



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON
May 11, 2006



Commemorating 75 Years of Service

Mr. Jerry L. Laws
Chairman
Advisory Committee on Cemeteries
and Memorials
12601 Baylor Peak Road
Las Cruces, NM 88011

Dear Mr. Laws:

Thank you for the recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials' November 2005 meeting held in Washington, DC. I appreciate the work that the Committee has done to assist the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regarding its memorial affairs program.

Enclosed is VA's response to the Committee's recommendations.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. James Nicholson".

R. James Nicholson

Enclosure

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)
RESPONSE TO THE
NOVEMBER 29-30, 2005
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CEMETERIES AND MEMORIALS**

Recommendation 1: Each new Advisory Committee member will have an opportunity to attend an orientation at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Training Center in St. Louis.

VA Response: The NCA National Training Center in St. Louis was established to provide a high performing, well-trained workforce to ensure that NCA maintains VA cemeteries as national shrines. Initially focused on training cemetery directors and assistant directors, the new facility will eventually expand its classes to train foremen, equipment operators, grounds keepers, cemetery representatives, and other employees.

NCA welcomes the opportunity to provide orientations to new Advisory Committee members at the National Training Center. Ms. Judy Bissinger, a new Advisory Committee member, visited the Training Center and Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in February 2006. She received an overview of NCA and the Training Center, met with the cemetery director interns, and discussed her role as a member of the Advisory Committee. Ms. Bissinger also toured Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery and stated that her briefing and tours helped prepare her for her Advisory Committee responsibilities.

Recommendation 2: Explore the creation of regional signature cemeteries from within VA's NCA cemeteries, geographically dispersed throughout the United States. The signature cemeteries would focus on the education of young Americans, on the service of the people who are now serving and who have served in the military, and focus on improving their knowledge of the history of the United States.

VA Response: NCA encourages all to learn about the service and dedication of our Nation's veterans through visits to all VA national cemeteries. We believe that creating regional signature cemeteries could diminish the history of each unique national cemetery and may be viewed as promoting one cemetery over another. If a national cemetery were designated as a "signature cemetery," the public may ignore a local national cemetery in favor of a regional "signature cemetery." Likewise, veterans' families may misconstrue a "signature cemetery" as a more desirable burial location. VA appreciates the Committee's support of educational activities at all 122 national cemeteries. To further the education of young Americans on the service of those who served in the military as well as improving their knowledge of American history, NCA

has implemented and maintains an active history program that provides many of these opportunities. Representative activities include:

- Development of the video, *Landscape of Honor and Sacrifice*, to educate the public about VA national cemeteries and the sacrifices of our Nation's veterans.
- The Memorials Inventory Project attracted a large number of veterans, active-duty personnel, youth groups, and civic organizations, as volunteers, to document all monument and memorials on NCA properties. The volunteers' work encompassed field work and research. Many project volunteers commented that they were honored to participate and "give back" to those who sacrificed so much to preserve American ideals. They also stated that they gained new insights into the histories of their communities. Information and photos of 80 sculpture monuments were shared with the Smithsonian American Art Museum in January 2006 and were made available for viewing by the public through their SIRIS database at www.siris.edu the following month. A Final Report of project findings, along with memorial lists, was made available to the public at the NCA Web site in March 2006. Recent articles written to highlight the project findings include the SOS, spring 2006 newsletter, VAnguard magazine, May/June 2006, and Stone in America magazine, May/June 2005.
- Co-development of *Teaching with Historic Places* lesson plans and activities for students in grades 5-12. Working collaboratively with a high school history teacher and the National Park Service's *Teaching with Historic Places* program staff, NCA History staff helped create lessons on two disparate Civil War-era NCA properties in Ohio that are now featured on the program's Website: Dayton, formerly the Central Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, and Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery. Teachers from around the world can access these pages at the following Website: www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/.

These and related educational activities at our national cemeteries provide young and old Americans an understanding of the sacrifices that have been made by our Nation's veterans.

Recommendation 3: The Committee fully endorses all initiatives to explore acquiring properties through BRAC and CARES for building new cemeteries and expanding existing cemeteries.

VA Response: VA appreciates the Committee's support in these ongoing initiatives. VA has been, and will continue to be, an active participant in the BRAC and CARES processes to identify suitable land for cemetery purposes.

A Department-level work group was established to assess the availability of surplus DoD assets to meet VA requirements. NCA is represented on this workgroup by the Director, Office of Finance and Planning. All BRAC sites were evaluated for potential cemetery operations.

In the CARES process, NCA identified seven viable opportunities to acquire additional land from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) in order to keep existing national cemeteries open or to enhance the availability of burial options.

For example:

- 51 acres have been transferred from VHA to NCA for future expansion of the Mountain Home National Cemetery.
- 20 acres are being evaluated for the establishment of columbaria at Los Angeles National Cemetery, which is located adjacent to the West Los Angeles Medical Center.

Recommendation 4: The Committee commends the Office of Field Programs for issuance of a Mission Statement.

VA Response: The mission of NCA and the Office of Field Programs is to honor veterans with a final resting place and lasting memorials that commemorate their service to our Nation. We thank the Committee for its continued support.



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON
May 11, 2006



Commemorating 75 Years of Service

The Honorable Larry E. Craig
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The enclosed set of recommendations from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials is being submitted for your information. I have also enclosed VA's responses to those recommendations.

A similar letter has been sent to other leaders of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs. Your continued interest in VA and our Nation's veterans is appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

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R. James Nicholson

Enclosure



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

May 11, 2006



Commemorating 75 Years of Service

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Akaka:

The enclosed set of recommendations from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials is being submitted for your information. I have also enclosed VA's responses to those recommendations.

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May 11, 2006



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The Honorable Steve Buyer
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The enclosed set of recommendations from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials is being submitted for your information. I have also enclosed VA's responses to those recommendations.

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Commemorating 75 Years of Service

The Honorable Lane Evans
Ranking Democratic Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Evans:

The enclosed set of recommendations from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials is being submitted for your information. I have also enclosed VA's responses to those recommendations.

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