

Knoxville National Cemetery
939 Tyson Street, NW
Knoxville, Tennessee 37917

Description

The Knoxville National Cemetery, established in 1863, is located within the city limits of Knoxville in Knox County. The site is nearly square in shape, and the burial sections are arranged in the shape of a large circle, separated by conveniently arranged walks. Each section forms a quarter of the large circle, while the headstones at the graves form circles, all converging toward the intersection of two walks, where the flagpole is located. The grounds are enclosed by a stone wall, constructed in 1875, on the north side of which is an iron fence. The main entrance is situated at the center of the south side and is protected by a double iron gate. A service building containing an administrative office and public restroom, is located to the northwest of the main entrance. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones.



The brick service building was constructed in 1936. It originally contained two storage bays and two toilets. A brick addition and garage were constructed in 1949. The roof of the building is covered with asbestos shingles, and the garage area has a built-up flat roof. The interior and exterior of the original service building were renovated in 1987 to accommodate the administrative office and to provide handicapped-accessible restroom facilities. One of the public toilets was converted to an employee restroom. The total area of the building and garage is 1,578 square feet. There is also an enclosed fuel storage area adjacent to the service building.

Noted Burials

There are two Medal of Honor recipients buried in the Knoxville National Cemetery. Their graves are marked with special markers inscribed with an enlarged gold-leafed replica of the medal of the awarding service and the words "MEDAL OF HONOR." The names and grave locations are as follows:

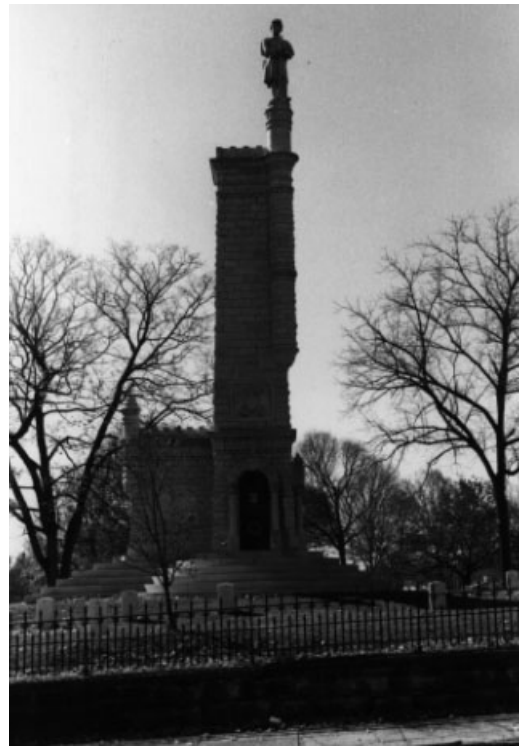
Troy A. McGill, Sergeant, U.S. Army, Troop G, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division - World War II - Section B, Grave 6294.

Timothy Spillane, Private, Company C, 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry, Civil War - Section A, Grave 3319.

Significant Monuments/Memorials

Grand Army of the Republic Monument - A 60-foot-high monument, prominently displayed in the northeast corner of the national cemetery, was erected by members of the Department of Tennessee, Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.). Department Commander H. C. Whittaker first

publicly outlined the plan on March 23, 1893, during the tenth annual G.A.R. encampment at Harriman. A memorial committee was chaired by William Rule, influential editor of the Knoxville Daily Journal, who later wrote that plans for the memorial were first presented at the Athens encampment in 1892. There was little hope that the state would sanction funding for a Union monument; this sadly was a burden each veteran and his friends would have to bear. After a promising beginning in 1893, the funding campaign became dismally inactive. Three years later, only \$1,300 had been collected. In the spring of 1896, the group forwarded, for the approval of the United States Quartermaster General, the chief supervising agency for all G.A.R. construction, a design for the monument. The structure was to be a 50-foot Tennessee marble shaft, embellished with unidentified bronze figures on the corners, and a single statue at the summit. A design was agreed upon and, on May 8, 1896, approved by the United States Quartermaster's Office. Approval was on the condition that no part of the expense attending the work be made a charge against the United States.



In the summer, the memorial committee signed a contract with William B. McMullen, president of the Tennessee Producers Marble Company and the Southern Monument Company, for material and construction, and with Colonel William A. Gage for engineering consultation. The design showed that flanking entrances were to lead, as if from drawbridges, into a small sanctuary dressed entirely with marble. In its west wall was to be an "art glass" window. The east wall would be hung with tablets detailing regimental histories. The monument was a miniature medieval fortress complete with its unique inner room, stained glass window and mosaic star. David H. Geddes, chief carver and foreman at the Southern Monument Company, and his assistants apparently had admirably sculpted the crenelated bastions, turrets, corbelled table, decorative frieze, round-arch openings, and rusticated wall surfaces. But, looking high over Holston Street to the central turret, one found not only a sentry peering steadfastly toward the southern horizon, but a ferocious bronze eagle with wings widely spread. The monument cost \$11,300 and was nearly paid for by soldier residents of the state. Of the estimated 7,000 donations, most came as one-dollar offerings from dutiful pensioners. The monument was formally turned over to the Government and accepted by the Secretary of War on October 24, 1901.

On August 22, 1904, a powerful bolt of lightning struck the monument. Only the steps and part of the foundation remained, and these were scarred. The stones and eagle, its wings "closely cropped at its body as evenly as if the work had been done by an instrument," were flung to the ground and into the street. Lightning had apparently been attracted to a steel rod that anchored the eagle to the shaft; consequently, the sculpture had sustained a direct hit. Through the state department, the committee sponsored G.A.R. General Orders No 2, calling for immediate reconstruction. United States Representative Henry R. Gibson introduced before the House a bill calling for \$10,000 to secure the repairs. The bill passed on April 25, 1905, but the appropriation was for a maximum of \$5,000 or "so much thereof might be necessary to repair the monument."

In November 1905, the committee retained Baumann Brothers, Incorporated, of Knoxville as the consulting architect. The Baumann design was to have closely duplicated the original plan. Reconstruction began the next May, following acceptance of a \$4,300 bid submitted by the Fenton Construction Company. The bronze eagle was replaced with an eight-foot-tall soldier, taking his post on top of the castle's main turret. The coat of arms was left off, for fear it would draw more lightning. The project was completed on October 15, 1906. A fanciful local legend identified the soldier figure with General John T. Wilder, who was the only ranking general on the memorial committee. Union General Wilder first came to Tennessee in 1863, when he marched his Indiana brigade through what is now Rockwood to join the Union Army at Chattanooga. He took part in the Battle of Chickamauga and, on that battlefield, there is an imposing monument to him and his brigade. While camping in what is now Rockwood, General Wilder, a mineralogist and engineer, noticed signs of both coal and iron ore in close proximity. After the war, he came back to Knoxville, established the Roane Iron Company, and operated it for several years. During the McKinley Administration, he was appointed Federal pension agent and maintained an office in the old post office. Every three months, he issued pension checks to hundreds of Union veterans.

Civil War Activity in Area

To Abraham Lincoln, there was no question that East Tennessee and its people were his main source of strength in the South and, immediately after the disaster that befell his army at Bull Run, he ordered an all-out advance into East Tennessee from the Cincinnati base. There were both military and political reasons for his strategy. Union occupation of the territory would sever the vital railroad line connecting Virginia with the Mississippi Valley, and the area was ablaze with Unionists eager to join his legions. East Tennessee was even more important to the Confederate States. Even before Tennessee had broken from the Union, companies of rebel troops were recruited in Knoxville and nearby counties, mustered into service with state militia, and stationed at strategic points.

By the summer of 1861, the Confederate States of America had assumed all the characteristics of an independent nation. In early June, the city of Knoxville was still controlled by the Military League troops. Their primary function was to protect the manufacturing facilities and the railroads that were daily transporting soldiers from the southwestern states through East Tennessee into Virginia. The continuous transit of troops was witnessed by people loyal to the Union with feelings of dissatisfaction, which sometimes grew into animated wrath. At Strawberry Plains, Tennessee, a regiment of southern troops being transported by train fired on a mass meeting of Unionists as they passed, and the fire was returned. No lives were lost, but feelings of hatred were naturally intensified. To prevent further occurrences, President Jefferson Davis established the District of East Tennessee of the Confederate Armies, and Brigadier General Felix K. Zollicoffer was named first commander. He established his headquarters in Knoxville and chose General William R. Caswell as his aide and Major B.F. Fogg as his adjutant. Zollicoffer found himself surrounded by multiple pockets of resistance as the mountaineers gathered all available weapons and met in secret rendezvous to plan their own private revolution. They brazenly exercised their freedom at the ballot box in August by electing Union candidates overwhelmingly in the Congressional districts around Knoxville.

The Confederate government was well aware that any Federal move into East Tennessee would have to come through southeastern Kentucky, following the route of the forbidding, ancient

Wilderness Trail that passed through Cumberland Gap, a narrow and easily defended pass located 60 miles north of Knoxville. Charged with the defense of the Gap and the entire Western Territory was General Albert Sidney Johnston, a man President Davis considered the ablest soldier in the entire Confederacy. On his journey from Richmond to East Tennessee, he stopped in Knoxville to confer with General Zollicoffer. The two quickly agreed that the natural defense of East Tennessee began at Cumberland Gap, and Johnston ordered that it be occupied immediately. Opposing the Confederates 40 miles north of the Gap at Camp Andrew Johnson, near Barbourville, Kentucky, was an unlikely group of refugees from East Tennessee, calling themselves the 1st and 2nd Tennessee Volunteers, organized and commanded by Samuel P. Carter. President Davis ordered Zollicoffer to shift his troops from Knoxville to Cumberland Gap and seize Camp Johnson as well as Camp Robinson that was commanded by Lieutenant William Nelson. Zollicoffer took three regiments and established Camp Buckner at Cumberland Ford. He captured the salt works at Manchester, took the salt and wagons and sent them on to Knoxville. He left General William Churchwell in command at Cumberland Gap and went back to East Tennessee. Operating out of Knoxville, the Confederates then began a more potent campaign to wipe out resistance. Vigilance committees were dispersed all around East Tennessee with the authority to arrest persons on suspicion of hostility. Jefferson Davis and his War Department, for some time, had doubts about the military abilities of Zollicoffer. Consequently, they assigned Major General George B. Crittenden to take over the District of East Tennessee. Zollicoffer was later killed at the Battle of Mill Springs in Kentucky. At Knoxville, the news of his death caused great consternation. He was the most popular Confederate leader in Tennessee and was the first Tennessee general killed in the Civil War.

The spring of 1862 witnessed decreased violence in East Tennessee. At Knoxville on March 8, 1862, Major General Edmund Kirby Smith succeeded General George B. Crittenden as Confederate commander of the District of East Tennessee, which was soon reorganized as the Department of East Tennessee, with headquarters at Knoxville. His first task was to muster sufficient forces for adequate defense of East Tennessee. By June 1862, his forces had swelled to 18,000. Confederates in East Tennessee were threatened by encirclement of Federal forces occupying Kentucky, western and central Tennessee, and northern Mississippi and Alabama. General Braxton Bragg assumed command in the West. A Confederate invasion of Kentucky took place and failed to turn the tide of the war in favor of the South. Bragg's and Smith's combined operations had produced some positive results for the South. East Tennessee and the valuable rail lines that ran through Knoxville were secured for the South for months to come.

In January 1863, General Ambrose Burnside was the new Federal Commander of the Army of the Ohio. In June, to pave the way for the invasion of East Tennessee, Burnside sent Colonel William P. Sanders to lead a cavalry raid on Confederate lines south of Cumberland Gap to tear up bridges and communications. On the night of June 19, Colonel Sanders ran into the Confederate pickets outside Knoxville. On the 20th, he was moving toward the center of Knoxville on the Tazewell Road. War had come to Knoxville. The Confederates in Knoxville knew that a Union raid on the city was a certainty. The call went out for Knoxville citizens to help defend their city and brace the garrison. By nightfall, 200 citizens and convalescent soldiers reported for duty, and the batteries were manned. Colonel Sanders and his raiders arrived in Knoxville after dark. The skirmish, mainly an artillery duel, lasted little more than an hour. Two Confederate officers and an enlisted man lost their lives. Their primary mission was to destroy communication lines. Sanders was later promoted to Brigadier General. On November 18, General Sanders and his aide, Major R.E. Lawder, were watching as the gray line swarmed up the hill against

the Federal position on Kingston Pike in front of Fort Loudon. They saw Captain Winthrop, a lone Confederate horseman, charging directly into a murderous fire of rifles. They turned and began to retreat for cover behind the hill. Sanders was hit and Lawder caught the general in his arms and quickly collected a few men, who carried their bleeding commander to the Anderson House. There, they found an old ladder and used it as a stretcher to move Sanders to a room at the Lamar House, where he was examined by Dr. J.C. Hatchitt. A Minie ball entered his left side and tore the spleen. Sanders, 28 years old, died the next morning, November 19. It was decided that, for the sake of the morale among the soldiers, General Sanders's death would be concealed for the time being. The funeral with graveside service would be held at night, as silently as possible. He was buried in the graveyard next to the Second Presbyterian Church, and his remains were later moved to the Chattanooga National Cemetery, Chattanooga, Tennessee. He is buried in Section C, Grave 1601. Sanders was the only Southern-born Union general officer killed in the Civil War and was a cousin of Jefferson Davis. By command of General Burnside, Fort Loudon was renamed Fort Sanders in his honor.

Union commander General Burnside established his Knoxville headquarters in the home of John H. Crozier, which stood on the northeast corner of Gay Street and Clinch Avenue (site of the present-day Farragut Building). By early September, he had occupied Knoxville and closed the short interior lines of communication from Virginia to Tennessee.

General James Longstreet was Lee's most trusted corps commander. He urged President Davis and General Robert E. Lee to send him and his First Corps by rail from Virginia through Knoxville to join Bragg.

General Longstreet's mission was to destroy Burnside quickly at Knoxville and return to the assistance of Bragg who, for the moment, had Grant trapped in Chattanooga. Burnside, on the other hand, had to delay Longstreet in order to increase Grant's chances of defeating Bragg and breaking out of the trap.

From Campbell's Station on November 16, 1863, General Burnside had sent instructions to Captain Orlando Poe, chief engineer of the Army of the Ohio, at Knoxville, to prepare lines of defense for the town, employing the engineering battalion of the 23rd Corps and such civilians as he could impress into service.

The siege of Knoxville effectively began on November 17, 1863, when the Confederates surrounded Knoxville except where it was bounded on the south by the Tennessee River. The Union troops, ordered by Burnside to retreat no farther, to stand or die in Knoxville, now began to number the days of the siege. The third day, November 19, was memorable, for in the early morning hours the 79th New York Highlanders inside the earthwork fort erected their flag staff, and for the first time the Stars and Stripes flew over the red clay ramparts. For these three days, the Confederate force had ringed the town but had not made a serious demonstration at any point. On November 20, offensive lines began to appear as Longstreet ordered the construction of entrenchments. To strengthen their "diggings," the Union troops reinforced their lines with every material on hand.

Fort Sanders was the most heavily fortified emplacement. The west front of this fort was in the vicinity of 17th Street between Clinch and Laurel Avenues, with the northwest bastion near the present site of Fort Sanders Manor, an apartment building at the intersection of 17th and

Laurel. Both sides knew that, although this fort was constructed according to classical engineering principles, its northwest bastion had been built upon a hill that fell off sharply to the northwest. Beneath the brow of this hill a large attacking force could approach within 100 yards without being exposed to view or to fire either from the fort or from the adjacent rifle pit.

By the night of November 20, the physical divisions of offensive and defensive lines were clearly drawn. On Saturday, November 21, the fifth day of the siege of Knoxville, there was no significant change in the positions of the lines. Longstreet's philosophy of attack was to move into enemy territory, select a defensive position, and entice the enemy into attacking from a disadvantageous angle. But Burnside, whose mission was defensive, had no intention of leaving his fortifications and attacking in open ground.

Sunday, the 22nd, there was less firing than usual, but several Union men were hit by Rebel snipers as the guard was changed in daylight hours at Fort Sanders. On the 23rd, Longstreet received word from Bragg that a large force was advancing from Kingston against the Confederates at Knoxville. Longstreet immediately withdrew most of Wheeler's cavalry from the line and sent them toward Kingston to block the progress of the unknown force pressing from the rear. Bragg, sensing an attack upon his own position at Missionary Ridge, decided to recall Longstreet from Knoxville. He dispatched Brigadier General Danville Leadbetter, his chief engineering officer, to Longstreet to personally urge either an immediate Confederate assault or a hasty withdrawal. The night of the 23rd, the Union picket lines between First and Second creeks were driven in, and it appeared that a general engagement would result. Burnside ordered his troops to set fire to the long line of buildings north of the railroad between the two armies. Flames lit up the wintry sky and the whole town was illuminated by the blazing buildings.



Tuesday, November 24, there was very little picket firing. Most of the day, the Confederates were occupied in establishing their rifle guns on Cherokee Heights south of the river, from which they could attack the western side of Fort Sanders. The attack was ordered to commence at sunrise of the 25th. Before orders could be issued to the subordinate officers, Longstreet learned that the brigades of Generals Bushrod Johnson and Archibald Gracie, about 2,600 men, were on their way to reinforce him and would arrive the night of the 25th from Loudon. The attack was postponed once again. General Leadbetter arrived at Longstreet's headquarters after dark on the 25th with orders from Bragg to attack and crush Burnside quickly. Longstreet suggested that with more reinforcements expected that evening and in the next few days, Union troops could be starved into surrender without the needless expense of Confederate lives in an assault that may not be successful. He added that if an assault must be made, it should be directed against the northwest bastion of Fort Sanders. Leadbetter agreed but requested that the final decision be delayed until he could make a thorough reconnaissance of the Federal lines and concluded that an attack upon Mabry's Hill was impossible.

On Saturday, November 28, the siege of Knoxville went into its twelfth day and General Leadbetter delivered General Bragg's order to attack immediately. Longstreet ordered General McLaws to strike at Fort Sanders as soon as it became visible in the morning sun of the 28th, but

it was extremely cold and foggy. Once more, Longstreet canceled the attack order. The attack was then to begin in the darkness of the 28th just before sunrise, preceded by only a few rounds of artillery fire to encourage the infantry, and the assault would be made by the infantry alone. As the Rebel sharpshooters advanced into position at about 11 p.m., Burnside's entire command was alerted to the point of attack. During the cold night of November 28, the Union soldiers ate and slept fully armed. Just before dawn on November 29, the Confederate troops moved forward. The bloody fight lasted only 20 minutes. The Confederates felt that without ladders they were not given a fair chance, and they wanted another crack at the fort. General Jenkins pleaded with Longstreet and finally obtained permission to renew the assault. While plans were being made, a courier suddenly arrived with a telegram which President Jefferson Davis sent to Major General Robert Ransom to relay to Longstreet. General Grant had driven Bragg's army from Missionary Ridge and Longstreet was ordered to join Bragg near Ringgold or Dalton, Georgia. As soon as it became evident to General Burnside that the assault was over, he ordered General Potter to arrange a 30-minute truce with Colonel Sorrel of Longstreet's staff in order to care for the wounded and bury the dead. The attacking Confederate troops sustained 813 casualties—129 killed, 458 wounded, and 226 missing. Union losses in the fort were reported as five killed and eight wounded. At 7 p.m. on November 29, a single cannon's roar marked the end of the truce. The victorious Union Army was once again besieged in Knoxville. The "defeated" Confederate army was still in a position to starve the Union army into surrender or to capture it by another assault. At midnight on December 4, 1863, as the men in Fort Sanders were standing to arms, something of an unusual nature was observed going on in the Confederate camps.

They made wild speculations. Some thought the Confederates were preparing for one final assault, others that they were retreating. At daylight, Captain Ames, Company B of the 36th Massachusetts, discovered that the Confederates were indeed gone. The siege of Knoxville was over.