CITY POINT NATIONAL CEMETERY

"The busiest place in Dixie"

City Point, Virginia, played a significant role in the final year of the Civil War. General-in-Chief of the Union Army Ulysses S. Grant established his headquarters here on June 15, 1864. Union ships sailed supplies up the James River to this hamlet north of Petersburg.

The massive supply depot included more than 280 buildings that housed facilities and services essential to keeping the Union Army combat ready. Deliveries flowed in to support the 100,000 men and 65,000 animals Grant employed in the siege of Petersburg. The Quartermaster Corps built eight wharves, which covered 8 acres and included 100,000 square feet of warehouse space. The magnitude of river traffic at City Point made it, briefly, one of the busiest ports in the world.

The Union Army also established hospital facilities at City Point in 1864. At first the wounded were housed in 1,200 tents. Later the army constructed ninety frame buildings capable of holding 5,400 men. The hospital complex included a water tower, ice house, dining hall and kitchens. By 1865, the complex had treated 29,000 patients.

Thousands of men, many former slaves, unload supplies on the wharf at City Point, c. 1864. Library of Congress.

National Cemetery

During the Civil War, Union and Confederate armies fought numerous battles for control of Richmond. Thousands of Union soldiers perished. They are now buried in City Point National Cemetery and six other national cemeteries established in the Richmond-Petersburg area in 1866. Most of the 6,909 burials were moved here from hospital cemeteries, including the old City Point burial ground, Point of Rocks Cemetery in Chesterfield County, and Harrison's Landing in Charles City County.

Rear of the original lodge at City Point sometime before it was razed in 1928. National Archives and Records Administration.

Unlike most Richmond-area national cemeteries where greater numbers of unknown dead are interred, only 1,400 unknowns are here. More than 1,100 Confederate soldiers, who died in nearby hospitals after the Union occupation, lie here, most in Section C.

In the 1950s, several more Civil War soldiers were laid to rest in the cemetery. Work undertaken in a vacant lot in Hopewell, Virginia, in 1955, uncovered the graves of seventeen Union and Confederate soldiers. Four years later, construction crews working on Interstate 95 unearthed the remains of two Union soldiers.

Army of the James

Beginning in March 1863, the federal government began actively recruiting black men for the U.S. Army. In May of the following year, the War Department created the Bureau of United States Colored Troops (USCT). These regiments fought in battles and engagements from Virginia to Texas. Originally, USCT regiments were assigned to both the X and XVIII Corps of the Army of the James, but were consolidated into the XXV Corps in December 1864. More than 1,300 USCT soldiers, both known and unknown, were buried here.

In 1865, a 20-foot-tall marble obelisk was erected at the cemetery under the direction of Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler and others. It honors the dead who served in the Army of the James. The badges of the XVIII Corps (trefoil cross), X Corps (four-bastioned fort), and XXIV Corps (heart) decorate the monument.

Members of the 4th U.S. Colored Infantry, c. 1865. The regiment was part of the Army of the James under Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler. Library of Congress.