

Galvanized Rebels



"Death Before Dishonor"

inscribed on the New Jersey Monument

NPS/C. Barr

Following the war, survivors of Andersonville propagated this misconception among their friends, families, and fellow Americans to demonstrate the loyalty of the Union soldier. Even in the stone monuments erected following the war's end, Union veterans inscribed the solemn pledge "Death before Dishonor." Of the sixteen state monuments within Andersonville National Historic Site, one-third includes the inscription. In addition, modern audiences familiar with TNT's 1996 miniseries "Andersonville" will remember one of its final scenes, in which Captain Wirz stands with Colonel O'Neil and offers the Union prisoners the opportunity to galvanize into the Confederate army in order to escape the horrendous conditions of Andersonville. At this offer, the entire mass of prisoner detachments forms ranks and turns away in defiance, all remaining loyal to the Union cause.



Union prisoners

galvanizing at Florence Stockade

Library of Congress/James E. Taylor

In reality, hundreds of Union soldiers changed sides during the course of the Civil War. During the conflict, both Union and Confederate forces turned to the imprisoned enemy as a potential recruitment pool, offering enlistment as an escape from the hardships of captivity. Like their Confederate counterparts who exchanged butternut uniforms for Federal blue, U.S. soldiers felt the pressure to galvanize. Those Union soldiers propositioned by Confederate staff with offers of release at the price of disloyalty to their nation found themselves in a potentially agonizing situation that set their will to survive against their love of and loyalty to country.

Particularly during the concluding months of the war and during times of scarce rations and intolerable weather conditions, Union soldiers confined in Confederate prisons took matters into their own hands, becoming "Galvanized Rebels" to flee the horrors of prison life. Camp Lawton near Millen, GA would experience a galvanization rate of approximately 4% in the course of the prison's operation— Florence Stockade in Florence, SC would see at least 6% of its Union internees leave to serve the Confederate war machine.



Joel Eaton was in the 81st Illinois and galvanized into the 10th Tennessee at Andersonville. He died shortly afterwards in Macon, GA, and is buried in the Confederate section of the Rose Hill Cemetery.

NPS/W. Barr