

# CAMP NELSON NATIONAL CEMETERY



U.S. Colored Troops barracks at Camp Nelson, c. 1865. National Archives and Records Administration.

## Camp Nelson

Gen. Ambrose Burnside, commander of the U.S. Army Department of the Ohio, established Camp Nelson in June 1863. It occupied a ridge above the Kentucky River about 20 miles south of Lexington. The Union depot provisioned the army's invasion of East Tennessee, then the Western Theater. Camp Nelson provided mules, horses, and other quartermaster and commissary supplies. Nelson General Hospital and a Soldiers' Home administered by the U.S. Sanitary Commission were established here.

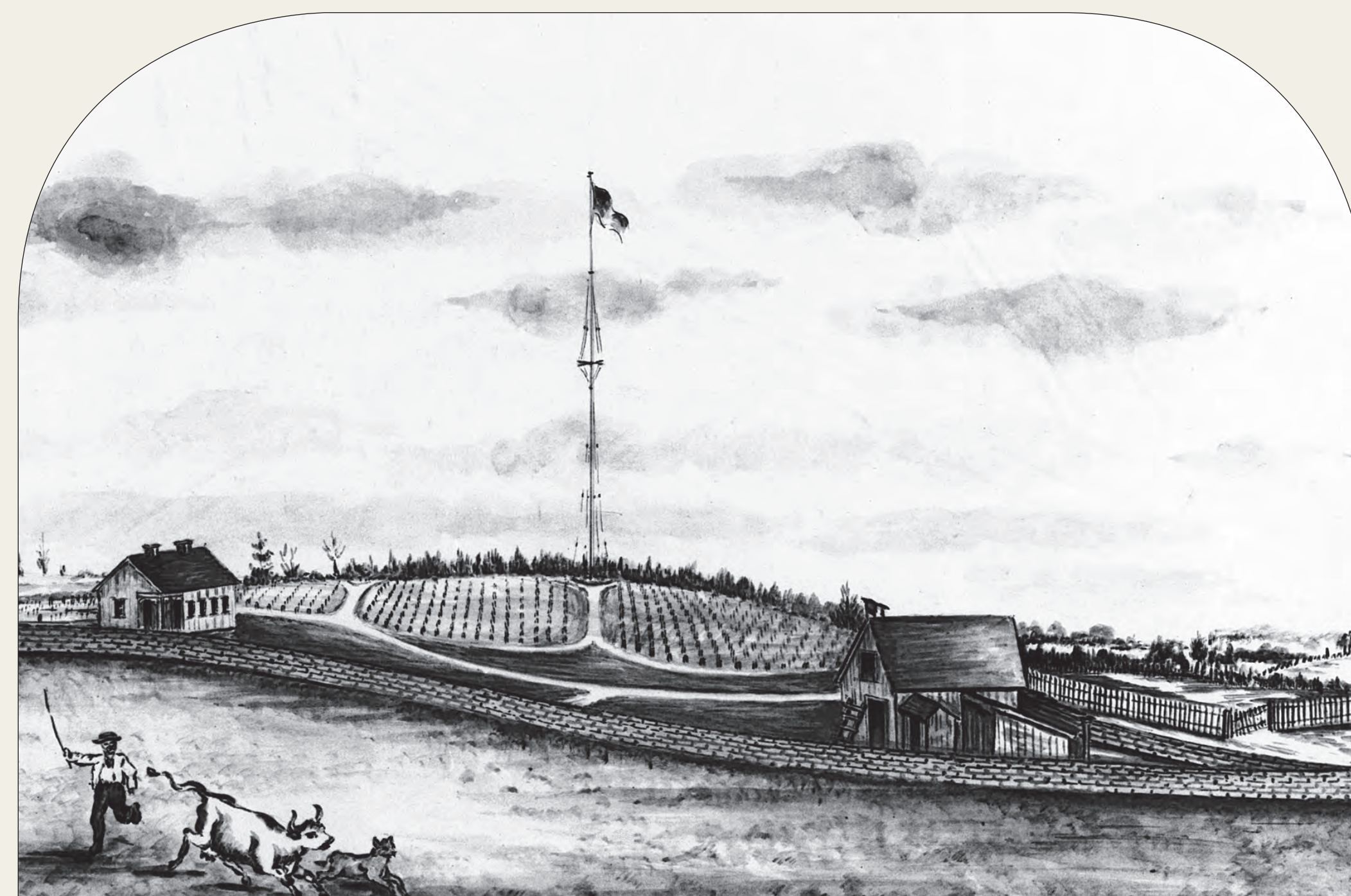
Camp Nelson became an important recruiting and training camp for U.S. Colored Troops (USCT). Many enslaved men who came to enlist brought their families. The army responded by building a large refugee camp to shelter them. More than 10,000 USCT passed through Camp Nelson, the third-largest USCT recruiting center established during the Civil War.

## “Harvest of Death”

Early in 1866, Capt. E. B. Whitman began gathering information in preparation for the reinterment of Union soldiers buried in the Military Division of Tennessee. This huge district included Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

Captain Whitman, later lieutenant colonel, placed newspaper notices seeking locations of Union graves. Citizens, chaplains, soldiers, and officers replied. Whitman made three major expeditions across the region, stopping at hundreds of battlefields and engagement sites. Because of his work, thousands of Union dead were moved to twelve new national cemeteries.

In May 1869, Whitman submitted a detailed summary of this difficult project to the quartermaster general. The report contained sketches and site plans of each cemetery, and data on interments and service affiliations.



Camp Nelson National Cemetery, from Brut. Lt. Col. E. B. Whitman's final report, c. 1869. Whitman used the phrase “Harvest of Death” in his exhaustive report to describe the work of collecting the dead. National Archives and Records Administration.

## National Cemetery

Prior to 1869, ten federally established or public cemeteries in Kentucky contained the remains of Union soldiers. The work of reintering the dead was almost complete when the army changed its plan and reduced the number of cemeteries in the state to six.



Cemetery gate, 1904. The cast-iron plaques contain information about the establishment of the national cemeteries (left) and the rules of behavior for visitors (right). National Archives and Records Administration.

Camp Nelson National Cemetery, the largest, had been established to bury soldiers who died in camp. In 1867, the U.S. Army Quartermaster General's Office moved remains here from Covington, Frankfort, London, Perryville, and Richmond, Kentucky. As a result, the cemetery more than doubled to 6.5 acres.

Two years later, it contained 3,638 Union graves, including 867 USCT. Fewer than one-third of the dead were unknown. By 1874, the government had purchased another 3 acres and built a Second Empire-style lodge for the superintendent and his family.

By law, the secretary of war appointed a “meritorious and trustworthy” superintendent to manage the cemetery. Ewald Schneider, who served in the 5th U.S. Artillery, was the first superintendent here. He lost a leg at the Battle of Chickamauga (Georgia) on September 19, 1863.