

Antietam Battlefield

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Antietam National Battlefield
P. O. Box 158
Sharpsburg, MD 21782



Antietam National Cemetery

The muffled drum's sad roll has beat
The soldier's last tattoo;
No more on life's parade shall meet
That brave and fallen few.

(From the poem "Bivouacs of the Dead," located in the center of the cemetery)

The Battle of Antietam, or Sharpsburg, on September 17th, 1862 was the tragic culmination of Robert E. Lee's first invasion of the north. That one fateful day over 23,100 men were killed wounded or listed as missing. Approximately 4,000 were killed and in the days that followed, many more died of wounds or disease. The peaceful village of Sharpsburg turned into a huge hospital and burial ground extending for miles in all directions.

Burial details performed their grisly task with speed, but not great care. Graves ranged from single burials to long shallow trenches accommodating hundreds. For example, William Roulette, whose farm still stands behind the visitor center today, had over 700 soldiers buried on his property. Grave markings were somewhat haphazard, from stone piles to rough hewn crosses and wooden headboards. A few ended up in area church cemeteries. In other cases, friends or relatives removed bodies from the area for transport home. By March of 1864, no effort had been made to find a suitable final resting place for those buried in the fields surrounding Sharpsburg. Many graves had become exposed, something had to be done.

Union Burial Detail at Antietam



Establishing a Plan

In 1864, State Senator Lewis P. Firey introduced to the Maryland Senate a plan to establish a state, or national cemetery for the men who died in the Maryland Campaign of 1862. On the 23rd of March 1865, the state established a burial site by purchasing 11¼ acres for \$1,161.75.

The original Cemetery Commissions plan allowed for burial of soldiers from both sides. However, the rancor and bitterness

over the recently completed conflict and the devastated South's inability to raise fund to join in such a venture persuaded Maryland to recant. Consequently, only Union dead are interred here. Confederate remains are buried in, in Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Frederick, Maryland, Rose Hill Cemetery in Hagerstown, Maryland, and Elmwood Cemetery in Shepherdstown, West Virginia.

An Arduous Task

In an effort to locate grave sites and identify the occupants, no one was of more value than two area men: Aaron Good and Joseph Gill. In the days, months and years following the battle, these men freely gave of their time and gathered a large number of names and burial locations. The valuable service provided by these men cannot be overstated. The dead were identified by letters, receipts, diaries, photographs,

marks on belts or cartridge boxes, and by interviewing relatives and survivors. Contributions totaling over \$70,000 were submitted from eighteen northern states to the administrators of the Antietam National Cemetery Board. With a work force consisting primarily of honorably discharged soldiers, the cemetery was completed by September, 1867.

Dedication

On September 17, 1867, on the fifth anniversary of the battle, the cemetery was ready for the dedication ceremonies. The ceremony was important enough to bring President Andrew Johnson and other dignitaries. President Johnson proclaimed,

"When we look on yon battlefield, I think of the brave men who fell in the fierce struggle of battle, and who sleep silent in their graves. Yes, many of them sleep in silence and peace within this beautiful enclosure after the earnest conflict has ceased."

Private Soldier Monument

The colossal structure of granite stands in the center of the cemetery reaches skyward 44 feet- 7 inches, weighs 250 tons and is made up of twenty seven pieces. The statue depicts a Union infantry soldier standing "in place, rest" facing homeward to the north. The statue itself is 21½ feet tall, weighs about thirty tons and is made up of two pieces joined at the waist.

Designed by James G. Baterson of Hartford, CT, and sculpted by James Poletto of Westerly, RI. for a cost of over \$32,000. The "Private Soldier" stood at the gateway of the

Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, PA in 1876. It was disassembled again for the long journey to Sharpsburg.

On September 17, 1880, the statue was finally in place where it was formally dedicated. The journey of "Old Simon" as he is known locally, had been delayed for several months when the section from the waist up fell into the river at Washington, D.C. When retrieved, it was transported on the C&O Canal, and dragged by using huge, wooden rollers through Sharpsburg to the cemetery.

The Cemetery Today

Antietam National Cemetery is one of the 130 cemeteries of the National Cemetery System. There are 4,776 Union remains (1,836 unknown) buried here from the Battle of Antietam, South Mountain, Monocacy, and other Maryland Campaigns.

In addition, more than two hundred non-Civil War graves are also buried here. Veterans from the Spanish American War, World War I and II, and Korea. The cemetery closed in 1953.

Recently an exception to the closure was made for the burial of Keedysville resident Patrick Howard Roy, United States Navy. Fireman Roy was killed during the attack on the USS COLE and was buried in the Cemetery on October 29, 2000.

If you walk to the back of the cemetery you will notice a few separate graves. Ironically, on the battlefield that led directly to Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, African-American graves from WW I were segregated

