

Andersonville Goes to Hollywood—Courtesy of  
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## Andersonville Goes to Hollywood—Courtesy of Ted Turner

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### In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Rachels and Baird | Andersonville Goes to Hollywood—Courtesy of Ted Turner Andersonville today: Homage to all of America's POW/MIAs. The Anderson Trust Andersonville National Historic Site Andersonville, GA 31711 (Donations are welcomed) 54 | Film & History Regular Feature | Film Reviews David Rachels and Robert Baird University of Illinois Andersonville Goes to Hollywood Courtesy of Ted Turner those who are interested in the facts of Andersonville—the filthy stockade in which 41,000 Union prisoners shared what little space, food, and water a dying Confederacy could provide them—should begin at the end of William Marvel's Andersonville: The Last Depot. In discussing his sources, Marvel argues that we should doubt anything about Andersonville written after 1865. Michael Dougherty's prison diary, published in 1908, is an example of why: Not only did Dougherty revise his original diary heavily, but he also embellished it with already-embellished passages from previously published works. The popular Andersonville diaries of John McElroy and John Ransom have not much more to recommend them.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, spurious accounts such as these quickly caught hold of

the popular imagination. A Pulitzer Prize-winning novel and now a major motion picture have only strengthened the Andersonville mythology. MacKinlay Kantor's blockbuster *Andersonville* appeared in 1955. By most standards *Andersonville* is a great book, alternately horrifying and touching, depressing and uplifting, massive in scope, and painstaking in detail. Sadly, Kantor's book is undone by its reliance on those sources that Marvel dismisses out-of-hand. "Kantor's research was impressive," Marvel writes, "for a novelist<sup>2</sup>". Now Marvel is free to take similar swipes at David W. Rintels, screenwriter for Ted Turner's *Andersonville*. Funded by Turner's deep pockets, cast with pros from Hollywood and Broadway, and directed by powerful storyteller John Frankenheimer (*The Manchurian Candidate* [1962]), *Andersonville* does rise above typical made-for-TV historical fare. But if historical accuracy is your yardstick, *Andersonville* cannot match such first-rank films as Edward Zwick's *Glory* (1989) and Ken Burns's *The Civil War* (1989). *Andersonville* flaunts its dramatic license in ways one expects. For example, in perhaps the movie's most shameless, calculated moment, Rintels has the prisoners Vol. 25, No. 1-2, 1995 | 55 Rachels and Baird | *Andersonville* Goes to Hollywood-Courtesy of Ted Turner refuse, en masse, an offer to trade their Union loyalty for their freedom. As Marvel points out, historical *Andersonville* had scores of willing turncoats. A monument to "Providence Spring." What is more remarkable about the film, however, is that it passes over what would seem to be some of the prison's most fertile cinematic materials. Television's *Andersonville*, for example, does not give a sense of the filth of the stockade. Stockade Creek was the prison's natural water supply, and at one end of the creek were "the sinks," crude latrines used by the prisoners. In history, the sinks were better photographed than any other part of the prison, as they seem to have fascinated photographer Andrew Jackson Riddle.<sup>4</sup> The film, however, never gives us a good look at the sinks, which turned a giant portion of the prison into an uninhabitable cesspool and helped to ruin the water supply. Fortunately, a spring burst forth—Providence Spring, the prisoners called it. In MacKinlay Kantor's *Andersonville*, a prisoner discovers the spring: He fell forward, burying his face in the flow, draining mouthful after mouthful, trying to condemn his stony throat to a banquet of swallowing. This was something to drown in, he would drown in it. Then he rose, supporting himself on trembling hands as he screamed with all his strength, "Water! Fresh water! It's a spring!" He did not distribute these tidings with any notion of sharing a treat with the rank and file of fellow men; it was only that he had to voice the discovery, bellow it above cracking thunder in order to reassure himself that it was true. Within a matter of seconds there were fifty men tumbled around him, guzzling like spooks shed by the bursting night; and more scores came shoving on top of them.<sup>5</sup> After the war, prisoners returned to *Andersonville* to build a memorial to this miracle. Amazingly, *Andersonville* the movie never...

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