

**Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials Minutes**  
**May 12-13, 2015**  
**Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, DC**

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**VA**



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

National Cemetery  
Administration

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**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CEMETERIES AND MEMORIALS MINUTES**

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## ATTENDEES

### Committee Members Present

Leslie Beavers	Amy Locklear
Wilfred Ebel	Alford McMichael
Michael Horne	Lupe Saldana
John (Jack) Kelly, Chairman	Edith Smith
Joe Foster	Jack Tilley

### Committee Members Absent

Elaine Rogers

### Ex-officio Members Present

Jack E. Lechner – Arlington National Cemetery  
Tom Sole - American Battle Monuments Commission  
Charles Sellars - Andersonville National Historic Site

### Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Attendees

Purnima Boominathan, Staff Attorney, (OGC), Office of General Counsel  
Jelessa Burney, Program Specialist, Office of the Secretary, Advisory Committee  
Management Office

### National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Participants

Ronald E. Walters, Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs  
Matthew Sullivan, Deputy Under Secretary for Finance and Planning  
Glenn Powers, Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs  
Anita Hanson, Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Management  
Eric Powell, Acting Director, Memorial Programs Service  
Christine Kluh, Director of Human Capital Management  
George Eisenbach, Director, Veterans Cemetery Grants Service  
Patricia (Tish) Tyson, Director of Communications and Management Service  
James Taft, Chief of Operations, Pacific District  
Steve Fezler, Program Specialist, Office of Field Programs  
Jeff Potts, Program Analyst, Policy and Planning Service  
Michael Nacincik, Designated Federal Officer  
Robin Cooper, Advisory Committee Program Manager  
Barbara Lewandrowski, Program Analyst  
Richelle Taylor, Public Affairs Specialist

### National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Attendees

Kathy Cassano, Executive Assistant, Deputy Under Secretary for Management  
James Theres, Speechwriter

### Public Attendees

Anh C. Phan, Outreach Representative, U.S. Senator Mark R. Warner  
John Cultis, Staffer, U.S. Senator Mark R. Warner  
Edward G. Lilley, Team Lead for Health Policy, The American Legion Post 1775  
William M. Jones, Cmdr., Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 609

**Tuesday, May 12, 2015**

The spring meeting of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials for FY 2015 was held at the 1100 First Street, NE, Washington, DC in Conference Room 104. The Committee convened at 8:00 am for a meet and greet.

**Call to Order, Welcome, and Pledge of Allegiance**

Committee Chairman Jack Kelly called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and gave opening remarks.

Committee members stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Kelly introduced Robin Cooper who gave an overview of the agenda for the two day meeting and welcomed new Committee members.

Chairman Kelly introduced Designated Federal Officer Michael Nacincik who welcomed Committee members and gave introductory remarks.

Chairman Kelly introduced Attorney Purnima Boominathan, Office of General Counsel, Ethics Specialty Team, Department of Veterans Affairs, Central Office.



**VA Office of General Counsel, Attorney Purnima Boominathan**

VA Attorney Purnima Boominathan addressed the ethics rules for the Advisory Committee members who are considered Special Government Employees (SGEs). SGE's serve less than 130 days during any 365-day period – with or without compensation. Attorney Boominathan discussed the ethics rules governing SGE's and provided contact information. She provided the annual compliance briefing that covers the two major components of ethics laws: standards of ethical conduct for the Executive Branch (not using public office for personal gain and not giving any unauthorized preferential treatment) and criminal conflict of interest. She reminded the Committee members that they are required to sign and submit their Ethics Review statements upon completion of their training.

## Chairman Remarks

Chairman Kelly introduced Ronald E. Walters, Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs to provide opening remarks.

## Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Ronald E. Walters Opening Remarks

Ronald Walters provided an overview of MyVA initiative and past and future NCA Projects.

### **MyVA Initiative**

The MyVA Initiative is driven by four driving principles:

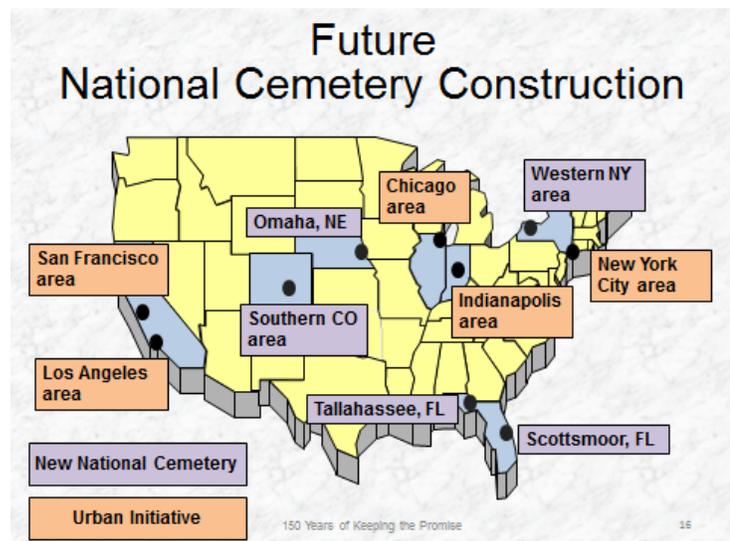
- Putting the Veteran's interest first
- Empowering employees and helping them deliver excellent customer service to improve the Veteran experience
- Improving or eliminating processes that impede good customer service
- Rethinking our internal structures and processes to become more Veteran-centric and productive.

NCA supports MyVA via the structure of customer service and centralized support functions. NCA received the highest score of on the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ASCI) in five consecutive surveys. The ASCI conducts nationwide scoring of public and private entities.

### **Objectives**

- Improve/maintain access to Veterans by opening new national, state and tribal cemeteries and keeping existing cemeteries open
- Establish a new process of pre-need eligibility for Veterans
- Develop regulations to implement legislation
- Develop recommendations for new burial options
- Leverage NCA's historical resources to create educational programming and literature for the public.

The old access threshold to build a new VA national cemetery was 170,000 Veterans within 75 miles. The new threshold is 80,000 Veterans within 75 miles. With the new threshold in place, NCA identified 18 locations across the country for expansion. Thirteen will be full service national cemeteries of which eight will be located in rural locations. The remaining five are Urban Initiative Columbaria-only cemeteries.



The five large national cemeteries will include casket and columbaria interments. They are located in Tallahassee and Cape Canaveral in Florida, Omaha, Nebraska, Western New York and Southern Colorado. Tallahassee and Cape Canaveral National Cemeteries will be open in late 2015 and Omaha National Cemetery in FY 2016. NCA hosted a dedication ceremony for Tallahassee National Cemetery on May 22, 2015.

### **Urban and Rural Initiative**

NCA will open Columbaria-only cemeteries to meet the needs of Veterans in densely populated, major metropolitan areas such as San Francisco and Chicago. NCA is developing columbaria-only cemeteries in response to a nationwide trend of Veterans choosing cremations over casket funerals. Almost half the burials (49%) in national cemeteries are for cremated remains. NCA will also improve access to Veterans who live in rural communities and open cemeteries in more remote places like Wyoming and Northern Wisconsin.

### **Extending the Life of Existing National Cemeteries**

NCA is preventing the loss of a burial option for Veterans who are currently served by an existing national cemetery in three ways: use of pre-placed vaults, construction of columbarium on existing land and new land acquisition.

- Pre-placed vaults decrease land requirements and gravesite construction costs by 50% because land does not have to be purchased; and sod and irrigation systems do not have to be installed. This program also reduces annual maintenance costs by \$34,000 per acre because of reduced mowing, irrigation, pesticide/fertilizer applications, and correcting soil settlement. The vaults also help keep headstones from sinking. Approximately 600,000 preplaced vaults were installed since FY 2000, saving 800 acres of land, \$24 million in land purchases, and \$136 million in maintenance costs.
- In addition to pre-placed vaults, thousands of columbarium niches are in process of being designed and constructed at existing national cemeteries to keep up with demand for cremation.
- NCA also extends the life of existing cemeteries through the purchase of additional land. Over the past three years, NCA has purchased 1,639 acres of land for new or existing cemetery expansion throughout the country. Examples are:
  - Morovis, Puerto Rico; 247 acres
  - Tallahassee, Florida; 250 acres
  - Fayetteville, Arkansas; 2.4 acres

There are 15 more property acquisitions that VA Real Property Service is currently acquiring before the end of calendar year 2015 and several more beyond that date.

### **Presentation of Certificates to New Committee Members**

Chairman Jack Kelly and Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs Glenn Powers presented certificates to new Committee members Amy Locklear (pictured in photo), Michael Horne and Edith Smith.



## Chairman Remarks

Chairman Kelly introduced Matthew Sullivan, Deputy Under Secretary for Finance and Planning.

## Remarks from Finance & Planning, Deputy Under Secretary for Finance and Planning, Matthew Sullivan

Mr. Sullivan's presentation covered a review of the FY 2016 budget request, key performance measures, an update on compliance reviews for the Veterans Cemetery Grants Service, and Legislative and Regulatory issues impacting NCA.

NCA is funded from four primary discretionary accounts:

- Operations and maintenance (O & M)
- Major construction
- Minor construction
- Veterans Cemetery Grants Services (VCGS)

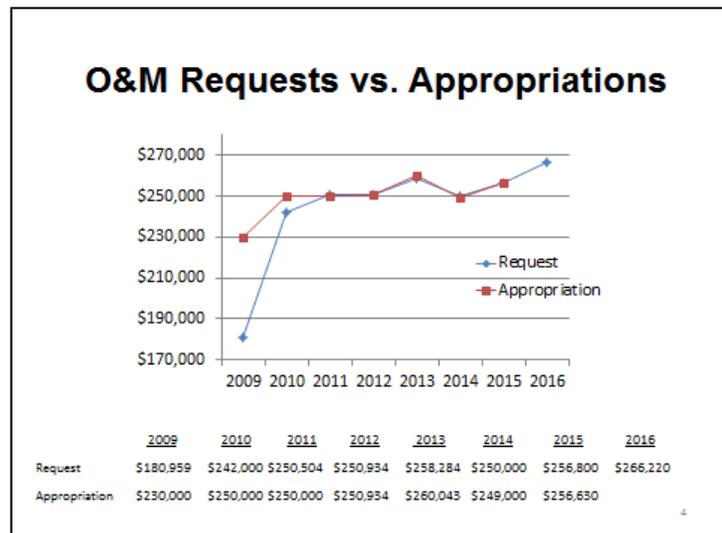
Major construction involves contracts greater than \$10 million. VCGS is a program that assists state and tribal organizations with construction and operations of state and tribal funded cemeteries.

### **FY 2016 Budget Request**

A review of the FY 2016 budget request as compared to the FY 2015 budget shows a difference of \$172.3 million up from \$363.8 million for a total of \$536.1 million projected to be allocated in FY 2016. A review of O & M requests versus appropriations reveals \$256.8 million request in FY 2015 versus \$256.6 million appropriation. The FY 2016 request is \$266.2 million.

A review of O & M base budgets reveal \$5.7 million for FY 2016 for national shrine projects to raise, realign and clean headstones and markers and repair sunken graves as compared to \$9.1 million allocated in FY 2015. Additionally, \$2 million per year is projected for non-recurring maintenance projects; and \$5.3 million to support cemetery activations. Two of five planned cemeteries are scheduled to open in FY 2015: Cape Canaveral and Tallahassee National Cemeteries, both located in Florida, and Omaha National Cemetery in Nebraska in FY 2016.

The FY 2016 budget request for Veterans Cemetery Grants Service is \$45 million as compared to FY 2015 at \$46 million. The total estimated cost of FY 2015 pending grant applications with matching funds by priority group is \$151 million. This cost covers applications for 12 expansion/improvement projects; 23 new cemeteries; one expansion for gravesites, and 13 for improvements not related to gravesites and operations and maintenance. Mandatory payments for the FY 2016 budget are projected at \$89.4 million versus \$83.5 million in FY 2015. Total cost includes headstones and markers, graveliners and outer burial receptacle reimbursements and casket and urns for a total of \$124 million.



Construction costs include major and minor projects totaling \$224.9 million for FY 2016 as compared to \$61.2 million in FY 2015. This significant increase accounts for gravesite expansion projects in Puerto Rico, Willamette, Oregon, Riverside, California, and Barrancas, Florida. Other major construction includes land acquisition for cemetery expansions and the Advance Planning Fund to support new burial policies and facility condition assessments. Minor construction funds are for cemetery expansions and improvements nationwide.

### **Performance Measures**

The performance dashboard indicates NCA has demonstrated consistent growth in performance factors to include: percent of Veterans served, percent of graves marked in national cemeteries within 60 days, percent of respondents who rate the quality of service as excellent; and percent of respondents who rate cemetery appearance as excellent. Performance ratings for FY 2014 and FY 2015 were constant at 89.8% and projected to increase to 91.5% for FY 2016.

NCA workload indicators decreased from a total of 360,761 in FY 2014 to 174,825 in FY 2015. Workload is projected to increase to 354,800 in FY 2016. The percentage of Veterans served was 79% in FY 2011 and is projected to increase to 82% in FY 2016.

### **Emerging Burial Needs Study**

NCA conducted an Emerging Burial Needs Study to reveal burial trends and Veterans preferences to ensure Veterans preferences are met. This is a multi-part study involving literature search, Veterans surveys, focus groups and minority Veterans.

### **Veterans Cemetery Grant Service Compliance Review**

A Veterans Cemetery Grant Service Compliance Review focused on strengthening partnerships and enhancing accountability with state and tribal cemeteries to measure critical customer satisfaction elements and encourage achievement of national shrine status. NCA is working on key legislative proposals and planned regulations for FY 2016 which will provide a headstone or marker for all Medal of Honor recipients gravesites regardless if a private marker or headstone exists; burial eligibility for dependents of active duty service members; and funding for crypts in grant-funded cemeteries.

NCA issued a Final Rule April 13, 2015 to establish the casket and urn reimbursement program for unclaimed remains. There is also a Final Rule draft to address applicant standing for headstones and markers.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduced Anita Hanson, Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Management and Christine Klueh, Director of Human Capital Management.

### **Remarks by the Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Management, Anita Hanson and Director of Human Capital Management, Christine Klueh**

Ms. Hanson's remarks covered design and construction, contracts, transformation, technology and data management, Memorial Benefits Management System, outreach, and the history program. Ms. Klueh addressed the human capital management component.

## **Design and Construction**

The minor construction annual budget for FY 2015 is \$61.5 million compared to \$89 million in FY 2014. Construction is divided into design and construction/design-build contracts and designated as follows:

### Design Contracts:

- 14 Gravesite Expansions
- 2 Building/Site Improvements
- 1 Cemetery Master Plan, New Land Acquisition

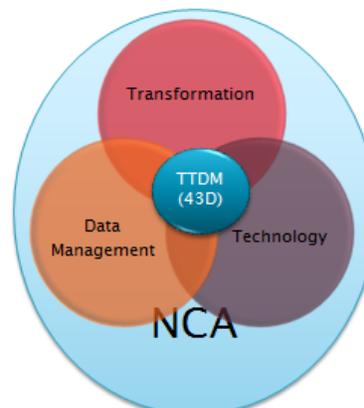
### Construction/Design-Build Contracts:

- 7 Gravesite Expansions
- 25 Building/Site Improvements
- 3 Irrigation Projects

NCA is also constructing five new cemeteries: Tallahassee, Florida; Scottsmoor, Florida; Omaha, Nebraska; Western New York, and Southern Colorado. A dedication ceremony was held for the groundbreaking of Tallahassee National Cemetery May 22, 2015. A dedication ceremony is tentatively scheduled for Cape Canaveral in November 2015.

Construction includes the Urban Initiative to build columbarium-only satellite sites in five urban locations: Chicago, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco (Alameda). Construction of these facilities will better serve urban areas comprised of approximately two million Veterans and address concerns raised by NCA's customers regarding time and distance challenges associated with accessing national cemeteries.

## **NCA 43D Transformation, Technology and Data Management (TTDM)**



### Roles for Success NCA 43D, TTDM

**Transformation**

- Manage Enterprise Business Architecture
- Identify Business and Requirements needs
- Provide Program Oversight and roadmap for future state of IT implementation

**Technology (Sustainment)**

- Provide IT support and equipment to all NCA users
- Property and Space Management
- Maintain accountability of IT equipment and software for NCA
- Maintain & Monitor Systems Operations
- Manage Data Quality

**Data Management**

- Publications
- Records Management
- Preserve and Protect the Privacy of Information
- Freedom of Information Act

TTDM – Provides Process and Information Technology support to NCA Mission

## **Contracting**

Construction contracts awarded to small businesses in FY 2015 totaled \$99.9 million compared to \$157.8 million in FY 2014. The total amount of contracts awarded in FY 2015 was \$124.4 million compared to \$186 million in FY 2014.

VA set performance levels to ensure contract awards to Veteran-Owned businesses at 12% of procurement in FY 2014 and NCA reached an actual goal of 65% or \$122.4 million. VA's goal for FY 2015 is set at 12% of procurement.

VA set performance levels to ensure contracts awards to Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Small Businesses at 10% of procurement in FY 2014. NCA reached an actual goal of 63.9% or \$118.9 million. VA goal for FY 2015 is 12% of procurement.

## **Transformation, Technology and Data Management**

### Systems Accomplishments:

- Memorial Benefit Management System (MBMS) FY 2014 projects are set to be delivered in June 2015

- The MBMS Long Term Solution strategy approved by NCA Leadership in April 2015
- Delivered 53 national gravesite locator files to support data.gov initiative
- Updated NCA systems to allow processing for new national cemeteries: Yellowstone National Cemetery and Tallahassee National Cemetery
- Updated Gravesite Assessment Report (GAR) User Guide and modified GAR report in support of NCA's bi-annual cemetery assessment
- Updated Burial Operations Support System to allow 3x4 and 4x9 sizes to more efficiently track gravesite sizes
- Updated nine maps for various national cemeteries in Kiosk system to support customer outreach.

#### IT Customer Service Accomplishments:

- 100% accountability Non-IT equipment for the last three years for NCA Central Office
- 100% accountability for all IT equipment for the last two years at NCA Central Office
- 94% compliant in FY 2014 NCA Privacy Compliance Assessment conducted by the Office of Information and Technology
- Reduced NCA's Freedom of Information Act backlog from 16 to 7 requests
- Upgraded from hard copy forms to the new Print Management System, which is expected to reduce timelessness of print requests.
- Received approval for space renovation project that will save approximately \$250K per year
- Reduced PIV only authentications exemptions by 52% (463 employees).

#### **Memorial Benefits Management System**

##### Planned (Customer-Facing):

Enhanced access by Veterans and the public to Memorials Information including:

- The National Gravesite Locator website and National Gravesite Locator Kiosks at all national cemeteries
- GPS and/or GIS data for directions to and within the cemetery to the exact gravesite
- Pictures of headstones, markers, and memorials within the cemetery linked to the Veteran or family member; potential to include memorial artifacts such as pictures of the Veteran MPEG movies or URL links to YouTube, etc.

##### Planned (Internal-Facing):

Future NCA programs include the use of mobile technologies for the following business processes:

- GPS survey level data for cemetery construction and expansions to include graves (four corners), headstones/markers, infrastructure (roads, irrigation, sewers, IT lines, telecommunications lines, etc.), monuments, buildings, and trees
- Capturing pictures (markers, gravesites, temporary gravesite markers) and linking directly to the graves registry in NCA systems
- Headstone and marker inscription data including receive and set dates
- Barcode data for tagging caskets and urns, as well as electronically tagging the containers to the gravesite, the headstone, and the marker, linked to NCA systems
- Maintenance data for the cemetery, facilities, and grounds.

## Outreach

In FY 2014, NCA had representatives at 68 national events, 3,709 local events and exposed burial benefits to more than 400,000 individuals.

New outreach initiatives include the use of GovDelivery to send emails to large groups and allow Veteran Service Organizations, families, members in the funeral industry and medical examiner and coroners offices to subscribe. NCA currently has 26,000 subscribers.

“NCA is also partnering with the VBA Veterans Group Life Insurance to provide inserts about burial benefits to enrollees and will send out 12,000 letters per month. In addition, the outreach team is designing a DD214 Folder for Veterans to store their DD214 and other documents. Veterans can use this folder to store “funeral wishes” for next of kin,” said Hanson.



NCA purchased a Mobile Command Outreach Vehicle in FY 2013. In FY 2015, the vehicle deployed to 14 events within 30 days. Events included Major League Baseball Spring Training for the Pittsburgh Pirates and New York Yankees, the Florida State Fair, Patriot Plaza Dedication and West Point Band, Wreaths Across America and Veterans Day.

## History Projects

The History staff engaged in several Civil War 150th Commemoration events from FY 2011 through FY 2015. The final program is planned for the summer 2015 to address the federal government care of Veterans post-war. Activities include:

Interpretive signage:

- By July 2015: new signs will be in 77 national cemeteries and 24 other properties related to the Civil War
- Planning additional signs to address the history of headstones, WWII POWs and other topics.

Confederate Study - Published by Government Printing Office this summer:

- In layout and design phase

## **Human Capital Management - Director of Human Capital Management, Christine Klueh,**

NCA's workforce consists of 1,730 employees of which 295 are managers or supervisors, 74% are Veterans, and 28% are disabled Veterans. NCA has the highest percentage of Veterans among all Federal agencies. NCA hiring performance exceeds that of VA and OPA which have 60 and 80 days, respectively. NCA's average time to hire is 39 days and the percent of vacancies with job offers within 60 days is 91% - VA's goal is 80%.



## **New Initiatives**

NCA's Workforce Planning and Succession Management focuses on developing a robust workforce through training, employee growth, and retention plans. NCA's Cemetery Intern Director Program is an intense 10-month residential program based in St. Louis that was created in 2005. The program, focused on cemetery operations and leadership, graduates 12-15 directors annually.

"Cemetery directors are critical front-line leaders whose actions directly impact cemetery appearance and customer service," said Klueh.

## **Training and Development of all NCA Employees**

- Over 425 employees trained annually at NCA's National Training Center (NTC) in St. Louis
- In Spring 2016, NTC will move from leased space to new construction at VAMC, St. Louis Campus
- Will provide increased training capacity for NCA, Army, DOI, state and tribal personnel.

## **Committee Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly recessed the Committee for lunch.

## **Break for Lunch-Noon-1:00 P.M.**

## **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly resumed meeting and called for oral public comments. Mr. William M. Jones, Commander, VFW Post 609 provided oral comments. *See full comments in Appendix A.* Chairman Kelly then introduced Glenn Powers, Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs.

## **Remarks by Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs, Glenn Powers**

Mr. Powers gave an overview of new leadership, casket and urn reimbursement program, pre-need eligibility determinations, GIS gravesite surveys at VA national cemeteries, and the pilot proposal for section markers and use of interpretive signs at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery.

## **New Leadership**

Stephan J. Frank is the newly appointed Executive Director of NCA Southeast District. Mr. Frank joined NCA after recently serving an over five-year tour of active duty with U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) at both Fort McPherson, Georgia and Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he served in the Logistics Directorate (G4) as Chief of Current Operations, Deputy Chief of Future Operations and Chief of Strategic Mobility. He retired as a colonel in U.S. Army Reserve with over 26 years in service.

## **Casket and Urn**

NCA established the Casket and Urn program stating that Public Law 112-260 "Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012" provides that VA may reimburse applicants for costs associated with the purchase of a casket or urn for the interment of Veterans with no known next of kin where sufficient resources are not available. NCA will begin processing applications and payment for casket and urn reimbursement on May 13, 2015.

## **Pre-Need**

NCA is developing procedures to provide non-final pre-need eligibility determinations upon request. Many funeral homes provide pre-need burial services to their clients that range from recording an individual's last wishes for final disposition of remains to reviewing trust agreements for cost coverage of funeral services, caskets/urns, cemetery plots, etc.

VA provides a variety of death benefits through the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and NCA. For Veteran families, planning for final disposition may involve determining which VA benefits are available and whether they meet eligibility requirements to receive them. NCA typically determines eligibility for burial in a VA national cemetery at time of death for Veterans and other individuals.

“Through NCA's customer surveys and other customer information, we have seen an increase in responses for pre-need eligibility determinations to assist families' funeral decisions. NCA understands this need and is now in the process of developing a Pre-Need Program to provide Veterans better access to their benefits,” Powers said.

The benefits of the Pre-Need Program include providing confidence to individuals that they will likely be eligible for burial benefits at their time of need; VA retaining pre-need eligibility data for use at time of need; Veterans' ability to communicate wishes to loved ones and service providers ahead of need.

## **GIS Surveys of VA National Cemeteries**

Surveys will include:

- Cross checking the field collected inscription data of headstones/markers with the permanent BOSS record database to determine discrepancies, if any
- Converting cemetery AutoCad burial maps into ArcGIS interactive drawings with GPS data, inscription data, BOSS record, and digital photos of the headstone / marker
- The contract is under development for award in FY 2015
- Starting with six to 14 cemeteries in base year of contract, followed by 20 or more cemeteries in each of three subsequent years.

The indefinite quantity contract as written includes NCA prioritized cemeteries as follows:

- Base Year- Starts with 6 and increases up to 14 total cemeteries if funding is available
- Option Year 1- up to 32 more cemeteries as funding permits
- Option Year 2- up to 19 more cemeteries as funding permits
- Option Year 3- up to 21 more cemeteries as funding permits.

## **Section Markers and Interpretive Signs at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery**

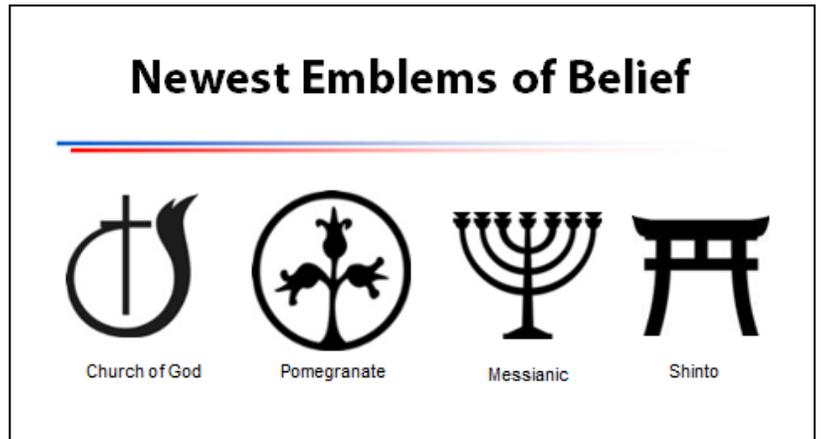
- Develop a prominent section marker and interpretive signs describing the history and use of different types of markers at national cemeteries
- Text describing the different types of headstones and markers used throughout the history of national cemeteries
- Text about the specific type of marker in the burial or memorial section where the Interpretive Sign is placed
- Photographs of national cemeteries depicting different types of headstones and markers.

## **Committee Chair Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduced Eric Powell, Acting Director for Memorial Programs Service.

## **Remarks by Acting Director for Memorial Programs Service, Eric Powell**

Mr. Powell gave an overview of activities within Memorial Programs Service. Memorial Programs Service is responsible for processing applications for and issuing headstones, markers and medallions, Presidential Memorial Certificates (PMC) Emblems of Belief and the First Notice of Death Program.



### **Headstone, Marker and Medallion**

The number of headstones and markers ordered in FY 2014 was 356, 062 and 169, 848 in FY 2015 to date. In FY 2014, 81.2% of the orders were processed on time and 79.7% were processed on time to date in FY 2015. The total number of medallions processed in FY 2014 was 10, 389 and the total to date for FY 2015 is 5,193.

### **Presidential Memorial Certificates**

The number of Presidential Memorial Certificates processed in FY 2014 was 618,570 and there are 435,865 PMCs processed to date in FY 2015. In FY 2014, 66.5% of orders were processed on time and 79.1% in FY 2015 to date were processed on time.

### **New Emblems of Belief**

There are four new Emblems of Belief recently added to the list of approved symbols. These are Church of God, Pomegranate, Messianic, and Shinto.

### **First Notice of Death Statistics**

#### **FY 2014**

- 667,514 NODs
- 240,010 FNODs
- \$46,405,647.06 in Benefits Cancelled
- \$245,952,893 in Benefits Cancelled by NCA from October 2008
- 23,460 Flags

#### **FYTD 2015**

- 344,797 NODs
- 123,596 FNODs
- \$17,340,903.48 in Benefits Cancelled
- \$263,293,797 in Benefits Cancelled by NCA from October 2008
- 14,477 Flags

### **Items of Interest**

Four Legislative Proposals:

- Expansion of Eligibility for Medal of Honor (MOH) Recipients
- Expansion of Medallion Eligibility
- Expansion of Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) Eligibility

- Alignment of In Memory Of (IMO) Date for Dependent
- Review of Inscription and Replacement Policies
- Fort Leavenworth Lodge Renovation.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduced George Eisenbach, Director of Veterans Cemetery Grants Program.

### **Remarks from Director of Veterans Cemetery Grants Program, George Eisenbach**

Mr. Eisenbach gave an overview of the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program FY 2014 and FY 2015 activities.

### **Overview**

The Veterans Cemetery Grants Program was established in 1978 to assist states, territories and tribal governments to establish, expand and improve Veteran cemeteries. The President allocated \$46 million for state grants in FY 2015. VA provides 100% of development costs to states. More than \$617 million was awarded since 1980. There are currently 95 cemeteries in 47 states, Guam and Saipan. Nine cemeteries are under construction and there were more than 32, 000 interments in FY 2014.

There were at total of 91 pre-applications valued \$264 million; 17 new pre-applications valued at \$46.9 million; 37 applications to establish new cemeteries; and 13 tribal government pre-applications.

“NCA will continue growth in state grants through partnerships with states and promote awareness of tribal grant opportunities via outreach with the Native American community. Sustainment of state cemeteries is dependent on cemetery appearance and maintaining national shrine standards, compliance review programs, and providing service without interruption,” said Eisenbach.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly called for 15-minute break and then introduced James Taft, Chief of Operations NCA Pacific District.

### **Remarks from Chief of Operations, NCA Pacific District, James Taft**

Mr. Taft gave an overview of the VA MyVA Initiative.

### **MyVA Vision**

- Puts the Veterans in control of how, when, and where they wish to be served
- Measures success by outcomes for the Veterans
- Integrates programs and organizations to optimize productivity and efficiency.



### **MyVA Primary Focus**

- Improving the Veterans experience by examining Veteran-facing processes and organizations from the Veteran’s perspective to enable every Veteran to have a seamless, integrated and responsive VA customer service experience every time.
- Achieving support services excellence by identifying common services that are performed in support of VA mission components and seeking to optimize these services to increase efficiency and eliminate duplication.

These services include:

- Human Resources, Legal Services, Information Technology, Acquisitions & Logistics, Real Property Facilities Management, Public Affairs, Congressional Affairs, Budget & Finance, and Security & Preparedness
- Establishing a culture of continuous performance improvement so conditions are set at the local level for issues to be raised, addressed, and solutions replicated across as many facilities as needed to achieve enterprise level results
- Enhancing strategic partnerships by making better “matches” and formal partnerships between community, nonprofit, and other organizations and the work being done for Veterans at VA facilities across the country
- Improving the employee experience and focusing on “people and culture” so employees are empowered to better serve Veterans.

### MyVA District Alignment – Improving the Veteran Experience

VA is creating a District Veteran Experience Office (DVEO). VA will assign two offices per district to maximize access to Veterans. The District Veteran Experience Officer (DVEO) will be in the Primary site and Deputy DVEO will be in the Secondary site.

#### North Atlantic District

- Primary – New York area
- Secondary – DC area

#### Southeast District

- Primary – Atlanta
- Secondary – Tampa

#### Midwest District

- Primary – Chicago area
- Secondary – Minneapolis

#### Continental District

- Primary – Denver
- Secondary – Dallas

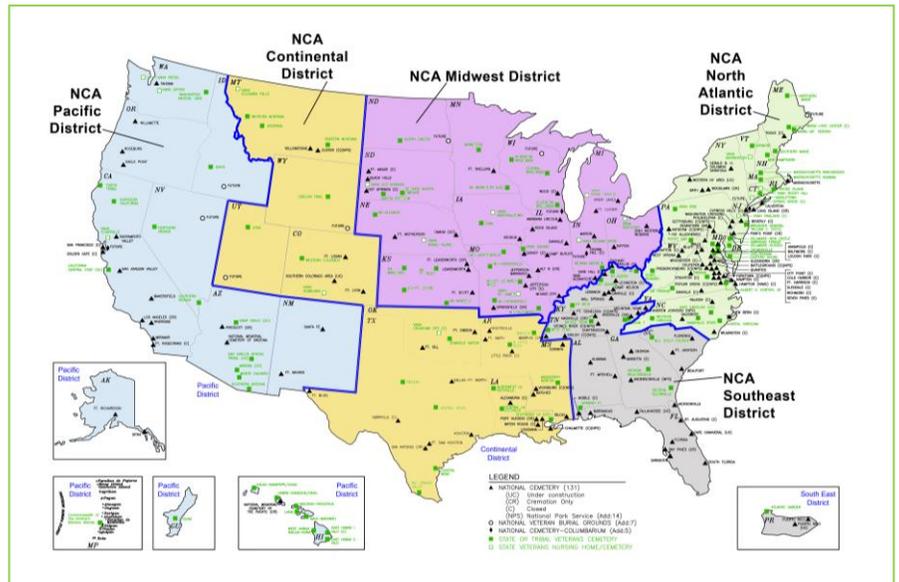
#### Pacific District

- Primary – Los Angeles area
- Secondary – Seattle

### Community Veterans Engagement Boards

Key Functions:

- Engage community resources
- Promote opportunities to benefit Veterans and the community
- Establish regular meetings and host both closed and open forums
- Foster community education on VA services and benefits



- Enable direct feedback from community leaders on Veterans issues during closed forums, which community VA leaders can then resolve
- Share efforts and outcomes with VA
- Enable direct feedback from Veterans and the public through open forums.

**Intended Community Outcomes:**

- An integrated VA presence in the community (VHA, VBA, NCA)
- Two-way communication between VA and community shareholders
- VA leaders understand local Veteran issues and can work in concert with other shareholders, including VSOs, to proactively address them
- Community leaders are educated and empowered to help Veterans leverage VA services in the community
- Veterans and local community members are informed of local VA strategies
- Opportunity for Veterans to provide direct feedback on their experiences.

**Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduced Barbara Lewandrowski, Program Analyst, Communications and Outreach Support.

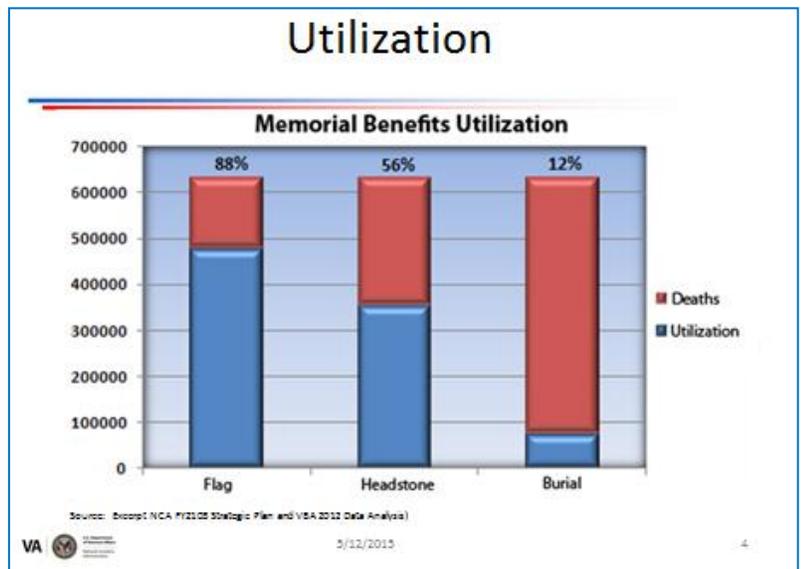
**Remarks from Program Analyst, Communications and Outreach Support,**

**Barbara Lewandrowski**

Ms. Lewandrowski gave an overview of outreach initiatives.

**Outreach Directive**

*Title 38 U.S.C. Chapter 63* directs VA to support the outreach mission by providing information and awareness to every Veteran and beneficiary to access VA benefits and services. NCA conducts a comprehensive outreach plan to increase awareness of VA memorial benefits; educate and inform Veterans and their families of the burial and memorial benefits; and encourage Veterans and their families to make plans to use these benefits at their time of need.



**Memorial Benefits Utilization**

As of FY 2013 more than 600,000 Veterans died. Of that number, VA processed 88% of applications for burial flag, 56% for headstones and 12% for burial in a national cemetery.

**Current Methods of Outreach**

- Face to Face Interaction
- Web Services and Social Media
- Printed, video and promotional

## Outreach by the Numbers

NCA outreach activities in FY 2014 included 68 national events, 3,709 local events and exposure to more than 400,000 Veterans. NCA has a diversified national audience and partners with entities in hospice and palliative care, medical examiners and coroners, ethnic groups, AARP, estate planners, and funeral and state associations.

NCA also participates in grassroots outreach efforts at local fairs and festivals, Veterans stand-downs, tribal pow-wows, health and wellness expos, Veterans benefit days and weekly rotations at the Pentagon in conjunction with VBA and VHA.

NCA used the Mobile Outreach Vehicle to establish a high visible presence at the 2015 Florida State Fair and Major League Baseball spring training both largely attended by Veterans and their families. The Mobile Outreach Vehicle helps NCA increase impact on local communities and enhances cemetery director's grass roots efforts. NCA collaborated with VHA and VBA to provide outreach at the Tallahassee National Cemetery dedication ceremony on May 22, 2015.

NCA uses social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, GovDelivery, VA Blogs, Rotating Photos on Website and traditional tools i.e., news releases, media advisories, brochures, etc., to communicate burial benefits messages. Facebook activity increased from less than 5,000 likes in FY 2012 to more than 20,000 likes in FY 2015.

GovDelivery currently has 28,000 subscribers. Additional communication tools include the Online Funeral Director Kit created in FY 2012 that provides members of the funeral industry direct access to information on burial benefits to provide to Veterans and their families. Information is in PDF format, DVD/Video, and live streaming from YouTube. Information is available in English and Spanish.

## Collaborative Efforts

- Speaker Requests
- TSP, FEGLI and other Benefit Guides
- Bi-Weekly outreach meetings with all of VA Outreach Teams
- Traveling Vietnam Wall and 9-11 Exhibit partners
- 50<sup>th</sup> Vietnam Commemoration
- DD214 Holder
- VGLI Insert

## Future Initiatives

National advertising contract

- Major newspapers
- Trade publications



- VSO, funeral industry, estate planning, end-of-life
- Partner with USPS to leverage the awareness of the flag benefit

Outreach standardized training module for all NCA staff conducting outreach

- Talent Management System
- VHA's EES
- Military Retirement Classes

Veteran Focus Events

- High visible events with 50,000+ attendance and large percentage of Veterans
- Fleet Week
- NFL Partnership
- Army-Navy Game
- Military Reenactments
- Major retiree events

“Through a variety of outreach platforms, this strategic outreach creates benefit awareness while engaging Veterans, family members and all stakeholders, but there’s still more to do,” said Lewandrowski.

### **Chairman Updates**

Chairman Kelly met with SECVA to discuss the processes of burial benefits and the unique function NCA has in respect to providing memorial benefits to Veterans and their families. SECVA is focused on customer service and providing the highest quality service to Veterans and their families. NCA customer satisfaction survey excels all of VA standards. SECVA also called for ideas in respect to implementing the MyVA initiative.

### **Meeting Adjourned**

Chairman Kelly adjourned the meeting for the day.

### **Wednesday, May 13, 2015**

### **Chairman Opening Remarks**

Chairman Kelly called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and introduced the Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Ronald E. Walters to present the Advisory Committee Project.

### **Remarks from Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Ronald E. Walters**

Mr. Walters outlined the duties and functions of the Advisory Committee and charged the group with specific duties. The committee will explore improving outreach, implementing weekend burials and explore digital memorialization options. NCA staff will communicate on a monthly basis with committee members. The Advisory Committee will discuss topics in depth and provide critical feedback at the next Advisory Committee meeting tentatively scheduled for the Fall 2015.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduced Michael Nacincik, Chief, Communications and Outreach Support, Steven Fezler, Program Analyst, Office of Field Programs, and Jeff Potts, Program Analyst, Office of Policy and Planning to discuss advisory committee charges.

### **Remarks from Chief, Communications and Outreach Support, Michael Nacincik**

Mr. Nacincik provided background on outreach and discussed the history of how Veterans receive information about burial benefits. A review of the NCA Survey of Satisfaction was used to illustrate Veterans preferences to receiving information of burial benefits.

The Advisory Committee is charged with:

- Examining whether current outreach areas should be modified or change; should any of the current initiatives be dropped, and exploring justification for expanding to new areas
- Determining if NCA is targeting appropriate groups to inform Veterans of memorial benefits; using appropriate communications methods to raise the awareness of targeted groups and devising new methods if necessary
- Developing demographic data to enhance NCA's capability to plan effective awareness outreach programs.

### **Remarks from Program Analyst, Office of Field Programs, Steven Fezler**

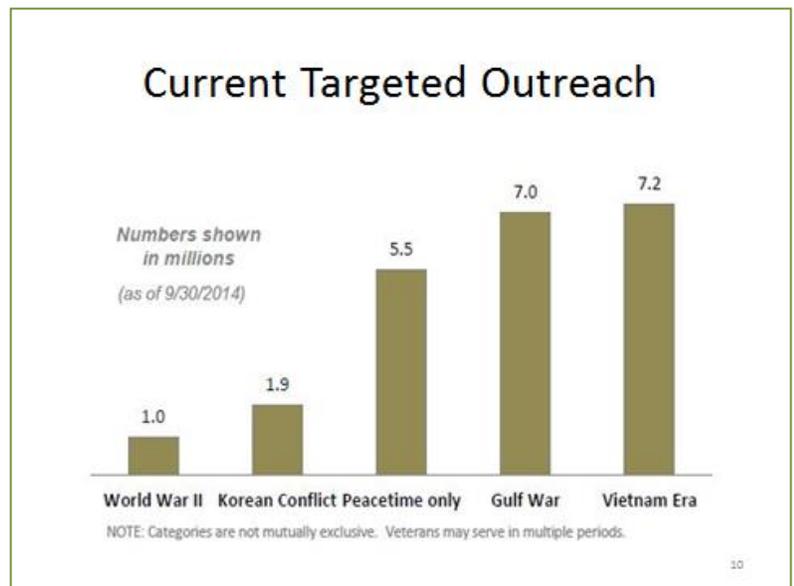
Mr. Fezler provided background on the weekend burial option. NCA cemeteries provide burial services Monday through Friday and the cemetery gates are open seven days a week. The Scheduling Office/Eligibility Determination is open seven days a week, 362 days a year and closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. NCA will provide weekend burials when a federal holiday falls on a Monday or Friday. Cemeteries will open for burials for one day over the holiday weekend as a service to Veterans and their families. NCA provides burial of Active Duty/KIA services on the weekends.

Advantages of weekend burial:

- More convenient than during work week for family members, travelers, friends, clergy
- More immediate burial scheduling
- No additional funeral costs (storage) incurred
- Alleviates burial surges on Mondays and Fridays.

Disadvantages of weekend burial:

- Possible disruption to visitor experience on weekends
- Increased funding requirements for weekend burials
- Possible implications for employee/employment union bargaining requirements
- Possible impacts on stakeholders (honor guards, volunteers, and supporting businesses).



The Advisory Committee is charged with:

- Research and analyzing the impact of weekend burials on stakeholders and developing a plan to engage them
- Developing a pilot project to implement the initiative.

**Remarks from Program Analyst, Office of Policy and Planning Service, Jeff Potts**

Mr. Potts provided background on digital memorial options. NCA contracted Booz, Allen & Hamilton, Inc. to conduct a survey for assessing Veteran preferences for burial and memorial options. The survey was mailed and conducted online to 30,000 Veterans nationwide. NCA also recruited 22 focus groups and 64 structured interviews with Veterans based on geographic, age, gender, race/ethnic diversity factors. The study highlighted Veteran interest in expanding NCA's memorial options, particularly in the area of digital and online memorials.

Focus group and Interview Results:

- Supported Survey Results:
  - Higher Interest in New Memorial Options
  - Lower Interest in New Interment Options
- Memorial Options
  - Higher interest in locating the veteran's grave and providing information on military service
  - Less interest on making post-military life public as it seems more personal

The Advisory Committee is charged with:

Determining Suitability of Federal Involvement:

- Deciding if online digital memorialization is consistent with NCA's mission to inter and memorialize Veterans
- Making suggestions for NCA to mitigate concerns associated with Federal involvement in public online tributes, such as censorship and oversight of comments

The Need for Federal Involvement:

- Determining if private sites are sufficient for Veteran memorialization? If not, why not?
- Determining characteristics or elements these sites provide as a model for NCA to consider
- Determining bases for public/private partnerships
- Determining what federal digital memorialization efforts provide a model for NCA

Data Review and Sources:

- Researching viewpoint difference among age groups
- Making recommendations for NCA to address the differing levels of interest among age groups
- Determining what groups would provide NCA insight on its consideration of digital memorialization options
- Selecting specific populations for NCA to survey

Programmatic Considerations:

- Making recommendations for NCA to pilot a digital memorialization approach

### **Committee Project**

Chairman Kelly discussed the workgroups that Advisory Committee members could participate/volunteer. The workgroups are dividing into outreach, weekend burials, and digital memorialization options.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly recessed the meeting for lunch, resumed the meeting and introduced ex-officio members Charles Sellars, Superintendent, Andersonville National Historic Site; Tom Sole, Director of Engineering and Maintenance, American Battle Monuments Commission; and Jack Lechner, Superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery.

### **Remarks from Superintendent, Andersonville National Historic Site, Charles Sellars**

Mr. Sellars provided an overview of the functions of the National Park Service (NPS) and provided background on specific cemeteries that NPS manages. NPS will host *The Funeral for 13,000 Event* in conjunction with National POW Recognition Day, September 16-20, 2015. This event will serve as the culmination of the commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War, and as a commemoration event for the 100th Anniversary of the National Park Service.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduced Tom Sole, Director of Engineering and Maintenance, American Battle Monuments Commission.

### **Remarks from Director of Engineering and Maintenance, American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), Tom Sole**

Mr. Sole gave an overview of staff and operating size and history of American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC).

Established by Congress in 1923, ABMC commemorates the service, achievements, and sacrifice of U.S. armed forces. ABMC manages 24 overseas military cemeteries, and 25 memorials, monuments, and markers. Nearly all the cemeteries and memorials specifically honor those who served in World War I or World War II - ABMC is tasked with "telling the story."

In FY 2014, ABMC acquired Clark Veterans Cemetery located in the Philippines. ABMC has started the process of operating and improving the cemetery. ABMC staff is conducting surveys to prioritize cemetery needs.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduced Jack Lechner, Superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery.

### **Remarks from Superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery, Jack Lechner**

Mr. Lechner provided an overview of Arlington National Cemetery daily functions, operations and future initiatives. Specific future projects include:

- ISS Enhancements
- Establish ISS as an Army Enterprise System
- QA Module Deployment
- Mobility Tablet Workflow Development
- Wi-Fi Network Coverage Expansion
- GPS Tracking for ANC Resources
- Kiosk Modernization
- ANC Website Enhancements

- Internal Events Management Module
- Headstone Designer / Marker Ordering System Revamp

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly called the Committee to discuss old and new business.

### **Old Business**

Chairman Kelly reported the recommendations from the last meeting where approved by VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald and were provided to leaders of the House and Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and members of the Advisory Committee. He asked for concerns about the report. He then discussed new business.

### **New Business**

The Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs charged the Advisory Committee to create workgroups to address increasing outreach awareness, possibility of conducting weekend burials at national cemeteries, and exploring digital memorialization options. Advisory Committee members may also introduce other options to explore, but is asked to focus on these three areas as a priority. The committee will be assigned NCA staff members to facilitate communication between the committee members and senior executive staff. Deadlines for reports are due by the next committee meeting scheduled in FY 2016.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly closed discussion on old and new business and opened the floor for recommendations.

### **Recommendations and Endorsements**

Chairman Kelly, DFO and NCA leadership discuss Advisory Committee recommendations and made endorsements.

**Recommendation I:** That VA considers providing a plot allowance for eligible spouses and dependents buried in state and tribal Veterans cemeteries.

**Recommendation II:** That the National Cemetery Administration create a mechanism to report when BOSS outages occur at state, tribal and National Park Service Veterans cemeteries.

### **Closing Remarks, Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs/Committee Chair/Mike Nacincik/Robin Cooper**

Each individual offered closing remarks thanking the Advisory Committee members for their participation and welcoming new Advisory Committee members to the group. Robin Cooper informed the group on the procedure for closing the meeting, travel and reimbursement.

### **Meeting Adjourned**



Michael Nacincik  
Designated Federal Officer

## Appendix A

### VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

The United States



*Founded 1899 by Act Of Congress*

Russell Mitchell Post 609

PO Box 25275

Alexandria, VA 22313

e-mail **VFW609@comcast.net**

William M. Jones  
Written Statement

Good morning/afternoon. My name is William Jones and I am the Commander of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 609. I want to thank the Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials for allowing me to speak today on behalf of VFW Post 609 as well as American Legion Post 1775.

I have been a member of VFW Post 609 for over 25 years and its commander for 11 years. I served in the U.S. Marine Corps for 8 years and am a Vietnam War veteran. In addition to myself, a lot of our members are rated 100% disabled by the VA. I am also a member of American Legion Post 1775.

I come before you today to seek your support for the request of VFW Post 609 and American Legion Post 1775 to be allowed back into the Caretaker's Lodge in Alexandria National Cemetery. These military service organizations have a long history and relationship with this cemetery and the VA.

These military service organizations have been the sole occupants of the Caretaker's Lodge in Alexandria National Cemetery for over 23 years. A third organization, the Vietnam Veterans America Chapter 917 was also an occupant until it recently disbanded. During this time, they served as responsible tenants of the building by paying for the heating oil and electricity, insurance to cover Post events, and a maintenance contract for yearly inspections and servicing of the boiler and hot water heater. These were all done at no cost to the VA, freeing up VA funds to provide vital services to America's veterans.

Just as important as their care of the Lodge, the VFW and American Legion Posts also provide critical assistance to the VA in taking care of the cemetery grounds. Alexandria National Cemetery is managed by the VA from Quantico. Because of the distance, Quantico relies heavily on our Post members in its caretaker responsibilities. For example, when the American flag is required to be lowered to half staff on special occasions, I am contacted and personally perform this service. Post members inspect the cemetery grounds after severe weather and report any damage or downed trees. The Posts also host community events such as Wreaths Across America and the setting out of American flags at the graves for this upcoming Memorial Day.

I want to talk more about this Community aspect of what the Posts provide to the Cemetery because it is so vital to the life of the Cemetery. The setting out of the flags for Memorial Day and the wreaths for the holidays are special events attended by members of the Posts, other veterans and active duty military, youth scout organizations, Daughters of the American Revolution, and community residents. These events provide an opportunity for these individuals to proudly show their patriotism and honor those who served their country. It has also made the Cemetery an active part of the life of the city of Alexandria.

As you can imagine, the Caretaker's Lodge is old and, as the decades passed, it needed extensive renovation. The renovation was scheduled to take one year and required the building to be empty. At the end of May in 2013, the VFW and American Legion Posts put their furniture, equipment and records into temporary storage and started holding their meetings at a VFW Post in Arlington. This proved a hardship to the Posts since, in addition to the storage costs, older Post members were not able to attend the monthly Post meetings at this location as it was much harder to get to. Also the Posts were unable to provide vital services to Alexandria veterans, such as being able to meet with them to assist them in filing their VA claims. It was a hardship, however, that the Posts were willing to endure because they knew how important the renovations were.

Unfortunately, one year came and went and we heard no word from the VA as to when the work would be complete and we would be able to move back in. We finally reached out to Thomas Muir, the Deputy Under Secretary for Management, National Cemetery Administration, and Senator Mark Warner's office. On December 2, 2014, I had a meeting with Mr. Muir and several other VA representatives, which was also attended by a representative from Senator Warner's office. At that meeting, Mr. Muir assured us that the VA wanted us back in the Caretaker's Lodge. Mr. Muir and everyone at that meeting indicated that the VFW post would be back in the Lodge well before Memorial Day so that we could have a big re-opening ceremony at the end of May. It has now been 5 months since that meeting, Memorial Day is on May 25<sup>th</sup>, and we still have not been told when the final work will be completed and we will be able to move back in. As you can imagine, this wall of silence is extremely frustrating.

For over 23 years, our veterans organizations have served Alexandria's veterans, the Alexandria National Cemetery and the American heroes buried there with devotion. We consider it an honor to be able to do so. We are asking that the VA honor its commitment to us and allow us to move back into the Caretaker's Lodge as soon as possible.

**William M. Jones**  
Commander  
VFW Post 609