MOUNT MORIAH SOLDIERS' LOT

Mourners at Alexandria National Cemetery, Virginia, c. 1865. After 1873, standard marble headstones replaced the wood headboards seen here. Miller, Photographic History of the Civil War *(1910).*

Civil War Dead

An estimated 700,000 Union and Confederate soldiers died in the Civil War (1861-1865). As the death toll rose, the U.S. government struggled with the urgent but unplanned need to bury fallen Union troops. This propelled the creation of a national cemetery system.

On September 11, 1861, the War Department directed officers to keep "accurate and permanent records of deceased soldiers." Federal authority to create military burial grounds came in an Omnibus Act of July 17, 1862. Cemetery sites were chosen where troops were concentrated: camps, hospitals, battlefields, railroad hubs. By 1872, 74 national cemeteries and several soldiers' lots contained 305,492 remains. About 45 percent were unknown.

The U.S. government established soldiers' lots at private cemeteries in northern states. National cemeteries, in contrast, were built throughout the South where most Civil War action occurred. While the army reported dozens of lots containing Union dead in the 1870s, the National Cemetery Administration maintains only fifteen. The number of graves ranges from less than ten to nearly 400 in these lots.

Philadelphia at War

Thousands of Union soldiers wounded in battles on the eastern seaboard were sent to Philadelphia hospitals. Private hospitals pressed into federal service proved inadequate to treat the overwhelming number of sick and wounded. The War Department created fourteen military hospitals collectively able to care for 14,000 patients in the Philadelphia area by the end of the Civil War.

The first military hospital was located at Broad and Cherry streets, near a railroad. When wounded began to arrive from Virginia in early summer 1862, additional facilities were needed. Several public and commercial buildings were converted into U.S. General Hospitals. Satterlee, opened in summer 1862, and Mower, completed that December, were the two largest hospitals. Together, they could accommodate 7,000 patients.

Over the course of the Civil War, more than 157,000 soldiers, sailors, and Confederate prisoners were treated in Philadelphia hospitals. Many died from disease or their wounds and were buried in nearby cemeteries.

This ward at a Washington, D.C., hospital was typical of those where Union soldiers were treated during the Civil War. Library of Congress.
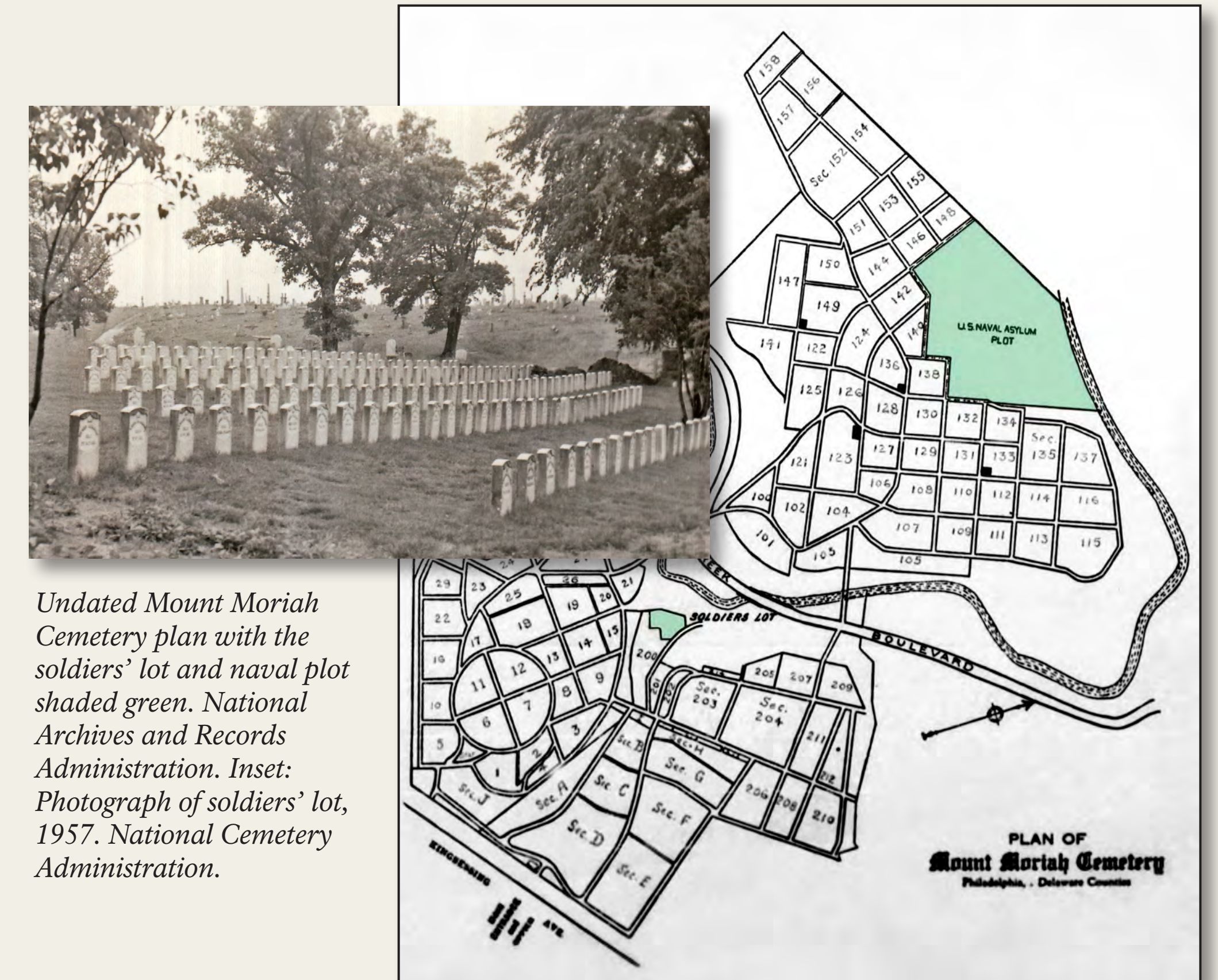
Undated Mount Moriah Cemetery plan with the soldiers' lot and naval plot shaded green. National Archives and Records Administration. Inset: Photograph of soldiers' lot, 1957. National Cemetery Administration.

Soldiers' Lot

Mount Moriah Cemetery administrators offered the federal government Lot 1, Section 200, for Union soldiers who died in the nearby Summit House General Hospital. Of the 404 burials here, one is unknown and six are Confederate prisoners.

During the war, Union dead were interred in numerous cemeteries in and around Philadelphia. All the remains from these government lots—except those at Mount Moriah—were removed to Philadelphia National Cemetery after it was established in 1885.

Today, the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) oversees two tracts in Mount Moriah: this soldiers' lot and the Naval Plot, the cemetery that served the former U.S. Naval Home (1834-1976) in Philadelphia. The Naval Plot, which contains more than 2,000 graves, was transferred to NCA in 1977.