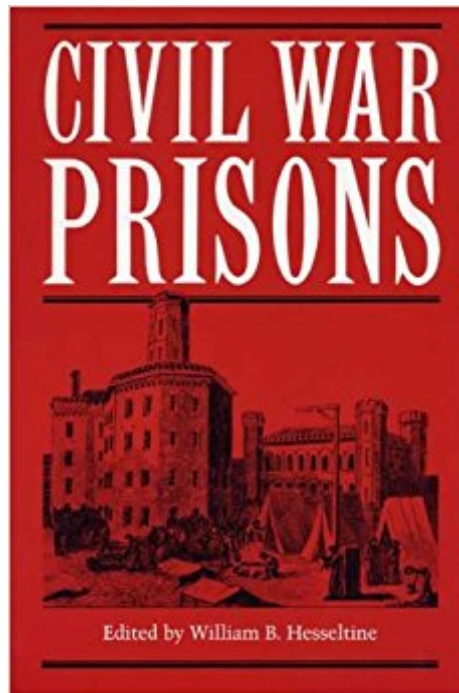




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Civil War Prisons



Synopsis

First published in 1962 as a special edition of Civil War History journal, Civil War Prisons remains the standard on the topic. Editor Hesseltine tackles the historiography of northern and southern prisons during the American Civil War. He attempts to bring closure to the legendary northern myth that the Southern government did its best to "exterminate" Union prisoners by calling the effective northern war propaganda a wartime "psychosis." Furthermore, the author offers his analysis over the much debated prisoner exchange system, and comes down hard on the North, especially its government and General Ulysses S. Grant, for their questionable approach to this issue. For all the serious scholarship and popular writing devoted to the American Civil War, the topic of prisoner-of-war camps, more than any other, retains the feeling of horror and passion that characterized the war years themselves, "Men held captive under such circumstances, guilty of no offense other than the deplorable misfortune of having been captured by the enemy, suffer tremendous psychological punishment as well as physical hardship. Monotony, estrangement and fear, along with privation and often brutality, combine to create nearly as wretched a quality of human life as is imaginable. The sufferings of Civil War prisoners (are) documented in this re-issue of an early number of the journal Civil War History. Recounted there are prisoner experiences in four Confederate installations: Andersonville, Georgia; Libby in Richmond, Virginia; Cahaba, Alabama; and Charleston, South Carolina. The remaining articles treat conditions in four Union prisons: Fort Warren in Boston harbor; Rock Island, Illinois; Elmira, New York; and Johnson's Island on Lake Erie. In addition to some examples of sparkling and vivid prose, this volume contains a number of excellent photographs as well as an introduction by the late William B. Hesseltine.

Kenneth B. Shover, The Historian

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Customer Reviews

Curiously, the two earlier reviewers, while writing interesting comments, aren't reviewing the book they think they are. They've confused William Hesseltine's 1930 *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* with the slim collection of essays edited by William B. Hesseltine entitled *Civil War Prisons*. The latter, issued in 1962 and reissued 30 years later by Kent State University Press, is the book they should've reviewed here. The essays collected in *Civil War Prisons* all originally appeared in a special issue of the journal "Civil War History." Predictably, they're both enjoyable and rigorously documented. One of them, the article on Andersonville, is also generously illustrated with both line drawings and photographs. The essays focus on prisons both well-known and not so familiar. Ovid Futch writes on the infamous Andersonville; Minor McLain on Fort Warren, the federal prison on George's Island in Boston Harbor; T.R. Walker on Rock Island Prison on an island in the Mississippi River; Frank Byrne presents an edited version of General Neal Dow's experiences as a captive in Richmond's Libby Prison; James Robertson's writes on New York's Elmira Prison, a camp so notorious for high death rates that it came to be called "Hellmira

very interesting information about the prisons

Very informative overall view of the subject.

I have had this book before and liked it, misplaced it somewhere, so reordered it. It was received when I was supposed to get it.

boreing book not my cup of tea

Not all prisons listed as hoped. but many of them are listed in detail. Will be useful in completing research .

Great

First we need to address the issue of just what work is being reviewed here and which book is being sold on this product page. As another reviewer here, Kerry Walters, has so well pointed out, several reviewers have mistaken this work edited by William B. Hesseltine, with a work actually written by Hesseltine around 1930 entitled "Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology." The book being reviewed here is "Civil War Prisons," which is the small volume published and released by The Kent State University Press in 1962. We are addressing two quite different works. Hesseltine's original work, which as noted was issued about 1930 has its own set of problems; if problems you chose to call them, and issues completely separate than those addressed in this work. Readers do take note of this...it makes very big difference in how this book is approached. (Note: Hesseltine's 1930s work is good but, in my opinion, should be approached with caution. Hesseltine has tried his best to be neutral in his assessments, but his sympathies bleed through here and there and again, in my opinion, he does not give a completely balanced overview....but of course each reader should make up their own mind on this subject.)

Civil War Prisons, Edited by William B. Hesseltine, the actual book being reviewed here, is a collection of essays (or articles), which address different prisons which existed during the Civil War. These articles and their authors include:

- Civil War Prisons - Introduction, by William B. Hesseltine
- Prison Life at Andersonville, by Ovid Futch
- The Military Prison at Fort Warren, by Minor H. McLain
- Rock Island Prison Barracks, by T.R. Walker
- A General Behind Bars: Neal Dow in Libby Prison, edited by Frank L. Byrne
- The Scourge of Elmira, by James I. Robertson Jr.
- Johnson's Island, by Edward T. Downer
- Cahaba to Charleston: The Prison Odyssey of Lt. Edmund E. Ryan, by William M. Armstrong (A distant relative of my wife...of great interest to us personally).

This 124 page small volume relies heavily on first hand accounts of selected men who were actual prisoners during the time of the War and shortly after. The compiler has made a good effort in giving a good cross section of experiences, but of course the reader should note that these are stories of a few, attempting to tell the story of literally thousands and as such, the accounts recorded in this volume might quite well be rather myopic in some cases. Like any battle in any war, there are as many opinions of how the battle went as there were men involved...each has his own story and take on the situation. The intention of this work was not meant to be a complete and comprehensive study of Civil War POWs, nor an all inclusive study of each of the infamous prisons involved. No, this is a collection of first hand accounts, enhanced by comments by each of the authors of each of the essays. Despite the notorious inaccuracies of many first-hand accounts, due to dimmed memories, the "war story syndrome," personal prejudices and the like, they are, from my personal likes and dislikes, my favorite. But that being said, the reader should take this into consideration when reading such material as this. Since Hesseltine's 1930s work was published,

and indeed since this volume was published, much research has been accomplished and we now have plethora of literature covering this subject with more being offered each year. This work in no way is the beginning and end of such studies but it is a great starting point for those unfamiliar with the subject. It is what I considered a "seed" work; one that should, when planted, encourage the interested reader to grow and seek out other, more in-depth studies on the subject. I am giving this one five stars because I personally feel that it serves the function for which it is meant. It is a scholarly work but presented in a fashion which is highly readable and simply interesting and informative. It is a basic overview and a good beginning of a study of an aspect of our history which we should all be aware of.

Don Blankenship
The Ozarks

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