

# Richmond National Cemetery

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
National Cemetery Administration



Richmond National Cemetery was established in 1866 and was originally intended to be a final resting place for over 6,000 Union soldiers who died during the American Civil War. Today, the cemetery contains the graves of more than 9,000 veterans of the Civil War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The Civil War soldiers buried at Richmond National Cemetery were originally interred at other cemeteries or battlefield gravesites and were later reinterred at this cemetery. Many of them had been prisoners of war at nearby Belle Isle and Libby Prison.

## Cemetery

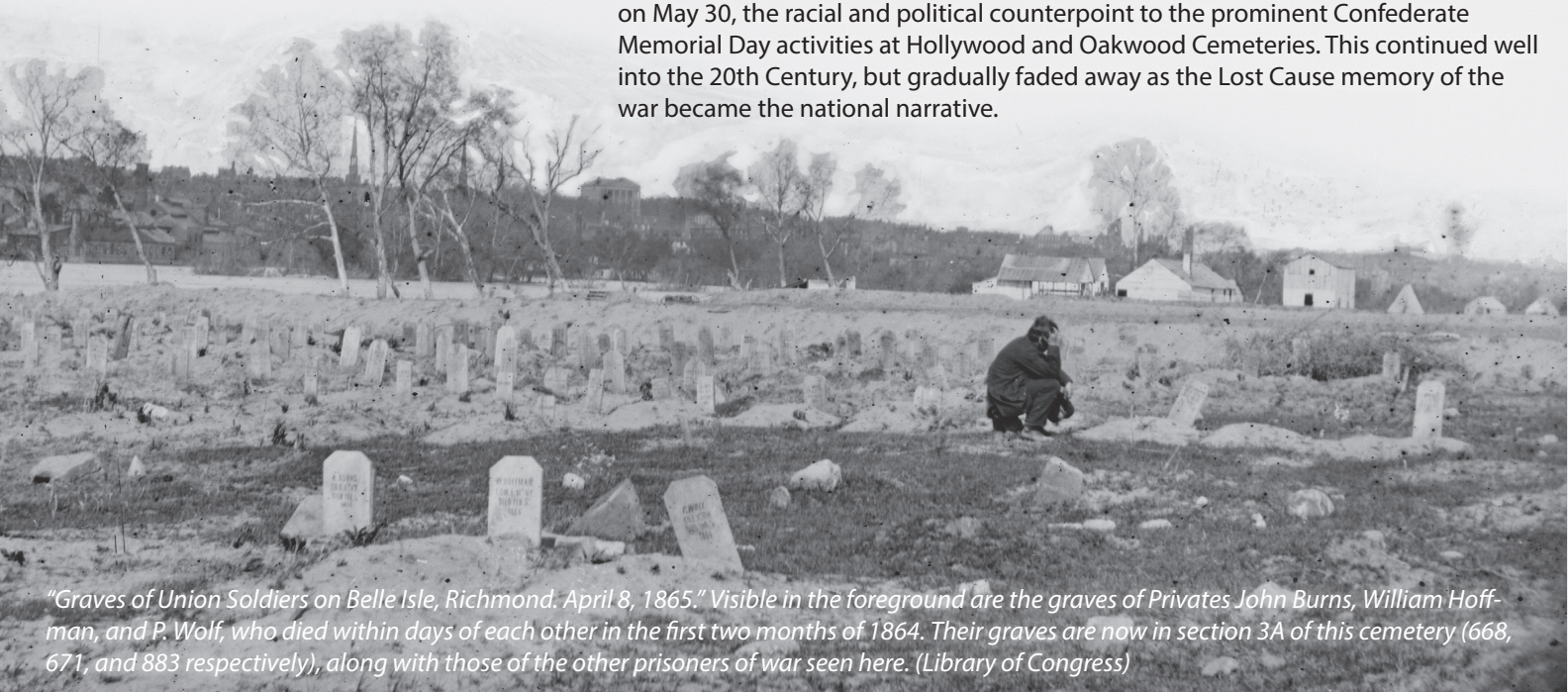
After the Civil War, a grim task began. In October 1865, U. S. Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs directed officers to find Union Civil War dead and plan to reinter them in new national cemeteries. No consideration was given to the race of the soldiers – the cemeteries would be racially integrated. The task of locating and reintering Union Civil War dead was monumental.

Most of the first burials at Richmond National Cemetery were reinterments of former prisoners of war. They included 3,200 from Richmond's Oakwood Cemetery, 388 from Hollywood Cemetery, 210 from the cemetery at the Belle Island prisoner of war camp, and over 500 from Shockoe Cemetery. Later, hundreds more were added from the battlefields of Cold Harbor, Seven Pines, and more than 70 additional sites within a 25-mile radius. Graves were also set aside for U. S. soldiers who died in Richmond during Reconstruction.

*“Holiday – Memorial Day. Decorated graves in section. – National Cemetery”  
Maggie L. Walker diary, May 20, 1918.*

## Memorialization

During the Reconstruction years, Richmond National Cemetery became the nexus for memorialization of Union war dead, especially among the formerly enslaved population of Richmond. Every year, large “Decoration Day” events were held here on May 30, the racial and political counterpoint to the prominent Confederate Memorial Day activities at Hollywood and Oakwood Cemeteries. This continued well into the 20th Century, but gradually faded away as the Lost Cause memory of the war became the national narrative.



*“Graves of Union Soldiers on Belle Isle, Richmond. April 8, 1865.” Visible in the foreground are the graves of Privates John Burns, William Hoffman, and P. Wolf, who died within days of each other in the first two months of 1864. Their graves are now in section 3A of this cemetery (668, 671, and 883 respectively), along with those of the other prisoners of war seen here. (Library of Congress)*



Most of the 20th Century soldiers buried here lived long after their service was completed. They served all over the globe in times of war and peace, and died in the America they helped to shape. Most were veterans from the Richmond area whose families stood here in times of deep grief to bury their fallen loved ones. The Civil War soldiers buried here never lived to see the results of the war for which they gave their lives. They perished far from their homes, prisoners in a land once considered their own country. They were buried by their captors in haste wherever a grave could be procured. There were no funeral processions, folded flags, or even notifications to loved ones. The people left behind often never knew what became of the man they sent off to war. The many headstones marked “unknown” testify to the sacrifice of soldiers who never lived to have children, to experience a long life, or to see the world they helped create. On behalf of a grateful nation, this cemetery is their monument.

## More Information

### Richmond National Cemetery

1701 Williamsburg Road  
Richmond, VA 23231  
804-795-2031  
[www.cem.va.gov/cems/nchp/richmond.asp](http://www.cem.va.gov/cems/nchp/richmond.asp)

The cemetery is open for visitation daily from sunrise to sunset.

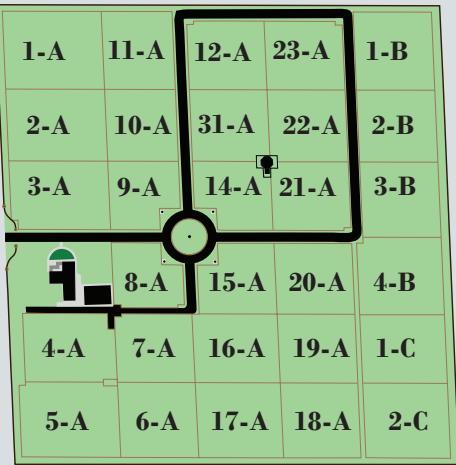
Leave a tribute for any veteran interred in a National Cemetery by visiting VA's digital memorial platform at [VA.gov/remember](http://VA.gov/remember)



VISIT VLM

This brochure was produced through a collaboration between the National Cemetery Administration's Veterans Legacy Program and the staff at Richmond National Battlefield Park.

# Richmond National Cemetery - Notable Burials



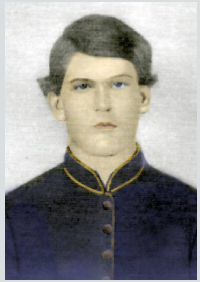
Map of Richmond National Cemetery

**Every soldier buried in this cemetery has an important story to tell. The individuals listed below are only selected examples of the vast sweep of history and service represented in this cemetery. We invite you to take some time to visit and read about some of the soldiers buried here.**

**Bodies in the Well: Fort Gilmer Civil War Dead:** On September 29, 1864, U. S. Colored Troops attacked Fort Gilmer, just a few miles to the south. The attack was an uncoordinated disaster. Men of the 7th USCT reached the fort's ditch but could not breach the walls. Rather than take them prisoner, Confederates began what can only be termed a massacre, rolling lit shells into their midst and killing others at close range. A postwar notation in the cemetery ledger notes: "These bodies were found in a well in front of Fort Gilmore [sic]...The well has been sought for during the last two years, but none of the neighbors could show where the well had been." Seventy years later, Black members of the local CCC Camp searched in vain for this well, not knowing that 43 bodies had already been found and reinterred here. Fort Gilmer is now a part of Richmond National Battlefield Park. Believed to be Section 23A, Sites 3625-3643, 3664-3694, 3875-3877

## NAME LOST, AND FOUND:

This grave illustrates the problem of identification of the dead. There is no Shutton from Tennessee, but there is a Robert *Shelton*. No one at the time had access to soldier records like we do, and could not put a proper name to the body. In some cases, now we can. This is one of them:



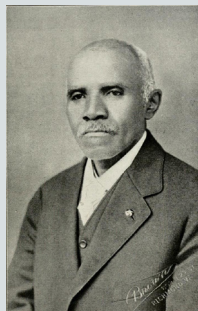
**PVT Robert Shelton:** Civil War; 2nd Tennessee Infantry (US); Born in Scott County, Tennessee; enlisted June 8, 1863, in Somerset, Kentucky. He was captured at Rogersville, Tennessee, on November 6, 1863, and brought to Richmond. He was probably confined on Belle Isle, but took sick and died of laryngitis and pneumonia at General Hospital #21 on December 25, 1863. He was originally buried at Oakwood Cemetery. He was a farmer, 25 years old, and left behind a wife and two children. His daughter Amanda was born two months before he enlisted. She lived until 1945, never knowing that the mis-identified man in this grave was the father she had only known as an infant. Section 8A, Site 1180



**PVT James Wall:** Civil War; 8th New York Heavy Artillery. Born in Utica, New York, and enlisted on August 2, 1862 at Elba, age 18. He was a farmer with hazel eyes, brown hair, florid complexion, 5'9" tall. Until 1864, his unit manned forts around Baltimore, MD, never firing a shot in anger. When the Overland Campaign began, these artillerymen were repurposed as infantry in the field. In the terrible fighting at Cold Harbor on June 3, 1864, Private Wall was killed, one of the unit's 505 casualties. Originally buried at Cold Harbor. Section 2A, Site 588

## CPT William Hancock Anderson:

Spanish-American War; 6th Virginia Volunteer Regiment. Born enslaved in New Kent County, Virginia, May 6, 1859, and grew up in Richmond. In 1882, he opened a publishing business and was appointed Captain and Adjutant of the 1st Battalion Virginia Volunteers, an all-Black militia unit, in 1885. When war broke out with Spain in 1898, Anderson's unit was converted to the 6th Virginia U.S. Volunteers. The 6th was discriminated against due to inherent racism, and the entire regiment was placed under arrest when they attempted to protest this mistreatment. They were branded the "mutinous Sixth" and Black officers were gotten rid of. Anderson mustered out in 1899 and later became an active leader in Richmond's Black community. Anderson was married and had three children, only one of whom lived to adulthood. He passed away on October 31, 1932. Section 3B, Site 4950



**PVT Otis Purcell Robinson:** World War I; African American member of Co. B, 545th Engineer Service Battalion. Grew up in Richmond's Carver neighborhood, and worked for the British-American Tobacco Company's factory on 7th Street. He was drafted into an all-Black engineer battalion in July 1918. While sailing overseas, he contracted influenza and died in France only a week after arrival. Initially buried in the St. Nazaire American Cemetery in France, he was returned home and buried here in 1922: Section 1B, Site 4907



**PFC Alex Park Wood:** World War II; 141st Infantry, 36th Division, KIA Italy. Born in Buckingham Co., Virginia, and worked as a carpenter for the C & O Railroad before the war. He enlisted July 1942 in Charlottesville, Va., with no more than a grammar school education. He was sent overseas in April 1943 to join the Fifth Army in Italy. He was killed in the fighting for the Bernhardt Line near Monte Casino. First buried at Marzanello Nuovo, Italy, and reinterred here on September 23, 1948. Section 2C, Site 5388

## D-DAY B-26 Crash Group Burial

On June 6, 1944, 54 B-26s belonging to the Ninth U.S. Air Force took off in bad weather to support the invasion of Normandy. At 5:05 AM, two of these bombers collided while they were still over England. The cause of the crash was attributed to poor visibility, and the three men interred here were part of one of those aircrews. They were initially buried in Cambridge, England, but were reinterred here on April 26, 1949. Section 1C, Site 5498.



**2LT Emil F. Ostrowski:** Co-pilot; Born in South River, NJ, graduate of Plainfield High School. He was working as a mechanic in Milwaukee when he enlisted in 1942. He was commissioned in 1943 and had only been overseas for three months when he was killed at the age of 23.

**SSGT James F. (Freddie) Bechtler:** Engineer-Gunner; Born in Rock Hill, SC; Was working in a textile mill when he enlisted in 1942. He was also 23 at the time of the crash. (photo at right)



**SGT Boris R. Salimsky:** Bombardier; Born to a Jewish family in Romania; Was living in New York when he enlisted on December 13, 1941. He was 23 when killed as well.



**YN2 Olga Suhinski Norris:** World War II; US Navy. Born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, she worked for General Electric there when she enlisted in the Navy's WAVES program in 1944. She was stationed at Hill Air Force Base in Clearfield, Utah, where she met and married Capt. Hugh E. Norris in May, 1945.

Relationships between officers and enlisted personnel were discouraged, but clearly not prohibited. Captain Norris stayed in the Air Force through the Korean War and saw service in both theaters of World War II, Japan, Okinawa, and Korea. She outlived him by 36 years, and they are buried here together. Section 2B, Site 5803

**CPL Joseph Thomas Green:** Korean War; Battery C, 503rd Field Artillery BN, 2nd Div., KIA; Grew up in Richmond's Jackson Ward, and went to Armstrong High School. Seriously wounded when his artillery battalion was ambushed near Kunu-ri, North Korea on November 26, 1950 and died of those wounds the following day. Originally buried in temporary U. S. Military Cemetery in Pyongyang, North Korea, and reinterred here in 1955. Section 2B, Site 7306



**1LT Charles Edward "Chuck" Aronhalt:** Vietnam War; From Cumberland, Maryland. Graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 1964, where he played football and commissioned through ROTC. He married in Richmond in 1965 and had a son, who was born just before he left for Vietnam. He had already earned the Bronze Star Medal for valor when he was killed in action at Pleiku. He

had been in Vietnam for five months. He was later awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (second only to the Medal of Honor) for this action. His citation reads in part: "he stood up and charged the insurgents alone. His rifle jammed as he ran, but he picked up a machine gun and continued charging and firing... Lieutenant Aronhalt was mortally wounded in the successful attempt at drawing the fire from his men. His valiant actions prevented the Viet Cong from taking the life of any one of his men..." Section 4B, Site 7323K.