 1870): 1; Editorial, *New Orleans Weekly Picayune*, (March 5, 1870): 1.
47. Duganne, 409.
48. Vicki Betts, "R.T.P. Allen: The Texas Years, 1857-1865," <http://scholarworks.uttyler.edu/pres-pubs/47/> (April 16, 2018).
49. Nott, 173.
50. Duganne, 409.
51. Joseph B. Leake, personal account dated March 3, 1886.
52. Nott, 172.
53. Thomas W. Cutrer, "Robert Thomas Pritchard Allen," <http://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fal58> (April 16, 2018).
54. W.W. Heartsill, *Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army* (Jackson, Tennessee: McCowat-Mercer Press, 1954), 205, 209.
55. Duganne, 385.
56. Calvin Hutchinson, unpublished letter dated March 18, 1865.



57. Kutzler, et al, *Crossing the Deadlines*, 84, 95.
58. Pollan and Gilbert, 19-21.
59. Mary Jayne Walsh, "Thomas Scott Anderson," <http://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fan12> (October 30, 2019).
60. Costa and Kahn, 1480.
61. Nott, 195-196.
62. Duganne, 271.
63. Sutton, 126-127.
64. Nott, 150.
65. Duganne, 333.
66. Charles Edward Stearns, unpublished letter dated August 18, 1863.
67. John B. Beach, unpublished personal accounts.
68. Glover and Gilbert, 24.
69. Nott, 99.
70. Duganne, 398.
71. Duganne, 347-348.
72. Gilligan, March 30, 1865 and April 22, 1865.
73. John Kennedy, unpublished personal diary, April 15, 1865.
74. Duganne, 361.
75. Sutton, 16.
76. William H. May, *The Old Flag: First Publication by Union Prisoners at Camp Ford, Tyler, Texas* (New York: William H. May and J.P. Robens, 1867).
77. Glover and Gilbert, 23.

78. Swiggett, 52.

79. Swiggett, 61-62.

#### Chapter IV

1. Gray, 19-21 (introduction).

2. Kutzler, *Living by Inches*, 48.

3. Gray, 153.

4. Gray, 11-13, 65.

5. Gray, 76.

6. Kutzler, *Living By Inches*, 125.

7. Gray, 78-79.

8. Gray, 86.

9. Gray, 107. The library would contain hundreds of writings volunteered by local groups, and included religious texts, magazines, children's stories, Union propaganda, and law books.

10. Anthony M. Keiley, *In Vinculis: or, The Prisoner of War* (Petersburg, Virginia: Daily Index Office, 1866), 173.

11. Gray, 81.

12. Gray, 19.

13. Gray, 94-95.

14. Gray, 38.

15. Gray, 30-31.

16. Gray, 40-41.

17. Gray, 103-104.

18. Gray, 77-78.
19. Gray, 23, 26.
20. Kutzler, et al, *Crossing the Deadlines*, 28-29.
21. Keiley, 157-159. Keiley was a member of the Virginia legislature until 1863, and served as the mayor of Richmond from 1871 to 1876. He would in the later years of his life become the Chief Justice of the International Court of Appeals in Cairo, Egypt. In 1905, while visiting Paris, Keiley would be run over and killed by a horse and cart.
22. Gray, 50.
23. Gray, 73.
24. Gray, 26-27.
25. Gray, 50-51.
26. Gray, 54.
27. Gray, 61.
28. Gray, 55.
29. Gray, 62-64.
30. Gray, 153.
31. Gray, 142-144.
32. Gray, 27.
33. Gray, 48.
34. Kutzler, et al, *Crossing the Deadlines*, 8.
35. Gray, 57.
36. Gray, 154.
37. Gray, 147.

38. Gray, 151.
39. "Re-print from the Army and Navy Journal," *The Daily True Delta* (August 13, 1864): 2.
40. Kutzler, et al, *Crossing the Deadlines*, 101.
41. Ovid L. Futch, *History of Andersonville Prison* (1968; repr., Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2011), 4.
42. Futch, 18
43. Eliza Frances Andrews, *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl, 1864-1865* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1908), 40.
44. Cleo Tilford, personal interview with the author regarding his grandfather, Temolian Tilford, Lamoni, Iowa, Fall 1988.
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46. Arch Fredric Blakey, "Henry Wirz," [www.anb.org/view/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-0401167;jsessionid=889D4DF8B64CB42788AAE00FAB5928B](http://www.anb.org/view/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-0401167;jsessionid=889D4DF8B64CB42788AAE00FAB5928B) (February 14, 2020).
47. John McElroy, *Andersonville, A Story of Rebel Military Prisons* (1879; repr., San Bernardino: First Rate Publishers, 2019), Chapter XIX. Note: the publication is divided by chapters as written by McElroy, but does not contain page numbers. McElroy's account of his time at Andersonville was one of the most widely read post-Civil War memoirs, selling over 600,000 copies after its initial publication in 1879. See Cloyd, 59.
48. Editorial, *Hartford Daily Courant* (August 23, 1865): 2.
49. Kutzler, *Living By Inches*, 57.

50. McElroy, Chapter LIV.
51. U.S. Congress, *A Summary of the Trial of Henry Wirz*, 40th Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, House Report No. 23 (1866), 805-808.
52. Cloyd, 32-34.
53. McElroy, Chapter LXXIV.
54. Futch, 119-120.
55. Sanders, 202.
56. Sanders, 226, 301.
57. McElroy, Chapter XLIX.
58. Futch, 41.
59. McElroy, Chapter XXXV.
60. Futch, 67-68.
61. Futch, 70-74.
62. Kutzler, et al, *Crossing the Deadlines*, 117.
63. Kutzler, et al, *Crossing the Deadlines*, 109.
64. Futch, 15.
65. McElroy, Chapter LXXXIII.
66. McElroy, Chapter XVI.
67. William Best Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* (1930; repr., Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 146.
68. Futch, 37.
69. Hesseltine, 152.
70. McElroy, Chapter XLVI.

71. Futch, 45.
72. McElroy, Chapter XXII.
73. Futch, 55.
74. Library of Congress, "Samuel J. Gibson diary and correspondence, July 27, 1864," <http://loc.gov/item/mss52410001> (September 19, 2019).
75. McElroy, Chapter XXIX.
76. Futch, 35.
77. Taylor, 141.
78. Taylor, 167.
79. Editorial, *Daily Richmond Examiner* (May 20, 1864): 1.
80. Kutzler, *Living by Inches*, 59.
81. Sanders, 206.
82. Futch, 57.
83. McElroy, Chapter XLIX.
84. Futch, 97.
85. McElroy, Chapter XLVII.
86. Futch, 101-106.
87. McElroy, Chapter XLII.
88. Futch, 111-112.
89. McElroy, Chapter XLIII.
90. McElroy, Chapter XXXIII.
91. Futch, 59-61.
92. Kutzler, et al, *Crossing the Deadlines*, 53-54.

93. Lessel Long, *Twelve Months in Andersonville* (1886; repr., Monee, Illinois: Big Byte Books, 2015), 42.
94. Derden, 77.
95. Lorien Foote, *The Yankee Plague* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 9.
96. Sanders, 272.
97. Foote, 116.
98. Foote, 1.
99. Andrews, 34.
100. Hesseltine, 196.
101. S. Theresa Wason, *John Whipple, The Farmer's Cabinet* (January 13, 1865): 2.
102. Andrews, 64.
103. Kutzler, et al, *Crossing the Deadlines*, 119.
104. Cloyd, 50, 79, 88. The Women's Relief Corp was organized in 1883 as women's auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic.
105. Cloyd, 178.
106. Cloyd, 155.
107. Amy Louise Wood, *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 19: Violence* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 199.
108. Cloyd, 102.
109. Fold3 Ancestry, "*Stories about Henry W. Wirz*," [www.fold3.com/page/636993663-henry-w-wirz](http://www.fold3.com/page/636993663-henry-w-wirz) (October 9, 2019).
110. Kutzler, et al, *Crossing the Deadlines*, 68.

## Chapter V

1. David Silkenat, *Raising the White Flag* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 2-3.
2. Silkenat, 41.
3. Silkenat, 168. The period of “hard war” was typified by guerilla warfare, black flag surrenders (giving no quarter), and all out fighting on a level that was rare during the first three years of the war.
4. Silkenat, 185.
5. Futch, 56.
6. Duganne, 281.
7. Gray, 153.
8. United States Census Bureau, “1860 Census,” [www.census.gov/library/publications/1864/dec/1860a.html](http://www.census.gov/library/publications/1864/dec/1860a.html) (October 17, 2019).
9. Futch, 122.

## Chapter VI

1. Futch, 19.
2. Futch, 56.
3. Futch, 25.
4. Andrews, 31.
5. McElroy, Chapters XIX and XXX.
6. McElroy, Chapter LXXXIII.
7. Futch, 121.
8. Hesseltine, 238-239.



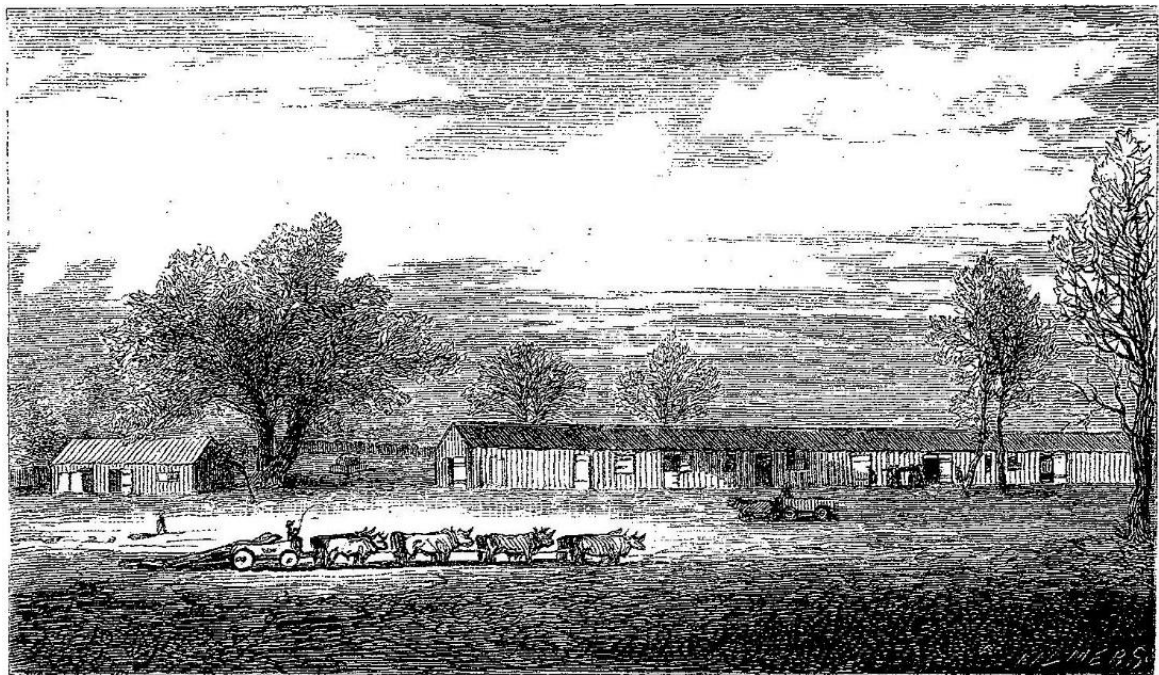
9. Hesselstine, 244, 247.
10. Hesselstine, 140-141.
11. Aragorn Storm Mille, "Clayton Crawford Gillespie," <http://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fgi59> (October 10, 2019).
12. Confederate Registry of Claims of Deceased Officers, Fleming Laurie Gillespie, Death at Baker's Creek (November 10, 1863).
13. Clayton Crawford Gillespie, unpublished poem to his wife, 1853.
14. Editorial, *Macon Telegraph* (April 20, 1863): 4.

## Chapter VII

1. Stone, 277.
2. Cloyd, 54.
3. Cloyd, 69.
4. Truett Bell, email message to author, March 19, 2018.

## APPENDIX

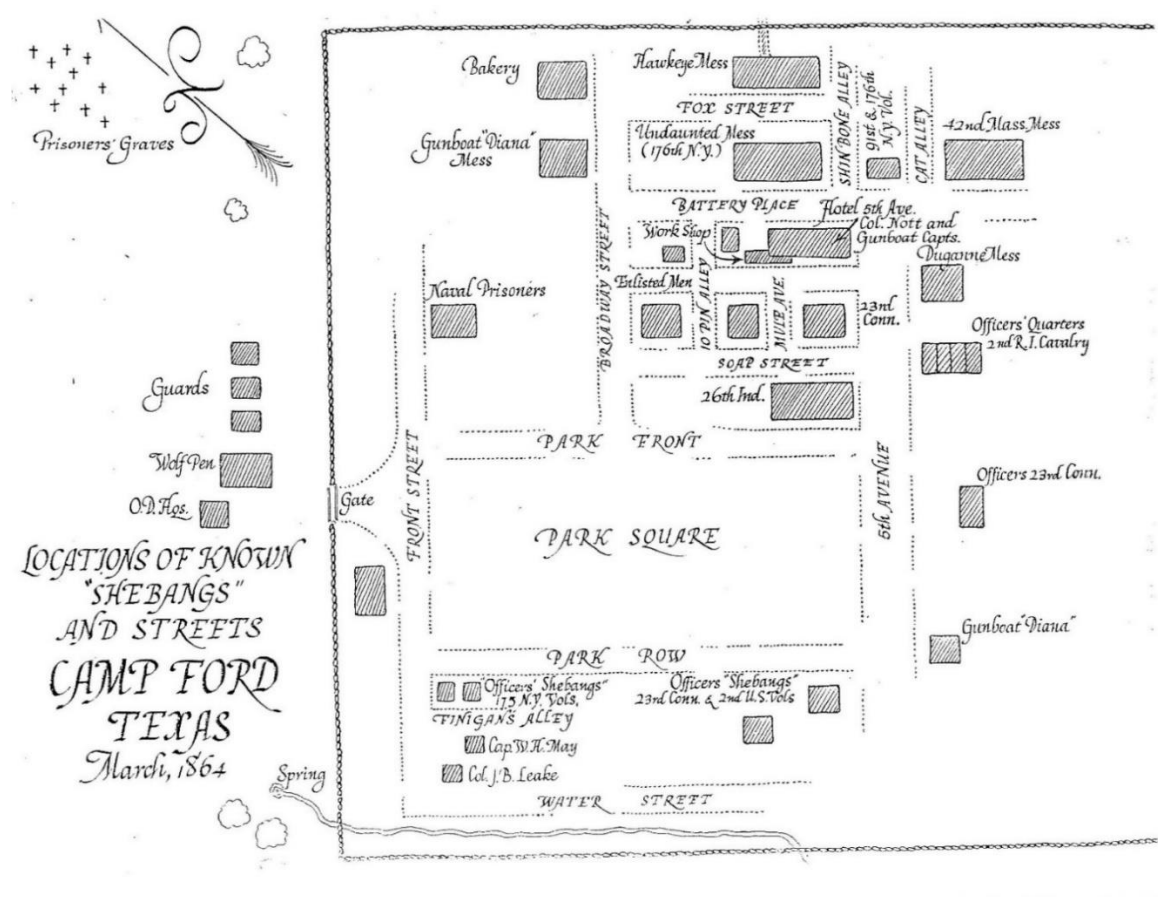
**Item #1:** There are no known photographs or contemporary drawings of Camp Groce available. The sketch below is from the memoir of Colonel J.H. Duganne, published in 1865. The small barrack on the left side was for the guards, while the longer one on the right housed the Union prisoners. Note that this sketch is from the earliest days of the camp, prior to the construction of the stockade walls in the Fall of 1863. (Source: J.H. Duganne, *Camps and Prisons. Twenty Months in the Department of the Gulf*, 1865)



CAMP GROCE.



**Item #3:** Diagram of the general layout, including street names, at Camp Ford in March of 1864, prior to the increase in prisoner population. Located in the archives of the Smith County Historical Society, the creator of the map is unknown. The baseball field mentioned in the personal account of several prisoners would have been located off of this map, just to the right of the building marked “42<sup>nd</sup> Mass. Mess.” (Courtesy of the Smith County Historical Society)



**Item #4:** Top = Colonel Robert T.P. Allen, commandant of Camp Ford from November 1863 to May 1864. (Courtesy of the University of Texas at Tyler)

Bottom = Colonel Clayton Crawford Gillespie, commandant of Camp Groce from May to December 1864. (Courtesy of M.K. Hardie, descendant of Col. Gillespie)

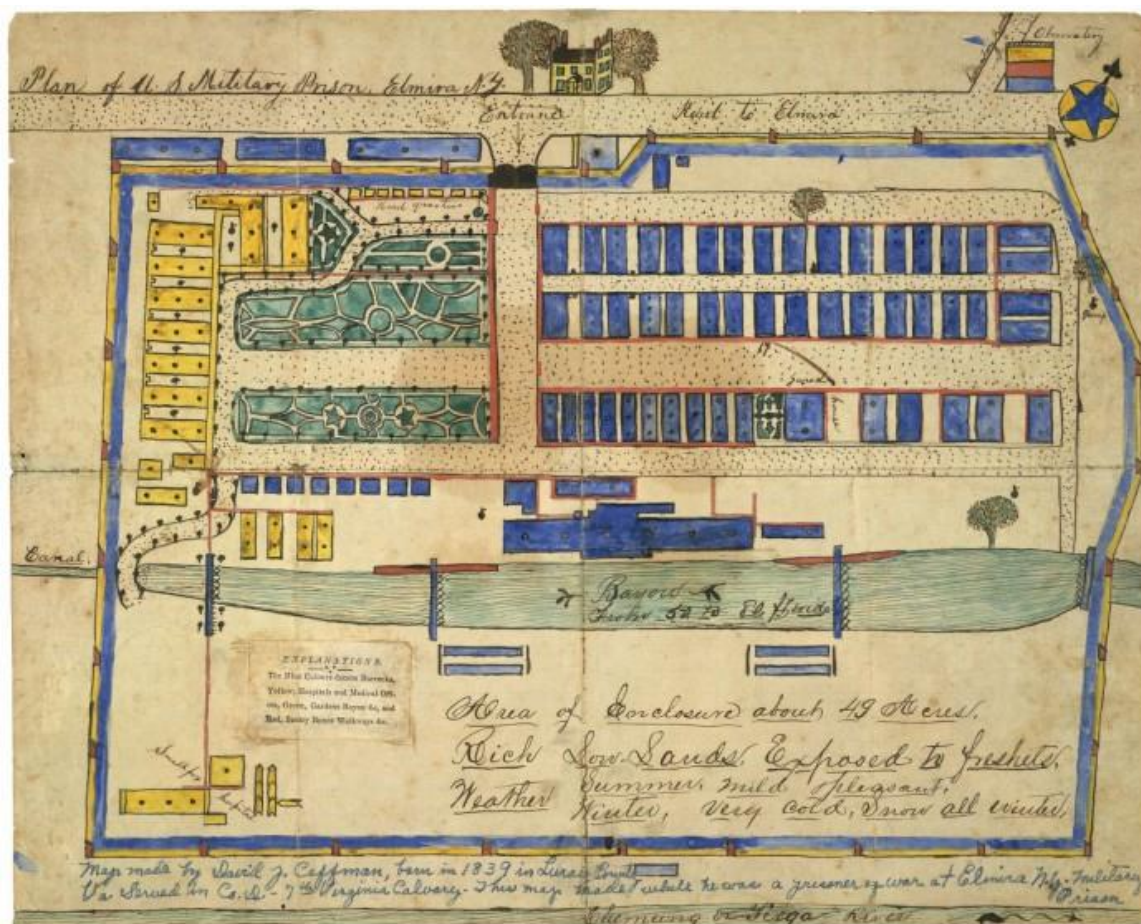


**Item #5:** First page of Volume 1, Issue 3 of "The Old Flag" newspaper created by Captain William H. May at Camp Ford. This is a reprinted copy made after the war by May, who was able to smuggle his original papers and printing tools out of the camp. No original copies of the newspaper are known to exist today. (Courtesy of the University of North Texas Library)

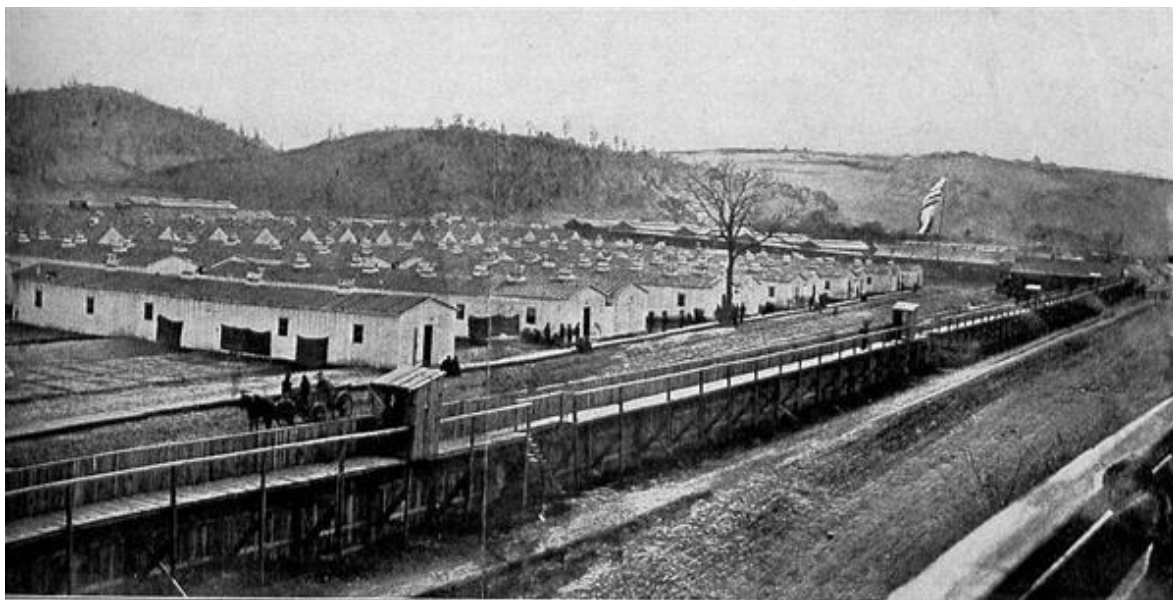




**Item #6:** Diagram of Elmira Prison created by David J. Coffman of the 7<sup>th</sup> Virginia Calvary, a prisoner of war at Elmira from 1864 to 1865. Likely drawn after the Civil War, the map depicts Foster's Pond flowing across the interior, and the gardens created by Lt. Colonel Moore in April of 1865 in the upper left hand corner. (Courtesy of the Library of Virginia)



**Item #7:** Photograph of Elmira Prison likely taken in the Fall of 1864 from one of the “viewing stands” located along Water Street. Note the substantial number of constructed barracks for the prisoners, unlike at Andersonville where little to no shelter was provided. (Courtesy of the National Archives, Washington D.C.)



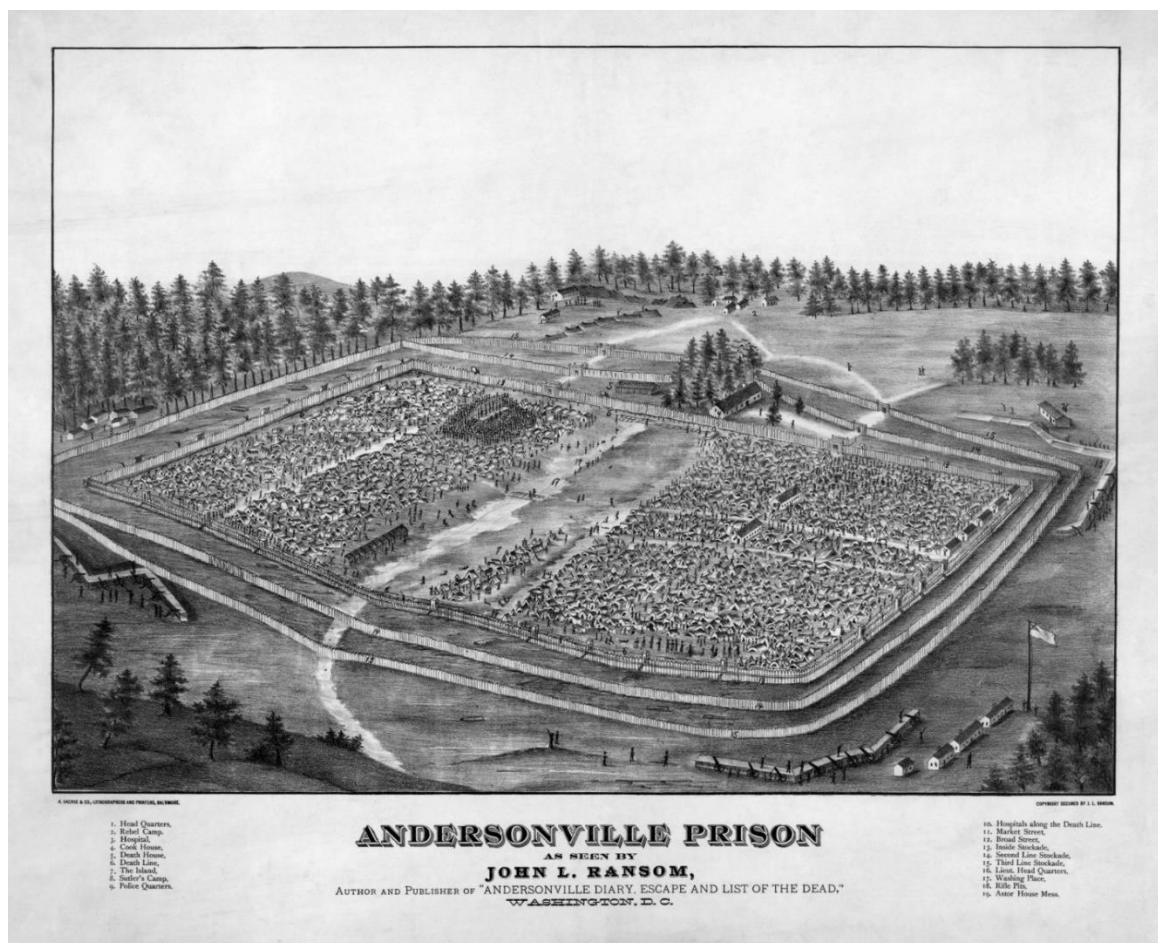


**Item #8:** Top = Major Henry V. Colt, commandant of Elmira Prison from July to October 1864. (Courtesy of the Chemung County Historical Society)

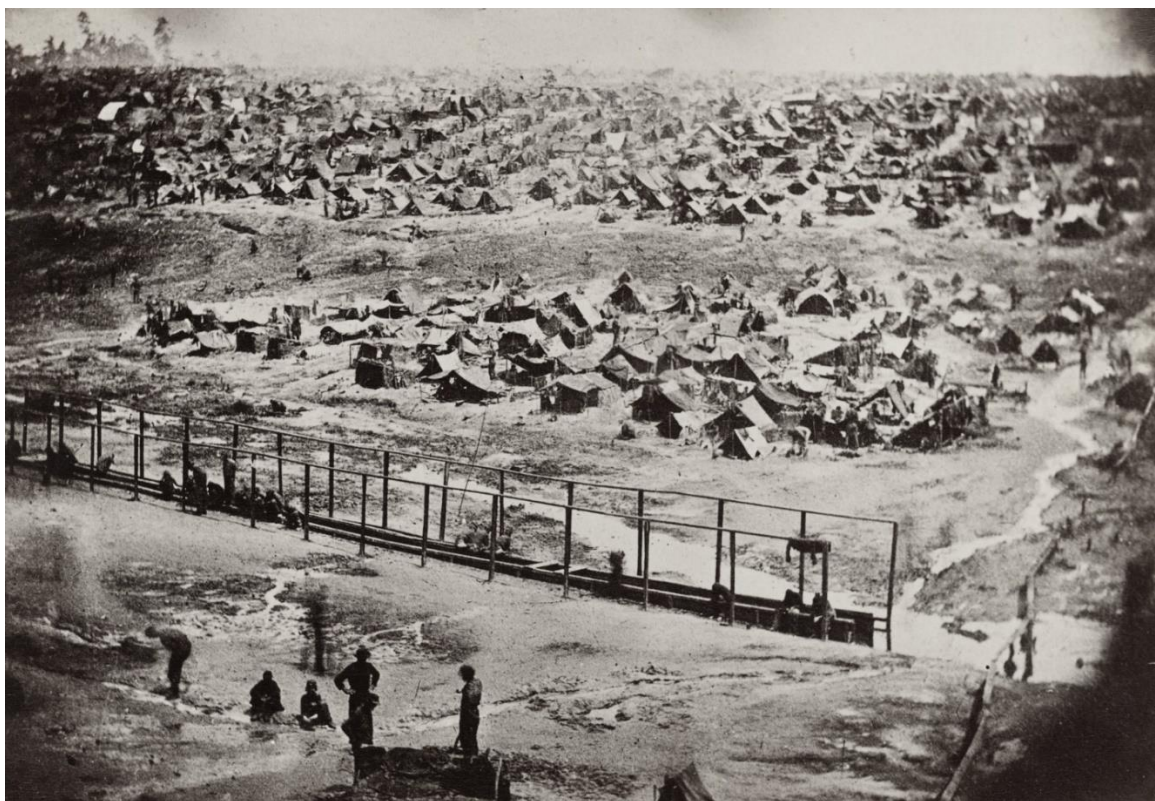
Bottom = Lt. Colonel Stephen Moore, commandant of Elmira Prison from October 1864 to July 1865. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)



**Item #9:** Depiction of Andersonville Prison created by Quartermaster John L. Ransom of the 9<sup>th</sup> Michigan Volunteer Cavalry, a prisoner from early 1864 until the end of the war. Ransom kept an extensive diary while at Andersonville, which he published, along with this lithograph, in 1882. Note the inclusion of the gallows in the upper left hand corner where the six leaders of the “Raiders” were hung in July of 1864. (Source: John L. Ransom, *Andersonville Diary*, 1881)



**Item #10:** Photograph of Andersonville Prison showing the all-purpose creek and putrid swamp in the foreground. The background shows the overcrowded conditions and makeshift shelters of prisoners fortunate to have any type of roof over their head. Note that this photograph was taken in August of 1864 when the population of the prison swelled to over 30,000. (Courtesy of the National Archives, Washington D.C.)



**Item #11:** Top = Captain Henry Wirz, commandant of Andersonville Prison from March 1864 to April 1865. (Courtesy of the National Archives, Washington D.C.)

Bottom = General John H. Winder, commissary general of Confederate prisons in Georgia and Alabama from 1864 until his death in February of 1865. (Courtesy of the National Archives, Washington D.C.)



## VITA

**Raymond R. Mitchell**

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### Education:

<b>Sam Houston State University</b>	Huntsville, Texas
M.A. History	Graduation - Spring 2020
<b>University of Houston Law School</b>	Houston, Texas
Juris Doctorate	1995
<b>University of Missouri</b>	Columbia, Missouri
B.A. Political Science	1992
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### Work Experience:

#### **Law Offices of Raymond R. Mitchell**

Owner	April 2009 to present	Katy, TX
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#### **Tiger Stripe Resources, LLC**

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#### **Griffith Land Services, Inc.**

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#### **Perdue, Brandon, Fielder, Collins & Mott, LLP**

Associate Attorney	June 1995 to July 1998	Houston, TX
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#### **University of Houston Law School**

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**Published Works:**

- **Nellie Doom biography** – Handbook of Texas – Texas State Historical Association – 2019
- **Lottie Deno biography** – Handbook of Texas – Texas State Historical Association – 2019

**Honors, Memberships, et al:**

- **Phi Alpha Theta National History Honor Society** – Sigma Phi Chapter - 2019
- **Alpha Chi National Honor Society** – Texas Omicron Chapter – 2019
- **Colonial Williamsburg Foundation** – 2006 to present
- **American Battlefield Trust (formerly Civil War Preservation Trust)** – 2005 to present
- **Gettysburg Foundation** – 2008 to present
- **Licensed Texas Attorney** – State Bar of Texas #00797097
- **Federal District Court Certification** – Southern District of Texas – License Admission #21131
- **American Association of Petroleum Landmen** – 2005 to present
- **Petroleum Geology for Non-Geologists Certification** – University of Tulsa – 2015