

**Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials
October 31 – November 1, 2007
Washington, DC
Minutes**

Committee Members Present:

James Adams	Rose Elizabeth Lee
Les Beavers	Carl Kikerpill
Judy Bissinger	Thomas Lockhart
Stan Brown	Donald Loudner
Bob Cardenas, Acting Chair	Joe Martory
Wilfred Ebel	Ben Spadaro
John Kelly	Judith Young

Committee Members Absent:

Jerry Laws, Chairman
James Altmeyer

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Fred Boyles, National Park Service
Jack Metzler, Jr., Arlington National Cemetery
Tom Sole, American Battle Monuments Commission

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Attendees:

Darlene Jones, Chief, Procedures and Program Development Staff (VBA)
Phil Riggan, VA Advisory Committee Management Officer (00AC)

National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Attendees:

The Honorable Gordon H. Mansfield, Acting VA Secretary
The Honorable William F. Tuerk, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
Richard A. Wannemacher, Jr., Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
Mike Nacincik, Designated Federal Officer, Chief, Communications and Outreach Support Division
Steve Muro, Director, Office of Field Programs
David K. Schettler, Director, Communications Management Service
Fred Neun, Director, Office of Construction Management
Frank Salvias, Director, State Cemetery Grants Program

Ron Walters, Director, Office of Finance and Planning
Don Murphy, Acting Director, Memorial Programs Service
Tish Tyson, Program Analyst, Legislative and Regulatory Division
Robin Cooper, Advisory Committee Program Manager

Public Attendees:

Daryl Puryear, the American Legion
Denise Williams, the American Legion

Wednesday, October 31, 2007

The fall meeting of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials for Fiscal Year 2008 was held in the Eaton Conference Room 819 of the Lafayette Building at 811 Vermont Avenue, Washington, DC.

Call to Order and Welcome

Acting Chairman Bob Cardenas called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The Committee members stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Acting Chairman Cardenas then introduced the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, the Honorable William F. Tuerk.

Remarks by the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs

The Under Secretary began by welcoming the Committee and commenting on the appointment of Acting Secretary Gordon Mansfield, after Secretary Jim Nicholson's departure at the end of September. He also introduced Frank Salvas, the new addition to NCA staff as the Director of the State Cemetery Grants Program. Under Secretary Tuerk congratulated Scott Gebhardtsbauer on his excellent performance as interim Acting Director of the State Cemetery Grants Program, while the position was vacant.

The Under Secretary then announced that since 2005, five new national cemeteries and six new state veterans cemeteries have been opened, bringing the burial option statistic to 83% of our veteran population being served within 75 miles of their homes – a remarkable achievement. And we are continuing to expand. At five of the six newest national cemeteries to be constructed, NCA has awarded, or will award this month, design contracts to selected Architectural and Engineering firms. Phase 1 areas are planned to be opened by the fall of 2008. Bringing six cemeteries on line, almost simultaneously, is a full-time, team effort. It requires constant support within our NCA staff. Under Secretary Tuerk acknowledged that it also requires the advice and counsel of the Advisory Committee and voiced his appreciation of their efforts.

A controversial issue that has risen recently concerns the flag folding ceremony. During committal services our honor guards fold the flag in traditional fashion and present it to the decedent's survivors. There is no official text or commentary that accompanies that portion of the ceremony, nor is there any particular symbolism in the thirteen folds. Over time, a number of recitations have evolved that purport to state the significance of each of the thirteen folds. Some of the recitations are religious in nature and raise the question if it is appropriate for a federal entity to use them. In September, the Under Secretary received a complaint from a next of kin who found a particular verse of the recitation in error. Contrary to what has been reported inaccurately by the media, this was not a person who objected to the mention of God, the divinity, religion, etc. Specifically what was stated was that the twelfth fold represented and commemorated "the gods Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" and probably should have been, "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Mr. Tuerk felt the validity of his objection caused NCA to do a review of what was being said at committal services by employees and volunteers, without NCA's authorization and not at NCA's direction. Director of Field Programs Steve Muro issued a memo stating no more recitations should be performed during the ceremony because NCA doesn't know what is being presented. The memo started some criticism from veteran's groups, from some members of Congress, and from some elements of the press, saying that NCA was trying to ban references to the divine from our national cemeteries and from our committal services at a time of a person's death, when it is a pretty apt time to mention the afterlife and similar issues – if that's your belief. The Under Secretary said a draft statement to clarify our policy with respect to recitals is in the works and a priority. The policy of NCA is this, "Our employees, our volunteers, who are deemed to be our employees for practical purposes, will be authorized to recite a text concerning the purported meaning of the thirteen folds. We however, will not be the providers of the text. We won't referee who is included and who isn't, in the proper expression of tradition in such matters. We will allow our employees and volunteers to recite such a text if it is presented to them by the survivors of the deceased. We won't provide a text. We won't approve any text. We will read text that survivors present for us to read. We will not discriminate. We will treat all such text equally, those that contain references to some faiths, to all faiths, to no faiths. We will not exclude references to faiths other than those that are typically contained in the text that I have seen, and that is specifically the Jewish and Christian traditions. We will accept **all** such texts on an equal and non-discriminatory basis. That I think is a wise policy – one that General Counsel advises is the most permissive that we can have." With that, the Under Secretary concluded his remarks.

Remarks from Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs

Mr. Wannemacher provided an update on the NCA employees in the field who are serving veterans and their families every day. In August the third class of cemetery director interns from the NCA National Training Center in St. Louis graduated. It was an exceptionally well-qualified class. Eight of the graduates are they themselves veterans. The ninth holds a master's degree in military studies. Those individuals assumed their new positions at cemeteries across the country on August 31st.

The Deputy Under Secretary went on to say that NCA has recently established another initiative - the NCA Leadership Institute – that is targeted for employees in the grades of GS 9 to 12... for Wage Grade System Supervisors, and Wage Grade System Team Leaders identified as high potential employees, people who have the motivation to succeed in leadership positions within NCA. Seventeen participants from across NCA were selected for the inaugural class, which will graduate on November 15. The Leadership Institute is the most recent development in NCA's commitment to provide professional training and career development opportunities for our employees. The National Training Center, the Leadership Institute and NCA's training program as a whole are key components to ensuring the consistent application of NCA's uniform standards for operations throughout VA's 125 national cemeteries.

The Organizational Assessment and Improvement Program provides continuous assessment of NCA's progress and improvement of processes and procedures. NCA's Office of Human Resources is exploring new ways to recruit a diverse, qualified, and professional workforce. The Office of Contracts is ensuring opportunities are extended to veteran-owned and disabled-veteran owned businesses. In addition, NCA's Information Technology staff is continuing to provide a model for customer service within VA's integrated IT system. Mr. Wannemacher concluded by thanking the Committee for their contributions in improving the burial and memorial services that are available to veterans and their families.

Remarks from VA Advisory Committee Management Officer

Mr. Phil Riggin, who has oversight responsibility for all 26 VA Advisory Committees, distributed a list of the committees that includes 15 that have been established by statute and 11 non-statutory panels designed to provide advice on specific issues concerning selected VA programs and policies. The list also included summaries of the committees' objectives. The statutory Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials is the third oldest committee, established in 1973 through a bill signed by the President of the United States.

The Advisory Committee's biannual report, which is a summary of activities over the past two years, also includes a number of recommendations to be sent to Congress as a part of the Committee's responsibility. In the case of the Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials, the NCA staff is responsible for updates on the progress of implementation of recommendations.

Field Operations Update

Mr. Muro spoke about the geographic locations of the five Memorial Service Networks and the regions where there are new national cemeteries under development, as well as future cemeteries. He briefly discussed basic burial benefits and eligibility criteria. He provided statistics on projected veteran deaths to the year 2020, past and projected annual interment rates to FY10, and demographic and cemetery workload indicators.

Statistics show an ever-increasing percent of the veteran population served within a 75 mile radius of a national or state veterans' cemetery (from approximately 65% in FY97 to a projected 90% in FY10). The ten most active national cemeteries in FY07 in order of the highest number of burials are: Riverside, California; Florida; Calverton, New York; Fort Snelling, Minnesota; Jefferson Barracks, Missouri; Fort Sam Houston, Texas; Fort Logan, Colorado; Willamette, Oregon; Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas; and the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona. The FY07 total number of headstones, markers, and inscriptions was 361,115. There were 423,143 Presidential Memorial Certificates (PMCs) issued in FY07. Mr. Muro outlined the functions of each of the Memorial Program Service (MPS) processing sites at Fort Leavenworth, Nashville, Lebanon, and Puerto Rico. He concluded his presentation by providing contact information and entertaining any questions or comments from the Committee members.

Arlington National Cemetery Update

Superintendent Jack Metzler provided the following statistics on FY07 funerals at Arlington National Cemetery (ANC): of the total of 6,778 funerals, 4,052 were ground burials, with 2,532 casketed and 1,520 cremation burials (63.4% of the total funerals were cremations). The inurnments at the columbarium (opened in 1980) numbered 2,726. Mr. Metzler pointed out differences in eligibility requirements from VA national cemeteries. Eligibility for in-ground burial at ANC is extended to any active duty member of the armed forces who dies while on active duty, regardless of the circumstances (natural causes, war, accident, etc.). In addition, any service member retired from active duty after 20 or more years is likewise eligible for in-ground burial. Any veteran who is honorably discharged and the recipient of the following awards is eligible: distinguished service cross, air force cross/navy cross, silver star, distinguished service medal, medal of honor, or the purple heart. Ground burial at ANC is available to any former POW who served honorably. Also eligible are reservists who meet the following three criteria: one period of active duty other than training; a total of 20 years reserve service; and reached at least 60 years of age. Current or former Presidents or honorably discharged former active duty veterans who held any of the following positions are eligible: Vice-President; a member of the Supreme Court; a senator, congressman, cabinet member or former cabinet member; or an ambassador at a level one posting. Regardless of who predeceases whom, the following persons are eligible as well for ground burial at ANC: a spouse, widow, widower, minor child, or permanently dependent child of an eligible veteran.

Eligibility for columbarium inurnment at ANC more closely mirrors the requirements at VA national cemeteries. Any honorably discharged veteran who has a period of active duty service is eligible for inurnment in the columbaria at ANC. At VA national cemeteries, any discharge (including a general discharge) other than dishonorable meets eligibility requirements.

Any veteran who is eligible for in-ground burial at ANC and whose remains are not available for burial is eligible for a memorial marker which is placed in a special section for that purpose.

Communications Update

The Director of Communications Management Service for NCA, David Schettler told Committee members that much of the communications information would be provided by other presenters. He did, however, want to inform the members of the publication of the book, "Sacred Ground" by author Tom Ruck. Mr. Ruck compiled photographs of several national cemeteries into a wonderful coffee-table book honoring our VA national cemeteries. Mr. Ruck solicited approval of the project to the delight of VA and NCA officials. He received a Secretary's award for the book. All proceeds from Mr. Ruck's royalties will go to the Freedom Alliance Scholarship Fund, which provides educational scholarships to the children of American military veterans who were killed or wounded in action.

Construction Update

Office of Construction Management Director Fred Neun opened his presentation by conveying the mission, which is to provide burial space to accommodate the needs of veterans and their dependents. The most important responsibility of the office is gravesite expansion. For FY08, \$25 million was requested in the President's budget for minor construction. We may be so fortunate as to receive more than that amount. Proposed minor construction projects include: monies for mini-minor projects in each Memorial Service Network, the wide-spread installation of columbaria, and land donation and acquisition. At the direction of the Millennium Act of 1999, the following six national cemeteries were opened and are operating: Fort Sill, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Atlanta, Sacramento, South Florida. In January 2007, Secretary Nicholson created a new office, the Office of Construction and Facilities Management for VA. They will have the responsibility for all major construction plans in VA, that is, all projects exceeding \$10 million. In the President's approved budget for major construction for FY08, we are awarded \$166.4 million. That number is so high because the funding for construction of six new cemeteries is included. These Public Law 108-109 cemeteries are at: Fort Sam Houston, Texas; Bakersfield, California; Birmingham, Alabama; Columbia, South Carolina; Jacksonville, Florida; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Sarasota, Florida.

Remarks from the Acting Secretary of VA

Under Secretary Tuerk introduced Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable Gordon H. Mansfield. He assumed his current responsibilities with the departure of Secretary Nicholson on October 1, 2007. The Acting Secretary acknowledged that despite a population of 244,000 employees, VA can not do it all alone. We need outside advice from a diverse, objective group that becomes a national voice of the people, in order to make better, informed decisions on how to serve veterans. It is vitally important that the Committee members have accepted the responsibility as advisers to the Secretary and to the department. Acting Secretary Mansfield extended a very heartfelt thanks to each of the members for their caring, active participation in

making a better VA that gets better results in helping veterans. Group photos were taken.

Memorial Programs Service Update

Acting Director Don Murphy presented on behalf of the service. The number of headstones, markers, and inscriptions increased from 335,172 in FY06 to 361,115 last FY. Of course the increase is based solely on the number of applications received and processed. Of the more than 360,000 total, 100,000 were supplied to our national cemeteries, 35,000 for federal and state cemeteries, and the remaining 220,000 are given to private cemeteries who are interring veterans. Applications for markers and headstones in a private cemetery can be received by regular mail or toll-free fax. Of the approximate 850 applications received daily, 550 are received via regular mail and 300 are received via fax, which was established to meet the break in mail service during the anthrax scare. In 1994 the MPS (1 800) call center was established to answer questions on eligibility, how to complete applications, status of an application, or questions in general. The total number of calls received during FY07 was 82,159 with an average wait time of just 1 minute, 9 seconds. The number of issued Presidential Memorial Certificates (PMCs) rose from 405,538 in FY06 to 423,143 in FY07. On average, 2.5 PMCs are issued to family members per written request. PMC requests can also be generated by the first notice of death by VBA. Those requests authorize a certificate be sent only to the next of kin of the deceased veteran.

Current initiatives in MPS include: the e-1330 application, customer notification postcards, the headstone/marker cleaning project, and the MPS brochure. The e-1330 is a web-based electronic version of the VA Form 40-1330, or application which allows submissions via the Internet. It will be made available to the public very soon. The automated, system generated customer notification postcards sent via the US Postal Service verifies receipt, approval, and processing of VA Form 40-1330. It also provides an expected delivery date and address. The headstone/marker cleaning project is a two year study involving five national cemeteries to determine the most effective, efficient, least damaging process and product to clean headstones and markers. MPS is currently working to extend the study with two of the five participating national cemeteries for two additional years. The MPS brochure highlights the most common errors made when completing the VA Form 40-1330 so they can be avoided. It will also be used as an outreach marketing tool to be disseminated throughout NCA. Mr. Murphy concluded his presentation by providing contact information.

Legislative and Regulatory Update

Senior Program Analyst Tish Tyson introduced the present staff of the Legislative and Regulatory Division of NCA who were in attendance. Primary responsibility of the division is for legislative affairs, regulations, Congressional relations, and policy documents. As far as Congressional relations, the division handles any inquiries that may come from a member of Congress, their staff, or a Committee. The staff member goes to a subject matter expert to formulate an accurate, timely, and consistent

response. They are also called upon to provide views on particular pieces of legislation at which time senior managers' aid in formulation of a response that goes through the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) who coordinates with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for refinement of views before going to the Committee who requested the views. The division also prepares NCA witnesses, testimony, and conducts research into potential and post-hearing questions and answers for Congressional hearings.

The legislative process consists of both the House of Representatives and Senate agreeing on a proposed bill within a session. Both chambers and the President must agree on a bill before it becomes law. Usually no more than 5% of introduced bills become public laws. The Legislative and Regulatory Division has tracking responsibilities for all legislation that may impact NCA or veterans' memorial benefits, like changes in eligibility, establishment of a national cemetery, and bills that would provide additional authorities.

State Cemetery Grants Program Update

The newly appointed Director of the State Cemetery Grants Program, Frank Salvas introduced himself to the Committee members. Because NCA is currently operating under a Continuing Resolution, we can only grant partial commitment to projects. For FY08, there are 39 pre-applications valued at approximately \$168 million.

The eight new cemeteries under construction are: Anderson, SC; Radcliff, KY; Glennville, GA; Williamstown, KY; Des Moines, IA; Abilene, TX; Missoula, MT; and Fort Riley, KS. There are also seven major expansion/improvement projects underway at existing cemeteries: BG Doyle, NJ; Boulder City, NV; Agawam, MA; Crownsville, MD; Cheltenham, MD; West Hawaii; and Exeter, RI. Thirty-six states are participating in the program and operate 67 state cemeteries. That total will be 44 participating, including Guam, Saipan, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Public Law 109-461 Section 403 provides for American Indian participation as well, which may impact funds in the future. The figures from state veterans' cemeteries participating in the program have grown from 38 cemeteries having 13,392 burials in 1999 to over 23,250 burials at 67 cemeteries in 2007. The nine new cemeteries under design are: Ft. Riley, KS; Ft. Leonard Wood, MO; Springvale, ME; Alliance, NE; Ft. Polk, LA; Aguadilla, PR; North East, KY; Spokane, WA; and Jackson, MS. The nine expansion and improvement projects under design are: Jacksonville, NC; Boulder City, NV; Garrison Forest, MD; Stockley, DE; Union Grove, WI; Wrightstown, NJ; Bluffdale, UT; Knoxville, TN; and Boscawen, NH.

Mr. Salvas named his supporting staff and provided the URL for the State Cemetery Grants website to the Committee members.

Veterans Benefits Administration Update

Ms. Darlene Jones of VBA spoke on the Compensation and Pension Service, processing burial claims. Provided to the veteran's family at the time of death are: the gravesite, opening and closing of the site, the headstone or marker, the burial flag, funeral honors, PMCs, burial cost reimbursement, and perpetual care. She went on to say that VA burial benefits are **only** payable on behalf of a former serviceperson who is considered to have been a veteran and that VBA burial benefits consist of a burial allowance, plot allowance, and transportation allowance. In addition for those eligible, VA provides: service-connected death burial allowance, non-service-connected death burial allowance, plot-interment allowance, and transportation allowance. For the purposes of the claimant, an individual may be eligible for a VA burial allowance if: they paid for a veteran's burial or funeral **and** they have not been reimbursed by another government agency or some other source, such as the deceased veteran's employer **and** the veteran was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. In addition, at least **one** of the following conditions must be met: the veteran died because of a service-related disability **or** the veteran was receiving VA pension or compensation at the time of death **or** the veteran was entitled to receive VA pension or compensation, but decided not to reduce his/her military retirement or disability pay **or** the veteran died in a VA hospital, in a nursing home under VA contract, or while in an approved state nursing home. For the purposes of payment of burial expenses, a veteran must have served during a period deemed to be active military, naval, or air service under 38 CFR 3.6(b)(6).

VA will pay up to \$2,000 toward burial expenses for service-related deaths on or after September 11, 2001 or up to \$3,000 toward burial and funeral expenses, and a \$300 plot-interment allowance for non-service-related deaths on or after December 1, 2001.

Budget Update

Director of Office of Finance and Planning Ron Walters presented to the members. When providing FY07 discretionary budget highlights, Mr. Walters stated that all but \$1 million or .6% for operations was spent, making it the least amount ever available for carryover in NCA. So NCA had a very successful year in terms of budget execution. The contracts for 14 of 15 minor construction projects on the operating plan were awarded, as well as five additional awards. The planned level of \$46 million was spent in the State Cemetery Grants Program and there was continued progress on six new national cemeteries in the major construction program.

Looking forward to the FY08 budget, the hearings that have been completed are: the House and Senate Veterans Affairs (Authorizing) Committees; the House Budget Committee; and the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees. Together Congress voted to provide VA with \$7 billion above the generous Presidential request of \$39.5 billion. The House Appropriations Committee action would provide an 8% increase over the President's request and the Senate Appropriations Committee action

would provide a 50% increase over his request. If approved, it will mark the highest level enjoyed in the appropriations process.

Thursday, November 1, 2007

The Committee met at 8:30 a.m. and departed for Quantico National Cemetery. After entering the cemetery grounds, the Committee was greeted by newly appointed cemetery Director Karl MacDonald. Quantico National Cemetery boasts 726 acres. There are three new sections of pre-placed crypts. The cemetery is currently utilizing a new committal shelter, irrigation system, and employs 21 FTE. The wreath-laying ceremony was conducted by Judith Bissinger, Les Beavers, and Mike Nacincik. A group photo was taken before the tour continued, which included a stop at the Memorial Pathway.

Next the Committee toured the Centralized Contracting Office and the Quantico Regional Processing Center. The Centralized Contracting Office processes approximately 400 contracts per year and the amount of awards total near \$150 million for FY07. The Regional Processing Center is one of five data centers for the Department of Veteran Affairs. The center is primarily responsible for the design, development, implementation, security and management of all data networks, systems and applications for NCA and many State Veterans Cemeteries.

Committee Business Session

The session began promptly at 2:00pm.

Recap of Recommendations and Endorsements from May, 2007 Advisory Committee Meeting in Atlanta, GA

Recommendation 1: The Committee suggests that NCA advise Congress to review the use of a "V" to mark veterans civilian markers in private cemeteries as described in H.R. 797 Bronze "V" Marker Option. The committee feels that the public will be confused by the "V" or not understand what it represents and suggests that instead of a "V" that the word "Veteran" be considered. The military uses a similar "V-device" with military medals to denote valor.

VA Response: The Department of Veterans Affairs has notified the Senate and House Committees on Veterans Affairs of concerns related to the design of an appropriate device and is prepared to offer technical assistance if the Committee so requests.

Recommendation 2: The Committee asks that VA contact the Federal Aviation Administration on behalf of Department of Veterans Affairs, National Park Service and state veterans' cemeteries to develop polices to reduce increasing noise levels at veterans cemeteries due to the low flying aircraft.

VA Response: The Department of Veterans Affairs believes that noise from low flying aircraft near national cemeteries is a minor problem associated with specific aircraft in isolated events and is not, on the whole, a major inconvenience for visitors or staff. In locations where noise levels are excessive and persistent, NCA will work with the appropriate authorities, to include the Federal Aviation Administration, to reduce noise levels.

Recommendation 3: The Committee commends the National Cemetery Administration and National Park Service for their joint Global Positioning System mapping of Alexandria, Va., National Cemetery and recommends that this be considered for future use by NCA.

VA Response: The Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes the benefits of Global Positioning System (GPS) integration within our national cemeteries to help manage, preserve, and document the historic landscapes and buildings maintained by NCA, as well as to locate underground utilities, emergency shutoffs, and irrigation systems, to name a few, and plans to expand its use. VA believes that combined with new-construction applications, this technology is an outstanding tool for tracking the evolution of burials, VA capital assets and historic features. In order to begin GPS integration at the cemeteries, NCA introduced "GPS Integration" as a funding line item for all new cemetery construction for Fiscal Year 2008 Major category construction projects and expanded to all cemeteries with the fiscal year 2009 Major construction plan (except Puerto Rico National Cemetery, which is projected to close by 2019). As funding permits, NCA intends to apply GPS integration to all our national cemeteries based upon lessons learned from implementation at the initial cemeteries.

Recommendation 4: The Committee recommends that the National Cemetery Administration determine the feasibility to produce 10"x4"x42" sunken shield and raised letter headstones to replace Civil War era headstones.

VA Response: The Department of Veterans Affairs supports this initiative and NCA's Memorial Programs Service is developing new specifications to be available for FY 2008. There are two sizes of marble headstones with raised lettering in a recessed shield; 12" x 42" x 3" and 13" x 42" x 3". NCA has begun introducing a third size for this type of historical headstone, which will be 10" x 42" x 3". This new headstone will be available for use beginning on October 1, 2007.

Recommendation 5: The Committee recommends an adequate burial allowance to off-set the cost of veteran burials in state veteran cemeteries under the provisions of the State Cemetery Grants Program.

VA Response: The Department of Veterans Affairs has contracted a private consulting firm to undertake a program evaluation of all memorial benefits, including the burial and plot allowances. When available, the study will be provided to the Advisory Committee.

Recommendation 6: The Committee recommends that the State Cemetery Grants Program funding be increased from 32 to 50 million dollars beginning in FY 2009.

VA Response: The Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes the contributions of State veterans' cemeteries in helping to meet the need for memorial benefits in areas not served by an open VA national cemetery. The President's FY 2009 budget will be submitted to Congress in February 2008. VA carefully analyzes its budget request to ensure its adequacy to meet the benefits needs for all VA programs. We believe the final budget request for the State Cemetery Grants Program will be sufficient to meet future demands.

Recommendation 7: The Committee commends the Memorial Service Network II, Georgia National Cemetery and National Cemetery Administration Veterans Affairs Central Office staff for their work in making this a successful advisory committee meeting.

VA Response: No response necessary.

New Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends that NCA consider an outreach program that encourages veterans to pre-register for eligibility for VA veterans' burial benefits.

Recommendation 2: The Committee recommends that NCA develop a fact sheet or brochure on what to do in order to prepare for end of life considerations.

Recommendation 3: The Committee recommends that NCA investigate the possibility of developing cooperating associations to allow for retail sales of theme related products to further the support by the public for national cemeteries.

Recommendation 4: The Committee recommends that NCA cooperate with individuals or organizations that may want to publish positive, favorable or informative books about NCA.

The date chosen for the spring meeting is April 28 – 29, 2008. The location will be West Palm Beach, Florida. The Committee was adjourned.



Michael Nacincik
Designated Federal Officer