

# BAXTER SPRINGS 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.

## Battle of Baxter Springs

On October 6, 1863, Confederate guerrilla William Clarke Quantrill planned a two-pronged attack on Fort Blair, a Union garrison near Baxter Springs, Kansas. One group of about 450 Confederates attacked from the east. The assault surprised the small Union post. Many soldiers were outside the fort at the time, but Lt. James B. Pond was able to rally his men and defend the fort.

A second group, led by Quantrill, got lost on the way to the fort. However, they encountered a detachment of Union soldiers escorting Gen. James G. Blunt, the U.S. district commander. The latter saw Quantrill’s men but, because most wore captured Union uniforms, their allegiance was unclear. The guerrillas charged and, after a brief exchange of gunfire, broke the Union line. Blunt lost more than eighty men, many executed after they had surrendered. Nearly 100 Union soldiers were killed in action that day.



Seven weeks before they attacked Fort Blair, William Clarke Quantrill and his men raided Lawrence, Kansas. They killed 150 civilians and burned the town. Harper’s Weekly Magazine (September 5, 1863).



Soldiers’ lot plan, 1900. National Cemetery Administration. Undated photograph of the monument funded by the federal government. National Archives and Records Administration.

## Soldiers’ Lot

The Union dead were buried in Baxter Springs’ city cemetery. The U.S. government had planned to remove these remains to the new national cemetery in Springfield, Missouri. However, residents petitioned to retain and care for the graves. Between 1869 and 1887, the City of Baxter Springs incrementally donated the 0.7-acre soldiers’ lot to the United States. In 1873, the mayor requested artillery pieces to be installed here as ornamental features. The U.S. Army Ordnance Department supplied the four 32-pounder cannon tubes that still flank the central monument.

The 27-foot-tall granite monument honoring the soldiers killed in the 1863 Battle of Baxter Springs was dedicated on Decoration (Memorial) Day 1886. Congress allotted \$4,000 to build it. The figure of a Union soldier at parade rest stands on a pedestal inscribed with 163 names of soldiers and civilians buried here.