

Culpeper National Cemetery
305 U. S. Avenue
Culpeper, Virginia 22701

Description

The Culpeper National Cemetery, established in 1867, is located about one-half mile from the Culpeper County Courthouse. The original site was square in shape and contained about six acres. This area is enclosed by a brick wall, four feet six inches high, and extending approximately 1,992 lineal feet. The main entrance, at the center of the west side, is protected by double ornamental wrought iron gates, eight feet, six inches wide, supported by stone piers with a four-foot-wide pedestrian gate to the right. From this entrance, a wide drive leads to and around a large circle at the center of the original cemetery. A flagpole rises atop a grassy mound in the center of the circle. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones, except for Section I, which is marked with flat granite markers.



The cemetery originally contained six burial sections, one of which was set aside for the graves of 912 unknown soldiers of the Civil War. In 1978, Post 2524 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Culpeper donated 10.51 acres of adjacent property to expand the cemetery. This area contains nine burial sections. An Officers Circle containing 17 interments is located around the flagpole.



The lodge was constructed in 1872 from a design by Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs, and is Second Empire in style. It is an L-shaped stone and frame structure with a mansard (covered with aluminum siding). The roof is tin. The main portion is one and one-half stories with dormer windows projecting from the mansard. The first floor contains an entry porch, a living room, dining room, and kitchen, and the upper story contains three bedrooms and a bath. The lodge also contains a full unfinished basement. There is a total of 1,508 square feet of living space. The windows on the first story are six-over-six double-hung, while the upper-story windows are casement types with a single horizontal muntin. The interior is finished with oak floors. The kitchen was added in the early 1900s, and there is a screened back porch off the kitchen.

A brick and concrete utility building, 22 feet, 3 inches by 33 feet, 4 inches, was constructed in 1934 behind the lodge. The roof is clad with composition shingles. A brick and concrete gasoline storage building, eight feet, six inches by eight feet, six inches, was constructed in 1939 and is located approximately 40 feet behind the utility building; its roof is slate.

An 1,800-square foot administration/maintenance building was constructed in 1989. The building is brick with gable roof clad with fiberglass shingles, aluminum framed windows and doors and typical details at the entry.

Significant Monuments/Memorials

Granite monuments commemorating the contributions of soldiers from several states rise above the simple white markers differentiating the historic sections of the cemetery. These include:

Pennsylvania Monument - Base, 13 feet by 13 feet; Height, 28 feet, 6 inches; fabricated by Smith Granite Company of Westerly, Rhode Island, erected by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1910.



New York Monument - Base, eight feet by eight feet; Height, 26 feet; erected in 1901 by the 28th New York Regimental Association, dedicated on August 8, 1902.

Massachusetts Monument - Base, three feet by four feet; Height, four feet; erected by the Second Massachusetts Infantry circa 1893.



Maine Monument - Base, three feet by six feet; Height, six feet; erected by the United States to the memory of 22 officers and soldiers of the 10th Maine Volunteer Infantry killed at Cedar Mountain, Virginia, August 9, 1862 (date of erection unknown).

Ohio Monument - Base, two feet by four feet; Height, four feet; erected by the Seventh Ohio Regimental Association, date unknown.



A monument, seven feet, six inches in height, made of an original cast-iron seacoast artillery tube and secured by a concrete base is located on the northwest side of the flagpole circle. The inscription on the cast-bronze plaque affixed to the monument reads as follows:

UNITED STATES
NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERY
CULPEPER, VIRGINIA
ESTABLISHED APRIL 1867
INTERMENTS 1350
KNOWN 448
UNKNOWN 902



Civil War Activity in Area

The area including the Culpeper National Cemetery is one of the oldest in the town of Culpeper and has significance in both its ability to represent the social and cultural life of antebellum and postbellum Culpeper and in its association with the Civil War in the Culpeper vicinity. Culpeper and the outlying vicinity witnessed major Civil War activity owing to the town's strategic location between the Rapidan and Rappahannock rivers, on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, and at the junction of five major roads. Culpeper County lies nearly midway between Washington, D.C., and Richmond, the opposing capitals, and both Confederate and Union soldiers occupied the town of Culpeper. The Culpeper vicinity was the scene of many battles and skirmishes as armies advanced and retreated between Washington and Richmond and established headquarters, camps, and hospitals. Culpeper County has been described as the "most trod upon and fought upon of any county in the country during the Civil War."

From the onset of the Civil War, citizens in Culpeper supported the Confederate cause. On May 23, 1861, Culpeper residents unanimously voted to approve Virginia's Ordinance of Secession. Two Culpeper companies already had formed, including the Culpeper Minute Men who became Company B of the 13th Regiment, Virginia Volunteers, under Captain Waller T. Patton. On May 27, Major H. G. Skinner swore another unit, the Little Fork Rangers, into service of the Confederate States of America. The company camped at a farm south of the present Culpeper National Cemetery. The farm where the Little Fork Rangers camped and trained prior to entering the 1st Battle of Manassas was once known as the Freeman property and later became the Eastern View Academy, where Admiral Cary T. Grayson and his brother were students. Admiral Grayson later became the personal physician of President Woodrow Wilson. The farm is located on the south side of Whipple Alley, also known as East Chandler Street, to the southeast of Culpeper National Cemetery.

In May 1862, Culpeper was occupied for 31 hours, first by Confederate and then by Union soldiers. At one point, the First Maine Cavalry encountered Confederate pickets about three miles from Culpeper Courthouse. Upon entering the town, they raided Confederate headquarters where "they found nothing of any great consequence except clothing." This occupancy of the town lasted only 45 minutes. However, within two weeks "nearly 10,000 troops were concentrated in a bevy of camps encircling the town." These troops most likely were camped in the area near the Culpeper National Cemetery, just as Confederate troops had been one year earlier, and many of their officers established residence in the commodious homes on South East Street.

The area about Culpeper is associated with various Civil War battles and engagements, including the Battle of Cedar Mountain, south of Culpeper, on August 9, 1862. This battle was an early manifestation of a northward offensive movement by General Robert E. Lee. Union Major General John Pope was in the vicinity of Culpeper advancing towards Orange Courthouse and Gordonsville. Major General Stonewall Jackson's troops faced Pope across the Rapidan River in early August, from encampments around Gordonsville and Orange Court House. On August 7, he thought he saw an opportunity to assail part of Pope's army near Culpeper Court House without having to face the rest of the Union strength. The effort to hurl his divisions, totaling 22,000 troops, at the 12,000 Union soldiers sputtered badly because of dreadful weather and poor country roads. The Confederates crossed the Rapidan on August 8 and pushed into Culpeper County but without engaging the enemy force or advancing with any real vigor. Early on August 9, Jackson's forward elements were approaching a Union position near the northwest corner of Cedar Mountain. Men of both armies fell out of ranks because of the high temperature, some suffering fatal heat stroke. Brigadier General Jubal A. Early, commanding the first Confederate brigade on the field, found Union cavalry spread across the farmland just above Cedar Run. Fighting then ensued. Confederate infantry maneuvered into position along a woodline facing a wheat field and along the thousand-yard-long Crittenden Lane. During the inconclusive artillery duel, the Union commander on the field, Major General Nathaniel P. Banks, launched some of his force against the Confederate guns near the Crittenden gate and the rest of his men through a corn field toward Crittenden Lane. Brigadier General Samuel W. Crawford's brigade of men moved into the wheat field and headed for the Confederate woodline without knowing that they faced an enemy who heavily outnumbered them. The Confederate infantry line was poorly situated. Crawford's men unraveled the entire left of his army, shattering brigade after brigade in the process. At the same time, Brigadier General Christopher C. Augur's division came out of rows of a corn field and up against the Confederates near Crittenden Lane. Confederate artillery at the Cedars and the Crittenden gate limbered up and dashed away just in time. As darkness fell, fresh brigades cleared the field and forced the Federals back toward Culpeper. The 22,000 Confederates defeated 12,000 Federals, at a cost of about 2,500 casualties for the Federals and 1,400 for the Confederates. Jackson subsequently declared that Cedar Mountain was the most successful of his exploits. The fight at Cedar Mountain—where Jackson drew his sword for the only time during the war—was his last independent battle. He won further fame as General Robert E. Lee's strong right arm, but he never again led a campaign as an independent commander.

On June 9, 1863, a fierce cavalry engagement took place in and around Brandy Station, Virginia. It has been described as the largest and first true cavalry engagement of the war. By June 5, infantry corps under Lieutenant Generals James Longstreet and Richard S. Ewell were camped in and around Culpeper. Six miles north of town, holding the line of the Rappahannock River, Major General J. E. B. Stuart bivouacked his cavalry troopers, screening the Confederate army against surprise by the enemy. Most of the Southern cavalry was camped near Brandy Station. A dense fog hung over the Rappahannock on the morning of June 9. Unknown to the Confederates, 10,000 Union horsemen had massed their forces on the other side. Misinterpreting the screening action of Stuart's cavalry, Union Brigadier General Alfred Pleasonton thought he was attacking a rebel raiding party of unknown strength. Pleasonton's attack plan called for a two-prong thrust at the enemy. One half of his men would cross the river at Beverly's Ford, two miles below Brandy Station, and the other half would cross at Kelly's Ford, four miles downstream. Caught in these pincers, the Southern cavalry would be surprised, outnumbered, and beaten. Early in the morning, Stuart heard ragged gunfire from the river. Soon his troopers

reached his Fleetwood Heights headquarters with the news that Union cavalymen had forced a crossing at Beverly's Ford and charged up the narrow road toward St. James Church and Gee House Hill. Just as Stuart heard that the enemy had been checked at St. James, he received the startling news that Union troops were riding in on his rear. The vanguard, then visible, was approaching Fleetwood from the Stevensburg Road, having crossed at Kelly's Ford and reached Stevensburg via La Grange. One lone artillery piece was left atop Fleetwood Hill, and only a token force to guard Stuart's headquarters. As this single gun fired the few shells available, the Union horsemen halted their advance. Racing against time, Confederate cavalry rushed back from the St. James battle line to meet this new threat. Never before had the Union cavalry shown such strength and skill in combat. Stuart's headquarters was overrun, and the rear lines at St. James were threatened. Help arrived as Brigadier General W. H. F. (Rooney) Lee's cavalry rode in from Little Fork Church (seven miles from Brandy) and saved the day for Stuart. After 12 hours of raging battle, Union troops retreated to the north side of the river. Some 19,000 mounted men were engaged in this, the greatest cavalry battle ever to take place in the western hemisphere. For the first time in the Civil War, Union cavalry matched the Confederate horsemen in skill and determination.

Records compiled after the war, as Culpeper National Cemetery was being established, indicate the burial in that cemetery of at least two Union cavalry officers who lost their lives at Brandy Station—Lt. Colonel Virgil Broderick, 1st New Jersey Cavalry, and 1st Lt. Isaac M. Ward, 6th United States Cavalry. During the winter of 1863-1864, the Army of the Potomac was encamped at Brandy Station. The remains of soldiers who died in the military hospital at that location were subsequently reinterred in the Culpeper National Cemetery. After the war, the remains of other members of the Union forces who fell in various skirmishes, along the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers were also reinterred in the national cemetery.

Historian Clarke B. Hall describes the town of Culpeper with 1,200 residents as "overrun" with soldiers and horses. The majority of antebellum residences along South East Street served as hospitals or meeting places, or provided lodging for both Union and Confederate troops during their respective occupations of the town. Confederate officers lodged in the fine East Street houses during the winter of 1862-1863 and Union officers during Grant's Winter Encampment of the Army of the Potomac in 1863-1864. Due to the convenient proximity to the Orange and Alexandria Railway, whose tracks run from north to south on the east side of the town of Culpeper, the homes in this area were convenient for requisition as either hospitals or headquarters during the Civil War.