



To Die in Chicago: Confederate Prisoners at Camp Douglas, 1862-65

George Levy

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“Did Wirtz, the commandant of Andersonville prison, ever do anything as inhumanly brutal as was inflicted on Confederate prisoners in Camp Douglas?”

—Sgt. T. B. Clore, Camp Douglas survivor

The Chicago doctors who inspected the prison in 1863 called Camp Douglas an “extermination camp.” It quickly became the largest Confederate burial ground outside of the South.

What George Levy’s meticulous research, including newly discovered hospital records, has uncovered is not a pretty picture. The story of Camp Douglas is one of brutal guards, deliberate starvation of prisoners, neglect of the sick, sadistic torture, murder, corruption at all levels, and a beef scandal reaching into the White House.

As a result of the overcrowding and substandard provisions, disease ran rampant and the mortality rate soared. By the thousands, prisoners needlessly died of pneumonia, smallpox, and other maladies. Most were buried in unmarked mass graves. The exact number of those who died is impossible to discern because of the Union’s haphazard recordkeeping and general disregard for the deceased.

Among the most shocking revelations are such forms of torture as hanging prisoners by their thumbs, hanging them by their heels and then whipping them, and forcing prisoners to sit with their exposed buttocks in the ice and snow.

The Confederate Camp Andersonville never saw such gratuitous barbarity.

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