

Nashville National Cemetery
1420 Gallatin Road, South
Madison, Tennessee 37115

Description

The Nashville National Cemetery, established in 1866, is located about six miles north of Nashville in Davidson County. The site is almost square in shape, and the grounds are laid off in irregular burial sections. The main entrance is situated near the center of the east side. In 1870, a smooth rusticated limestone arch, about 32 feet high and 25 feet, 10 inches wide, with two Tuscan columns, was constructed on each side. It is similar in design to one at Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia. Under the arch is a wrought iron gate, which was the original entry to the cemetery. In the early 1940's,



new entries were constructed on each side of the arch. These new entries are typical of those constructed in national cemeteries during the period, replacing original gates that were too narrow to accommodate modern automobiles. Wrought iron fencing supported by concrete pillars extends for approximately 50 feet from the entry. The portion of the perimeter wall along Gallatin Road is built of rough-dressed blocks of limestone of nearly uniform thickness and presents the appearance of dimension stone work. On all other sides of the cemetery, the wall is built of rubble limestone, laid in mortar and covered by a coping of sawed limestone slabs. An iron pedestrian gate is located on the north side. A rear entrance gate, used by cemetery vehicles, is located in the southwest corner.

The tracks of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad run directly through the cemetery, dividing it into nearly two equal parts. These two parts of the cemetery are connected by a tunnel under the railroad tracks. A natural stream enters the cemetery near the northwest corner forming a pond and runs south to the railroad tracks, then turns to the northeast passing somewhat to the north of the main entrance. The lodge, administration building, and utility building are all located in the northern portion of the cemetery. The rostrum is located on the west side of the cemetery. A committal service shelter is located east of the rostrum. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones, except for four sections, which are marked with flat granite markers.

The site for the cemetery was chosen by General George H. Thomas, Federal commander at the Battle of Nashville, and for a time after the war, the person in charge of U.S. military forces around the city. Thomas chose this site along the rails of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad in order, he said, that "no one could come to Nashville from the north and not be reminded of the sacrifices that had been made for the preservation of the Union." At first, the cemetery was bordered by the railroad, but it soon spread across so that the railroad almost equally divided it. In about 1915, the railroad bed was elevated above the graves. A newspaper article dated August 1, 1975, states that Mr. William Kaiser, who was cemetery director from February 1975 to September 1983, found what appeared to be the remains of a spiral staircase coming down from the railroad. In earlier times, when people more commonly visited cemeteries, travelers could alight directly from an inbound train into the cemetery.

The lodge was constructed in 1931. It is a two-story hollow tile, stucco and concrete structure, with a mansard roof, containing seven rooms and a basement. The roof is composition shingles. There is a screened front porch and an enclosed back porch with a tin roof. The rear porch steps were replaced in 1968.



The one-story brick administration building with a slate roof was constructed in 1974.

The stone and concrete utility building, 18 feet by 31 feet, was constructed circa 1887 of Ashlar limestone and is located in the northwest center of the grounds. The building is a one-story structure with a central two-story gabled entry with larger ashlar stone than the rest of the building. It is utilitarian in materials and design without an intended architectural motif. It is elegant because of its simplicity. It was originally built to accommodate work animals, carts and wagons which were part of the cemetery equipment. In 1932, one room and toilet were added to the left wing of the building. The building contains three garage bays, and the roof is asphalt shingles. An addition with a metal roof, containing a garage service area, was constructed on the right wing in the 1970's.



The stone rostrum, approximately 49 feet by 17 feet, with stone walls and iron columns, was constructed in 1940. The floor is flagstone over reinforced concrete, and the roof is copper composition shingles. It is located near the center of the west wall.



A stucco and concrete storage building is located near Section TT. The roof is tin. This was formerly the public restroom building, and the windows and doors have been barred.

The arch located in the central portion of the cemetery under the railroad tracks contains the following inscription:

HERE REST IN PEACE 16,516 CITIZENS
WHO DIED FOR THEIR COUNTRY
IN THE YEARS 1861 TO 1865

Noted Burials

There are three Medal of Honor recipients buried in the 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:

John Carr - Private, Company G, 8th U.S. Cavalry - Section KK, Grave 16550.

Charles P. Cantrell, Private, Company F, 10th U.S. Infantry - Section 1, Grave 132.

William Franklin Lyell - Corporal, U.S. Army, Company F, 17th Infantry Regiment,
7th Infantry Division - Section 1, Grave 151.

Significant Monuments/Memorials

Minnesota Monument - In 1920, the State of Minnesota erected a monument in memory of Minnesota soldiers buried within the cemetery. The monument depicts a bronze female figure and is located in Section MM.



Five artillery monuments, each seven feet, six inches in height and made of an original cast-iron seacoast artillery tube secured by a concrete base, are placed in different parts of the grounds. They are located in Sections, A, B, O, P, and NN. A bronze shield is affixed to the monument located in Section NN and is inscribed as follows:

UNITED STATES
NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERY
NASHVILLE
ESTABLISHED JAN 28TH 1867
INTERMENTS 16530
KNOWN 12524
UNKNOWN 4006

Civil War Activity in Area

Nashville was an important city during the war years, being the capital of Tennessee, a secessionist state, but one in which there was considerable sentiment for the Union cause. Its location on the Cumberland River and its position as one of the foremost railroad centers of the South made Nashville a site of prime importance in the military plans of Union and Confederate forces. Federal armies held Nashville for most of the last three years of the war and, during that time, it became one of the chief supply bases for the Union forces. Coincident with its mission as a supply base for the sinews of war in the form of men and materiel, Nashville and its environs saw the establishment of an extensive system of military hospitals to care for the sick and wounded of the war.



The strategic position of the city of Nashville as a vital and important supply depot made it the objective of a daring counter offensive by the forces of the Confederacy during the final months of 1864.

By the end of October, General John B. Hood's Army of Tennessee was at Florence, Alabama, and on November 19, it began its forward movement across Tennessee. As yet, neither General George Thomas nor Major General John M. Schofield was strong enough to oppose Hood, but reinforcements were on the way. On November 21, Hood's army marched north crossing the border into southern middle Tennessee, where Hood hoped to position himself between General George Thomas at Nashville and General John Schofield's 23,000 troops at Pulaski, 30 miles south of Columbia. Both armies raced for Columbia, but Schofield's arrived first and threw a heavy line of breastworks around the south of town. On November 29 Hood caught up with Schofield at Spring Hill, just south of Franklin; that night while Hood was asleep Schofield escaped through the Confederate lines to Franklin. Schofield reached Franklin, 15 miles farther north, at noon on November 30, 1864, and began strengthening some already existing earthworks. When complete, these rebuilt Federal breastworks had exterior ditches and earthen walls topped with protective head logs. When Hood learned of Schofield's escape, he became furious, blaming his subordinates for this failure. He mercilessly marched his army at quick time until they reached the rim of Winstead Hill, south of Franklin at about 2 p.m. on November 30. At 3 p.m., Hood ordered a direct frontal assault of the Federal works, marching about 18 Confederate infantry brigades across the open fields in front. As the Confederate line reached the main works, a portion managed to breach the defenses near the center, but reserve forces under General Emerson Opdycke were soon able to plug this gap. Much hand-to-hand combat ensued until the battle came to a halt. That night, Schofield quietly pulled his army out of Franklin, leaving behind his dead and wounded Union soldiers. The best estimate of Hood's losses at Franklin is approximately 7,000 men, including 1,750 killed on the field, about 4,500 wounded, and another 702 taken prisoner. Within five hours, at least one-third of the Confederate infantry sent into battle was lost. There were five Confederate generals killed outright, and another died of wounds a few days later. Five others received lesser wounds and a twelfth was captured. Ninety field officers became casualties, and in one brigade, only a captain was left to command. Among those killed was 36-year-old Major General Patrick Cleburne, the "Stonewall Jackson of the West."

After Franklin, Schofield withdrew to Nashville, where General Thomas was rapidly building up a force strong enough to take the offensive. Hood followed and, on December 2, had his army in position south and east of the city, astride the Franklin Pike and the railroad to Chattanooga. The reinforcements which Grant had arranged for were coming in rapidly, and within a few days Thomas had a force of close to 70,000 men to deal with about 19,000 under Hood. There were two lines of earthworks encircling the city of Nashville. An inner line close to the city limits was seven miles long and was supported by 20 artillery batteries. A longer outer line rested on a range of hills running through the outskirts of town. General Thomas placed approximately 55,000 of his troops on this outer or front line while some 5,000 soldiers of the Quartermaster's Corps were given the job of defending the inner works. A cavalry force of over 10,000 troopers was assembled to support the infantry. There was a two-week period of inactivity on the part of General Thomas, who blamed his unwillingness to attack the Confederates as due to ice and snow storms and his shortage of horses to remount his cavalry. General Grant sent Thomas a point blank order to attack. Meanwhile, Grant had become impatient to the point of ordering Major General John A. Logan to proceed to Nashville to supersede

Thomas. On the 14th the weather cleared, and Thomas moved out. The first day of the battle began when Thomas's blue lines slowly edged their way through heavy fog and, with about 35,000 men, struck Hood's left. Hood's right flank was held in position by more Union forces. The Federal onslaught was almost irresistible, driving the gray-clad veterans more than a mile to the rear, where they held on the Franklin Pike, but barely. The weather was foul, with melting ice. Both lines were adjusted somewhat during the night. At about 6 a.m. on December 15, 1864, in a dense fog, General James B. Steedman's division led the Federal attack by hitting the lunette and its attached lines on the Confederate far right. In spite of several desperate charges, these troops, composed largely of members of the United States Colored Infantry, were not able to turn the Confederate right, but by keeping General Benjamin F. Cheatham's Confederate troops occupied all day, they fulfilled their assigned role of carrying out a diversionary attack.

By the morning of December 16, Hood had reduced his previous five-mile line of defenses to a three-mile line. Even as he prepared to make another stand, he took the precaution, to the dismay of his troops, of sending his wagon trains to Franklin in case of defeat. At 4 p.m., General Thomas launched a combined assault. General John McArthur's and General Darius N. Couch's commands, operating from behind hastily built earthworks, spontaneously attacked the Confederate left on the slopes of Shy's Hill. This, combined with attacks by General Schofield's corps to the west and Wilson's dismounted cavalry (carrying Spencer repeating carbines) to the south of Shy's Hill led to the collapse of the Confederate left wing. As the left was overrun, the middle soon gave way, followed by the fall of the far right on Peach Orchard Hill. Thomas had engaged about 55,000 men and suffered 3,600 casualties, mostly wounded (2,562). Hood's force had a little over 20,000 men, and he lost 4,500 captured and another 1,500 killed and wounded. Nashville was perhaps the most complete victory of the entire war, for it utterly destroyed Hood's army.