

ALEXANDRIA NATIONAL CEMETERY

Securing the Capital

On May 24, 1861, Gen. Winfield Scott ordered eleven regiments of Union troops from Washington, D.C., across the Potomac River, where they captured Arlington and Alexandria.

After their defeat in July at Manassas, Virginia, the Union Army began constructing fortifications to protect the capital city. Fort Albany, Battery Rogers, and Fort Ellsworth near Alexandria anchored the southern end of Washington's defenses. The city became an important Union base of operations.



Battery Rogers, Alexandria harbor, was one of ninety-three detached batteries that made up the defenses of Washington, c. 1864. Library of Congress.



Mansion House Hospital, at the intersection of North Fairfax and Cameron streets, c. 1864. Library of Congress.

Military Hospitals

The influx of troops to Alexandria prompted the need for military hospitals. Thousands of sick and wounded Union soldiers were treated in area hospitals throughout the Civil War. The army opened Mansion House Hospital, Old General Hospital, Sickel General Hospital, and Slough Barracks General Hospital. It also established a large convalescent camp in Alexandria for soldiers who were discharged from the hospital but were still recovering.

Beginning in March 1863, the federal government began actively recruiting black men for the Union Army. A few months later, the War Department created the Bureau of United States Colored Troops (USCT). USCT regiments fought in battles and engagements from Virginia to Texas. L'Overture General Hospital, designed by the Quartermaster Department, opened in Alexandria in February 1864 for the treatment of black soldiers and civilians.

The First National Cemeteries

Despite the numerous medical facilities in Alexandria, many soldiers died. The federal government acquired 4 acres adjoining the city cemeteries in 1862 to bury the dead. Initially it was known as Soldiers Cemetery. In 1871, the Quartermaster Department built a Second Empire-style lodge of Seneca sandstone at the entrance. A matching stone wall enclosed the cemetery. Today, Alexandria National Cemetery is the final resting place of about 4,000 individuals, including 280 USCT soldiers.

A simple boulder monument with a bronze plaque, erected in 1922, honors four civilian employees of the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps. The men drowned attempting to cross the Potomac River on April 24, 1865, while pursuing John Wilkes Booth, President Abraham Lincoln's assassin. Their graves are located near the monument.



Entrance to Alexandria National Cemetery, 1869. National Archives and Records Administration.