

CULPEPER NATIONAL CEMETERY

Seat of War

Railroads connecting Washington, D.C., and Richmond crossed Culpeper County, Virginia, so this area witnessed major Civil War battles. Both Union and Confederate armies occupied this area throughout the war. In 1861, the Confederates established a supply depot and training base here. In August 1862, Union Gen. John Pope marched the Army of Virginia into Culpeper County and engaged Gen. Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson at the Battle of Cedar Mountain, but failed to secure a Union victory.

In fall 1862, Gen. Robert E. Lee wintered in Culpeper County. Brandy Station, the largest Civil War cavalry battle, was fought here in June 1863. Neither side claimed victory. After General Lee’s defeat at Gettysburg the next month, Confederate troops returned to Culpeper to regroup.

As a result of the second Battle of Rappahannock Station in November 1863, the Union Army of the Potomac pushed General Lee out of the county and wintered here. The following spring, Ulysses S. Grant, the new Union general-in-chief, launched his Overland Campaign from Culpeper, moving the war southward to Petersburg and Richmond.



Culpeper, summer 1862. Library of Congress.

National Cemetery

In 1867, the federal government bought 6 acres from Edward B. Hill, the brother of Confederate Gen. A. P. Hill, to create Culpeper National Cemetery. Here lie the Union soldiers who died at the battles of Cedar Mountain, Brandy Station, Trevilian Station; in the Gordonville Confederate hospital; and many other sites in Culpeper, Page, and Rappahannock counties.



This 1906 view shows the lodge, flagstaff and enclosure wall. National Cemetery Administration.

The original cemetery featured four burial sections laid out in a square. A flagstaff mound at the end of the main drive marked the center. In the 1870s, permanent marble headstones replaced temporary headboards on the 1,355 Civil War graves. Construction of a brick enclosure wall and a Second Empire-style lodge at the entrance followed. The cemetery has grown to more than 29 acres.

An 1872 law directed the secretary of war to appoint a superintendent for each national cemetery from among “meritorious and trustworthy soldiers, either commissioned officers or enlisted men of the Volunteer or Regular Army.” To qualify, an individual must have been honorably mustered out or discharged from the service of the United States.

Monuments

The cemetery contains five monuments erected between 1893 and 1910 by veterans’ organizations. The oldest honors the service of the 2nd Massachusetts Infantry at the nearby Battle of Cedar Mountain. The last and largest, funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, commemorates the Civil War service of all Pennsylvanians. Other monuments honor the 10th Maine Infantry Regiment, 28th New York Infantry Regiment, and the 7th Ohio Infantry Regiment; all fought at Cedar Mountain.



The Pennsylvania Monument just before it was unveiled on October 17, 1912. National Archives and Records Administration.