

ASHLAND SOLDIERS' LOT



Mourners at Alexandria National Cemetery, Virginia, c. 1865. After 1873, standard marble headstones replaced the wood headboards seen here. Miller, *Photographic History of the Civil War* (1910).

Civil War Dead

An estimated 700,000 Union and Confederate soldiers died in the Civil War (1861-1865). As the death toll rose, the U.S. government struggled with the urgent but unplanned need to bury fallen Union troops. This propelled the creation of a national cemetery system.

On September 11, 1861, the War Department directed officers to keep “accurate and permanent records of deceased soldiers.” Federal authority to create military burial grounds came in an Omnibus Act of July 17, 1862. Cemetery sites were chosen where troops were concentrated: camps, hospitals, battlefields, railroad hubs. By 1872, 74 national cemeteries and several soldiers’ lots contained 305,492 remains. About 45 percent were unknown.

The U.S. government established soldiers’ lots at private cemeteries in northern states. National cemeteries, in contrast, were built throughout the South where most Civil War action occurred. While the army reported dozens of lots containing Union dead in the 1870s, the National Cemetery Administration maintains only fifteen. The number of graves ranges from less than ten to nearly 400 in these lots.

Carlisle at War

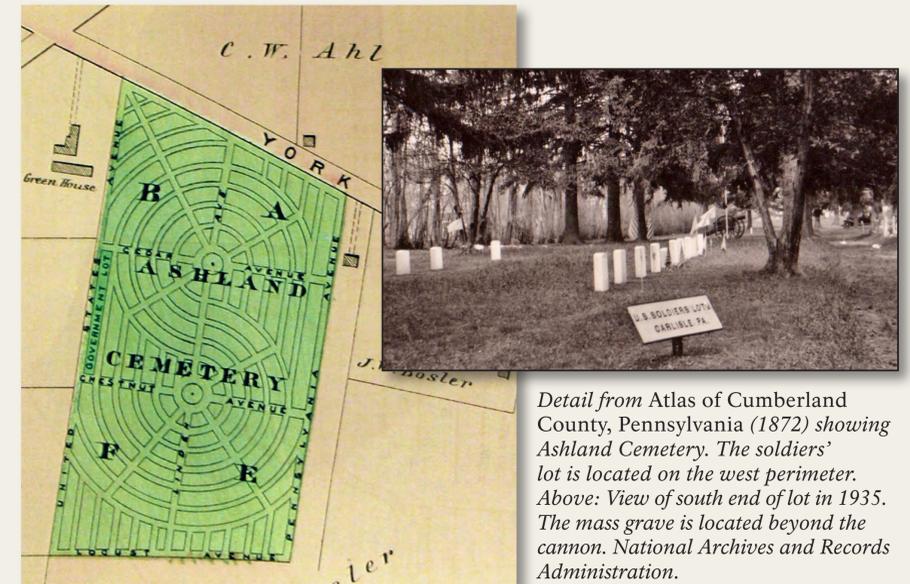
After Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, in April 1861, the men of Carlisle responded to the national call to put down the southern rebellion. Four companies of Pennsylvania infantry and five cavalry companies were organized here. Carlisle Army Barracks, just outside of town, included a Quartermaster and Ordnance Depot, and U.S. Cavalry training facility.

The Civil War reached Carlisle in June 1863. Confederate cavalry briefly occupied the town, taking from its citizenry supplies for both men and horses. Soon after, Confederate infantry arrived at the deserted U.S. Army barracks. Within a few days the rested and fed Confederates departed.

On July 1, Union forces set up artillery in Carlisle. When Confederate forces arrived and demanded their surrender, they declined. The Confederates burned Carlisle Barracks that night and departed. After the Battle of Gettysburg, 50 miles to the south, buildings at Dickenson College and many others in town served as temporary hospitals.



Confederate forces attack Carlisle. Harper’s Weekly Magazine (July 25, 1863).



Detail from Atlas of Cumberland County, Pennsylvania (1872) showing Ashland Cemetery. The soldiers’ lot is located on the west perimeter. Above: View of south end of lot in 1935. The mass grave is located beyond the cannon. National Archives and Records Administration.

Military Burials

Ashland Cemetery was established in 1865 on 12 acres. The soldiers’ lot was acquired by the federal government in March 1866. An 1870 army inspection reported thirty-eight graves in the rectangular 0.2-acre lot. In May 1871, burials from Carlisle Barracks Post Cemetery were moved here. More than 300 sets of remains were recovered, far more than expected.

In the 1930s, the army tried to determine the number of unknown dead buried in the north end of the lot in order to erect a monument on the mass grave. Eventually, a standard government headstone, inscribed “500 Unknown U.S. Soldiers,” was installed. Later research identified thirty-five of the dead. A granite monument with a bronze plaque inscribed with these names replaced the headstone in 1960.

Today, the soldiers’ lot contains twenty-three individual graves. Civil War Medal of Honor recipient Pvt. Jacob Cart, 7th Pennsylvania Reserve Infantry, is memorialized here. He captured a Confederate regimental flag at Fredericksburg, Virginia, on December 13, 1862 (Section 22, Row D, Site 24).