

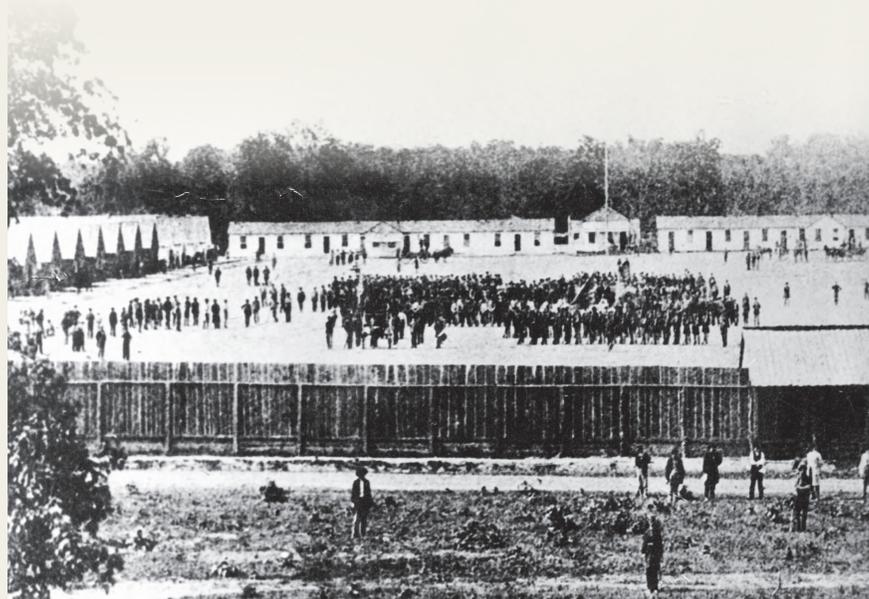
CONFEDERATE BURIALS IN THE NATIONAL CEMETERY

Camp Butler Prison Camp

On February 16, 1862, Fort Donelson, a Confederate stronghold on the Cumberland River west of Clarksville, Tennessee, surrendered. Faced with 15,000 prisoners, the U.S. Army converted several training camps, including Camp Butler, into military prisons; it received 2,000 prisoners.

An additional 1,000 prisoners arrived in April 1862, after the capture of Island No. 10 in the Mississippi River, near New Madrid, Missouri. Beginning in September, prisoners were sent south for exchange for Union prisoners; the camp was empty by October. In early 1863, an estimated 1,665 Confederate soldiers captured in Arkansas and Tennessee, arrived at Camp Butler.

Barracks were often full, forcing prisoners to live in tents. Illness reached epidemic proportions—pneumonia was a constant problem. When the last Confederate prisoners departed on May 19, 1863, more than 800 of their comrades had been buried in the prison cemetery, victims of inadequate facilities, poor sanitation, and disease.



Camp Butler, c. 1862. National Archives and Records Administration.



The Confederate section in 1939. National Archives and Records Administration.

Prison Dead

Prisoners who died at Camp Butler were interred in an old cornfield northeast of the camp, near the graves of Union soldiers.

Like Union dead, prisoners were buried in individual coffins and placed in graves marked with headboards or stakes. All Confederate prisoners buried at Camp Butler are in their original graves.

The post burial ground at Camp Butler became a national cemetery in 1862. An 1868 U.S. Army inspection report explained the layout: “The burials were made from the hospitals at Camp Butler as the deaths occurred, and do not seem to have been made according to any regular plan or order; but the graves were dug as most convenient.”

In 1908, the Commission for Marking Graves of Confederate Dead erected the pointed-top marble headstones that still mark the graves.

Toward Reconciliation

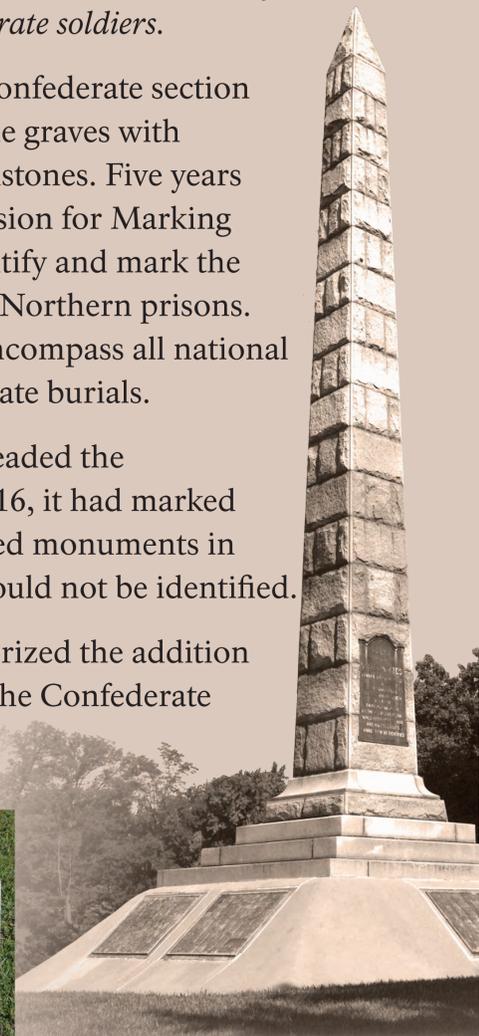
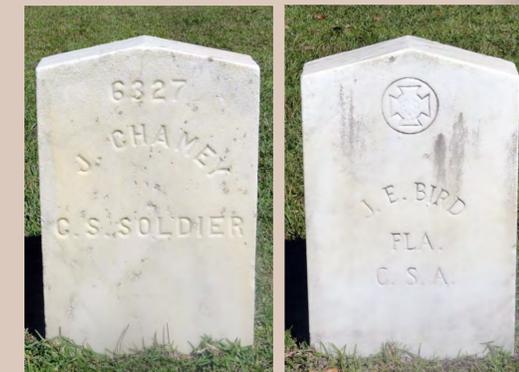
On May 30, 1868, the Grand Army of the Republic decorated Union and Confederate graves at Arlington National Cemetery. Thirty years later President William McKinley proclaimed:

The Union is once more the common altar of our love and loyalty, our devotion and sacrifice . . . Every soldier's grave made during our unfortunate Civil War is a tribute to American valor . . . in the spirit of fraternity we should share with you in the care of the graves of the Confederate soldiers.

The War Department created the Confederate section at Arlington in 1901, and marked the graves with distinctive pointed-top marble headstones. Five years later, Congress created the Commission for Marking Graves of Confederate Dead to identify and mark the graves of Confederates who died in Northern prisons. Its mission was later expanded to encompass all national cemeteries that contained Confederate burials.

Four former Confederate officers headed the Commission over its lifetime. By 1916, it had marked in excess of 25,500 graves and erected monuments in locations where individual graves could not be identified.

In 1930, the War Department authorized the addition of the Southern Cross of Honor to the Confederate headstone.



North Alton Confederate Cemetery Monument, 1909, Alton, Ill.

Original Commission headstone (left) and headstone with Southern Cross of Honor (right).