




Committee Members Present:

James Adams	Rose Elizabeth Lee
Les Beavers	Carl Kikerpill
Judy Bissinger	Thomas Lockhart
Stan Brown	Donald Loudner
Wilfred Ebel	Ben Spadaro
John (Jack) Kelly, Chairman	Judith Young
Jerry Laws	

Committee Members Absent:

Bob Cardenas
Joe Martory

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:

The Honorable James B. Peake, M.D., Secretary of VA
Jonathan Gurland, General Attorney, Office of General Counsel

National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Attendees:

The Honorable William F. Tuerk, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
Richard Wannemacher, Senior Advisor
Steve Muro, Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
Mike Nacincik, Designated Federal Officer, Chief, Communications and Outreach
Support Division
Dave Schettler, Director, Communications Management Service
Pat Hallinan, Director, Office of Field Programs
Kimberly Wright, Director, Memorial Service Network I
Lindee Lenox, Director, Memorial Programs Service
Frederick Neun, Director, Office of Construction Management
Frank Salvas, Director, State Cemetery Grants Service
Ron Walters, Director, Office of Finance and Planning
Robin Cooper, Advisory Committee Program Manager

ICF International – Burial Benefits Program Evaluation

Dr. Christopher Spera, Consultant, Policy & Planning
Dr. Bradford Booth, Contractor, Policy & Planning

Public Attendees:

Ian DePlank, American Legion
Robert Madden, American Legion

Tuesday, November 18, 2008

The fall meeting of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials for FY 2009 was held on the banks of the Potomac in the National Harbor Meeting Room #10 of the Gaylord Resort and Convention Center at 201 Waterfront Street, National Harbor, Maryland.

Call to Order, Welcome, and Pledge of Allegiance

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

Chairman Kelly then welcomed Administrative Announcements and a Status Report from the previous meeting from Ms. Cooper and Mr. Nacincik.

The Chairman 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 thanking the members for their service. He assured, with great confidence that NCA is prepared for the upcoming transition to the new administration. The Under Secretary announced that Steve Muro had been named Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs and Pat Hallinan had been named the Director of the Office of Field Programs. Under Secretary Tuerk expressed appreciation to Richard Wannemacher for his years of service as Acting Deputy Under Secretary. Both are sure that NCA is well-positioned to meet the challenges of tomorrow, and well-prepared to fulfill its sacred mission in service to America's Veterans.

When USMA Tuerk first appeared before the Advisory Committee in November 2005, he stated four goals that he hoped to achieve during his tenure with NCA. The first of the four goals was to bring the 11 new cemeteries that were at the time in various stages of development to full operational status as expeditiously as possible. Second was to find ways to enhance the State Cemetery Grants Program so that Veterans in less densely populated areas might better be able to gain access to burial among comrades in places of honor. His third goal was to secure full funding for the National Shrine Commitment. Finally, the Under Secretary wanted to develop a plan to meet the burial needs of post-World War II generations and to have in place a workforce that would continue to be committed, enthusiastic, well-trained, and diverse. In assessing the progress that has been made, the Under Secretary provided a brief overview of what NCA has accomplished. First, Phase 1, ten-year build-outs are complete at the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies and at Georgia National Cemetery. Great Lakes, Sacramento Valley and South Florida National Cemeteries are in full operational status as Phase 1B is completed. "Fast Track" construction at three more cemeteries (Fort Jackson, Sarasota, and Jacksonville) will be complete this calendar year or within days thereafter. Three more national cemeteries will all be operational within 12 months. They are: Alabama, Bakersfield, and Washington Crossing National Cemeteries. Funding for State Cemetery Grants is at an all-time high: \$42 Million for FY 2009, with 11 state Veteran cemeteries having opened since 2005. When the state cemeteries to be funded in FY 2009 are opened, VA will have achieved its strategic goal of providing burial space within a 75 mile radius of 90 percent of the nation's Veterans. Great progress has also been made in fulfilling our commitment to achieve National Shrine status. NCA has invested in – and will continue to allocate funds for – projects to raise, realign, and clean headstones and markers, to rehabilitate turf, and to repair sunken gravesites. The fourth goal dealt with planning for the future of NCA. ICF International, a contractor which recently conducted an independent evaluation of NCA's burial benefits programs, is providing information that is a springboard to thinking anew of NCA's future course and direction.

Introduction of VA Secretary Peake

The Under Secretary then introduced VA Secretary James B. Peake, M.D. to Committee members who were being addressed by him for the first time since his appointment in December of 2007. Secretary Peake graduated from the US Military Academy and is a highly decorated combat Veteran, having served in Vietnam and thereafter in the 101st Airborne. He entered medical school and received his M.D. from Cornell University. His 38-year military career includes serving as US Army Surgeon General, among other honors.

Remarks from VA Secretary, the Honorable James B. Peake, M.D.

The Committee adjourned briefly in order to take photographs with the Secretary. The Secretary began by thanking USMA Tuerk and Chairman Kelly for the introduction, leadership, and work with the Committee. He then proceeded to comment on the impressive diversity of the Committee. He went on to extol the significance of providing a befitting burial space for the more than 111,000 World War II and Korean War Veterans to be interred in national cemeteries in 2009 and how important that is to the Veterans, their families and loved ones. It is equally important that NCA meets the needs of the OIF/OEF veterans and those of the younger generation that need our services. Secretary Peake offered his sincere appreciation of the services and benefits NCA provides. The Secretary then entertained questions and comments from Committee members and extended his gratitude for the service the Advisory Committee provides.

Return to remarks by the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs

Under Secretary Tuerk resumed his remarks following Secretary Peake's departure. He reports that NCA has made significant progress in the realm of succession planning and workforce development. The establishment of the NCA Leadership Institute in 2007 is another example of the commitment and the investment that NCA has placed in the continued development of NCA employees. Similarly at the NCA Training Center in St. Louis NCA has continued to expand and improve the Cemetery Director Interns program and other opportunities that impact key skills in cemetery operations, administration, leadership, and supervision.

He concluded by saying, despite his best efforts, he will not have visited each of the 125 National cemeteries during his tenure as Under Secretary of Memorial Affairs. He has visited 60 national cemeteries and 18 state cemeteries, where he enjoyed visiting and getting to know the people who interact with our Veterans and their families, at their worksites. He expressed his pride at NCA employee achievements and accomplishments. He thanked the Committee members for their service and all that they do for NCA and for the Veterans served.

Office of General Counsel

Chairman Kelly introduced VA General Attorney Jonathan Gurland, who addressed the ethics rules for the Advisory Committee members, which are considered Special Government Employees (SGEs). Mr. Gurland provided the annual compliance briefing which 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. The main criminal conflict of interest statute prohibits an SGE from participating personally and substantially in any particular matter (a matter narrowly focused upon financial interests of specific persons or a discrete and identifiable class of persons) that directly and predictably affects the financial interests of the SGE, his or her spouse, minor child, general partner, an organization in which the SGE serves as an officer, director, trustee, general partner, or employee, or an organization with which the SGE is negotiating, or with which the SGE has an arrangement, for prospective employment. Examples of "particular matters" would be a Veteran's benefit claim, a state cemetery grant, or a contract.

It is imperative that an SGE not “switch sides” in matters in which they are participating in their official Committee capacity. Two conflict of interest prohibitions are: acting on someone else’s behalf before the government and compensation for representational services. There is also a post-government employment restriction that imposes a lifetime ban on a former SGE from representing another person or entity to VA or another Federal agency or other specified entity in any particular matter involving a specific party in which the former SGE participated personally and substantially while serving in the Government. Of course bribery is prohibited.

According to the standards of ethical conduct, an SGE may engage in teaching, speaking, and writing as an outside activity and receive compensation for doing so. A federal employee or an SGE may not receive compensation where the subject matter of the activity is related to their official duties. An SGE may not solicit or accept gifts given because of their official position or gifts given by a prohibited source (ex: vendors, Veterans, and Veterans’ service organization). The gift limitation is that a gift may not exceed \$20 per occasion or \$50 from any one source per calendar year. When engaging in charitable fundraising in a personal capacity, an SGE may do so if they do not solicit from anyone known to have interests that may be substantially affected by their Committee duties. An SGE may not serve as an expert witness, except for the United States, in any proceeding in which the U.S. is a party or has a direct and substantial interest, if: (1) They have participated as an employee or SGE in the particular subject matter of the proceeding; or (2) Their employing agency is a party or has a direct and substantial interest and they (a) are appointed by the President; (b) serve on a commission established by statute; or (c) have served or are expected to serve for more than 60 days in a period of 365 consecutive days.

The U.S. Constitution provides that any person who occupies an office for trust or profit may not accept any emolument from any foreign government or foreign governmental entity or may not accept any gift or title of nobility or decoration, except to the extent that the Congress so authorizes. The law limits gifts SGEs can accept from foreign governments and international organizations to \$335 in value. The Hatch Act restrictions only apply while SGEs are performing their duties. Mr. Gurland provided contact information should the Committee members have further questions. The Committee members were required to sign and submit their Ethics Review statements upon completion of their training.

Remarks from Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs

Mr. Steve Muro gave the Advisory Committee members a preview of the new video, “A Sacred Trust” which is in final draft and will be distributed in its final format to members sometime in the near future.

National Program to Erect Memorials in VA National Cemeteries Workshop

Chairman Kelly introduced Committee member General Stan Brown, who had asked for resolution to the question, “Should the Department of Veterans Affairs play a role in educating our citizens, especially children?”. The issue has been raised several times in the past by General Brown. Fred Boyles will also present during the workshop. He defined the role of the National Park Service as interpreters of history at the cemeteries under their purview.

General Brown took the position that national cemeteries should teach the following lessons: prestige (enhance recognition of the Veteran's sacrifice and contribution to our nation), youth awareness (enhance our citizens' education and patriotism, especially our children), and perpetuity (the "School of Patriotism", on hallowed ground, will have everlasting purpose beyond the burial of our Veterans). General Brown feels that hallowed ground should be used to encourage patriotism and national heritage. He outlined the following criteria when deciding where the learning centers should be located: distance (bring the centers to those who may not be able to afford or otherwise have the means to go to a teaching location, such as Washington, DC), proximity to urban core or significant population, civic interest and/or commitment, and ability to raise large sums of money. General Brown proposed the following locations as initial learning centers: Riverside, California; Omaha, Nebraska; Atlanta, Georgia; and locations in the northwest and northeast. He said ideas for those locations could be suggested by Committee members. General Brown recommended that the existing NCA National Shrine program also become the vehicle to embellish the teaching of patriotism and national heritage to our citizens, especially the children.

Chairman Kelly reminded all present that under procedural rules, any considerations or recommendations to be made on this issue would be entertained during the New Business Session. The workshop is opened to discussion of the issue and to entertain the questions proposed by General Brown's presentation. When a Committee member asked General Brown to clarify what action he was requesting of the Committee and of NCA with regards to education, he replied, "I'm asking this group to recommend to NCA, the adoption of this program to create cemeteries throughout this nation and to allow the construction of memorials under their guidance (which is always the case) so that the children will have someplace to go in the vicinity to see what they come to Washington (DC) today to see". He went on to say that it is at no cost to NCA; that memorials at Riverside are constructed under guidance and with NCA's approval, but not at their expense. Mike Nacincik, who once worked in the VA Office of Public Affairs, gave details of the national VA Veteran's Day outreach. The program Committee, which was composed of 35 national Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), was responsible for: organizing and executing the Veteran's Day ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery; organizing and supporting regional sites throughout the country; and education of our nation's youth and all citizens about the role of Veterans and what they have done for our nation while in service and what they continue to do as private citizens after they left service. One of the things that Public Affairs did was to work with the Department of Education at the federal level, each state's Department of Education, and local school boards to produce a Veteran's Day information packet and educational kit that was mailed out to over 110,000 high schools, elementary schools, private schools, and junior high schools. The kit, which is now available online, provides lessons any teacher could offer about Veterans and VA, suggestions on how to produce a Veteran's Day program and activities for their schools to increase educational awareness. So VA is providing education at many levels for our country and our youth nationally and locally.

Chairman Kelly offered that it is not the role or mission of NCA to educate, but to honor Veterans with a final resting place in a national shrine with a lasting tribute that commemorates their service to our nation. The U.S. government has stated that education is the role of the state and local authority. They have created a separate cabinet agency to deal with the role of education. The National Park Service is charged with being "Interpreters of history". Fred Boyles will address that in his portion of this workshop.

Fred Boyles said that Congress has designated the National Park Service as interpreters of history. Interpretation is "the telling of the stories of our National Cemeteries". The Park Service cares for a total of 79 million acres in 49 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Park Rangers are tasked with three responsibilities: law enforcement, resource management, and interpretation. Interpreters communicate the park story to its visitors. The Park Service is where you can learn about the heroic sacrifices made by earlier generations, where the youth can learn about the blessings of liberty and about the great Americans who have sacrificed so much for our country. Author Freeman Tilden who wrote, "Interpreting our Heritage" defines interpretation as, "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information". Tilden's principles are that interpretation: is about relating to the visitor; is more than information; is a learnable art; is provocative (thought-provoking); should aim to present a whole, rather than a part; is fundamentally different to children than it is to adults. Rangers offer two methods of interpretation: personal (when someone is actually dealing with you one-to-one) and non-personal services.

Mr. Boyles said that some of the cemetery issues are that even though school groups have a legitimate reason for being at a site in a park service cemetery, they are strictly prohibited from attending during a funeral. Low interment rates at the two open National Park Service cemeteries (when compared to VA national cemeteries) allow for separation of groups of visitors. Another issue is that sometimes a cemetery doesn't necessarily have a story to tell, just something non-specific or generic.

Chairman Kelly reiterated that the U.S. government and Congress made a determination when they put in the charter of the National Park Service that one of their roles was education and interpretation, a mission which was not granted to the Department of Veterans Affairs. He asked if the Committee should ask VA to deviate from their mission or role and become an educational facility. Former Chairman Jerry Laws took exception with the idea of encumbering NCA with the responsibility of education in addition to their present duties. When asked, member Les Beavers provided information that his state cemeteries, under state legislation, conduct educational programs using the cemeteries. Any presentation for Veteran's Day is provided by a Veteran and not a teacher and is on specific occasions, not on a daily or ongoing basis. When asked what impact he thought a national program to erect memorials would have in a national cemetery, Jack Metzler responded that several million dollars per year is spent at Arlington National Cemetery in support of school groups that visit. Some of the costs that those visits incur are for: janitorial costs, the necessity of a paid parking lot, custodial clean-up after large groups, and road maintenance to accommodate the frequency and weight-load of commercial vehicles that are used to transport large groups. Chairman Kelly asked that the Advisory Committee members weigh the considerations that have been presented so far on this issue from all sources. The Committee then adjourned for lunch.

Field Operations Update

Newly appointed Director of the Office of Field Programs, Pat Hallinan was introduced as the first speaker when the Committee resumed. He refrained from repeating the usual opening information from field ops that Committee members are already familiar with and instead provided current status information. Of the 125 VA National Cemeteries, 65 are open, 21 are cremation only, and 39 are closed. The six cemeteries under development are: Bakersfield, Alabama (Birmingham area), Washington Crossing (Philadelphia area), Fort Jackson (Greenville area), Jacksonville, and Sarasota.

Mr. Hallinan next spoke about the National Cemetery Scheduling Office (NCSO), which is open seven days a week (only closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's). It is currently serving Memorial Service Network III and Memorial Service Network IV cemeteries, all new national cemeteries, Los Angeles National Cemetery, Port Hudson, and Alaska. It will expand to serve nationwide in FY 2009. The NCSO provides an electronic interment confirmation to funeral directors. Some benefits of the NCSO include: consistency, accuracy, and timeliness; it capitalizes on new technologies that support paperless, secure recordkeeping; it allows cemetery staff to handle other essential functions; and it is co-located with eligibility experts.

The Memorial Programs Service (MPS) results for headstones, markers, and inscriptions in FY 2008 were as follows: 111,764 in national cemeteries; 212,372 in private cemeteries, and 36,319 in state cemeteries and others for a total of 360,455 provided. The results for Presidential Memorial Certificates (PMCs) also from MPS and for FY 2008 were: 326,296 by application to MPS; 159,980 by VBA when death is reported; and 25,077 by NCA when a Veteran is interred in a national or state Veteran cemetery for a total of 511,353 certificates provided. MPS initiatives include: the medallion benefit; the customer survey for recipients of PMCs and headstones and markers for private cemeteries; the post card initiative (advises customers of status of headstone and marker applications); and the First Notice of Death (FNOD) Office (transfer of function from VBA).

Budget/Performance Update and Burial Benefits Program Evaluation

Ron Walters, Director of the Office of Finance and Planning, provided an update next. He began by commenting on the generosity of the President and Congress in FY 2008. NCA requested \$390 million and was given \$477, a 22% increase. The operations and maintenance budget gained \$28.2 million; major construction remained the same; minor construction gained \$50.6 million; and the State Cemetery Grants Program gained \$7.5 million in FY 2008. Much of the money was targeted to fund national shrine projects in the operations and maintenance and the minor construction accounts. Both accounts received an increase in funding that amounted to three times the requested amount for operations and maintenance and nine times the requested amount for minor construction. Those monies were spent on realigning and raising sunken graves and headstones and cleaning them. All but \$220,000 for operations was spent in FY 2008 – the least amount ever for carryover in NCA. Contracts awarded exceeded 30 national shrine projects. Contracts were awarded for 39 of 42 minor construction projects to include: roads, buildings, historic structures, and irrigation systems. In the State Cemetery Grants Program, 11 projects were awarded for a total of \$37.3 million. Continued progress was made on the six new national cemeteries in the major construction program.

With respect to the FY 2009 budget, the President and Congress were again generous. Monies were immediately available at the start of the FY, which aids in planning and execution of the NCA budget. The increase from both the House and Senate, above the President's budget, resulted in a 32% or a \$109 million increase. The FY 2009 major construction budget includes a new land acquisition line item (\$5 million), which allows VA the flexibility to acquire land quickly when the opportunity presents itself. The major construction budget also includes \$83.4 million for three gravesite expansion projects for Calverton, NY, Massachusetts, and Puerto Rico National Cemeteries.

Mr. Walters then moved on to address performance activities. By the end of FY 2008, 84.2% of Veterans were served with a burial option within a 75-mile radius and with the opening of four state Veterans' cemeteries. In FY 2009, that number will increase to 88% with the opening of the six new national cemeteries that are currently under development. Additional state Veterans' cemeteries will allow NCA to achieve the strategic goal of 90% by 2010. The percent of respondents who rate the quality of service and the appearance as excellent as well as the percent of graves in a national cemetery marked within 60 days of interment exceed 90% and are rated excellent in all areas. In addition, the independent Program Evaluation of VA Burial Benefits was completed in August 2008 by ICF International. They recommend continuing the use of the 75-mile service area standard for establishing new national cemeteries but reducing the Veteran population threshold to 110,000. NCA senior management is reviewing recommendations in keeping with the broader context of determining the future direction of NCA. The Advisory Committee of course, will also play a vital role.

Role of the Support Committee in Memorial Service Network (MSN) I

Director of MSN I (Philadelphia), Kimberly Wright, began her presentation with a greeting to all those present. She expressed thanks to those who had provided support for the Washington Crossing National Cemetery that had recently been dedicated. Ms. Wright indicated that there was very little official information to be found on support committees that are currently functioning in NCA. She conducted an informal count of MSN I, finding that of 33 national cemeteries, 11 of them had support Committees. Of those existing 11, only three met the criteria of support Committee as defined in NCA Directive 3013: "...of existing for a twofold purpose, to beautify the grounds of the national cemetery and to conduct major ceremonies or special events dedicated to those serving in the military or interred in a national cemetery." More often than not, a sole Veteran Service Organization (VSO) has, for many years, organized the major ceremonies for Veteran's Day and Memorial Day. Interaction between this group and the cemetery director tends to be very limited, other than for participation in funeral military honors. Ms. Wright also stated that while their contribution and support is very much appreciated, these groups do not typically provide the cemeteries with beautification projects or host other special events at the cemetery.

There are several very active support Committees like those at: Fort Snelling, Florida, Willamette, Calverton, and Long Island. They have provided services like: beautification projects, honor guards, special equipment for ceremonies, and transportation modes on cemetery grounds for both Veterans and the elderly.

Ms. Wright went on to say that the cemetery director's role is very important to the success of the support Committee. The Washington Crossing National Cemetery is in the process of formalizing a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Guardians of the National Veterans Cemetery, Bucks County. The group of over 147 Veterans and non-Veterans has the following mission statement, "To advocate for, protect the establishment of, and serve to defend, preserve, and support the National Veterans Cemetery, Bucks County on behalf of the Veterans of the armed services of the United States of America." The group is registered as a 501(c) (3) Corporation and funds raised by the group are specifically earmarked for charitable and educational purposes related to the mission of the National Cemetery in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. The Guardians will work with the cemetery director to plan beautification projects and improve public awareness of national cemeteries through ceremonies and special events.

The creation of the MOA gives clear guidance and protects the sanctity and reverence of NCA's mission to honor Veterans with final resting places in national shrines with lasting tributes that commemorate their service to our nation. The responsibility of the cemetery director then becomes to ensure that all support Committee members are registered with the VA Voluntary Service, he/she must attend every meeting or send a cemetery representative to do so in order to ensure that the projects and programs that are being proposed by the Committee are in keeping with the goals of the NCA operational standards and measures and national shrine commitment. Projects are to be well conceived and not to detract from the primary mission of the cemetery. It is also the responsibility of the director to be aware of any fundraising being proposed by the support Committee to ensure that such activities are not conducted on cemetery grounds, or that the Department of Veterans Affairs is not made an endorser of solicitations made by and on behalf of the support Committee.

Ms. Wright shared slides of a few beautification projects completed by support Committees such as the assembly area near a flagpole having been improved at Calverton and a small garden area with benches that was once a reflecting pool at Long Island National Cemetery. Ms. Wright closed by saying that the Committees are an integral and vital partnership and are assets to NCA that encourage participation and provide support for their local cemeteries.

A question and answer discussion period ensued that raised such issues as: How much on average does a support Committee raise for a project? What happens if the cemetery director doesn't find a project appropriate? What are the technical requirements or standards for submitting an idea for a project? Are funds to be held in trust for the long - term maintenance of projects? Kimberly Wright said of the support groups in MSN I that they typically raise less than \$100,000 for a project. The support group at Riverside National Cemetery has raised over \$1,000,000 for more than one of the memorials located there. They are the exception, rather than the rule, when it comes to fundraising. Pat Hallinan responded that the MSN director would make a recommendation if a cemetery director has reservations about a project idea for one of the national cemeteries. Fred Neun replied that a manual outlining technical requirements and standards has been presented to USMA Tuerk. Pat Hallinan said the manual has been vetted but still requires a final signature. USMA Tuerk said there were some issues that needed to be addressed concerning levels and responsibility of review. NCA hopes to have the manual ready by the end of the calendar year. General Brown said at Riverside, an ever increasing trust fund is established for perpetual maintenance of their memorials. Chairman Kelly offered that if the funds are not sufficient to cover repairs and maintenance, it could result in a liability for NCA. Tom Sole (ABMC) reminded the Committee that the number of private

memorials should be limited in order to preserve and protect the exceptional and unique quality at a site, which could diminish the message if it is overstated.

Medallion/MPS Updates

Lindee Lenox of Memorial Programs Service (MPS) reminded the Committee that Public Law 110-157 (signed in December 2007) made permanent and retroactive, the authority to provide a second marker for graves that are already marked with a private memorial and can now have a government headstone or marker. It also provided that a medallion or other device would be furnished that could be affixed to a private headstone or marker to have the grave recognized as that of a Veteran. The medallion is issued in lieu of a government headstone or marker, so someone can not have both. NCA contracted with the Army Institute of Heraldry for professional design services, and conducted a workshop for the Committee to obtain their ideas and recommendations for the new device. Thomas Casciaro, Chief of the Technical and Production Division, made drawings and notes and collected drawings as the Committee made suggestions. He noted that the Committee wanted a distinctive shape, wanted the medallion or device to be something that people could see immediately and from a distance when they went into a graveyard, wanted flag symbolism, wanted it to be all-encompassing (so as to represent Veterans from all branches of service) and timeless, and wanted the word "Veteran" inscribed on it.

Ms. Lenox showed slides of what the Institute produced. The first design was a shield shape representing the U.S. Coat of Arms with thirteen stars representing the original thirteen colonies and a laurel wreath symbolizing honor. Design #2 had a trefoil shape, symbolizing the folded U.S. flag and also was encircled with a laurel wreath. Design #3 boasted an eagle grasping thirteen arrows that represents courage with a triangle shape behind it to represent the folded flag. The Institute presented the Commission of Fine Arts with a presentation on June 19, 2008.

The Commission recommended Design #1 because they felt the shield is a familiar symbol; they liked the graceful design; they felt it suggested all Veterans; and that it was easily understood. In addition to the reasons articulated by the Commission, MPS chose design #1 because it was a superior resolution of forms and was very bold and distinctive. It was presented to the Deputy Under Secretary and he endorsed it as well as the Director of Field Ops. It was presented at the national Veterans Service Organizations meeting in October and they preferred this design as well. Several Committee members commented whether they agreed with the recommendation or preferred another design.

Ms. Lenox continued to present, in hopes of answering some of the questions that arose. She said that after consulting with responses to a FedBizOpps request, two metals had been considered for the medallion: bronze and aluminum. They also suggested affixing methods and sizes. Bronze was preferred over aluminum despite its intrinsic value because it is consistent with the other VA government products (headstones and markers); it weathers well; it is "classy" in that it honors Veterans appropriately; and it is heavier than aluminum. The 5" and 3" medallions were preferred for headstones and the 1 ½" was primarily for niche covers and markers. Epoxy was recommended for affixing the medallion to the surface of the headstone or marker and the blind drill and tap method. Both methods will be offered. A separate application form for the medallion is being designed and will be made available on the website. It should be available in the spring of 2009. When asked which of the three designs they preferred, the Committee voted as follows: Design #1 received three votes, Design #2

received eight votes, and Design #3 received one vote. Design #2, the trefoil, was the preferred medallion design among Advisory Committee members.

Construction Update

Chairman Kelly introduced Director of the Office of Construction Management, Fred Neun, who provided a status of NCA construction projects at the six cemeteries under development. NCA no longer controls its major construction projects; they fall under the purview of the Office of Construction and Facilities Management (OCFM) that Secretary James Nicholson created in January of 2007. The management, construction, and oversight of these major construction projects are handled by OCFM. However, Mr. Neun briefly presented the following data: Bakersfield, CA, boasts 502-acres, which will provide burial space for more than 200 years. In the first ten-year build out, 8,700 gravesites will be built. The first phase will be complete in May 2009, which will allow burials to commence in June. The total project costs are at \$19.8 million. The Alabama National Cemetery has 480-acres that will accommodate 11,050 gravesites in the first ten year build out. Construction was awarded in September, 2008. The projected completion date is in January, which means burials will start in February or March of 2009. Project costs are estimated at a total of \$18.5 million. Fort Jackson, SC will occupy 583-acres. The land is being transferred from the Army. The number of gravesites will be 8,200 for the first ten years. Construction completion estimate is for December 2008, which is when burials will begin. The total project costs are at \$19.2 million. The new national cemetery at Jacksonville, FL is over 525-acres. The total number of graves in the ten-year build out will be 16,200. The construction will be completed in December 2008 for Phase I, which is when burials will begin. The total project costs are at \$22.4 million. In Florida at Sarasota, the cemetery will occupy 295-acres and provide 22,300 gravesites in the first ten-year build out. Phase I of the construction completion will be finished and burials will begin in December of 2008. The total costs are \$27.8 million. The cemetery at Washington Crossing, PA is 205-acres and will provide 22,620 gravesites in the ten-year build out. Construction will commence in February or March 2009. Phase I at Washington Crossing will be completed and burials will start in September 2009. The total project costs are at \$29.6 million.

Mr. Neun then provided the following information on minor construction projects, which are projects that can be completed for \$10 million or less. In FY 2008, NCA received \$75 million, which will fund 42 minor construction projects that are currently in design or under construction. Among the top projects are: the total emergency money for all five MSNs in the FY 2009 operating plan is \$.5 million; Fort Rosecrans will receive \$5.1 million for the installation of a columbaria; Fort Logan will receive \$8.140 million for a 10,000 niche columbaria; Fort Bliss will receive \$2.04 million for a 2,000 niche columbaria; and Fort Hudson will receive \$4.84 million for site expansion and to install 2,400 pre-placed crypts. In areas other than gravesite expansion projects, the following minor construction projects are among the top in the FY09 operating plan: Bath will receive \$1.6 million to correct site drainage and repair roads; Los Angeles will receive \$4 million to replace roads and curbs; Zachary Taylor will receive \$0.85 million for total reconstruction of their storm sewer system; Fort Scott will receive \$.5 million for renovation/repair of their historic administrative building (lodge); and Nashville and Raleigh will receive \$6 million to repair historic perimeter walls in the cemeteries. Once the projects have been approved the money will stay with the project and roll over if needed until completion.

State Cemetery Grants Program Update

Director of State Cemetery Grants Program (SCGP), Frank Salvas briefed the Committee on the state cemeteries. There are 72 cemeteries in 36 states and also in Guam and Saipan. The following five state Veterans' cemeteries were dedicated in FY 2008: Glennville, GA; Anderson, SC; Des Moines, IA; Williamstown, KY; and Missoula, MT. There are two public laws that are currently very important to the SCGP: Public Law 109 - 461 which authorizes VA to offer grants to tribal governments and also Public Law 110 - 57 which establishes operations and maintenance grants. The operating budget for FY 2008 – 2009 is \$39.5 million, which allowed 11 grants to be awarded and \$2.9 million to be carried over. In FY 2008, SCGP established new cemeteries at the following locations: Ft. Riley, KS; Williamstown, KY; Springvale, ME; Alliance, NB; and Ft. Leonard Wood, MO. In addition, the following existing cemeteries expanded: Garrison Forrest, MD; Jacksonville, MO; Union Grove, WI; and Boscawen, NH. In FY 2008 improvements were made at: Boulder City, NV (maintenance building) and West Hawaii (full casket, in-ground cremains, columbaria, storage facility). With regards to the FY 2009 priority list, Mr. Salvas has validated that the preapplications on record are still valid and that the state matching funds have been certified by a state budget official as being put aside specifically for this purpose and to determine when they expire. As of August 15th of each year Mr. Salvas creates a priority list that is approved by the Secretary of VA. This major accomplishment defines and is a tool for planning projects for the upcoming year. There are 13 projects to establish state Veterans cemeteries. Seven of those projects are from American Indian Tribal Governments. Mr. Salvas stated that the grant process is a business process and that anyone who wishes to participate must adhere to it as such. He concluded by providing a contact list for SCGP.

ICF International – Burial Benefits Program Evaluation

Consultants Dr. Chris Spera and Dr. Bradford Booth provided the major findings and primary recommendations as determined by the burial benefits program evaluation conducted by ICF International who have been working with NCA for ten years. The first research question addressed was whether or not the current 75-mile service area standard was adequate and reasonable. The question of how far a family was willing to travel to have their loved one buried in a VA national cemetery had to be determined.

Findings indicate that there is no specific number of miles at which a family no longer considers burial in a national cemetery, but rather linear distance decided the propensity to choose a national cemetery. Propensity declines by 5% per each increase of approximately 5 miles in distance. ICF methodology revealed the following top five areas of unserved Veterans: Charleston, WV; Schuyler, NE; Tallahassee, FL; La Crosse, WA; and Houghton Lake, MI. A decline in the linear distance standard (from 75-mile to 65 and 55) would reduce the percent served to 82.4% and 74.1% respectively in 2010. Also, very few areas will meet the criteria for a new national cemetery between 2010 and 2030 regardless of the linear mile standard in effect, due to the 170,000 Veteran population thresholds.

They recommend that the population threshold be changed versus the service area standard. The following access policy recommendations were made: (1) Retain the 75-mile service area standard for the construction of new national cemeteries, but reduce the population threshold to 110,000 to allow more unserved communities to qualify; (2) Between 2010 and 2015, construct new national cemeteries, or assist states in constructing their own state Veteran cemeteries at or near the following locations, all of

which meet a criterion of 110,000 unserved Veterans within a 75-mile radius (Charleston, WV and Schuyler, NE); and (3) Between 2015 and 2020, construct a new national cemetery, or assist the state with construction of a state Veterans cemetery at or near Crystal City, MO, to replace Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery scheduled to close in or about 2017.

The next research question addressed was whether cremation only is an acceptable burial option for Veterans. Of the approximately 16,000 Veterans surveyed, 68% would feel served if cremation was the only burial option available at the nearest national or state Veterans cemetery. The following recommendation resulted: (5A) Adjust the formula for calculating percent served by a VA burial option by classifying two-thirds of Veterans living exclusively within 75 miles of a cremation-only national or state Veterans cemetery as served and one-third as unserved; and (5B) Track and set targets for two performance measures related to percent of Veterans served by a VA burial option: 1) percent of Veterans within 75 miles of a national or state Veterans cemetery offering both a casketed and cremation burial option and, 2) percent of Veterans within 75 miles of a national or state Veterans cemetery offering only a cremation burial option.

The next research question asked whether or not Veterans making a certain family income should be excluded from a portion of the burial benefits package. When considering the impact of a financial means test for the lowest proposed income level threshold (\$50,000 in 2008), the government would save over \$34.5 million per year, with a loss in benefits to Veterans' families per year of \$38.2 million. Recommendation 17 follows: Do not implement a financial means test at the current time, since existing data do not support VA moving forward with implementation. In assessing burial allowance in 1973, the service-connected burial allowance, the nonservice-connected burial allowance and plot allowance paid for on average 72% of funeral costs, 22% of funeral costs, and 54% of burial plot costs. By 2007, the value had decreased significantly and now represents 23% of the service-connected burial allowance, 4% of the nonservice-connected burial allowance, and 14% for burial plot costs. The following recommendations were made: (18) Establish a basis for each allowance, which should be a percentage of the average cost of a funeral, burial, and burial plot; and (19) Develop an annual schedule for review and adjustment of the allowances for funeral, burial, and burial plot costs using the Consumer Price Index for funeral expenses maintained by the Bureau of Labor.

Dr. Spera next covered the method by which Veterans and their families access information on VA burial benefits. A key finding on this issue is that while 17% of World War II Veterans selected VA's website as a source of information about burial benefits, over 75% of Gulf War Veterans selected the web as a preferred choice. ICF made the following recommendation: (7) Develop an interactive web-based tool targeting outreach to younger Veterans and their family members so that potential beneficiaries could enter information, and then get an explanation of the burial benefits to which they are eligible, including ones currently unknown to many.

In addition, the following recommendations were made by ICF International as a result of the burial benefits program evaluation: (10A) Expand the sample of the NCA Survey to include next-of-kin who interred a Veteran or family member in a national cemetery within the past 5 years (as opposed to one year); (10B) Conduct annual intercept surveys of visitors at closed cemeteries to collect data from these visitors; Enumerators would administer a short survey to a random sample of visitors; and (16) Continue to build and maintain national cemeteries and fund state Veteran cemeteries rather than adopt an alternative benefit using cash payments.

Wednesday, November 19, 2008

The Committee met at 8:15 a.m. and departed for the historic Congressional Cemetery located in southeast, Washington, DC. After entering the cemetery grounds, the Committee was greeted by cemetery Executive Director Cindy Hays, Chairperson Patrick Crowley, and Moss Rudley of the Historic Preservation Training Center of the National Park Service. The cemetery might best be known for its unique 165 cenotaphs (each a tomb or monument erected in honor of a person or group of people whose remains are elsewhere). NCA funded a \$1.75 million project to repair the 7,500 pound cenotaphs that are made of Aquia Creek sandstone, not unlike the U. S. Capitol and the White House. The Committee performed a wreath-laying ceremony before departing. When the Committee returned, they viewed a brief VA News clip which aired the week of August 4, 2008 on the reinterment of General Macomb and his wife after restoration on their monument had been performed. General Macomb was a celebrated hero of the Battle of Plattsburgh of the War of 1812.

Arlington National Cemetery Update

Superintendent John "Jack" Metzler, Jr., provided an update on Arlington National Cemetery (ANC). When reviewing the operating budget for FY 2009, Mr. Metzler noted an increase in contractual services. At one time ANC had 350 employees which are now reduced to only 96, requiring contracting out some services. Congress gave an additional \$5.5 million dollars, \$5 million of which was added to the budget for lands and structures and \$.5 million will be used for national shrine commitment (raising and realigning headstones and cleaning). The statistics for FY 2008 are: of a total of 6,904 funerals, in-ground burials numbered 4,123 and columbaria inurnments totaled 2,781. Of the in-ground burials, 2,527 were casketed burials and 1,596 were cremation. Cremations amounted to 63.4% of the total number of funerals. With regards to burial history, a spike in the number of burials occurred after President Kennedy's burial (1966), but then was reduced by about half after a change in eligibility occurred in 1967. A gradual increase resumed after eligibility for inurnment in the columbaria occurred after opening in 1980. A chain-link fence has been replaced by a half-mile stone boundary wall, which on the inside, houses columbaria. The height is three niches high and will yield space for 6, 573 inurnments. Mr. Metzler then presented slides of the next development project in which land has been transferred to ANC for expansion. A water-diversion project is currently underway in preparation for burials.

National Park Service Update

Superintendent of Andersonville National Historic Site, Fred Boyles, who had addressed the Committee earlier, provided updates. Mr. Boyles provided a binder of interpretive material on most of the National Park Service national cemeteries. He pointed out the educational program, the cemetery ramble (or scavenger hunt) at Andersonville. It uses some of the educational objectives of the state of Georgia to help children explore the cemetery on their own. There are national standards for education in each field and the ones pertaining to civics and social studies can be found at www.socialstudies.org. Educational objectives often trickle down to the state level. If a teacher wants to sponsor a field trip, an educational objective should be established, unless it is purely recreational. Committee members were invited to view guidelines for the state of Georgia at georgiastandards.org.

American Battle Monuments Commission Update

Tom Sole, Director of Engineering and Maintenance for the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), was the next presenter. He pointed out that ABMC, like the Park Service, is also tasked with "telling the story". They have provided guidance to ABMC by example in their interpretive centers. It was actually dictated in legislation for the Normandy Visitor Center how to go about conveying a story. The mission of ABMC is to commemorate the achievements, the sacrifice, and the service of our armed forces. ABMC honors with something exceptional and then tells why. An example is the preservation at historic site Pointe du Hoc, France. It was at one time a private monument but was then given to ABMC in 1979. It was closed in 2001 because of instability and was deemed unsafe for visitors. Congress has decided to remedy the situation but maintenance comes at a cost. Repair estimates are at about \$20 million according to a 2006 study. The observation bunker alone can be repaired for approximately \$6 million. Permission must be granted by France, who owns the land. ABMC assumes responsibility for maintaining historical icons such as this, much like the Park Service.

An interpretive program was instituted with the development of the Normandy Visitor Center. Three other sites are candidates for "telling the story" because they are historic sites. They are: Sicily, Italy (WWII); Oise-Aisne, France (WWI); and Manila, Philippines (Pacific). Of course it is imperative to have an audience to hear the story that is being told. ABMC solicits visitors from trade shows, interaction with tourist agencies, and by other outreach means.

Remarks from the Senior Advisor to the USMA

Mr. Wannemacher stated that throughout the past administrations, NCA has never lost sight of its goals and never failed to focus on its objectives; to memorialize, to inter those men and women who have served and have died. The Millennium Bill identified projects that needed attention but at the time there were no standards and guidelines on how to maintain the national cemeteries. NCA needed a team to provide assistance and direction to cemeteries as they faced these challenges. Also, NCA has seen innovations from its employees such as: a mower/trimmer, a lowering device, and tamping equipment. Recent accomplishments also include the establishment of the training center at St. Louis that provides unique training to new directors. Mr. Wannemacher expressed his confidence in NCA's achievements and its future under new leadership. He graciously thanked the Committee for their efforts. Under Secretary Tuerk took the opportunity to thank Mr. Wannemacher for his support and continuous service in NCA.

Committee Business Session

Old Business

The minutes from the spring meeting were motioned to accept and seconded.

New Business

Recap of Recommendations and Endorsements from April 2008 Advisory Committee Meeting in West Palm Beach, FL

Recommendation 1: The Advisory Committee requests the opportunity to review and provide comments on the draft VA Burial Benefits Program Evaluation and, if feasible, for the authors to conduct outreach to the Committee.

VA Response: VA appreciates the work that the Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials has done by providing thoughtful and valuable input to the Burial Benefits Program Evaluation. Committee members participated in stakeholder sessions as the contract Statement of Work was developed and with the Program Evaluation contractor, Caliber/ICF, as part of the analysis plan development. The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) will brief the Committee on the report, its findings and recommendations after the report is finalized. VA looks forward to continuing to work with the Committee in the future and considers the Committee's continued interest and input regarding these findings and recommendations of value in assisting NCA to make informed decisions regarding memorial benefits.

Recommendation 2: The Advisory Committee urges NCA to contact the "Trust for Public Lands" to study strategic opportunities to purchase land for future national cemeteries.

VA Response: NCA recognizes the importance of developing a proactive strategy to purchase land for future national cemeteries and to ensure the continuation of national cemeteries currently in service. Any entity that can assist NCA in purchasing available property for future national cemeteries is welcomed.

NCA is developing a list of site needs to determine which cemeteries have immediate, short term and long term acquisition needs. After NCA has developed the list, it would be appropriate to contact the Trust for Public Lands for any assistance that it can provide and to see if any public land is available to meet NCA's goals.

Additionally, NCA's senior managers are exploring alternatives to expand the pool of available properties and enhance site analyses prior to purchase. For example, our FY 2009 budget request includes \$5 million for a new Land Acquisition line item that will allow greater flexibility in the purchase of land when it becomes available.

Recommendation 3: The Advisory Committee recommends that NCA develop a Public Service Announcement (PSA) regarding burial benefits that may be used to highlight memorial benefits where new national cemetery dedication ceremonies are taking place.

VA Response: VA restrictions on advertising were lifted on June 16, 2008. The Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs may now purchase advertising in media outlets to promote awareness of benefits and services in coordination with the Department's Office of Public Affairs (OPIA). OPIA is evaluating the possibility of a PSA/Advertising campaign through a partnership with the Ad Council and the possibility of hiring contractors to develop a VA benefits PSA campaign. NCA will coordinate with OPIA to incorporate memorial benefits into any overall OPIA PSA/Advertising campaign.

Recommendation 4: The Advisory Committee recommends that VA, through an award from the Secretary of VA, acknowledge Worchester Wreath Company for their philanthropic efforts in organizing their Wreaths Across America (WAA) program. Additionally, the Advisory Committee recommends that all VA national cemeteries support and participate in Wreaths Across America.

VA Response: VA agrees that the Wreaths Across America program has promoted volunteerism and goodwill, and raised awareness of Veterans, NCA, and VA. The Department will consider appropriate ways to recognize the Worchester Wreath Company for the program. All VA national cemeteries currently participate in WAA. Each VA national cemetery has a WAA ceremony and prepares a media advisory and news release to generate public and media interest.

While General Brown was writing the first new recommendation, Wil Ebel referred to a credo he wrote for VA that stated a national shrine should be a place to rejoice as much to grieve and encouraged community participation. He also made reference to a memo from USMA Nicholson to NCA staff on defining national shrine status. Designated Federal Officer Mike Nacincik pointed out that any recommendation tasking NCA with anything other than what is specified in Title 38 (like educating) would probably not be favorably received by the Secretary of VA. Judith Young asked why the issue of education was being considered with the advancement of memorials. Chairman Kelly said they should be regarded separately.

New Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The Advisory Committee requests that NCA adopt the use of memorials at selected NCA cemeteries for the purpose of enhancing the education of our citizens, especially our younger children, about the sacrifice and contribution of our Veterans.

Recommendation 2: The Advisory Committee endorses the recommendations in the recent ICF International "Evaluation of the VA Burial Benefits Program" (Final Report August 2008) with the exception of the analysis of the drive-time standard.

Donald Loudner voted against because it failed to reflect the needs of small states that don't meet guidelines.

Recommendation 3: The Advisory Committee recommends that VA pay a \$300 plot allowance to the state for the cost of a plot or interment in a state Veterans cemetery for a Veteran's survivors (spouse or dependent child) when buried in a state Veterans cemetery.

The spring meeting of the Advisory Committee will be held in Fort Bliss, Texas. The meeting dates are Tuesday, May 5 and Wednesday, May 6, 2009. The meeting was adjourned.



Michael Nacincik
Designated Federal Officer