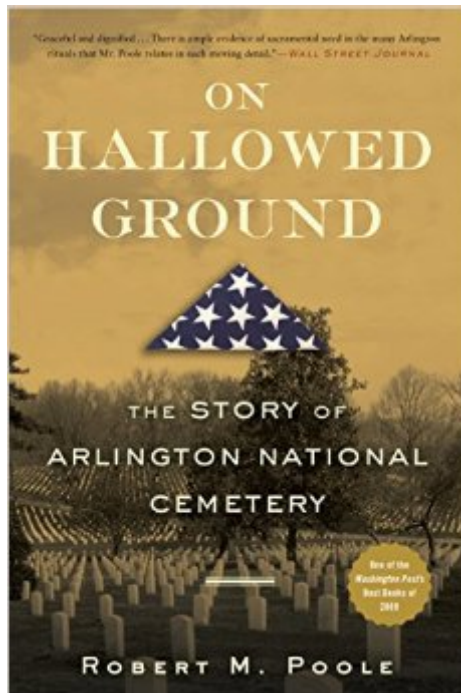


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On Hallowed Ground: The Story Of Arlington National Cemetery



Synopsis

On Hallowed Ground opens with the long-delayed funeral of four servicemen, brought home for final honors at Arlington National Cemetery almost forty years after they disappeared in Vietnam. To understand how this tradition of extraordinary care for our war dead began, Robert Poole traces the founding of Arlington Cemetery on what had been the family plantation of Robert E. Lee. After resigning his commission in the U.S. Army, Lee left Arlington to command the Army of Northern Virginia. Arlington, strategic to the defense of Washington, D.C., became a U.S. Army headquarters and a cemetery for indigent Civil War soldiers before Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton made it the new national cemetery. Initially, there was no honor attached to being buried at Arlington; this began to change after the war, as the Union gathered thousands of hastily-buried casualties from nearby battlefields and reinterred them at Arlington, where they received the honors of a grateful nation. But the rites, rituals, and reverence associated with Arlington evolved over the next hundred years, paid through the blood of those who fought in the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Cold War, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and Iraq and Afghanistan. Robert Poole paints an intimate, behind-the-scenes picture of the history and day-to-day operations of Arlington National Cemetery.

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Customer Reviews

This history of the Arlington National Cemetery kept me thoroughly completely engaged throughout. An chronological accounting of our nation's cemetery through individual stories of the people who were buried there, it made an great companion to the more thematically structured and excellent Civil War history by Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, which I had previously completed. Poole's account details the complex political and bureaucratic processes around the selection of unknown soldiers, and the developing culture of memorial to war dead as well as the role of the cemetery in attempting to heal internal national divisions (Civil War, Vietnam "war"). His detailing of how Robert E Lee's wife's family plantation was slowly appropriated alone is well worth the reading time. I also greatly appreciated how Poole's highlighting the design--land use, vistas, monuments, tombstones, rituals etc--deftly demonstrates that attention to detail reinforces beliefs and values. Examples include the categorization--by war, race and sex--of people buried, to a soldier's description of the practice needed folding a flag apparent simplicity of folding the flag at a state funeral. There many things and further questions (areas of inquiry) that came to my mind as I read this book.

Robert Poole comes closer to the heart and soul of Arlington than any other book that has been written. Much of the other information that has been published before is guidebook/history information. Unlike other superficial accounts that show pictures of the grandeur of the cemetery and the ceremony, there is much background, including how close our ceremonies are to those of the Grecian warrior's and how no other country goes to the extent the United States does to honor their common military men, including returning them to their home country. I have been with the military all of my life. Arlington is a family and friend's cemetery, a very personal place and "On Hallowed Ground" comes the closest to touching the feelings that those of us that regard Arlington have as our personal hallowed remembrance as any book. With that said I wish that there was more of the tales of the common military man here. Out of 267 pages more than 80 are devoted to the very detailed history of the Lees, the Civil War and the acquiring of the Lee land for this cemetery. I wish there was less of Lee, which has been previously covered by other books and more of the soul of the men and women of Arlington. The Old Guard is covered, but not to a great extent. There is little of the expansion of the cemetery in and after the Vietnam era, which he attributes not to the war but to the popularity after Kennedy's burial, which he does a magnificent job of describing. But I

remember an officer whose office suddenly overlooked the growing number of headstones as being insulted that, that was now the view from his office; and I of course could not reply what I was thinking, that maybe that is what he needed to see.

Millions of people come to Arlington Cemetery every year, some come as visitors and take the standard tour, some come to mourn and seek the grave of a loved one, and many come solemnly as a part of multiple daily funeral processions. Having done all three and having had the opportunity to drive by and around the National Cemetery on a daily commute for almost two decades I still found it to be a mysterious and, if given into, a mentally overwhelming place. "On Hallowed Ground, the Story of Arlington National Cemetery, by Robert Poole, takes out the mystery. But his work only pushes the mentally overwhelming nature of Arlington, and what it stands for, to new heights. I received this book as Christmas gift this year from a disabled Iraqi vet making a new life for himself along the Space Coast with me here in Florida. We have become friends. In honesty my initial reaction to the gift, was of course gracious, but as I thought about the pile of unread books seeking priority, my gut told me, having lived in Northern Virginia most of my life, what more stories about the old cemetery did I need to hear? Well, for whatever reasons, I cracked the cover. Ironically on a flight from Orlando to Reagan National I read about the history of the land once belonging to Robert E. Lee as my flight covered the whole of the Confederacy in just less than two hours. I was hooked on the story. I assume Mr. Poole chose the word "story" as opposed to history, because the history of the cemetery is more appropriately contained within the lives of the thousands upon thousands of individuals now resting eternally.

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