



Conclusion

What happened to Henry Wirz?



The Wirz Monument - Andersonville, GA

Henry Wirz was ultimately found guilty by the military tribunal of violating the laws of war, including the intentional mistreatment of prisoners and the murder of prisoners. He was sentenced to death and was hung on November 10, 1865. His supporters have long claimed that he was offered a pardon in exchange for testifying against Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee, although there is no evidence to support this.

In the years after the war, Wirz's memory became a rallying cry for southerners who felt that he had been unfairly targeted by a vengeful United States government. In 1909, an organization called the United Daughters of the Confederacy erected a monument to Wirz in the town of Andersonville, proclaiming Wirz the martyr of the Confederacy. More than a century after his death, the Sons of Confederate Veterans organization awarded Wirz a "Medal of Honor" in recognition of his service to the Confederacy. Few figures of the Civil War spark as much controversy and debate as does Henry Wirz.

The legacy of the Wirz Trial is that it became the basis for military tribunals in the United States. It is often referred to as the world's first war crimes trial. At the end of World War II, the United States military used tribunals modeled on that of Henry Wirz to prosecute Nazis for their crimes against the Jewish population in Europe. Even the Nazis' defenses sound eerily similar to those of Wirz: "I was just following orders; I'm not in the American military therefore I cannot be tried by the US Armed Forces; I am under the protection of a surrender and parole at the end of the war" are all defenses used in both 1865 and 1945. In both cases, the United States argued that the laws of war dictated that in the cases of atrocities such as Andersonville, military justice was appropriate. Even in the 21st century, military tribunals continue to be the means by which the American military prosecutes enemy combatants and terrorists for violating the laws of war.



The execution of Henry Wirz - November 10, 1865