



Glossary of Terms related to Andersonville



Stockade

An enclosed area surrounded by tall log walls.

Ration

The food given to a prisoner for the day.

Scurvy

A disease caused by lack of Vitamin C. Symptoms include rotting gums and teeth, and eventually the muscles in the legs and arms contract, making the patient unable to walk. Often fatal inside Andersonville Prison. Sometimes called “scorbutus” by 19th century doctors.

Dysentery

a disease caused by bacteria in unclean drinking water. Symptoms include persistent bloody diarrhea. Often fatal inside Andersonville Prison.

Gangrene

A severe infection of open wounds in which bacteria destroys the living tissue in and around the wound. If untreated is almost always fatal. During the Civil War treatment usually included amputating the infected limb. Often fatal inside Andersonville Prison.

Diarrhea

Although this is actually a symptom of many other diseases, during the Civil War it was recognized as a disease. Often fatal inside Andersonville Prison.

Barracks

Military housing, usually simply a large building with bedding for many soldiers. These were not present at Andersonville until the very end of the camp’s operation, and even then they were very rudimentary.

Shebang

Term used by prisoners to describe their rough shelters made out of their blankets and jackets.

Sinks

Civil War term for the restroom area. At Andersonville, the sink was located along a body of flowing water like a river or stream and downstream of the river where soldiers got their drinking water.

Stockade Branch

The small stream that ran through the prison. A few feet wide and a few inches deep, this was the majority of the prisons drinking water. The sinks were located along this stream. Area around the stream often referred to as the “swamp” and was uninhabitable.

Quartermaster

The military official in charge of acquiring and distributing supplies.

Unbolted cornmeal

Flour made from corn that could be made into a bread or cake, or cooked into a bush. Unbolted means that it wasn't filtered and the cornmeal contained dried corn kernels and even pieces of husk. Typical daily ration of cornmeal was about a pint a day per person.

Stocks

Tool of punishment for prisoners who violated various rules, including attempted escape. The prisoners feet would be clamped down and the prisoner would be forced to lie on their back, unable to move because their feet were immobilized.

Deadline

A small rail that ran around the inside of the prison about 20 feet from the prison wall. Any prisoner who crossed the deadline was to be shot by the guards.

Deadrun

The area between the stockade wall and the deadline.

Pigeon Roost

Prisoners' term for the guard towers.

Grayback

Prisoners' term for the large lice that seemed to cover everything inside the prison.

Raider

Group of prisoners who stole from their fellow captives. They usually took food, clothing, or money. In some instances they killed prisoners. The leaders of the Raiders were hung inside the prison after a trial.

Regulators

A group of prisoners who organized themselves to fight against the Raiders.

Gallows

A raised frame and platform built to execute criminals by hanging. The gallows used to hang the Raiders were located just inside the South Gate.

Exchange

A system in which the US and Confederate governments would swap prisoners, and the prisoners returned home or back to their own army. Rumors of exchange were common inside Andersonville.

Parole

The prisoner signs a document promising not to run away and would then be sent out on work details outside the prison doing clerical jobs, collecting firewood, or burying the dead. Term can also refer to a scenario in which a prisoner is released to go home on the promise that they won't rejoin their army until they are formally exchanged.

Deadhouse

small enclosure outside of the south gate of the prison where the day's dead would be stacked up awaiting transport to the cemetery.

Reserves & Militia

Soldiers who were not regular troops with combat experience. Often were too young or too old for traditional military service and were used as the primary guard force at Andersonville for much of the prison's operation.

Earthworks

Small forts built out of mounds of dirt. Used to defend Andersonville from potential attacks.

Haversack

A bag that looked like a modern briefcase or large purse. Soldiers used these to carry their belongings.

Canteen

A container made of metal or wood that held a soldier's water. At Andersonville they were sometimes broken in half and used as tools.

Housewife

Civil War term for a soldier's sewing kit.

Galvanized Yankee

A prisoner that signed an oath of allegiance to the opposite side and joined their army as a way to get out of military prison. Both sides recruited among their prison populations, and this term was used to describe men of either side who enlisted with their former enemy.

Bounty Jumper

A soldier who enlisted under a false name to collect the signing bonus (called a bounty) and then ran away to join another unit to collect the bounty. Some of these men were eventually captured and imprisoned at Andersonville. Many of the Raiders were bounty jumpers.

Deserter

Someone who runs away from their military unit without permission.

Mess

A small group of soldiers organized for the purpose of collecting, cooking, and sharing food.

Company

A unit of soldiers consisting of usually around 100 men.

Regiment

A unit of soldiers consisting of several companies and usually consisted of around 1,000 men.

Brigade

A unit of soldiers. Typically made up of 4 regiments (3-4,000 soldiers)

Infantry

The branch of the army in which soldiers marched everywhere and fought using rifles or muskets. This was the largest branch of the army and was the main fighting force of the army.

Cavalry

The branch of the army in which soldiers are mounted on horses. Usually used for scouting out an area or launching fast, small attacks behind enemy lines.

Artillery

The branch of the army that operated cannons.