

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## **Warren Lee Goss** (1835-1925)

From *The Soldier's Story*

The Soldier's Story was first published in 1866 and went through two more editions and fourteen additional printings, the last in 1876. Many editions included an appendix "containing the names of the Union soldiers who died at Andersonville," and some had a "presentation page," indicating that the book was used as a gift and memorial.

Goss was born in Brewster, Massachusetts, and educated at Pierce Academy in Middleboro. In 1860-61, he spent one year at Harvard Law School, after which he enlisted as a private in the engineer corps. The Soldier's Story, however, tells only of his military experience, beginning with his enlistment, his capture in 1862, and his first imprisonment at Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia. Exchanged in the fall of 1862, he regained his health, and reenlisted in November, 1863, as a sergeant. In the spring of 1864, he was captured again and this time taken to Andersonville in Southern Georgia.

Andersonville prison was one of the worst atrocities of the Civil War. It was still being written about in the 1950s, in MacKinlay Kantor's best-selling novel *Andersonville* and in the *Andersonville Trial*, a play based upon the trial and execution of Colonel Wirz, the commander. Goss satisfied the great curiosity about it and appealed to post-war, pro-Union and anti-Confederate sentiments, while generally avoiding sensationalism.

He describes Andersonville as a bare compound surrounded by a stockade fence. Most of the prisoners had no more shelter than tattered blankets supported by sticks. They cooked on open fires, eating meager rations of dried corn, beans and sometimes a little meat. The barracks that once had been planned were built very late and in insufficient number (the South by that time being very short of men, funds, and supplies). The compound soon became massively overcrowded, and by August, 1864, held 31,000 men, nearly 3000 of whom died in that month alone. To escape, Goss and others dug tunnels, feigned death, and tried running off while outside on wood-gathering forays. Few succeeded, though Goss did once escape for a few days. In the fall he was among the "lucky ones" moved to a prison in Charleston, South Carolina, from which he was exchanged in December.

The chapter below, describing events near the beginning of his account of Andersonville, is typical in its emphasis on not just the conditions of the prison but also on the society and the survival strategies that grew up among the prisoners. As can be seen, he also attacks southern character and praises the prisoner's loyalty to the Union. But the overall message is that "Yankee ingenuity" and the New England and western character are what have been tested and have endured.

After the war, Goss became an editor and magazine writer and an author of children's novels and children's biographies of Grant and Sherman. He also held offices in veterans' organizations.

The selection here is Chapter 5 of *The Soldier's Story* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1866). There is no biography of Goss, though he did write a second autobiography, *Recollections of a Private* (1890).

### Reading

The Soldier's Story of His Captivity at Andersonville, Belle Isle  
<http://archive.org/details/soldiersstoryhi02gossgoog>