

ALLEGHENY 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.

Pittsburgh at War

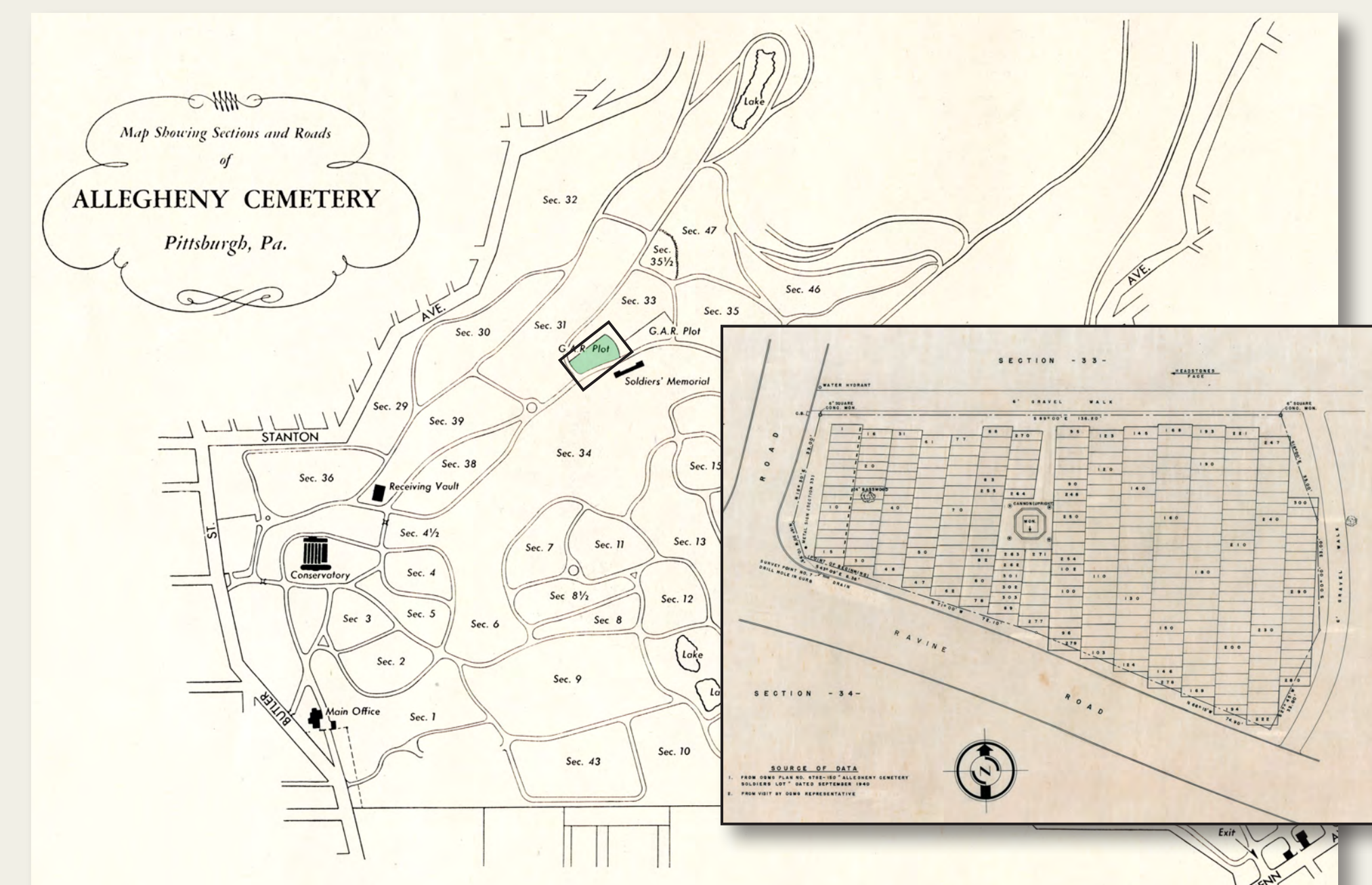
When President Abraham Lincoln issued a call for volunteers on April 12, 1861, to suppress the southern rebellion, the quota for Pittsburgh was 3,277 men. More than 11,000 came forward. Forty companies raised from Allegheny County remained at Camp Wilkins, which was established on the city’s fairgrounds. In August 1861, the U.S. Army took charge of the camp and mustered the men into Union service.

The area’s river network transported thousands of men and tons of supplies to the battlefield. City foundries produced in excess of 1,100 cannon—nearly 15 percent of all artillery made for the U.S. Army during the Civil War.

Pittsburgh rallied for the war effort. In fall 1861, citizens formed a subsistence committee. Members served more than 400,000 meals to soldiers who passed through the city. Mercy Hospital, established in 1847 by the Sisters of Mercy, a Roman Catholic order of nuns, filled with sick and wounded soldiers. Overcrowding at Mercy led the federal government to establish a military hospital in 1862 at West Pennsylvania Hospital.



Allegheny Arsenal, in Pittsburgh’s Lawrenceville neighborhood, manufactured cartridges and other ammunition for the Union. An explosion on September 12, 1862—the same day as the Battle of Antietam, Maryland—killed 78 workers, most young women. Many were buried together at Allegheny Cemetery. Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.



Allegheny Cemetery plan, 1947, with soldiers’ lot shaded green. The 103rd anniversary commemorative booklet. Inset: Soldiers’ lot plan, 1956. National Cemetery Administration.

Soldiers’ Lot

Allegheny Cemetery, incorporated in 1844, is an early rural-style burial ground. In 1862, the Allegheny Cemetery Association set aside a lot in Section 33 for the free burial of U.S. soldiers who died during the Civil War. Some 236 Union soldiers and several Confederate prisoners were eventually interred here. In 1875, the federal government obtained a deed for the land.

The next year, the Allegheny County Ladies Memorial Association erected a monument in the lot. Pittsburgh artist Fred Mayer designed the 16-foot-tall sandstone sculpture composed of an allegorical figure of “Grief” atop a pedestal. Bas-relief carvings of soldiers and sailors alternate with bronze plaques on the pedestal. Four carved mortars—small, blunt artillery—anchor the base.

The graves in this lot feature standard government-issued marble headstones. Union dead are marked by a rounded-top design approved in 1873, and Confederate dead by pointed-top headstones, first used in 1901.