

# Gene Hackman meets H.K. Edgerton

ASHEVILLE, June 27 – On Thursday, June 26, 2008, at the invitation of Asheville Tribune Editor David Morgan and confirmation of SLRC Administrative Director, the Honorable Roger McCredie that a Truth Patrol should be present; I would don the uniform of the Southern soldier, pick up his glorious banner and head out to Malaprops' Bookstore in downtown Asheville where actor Gene Hackman with his co-author, Daniel Lenihan had come to promote, sign copies and

began his opening statements by saying that their book centered on Andersonville that was undoubtedly the worst prisoner of war facility on either side of the war effort, North or South. After several more moments of discourse in an explanation that their book was about some Union Captain who had escaped Andersonville and was planning on returning to aid in the escape of some of his comrades who were still suffering there; Mr. Lenihan opened the floor up for questions from the audience.

to an overcrowded Andersonville where Major Wirtz was having difficulty feeding his own men.

You make no mention of the deliberate actions of Union Colonel Sweet, who deliberately starved, tortured, maimed and immediately killed any Confederate soldier who looked like me and left their remains to be eaten by the hoards of rats who patrolled there. Mr. Lenihan would back away from his original contentions and began to offer a substantially different and more accurate description of

actors, but that on this evening that before he had so by his statements vindicated himself and his co-author; I had come to whip him. He answered cheerfully that he could sense that. I told him that Harriet Beecher Stowe's book, Uncle Tom's Cabin and the biased writings about Andersonville had probably been the most significant determining factors in turning Northern people against the Southern people, and probably more so than Lincoln's proclamation that those bad people have fired upon our flag at Ft. Sumter, and for this reason alone, anything written about Andersonville would always fall under the eye of those of us who work hard to vindicate our homeland from the wrongs that besiege the pages of those who

write unfairly about her.

On Friday June 27, 2008, the Asheville Citizen- Times would only show a postage stamp picture taken by their staff photographer, John Coutlakis with his arms draped around one of our residents, but you can believe it was not the picture that he took with a black man dressed in the Confederate uniform carrying the Confederate Naval Jack. Nor would the story reported carry the exchange of dialogue that took place in Malaprops that would lead some of Western North Carolina's most prominent citizens and visitors as it had Gene Hackman and co-author Daniel Lenihan to the conclusion that Major Wirtz deserved vindication and just maybe so does his homeland, the Southland of America.



Above, H.K. Edgerton (l) and Gene Hackman (r). On Thursday, June 26, actor Gene Hackman and Dan Lenihan presented themselves for a book signing and discussion at Malaprops bookstore of their Civil War novel / *Escape from Andersonville*. The bookstore was packed with an attentive audience.

Even though the book was fictional and not written as an historical account, several people asked Hackman and Lenihan their views regarding historical events. One of the questions asked was whether or not the authors thought that the North had railroaded the Commandant of the camp, Captain Henry Wirz, to his hanging at the end of the war. After some reflection, the authors voiced their view that they believed that such had been the case.

After the discussion, the authors remained to sign what appeared to be close to 100 of their books. In a slight turn of events - that was well received - H.K. Edgerton presented the authors with a copy of Mike Scruggs' book *The Un-Civil War* that Edgerton himself signed, while dressed in his Confederate uniform and carrying the Battle Flag.

answer questions about their book titled "Escape From Andersonville", touted as a novel of the Civil War.

After greeting and posing for pictures for many of the people that included some of Asheville and Buncombe Counties most prominent citizens who stood in line outside Malaprops waiting to be seated, I would enter and take my seat right up front next to the podium from which the authors would speak. After their introductions whereupon Mr. Hackman had set the stage with his charismatic charm, he turned and introduced his co-author who

I was the first to be recognized and offered this discord: " Mr. Lenihan, I take great exception on your opening remarks in describing Andersonville as the worst of the prison systems on both sides of the War. You make no mention of places like Camp Douglas which would have made Andersonville look like a picnic with the POPE." I take exception with the title of your book, *The Escape from Andersonville*, when Major Wirtz did everything he could do to return Union soldiers under the prisoner exchange program, only to have General Grant suspend the program and send his men back

historical events surrounding this tragic epoch. I must say that it was not until Mr. Hackman answered a question in affirmation that he and Mr. Lenihan had come to the conclusion that the trial and consequential hanging of Major Wirtz was tainted and Major Wirtz was used as a scapegoat by the Northern Federal government, did I began to feel better about this night, and when I began clap loudly after Mr. Hackman's statement, I believed he felt his first moment of relief.

I raised my hand once more and told Mr. Hackman that he had always been one of my favorite



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