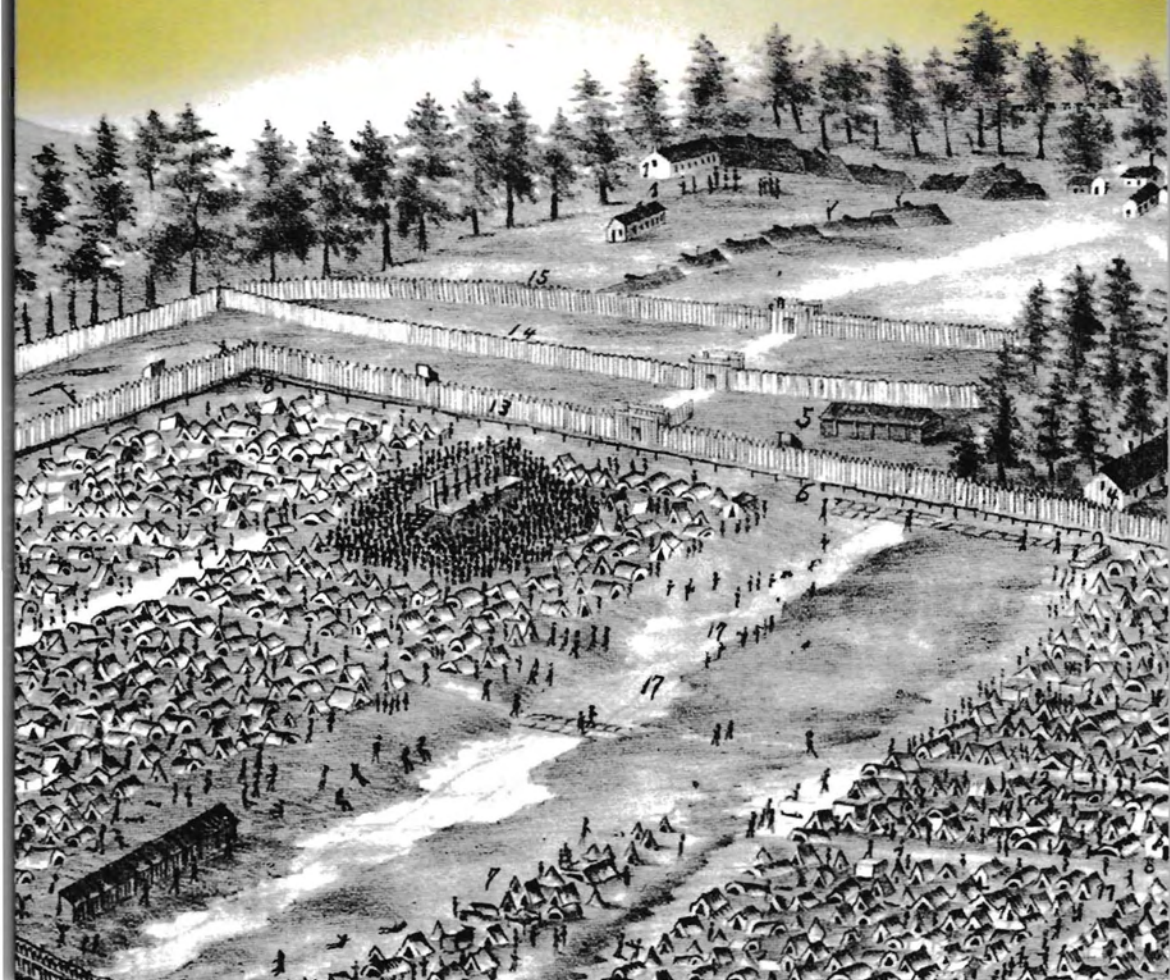


JAMES MADISON PAGE

# THE TRUE STORY OF ANDERSONVILLE PRISON

A Defense of Major Henry Wirz





## CHAPTER VI: "THE DEAD-LINE" AND THE DEATH OF "POLL PARROT"

I think that it was about the first of May that a lieutenant with a squad of negroes began to put up a railing fifteen feet from the stockade. If I am not mistaken the lieutenant's name was Davis. They took boards about six inches wide, such as are used in fence building, and set posts into the ground every fifteen feet and nailed the boards on top of the posts. This was known as the "dead-line." I was absent when, in the course of their building, they reached our quarters, and when I returned I found my comrades very much distressed and alarmed. They told me the lieutenant and his men were there; that the officer measured the ground from the palisade and they had found that our house was three feet within the prescribed limit of the dead-line; that it was but twelve feet from the stockade, and that the officer ordered them to move it at once. This was indeed a calamity.

We were discussing the matter when the young officer appeared on the scene. We called his attention to the crowded condition of the ground about us. It was the most desirable part of the camp and in our immediate vicinity there was not a square foot of unoccupied ground.

"I cannot help it," said he; "I am carrying out my orders, and if you cannot move the cabin you will have to take it down."

There was no use expostulating with him. He left, giving us an hour, I think it was, to move our habitation. We were speechless. He returned at the specified time, flew in a rage to find that we had done nothing, and used some very strong English.

"If you care to retain your building material," exclaimed the irate officer, "you had better get it away from here in the next twenty minutes. I will give you that time." He looked at his watch with the declaration that he would return in twenty minutes, and if the building was not moved that he would confiscate the whole thing.

Some of the boys suggested taking the house down and cutting off a few feet of the logs and rebuilding it inside of the dead-line; but this plan was not feasible and I told them that I would try to see Captain Wirz at once, and in case the Lieutenant returned before I did to explain matters to him, and try and stay his hand.

The boys were dismayed at the situation, and doubted their ability to do anything with the officer in the mean time, and doubted still more that the Captain would help us.

I made as good time as a sick man could to the south gate, and fortunately I saw Wirz just entering it. I saluted and said, "Captain, we are in serious trouble at our quarters, and we want you to help us out. I hate to bother you but you are our only refuge now." "What is the trouble?" "Before the stockade was completed a sergeant in Colonel Person's regiment stationed here directed us while building our cabin to be sure and not build it closer to the stockade than twelve feet. We followed his instructions, and to make sure of it the end nearest to the wall is twelve feet from it. Now the lieutenant building the dead-line has ordered us to move it or take it down. The space adjacent to the cabin is so densely crowded that it is impossible to move it intact, and we cannot take it down as we do not know where to locate it." "Can you not shorten it in some way?" I explained why that could not be done. "Where are you located?" "Almost directly under sentry box number 35." "Very well, I'll go up with you and see for myself." He walked with me to our quarters, two hundred and fifty yards southeast of the gate.

When we came in sight of our house I saw that it was still there and the boys were all outside, the most of them sitting on the "piazza." They arose as we approached, and I could see surprise on their countenances. Wirz looked the situation over carefully while we were narrowly eyeing him, and I caught the faintest glimmer of a smile on his face as he said, pointing with his hand to the extreme southerly end of the cabin, "Who sleeps there?" "That is where I sleep, Captain," said I. "Well," said he, "you must be careful and not get up inside the dead-line." Then he went on, looking at all of us, "Men, let your quarters stand, and when Lieutenant Davis returns tell him that such are my orders, and not to interfere with your cabin. He can make a short offset in his line and go by without much trouble."

We heartily thanked him, and Billy Bowles was very enthusiastic over the outcome of the affair, and yelled, "Hurrah for Captain Wirz!" and we and some of our neighbors heartily joined in the cheering.

The cabin stood where it was originally built. It was not moved or taken down. This fact will be remembered by many ex-prisoners who are now living, as this incident was often referred to and discussed at the prison. We had the distinction of occupying the only house, cabin, hut, quarters, or habitation within the dead-line at Andersonville!

'Anyone researching Andersonville should read this very well written book to learn the whole truth about what happened.' - Saber and Scroll

After the American Civil War, Major Wirz was tried by a military tribunal, found guilty of "war crimes" and hanged.

Forty years later, in 1908, Page wrote this memoir to tell dispel the slanders told about Wirz.

Page explains how the prison Wirz was in charge of was designed to hold, at most, 10,000 prisoners. The population quickly swelled to 30,000 prisoners, overwhelming the South's ability to feed, clothe and house the Andersonville prisoners.

Over 13,000 POWs died out of 45,000 prisoners due to disease and diet, and Page claims that Wirz was made a scapegoat to appease the wrath of the families of those who had died.

'a good read and very different than what is force fed us' - Civil War Talk

James Madison Page was born on July 22, 1839 in Crawfordville, Pennsylvania. He served in the Union army as 2d Lieutenant of Company A, Sixth Michigan Cavalry. After participating in many skirmishes and battles, including Gettysburg, Page was captured on September 21, 1863 along the Rapidan in Virginia and spent the next thirteen months in Southern military prisons, seven of which were at Camp Sumter near Andersonville, Georgia. After the war, Page was subpoenaed for the war crimes trial of Major Henry Wirz, the former commandant of the prison, but after being interviewed, the prosecution decided not to call him as a witness because his testimony undermined the predetermined guilt of the accused. Having been present at the prison in the summer of 1864, when the atrocities were said to have occurred, Page denied that any of the four murders charged to Wirz had happened, which denial was supported by the fact that the alleged deceased were never named. After being dissuaded by his sister from joining the ill-fated Indian foray in the West under the command of General George Custer, Page instead moved to the Montana Territory in 1866, where he worked as a Government surveyor. The town of Pageville in Madison County was named in his honor. Page spent his final years in Long Beach, California, where he died in 1924. The True Story of Andersonville Prison was first published in 1908.