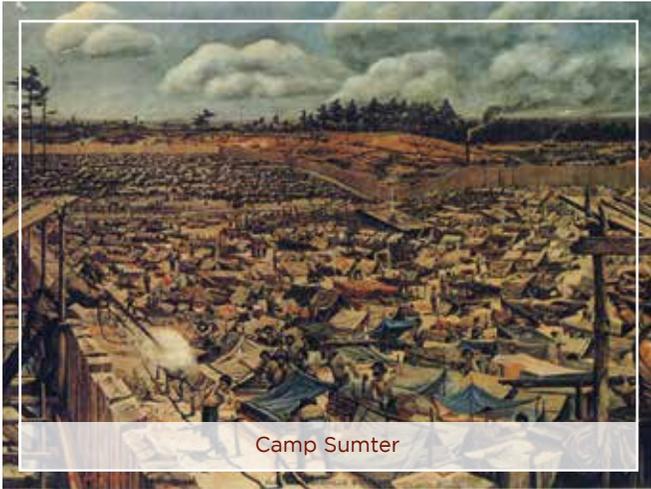


A GUIDE TO
GEORGIA
CIVIL WAR PRISONS



GEORGIA'S CIVIL WAR PRISONS



Georgia was home to 16 Confederate prisons during the Civil War (1861-65), including notorious Camp Sumter in Andersonville.

They ranged from well-constructed fortifications, such as county jails, to makeshift installations, such as wooded areas patrolled by armed guards.

Georgia was relatively distant from the battle lines for most of the war, which made it prime ground for incarcerating captured Union soldiers. Conditions at the prisons depended on the Confederacy's military fortunes. Toward the end of the war, as the tide turned against the Confederate army, the government's ability to supply and provision prisons in Georgia weakened, and prisoners attempted to survive without adequate food, clothing and shelter.

Prison Sites

One of the first prisons to hold Union soldiers in Georgia was the Fulton County Jail in Atlanta. The facility, built before the war, was large enough to serve as a holding area for more than 150 prisoners who were sent to Atlanta to relieve overcrowding at sites in Richmond, Va., in early 1862. On several occasions throughout the war, makeshift facilities were used in and around Atlanta before prisoners were transferred to other sites. This was especially true as large campaigns in Virginia and Georgia in 1864 swelled the number of prisoners.

Also in 1862, a prison pen, known as Camp Oglethorpe, was opened in Macon. Wedged between railroad

tracks and the Ocmulgee River, the site was enclosed by a rough stockade on 15 to 20 acres. Nearly 1,000 prisoners, a mixture of officers and enlisted men, arrived in May. Their living quarters consisted of sheds or stalls already on site or shelters constructed from materials found within the stockade. As a result of a formal exchange cartel, most of the prisoners gained their freedom, and by the beginning of 1863, Camp Oglethorpe was nearly abandoned.

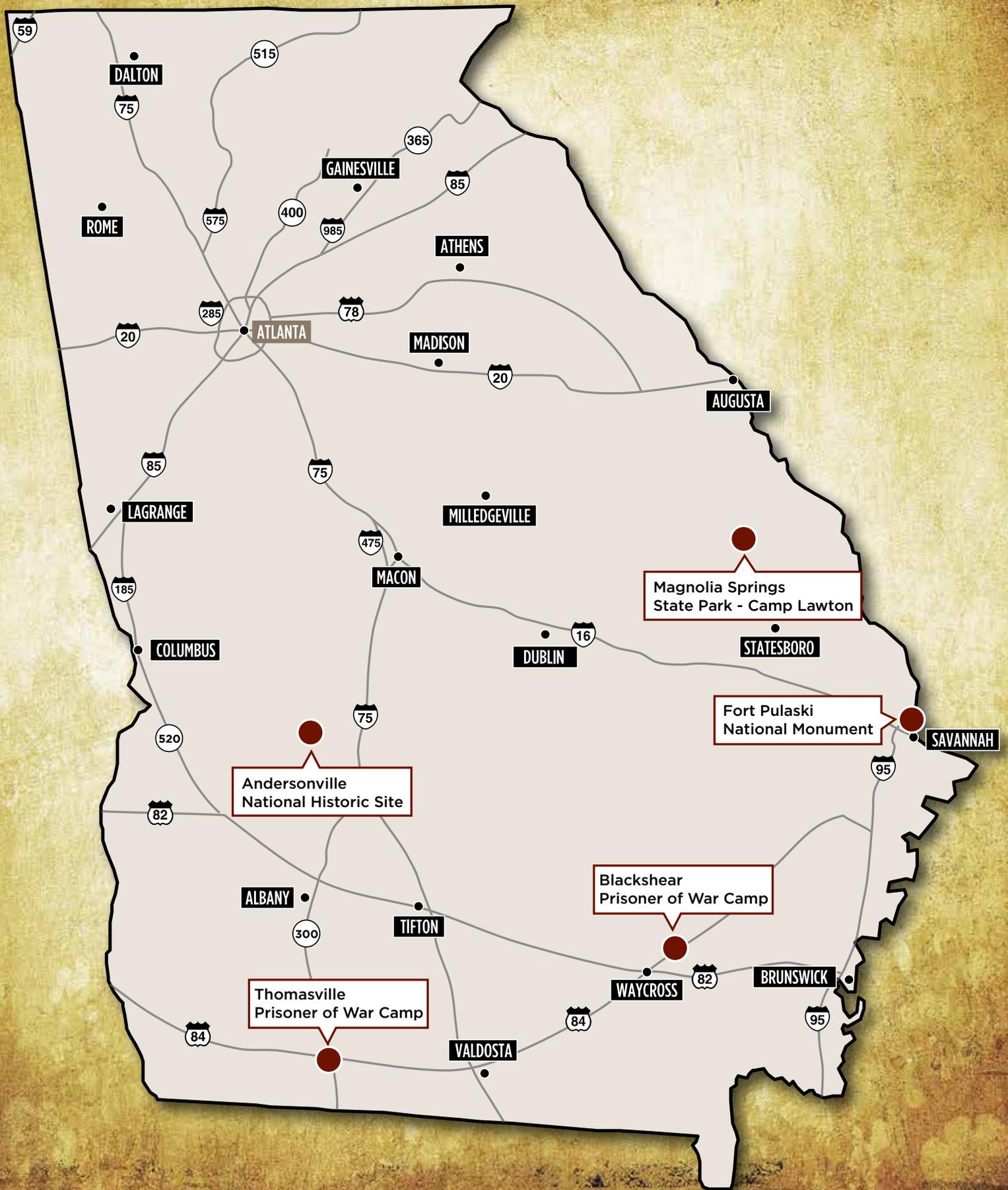
However, the breakdown of prisoner exchanges, combined with Union Gen. William T. Sherman's Georgia campaign, forced the Confederacy to reopen Camp Oglethorpe as an officers' prison. By summer 1864, more than 2,300 Union officers were housed there. Shelter was barely adequate, and rations consisted of beans, cornmeal and rice in meager amounts. The lack of sanitation, coupled with a dwindling diet, led to diseases such as chronic dysentery and scurvy. An official death total for the prison is unknown. Most of the prisoners were moved from the Macon facility by late July 1864 because of Union cavalry raids nearby, although some officers were held there until September.

The Shadow of Andersonville

When Sherman's Union army took Atlanta on Sept. 2, 1864, Confederate prison authorities knew that Andersonville would be a prime target of any Union thrust into the heartland of Georgia, and they began moving Union prisoners to more secure locations. At Camp Davidson, constructed in July 1864 in Savannah, prisoners were confined within a stockade that enclosed part of an orchard. The ample rations were a welcome respite from the horrors of Macon and Andersonville. The camp guards, the First Georgia Volunteers, once had been prisoners of war themselves. Because of overcrowding caused by the influx of Andersonville prisoners in September, a second Savannah prison to house officers was set up on land adjacent to the city jail. Another stockade was hastily constructed for enlisted men. The structure, along with Camp Davidson, may have held more than 10,000 men, but both were abandoned after only a month and a half.

The most substantial prison holding former Andersonville captives was Camp Lawton in Millen, located in Jenkins County between Augusta and Savannah. Camp Lawton was a stockade structure enclosing 42 acres, making it the largest Civil War prison in terms of area. Set only a mile off the Augusta Railroad, the pen was designed to hold up to 40,000 prisoners, although the population never grew much beyond 10,000. By all accounts, the prison at Millen was infinitely better than Andersonville. A generous





DALTON

75

515

GAINESVILLE

365

85

ROME

575

400

985

ATHENS

285

78

ATLANTA

MADISON

20

AUGUSTA

85

75

LAGRANGE

MILLEDGEVILLE

475

MACON

Magnolia Springs
State Park - Camp Lawton

185

DUBLIN

16

STATESBORO

COLUMBUS

75

Fort Pulaski
National Monument

520

95

SAVANNAH

Andersonville
National Historic Site

82

ALBANY

TIFTON

Blackshear
Prisoner of War Camp

300

WAYCROSS

BRUNSWICK

Thomasville
Prisoner of War Camp

84

VALDOSTA

84

95

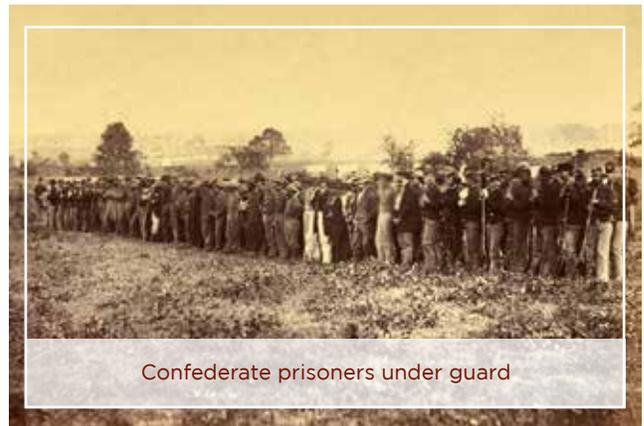
spring ran through the site, providing a fresh supply of drinking water. Rations were also more plentiful because the countryside had yet to be scavenged of its food resources. Yet, disease and death were not unknown because many of the prisoners were terribly debilitated from their incarceration at Andersonville. During the short time the prison was open, from late September to early November 1864, nearly 500 prisoners succumbed to disease.

As Sherman's troops approached Millen in the March to the Sea, the prisoners had to be moved yet again. Many were sent to South Carolina, and others were sent to Savannah. The exact site of Camp Lawton was not located until 2010, when its discovery by archaeology students at Georgia Southern University made national news. The find was significant because the site, previously unidentified and thus unlooted, yielded an unusually rich cache of artifacts left by prisoners and their guards. Researchers believe that many of the artifacts are possessions dropped by prisoners as they were forced onto trains during the camp's final evacuation.

From Savannah, approximately 5,000 prisoners were transported down the Atlantic and Gulf Coast Railroad to Blackshear. The camp was a makeshift guard line with artillery pieces surrounding several thousand men in the piney woods of southeast Georgia. As might be expected, escapes were frequent, discipline lax and resources scarce. The Blackshear area held prisoners for less than a month, from late November to early December. The collapse of the Confederate infrastructure caused much confusion about what to do with the prisoners. Some were shipped back to South Carolina, but the majority went southwest to Thomasville, where the Atlantic and Gulf rail line ended. Impressed slave labor from nearby plantations constructed another stockade.

The prison at Thomasville was located one-half mile northwest of town, on a 5-acre tract surrounded by a ditch 6 feet deep and 10 feet wide. The site was occupied by approximately 5,000 Union prisoners for only two weeks in December 1864. The men constructed their own shelters from timber within the site.

Exposure to the elements and close quarters caused an outbreak of smallpox, which claimed hundreds of lives. Confederate authorities soon ordered the site to be abandoned, and all of Thomasville's prisoners were sent back to Andersonville. That meant a 60-mile march north to Albany, where they embarked on the Southwestern Railroad back to Andersonville, arriving on Christmas Eve 1864.



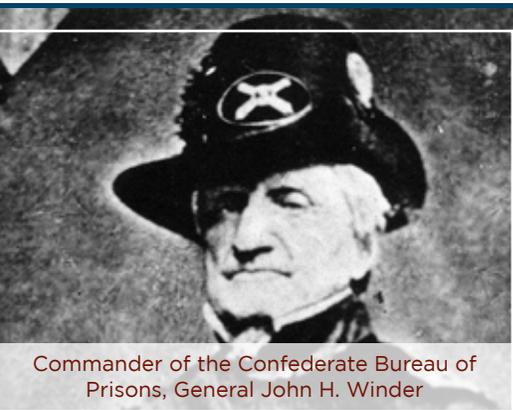
Confederate prisoners under guard

Forgotten History

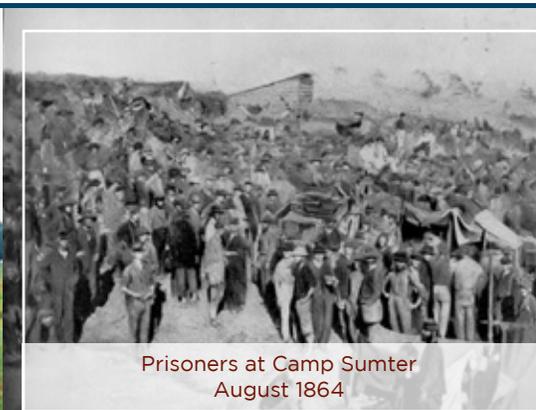
Though Andersonville is a National Historic Site, little has been done to commemorate other Civil War prison sites in Georgia. State historic markers have been erected at Blackshear and Thomasville. Magnolia Springs State Park now incorporates the area of Camp Lawton, including some historic earthworks. Other prison sites, such as those in Atlanta and Savannah, have been destroyed by development.



CAMP SUMTER, ANDERSONVILLE



Commander of the Confederate Bureau of Prisons, General John H. Winder



Prisoners at Camp Sumter August 1864

Open for a mere 14 months from 1864 to 1865, Camp Sumter Military Prison located at Andersonville, Ga., was the deadliest single location for a United States soldier during the Civil War.

Constructed in January 1864, the 16-acre stockade prison was built on remote land in Sumter County. A forested lot was cleared by slaves for the prison, and trees surrounding the prison complex were used to build shelters and meager fires. By placing prisoners in such a remote location, Confederate officials limited the chances of escape or liberation.

A stream cut through the stockade had sufficient water for around 10,000 men. In July 1864, the prison was expanded by 10 acres to alleviate overcrowding. By August 1864, there were 33,000 prisoners in the stockade attempting to survive. While the expansion might have eased the congestion temporarily, the lack of shelter, blistering temperatures and insufficient clean water began to take its toll on prisoner health. The huge prison population was kept in check by cannons that covered all points and could be fired at any sign of riot or escape plot.

Throughout the 14 months of operation, the prison ushered almost 45,000 prisoners through its gates. Prisoners at Andersonville reflected a diverse population who fought for the Union by enlisting in the United States Army or worked on its behalf as teamsters and sympathizers. Prisoners represented Northern and Southern states, and dozens of foreign countries, and were white and black, soldier and civilian.

The train depot in the town of Andersonville was the central transportation hub for prisoners, guards and civilians traveling to and from the prison. Farms and civilian merchants could sell to the prison; however, the inflated war-time economy resulted in competition by other branches of the Confederate military for goods and

services. Civilians from surrounding communities flocked to the prison site to sightsee and to barter with guards and paroled prisoners. Some even sought to extend Christian charity to the Yankees by bringing blankets and food, but they were soundly rebuked and turned away by prison officials. Some of their "missions of mercy" were even threatened with charges of treason.

The Atlanta Campaign signaled the approach of Union forces into Georgia, and thousands of prisoners were moved from Andersonville to other prisons across the state, including Camp Lawton, Blackshear and Thomasville. Any effort to liberate Andersonville was never fully supported by Union commanders, and thus, never realized.

Decisions about the prison stockade and prisoners' lives were made almost entirely by Capt. Henry Wirz. Also present for a short time at Andersonville was his commanding officer, Brig. Gen. John H. Winder. Together, they controlled the prison complex. Winder died before the conclusion of the war and was never held responsible for his actions. Wirz was arrested at the prison and taken to Washington, D.C., for trial. A military tribunal found him guilty of violations of the laws of war and sentenced him to hang. He was executed in November 1865. Wirz is one of a handful of Confederate officers executed for their actions during the Civil War.

Today, Andersonville National Cemetery is a stark reminder of the burden of choice. More than 13,000 United States soldiers and civilians are buried in trench graves as a direct consequence of decisions at Camp Sumter Military Prison. That death toll makes it deadlier than the battles of Gettysburg, Antietam and the Vicksburg Campaign combined. Andersonville National Cemetery continues as an active burial ground for the honored dead of the United States armed forces and their families.

- Eric Leonard, acting superintendent, Andersonville National Historic Site

CAMP LAWTON, MILLEN



Shortly after the fall of Atlanta in September 1864, Commander of the Confederate Bureau of Prisons General John H. Winder ordered the construction of Camp Lawton in Millen.

The camp was built to ease overcrowding at Andersonville and disperse prisoners around the state in case Sherman's forces attempted to free the inmates. The site was chosen because of its proximity to the Augusta Railroad and the large natural spring that provided a steady supply of fresh water and waste removal.

Built by a force of 300 federal prisoners and 500 slaves, Camp Lawton encompassed 42 acres of log stockade and was the largest prison camp of the war. The walls were 15 feet high with sentry boxes at regular intervals. A deadline, which if crossed would result in getting shot, was marked around the inside perimeter to keep prisoners 30 feet from the wall. The camp also consisted of three earthen forts on surrounding high ground armed with artillery that could sweep the field below in case of insurrection or mass escape.

Prisoners from Andersonville began arriving at Millen Station in October 1864, and by early November the inmate population reached 10,299. Many were suffering ill health from their captivity at Camp Sumter, so the mortality rate was high. Barracks were not provided, so prisoners had to build their own shelters or "shebangs."

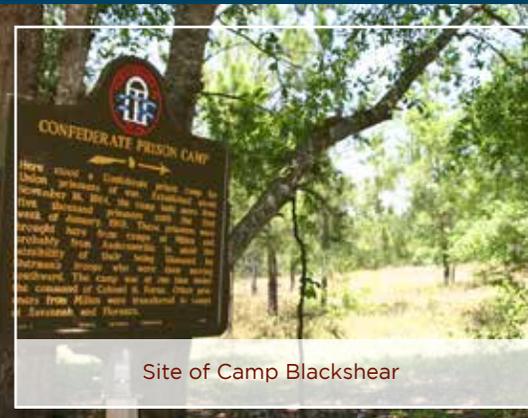
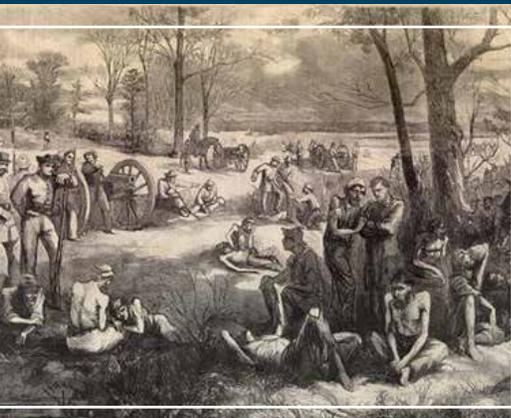
By Nov. 23, 1864, the camp had been hastily evacuated as Gen. Judson Kilpatrick's cavalry was near Big Buckhead Church in Jenkins County and too close for comfort. Some of the prisoners had been exchanged while at Camp Lawton, but the majority were sent by rail to temporary camps in Blackshear and Thomasville and then back to Camp Sumter as Sherman's intended movements became clear.

When Sherman's left wing arrived at Camp Lawton, they were enraged by the filth, debris and unburied bodies at the camp. During the camp's brief existence, as many as 1,000 of the prisoners had died of disease, exposure and malnutrition. Fresh burial trenches were evident in two cemeteries. The federal soldiers burned the stockade and outbuildings as well as the Millen Depot in the town.

Today, the prison camp is at the site of the federal fish hatchery at Magnolia Springs State Park. In 2010, archeological teams from Georgia Southern University uncovered remains of the post holes for the enormous stockade wall and numerous military and personal artifacts. Archeological work has continued, and the digs can be viewed by the public. Exhibits of artifacts from the camp are on display at the Magnolia Springs History Center.



BLACKSHEAR CIVIL WAR PRISON CAMP



It was in late 1864, after the fall of Atlanta, that the invasion of Gen. William T. Sherman's forces created much concern of a possible liberation of Union prisoners held at Andersonville and other prisons throughout Georgia.

The Confederate Army began transporting prisoners by rail to various locations in hopes of keeping them out of reach of Sherman's army. Blackshear was among 30 towns selected to hold prisoners until Union forces were no longer a threat. Blackshear was selected because it was situated along the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad and far enough out of the line of march of Sherman's army.

From November 1864 until January 1865, thousands of Union soldiers were held captive outside of Blackshear. As in many prisons, sickness spread, and Union soldiers died at the Blackshear camp. On the grounds of the prison, soldiers were buried in a cemetery, which stood across the street from the Primitive Baptist Church. Following the war, the bodies of fallen soldiers were recovered by families and the government. Approximately 27 Union soldiers have been recorded to have been reinterred from burials at the Blackshear Prison Camp to the National Cemetery in Beaufort, S.C. Further archaeological studies are needed to determine if bodies remain in the Blackshear Prison Camp cemetery.

After the passing of 150 years and the farming of the land on which the prison once stood, there still are many questions yet to be answered about the Blackshear Prison Camp. As the war drew to a close, many of the Confederate records were destroyed, adding to the speculation and questions. When the Pierce County Courthouse burned in 1875, local historical records that might answer many questions about the Civil War prison were destroyed.

Today, if you head west out of Blackshear on Hwy. 203, you will drive through the heart of the prison camp. The historical marker stands on the right side of the road. You may wish to stop and look around. Look upon the open field and imagine thousands of Union and Confederate soldiers camped on the ground. Listen closely, and perhaps you will hear the voices of our nation's past.

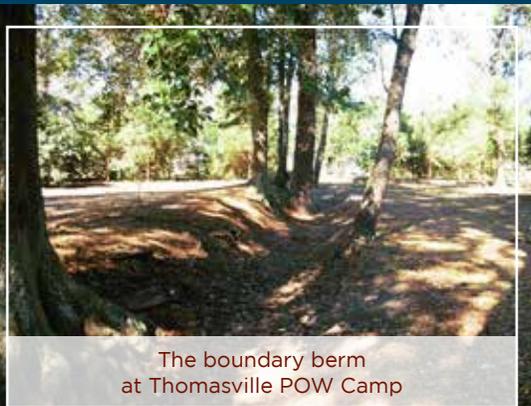
This hallowed ground is a constant reminder of the brave soldiers, Union and Confederate, who fought and died for causes they believed to be right. Through their sacrifice, our nation remains united.

On Oct. 22, 2013, The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation placed the Blackshear Civil War Prison Camp on its 2014 list of "Places in Peril." Places in Peril is designed to raise awareness about Georgia's significant historic, archaeological and cultural resources, including buildings, structures, districts, archaeological sites and cultural landscapes that are threatened by demolition, neglect, lack of maintenance, inappropriate development or insensitive public policy. Recent archaeological studies of the site have been conducted by a team of Georgia Southern University archaeologists led by Lance Greene, Ph.D.

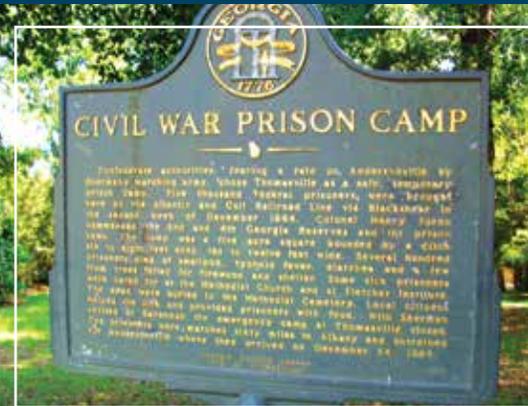
- Compiled by John W. Guss and the Pierce County Historical and Genealogical Society



THOMASVILLE PRISONER OF WAR CAMP



The boundary berm at Thomasville POW Camp



In late November 1864, Confederates set up a temporary prison camp in Thomasville in a desperate attempt to move Union prisoners out of Gen. Sherman's course on the March to the Sea.

Because the camp would not be permanent, it was not enclosed by a log stockade like other prison sites. Instead, an earthen berm marked the enclosure.

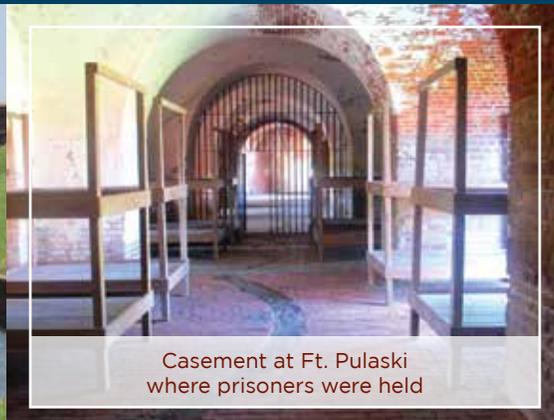
By Dec. 10, 5,000 Union prisoners were moved to the 5-acre compound that offered little or no shelter. By Dec. 17, less than two weeks after the first prisoners had arrived, Commander of the Confederate Bureau of Prisons General John H. Winder ordered the prison camp at Thomasville closed. Confederates had received reports of far-reaching movements of Gen. Kilpatrick's federal cavalry after the fall of Savannah, and they feared a raid on the camp.

The prisoners marched from Thomasville to Albany, where they were put on trains and sent back to Camp Sumter at Andersonville by Dec. 24. The unfortunate among them who died while at Thomasville were buried nearby at the First Methodist Church cemetery and were later reinterred at Andersonville National Cemetery.

Today, a state historical marker is located at the Thomasville Prison Camp site on Wolfe Street. Portions of the ditch and berm enclosure still can be seen.



CONFEDERATE PRISONERS IN GEORGIA: THE IMMORTAL 600 AT FORT PULASKI



Casemate at Ft. Pulaski
where prisoners were held



In October 1864, the Union garrison occupying Fort Pulaski accepted transfer of a group of captive Confederate officers who would become known as The Immortal 600.

Before their arrival at Fort Pulaski, the prisoners had endured a harrowing odyssey outside of Charleston, S.C. Federal Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, ordered 600 prisoners of war to be positioned at Morris Island in Charleston Harbor within direct line of fire from Confederate guns at Fort Sumter, essentially acting as human shields. Stanton's order was made in response to the Confederate government holding 600 Federal officers in the line of fire of the Federal artillery in Charleston. Both sides were resorting to tactics they knew were against the code of honor taught at West Point, yet both felt that they had little choice under the circumstances.

The standoff continued until a yellow fever epidemic forced the Confederates to remove the Union officers from Charleston's city limits. The Federal authorities then had the Confederate prisoners transferred from the open stockade in front of their siege guns on Morris Island to Fort Pulaski on Cockspur Island at the mouth of the Savannah River.

On Oct. 23, 1864, 520 tired, poorly clothed men — many suffering from dysentery — arrived in the casemates of Fort Pulaski. Concurrent with the move, the emaciated Confederates received extra rations and were promised extra blankets and clothing. However, despite the best intentions of the fort's command, the prisoners never received sufficient food, blankets or clothes. By early December, the prisoners exhibited symptoms of scurvy, and 13 died while being held in the fort's open casemates. The dead were buried outside the fort on Cockspur Island. Most died of dehydration due to dysentery. In March 1865, the remaining Confederate prisoners were transferred to the prison at Fort Delaware near Wilmington, Del.

Fort Pulaski National Monument is located on Cockspur Island south of Savannah on US 80. The fort is one of four Civil War parks in Georgia operated by the federal government and is open seven days a week.

