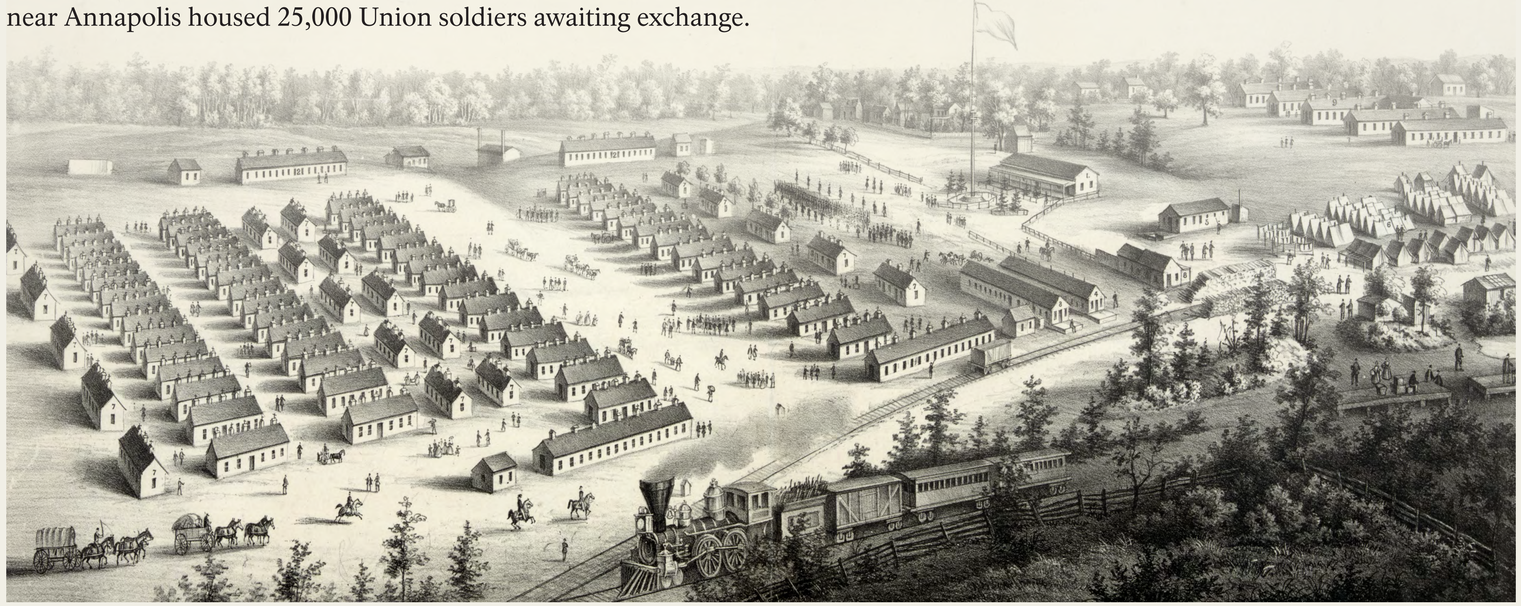
ANNAPOLIS NATIONAL CEMETERY

Civil War Annapolis

In April 1861, Gen. Benjamin Butler and his Massachusetts troops entered the Maryland capital to ensure the state remained in the Union. The U.S. Army then formed the Department of Annapolis, headed by Butler, to secure communication between the North and Washington, D.C. By summer, the U.S. Naval Academy was converted into a hospital. As Civil War fighting along the eastern seaboard intensified, St. John's College became a second hospital.

Annapolis also served as a parole camp. Union and Confederate forces exchanged prisoners on a one-for-one basis. Some were confined, others paroled and released. Paroled soldiers swore an oath to not take up arms until they were formally exchanged. Union authorities wanted their men available as soon as they were exchanged, so the U.S. Army housed the parolees in camps instead of allowing them to go home. At one time, Camp Parole near Annapolis housed 25,000 Union soldiers awaiting exchange.

U.S. Naval Academy buildings used as a U.S. General Hospital during the war, c. 1864. Library of Congress.



Camp Parole near Annapolis, 1865. Library of Congress.

National Cemetery

In 1862, the government leased 4 acres from Judge Nicholas Brewer. This land became Annapolis National Cemetery. Men who died at Camp Parole or the city's military hospitals occupy most of the graves. An 1868 army inspection listed 2,661 burials, including seven civilians, three female nurses, one Russian sailor, and one child. By the 1874 inspection, the list had been revised to 2,482 burials, including 211 unknowns and fourteen citizens. In the 1910s, a federal commission identified a few Confederate prisoner-of-war dead buried in the cemetery, and their graves were marked with distinctive pointed-top headstones.

The irregular-shaped cemetery occupies rolling land enclosed by a stone wall. Originally burial sections were separated by grass paths, and a central drive extended from the main gate, around the flagstaff mound, to the opposite wall. The original 1871 lodge was razed and replaced in 1940 with a Colonial Revival-style building. The old gates, too narrow for modern automobile access, were replaced at the same time.

Postcard view of Annapolis National Cemetery, c. 1912, showing entrance, lodge, and tool house. National Cemetery Administration.