



On Hallowed Ground: The Story of Arlington National Cemetery

Robert M. Poole

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Created at the end of the Civil War, Arlington National Cemetery has become a part of the landscape as fixed in the national imagination as the White House or the Capitol building. The mansion at Arlington's heart, and the rolling hills on which it sits, had been the family plantation of Robert E. Lee before he joined the Confederacy; strategic to the defense of Washington, Arlington became a Union encampment, a haven for freedmen, and a pauper's cemetery for soldiers dying in the nation's bloodiest conflict.

With the passage of time, new layers of meaning were added to Arlington, which would become our nation's most honored shrine. More than three hundred thousand rest in Arlington's 624 acres, representing every war the nation ever fought. Each tombstone tells a story, from the Tomb of the Unknowns, so carefully tended today, to the eternal flame at John F. Kennedy's grave to the final resting places of ordinary citizen-warriors sleeping among Arlington's rolling green hills. Their stories, and the cemetery's time-honored rituals—the horse-drawn caissons, the rifle salutes, the sounding of Taps—still speak to us all.

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