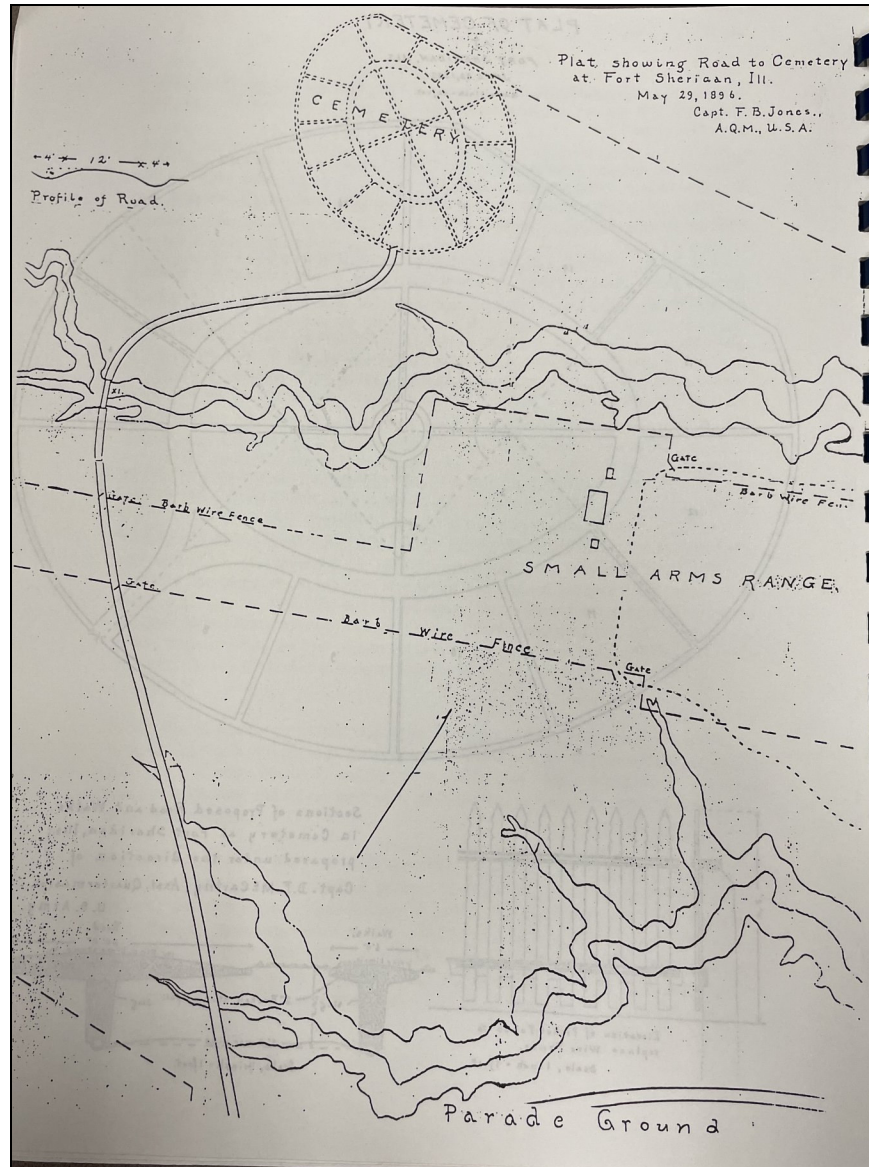


Fort Sheridan Cemetery

(Excerpts from the published booklet *Fort Sheridan Cemetery*, © 1996 Zion Genealogical Society)(

[Ed Note: some facts may have changed in the 25+ years since the publication of this booklet in 1996.]



1896 Plat of road to cemetery

Directions To Fort Sheridan Cemetery (An Army Post Cemetery)

Fort Sheridan Cemetery is located at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. It is located east of Sheridan Road between the cities of Highwood and Lake Forest, Illinois. There are two entrances off Sheridan Road, (the Main gate and the "Truck" gate) and a third entrance, the South

Gate on Clay Avenue at the southeastern tip of the post. (This entrance is actually in Highland Park, Illinois).

The hours are 8 A. M. to 5 P. M. daily and 8 A. M. to 7 P. M. on Memorial Day.

Directions from US Route 41 (A major highway which runs north and south in the eastern part of Illinois, parallel to the shore of Lake Michigan.) As you get into the area of Highland Park and Lake Forest, look for the OLD ELM ROAD exit. Take Old Elm Road EAST (toward Lake Michigan) 1.3 miles from US 41 to the END. Once you cross the railroad tracks, there is a "T" intersection with Sheridan Road across the top of the "T". Turn RIGHT(South). Go .7 miles south on Sheridan past the MAIN GATE on your left. Continue south until you round a slight left curve in the road. The entrance for the cemetery is the "Truck" gate which is on the left hand side of the road, directly across from the Hotel Moraine. TURN LEFT into the fort.

You will see that this is now "The Philip H. Sheridan Reserve Center". TURN LEFT once you are inside the gate at the first intersection (Lyster Road). Proceed north 1.1 miles. You will now be heading NORTH toward the Fort Sheridan Cemetery and parallel to Sheridan Road (which you were just on). Continue on Lyster Road north past the flag pole and statue of General Philip H. Sheridan on your right. At the flag pole, Lyster Road becomes George Bell Road. Continue along George Bell Road past the golf course. TURN RIGHT (east) at Vattman Road and proceed .1 mile to the Fort Sheridan Post Cemetery. The Cemetery is on your left.

The cemetery is an oval shaped design enclosed entirely by cyclone fencing.

It is approximately 554 feet long and 467 feet wide. It is divided into 12 pie-shaped sections of unequal size. Each section has a driveway sized access road adjacent to its edge. (Section numbers are 5 through 16 inclusive). (Sections 2,3 and 4 comprise the inner circle, but to date, no one is interred there). Rows are identified by letters starting at the inner circular road and advancing to the last row at the cyclone fence., i. e.: ROW AA, A B, C, D, E, F, etc. (Grave number 7, Row AA #288 is the first inner row in Section 7 and plot number 288). In cases where a spouse or child is also interred in the same grave, the non-military person's name is found on the reverse of the headstone. The grave numbers are generally consecutively identified across the rows. The section, row and plot number are printed on the back of most headstones. Good luck in your visit and finding the information you seek.

Fort Sheridan is situated on the shores of Lake Michigan between the towns of Lake Forest to the north and Highland Park to the south. The post is east of U. S. Highway 41, a main roadway from Chicago.

Some of the events leading to the establishment of Ft. Sheridan were the Chicago Fire of 1871, the labor riots of 1877 and the Haymarket riot of 1886. Local industrialists called a meeting of the Commercial Club of Chicago, to determine what support could be offered to provide protection for Chicago and prevent rioting in the city. Local legend adds that these wealthy industrialists, who owned large estates on Lake County's North Shore, were concerned for their safety and wanted an army between them and possible rioting in Chicago. The group acquired land in Highlandwood, Illinois and donated it to the Federal Government for use as an army base.

The first troops arrived in 1887 to form a garrison which was first named "Camp Highwood".

The garrison was renamed Fort Sheridan in 1888 in honor of Lieutenant General Philip Sheridan (1831-1888), a cavalry officer during the Civil War. He became a leader in calming the civil disturbances during the Chicago Fire and was a member of the Commercial Club of Chicago.

In 1889, Congress appropriated money for permanent buildings, the water tower (the fort's most noticeable landmark), a wharf, a rifle range and the cemetery. The cemetery was originally designed so that Sections 5, 6 and 7 were designated for burial of civilians but as early as 1896, enlisted men are buried in these sections, possibly to place them close to family members who had predeceased them. Section 8 was designated for non-commissioned officers, Section 10 and 11 for Officers and Sections 12-16 for enlisted men. Sections 2-4 are in the center of the cemetery and as of this publication have not been used for burials.

On October 9, 1895, the War Department Quartermaster General R. N. Batchelder authorized \$1333 for the construction of a road, including tile drain, etc. from the post to the cemetery at Fort Sheridan.

The Assistant Quartermaster, Capt. F. B. Jones was instructed that the "work shall be borne on your monthly reports of progress to this office".

The cemetery is a post cemetery (Not a National Cemetery or Veteran's Administration Cemetery). Up until the 1970s, spouses could reserve burial space for themselves next to their loved one(s). Due to space limitations, family members can no longer be buried there with the exception of the spaces reserved prior to the change in policy.

Not all military personnel who died at Fort Sheridan are buried there. Many were transferred to other locations (home or other military cemetery closer to loved ones) for interment.

Others who were originally interred at Fort Sheridan were disinterred and transferred elsewhere at the request of their families. These burials are not included in this publication.

At the entrance to the cemetery stands a monument to Chaplain Edward J. Vatman, a major in the Army who ran a home for war widows and children of soldiers who died in World War I. Chaplain Vatman was a close personal friend of President Theodore Roosevelt. When the President visited the area, he always stayed in the Chaplain's quarters. Chaplain Vatman designed, built and paid for the monument prior to his death.

He had President Roosevelt's approval for the site and the design.

Upon his death on September 29, 1919, his body was buried beneath the monument.

Paging through the log book of burials, there is much history and much sadness recorded there. The log book records the death of at least 66 men at Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois in 1918-1919 due to the flu epidemic that killed 20 million people that

year. There are burials here from soldiers who served in the Civil War, the Philippine Insurrection, World War I, World War II and Vietnam, as well as many other conflicts.

Three soldiers who served with General George A. Custer are buried here. 1st Sgt. August B. Siefert, 1st Sgt. John Hackett and Private Philip Spinner are identified as having served with the 7th Cavalry under General Custer at the time of the Battle of the Little Big Horn. It is not known whether Siefert and Spinner were actually at the Battle, but it appears that Sgt. Hackett was part of the support personnel and personally helped in the burial of General Custer. Hackett's step-son, Charles Hackett was 9 years old when his widowed mother married Hackett in 1902. John Hackett, a native of Dublin, Ireland, enlisted in Chicago, November 14, 1872 for five years. John told his step-son that two days after the battle when they were sure the Indians had left the area, work details were assigned to bury the dead. He said that he and a "Mr. Wilson" were assigned to bury the group of bodies clustered around Custer's body. "There was an arc of dead horses around them. Because it was the heat of summer and the men had been dead several days, it was necessary to bury the bodies as soon as possible."

World War I interments include 9 German Prisoners of War, most captured during the campaign in North Africa. Fort Sheridan was headquarters for 46 prisoner-of-war camps throughout Illinois, Wisconsin and Michigan. More than 15,000 prisoners of war were held in the Midwest and for the most part, made to work as crop harvesters and on civilian construction projects.

A Chicago Sun-Times article in 1972 reported "German Soldiers Honored In Death At Fort Sheridan".

"Several hundred persons attended the service Monday at the fort cemetery and then stayed to pay homage to some 2,000 Americans who also are buried there. Among those who went to the installation a half hour early for the German ceremony - and more than half of it conducted in the language of the Fatherland - are German nationals in Chicago for business or vacations, representatives of the consulate here, members of the German-American communities here and in Wisconsin and what remains of the Verein Deutschcher Weltkriegs - Veteranen von Chicago (World War I Veterans) .

It appears that these ceremonies were held on Memorial Day for many years until about 1973.

Three of the German prisoners-of-war died as the result of a truck/train accident in Rockford while in transit from Camp Grant, Rockford, IL to another work site. One died at Sturgeon Bay, (cause of death not recorded in Fort Sheridan log book). One died from a fall and the others apparently of natural causes Cyril H. Evans, a Private with the British Royal Army Ordnance Corps who had been liberated from a Japanese Prison and died at Camp Grant, IL was buried at Fort Sheridan on October 26, 1945.

The cemetery contains a memorial for Private 1st Class Ervin C. Staples who died in the bombing of the Hotel Nicolet at Malmedy, Belgium along with 68 other soldiers who were housed there. After being reported missing in action since December 25, 1944 and his body unrecoverable as of May of 1949, his death was honored through the erection of this memorial.

Since Fort Sheridan's closure in May of 1993, there has been much controversy regarding the future use of Fort Sheridan land with many studies performed including housing development, housing the homeless, recreation, resorts, etc. Many members of the military have petitioned unsuccessfully for the Fort Sheridan Cemetery to be designated as a National Cemetery

[Ed Note: The publication *Fort Sheridan Cemetery* includes a listing of all graves in the cemetery as of 1996. The publication is non-circulating and can be viewed at the Highwood Public Library, Highwood, Illinois.]