

SEVEN PINES NATIONAL CEMETERY



Fort Sumner, Fair Oaks Station, was part of a line of earthen fortifications the Union Army constructed after the Battle of Seven Pines, June 1862. Library of Congress.

Battle of Seven Pines

In spring 1862, Union Gen. George B. McClellan devised a plan to take Richmond, the Confederate capital. By May, McClellan had pushed Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's forces to the city outskirts. The Union troops outnumbered the Confederates by 40,000 men.

As McClellan pushed forward, the Chickahominy River divided his army, giving Johnston an opportunity to strike. The Confederates attacked on May 31, 1862, but a complex battle plan and poor coordination resulted in a five-hour delay. Still, the Confederates drove Union forces back. The timely arrival of Union reinforcements prevented further Confederate gains.

The next day, June 1, the battle renewed but neither side made headway. By mid-afternoon it was over. The Union Army lost approximately 5,000 men, the Confederates 6,200.

National Cemetery

During the Civil War, Union and Confederate armies fought numerous battles for control of Richmond. Thousands of Union soldiers perished. They are now buried in seven national cemeteries created in the Richmond-Petersburg area in 1866.

Seven Pines National Cemetery contains the remains of Union soldiers killed at the Battle of Seven Pines, associated engagements at Fair Oaks, and the Battle of Savage Station. Additionally, remains recovered from burial grounds near field hospitals at sixty farms are interred here. By 1874, a total of 1,357 Union soldiers were buried at this cemetery, only 150 were identified.

The cemetery design divided the nearly 2-acre tract into four burial sections separated by gravel walks. A flagstaff mound marked the center. By 1871, an iron gun monument had been placed south of the flagstaff. A few years later, a brick Second Empire-style lodge was completed. A brick wall enclosing the cemetery was built soon afterward.



View of cemetery showing the seven pine trees planted by Superintendent Kelly, 1912. Library of Congress.

Artillery Monuments

Bronze plaques, authorized in 1872 to be placed on ornamental cannon (right), were an important cemetery feature. According to the Quartermaster General: "No cemetery can be considered properly finished till some considerable monumental brass bears an inscription recognizing its establishment and the number of dead soldiers it contains." Many of these plaques and artillery monuments survive in the cemeteries. National Cemetery Administration.



The Seven Pines

Civil War maps show a village labeled "Seven Pines" at the intersection of Williamsburg Pike and Nine Mile Road. According to local lore, the name came from seven pine trees that had once stood at the crossroads. About 1869, cemetery superintendent James Kelly planted seven new pines, three on the west side and four on the east side of the gate along Williamsburg Pike.