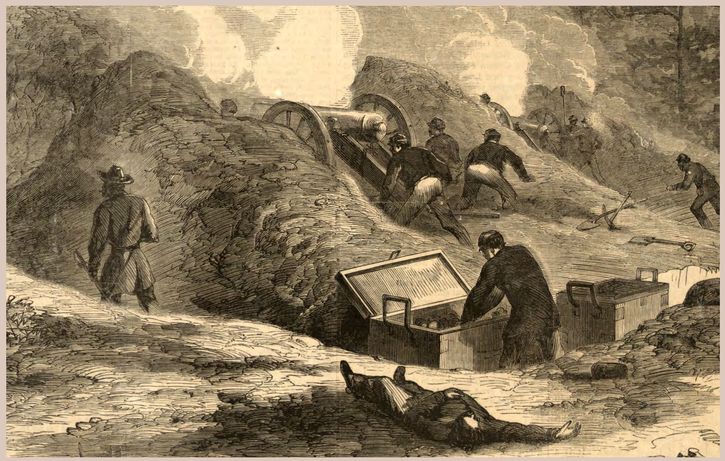
# COLD HARBOR NATIONAL CEMETERY

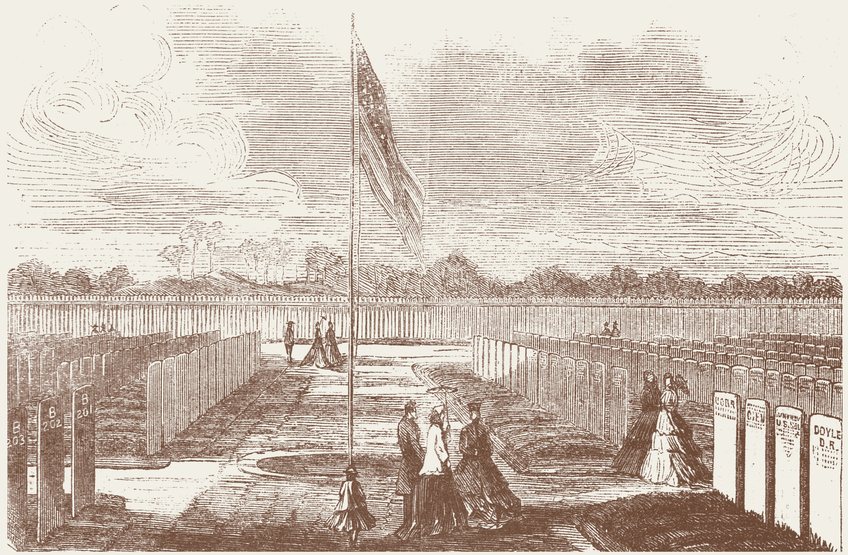
## “Grant’s slaughter pen”

Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee’s army stood between Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and Richmond, the Confederate capital. Grant ordered his cavalry to take and hold the vital crossroads known as Cold Harbor. On May 31, 1864, they succeeded, and that night both sides built fortifications. The next day, six Union divisions attacked. One New York soldier called it hell “turned up sideways.” The Union lost 2,200 men, took 750 prisoners, and gained nothing.



*A Union battery at the Battle of Cold Harbor, June 1864, Library of Congress.*

Grant planned another assault for the next morning, but everything went wrong. Union soldiers, maneuvering in the dark, did not reach their positions until dawn, and he postponed the attack one day to June 3. The delay allowed Lee to strengthen the Confederate line. Before sunrise, 50,000 Union infantry charged. An hour later 7,000 Union soldiers lay dead or wounded. Grant later wrote, “I have always regretted that the last assault at Cold Harbor was ever made.” The Union offensive on Richmond ended at Cold Harbor and Grant moved on to Petersburg, Virginia.




*Depiction of the cemetery with headboards.* Harper’s Weekly, *October 1866.*

## National Cemetery

During the Civil War, thousands of Union soldiers perished in battles fought for control of Richmond. They are now buried in Cold Harbor National Cemetery and six other national cemeteries established in the Richmond-Petersburg area in 1866. Here lie soldiers who died at the battles of Mechanicsville, Savage Station, and many other nearby sites.

The 1.4-acre cemetery is divided into quadrants with a flagstaff mound at the center. It was enclosed by a brick wall in 1871. A Second Empire-style lodge built in the 1870s stands at the entrance. The remains of 889 unknown Union soldiers are interred in two trenches along the north wall.

Medal of Honor recipient Augustus Barry, a sergeant-major with the 16th U.S. Infantry, was wounded in 1864 at the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, Georgia. Berry’s commendation was for “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.” In 1867, he was appointed the cemetery superintendent; four years later he was buried in Section A, Grave 309.

## Monuments

The first monument, a white marble sarcophagus, was erected in 1877 to mark trench burials containing the unknown dead. The citizens of New York and Pennsylvania erected monuments in 1909. The first is inscribed with the names of 219 men of the 8th New York Heavy Artillery who died fighting at Cold Harbor. The second, a 30-foot-tall granite shaft topped by a standing soldier, honors the sacrifice made nearby by Pennsylvania troops.

*Dedication of the Pennsylvania Monument, attended by surviving veterans and others, 1909. National Cemetery Administration.*

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