

VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials

VA



**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

National Cemetery
Administration

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CEMETERIES AND MEMORIALS**

May 7, 2019 – May 8, 2019

Washington, DC
8:30 am – 4:30pm

MINUTES

Committee Members Present:

- Leslie E. Beavers, Committee Chairman
- Gordon W. Lightfoot, Committee Member
- Edith Gilbert Smith, Committee Member
- Heather Mitchell Braatz, Committee Member
- JoAnn Fisher, Ed.D., Committee Member
- Marianne A. Trussell, Committee Member
- Edward Saunders, Committee Member
- Joey Strickland, Committee Member
- Dino Teppara, Committee Member
- Kathleen Moakler, Committee Member
- Michael Dover, Committee Member

Committee Member Absent:

- Michael Figlioli, Committee Member

Ex-officio Members Present:

- Tom Sole, American Battle Monuments Commission
- Charles Sellars, National Park Service

Ex-officio Members Absent:

- Karen Durham-Aguilera, Executive Director, Army National Military Cemeteries
- Colonel Jerry Farnsworth, Chief of Staff, Army National Military Cemeteries

Office of the VA Secretary Attendees (May 7th):

Honorable Robert L. Wilkie, VA Secretary
Jeffery “Boomer” Moragne, Director, Advisory Committee Management Office
Jelessa M.H. Burney, Program Specialist, Advisory Committee Management Office

Office of General Counsel

Carol Borden, VA Staff Attorney, Office of General Counsel

National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Attendees:

- Honorable Randy Reeves, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs (May 7th)
- Ronald Walters, PhD, Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs (May 7th)
- Tom Howard, NCA Chief of Staff (May 7th)
- Gina Farrisee, Executive Director, Strategy and Analysis (May 7th)
- Katy Mozingo, Executive Assistant to Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs (May 7th)
- Glenn Powers, Deputy Undersecretary, Field Programs and Cemetery Operations
- Daniel Devine, Executive Director, Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovations (May 7th)
- Les' Melnyk, Chief of Public Affairs (May 7th)
- Sara Amy Leach, Senior Historian (May 7th)
- Jennifer Perunko, Historian (May 7th)
- Bryce Carpenter, PhD, Educational Outreach Program Officer (May 7th)
- Heidi Wiesner, Education Specialist, Veterans Legacy Program (May 7th)
- Amerophan Callahan, Executive Director, Office of Field Programs (May 8th)
- Eric Powell, PhD, Director, Memorial Products Service (May 8th)
- Ginger Wilson, Director, National Cemetery Scheduling Office (May 8th)
- George D. Eisenbach, Jr., Director, Veterans Cemetery Grants Program (May 8th)
- Kenneth Holliday, Alternate Designated Federal Officer & Education Specialist, Veterans Legacy Program
- Christine B. Hamilton, Designated Federal Officer

Public Attendees:

James Edwin Ray via telephone

Tuesday, May 7, 2019

The semi-annual meeting of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials was held at the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Omar B. Ketchum Memorial Hall, in Washington, DC. The session was open to the public; and the meeting location and teleconference number was published in the Federal Register announcement.

Opening Remarks

The Committee Chairman, Leslie Beavers, called the meeting to order at 8:29 a.m. The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence to honor the lives and sacrifices of Veterans and Servicemembers.

Chairman Beavers welcomed attendees and asked Les' Melnyk, NCA Chief of Public Affairs to introduce himself.

Christine Hamilton, Designated Federal Officer, provided administrative announcements and an overview of the agenda.

Chairman Beavers reminded members that the committee is authorized under 38. U.S.C. Section 2401 to advise the Secretary and report to Congress. He also mentioned the committee's good score record for submitting actionable recommendations for VA consideration.

The new members, Kathleen Moakler, Dino Teppara, and Michael Dover introduced themselves to the attendees.

Key Strategic Initiatives Update: Weekend Burial Pilot

Glenn Powers, Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations, provided the committee with an update on the Weekend Burial Pilot, for which the committee was instrumental in preliminary research and guidance.

NCA evaluated the following key factors:

- Impact of Customer Satisfaction – Does offering a Saturday burial option increase customer satisfaction?
- Impact on Utilization – Does offering a Saturday burial option increase the percent of potential customers choosing NCA?
- Impact on Cost – Does offering a Saturday burial option have a significant cost?

Interments in the national cemeteries are essentially performed during the standard workweek of Monday thru Friday. However, cemeteries will inter on a federal holiday to provide service during the three-day holiday weekend.

In November 2017, NCA embarked on a weekend burial pilot to gain a better understanding of what needs to be considered if implemented on a regular basis. During Phase 1 of the pilot, six cemeteries were selected to offer inurnments of cremated remains only during the first Saturday of each month. The six cemeteries were Calverton (NY), Florida (FL), Jefferson Barracks (MO), Fort Snelling (MN), Fort Bliss (TX), and Riverside (CA).

Military honors are primarily arranged by the Department of Defense, and in some case, Veterans Service Organizations. Military Honors was provided at committal services upon request. NCA resourced this pilot by providing overtime to employees.

Mr. Powers provided a statistical breakdown of inurnments performed during the pilot across the six cemeteries. From November 2017 to present, the total number of inurnments is 1286. Religion, distance for the family to travel, season, and regional significance play a role in a family's selection of cremation over casketed burials.

NCA conducted a survey to obtain feedback from the 247 employees who participated in the weekend burial pilot.

	Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Inurnments	
	FY18 Inurn Rate	FY 18 Wkd/Total Inurns
Ft. Snelling	72.0%	4.6%
Florida	68.5%	4.8%
Riverside	58.0%	4.8%
Jefferson Barracks	35.8%	9.4%
Ft. Bliss	34.6%	2.3%
Calverton	20.6%	9.9%

Note: All except Ft. Bliss are large national cemeteries.

- Of the 247 respondents, 77% reported that they worked weekends to support burials.
 - 48% voluntary overtime
 - 13% mandatory overtime
 - 38% mix of voluntary and mandatory overtime

- Most employees who worked reported working 2-5 of the 17 weekends during the pilot

- Overall employees across all sites reported a burnout level of 2.72
 - Cemetery ranges included a high of 3.38 and a low of 2 where 1=None, 2=Mild, 3=Moderate, 4=Considerable, 5=Severe

- If NCA decides to offer weekend burial on a permanent basis, employees responded with their willingness to work:

- Overtime
 - Yes, one Saturday a month (29%)
 - Yes, one Saturday on a rotating basis (e.g., every other month) (24%)
 - No (47%)

- Alternate Schedule (Tuesday-Saturday)
 - Yes, on a permanent basis (15%)
 - Yes, on a rotating basis (e.g., every other month) (21%)
 - No (65%)

- When asked if NCA should offer weekend burials, employees said:
 - Yes (27%)
 - No (73%)

Conclusions:

- Discontinue pilot as of March 30, 2019.
- Inform Congress and VSO community of pilot findings and the decision to suspend routine weekend burials at this time.
- Partner with VA's Veterans Experience Office to develop and administer a customer survey targeted to those families who utilized weekend burials to obtain additional data.
- Assess resource requirements to offer weekend burials on a permanent basis based on pilot data. Consider including a resource request in a future budget, depending on competing priorities.

Following the conclusion of the presentation, Chairman Beavers opened the floor for further discussion. He mentioned his concern about mandating weekend burials without consideration of resources. Chairman Beavers pointed out that this is not just an overtime issue but staffing and scheduling should also be considered.

Committee Member Joey Strickland also stressed his concern as the Secretary of the Veteran State Cemetery of Louisiana. He stated that weekend burials may be funded at the federal level, but they will not be funded at the state level. In addition, burial plot funds from VA would need to be higher and refunded in a more efficient and expedited manner. Chairman Beavers clarified that state cemeteries should be allowed to opt-in, as opposed to mandating weekend burials. Ex-officio member Charles Sellars also stated that from the National Park Service's standpoint weekend burials would be an unfunded mandate, which they are unable to support.

Mr. Powers concluded that during the pilot, for the most part, the cemeteries saw the same interments, but spread over six days rather than five typical workdays. He also stated that, although it was hard to collect formal customer satisfaction data, it was reasonable to assume that we enabled increased satisfaction somewhat by providing more convenience to the families.

Committee member Dino Teppara asked a question about the actual number of participants in the employee survey, payment for volunteers, and weekend burial days. Mr. Powers explained that he did not have the actual number of participants who completed the survey but can provide him with this information. He further explained that the volunteers were paid for one Saturday per month [for cremation-only burials].

Committee member Heather Braatz stated that cremation is on a rise, by 2020, we're looking at about 78 percent cremation. She asked Mr. Powers if people optioned for Saturday, would that lighten the load for burying on other days of the week, like Tuesday. Mr. Powers stated that the workload would be redistributed. During the pilot, there wasn't an increase in utilization, so the burial workload was lighter during the

week, but it allowed cemetery employees to perform other tasks, such as maintenance activities.

Committee member Gordon Lightfoot asked about surveying customers for feedback. Mr. Powers stated that the Annual Survey of Satisfaction did not provide the specific feedback needed. For that reason, NCA is working with VA's Veterans Experience Office to target customers or focus groups for pilot feedback.

Committee Member Edith Smith asked about wait times as compared to burial wait times at Arlington National Cemetery. Mr. Powers stated that NCA does not have the wait times like Arlington. Heather Braatz stated that the wait times are dependent upon the family's preference. She stated that funeral homes are open seven days a week, but families are very understanding of the hours of operation at national cemeteries. They are willing to wait, particularly for cremation burials.

Adding to the discussion of wait times, Ginger Wilson, Director of the National Cemetery Scheduling Office, stated that national cemeteries can perform next day burials, and there are many other variables to be considered. For example, a family may want an afternoon burial after considering the time for the funeral service and commute for the family. The NCSO is usually able to accommodate the family very easily. Military funeral honors schedule (which is independent of NCA) is also something that is considered for the scheduling of the burial. There's usually a good partnership between the funeral director, cemetery director, and Honor Guard unit.

Ethics Training for Special Government Employees

Ms. Carol Borden, VA Attorney for the Office of General Counsel, provided a presentation on Ethics Training for Special Government Employees (SGE), which is an annual requirement. **Note:** A member is not an SGE if he or she serves as a representative of an outside organization or another Federal agency.

Ms. Borden's key points were as follows:

- Members are required to file an annual financial disclosure report that must be filed and certified prior to attending a meeting.
- For members protections, all questions or concerns should be submitted in writing to GovernmentEthics@va.gov. By contacting an ethics attorney, the SGE may be provided a safe harbor if a conflict of interest arises.
- A member should notify OGC or the DFO if something is missed or changed on their financial disclosure.
- Ethics rules still apply when members are not serving in their official capacity, such as attendance at a dinner party or other non-committee meetings.

- Ms. Borden also provided members with information regarding code of conduct and prohibitions:
 - Conflict of Interest 18 U.S.C. § 208
 - Exception for Particular Matter of General Applicability
 - An SGE should not receive compensation from an outside entity for duties performed on the committee. 18 U.S.C § 201 & 209
 - An SGE should not switch sides in connection with any specific party matter. 18 U.S.C. § 203
 - An SGE should not act as agent or attorney, with or without compensation before any Federal agency or court in connection with any specific party matter 18 U.S.C. § 205.
 - An SGE should not use the public office for private gain.
 - An SGE should not give unauthorized preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.
 - An SGE should not receive compensation for teaching, speaking, or writing about anything relating to official duties on committee
 - Exception – Teaching a course requiring multiple presentations offered as part of regular curriculum of an elementary/high school or institution of higher education or training program sponsored by the Federal Government.
 - An SGE may not accept gift given because of official position OR from a “prohibited source”.
 - Exception – MAY accept meals, lodgings, transportation and other benefits arising from outside employment when benefits not offered due to status as Federal employee.
 - Other minor exceptions exist, e.g., de minimis \$20 per occasion, \$50 during calendar year – consult an ethics official.
 - VA may be able to accept a gift on behalf of the member.
 - An SGE may engage in fundraising in a personal capacity as long as SGE does not personally solicit funds or support from a person whose interests may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the Member’s official duties
 - The Hatch Act restricts certain political activities of Government employees. It applies to SGEs only when engaged in Government business.

Federal Advisory Committee Act 101

Mr. Jeffery “Boomer” Moragne, Director of the VA Advisory Committee Management Office presented information about the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which governs all federal advisory committees. He began his presentation by stating that the [Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials] is considered a gold standard committee. 86 percent of recommendations over the last ten years have been actionable.

To continue this high standard, Mr. Moragne provided the following key points to the committee:

- The Federal Advisory Committee Act came into being in 1972. Federal Advisory Committees were reduced from 8,000 to about a thousand. The reason for the reduction was to do away with nepotism, favoritism, and duplicated missions across federal government agencies.
- Each Federal Advisory Committee (FAC) has its own charter, mission, and resources, to include DFO(s), who ensure that the meeting held, publicly and privately, are purposeful. The membership must be balanced and represent the constituency for which it serves.
- Unless a meeting is closed, it is open to the public. Public meetings, with an approved agenda, must be announced in the Federal Register 15 – 30 days in advance of the meeting. The public must have an opportunity to speak or submit written comments. Also, a DFO must be present at all meetings. If the meeting is held virtually, the public must be provided a dial-in number.
- Seven members of this committee must be present to have a quorum. Otherwise, the committee will not be allowed to deliberate or vote on any items. The meeting will be considered an ad-hoc subcommittee and will be required to brief the full committee at the next meeting.

Mr. Moragne explained the difference between **preparatory work** and **administrative work** for closed meetings. FACs may convene to perform two types of work without a public meeting:

1. Preparatory work. A meeting convened solely to gather information, conduct research, analyze relevant issues, facts in preparation for a FAC meeting or to draft papers for deliberation by FAC

2. Administrative work. A meeting convened solely to discuss administrative matters of the FAC or receive administrative information from agency.

FAC meetings may also be closed in whole or in part under limited circumstances, such as when discussing trade secrets, personal information, and criminal matters. OGC must concur in the closure.

Mr. Moragne also reiterated that members may speak as a private citizen but not as a member of the committee. Members may discuss anything of public record but may not speak about potential recommendations, plot of land, etc.



Federal Advisory Committee Act 101

- **Can Committee Members testify/speak on Federal Advisory Committee matters?**

PERMISSIBLE

- If asked to testify, you may speak about FAC matters only in your personal capacity.
- Your testimony should clarify that you are providing your personal opinion and are not speaking on behalf of VA or the FAC.
- As a courtesy, we appreciate you informing the FAC's DFO if you are going to testify.

MISCONDUCT

- Federal Advisory Committee members do not have authority to testify on behalf of the Committee and do not speak for VA.
- Since you are acting in your personal capacity if you testify/speak, VA cannot reimburse you for expenses or pay honoraria.

Note: Some ethic rules do not apply to a declared Veterans Service Organization (VSO) representative. However, a member, who is also a declared VSO, still cannot represent himself or herself as the voice of the committee.

Mr. Moragne clarified that members are on the committee for two, two-year terms, and may be extended for one year at the discretion of VA. The DFO and leadership may recommend a member for another VA Advisory Committee. However, the appointment may be only for one year.

In closing, Mr. Moragne provided the committee with the following best practice tips:

1. Master Your Committee Calendar...plan 18 months of committee meetings in advance during the next meeting or an administrative call
2. Know your role...understand the committee's charter and guidance located in the VA Committee Members Handbook
3. Subcommittees...formally establish these groups in accordance with the VA guidance to do the heavy lifting on research and assist with drafting recommendations.
4. Meeting Mechanics...dedicate meeting time to discuss individual presentations and how they connect to the committee's advice/recommendations
5. Cross Committee Collaboration...use your subcommittee to engage other FACs
6. SMART Template...use the template to achieve better results
7. VA Library Services...use this service for data and information searches
8. Subject Matter Experts...recommend stakeholders for the Committee to engage

9. Annual Field Visits...do field visits and Capitol Hill meetings to better understand Veterans, Caregivers, Survivors, Stakeholders and VA Employees challenges
10. FACA and Ethics questions...ask your Designated Federal Officer for guidance

Remarks from Mr. Tom Howard, NCA Chief of Staff

Mr. Howard welcomed the members and introduced the following NCA staff:

- Sara Amy Leach, Senior Historian
- Melissa Decker, Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
- Dr. Bryce Carpenter, Program Manager, Veterans Legacy Program
- Heidi Wiesner, Educational Specialist Officer, Veterans Legacy Program

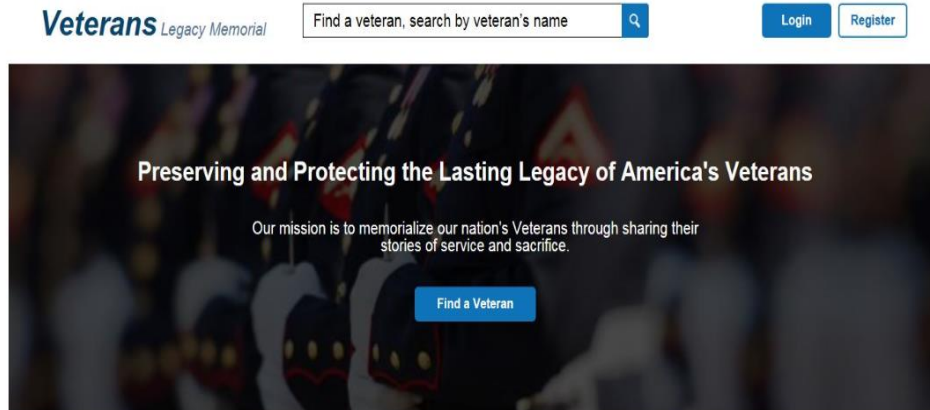
Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) Online Platform

Mr. Daniel Devine, Executive Director, Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovations provided an overview of the Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) initiative. He commended Dr. Bryce Carpenter, along with the VA Office of Information and Technology, for their efforts in making VLM a reality for NCA.

Mr. Devine's key points were as follows:

- Online memorialization platform: the first of its kind! **Allows family and friends to pay respects and share photos in an online memorial space.**
- For historic Veterans, a place for genealogists, scholars, and students to share research.
- VLM was mentioned in the President's 2018 Memorial Day Proclamation
- VLM will serve as a digital representation of NCA cemeteries
- VLM will allow users to engage with virtual memorials of Veterans
 - Interact with memorials through mobile devices
 - Share stories
 - Leave virtual "coins" or mementos
 - Virtually visit the grave of a Veteran
- **Current business development phase**
 - VA Office of Information Technology (OIT) now working to build out VLM for operation in the secure environment of the va.gov domain.
 - Constructing sustainable management model
- **May 20, 2019**
 - Public launch for memorial portal
 - Note: The initial launch will be **limited in scope**

- **Future State:**
 - Geospatial capture and integration
 - User-to-gravesite navigation
 - Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) capabilities
 - Full integration with new Memorial Burial Management System (MBMS)



A first look at the VLM

Preserving the memory of historical veterans

The VLM is designed to allow everyone access to the memorial information of veterans and families who have received benefits from the VA. This includes historical veterans as well. In fact, part of the platform's mission is preserving and sharing the information of historical veterans.

Committee Member Edward Saunders asked a question regarding the terms of use, how the site will be monitored, and if the next of kin will have a say in the process. Committee Member Marianne Trussell seconded his comment, stating that whether the next of kin will have a say [on what is posted] has always been one of her concerns. Mr. Devine assured the committee that there will be a significant registration process, which will include emails to the next of kin.

Ms. Trussell asked if the next of kin is no longer living, can there be a surrogate next of kin who can be designated to guard the information [posted on VLM]. Dr. Carpenter stated that NCA is open to recommendations on what to do in that instance. The first intention is to gain the permissions from the next of kin who are a spouse, adult child, or sibling who would have the immediate authority over the deceased Veteran's information on the site. NCA is also open to recommendations about how the site becomes a legacy account, with authority passed from one family member to another. Ms. Trussell volunteered her services to test the next of kin authorization functionality when it is available.

Committee member Joey Strickland asked a question regarding the future VLM phase and how it will relate to tribal reservations, who may not necessarily have a next of kin points of contact. Mr. Devine stated that NCA will work with Stephanie Birdwell, Office of Tribal Government Relations, which is located within the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs.

Committee member Gordon Lightfoot asked a question about terms of use. Mr. Devine explained that there will be a terms of use agreement on the site, which users will have to accept. The terms of use outlines what is acceptable for posts, comments, appropriate language, etc.

Dr. Carpenter clarified that the initial launch is just a landing page with only the public information found on the headstone in the national cemetery.

Ex-Office member Charles Sellars asked if VLM will be extended to the 14 National Park Service national cemeteries. At this time, NPS will not be included.

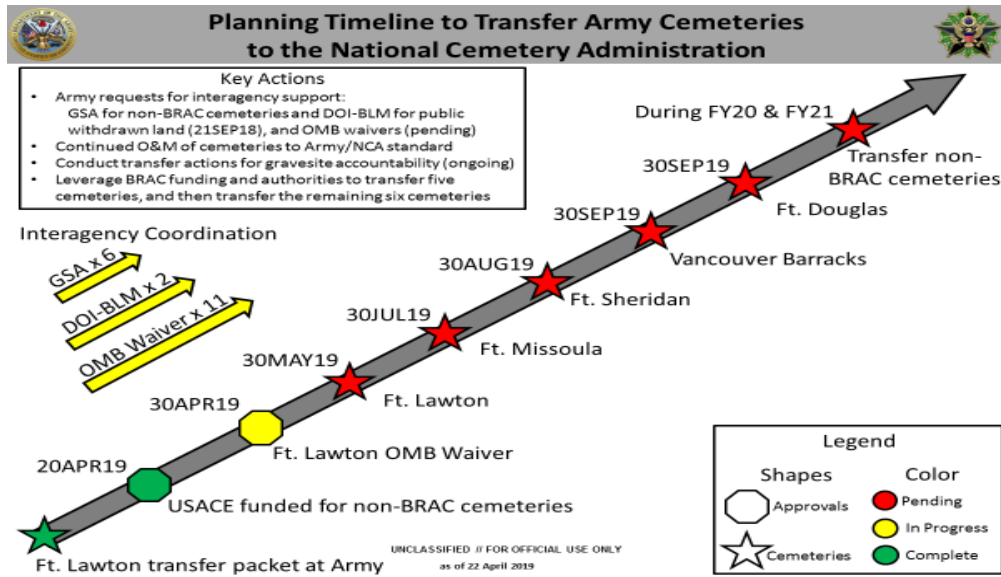
Committee member Kathleen Moakler suggested interactivity between VLM and other sites like the National Records Center and the Office of Survivor's Assistance.

In closing, Dr. Carpenter clarified the term "augmented reality" for Chairman Beavers. *"So imagine walking through a National Cemetery, holding a cell phone or a tablet, and you have a connection to the internet through wifi or your cell provider, and as you are walking near a grave site of a Veteran, for whom there has been some legacy research, ...it will automatically appear on your device and say, you're walking next to the grave site of a Medal of Honor recipient...So one of the goals is...to enhance the onsite experience. It will extend that National Cemetery experience to remote users."*

Status Update: Army Post Cemetery Transfer

Mr. Glenn Powers, Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations, provided an update on the Army Post Cemetery Transfer from the Department of the Army (DoA).

By 2021, the DoA will transfer 11 cemeteries to NCA for operations, maintenance, and perpetual care of gravesites. The following slide shows the planning timeline for the transfers:



Note: 5 of the 11 Army cemeteries are open. Fort Lawton (closed) in Seattle, Washington, is scheduled to be the first cemetery to transfer over to VA.

Mr. Powers pointed out that there is a significant difference in burial eligibility criteria between Army Post cemeteries and VA cemeteries. Burials in the transferred cemeteries will be based upon VA's eligibility requirements, which includes Veterans who are not Armed Forces retirees. He showed Army data which showed the Army had a total of 65 interments by DoA for FY18 at all eleven cemeteries. Besides eligibility, Mr. Powers believes that the closure of the posts that once managed these cemeteries is a factor.

Mr. Powers explained that Fort Sheridan in Chicago, Illinois, had the best utilization rate for the Army, by far. Fort Sheridan is an open cemetery, which conducted 49 interments in FY18. In a chart he provided, the incremental veteran population depicts the number of Veterans potentially served by each post cemetery (if it is open to interments) who are not currently served by an open national state or tribal cemetery.

He continued with a detailed discussion on the Army cemeteries. He clarified that NCA may inter at a closed cemetery if a gravesite comes available. Ms. Ginger Wilson, Director of the National Cemetery Scheduling Office, clarified that such a request would have to be coordinated with the cemetery director.

Status Update: American Battle Monuments Commission

Ex-Officio Member Mr. Tom Sole Chief, Engineering and Strategic Plans, provided a status update on the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC). He began his presentation with an overview of the ABMC history.

ABMC was established in 1923. General John J. Pershing served as the first chairman until his death in 1948. The current Chairman is Mr. David J. Urban and the current Secretary is MG William Matz.

The ABMC mission is to honor the service of the armed forces by creating and maintaining memorial sites, offering commemorative services, and facilitating the education of their legacy to future generations.

Mr. Sole clarified that ABMC have cemeteries, but they are not in the burial business. Their mission is to commemorate and memorialize the service of armed forces.



Cemeteries and Memorials

World War I	
9 cemeteries	
14 monuments, memorials, markers	
World War II	
14 cemeteries	
14 monuments, memorials, markers	
Others	
3 cemeteries	
2 monuments	

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ABMC cemeteries and monuments can be found at <https://www.abmc.gov/>.

Under the Interpretative Program, ABMC has visitor centers which provide historical context of the cemetery grounds below:

- Normandy American Cemetery, dedicated June 2007
- Cambridge & Sicily-Rome cemeteries and Pointe-du-Hoc, dedicated May 2014
- Meuse-Argonne, and Flanders Field, newly completed
- Manila and Lafayette Escadrille Memorial, under construction
- Netherlands and Honolulu, future construction

ABMC commemorative events are shown below:

U.S. CENTENNIAL EVENTS – EUROPE 2018







Jul 28 **The Oise-Aisne Offensive**
- Oise-Aisne American Cemetery – France

Sep 22 **The St. Mihiel Offensive**
- St. Mihiel American Cemetery – France

Sep 23 **The Meuse-Argonne Offensive**
- Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery – France

Oct 27 **American Operations in Belgium**
- Flanders Field American Cemetery – Belgium

Nov 11 **Ceremonies to Commemorate the Armistice**
- ABMC WWI Cemeteries in France / Belgium / England
- President Trump at Suresnes American Cemetery

 AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

WORLD WAR II 75TH ANNIVERSARY EVENTS, 2019

Jan 22 **Anzio / Nettuno Landings**
- Sicily-Rome American Cemetery – Italy

Jun 6 **D-Day Landings**
- Normandy American Cemetery – France

Aug 16 **Southern Landings**
- Rhone American Cemetery – France

Sep 15 **Liberation Concert**
- Netherlands American Cemetery

Oct 20 **MacArthur Returns to the Philippines**
- Manila American Cemetery

Dec 16 **Battle of the Bulge**
- Mardasson Memorial in Bastogne, Belgium
- Luxembourg American Cemetery

 AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

Committee Member Dr. Joann Fisher asked if women Veterans are buried in the ABMC cemeteries. Mr. Sole confirmed that there are, and [stories] of women Veterans play a key role in the interpretative centers. He mentioned that the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial is probably the only site that does not have women Veterans because the interred are all male pilots. Following a brief discussion about events featuring women Veterans, Chairman Beavers adjourned the morning session for lunch.

Introduction of Mr. Randy Reeves, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs

Prior to introducing Mr. Randy Reeves, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Chairman Beavers thanked Dr. Ronald Walters, Principal Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs for his attendance.

Chairman Beavers stated that he could not think of anyone better to be in the position he's in. His key points [from Mr. Reeves' bio] are as follows:

- Mr. Reeves was confirmed by Congress on November 8, 2017.
- He served as the Executive Director of the Mississippi Veterans Affairs Board from 2011-2017.
- Mr. Reeves also served as the President of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) in 2017.
- In January 2009, he was appointed as the first Director of the Mississippi Veterans Memorial Cemetery. He was appointed Deputy Director of the Mississippi Veterans Affairs Board in late 2009.
- Mr. Reeves originally entered military service in 1980 when he enlisted in the United States Air Force. He served for eight years as an enlisted man in the Air Force and was commissioned as an officer in the United States Navy in 1988. During his 27-year military career he served at sea and ashore in various positions, including command. He is a Veteran of Operation Desert Storm and the Global War on Terrorism with multiple deployments. Mr. Reeves' complete executive bio can be found at: <https://www.cem.va.gov/about/usma.asp>

Remarks from Mr. Randy Reeves, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs

Mr. Reeves thanked the Chairman for his generous introduction. He stated that he is honored to be with such a distinguished group. In addition, he welcomed the new members.

Mr. Reeves mentioned NCA's partnership with Carry the Load (CTL) during the month of May 2019. 26 national cemeteries in 17 states participated in relays with CTL and unveiled plaques dedicated to the fallen and their families at each cemetery location. Mr. Reeves participated in the relay held at Alexandria National Cemetery on May 5th.

CTL's website can be found at

<http://www.carrytheload.org/site/PageServer?pagename=home>

Mr. Reeves thanked Ginger Wilson, Director, National Cemetery Scheduling Office (NCSO), and mentioned that the Advisory Committee, under the leadership of Leslie Beavers, helped NCA with identifying issues and providing recommendations for improvement.

He stated that he looks forward to the committee's recommendations, such as the Emblems of Belief, and how to appropriately guide the [EOB determination process] as we move into the future.

Since confirmation, Mr. Reeves has been focused on how to outreach to tribal nations and how to honor and recognize tribal traditions.

He stated that his vision is to ensure that *"no Veteran ever dies, to make sure that they don't die that second death and to do everything we can to properly, honorably, and with dignity honor who they are and remember them forever....And you all sitting around the table, along with myself, the Secretary, and all of us who serve Veterans, it is our job to make sure America does not forget the sacrifices of those who wore the cloth of this Nation."*

Chairman Beavers mentioned that for the sixth consecutive time NCA has achieved the highest score in the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI). ACSI is awarded to a public or private organization every three years. Mr. Reeves clarified that the highest score achieved on the ACSI is 96 percent. Only one organization, other than NCA, has achieved this score. The NCA team also continues to consistently hold high customer satisfaction rates (98-99 percent) on the Annual Survey of Satisfaction.

Committee member, Gordon Lightfoot asked a question about the pre-need applications backlog at NCSO. Ginger Wilson explained that NCSO started a pre-need inventory elimination plan in October 2018, with an inventory of 37,751 pending applications. NCSO hired contractors to review, scan, and upload applications. The contractors also made one of two determinations, either to approve or [forward] for additional review.

There are also eight, permanent full-time employees assigned to the eligibility division. Overtime and temporary promotions for six individuals was also offered to augment staff. NCSO now has about 18,000 pending applications.

Ms. Wilson stated that NCSO is also receiving, on average, 3,950 applications per month. NSCO has successfully achieved completion determination of a little over 40,000 pre-need applications.

Committee Member Edward Saunders asked Mr. Reeves, *"...given resources, what he would like to see the VA do in your area that's not being done now?"*

Mr. Reeves responded: *"You know that we are well on track. We're about 93 percent of coverage for all of our veterans within 75 miles of their home. We are asking for different initiatives to take care of what I call the hardest five percent. I'm not going to be able to put a cemetery where I've got 10 veterans, for instance, but we need to look at other initiatives that will lessen the burden on a family that has to travel for long distances. And I would like, if I could -- and I need to look at what I ask Congress for and how, but what I'd like from this committee is to give me recommendations that I can take as actionable to address that hardest five percent. I'm turning that around and asking you for*

something. What I need is actually -- we've met the strategic level goals. Now I've got to get tactical with that five percent. I need you to help me, you know, figure out exactly how I approach that five percent. It's going to be places like where you're from."

There was some discussion on the lack of funding available to state cemeteries for the burial of indigent Veterans. Committee Member Joey Strickland stated that he would like to see a program at the national level that he could apply towards the burial of indigent Veterans. Mr. Reeves stated that the plot allowance is a Veterans Benefits Administration benefit, but he would like to see a proposal [from the committee]. Mr. Strickland also mentioned that the plot allowance fee should be raised. If a family is unable to pay the \$745 charge for the plot, the fee is waived.

Committee member Heather Braatz asked "[Under] Secretary, how do you feel that funeral directors across the nation can better support NCA's vision?" Mr. Reeves responded that funeral directors across the country can continue to partner with [NCA], but what he would like for them to reach out to the scheduling office and the cemeteries to ensure that the correct information is provided to families.



Upon conclusion of his remarks, USMA Reeves presented Certificates of Appointment to three the new members: Lieutenant Dino Teppara, Chaplain Michael Dover, and Mrs. Kathleen Moakler.

From left to right, Dino Teppara, Michael Dover, Randy Reeves, Kathleen Moakler

Project Highlights: NCA History Program

Sara Amy Leach, NCA Senior Historian, provided the committee with an overview of the projects currently under history program. Her key points were as follows:

- The history team consists of Sara Amy Leach, Senior Historian, Jennifer Perunko, and Virginia Price (not present at the meeting). There is also a part-time researcher, who is a professor at Northern Virginia Community College.
- Ms. Virginia Price is working with IT to add a Medal of Honor recipients' flag on the system. The history team will move on to other notables at a later date.
- Jennifer Perunko is responsible for tracking donated monuments and to improve access to key information about the monuments on the NCA website.
- The history team is also working with cemetery directors on the cleaning of headstones.
- The Gettysburg Address tablet is a fundamental aspect to the national cemeteries. The tables were introduced in 1909. All tablets were cast at Rock Island Arsenal in 1909 and 2009. The timeline and pictures about the Gettysburg address are shown below.

Gettysburg Address Timeline

1863 Lincoln gives Address at Soldiers Cemetery, Gettysburg, PA
- Lincoln personally wrote 4-5 versions of speech

1895 Congress authorizes *Gettysburg Address Monument* for Gettysburg NC

1909 Centennial observance of Abraham Lincoln's birth
- Memorial Day, War Department selects the 'official' version of speech
- Commercial and government postcards popularize commemoration

2009 Bicentennial observance of Abraham Lincoln's birth
- History Program produces 62 replica tablets for NCA participation

2018 November, Veterans Month, Los Angeles NC tablet installed at VACO

Casting Gettysburg Address tablets, RIA, 2008



ALBC logo, back stamp, new bolt, Rock Island NC tablet painted black and silver next to replica.

Gettysburg Address at VACO



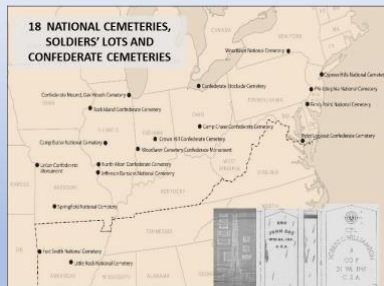
Artifact and banner installed November 2018

Visit the accompanying online exhibit at <https://www.cem.va.gov/history/resources.asp>

The History Team is also conducting a study on Confederate Veterans buried in 18 cemeteries, half confederate and half confederate cemeteries. In the national cemeteries, there were 400 Confederate graves in the study. There were more 25,000 Confederate soldiers buried in cemeteries, 29 of which are national cemeteries. The gravesites include Prisoner of War gravesites in the North. There was further discussion about NCA's role in researching and memorializing the Confederate dead.

Commission for Marking Graves of Confederate Dead

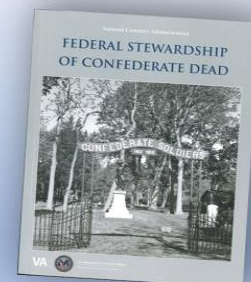
- Congress authorized to identify and mark graves of Confederates who died in Northern prisons and hospitals.
- Mission was expanded to encompass all national cemeteries containing Confederate burials.
- Result: Between 1906 and 1916, it marked more than 25,500 graves and erected monuments where individual graves could not be identified.



Federal Stewardship of Confederate Dead

National Cemetery Administration / History Program

- Published July 2016
- 311 pp., 245 illustrations
- Download PDF for free: https://www.cem.va.gov/CEM/publications/NC_A_Fed_Stewardship_Confed_Death.pdf
- If you would like a paper copy, tell Christine or myself



Ms. Leach spoke about the project to funeral tunnel at Dayton National Cemetery, which is part of the VA Medical Center campus and a National Historic Landmark as of 2012. The Dayton National Cemetery Support Committee provided a \$10,000 donation towards the preservation and planning service.

Note: *The Chairman temporarily adjourned the meeting for a photo opportunity with the Honorable Robert L. Wilkie, VA Secretary.*



(Shown left to right, Gordon Lightfoot, Edward Saunders, Heather Mitchell Braatz, Michael Dover, Edith Smith, Marianne Trussell, Dr. JoAnn Fisher, Joey Strickland, Randy Reeves, Robert Wilkie, Charles Sellars, Leslie Beavers, Kathleen Moakler, Tom Sole, Dino Teppara, Kenneth Holliday, Christine Hamilton)

Introduction of the Honorable Robert L. Wilkie, VA Secretary

The meeting resumed following the Secretary's photo opportunity with committee members. Mr. Reeves introduced the Honorable Robert L. Wilkie, VA Secretary to members. His key points were as follows:

- Mr. Wilkie was appointed and sworn in as the VA Secretary on July 30, 2018.
- He previously served as Undersecretary for Defense, Personnel and Readiness.
- Mr. Wilkie also serves as a Colonel in the United States Air Force Reserves, and also served in the United States Naval Reserve.
- Mr. Reeves stated, in part, "... *Secretary Wilkie is here at a time and has presided over one of the largest transformations, if not the largest, of the US Department of Veterans Affairs in history.*"

Remarks from Mr. Robert L. Wilkie, Secretary of Veterans Affairs

Mr. Wilkie began his remarks by thanking Mr. Reeves for his introduction. He stated that the night before the meeting, he spoke at a Fisher House fundraiser. Six holders of the Medal of Honor were in attendance. He stated that for these types of occasions, he never speaks [about programs], but rather about what it means to serve and how the culture impacts what we do and how we present ourselves.

The Secretary expressed a personal account about his father, a career Army Officer, who served in Vietnam. He said that he thought about what happened in the immediate aftermath of that conflict. His father, then a senior leader of the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, was not allowed to wear his uniform off-post. Secretary Wilkie vowed that he would do everything to make sure that our culture never repeats the mistakes of those days.



(Shown above, VA Secretary Robert L. Wilkie)

Mr. Wilkie stated that 41 million American men and women have put on the uniform, and over 800,000 have paid the ultimate price.

He also stated, in part, “... *There were millions of ordinary Americans, who didn’t ask why, but just said “yes”, and followed the flag... This is why what you do is so important, that America as a Nation honor and revere those who serve from the moment that they enter that military entrance processing station to the time that they are laid to rest and memorialized forever.*”

Mr. Wilkie continued to speak about the dedication of workers in the national cemeteries and cemetery expansion efforts. NCA will be expanding to five new cemeteries and cooperating with more cemeteries at state and local levels. The Secretary made a point to ensure VA’s presence with native Americans in the Great Plains, Southwest, and Pacific Island.

In terms of budget, Secretary Wilkie mentioned that he presented the largest budget in VA history (\$220 billion) to Congress. He expects to use nine and half billion for mental health and suicide prevention. Ten percent of the medical budget (\$9 billion) will be devoted to taking care of the needs of women Veterans.

In addition, the Secretary spoke about the [Mission Act](#), which allows the Veteran the option of choosing the private sector if VA cannot provide the service the Veteran needs. The Mission Act also provides financial support to families who support and care for Veterans of Vietnam.

In addition, VA is embarking on an enterprise-wide, reform agenda to:

- Create more efficient purchasing procedures, to include distribution of materials and equipment across the enterprise.
- Reduce Human Resource offices from 140 to 18, putting resources where they need to be.
- Build an electronic health record at the time of military entrance until the time the Veteran comes to VA. The electronic health record is important because it is going to create a holistic picture of the Veteran's health, particularly as VA currently combats mental health, suicide, and opioid issues. Secretary Wilkie stated that we need a national conversation about mental health.
- Secretary Wilkie allowed additional time for questions from the committee before concluding his remarks. Chairman Beavers thanked him for taking time to speak to the committee.


Project Highlights: NCA History Program (continued)

Following the Secretary's remarks, Sara Amy Leach continued her presentation on the historic preservation planning for a tunnel at Dayton National Cemetery.

Preservation Planning at Dayton National Cemetery

Funeral tunnel, 1870/1887
Interpretation plan for all cemetery historic resources

- Dayton National Cemetery Support Committee (DNCSC) donated \$10K for 'services' – historic preservation planning focused on the unique funeral tunnel *and* associated historic resources (monument, tablets).
- DNCSC partnered with the Ball State University's Department of Architecture & Applied Anthropology Lab (Muncie, IN) as a faculty-student project.
- Sept. 2018 – May 2019. Project anticipated as the first of a series of DNCSC donations with the goal of tunnel restoration (right, ca. 1900).



The tunnel, also known as the "Tunnel of Death", was built in 1870 – 1887. The hospital, which is shown in the picture above, was demolished in the 1930s.

One of the last acts that Lincoln signed was to establish the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. In 1887, young men are aging and dying on site. VA took over in 1930.

1865
Congress establishes NHDVS

1867
Central Branch est. on 355 acres, heavily designed

1887
3,000 veterans interred

1930
VA takes cemetery management

2012
Former NHDVS acreage designated National Historic Landmark

2018-19
SecVA commits to VA National History Center on campus

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Ms. Leach provided additional information about Emblems of Belief (EoB).

Emblems of Belief: Benchmarks

1922	<u>World War I</u> : Christian Latin Cross and Hebrew Star of David introduced with "General" headstone	
1951	<u>World War II</u> : Buddhist Wheel of Righteousness	
1979	Court decision: Atheism (Atom) appeal	
2007	Court settlement: Wicca (Pentacle) appeal NCA initiates propose rule (72 FR 2480)	
2009	NCA regulation (38.632) explains application process	
2018	NCA revisiting definitions and criteria	
2019	70 approved EOBs 5 denials or delays (since 2009); 6 under review	

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1922: War Department identified the two EOBs as appropriate for “General”-style headstones for World War troops

- Headstone/marker applications revised

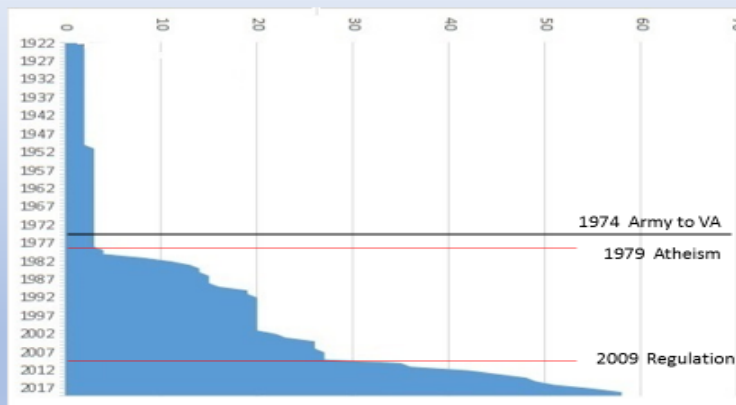
1951: Buddhist EOB initially limited to World War II graves at NMCP; restriction later lifted

- This and subsequent emblems were initiated when the veteran, family member, or organization requested it, per historic records



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Emblems of Belief by Year of Approval, 1922-2019 *



* 12 of 70 EOBs are excluded from chart due to missing records; most are likely 1950-1980s.

CFR 38.632, the current regulation on requesting a new emblem of belief for inscription on Government headstones and markers, was published on July 1, 2009. It provides a detailed process in which NCA considers applications for a decedent.

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For more History Program (44D) projects visit:
<https://www.cem.va.gov/history/outreach.asp>

Following Ms. Leach’s presentation, the committee had an opportunity to review the display boards, “Book of Confederate Dead”, and “Interpretative Signs in VA Cemeteries”.

Public Comments

The DFO, Christine Hamilton, received an email from a James Edwin Ray regarding Confederate grave markers. The Chair mentioned that the comment would be addressed during the public comment period on May 8th.

No other comments were received.

Status Update: Veterans Legacy Program

Dr. Bryce Carpenter, Heidi Wiesner, and Kenneth Holliday (Alternate DFO) provided the committee with a status update on the Veterans Legacy Program (VLP).

VLP creates partnerships that engage students, educators, and the American public with their local history through the diversity of the Veteran experience enshrined in our 136 national cemeteries.

- Educational Outreach
- Modernizing Memorialization
- Strategic Partnerships

Strategic Goals:

- Elevate NCA brand recognition
- Engagement at community level
- Extend memorialization

Dr. Bryce Carpenter started off the discussion on educational outreach. He stated that [VLP] is an expression of [NCA's] statutory mission to memorialize Veterans in perpetuity. Through education outreach, NCA connects communities to national cemeteries in new ways. VLP gives new opportunities for young Americans to learn about those who wore the uniform from previous generations. Educational outreach and modernizing memorialization cannot be done with strategic partnerships.

Dr. Carpenter mentioned that NCA has had very good partnerships with other agencies, like the American Battle Monument Commission, Department of Army, Library of Congress, several state agencies, and nonprofit organizations.

The educational outreach focuses on finding relationships with universities for several reasons. (1) Universities have the business capacity to engage in a formal relationship with federal government. (2) They can create their research into well-produced materials that can be shared with the communities. (3) Thru formalized contracts, NCA invests and creates student opportunities. (4) Work is done directly or indirectly with public school teachers to introduce the Veteran experience into the classrooms of students (K-12).



Educational Outreach

- **NCA creates university and public school partnerships to focus on extending memorialization at national cemeteries**
- Partnerships may include teachers across several schools and grade-levels in a single school district
- Public school teachers working with university faculty on a project that instructs and engages students on researching local Veterans

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Educational Outreach: 2018

Partnerships with Universities: engaging professors, teachers, and students of all levels in researching and sharing stories of service of Veterans in their local national cemetery.

- Nearly 1,000 Veterans stories discovered, researched, and shared by:
 - 55 professors
 - 260 K-12 teachers
 - 200 college students
 - 9,000 K-12 students

Each program is different, but each leads to college and K-12 students engaging with and sharing their Veteran research at NCA cemeteries.



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Educational Outreach: 2018

Partnerships with Universities & Educational Organizations:

- University of Central Florida (Orlando, FL)
- San Francisco State University (San Francisco, CA)
- Black Hills State University (Spearfish, SD)
- University of California-Riverside (Riverside, CA)
- California State Polytechnic University (Pomona, CA)
- University of Denver (Denver, CO)
- University of Tennessee (Knoxville, TN)
- George Mason University (Fairfax, VA)
- National History Day (everywhere)
- Interagency: ABMC, WW1CC

Since 2016, Legacy has worked with 26 NCA cemeteries, 2 state Veteran cemeteries, 3 tribal Veteran cemeteries, 6 ABMC overseas cemeteries and 2 ABMC memorials

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Educational Outreach: 2019

Partnerships with Universities & Educational Organizations:

- San Francisco State University (San Francisco, CA)
- Black Hills State University (Spearfish, SD)
- University of California-Riverside (Riverside, CA)
- University of Denver (Denver, CO)
- University of Central Florida (Orlando, FL)

Legacy Continues to Grow in 2019

- New cemeteries engaged across all five NCA continental districts
- New digital products
- New educational tools and lesson plans
- Events and school visits to NCA cemeteries
- Additional platforms and ways to share Veteran stories

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Kenneth Holliday stated that over two hundred written biographies have been written by students at the University of Central Florida.

Heidi Wiesner mentioned that VLP partnered with a documentary film maker at San Francisco State University, who has produced 27 short films/documentaries. She further stated that at Black Hills State University (Spearfish, South Dakota) there is a real emphasis on oral tradition, history, and outreach in that community through art.

Dr. Carpenter stated that Black Hills State also has a special emphasis on telling the native Veteran experience.

Mr. Holliday stated that the University of California-Riverside produce a lot of written biographies for Veterans buried at Riverside National Cemetery. He also spoke about the library exhibit at the University of Denver, where the committee visited last year. The students who created the exhibit did research on Veterans, many of whom were relatives, interred at Fort Logan National Cemetery. This program is being expanded this year.

Ms. Wiesner clarified although the universities do not follow the same programs, the students are engaged in the local cemeteries and are able to develop products that get the public engaged. 26 national, three state, three tribal Veteran cemeteries and six ABMC overseas have participated in the VLP.

To sum up the magnitude of this program, Dr. Carpenter stated that 55 professional scholars, 260 K-12 teachers, over two hundred college students, and over nine thousand K-12 students have been impacted by the Veterans Legacy Program.

He also mentioned the app that was developed by the University of California for Veterans interred at Riverside National Cemetery. An American flag is shown for each Veteran, for whom a story has been researched. In addition, George Mason University (GMU) in Fairfax, Virginia developed a website about Veterans interred at Alexandria National Cemetery. The website is currently being used in the Alexandria City Public Schools. The budget funding for VLP is \$1.7 million each budget year.

The VLP team discussed a few more pending projects. Committee Member, Heather Braatz, commended the VLP team for their extraordinary efforts.

Closing Remarks

Chairman Beavers discussed the agenda for the next day, which includes workgroup presentations and discussion on proposed recommendations to VA. The agenda also includes an update on progress at the National Cemetery Scheduling Office, a discussion on a two-year plan for site visits. The Chairman stated that the committee will report out on how to reach the hardest five percent of Veteran population at the next business meeting

Meeting Adjourned

The Chairman adjourned the meeting on Tuesday, May 7, 2019, at 4:12pm.

Tuesday, May 8, 2019

Day two of the semi-annual meeting of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials was held at the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Omar B. Ketchum Memorial Hall, in Washington, DC. The session was open to the public; and the meeting location and teleconference number was published in the Federal Register announcement.

Opening Remarks & Recap

The Committee Chairman, Leslie Beavers, called the meeting to order at 8:31am. The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence to honor the lives and sacrifices of Veterans and Servicemembers.

Chairman Beavers welcomed attendees back and provided important reminders for the day's agenda. He also thanked Veterans of Foreign Wars, and specifically, Committee Member, Michael Figlioli, for their gracious conference accommodations. Christine Hamilton, Designated Federal Officer, provided administrative announcements and an overview of the agenda.

The meeting was kicked-off with members providing their reactions and feedback about the Secretary's visit and the NCA information provided on the first day, May 7, 2019.

There was some discussion about the intent of the prior recommendation for Outreach Ambassador Program, which was not on the agenda. Note: This topic was discussed again during the workgroup charge discussion, see page 50)

Demonstration of GIS/GPS Technology (via teleconference)

Mr. Glenn Madderom, Chief of Cemetery Development, along with Mr. Robert Thomas, GIS Program Specialist provided an overview of the program via teleconference.



GPS = A global positioning system allows the user to pinpoint any geographic spot on the planet.

GIS = geographic information system for storing and manipulating geographical information on computer.

NCA Long Range Plan

- **Goal #4:**
Stakeholders will place greater trust in NCA based on enhanced accountability.
- **Objective #4.1:**
By the end of 2021, strengthen our capability to account for remains, mark graves, account for gravesite usage, and map gravesites by improving our use of information technology.
- **Strategy #4.1.1:**
Implement Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to collect geo-spatial data for all gravesites in national cemeteries and use a Geographical Information System (GIS) to enhance the accounting for remains, marking of graves, and mapping of national cemeteries.

Mr. Madderom stated that there are three key components to the GPS program out in the field:

1. Gravesite, which is represented by a polygon feature in the GIS
2. Casket or Urn, being placed into a geospatial location within that gravesite
3. Headstone/Marker, that goes on the gravesite

He further clarified that by taking GPS shots and photos during the interment and marker placement process, [NCA's] goal is to permanently record the geospatial locations of those items, and then link them to that specific gravesite.

The GIS Program Goals for FY16-21, are as follows:

- Deploy an enterprise GIS to store spatial cemetery data for 138 cemeteries.
- Include development of internal operations dashboards
- Convert static AutoCAD gravesite maps into interactive GIS gravesite maps.
- Collect existing headstone locations and photographs via GPS national contracts for all cemeteries.

- Purchase GPS equipment and train employees at all staffed cemeteries to continually collect data and photos for all new interments and markers.
- In the future – Integrate into MBMS and support development of public web application for viewing gravesites.

Mr. Madderom clarified that as the data gets pulled through the cloud into the NCA database, the grave maps will automatically reflect that the grave is an occupied gravesite; and will be linked to the headstone/gravesite photos and interment *data*.

NCA works with the VA GeoBISL office for GIS programming and capabilities thru the VA web portal (NCA Viewer).

Mr. Robert Thomas provided a demonstration of the NCA Viewer. The user-friendly and interactive portal is available for all NCA staff. A PDF report is also available based upon user privilege. The portal is reflective of 170 cemeteries that are maintained by NCA.

Mr. Madderom confirmed that the GPS equipment being used normally has a four-six inch accuracy range. In addition, the GPS equipment can be used in all kinds of weather conditions. GPS data points and headstone photos for all existing gravesites are being captured by a national contractor. Field inscription information from the existing headstones and markers are then compared to the permanent burial records within BOSS (Burial Operations Support System) and discrepancies are being flagged.

Status Update: National Park Service

Ex-officio member and Andersonville Superintendent Mr. Charles Sellars provided the committee with a status update on the National Park Service (NPS).

NPS has fourteen national cemeteries located across the country and over 94,000 graves. Only two are open for initial interments (Andersonville NC and Andrew Johnson NC). At Andrew Johnson NC, two gravesites are left for interment of cremated remains.

Mr. Sellars stated that NPS always tries to emphasize youth engagement at the national parks and cemeteries. There are multiple youth-type agreements that bring labor into the national parks and cemeteries.

Stones River National Cemetery has made great strides in maintaining its historic headstones since the beginning of FY2019. On October 20, 2018, NPS partnered with the Hands On Preservation Experience (HOPE) Crew, the Historic Preservation Training Center, and Cemetery Preservation Supply to put on a volunteer headstone cleaning event. 130 volunteers joined our partners and cleaned more than 4,000 headstones. The park also contracted to have 2,450 headstones raised, straightened, and aligned. This work was completed in March 2019.

At Yorktown National Cemetery, the HOPE Crew completed a masonry project to repoint the mortar joints in the cemetery wall. The Traditional Trades Apprenticeship Program (TTAP), which is another youth group up to age 35, will be conducting a project to repoint the stone walls surrounding the cemetery this year.

The Historic Preservation Training Center is a NPS program that is available to anyone who is interested in the preservation of historic structures.

NPS is developing a Cultural Landscape Report at Fredericksburg National Cemetery. A request was received from the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War:

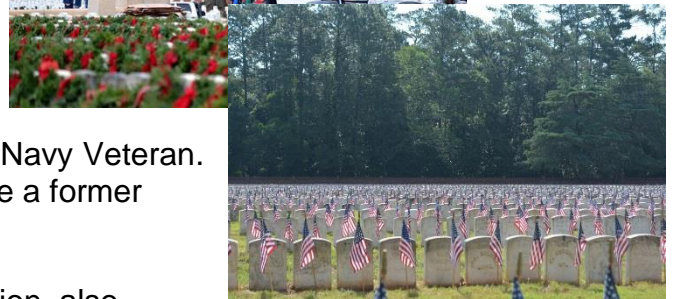
- <http://suvvw.org/last/lastsoldier.htm>
- For placing a metal star adjacent to the headstone for the last Union Veteran that passes away and is interred in that cemetery
- This request was denied by the NPS because there isn't a policy that would allow the metal star to be affixed to a headstone

At Andersonville National Cemetery, there were 198 interments in 2018. Multiple youth programs are scheduled to work in the cemetery this year. Using the American Conservation Experience (ACE), NPS was able to set, realign and clean multiple headstones throughout the National Cemetery.

Wreaths Across America is an event that keeps growing for Andersonville. This past year with the help of partner groups, NPS was able to get 15,120 wreaths from Wreaths Across America.



On the Saturday before the annual Memorial Day event, 300 Scouts placed flags on every grave. At the event, the guest speaker was the former superintendent at Andersonville and Navy Veteran. The guest speaker for this upcoming year will be a former Prisoner of War (POW) Vietnam Veteran.



Saluting Branches, a national arborist organization, also performed volunteer work at the cemetery. They conducted evaluation of the trees and reinstalled lightning protection on historic trees.

Mr. Sellars discussed H.R. 4910, a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide outer burial receptacles for remains buried in National Parks, and for other purposes. The Department of Interior is now responsible for providing the burial vault/grave liner or reimburse the families. The Department is still working on the policy changes to support this legislation.

Andersonville is also the site for the Camp Sumpter (POW camp) and the National Prisoner of War Museum. Over 13,000 soldiers are interred there, with 95 percent known gravesite information.

Status Update: State and Tribal Veteran Cemeteries

Mr. George D. Eisenbach, Jr, Director of the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program (VCGP), provide a status update on state and tribal Veteran Cemeteries.

The VCGP was established in 1978 to assist state, territories, and tribal governments with the establishment, expansion, and improvements in Veterans cemeteries. In 2018, the program celebrated its 40th Anniversary. The FY19 President's budget is \$45 million.



Western Montana State Veterans Cemetery

Mr. Eisenbach presented the following points:

- VA Provides up to 100% of development cost
- More than \$816M awarded since 1980
- 112 Cemeteries (101 state cemeteries and 11 tribal) in 48 States, Guam, Saipan, Puerto Rico
- More than 39,450 interments in FY2018



Lakota Freedom Veterans Cemetery

Under Construction – Opening

- Southwest Louisiana State Veterans Cemetery – FY20
- Leech Lake Veterans Cemetery, MN – FY19
- All Nations Veterans Cemetery, ND – FY19
- NM State Veterans Cemetery, Gallup – FY19
- NM State Veterans Cemetery, Angel Fire – FY20

Tribal Government Grants – Opening

- Awarded in the same manner as states
- 573 Federally recognized Tribal Governments
- Significant interest
- Opportunity to serve more veterans
- Addressing cultural differences

Strategic Outlook - Challenges/Opportunities Ahead

- Need for continued growth
- Tribal Veterans cemeteries
- Sustainment
- Compliance Review Program (CRP)

Re-write 38CFR, Part 39 (Aid for the establishment, expansion, and improvement, or operation and maintenance, of Veterans cemeteries)

Note: Mr. Eisenbach confirmed that NCA is taking a hard look at approving grants for states that have residency requirements.

Mr. Eisenbach spoke about the application process. Pre-applications are due July 1st of the current fiscal year in order to be eligible for the next coming fiscal year and ranked in order. To put in a pre-application, only 10 percent matching funds and legislation are required. However, 100% of the construction funds are fully reimbursable. For FY19, 50 of 99 projects on the priority list, valued at \$264 million, are fully actionable.

The priority list is ranked based upon priority groups: (1) cemeteries currently in existence but running out of burial options in less than four years, (2) new cemetery establishment, and looking at the unserved Veteran population as the highest priority (3) cemeteries currently in existence but running out of burial options in greater than four year, and (4) cemeteries requiring improvement, operation, and maintenance, which are capped at \$5 million.

To apply, go to <https://www.grants.gov/>. Enter “*Veterans Cemeteries*” in the search field. More information on the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program can be found at: <https://www.cem.va.gov/cem/grants/index.asp>

The committee held further discussion about the plot allowance for state cemeteries. Committee Member, Joey Strickland, reiterated that there is a lot of pressure to get the cemeteries of state general funds. However, this can be accomplished without a raise in the burial plot fee from the current \$745 to possibly, \$1000. In addition, the problem is compounded because the [state cemeteries] do not receive the burial plot payments timely from Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

Chairman Beavers asked Mr. Eisenbach to investigate possibility of state cemeteries having access to the scheduling system, since they already have access to BOSS. He also asked about NCA training for the state and tribal personnel. Mr. Eisenbach stated that NCA is working on the legislative proposal. He is looking into all of the considerations, such as impact of lack of training on the Compliance Review Program. Chairman Beavers recommended that starting a new cemetery director through with NCA training would immediately begin a better standard.

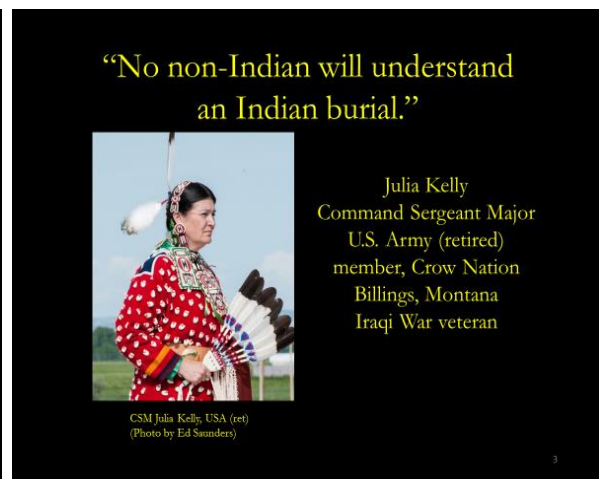
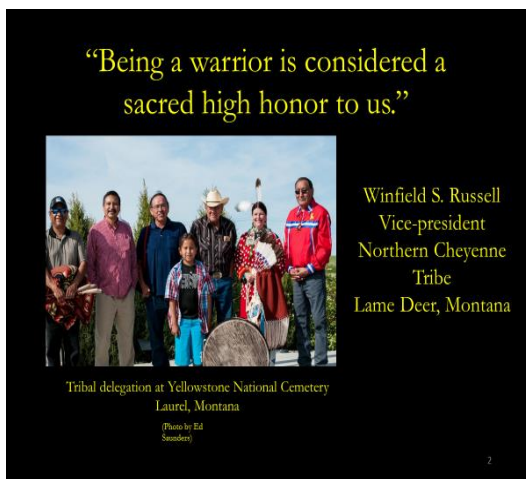
Chairman Beavers clarified that the committee would like to invite VBA for further discussion on plot allowance concerns. State and tribal Veteran cemeteries are an adjunct to the national cemeteries and are a major part of NCA’s mission to provide greater access and burial options to Veterans, surviving spouses, and family members.

Workgroup Report: Burial Needs of American Indian Veterans

At the October meeting held in Lakewood, Colorado, the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs charged Committee Members Joey Strickland and Edward Saunders with researching the burial needs of American Indian Veterans.

(Mr. Strickland researched the east of the Mississippi River and Mr. Saunders took on the west.)

Their objective was to provide evidence-based recommendations to the ACCM on integrating American Indian burial practices in U.S. national cemeteries.



“The depth of understanding of an American Indian burial is something that maybe is not appreciated outside of the tribal community.” – Derived from interview with Command Sergeant Major Julia Kelly

Mr. Saunders discussed their research methodology, which was to talk to:

- Tribal leaders, American Indian Veterans, and subject matter experts.
- National cemetery directors supporting large numbers of American Indian veteran burials.
- Managers of American Indian Veterans cemeteries.
- Funeral directors supporting American Indian reservations.

In addition, Mr. Saunders and Mr. Strickland conducted research by reading:

- Existing Veterans Administration reports.
- Contemporary articles on challenges of American Indian culture and beliefs.
- Books on American Indian history, culture, and heritage.

Mr. Saunders and Mr. Strickland provided a detailed, written report to the committee and NCA leadership. Their key points were summarized as follows:

Background

- American Indians/Alaska Natives are largest minority in the Armed Forces.
- 573 federally recognized American Indian tribes.
- Census Bureau: 141,494 single-race American Indian/Alaska Natives military Veterans.
- The majority of American Indians live in the American West.
- American Indians have deep spiritual beliefs.

Challenges

- Sensitivity to American Indian beliefs, burial rites, and customs in burial.
- National cemeteries blend American Indian beliefs with cemetery efficiency and safety.
- Seek compromise.
- Communications with American Indians and national cemeteries.

Findings

- American Indian burial ceremonies are complex.
- National cemetery operations may conflict with American Indian burial ceremonies. (*30-minute committal service time limit is not sufficient for tribal burials since the cemetery is actually the beginning of the healing of grief.*)
- Three national cemeteries in the West have flexible policies allowing for American Indian ceremonies. (*Black Hills NC, Santa Fe NC, and National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona*)
- American Indian ceremonies at gravesite a must be per their culture and belief.

Emblems of Belief (EOB)

- Federal law (CFR 38.632) governs EOB
- NCA presently has seventy-one EOBs: three are American Indian specific. <https://www.cem.va.gov/hmm/emblems.asp>
- Presently, an application for a new EOB can't be submitted before a Veteran dies.
- Conflicts with pre-need filing if an American Indian Veteran wants a different EOB.

In Mr. Strickland's interview with Tribal Leader Keel, he stated that a way to look at emblems is to look at tribes as clans. For example, the Cherokee has seven different clans within their tribe, and each one of those clans has a spirit animal that they believe in as a part of their religion. A spirit animal such as a wolf, deer, bird, etc. that represents a clan should be honored by VA. Other common tribal emblems to be considered are peace pipe, eagle feathers, buffalo, dream catcher, and arrows.

Mr. Glenn Powers clarified that the definitions for emblem of belief has to be redefined and the ten words, excluding what should not be considered, should also be reviewed. He further clarified that to extend EOB to pre-need would be a tremendous potential workload because it would have to be opened for everyone to consider what they wanted on their headstone before death.

Mr. Strickland stated the tribal leaders do not know that they could submit a symbol, such as a Morning Star of the Northern Cheyenne or a symbol of the Northern Cherokee. He recommended, in this informal discussion with the tribal leaders, for them to obtain a consensus of the EOB that represents their clan or band, if possible.

Mr. Powers pointed out that the EOB application has to be submitted by the family after the Veteran's death. Mr. Saunders suggested that the tribal leader may consider having the EOB application ready for the family at the time of death, for submission to NCA.

Recommendations

- NCA outreach programs to American Indian tribes.
- Compromise on American Indian tribal beliefs in burial at national cemeteries.
- Use existing models at western national cemeteries for American Indian burials.
- Review policies and laws for allowing new EOB, including American Indian specific EOB.

Mr. Powers recommended that Mr. Saunders and Mr. Strickland match up their detailed report against the public rule, which is still out for comment.

Chairman Beavers reiterated his concern about not being able to pre-submit an EOB application for an already approved EOB.

Status Update: National Cemetery Scheduling Office (NCSO) & Pre-Need

Mr. Glenn Powers introduced his senior staff under the Office of Cemetery Operations and Field Operations; and described their key areas of responsibility. Ms. Amerophan Callahan, formerly Senior Executive Director at Fort Snelling National Cemetery, is now the Senior Executive Director of Field Programs. The Office of Field Programs includes Memorial Products Service, managed by Director, Dr. Eric Powell; and the National Cemetery Scheduling Office (NCSO), managed by Director, Ginger Wilson.

Ms. Wilson presented information on the progress of NCSO and the Pre-Need Eligibility Determination program.

Mission

- Determine eligibility for burial benefits
- Schedule committal and memorial services

Two Divisions:

Scheduling

- Determine eligibility of servicemembers, Veterans, and dependents at time of need
- Schedule interments and memorial services for 136 National Cemeteries

Eligibility

- Provide elevated eligibility assistance - in advance of need and at the time of need
- Schedule committal and memorial services after determinations

Mission Statement:

Mission

The National Cemetery Scheduling Office (NCSO) is dedicated to serving Veterans, by providing Veterans, and their eligible beneficiaries, with burial and memorial benefits earned through their honorable service to our Nation.

Vision

NCSO will be the Center of Excellence for honoring our Nation's Veterans and their families.

NCSO 2019

Budget

- \$9.3 M
- 95 full time equivalent employees
- 18 temporary employees

Ms. Wilson noted that part of the transformation included more managerial oversight. NCSO now consists of a Division Chief (at a higher grade than a year ago), four supervisors, and four leads for individual teams of 14 employees. The Eligibility Division has one Division Chief (at a higher grade than a year ago) and two supervisors, with a total number of 25 employees.

Results from December 2017 to March 2019

- Increased agent availability rate from 63.1% to 86.7%
- Decreased maximum call wait time from 46:52 to 5:42 minutes
- Current, average call wait time is 1:41 minutes
- Reduced average talk time from 12:05 to 8:48 minutes
- Decreased average fax fail rate from 88% to 2.5%

COMPARATIVE CALL DATA

FY 18	Calls Received	Calls Answered	Percent of Calls Answered (to Received)	Services Scheduled	Abandoned Call Rate	Agent Availability Rate
October 1 - April 30	210,819	102,022	48%	61,285	21%	69%
May 1 - September 30	103,494	78,433	76%	98,383	6%	74%
Total	314,313	184,969	59%	159,668	27%	71%

FY 19	Calls Received	Calls Answered	Percent of Calls Answered (to Received)	Services Scheduled	Abandoned Call Rate	Agent Availability Rate
October 1 - April 30	139,874	123,600	88%	58,741	9%	82%



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5

The data above shows when change started to occur based upon transformational efforts at NCSO.

As of May 6th, there were 15,901 pending pre-need applications.

Pre-Need eligibility targets:

- 120 days (15,800 applications) - no more than 15% of inventory to be pending greater than 120 days - 18,170 applications
- 60 days (7,900 applications) - no more than 15% of inventory to be pending greater than 60 days - 9,085 applications

Assumptions:

- Monthly average inventory received - 3,950, based upon historical average
- Applications processed in “First-in, First-out” order

Ms. Wilson described the pre-need process. She stated that the 60 days target is crucial because there are denials. When applications are received, they are inventoried, counted; and then sent to the contractor for scanning of documents and manual tracking on a spreadsheet. The applications received electronically from va.gov do not require scanning. If an application is denied, the Veteran or spouse has 30 days to appeal the decision. There are some duplicate applications due to the eight to nine - month delay. Currently, NCSO is processing applications received in September 2018.

Ms. Wilson further clarified that overtime and temporary employees will be taken away to allow NCSO to review and re-assess progress with the permanent staffing.

NCSO Transformation

The Team

- Increased staffing and position redesign
- Building renovation
- Employee skills training programs

The Tactics

- Established team member performance goals and accountability
- Realigned shift hours for high call times
- Adopted call center industry “best practices” (e.g. quality assurance monitoring)

New Technology

- Cisco phone platform migration
- Upgraded IT infrastructure
- eFax system implementation

Chairman Beavers commended Ms. Wilson and the NCSO staff on the substantial improvements, along with other transformational efforts, such as training, office renovation, and change to a new telephone system (Tadiran to Cisco). He stated, in part “.../ *think it speaks so well of NCA overall about how they’ve addressed this issue...*”



NCSO Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony, May 3, 2019

2018 Recommendation: Revision of Emblems of Belief (EOB) Regulation

Eric Powell, PhD, Director of Memorial Products Service, presented information on the EOB regulation. In 2017, NCA received three non-traditional, EOB requests: a shepherd dog and flag, a heart, and a guardian angel. Subsequently, all three were approved because they did not fall under the unauthorized categories: social, cultural, ethnic, civic, fraternal, trade, commercial, political, professional or military emblems.

In October 2018, the committee recommended that NCA revise the regulation [38 CFR 632 Headstone or Marker Application Process](#) to:

- **Clarify** the EOB application
- **Clarify** the certification requirements
- **Research and Communicate** the purpose of the emblems
- **Clarify** the wording in the decision-making process
- **Consider** a “Sunset Date” of seven (7) years for EOBs not requested for inscription

VA concurred in principle to this recommendation. NCA will clarify the [VA Form 40-1330](#), which is the application used to select an EOB, and will work with the Office of General Counsel (OGC) to review the regulatory and certification process.

Additionally, NCA:

- is considering adding contextual information to each rendering on our list of approved EOBs so that those considering EOBs can be aware of the original meaning as designated by the originating applicant.
- is re-evaluating whether we should ask about EOBs during pre-need determinations.
- has determined that NCA may deny an EOB notwithstanding the applicant’s certification that the emblem represents the decedent’s sincerely held belief system.
- has identified consistent determinations as the next area requiring focused effort.

There was some discussion about the request for an EOB on a pre-need application. The pre-need application states to request an EOB. However, the regulation does not allow an application until the time of need. Committee member Gordon Lightfoot asked, *“If you effectuate the EOB after need, then is that truly giving the Veteran the opportunity to say this is my request?”*

Mr. Powers pointed out that if a Veteran passes many years later, the Veteran may have forgotten that he or she filled out a pre-need form, and that an EOB can be potentially be requested too far in advance.

NCA needs a method to consistently determine if a requested EOB:

- would have an adverse impact on the dignity and solemnity of the national cemeteries; or
- fits into one of the unauthorized categories (*social, cultural, ethnic, civic, fraternal, trade, commercial, political, professional or military*).

Dr. Powell stated that MPS has a checklist, but it doesn't really define the [unauthorized categories]. MPS is currently reviewing three new requests, a rose, shamrock, and an Egyptian ankh. The review is problematic because it is not clear if the requests fall under one of the unauthorized categories religion, culture, ethnic).

The unauthorized categories, without definition, does not allow for the decisions to be applied consistently. NCA will need the committee's help to define the categories, which would be a regulatory change. Sara Amy Leach is currently researching the history on the EOB certification process. The workgroup charge is shown on page 48.

Clarifying Instructions for Funeral Directors

Chairman Beavers charged Committee Member, Heather Mitchell Braatz, with reviewing the NCA instructions for funeral directors, based upon his visit to the NCSO and sitting with the schedulers.

Ms. Braatz is an expert in the funeral director's field. She reached out to licensed funeral directors in her network and asked, "*What do you do when you need to place someone in a national cemetery?*" stated that she has called the NCSO between 50 and 100 times to serve Veterans. About fifteen funeral home directors provided different answers. She further stated that she was always impressed by how incredibly helpful and resourceful everyone was.

Based upon her research, Ms. Braatz composed the following draft recommendation: *The Advisory Committee recommends that the NCA/NCSO create a "fill-in-the-blank" style form that funeral directors can download and print for when they are serving the family of a Veteran. This would contain the exact same information in the order that the NCSO scheduling representative asks for it over the phone.*

Known Information

Funeral directors will typically be able to provide based on the death certificate or arrangement conference.

- Cemetery of choice
- First or subsequent burial (Veteran or dependent already buried)
- If subsequent interment, who is already interred, section and site number (if known)

- Decedent's full name, gender, SSN, date of death, date of birth and relationship (Veteran or dependent)
- Contact Info (funeral director's name as well as the name, address, and E-mail address of the funeral home)
- Next of kin information (name, relationship to deceased, SSN, phone number, address)
- Type of religious emblem for headstone (if desired)
- Did the decedent reside within 75 miles of requested cemetery?
- ZIP code of decedent at time of death
- County of decedent at time of death
- Type of burial (casket or cremation)
- Marital status of deceased (if Veteran is buried in a private cemetery, must provide documentation of marital status of spouse at time of death)
- Casket size/liner size/urn size/urn vault size
- Is surviving spouse a Veteran?
- Any dependent disabled children for future interment (must provide name and date of birth). If requesting immediate interment (must provide marital status, doctor's statement stating type of illness, date of onset of illness and capability of self-support).
- Military Honors requested

Missing information

Funeral directors do not know to ask family before calling, or are unsure as to how to ask the family.

- Capital crime
- Sex offense
- Other?

Instructions to Funeral Directors

This resource is an opportunity to include guiding instructions to funeral directors.

1. Fax or email (nca.scheduling@va.gov) to St. Louis the DD-214 **before calling 1-800-535-1117.**
 - a. **Does St. Louis want a death certificate if available?**
2. If no DD-214 is available, how to most effectively and efficiently communicate to the representative that they need to determine the deceased Veteran's eligibility.
3. What important information should be conveyed by the funeral home to the family to best meet their expectations (sample scripts). For example:
 - a. *Scheduling.* "Many time slots at National Cemeteries are scheduled well in advance and a service on your family's preferred day may not be available. Please provide the funeral home with alternative dates in the order of preference, and your funeral director will strive to find an available time that works for your family."

- b. *Expectations.* “Some of the busiest National Cemeteries have 15-20 services per day. For the consideration of the other grieving families, you may anticipate the service lasting **XX minutes long**. It is important that all who are attending arrive to the cemetery **XX minutes early**, as your cars will proceed to the ceremony site in a single line and will park beside the commencement shelter. The service will be conducted by a VSO Chaplain and honors will be presented by the VSO honor guard. As soon as the ceremony concludes, your party will need to move your cars in preparation for the next ceremony. (If ground burial) You may observe the interment from your car or the side of the road. (If columbarium) You may observe the placement of the urn...”
- c. *Headstone.* “In order to ensure your loved one’s marker is engraved in a timely manner, please choose an emblem of belief (if desired) and the terms of endearment” (See attached “Tahoma Forms.PDF”)
- d. *Other?*

Ms. Braatz mentioned that what was formerly known as the “*Funeral Director’s Toolkit*” on the VA website is now, “*Schedule a Burial*”. Ms. Hamilton clarified that there are two links on cem.va.gov, by which family members and funeral directors, can find burial instructions <https://www.cem.va.gov/cem/resources.asp> and https://www.cem.va.gov/cem/burial_benefits/need.asp. The two links have slightly different formatting.

The funeral director’s local checklist may be different from what NCSO needs to schedule a burial. Ms. Braatz clarified that every state is different, based upon the information needed for vital records. Chairman Beavers reiterated that what is needed is for funeral directors to be able to provide the schedulers exactly what is needed.

Ms. Ginger Wilson confirmed that she and Ms. Braatz will map out a plan for improvement. Committee Member Kathleen Moakler mentioned training for funeral directors to ensure that they are able to gain the needed information from the family members. The two critical questions pertaining to capitol crimes and sex offense are sensitive in nature. Mr. Powers clarified that these questions do not have to be asked because there are other ways for NCA to find out this information. NCA has the authority to disinter a Veteran or another decedent if it is later determined that the deceased committed a capitol crime or sex offense, Tier III.

Chairman Beavers recommended an interactive, electronic form that a funeral home director could fill in and email to the NCSO. Ms. Wilson stated that NCSO is currently working through Personally Identifiable Identification restrictions regarding email. Mr. Powers clarified that NCA is also working on improving technology for a self-service form that could be filled out online and routed directly to the processing queue.

The complete recommendation is shown on page 48.

Public Comments

The DFO, Christine Hamilton, received an email from a James Edwin Ray regarding Confederate grave markers. Mr. Ray asked if the committee formed any opinions about the proposed change to the rule, "*RIN 2900-AQ28 - Government-Furnished Headstones, Markers, and Medallions; Unmarked Graves*"

Chairman Beavers stated that the email and comments have been received by NCA staff and is currently under consideration. The Chairman thanked Mr. Ray for his comments.

Committee Member Edward Saunders also submitted a public comment in response to USMA Reeves' statement in the October 2018 meeting regarding the challenge of providing a dignified burial option to the last 5 percent of serving America's Veterans. As of October 2018, NCA was serving 92.3 percent of the Veteran population.

Mr. Saunders reported that according to the United States (U.S.) Census Bureau, the highest percentage of Veteran population are in Alaska, Montana, Wyoming, and Virginia. He stated that the frontier is defined as a county with fewer than seven people in a square mile. A vast majority of frontier counties are in the Upper West section of the U.S. If a state has more than 50 percent frontier counties, it is designated as a frontier state. The question Mr. Saunders asked of the committee is, "*If you have a high percentage of Veterans in a frontier state, what do you do?*" He asked the committee to look at, as a future recommendation, how to serve Veterans in wide open areas.

The Chairman charged Mr. Saunders as a lead on a working group to look at this issue, as shown on page 49. Chairman Beavers also stated that he would like Verdie Bowen, Jr., Director, Office of Veterans Affairs State of Alaska involved in the discussions as a workgroup member. Christine Hamilton will confirm that this can be done. NCA will need to provide Veteran percentage data for the state of Virginia.

Recap of Recommendations/New Charges/Next Steps

Recommendation 1

The Advisory Committee recommends that the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) and the National Cemetery Scheduling Office (NCSO) create a checklist that funeral directors can download and print for use when they are serving the family of a Veteran. This checklist would contain the same information in the order that the NCSO requires.

The Advisory Committee recommends that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) review and assess the VA Benefits and Health Care "Schedule A Burial" websites (both the [cem/resources.asp](#) and the [cem/burial/benefits/need.asp](#)) to determine if a revision should be made to better enable funeral directors and other scheduling agents to more efficiently access necessary information about the National Cemetery Scheduling Office process.

Recommendation 2

The Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials recommends the report submitted by the work group on the Burial Needs of American Indian and Alaskan Native Veterans be provided to the National Cemetery Administration for consideration and comment on the report's recommendations, with the exception of the recommendation on Emblems of Belief which will be considered by another work group.

Workgroup Charge 1: Review of Emblems of Belief (EOB) Regulation & Application Process

In the May 2018 meeting, the EOB workgroup was formed to research the EOB regulation and application process. In the October 2018, the EOB Workgroup reported to the full committee on their recommendations. The committee recommended that NCA revise the EOB regulation to clarify the application and certification requirements; research and communicate the purpose of the EOBs; clarify the wording of the decision-making process; and consider removal for EOBs that have not been requested for seven years.

NCA needs a method to consistently determine if a request for a new EOB would have an adverse impact on the dignity and solemnity of the national cemeteries; or if it would fit into one of the unauthorized categories (*social, cultural, ethnic, civic, fraternal, trade, commercial, political, professional or military*). In the May 2019 meeting, Chairman Beavers charged a workgroup to evaluate and define the ten "unauthorized" categories; and to determine whether to expand or eliminate one [or more] of the ten unauthorized categories. The evaluation will include a review of the working checklist used to deny an application. Additionally, Col. Joey Strickland is onboard to provide specific EOB requirements related to American Indian and Alaskan Native Veterans. After NCA receives the results from this charge, NCA will determine how to effect necessary changes (e.g., whether a regulatory change is needed.)

Workgroup Members

- Marianne Trussell – Lead
- Heather Braatz
- Kathleen Moakler
- Chaplain Mike Dover
- Joey Strickland

Note: Include Glenn Powers, Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations in initial meetings

Workgroup Charge 2: Research ways to serve the Hardest Five Percent of Veterans

In the May 2019 meeting, Lt. Col. Saunders provided a public comment regarding how to serve the hardest five-percent of Veterans requiring burial services. Based upon his research, Alaska, Montana, Wyoming, and Virginia are the top four states with the highest percentage of Veteran unserved population. He also reported a challenge with reaching Veterans in Frontier counties that have fewer than seven people per square mile. He concluded that the American West has a high per capita of unserved Veterans and should be considered the last five-percent. Col. Saunders recommended that the Advisory Committee, in time, research and advise the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs on strategies to better serve Veterans in burial predominantly in rural areas.

Chairman Beavers charged Mr. Saunders with researching this issue further and providing specific recommendations to NCA.

Workgroup Members

- Lt. Col. Saunders – Lead
- Charles Sellars
- Mike Figlioli
- Joey Strickland

Workgroup Charge 3: Cross-collaborate with Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to resolve plot allowance discrepancies for Veterans and Survivors interred in state cemeteries.

During the open discussion at the May 2019 meeting, Col. Strickland mentioned the challenge with reimbursing Surviving family members for plots in State cemeteries. He reported that the plot allowance is not enough and is often waived by cemetery directors if the family is unable to pay. Additionally, reimbursement may take months to be received, and receipts lack a clear accounting method. There was also discussion about the relocation of burial claims to Pension Management Centers (PMC) and the possible impact this had on the timeliness of claims. Ms. Edith Smith pointed out that the plot allowance is not payable for a Surviving Spouse interred in a State cemetery.

Chairman Beavers charged Col. Strickland with leading a workgroup to enter into discussions with other VBA advisory committees. Col. Strickland will work with Christine Hamilton to connect with VBA; and the Chair and Designated Federal Officers for the Veterans' Family, Caregiver, and Survivor Advisory Committee.

Workgroup Members

Col. Joey Strickland
Mike Figlioli

Workgroup Charge 4: Revisit of 2017 Recommendation for an Outreach Ambassador Program

In the October/November 2017 meeting, the committee recommended that NCA establish an NCA Outreach Ambassador Program, which provides a model by which committee members have increased access to outreach opportunities and receive suitable staff support (training, materials, etc.). On March 22, 2018, Christine Hamilton administered the 2018 Community Outreach Assessment to Cemetery Directors to assess the need for an Outreach Ambassador Program and to identify gaps in outreach, in general. A total of 68 responses were received. (This information was taken directly from the 2017 recommendation)

The committee discussed their concern about one question that may have been misconstrued by national cemetery directors – “Do you believe that having assigned private volunteers to work community events would be beneficial? If no or not sure, please provide additional feedback.” More than half of the respondents answered “no” or “not sure”. The committee clarified that the purpose of the Outreach Ambassador is to be a general advocate or messenger on behalf of NCA, and not an outreach volunteer for national cemeteries. The ambassador’s role is to voluntarily speak in a general sense about the value of national cemeteries and burial/memorial options available to Veterans, spouses, surviving spouses, and eligible dependent children. Chairman Jack Kelly stated that he would like to focus on ten individuals, who will be trained as Outreach Ambassadors at NCA’s National Training Center. The concern in the assessment regarding [sufficient] outreach materials is separate item for NCA to address.

Chairman Beavers charged member, Gordon Lightfoot with leading a workgroup to revise the Outreach Ambassador Program recommendation into a specific, realistic, actionable, measurable, and time-phased (S.M.A.R.T.) recommendation for NCA. The workgroup will report out at the next committee meeting.

Workgroup Member

Gordon Lightfoot - Lead
Edith Smith
Dr. JoAnn Fisher
Dino Teppara

Meeting Adjourned

Chairman Beavers adjourned the business portion of the meeting at 3:47pm. The remainder of the meeting was used for administrative business.

Administrative Business: Review of 2-Year Calendar

The committee recommended the following sites to visit in early October 2019:

1. National Memorial Cemeteries of Arizona (NMCA)
2. [Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery at Camp Navajo](#)
3. San Carlos Apache Tribal Veterans Cemetery in San Carlos

****Spring 2020 site visits to Northeast cemeteries, such as Togus National Cemetery in Maine, will be determined at a later date.**



Leslie E. Beavers
Committee Chair

Note: Meeting transcripts are available upon request to Christine.hamilton1@va.gov