

OAKDALE 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.

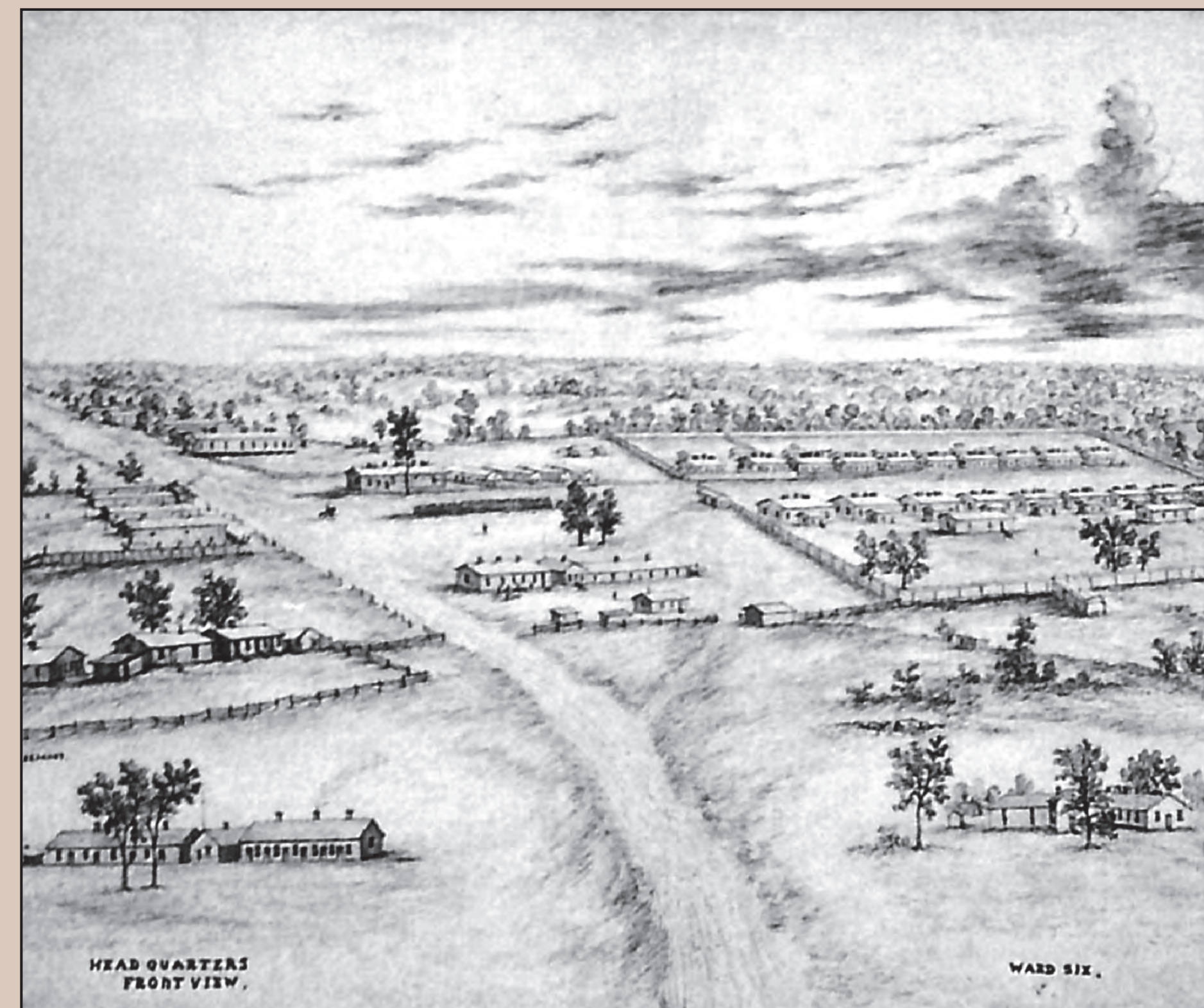
The U.S. government established soldiers’ lots at private cemeteries in northern states. National cemeteries, in contrast, were built throughout the South where most Civil War action occurred. While the army reported dozens of lots containing Union dead in the 1870s, the National Cemetery Administration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

Davenport at War

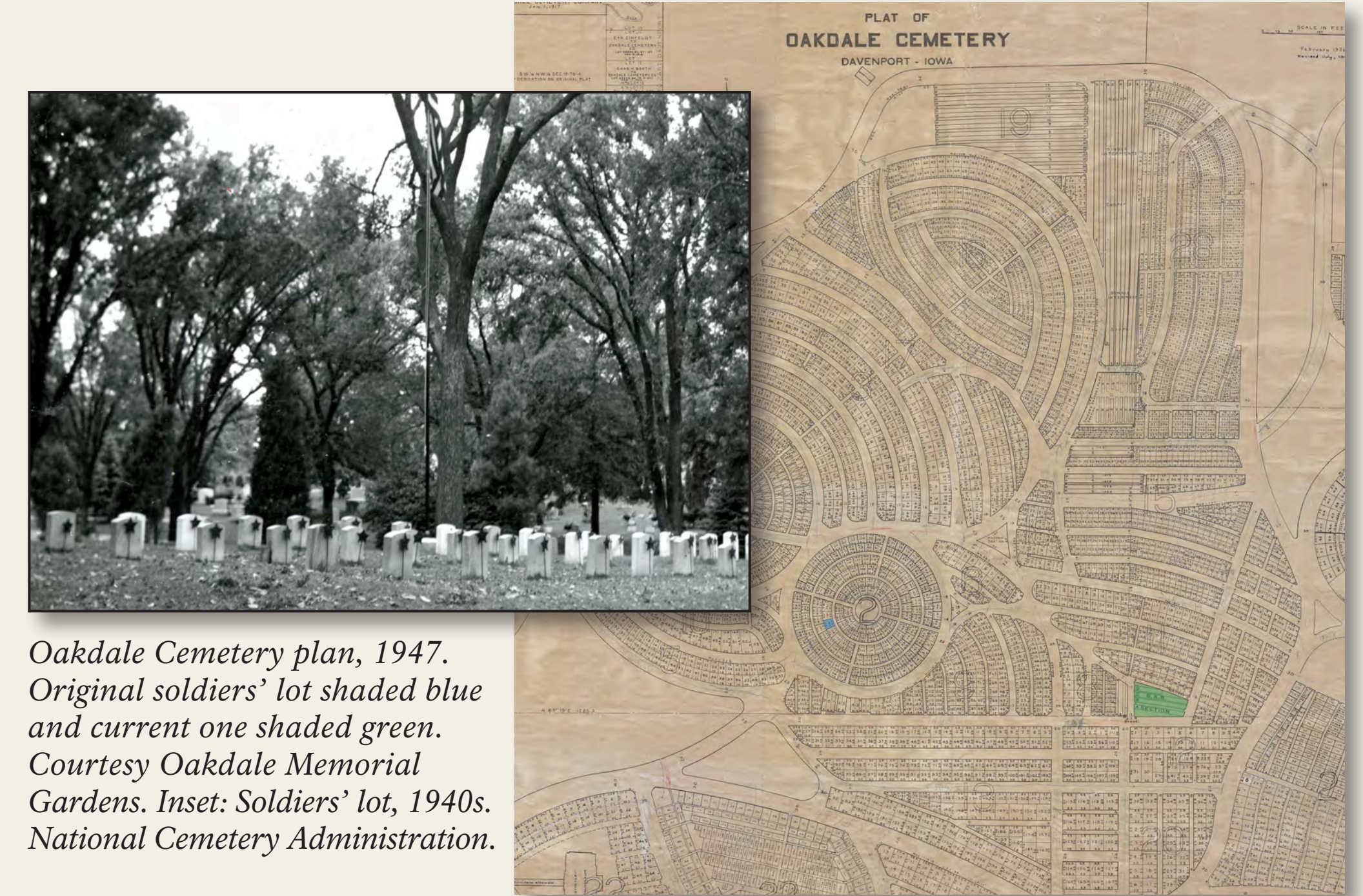
On April 12, 1861, Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter in South Carolina. President Abraham Lincoln issued a call for volunteers to put down the southern rebellion. During the Civil War, nine infantry regiments, six cavalry regiments, and one battery of artillery would be organized in Davenport, Iowa. Some Davenport units fought in major battles on both sides of the Mississippi River.

In August 1861, Camp McClellan was established east of town. A barracks, mess hall, commissary, canteen, and officers’ quarters were built for men who volunteered for Union service. They enlisted, mustered in, and trained there.

Later renamed Camp Kearney, the sprawling facility also contained a U.S. General Hospital with 300 beds. Sick and wounded soldiers were treated here. Men who died at the hospital were buried in Oakdale Cemetery.



Drawing of Camp McClellan by W. S. Harnon, December 1865. National Archives and Records Administration.



Oakdale Cemetery plan, 1947. Original soldiers’ lot shaded blue and current one shaded green. Courtesy Oakdale Memorial Gardens. Inset: Soldiers’ lot, 1940s. National Cemetery Administration.

Soldiers’ Lot

Oakdale Cemetery (now Oakdale Memorial Gardens) was established in 1856 on 40 acres. Graves of Union dead were once scattered throughout the cemetery. The largest group, 160, was interred in the “back part of Oak Dale cemetery.” These remains, along with eleven others in another section, were removed to Rock Island National Cemetery by September 1868.

The federal government continued to maintain two lots in Section 2 at Oakdale. Part of the center circle held the remains of seven soldiers from Scott County, Iowa, who died in 1862 at the Battle of Fort Donelson, Tennessee. Lot 140 contained Civil War veterans who died in the 1890s.

In 1900, the U.S. government moved the remains of eleven soldiers and two children from these lots to one owned by the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), a Union veterans organization. In 1940, the GAR deeded its lot to Oakdale Cemetery. The federal government acquired it the next year. Today the soldiers’ lot contains seventy-one Civil War veterans, four other veterans, and two children.