

Florence National Cemetery
803 East National Cemetery Road
Florence, South Carolina 29501

Description

The Florence National Cemetery, established in 1865, is located in Florence County. East National Cemetery Road runs north and south and divides the cemetery into two sections. The main entrance to the north side is protected by double iron gates supported by brick piers and a pedestrian gate on the right side. A second pedestrian gate is located to the west of the main gate. From the main entrance a drive extends to a circle, upon which the flagpole is located. The grounds are enclosed by a brick wall. To the east of the main gate is the office and the utility building. A rostrum is located between Sections A and B in the northwestern area of the cemetery.



The entrance to the south side of the cemetery contains two brick columns and is enclosed by wrought iron fencing. There is no gate at this entrance. A drive extends to a circle on which the flagpole is located. A committal service tent is located to the southwest of the flagpole.

Graves are marked with upright marble headstones, except for Section 1 in the south side of the cemetery, which is marked with flat granite markers.

The brick and concrete combination administration/utility building, constructed in 1906, is located to the east of the main entrance and contains public restrooms. The gable and flat roof is slate.

A brick and concrete rostrum, 15 feet by 11 feet, 4 inches, with a wrought iron railing, was constructed in 1938. The hipped roof is metal.

Significant Monuments/Memorials

There are two plaques to the west of the main entrance, manufactured circa 1880. One is inscribed with the language of the Act to Protect and Establish National Cemeteries (see full text in Appendix A).

The second plaque is inscribed with General Orders No. 80 of the War Department issued by the Adjutant General's Office in Washington, September 1, 1875, by order of the Secretary of War (see full text in Appendix B).



Civil War Activity in Area

During the Civil War, one of the largest prisoners of war camps was located in Florence, South Carolina, just south of the Florence National Cemetery. In the late summer and early fall of 1864, as the Federals under Major General William Tecumseh Sherman prepared to leave Atlanta for their march across Georgia to the sea, thousands of Federal prisoners of war were suffering and dying in a stockade in south Georgia. Fearing that Sherman's men might attempt to free the Union prisoners then held at Andersonville, Confederate prisoners took steps to ensure that such an attempt would fail. All Federal prisoners who were well enough to travel were sent to Savannah and Charleston. Thousands were sent to Charleston in early September, where they were crowded on the grounds of the city jail and on a race course. Additional prisoners came in daily, despite protests by Major General Samuel Jones, commander of the makeshift camp. The number of Federals held in the city soon exceeded 7,000. An outbreak of yellow fever, which threatened to reach epidemic proportions in the city, further alarmed Jones. On September 12, 1864, he sent an officer to Florence to supervise the construction, by slave labor, of a prison stockade there.

In the fall of 1864, Florence was significant primarily as the junction of three railroads, which would facilitate the transportation of both prisoners and supplies. The prison site was located about a mile to a mile and a half southeast of Florence in an abandoned field which was surrounded by small pines, marshes, and swamps, with a small creek intersecting the stockade at about two-thirds of its length. Some 23 acres were eventually used for the stockade and grounds; a report would later state that nearly a third of the area was swampy and unfit for use.

The stockade was modeled after the one at Andersonville, in which heavy timbers were set upright three to four feet in the ground to form an enclosure. When completed, the enclosure was 1,400 feet long and 725 feet wide. An earthen rampart was constructed against the stockade's outer wall to serve as a walkway for guards, about three feet below the top of the wall, and a ditch five feet deep and seven feet wide was dug just beyond the rampart. A "dead line" was marked some ten or twelve feet inside the walls of the stockade, by a ditch, a fence, or by an imaginary line. Guards were instructed to shoot, without question, any prisoner crossing that line.

Major Frederick F. Warley of the 2nd South Carolina Artillery, a veteran of the siege of Charleston and a recently exchanged prisoner from a Federal prison himself, was assigned to command the new stockade and camp. The first group of Federal prisoners arrived at Florence on September 15; however, work on the stockade had barely begun. The prisoners were herded together in an open field and guarded by just over 100 troops. When the guards allowed a few prisoners to gather firewood, a general rush was made, and guards were knocked down in all directions. As many as a few hundred prisoners escaped. Some made their way to the North, although most of them were recaptured. Warley telegraphed frantically for support. A detail of cavalry and a battery of artillery were eventually sent to his aid, and he was able to get the stockade completed enough in a few days to hold his prisoners.

Warley was soon replaced by Colonel George P. Harrison, Jr. of the 32nd Georgia Infantry, who had commanded his regiment since 1862 and had fought in South Carolina for most of the war. By the end of September, some 12,000 Federals were at Florence, many of them ill from their stays at Andersonville and at Charleston. The rations which were most often distrib-

uted to the prisoners were molasses, cornbread, and rice, with an occasional ration of beef or pork. The prisoners had no utensils to cook or eat with at first, and many of the sick became still more weak. Male nurses made rude shelters from the boughs of pine trees to shelter the sick prisoners from the sunny days and cool nights. Some prisoners had worn out the clothes issued to them at Charleston and were nearly naked. Confederate authorities were aware of these problems and attempted to correct them while struggling to keep order in the stockade and camp. Deaths in the camp were estimated at 30 a day by this time.

Harrison, after commanding the prison for a short time, rejoined his regiment in the field. He was succeeded in December by Lieutenant Colonel John F. Iverson of the 5th Georgia Infantry. He had been in charge of the prisoners on the race course in Charleston. Iverson's chief subordinate, Captain James B. Barrett, was in the actual day-to-day command of the stockade.

In November, Brigadier General John Henry Winder was given command of all Confederate prisons east of the Mississippi River and also given authority to enforce his orders. By December 1864, when he made an inspection visit to the Florence stockade, conditions had worsened to the extent that he recommended the prisoners' removal to a more secure and more healthy place. He became increasingly concerned for the survival of the Confederate prisoners in the Carolinas in late 1864 and early 1865. Winder proposed the wholesale parole of the prisoners whose terms of United States service had expired. His proposal was not approved, so he suggested several possible sites for new prisons while still attempting to improve conditions in the prisons under his command. Winder died of a heart attack on February 6, while on an inspection visit to Florence.

Colonel Henry Forno, who had been an inspector general under Winder's supervision, became commander of Confederate prisons in South Carolina. He complained in an inspection report that the guards at Florence were inefficient and stated that the quantity and quality of rations fed to the Federal prisoners needed to be improved. In spite of constant pleas, the Confederate authorities were unable to increase the rations.

As Sherman's forces advanced into South Carolina and neared Columbia in mid-February, the military situation was critical. All the prisoners who were well enough had to be removed from Florence and sent to some safer place. It was finally decided that the able-bodied Federals would be sent to Greensboro for exchange, while the sick prisoners would be sent to Wilmington for exchange. The first group of Federals left Florence on February 15 and, by the end of the month, the stockade was evacuated. It had only been in use for four and one-half months.

Estimates of the number of prisoners who died in the Florence stockade range as high as 5,900, the number claimed by a bitter ex-prisoner in his memoirs. The best figure which can now be determined from the extant records, however, is about 2,800.

An article in National Cemetery Administration microfilm records, which was prepared from the daily journal of Robert Kellogg, Sergeant-Major, 16th Regiment, Connecticut Volunteers, describes the Florence Prison Stockade. The interior of the prison, in its general features, resembled very much the former place of confinement at Andersonville. A swampy spot extended through the center with a hill on each side. This was far superior, inasmuch as a fine stream of clear, cold water ran through the whole prison. The "dead line" was marked by a shallow ditch, or furrow, having no railing at all. Instead of sentry boxes, the guards walked upon

an elevated bed of earth, which was thrown up so high as to overlook the camp. The top of the stockade reached to about breast high to a man of common height. The enclosure was built of unhewn trunks of trees of nearly uniform length, which were let into the ground and placed side by side very closely. No tents or shelter of any kind were furnished. Some members of the 16th Regiment were among the first to enter and gathered an ample store of wood for the winter, with which they were able to build some quite comfortable huts. The 5th Georgia Regiment was sent to guard the prison, and there were also several battalions of reserves stationed there for the same purpose.

Soon after their arrival, they learned that most of their comrades whom they had left behind in the Georgia prison because they were too sick, were actually in the hospital about a mile away. At about four o'clock every afternoon, the surgeon in charge, Doctor Strother, would come to the prison gate and take out all whom he thought best to go. Those who were able walked to the appointed place, and an army wagon drawn by a span of mules, conveyed the rest. They reached the place of their destination and found it guarded. Some shelters were made in the shape of nine long sheds consisting of a framework of poles overlaid with pine boughs. They afforded some protection from the sun but none from the rain. There were ward divisions, 11 in number, each one being in charge of a wardmaster assisted by eight to ten nurses. There were also seven stewards, whose business it was to receive the medicine from the dispensary and see that it was faithfully administered to the sick, of whom there were about 60 in each ward.

Many supplies were received from the U. S. Sanitary Commission, consisting of shirts, hats, shoes, stockings, slippers, dressing gowns, blankets, bed quilts, and items for the comfort of the sick, including condensed coffee and milk, extract of beef, tomatoes in tin cans, etc. These articles were stored in the log house which was used as a dispensary, and one of the prisoners was placed in charge of them. A sour beer was made from corn meal and administered to those who had the scurvy. The effect was very good.

About October 1864, the hospital and all the sick were removed from inside the stockade. For some time after, the sick were without shelter, but by the first of November, a barrack or shed was completed for their accommodation and preparations made for the erection of more. Two of the structures were 75 feet long, and 31 feet wide, without a nail in them. The frames were made of timber, cut in the swamp near the prison, and fastened together with wooden pins. The roof was made of shingles held on by heavy poles for weights. A number of other surgeons arrived and were assigned to duty in the hospital. More patients were admitted until the whole number amounted to nearly 800. There were so many that they could not obtain prescriptions or have medicine administered to them as often as needed.

More supplies came, including a large quantity of sheets. The sick men were lying upon the bare ground and it was felt that the sheets would do little good to be spread down in the dirt, so the principal surgeon decided that they would be exchanged for sweet potatoes, as these would benefit the men more, especially those suffering with scurvy. The old sheets were used for bandages and were invaluable, as many amputations of gangrenous limbs were taking place.

On each corner of the prison was a raised platform and from two of these, at all hours of the day and night, a man stood by guns, ready for action in case of any attempted breakout.

Prior to the Presidential election in 1864, the rebels expressed intense interest in its result. They were anxious for George B. McClellan to win over President Abraham Lincoln or, at least, for Lincoln's defeat. At that time, there were about 10,000 men in the camp. To test the sentiments of the prisoners, on the day of the election, two bags were placed on the inside of the stockade. A quantity of white and black beans was given to Sergeant Kemp of the 1st Connecticut Cavalry, with the understanding that they would be used as ballots. Those who were in favor of Lincoln were to put a black bean into a bag, and those for McClellan were to vote with a white bean. All did not vote. The result was about 1,500 for McClellan and 6,000 for Lincoln. About a week later, the results of the election were known. The rebels were disappointed. They understood the full significance of the re-election. They knew with sorrow that their independence from Yankee rule was far from being realized.

Many men had died at the prison stockade and were buried on the plantation of Dr. James H. Jarrott, a wealthy landholder and owner of many slaves. He was said to have been a "Union man." The dead were removed from the hospital every morning in an army wagon drawn by mules. They were piled upon one another until the wagon was filled. A party of prisoners dug trenches where the bodies were to be laid. Interments were made in two separate burial grounds, one containing approximately 416 remains and the other approximately 2,322 remains. Interments in the larger portion were made in 16 trenches. The larger area was designated as the Florence National Cemetery in 1865, and the remains from the smaller portion were reinterred there.



There are five known burials in the trenches:

Chapin, W. R. - Sergeant, Company I, 14th Illinois Infantry - Section B, Grave 889

Gardiner, J. S. - Company F, 135th Ohio - Section F, Grave 135

Kinney, George - Private, Company D, 29th Maine Infantry - Section B, Grave 144

Morse, O. S. - 57th Massachusetts Infantry - Section B, Grave 1045

Budwin, Florena - Section D, Grave 2480

Florena Budwin was the bride of a captain from Pennsylvania. After Captain Budwin joined the Federal forces, his bride disguised herself as a man and donned a uniform, hoping to find her husband. There are no records to give her date of birth or the date of her enlistment in the Union army. She was captured near Charleston, South Carolina, in 1864 and sent to Florence in the autumn of that year. After arriving at the stockade with thousands of other Union troops, she took sick as the rations were meager and medical supplies scarce. While the camp physician was making



a routine examination, he found that one of his patients was a woman. She was removed to separate quarters and given food and clothing by the sympathetic women of Florence. When she recovered, she told a most remarkable story of how she had donned a Federal uniform so as to serve by the side of her husband, that her husband had been killed, and that she was captured. After Florena grew strong, she stayed on at the prison as a nurse, and her devotion to her husband was bestowed on the hundreds of soldiers who were suffering from lack of food and medicine. A few months later, she fell sick a second time and did not recover. She died on January 25, 1865, and was buried with full military honors. She was the first woman service member to be buried in a national cemetery in the United States.