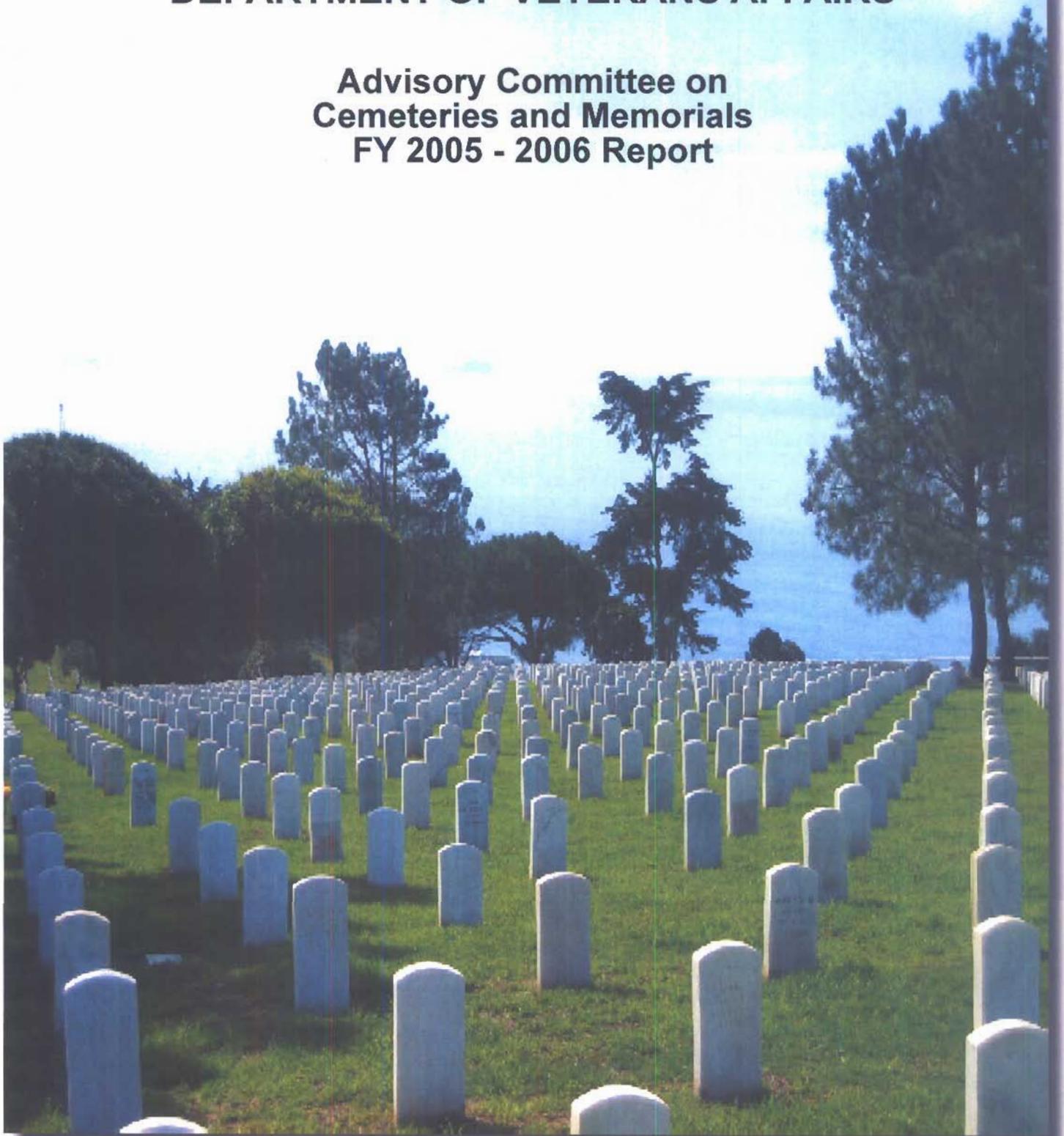


# DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

## Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials FY 2005 - 2006 Report



Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery

**Report of the  
Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials  
FY 2005 – 2006**

This report is respectfully submitted in accordance with the statute (38 U.S.C. 2401), which established the Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials.

The Committee serves as an advisory body to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs through the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs on issues involving the operations of the National Cemetery Administration, the State Cemetery Grants Program, the provision of headstones and markers, the provision of Presidential Memorial Certificates and related burial benefits. The Committee assists the Secretary in assuring that plans and programs are meeting the needs of the Nation's veterans and their eligible family members and meeting the mandate to maintain national cemeteries as national shrines.

This report covers FY 2005 and 2006. The Committee extends its appreciation to the National Cemetery Administration management and staff for their continued support of this Committee in the performance of its responsibilities. The Committee is dedicated to providing the maximum assistance and support to the National Cemetery Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs in the accomplishment of this most vital mission.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry L. Laws", written in a cursive style.

Jerry L. Laws  
Chair

September 2007

## Executive Summary

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials is a statutory committee authorized by Congress in Public Law 93-43 and codified in 38 U.S.C. 2401. The Committee advises the Secretary of Veterans Affairs through the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs on issues involving the operations of the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), the State Cemetery Grants Program, the provision of headstones and markers, the provision of Presidential Memorial Certificates (PMCs) and related burial benefits.

The Advisory Committee's charter requires that the Committee provide periodic reports and recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and to Congress. This report covers Committee activities and recommendations for FY 2005 and 2006.

### Advisory Committee Meetings

During the period covered by this report, the Committee held four meetings. The first meeting was held in Washington, DC, November 30 - December 1, 2004, where members received briefings by NCA senior leaders on the status of new national cemeteries, expansion of existing national cemeteries, State veterans cemeteries funded by State Cemetery Grants, current legislation, NCA's new outreach initiatives, history outreach, and the impact of the National Shrine Commitment on families who visit national cemeteries. The Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable Gordon H. Mansfield and Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs John W. (Jack) Nicholson presented Certificates of Appointments to Mr. James Altmeyer; Brigadier General Stanford E. Brown (USAF, Ret.); and Mr. John Kelly. VA Deputy Secretary Mansfield and Under Secretary Nicholson addressed the Committee members as well. The Committee visited the World War II Memorial for a wreath laying ceremony.

The second meeting was held in St. Louis, MO., June 15 - 16, 2005, where members received briefings by NCA senior leaders on the status of new national cemeteries, expansion of existing national cemeteries, State veterans cemeteries funded by State Cemetery Grants, current legislation, historic preservation, Millennium Act reports, budget and NCA's volunteer program. Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Richard A. Wannemacher, Jr. also addressed the Committee. The Advisory Committee members also toured Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery to observe the repairing of sunken graves; the layout of gravesites; and the opening and closing and dressing of graves. The group also observed setting, raising and realigning upright headstones and flat markers.

During the third meeting held in Washington, DC, November 29 - 30, 2005, members received briefings by NCA senior leaders on the status of new national cemeteries, expansion of existing national cemeteries, State veterans cemeteries funded by State Cemetery Grants, current legislation, historic preservation, and the NCA budget. VA Secretary R. James Nicholson, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs William F. Tuerk and White House Liaison Phil Riggins addressed the Committee as well. The Committee toured the National Archives and the Women in Military Service for America Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery.

The fourth meeting, was held in Riverside, CA, April 27- 28, 2006. The agenda included briefings by NCA senior leaders on the status of new national cemeteries, expansion of existing national cemeteries, State veterans cemeteries funded by State Cemetery Grants, current legislation, veteran demographics, field operations and the NCA budget. Under Secretary William F. Tuerk and Deputy Under Secretary Richard A. Wannemacher, Jr., provided operational updates to the Committee. The Committee toured Riverside National Cemetery.

## Committee Recommendations

Committee deliberations and recommendations during this period addressed issues and activities related to the goals of NCA's Strategic Plan:

**Goal 1:** Ensure that the burial needs of veterans and their eligible family members are met.

**Goal 2:** Provide veterans and their families with symbolic expressions of remembrance.

**Goal 3:** Ensure that national cemeteries are maintained as national shrines dedicated to preserving our Nation's history, nurturing patriotism, and honoring the service and sacrifice veterans have made.

**Goal 4:** Provide "One VA" world-class service to veterans and their families through the effective management of people, technology, processes, and financial resources.

**Other Areas of Committee Interest:** The Committee recommends that NCA actively investigate and pursue an Internet online headstone/marker application process as an alternate to the traditional hardcopy and fax application processes; recommends that NCA develop a supplemental vehicle to the NCA benefits brochure to assist veterans in preparing their families for their VA burial benefits; the Committee endorses NCA's online training efforts and recommends that these efforts be fully implemented and broadened to include certification; the Committee also recommends that NCA provide outreach education.



*The National Training Center focuses on preparing employees to manage and operate cemeteries as national shrines for America's deceased veterans. No other federal training facility provides training in cemetery management.*



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The Committee expresses its appreciation to Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, the Honorable William F. Tuerk, other senior NCA leadership, NCA Central Office (NCACO), Memorial Service Network staff, cemetery directors, and staffs for their support and cooperation during the period covered by this report. All concerned were gracious in supplying timely and relevant information to the Committee, arranging meetings and ensuring Committee members were well-informed on pertinent issues. Your efforts helped us to carry out the Committee's responsibility of providing thoughtful and useful advice to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

## COMMITTEE INFORMATION

The Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials is a statutory committee authorized by Congress in Pub. L. 93-43 (June 18, 1973) codified under 38 U.S.C. § 2401.

The Committee serves as an advisory body to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs through the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs on issues involving the operations of the National Cemetery Administration; the State Cemetery Grants program; the provision of headstones, markers, and Presidential Memorial Certificates; and related burial benefits. The Committee assists the Secretary in assuring that plans and programs are meeting the needs of the Nation's veterans and their eligible family members and meeting the mandate to maintain national cemeteries as national shrines. The Committee is comprised of members of the public with a variety of backgrounds and knowledge sufficient to provide adequate advice and guidance to the Secretary. Committee members are representative of veteran service organizations, military retirees, business, and community leaders. Appointments for regular members are for one or two years. In addition, there are three ex-officio members, one each appointed from the American Battle Monuments Commission, the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior and the Department of the Army's Arlington National Cemetery. Current membership on the Committee is 16 regular members and three ex-officio members. The Committee usually meets twice a year, with one meeting in the Washington, DC area and the other meeting outside of Washington, DC, usually at an NCA field site.

More information about the Department of Veterans Affairs and its services is located at <http://www.va.gov>. Additional information about the National Cemetery Administration is available at <http://www.cem.va.gov>. More information about VA's Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials and its activities is on the General Services Administration Web site on advisory committees at <http://fido.gov/facadatabase/default.asp>.



**ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES**  
**FY 2005 - 2006**  
**(November 30, 2004 - April 27, 2006)**

Committee members are appointed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Appointees are drawn from a range of expertise to provide viewpoints from various perspectives. Appointments are also considered to achieve geographic, gender, ethnic, and military service diversity.

**November 30 - December 1, 2004**

The Advisory Committee held its first meeting of FY 2005 in Washington, DC, at VA Central Office (VACO). Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs John W. (Jack) Nicholson hosted the meeting. Jerry L. Laws, Chair, presided over the meeting. Under Secretary Nicholson discussed the Organizational Assessment and Improvement Program and the goals to achieve National Shrine status. He reported that the first 12 site visits had been completed and the remaining visits would be scheduled between January and August 2005. Under Secretary Nicholson also noted that the American Customer Satisfaction gave NCA a rating of 95 percent, the highest ever given to any public or private organization. The Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable Gordon H. Mansfield, commented on the progress of the National Shrine Commitment, xeriscaping at the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona, and the report to Congress on the establishment of baselines, distance, and direction guidelines throughout VA. The Deputy Secretary and Under Secretary then presented Certificates of Appointments to the three new Committee members. NCA senior leaders briefed the members on the status of new national cemeteries, expansion of existing State cemeteries funded by State Cemetery Grants, current legislation and NCA's budget. The Committee visited the newly-dedicated World War II Memorial for a wreath laying ceremony.

**June 15-16, 2005**

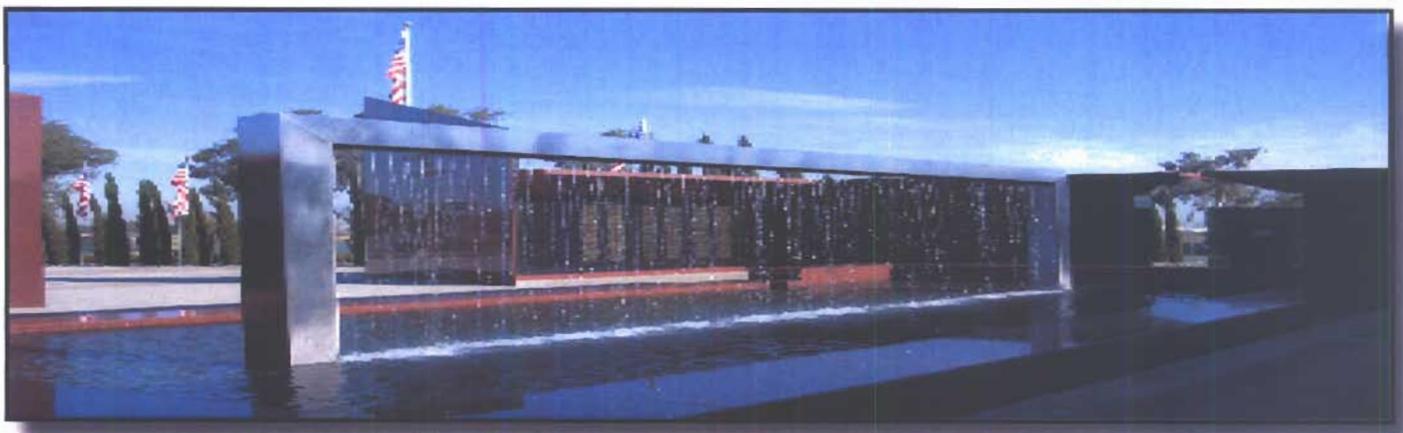
The Committee's second meeting of FY 2005 was held in St. Louis, MO, in conjunction with NCA's 2005 National Conference. Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Richard A. Wannemacher, Jr., hosted the meeting. Jerry L. Laws, Chair, presided over the meeting. Acting Under Secretary Wannemacher discussed VA's strategic goal of providing burial options to 90 percent of veterans within 75 miles of their residence by the year 2010. The Committee toured and attended training classes that were underway at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery. Upon completion of the tour the members observed demonstrations of developing healthy turf, repairing sunken graves, gravesite layout and opening. The Committee visited the National Cemetery Training Center, where they received a program overview to include history of the Training Center and plans for development of future curricula.

## November 29-30, 2005

The Committee's first meeting of FY 2006 was held in Washington, DC, at VA Central Office (VACO). Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs William F. Tuerk hosted the meeting. Jerry L. Laws, Chair, presided over the meeting. VA Secretary Nicholson welcomed Under Secretary Tuerk to his new position and added that NCA provided a vital component to VA's mission of care for veterans. Secretary Nicholson also congratulated NCA on the consumer satisfaction survey scores. NCA senior leaders briefed the members on the status of new national cemeteries, expansion of existing State cemeteries funded by State Cemetery Grants, current legislation and NCA's budget. The Committee toured the National Archives and the Women in Military Service for America Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery.

## April 27-28, 2006

The Advisory Committee held its second meeting of FY 2006 in Riverside, CA. Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs William F. Tuerk hosted the meeting. Jerry L. Laws, Chair presided over the meeting. NCA senior leaders briefed the members on the status of new national cemeteries, expansion of existing State cemeteries funded by State Cemetery Grants, current legislation and budget. The Committee toured Riverside National Cemetery. In the early 1970's community leaders and U.S. Representative George Brown ensured that Riverside was established to provide burial space for veterans of southern California. Admiral Jack McCain, Chair of the Presidential Commission, visited the Camp Haan site, escorted by then Colonel Stanford Brown. Those involved dedicated themselves to making Riverside more than another "garden of stones." Riverside National Cemetery was dedicated on Veterans Day 1978. Several stops were made throughout the tour of the cemetery to include the impressive Medal of Honor Memorial and the Amphitheater overlooking Lake B. The Committee traveled to Lake A and saw future sites of the American Indian and Vietnam Wall Memorials.



*Riverside National Cemetery is home of the Medal of Honor Memorial and one of four sites recognized as a National Medal of Honor Memorial Site. The Riverside National Cemetery Support Committee works with the cemetery and the National Cemetery Administration to identify appropriate memorials for placement at the cemetery.*

## COMMITTEE ENDORSEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Committee deliberations and recommendations during this period addressed issues and activities related to the goals of the National Cemetery Administration's strategic plan, major programs and the adequacy of VA memorial benefits for veterans and their dependents:

### **GOAL 1: Ensure that the burial needs of veterans and eligible family members are met.**

Experience and recent historical data show that over 80 percent of persons interred in national cemeteries resided within 75 miles of the cemetery at time of death. Based upon this experience, NCA considers eligible veterans to have reasonable access if a burial option (whether for casketed remains or limited to cremated remains only) is available within 75 miles of the veteran's place of residence.

In order to ensure that burial options are provided for all eligible veterans and their family members, NCA is planning for the development of new national cemeteries to serve veterans in the areas of Sarasota, FL, Jacksonville, FL, Bakersfield, CA, Philadelphia, PA, Birmingham AL, and Columbia, SC. NCA will expand existing national cemeteries by completing phased development projects in order to make additional gravesites and/or columbaria available for interments. National cemeteries that closed due to depletion of grave space are identified to determine the feasibility extending the service period of the cemetery by the acquisition of adjacent or contiguous land, or by the construction of columbaria.

NCA also encourages the development of additional gravesites for veterans and their families through the State Cemetery Grants Program (SCGP). These cemeteries are located in areas where there are no plans for NCA to operate and maintain a national cemetery. The SCGP, administered by NCA, provides grants to states of up to 100 percent of the cost of establishing, expanding, or improving state veterans cemeteries including the acquisition of initial operating equipment.

### **GOAL 2: Provide veterans and their families with symbolic expressions of remembrance.**

NCA will continue to provide headstones and markers for graves of eligible persons in national, state, and other public and private cemeteries. Delivery of these benefits is not dependent on interment in a national cemetery; more than 70 percent of all headstones and markers are provided for graves in other federal, state and private cemeteries. NCA will improve accuracy and operational processes, reducing the number of inaccurate or damaged headstones and markers delivered to cemeteries. In addition, NCA will continue to ensure that Presidential Memorial Certificates are delivered accurately and in a timely manner. NCA will use, to the maximum extent possible, modern technology to automate its operations processes.

### **GOAL 3: Ensure that national cemeteries are maintained as national shrines, dedicated to preserving our Nation's history, nurturing patriotism, and honoring the service and sacrifice veterans have made.**

NCA will strive to maintain the appearance of national cemeteries as national shrines so that bereaved family members are comforted when they come to the cemetery for the interment, or

later to visit the grave(s), of their loved one(s). To achieve this goal, NCA must maintain occupied graves and developed acres in a manner befitting their stature as national shrines. Improvements in the appearance of burial grounds and historic structures are also required for NCA to fulfill its national shrine commitment. Extensive renovation of grounds, gravesites, and gravemarkers are undertaken at cemeteries where long-standing deferred maintenance needs exist. NCA will continue its partnerships with various civic organizations that allow volunteers to participate in maintaining the appearance and administrative operations of the cemetery. Using customer satisfaction survey instruments, we will continue to obtain feedback from veterans, their families, and other customers to ascertain how they perceive the quality of the appearance of national cemeteries.

**GOAL 4: Provide One VA world-class service to veterans and their families through the effective management of people, technology, processes and financial resources.**

This goal, based on the assumption that dedicated, motivated and knowledgeable employees are the foundation of quality customer service, encompasses all employee issues for which management bears responsibility, such as human resource systems, work environment, and training. NCA employees have the right to fair and equal treatment, and to express their views and have them considered fairly. Employees are encouraged to challenge work processes with new ideas to improve service to veterans and other customers. NCA is continually reviewing its internal structure and processes to identify potential improvements and re-engineering automated systems to improve efficiency and effectiveness. NCA is committed to supporting its interment, acreage and grounds maintenance needs through the cost-conscious and environmentally sound use of natural resources.



Long Island National Cemetery

**GOAL 1: Ensure that the burial needs of veterans and eligible family members are met.**

**Recommendation 1.1: The Committee fully endorses all initiatives to explore acquiring properties through BRAC and CARES for building new cemeteries and expanding existing cemeteries.**

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

*A Department-level work group was established by VA's Chief of Staff 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:*

- *Fifty-one acres have been transferred from VHA to NCA for future expansion of the Mountain Home National Cemetery.*
- *Twenty 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 1.2: The Committee endorses and commends NCA efforts to support the establishment of State veterans cemeteries as a means of increasing service to veterans in lesser-populated areas.**

*VA Response: NCA plans to establish 20 new State veterans cemeteries by 2010.*

**Recommendation 1.3: The Committee commends the Office of Field Programs for issuance of a Mission Statement.**

*VA Response: The mission of the National Cemetery Administration 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 their continued support of our mission.*

**GOAL 2: Provide veterans and their families with symbolic expressions of remembrance.**

**Recommendation 2.1: The Committee recommends that NCA actively investigate and pursue an Internet online headstone/marker application process as an alternative to the traditional hardcopy and fax application processes.**

VA Response: *NCA initially developed a scanning process to improve the headstone/marker application process. There were several discussions about what technologies should be utilized in this process. There were several critical issues that needed to be addressed and the scanning strategy was designed to quickly remedy those requirements.*

*The scanning solution, whereby incoming faxes are automatically converted into electronic files which can easily be viewed and manipulated by NCA staff, was implemented as the initial phase of an ongoing project to modernize the headstone/marker application process. Currently, a number of existing constraints limit the scope in which this process can be further automated, and has impacted the ability to provide full Web-based applications. The most notable constraints are:*

*Supporting Documentation – Proof of eligibility, usually the DD-214, is required by NCA to accompany the application. At this time, VA does not have online access to older veteran files and a copy of the discharge papers is the quickest way to determine eligibility. This will be true for the foreseeable future, and some records will never be available online.*

*Required Signatures – The application requires the signature of the applicant, the person receiving the marker, and the cemetery official agreeing to allow the marker to be set.*

*NCA is, however, moving forward to improve the headstone/marker application process while working within the limitations of the constraints listed above. For example, NCA has an electronic version of the application form (VA 40-1330) available on its Website that can be accessed and completed online. The completed form can then be printed, signed, and forwarded along with supporting documents to NCA for processing.*

**GOAL 3: Ensure that national cemeteries are maintained as national shrines dedicated to preserving our Nation's history, nurturing patriotism, and honoring the service and sacrifice veterans have made.**

**Recommendation 3.1: The Committee recommends that NCA and VA continue to pursue full funding of the national shrine commitment in order to meet their plan to bring national cemeteries up to shrine status.**

*VA Response: The funding, included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2005 budget, will allow NCA to make steady progress towards improving the appearance of VA's national cemeteries. The 2005 appropriations bill, enacted in December 2004, provides \$21 million for cemetery improvement projects. The projects include: raising, realigning, and cleaning headstones and markers; renovating turf in burial sections; and repairing cemetery infrastructure including roads, buildings, irrigation systems, and historic structures. NCA has adopted a comprehensive set of standards for performance in key cemetery operations, which provides guidance and direction for maintaining national cemeteries as national shrines. In addition, in FY 2004, NCA put in place an Organizational Assessment and Improvement Program to ensure accountability for managing results, directing resources to the areas most in need of improvement, and assessing the progress made toward meeting the national shrine commitment. Each national cemetery will be evaluated through site visits on a recurring basis.*

During FY 2004, site visits began at six national cemeteries and plans are in place to expand the number of site visits to 24 national cemeteries in FY 2005.

**Recommendation 3.2: The Committee encourages State cemeteries to attain and be awarded national shrine status.**

*VA Response: NCA is developing a two-week training module for State cemetery directors that will be completed by the end of 2005. The module will be taught at the National Training Center and will be heavily oriented toward meeting NCA Operational Standards and Measures. NCA will also continue to use the Triennial Review of State Cemeteries to assist them in understanding and meeting operational standards and measures.*

**GOAL 4: Provide One VA world-class service to veterans and their families through the effective management of people, technology, processes and financial resources.**

**Recommendation 4.1: The Committee endorses NCA's online training efforts and recommends that these efforts be fully implemented and broadened to include certification.**

*VA Response: NCA's education and training efforts are currently concentrated on design and delivery of relevant programs at the National Training Center in St. Louis. However, much is also being done to address online learning within the organization. As a first step, NCA personnel are being made aware of upcoming training opportunities through weekly e-mails, which include Web and computer-based training options. A recent survey of field sites revealed that the vast majority of national cemetery personnel are already using Web and computer-based training applications either on site or at their local VA Medical Center.*

*In addition, NCA is involved in a VA-wide effort to deliver online supervisory training to field personnel in Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and NCA. At present, NCA is assessing online learning capabilities among field sites and will be reviewing existing training materials using NCA subject matter experts. NCA supervisors will likely be included in pilot tests sometime in early 2006.*

*With regard to certification of training activities, any program currently attended by an NCA employee includes contact/credit hours equal to the time spent engaged in the learning activity. NCA has developed a certification program for Cemetery Foremen, and similar programs will be created for other positions as a means of providing upward mobility opportunities to cemetery personnel for higher graded positions. As NCA expands its internal training offerings and considers new and innovative approaches to employee development, designated tracks and/or certification programs will continue to be established.*

**Recommendation 4.2: The Committee recommends that NCA provide education to newly-formed cemetery support organizations.**

*VA Response: It has always been NCA's practice to inform and educate newly- formed cemetery support organizations. This type of approach reduces the learning phase for these dedicated volunteers and enhances their contributions and effectiveness.*

**Recommendation 4.3: Each new Advisory Committee member will have an opportunity to attend an orientation at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery and the 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 maintain our 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.*

*We welcome 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 4.4: The Committee endorses continued evaluation and efforts to study burial benefits including service area and population threshold.**

*VA Response: A joint effort is underway to conduct a comprehensive program evaluation of the full array of burial benefits and services that VA provides. The program evaluation conducted by NCA, in partnership with the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Office of Policy, Planning, and Preparedness, will assess, develop, and update program outcomes, goals, and objectives, and compare actual program results with established goals. It is anticipated that the study to be completed in FY 2008.*

**Recommendation 4.5: The Committee commends NCA, the Under Secretary and his staff for their focus and service to veterans and their families.**

*VA Response: In December 2004, the American Customer Satisfaction Index gave NCA the highest rating ever measured by the survey, either in the public or private sector.*

**Recommendation 4.6: The Committee commends the Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs for the performance of his duties, and for providing wise and steadfast counsel and leadership, thereby ensuring effective continuity in the operation of the National Cemetery Administration (NCA).**

*VA Response: The Acting Under Secretary appreciates the commendation, but notes that NCA performs its mission through the dedication and support of many individuals. These include cemetery personnel who care for grieving families and maintain cemeteries as National Shrines; Memorial Service Network and Central Office personnel who ensure efficiency and effectiveness of operations; VA and elected leaders who provide fiscal and legislative support; and the people of a grateful Nation who are committed to memorializing our veterans and their sacrifices in perpetuity.*

**Recommendation 5.1: The Committee endorses and supports the position of the Secretary on the Statement of Administration Policy related to bills HR 5037 and S2452.**

*VA Response: HR 5037, Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act, and S 2452, the Senate companion bill, would prohibit unauthorized demonstrations at VA national cemeteries or Arlington National Cemetery. On April 6, 2006, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs William F. Tuerk testified in support of HR 5037 before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Disability and Memorial Affairs. In his testimony, he stated, "NCA fully supports the intentions and purposes of this bill... VA's current regulations already prohibit any demonstration, which includes oration and display of placards or flags within the grounds of a VA national cemetery, and the distribution of handbills or display of placards on cemetery grounds, except as authorized by the head of the facility." VA continues to work closely with Congress to preserve the decorum and sanctity of our national cemeteries.*

**Recommendation 5.2: The Committee recommends that NCA explore outreach opportunities to elder care and estate planning organizations.**

*VA Response: NCA had already begun to develop initiatives in this area. In FY 2004, NCA exhibited at the American Association of Retired Persons and National Association of Home Care & Hospice national conventions. Further movement along this line will be pursued, in conjunction with comprehensive outreach efforts to traditional audiences in the Veteran Service Organizations and active military areas. In addition, new VA-wide efforts to reach out to faith-based organizations will be pursued.*

**Recommendation 5.3: The Committee recommends that NCA proceed with a nation-wide information mailing to every funeral home in the country.**

*VA Response: With funding approval, NCA will gain access to funeral home mailing lists and send each an outreach package, including, but not limited to an introductory letter from the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, an NCA brochure, a map showing all national and state veterans cemeteries, and a sample Presidential Memorial Certificate (suitable for framing).*

**Recommendation 5.4: The Committee recommends that NCA develop a supplemental vehicle to the NCA benefits brochure, to assist veterans in preparing their families concerning their VA burial benefits.**

*VA Response: This proposal suggests a check-list and document collection device for a range of documents to assist veteran families. For NCA burial benefits, however, applicable discharge documents are the only ones required to determine eligibility. NCA will need to discuss with VA whether or not this supplemental vehicle can be more appropriately handled at the Department level.*

**Recommendation 5.5: The Committee recommends that NCA explore the use of non-traditional media outlets (such as the Pentagon Channel, the Military Channel, etc.) to serve as outreach vehicles for NCA information.**

*VA Response: NCA is expanding its outreach to non-traditional media outlets and is partnering with*

VA's Office of Public Affairs (OPA), VHA, and VBA in producing "American Veteran," a new television program about VA and benefits for veterans. "American Veteran" is being broadcast on the Pentagon Channel, and OPA is working to gain a larger broadcast audience through agreements with local television and cable to broadcast the monthly show.

NCA is also working with the Department of the Army to find a major network to produce a documentary on the replacement of the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery. Discovery Network has expressed enthusiastic interest.

**Recommendation 5.5: The Committee wholeheartedly supports the NCA reorganization plan.**

*VA Response:* NCA's reorganization proposal has been submitted to the Office of Human Resources and Administration. The reorganization plan for two Deputy Under Secretary positions, who will report to the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, is being reviewed. This plan allows NCA to manage both the field and management functions more effectively. A determination on the reorganization proposal is expected to be reviewed by the Secretary in the near future.

**Recommendation 5.6: The Committee recommends that NCA establish relations with the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, and similar youth organizations to support the commemoration of VA's 75th Anniversary.**

*VA Response:* NCA Communications and Outreach Support staff will investigate possible initiatives to provide information to youth organizations' national representatives by building on relationships that already exist between individual cemeteries and local troops.

**Recommendation 5.7: The Committee urges the Secretary to allocate such funds as necessary to print local cemetery brochures for the 10 national cemeteries with the greatest rate of interments.**

*VA Response:* The Department appreciates the Committee's support for this initiative. The cemetery brochures will help the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) in its outreach to veterans and their family members. Funding for this initiative is considered within NCA's budget execution and review process. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2006, funding is provided to produce approximately 400,000 brochures for 32 cemeteries. The brochures are printed on a priority basis, first for active cemeteries based on their interment workload, and then for closed cemeteries.

**Recommendation 5.8: Explore the creation of regional signature cemeteries from within the 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 both young and old 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. We appreciate 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 our 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](http://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 Web site: 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 Web site: [www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/](http://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.*

## LEGISLATION

The Committee received information about legislation affecting veterans and their families and NCA overall as follows:

Enacted on December 22, 2006, Public Law 109-461, Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006.

Sec. 401 - Amends section 2306 of title 38, United States Code, to allow provision of memorial headstones or markers for eligible dependent children whose remains are unavailable for burial and who died after December 22, 2006.

Sec. 402 – Amends section 2306 of title 38, United States Code, to extend to December 31, 2007, the authority to provide a government-furnished headstone or marker for the previously marked grave of a veteran interred in a private cemetery; to clarify that the provision applies to headstones and markers; and to provide further detail about the placement of second markers.

Sec. 403 – Amends section 2408 of title 38, United States Code, to allow the Secretary to make grants to tribal organizations in the same manner, and under the same conditions, as grants to States are made under the State Cemetery Grants Program.

Sec. 502 and Sec. 503 - Add new sections 8127 and 8128 to chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, regarding contracting preferences for veteran-owned businesses.

Sec. 811 – Adds a new section 312 to title 38, United States Code, to establish a position of VA Director of Construction and Facilities Management responsible for Department-wide construction and facility management.

Enacted on May 29, 2006, Public Law 109-228, Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act, Establishes a new section 2413 in chapter 24 of title 38 of the United States Code (U.S.C.) that prohibits demonstrations on NCA cemetery property unless approved by the Cemetery Director. (This does not change the current authority or responsibilities of Cemetery Directors.) Sets new restrictions on demonstrations that take place outside of cemetery grounds, which will be enforced by Federal, State, or local authorities, as appropriate.

Enacted January 6, 2006, Public Law 109-163, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006. Sec. 662 - Amends Section 2411 of title 38, United States Code, to change the circumstances under which a person who has committed a capital offense is denied certain burial-related benefits and funeral honors. The Public Law changed the definitions of Federal and State capital crimes and expanded the categories of individuals who are ineligible for interment in a national cemetery, or memorialization. Note: There are also new restrictions placed on the provision of military funeral honors by the Department of Defense. VA is required to make a good faith effort to determine if an individual is ineligible for interment based on the new public law.

## **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

### **Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials FY 2005 AND 2006**

Members of the Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials are appointed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and are asked to serve based on their knowledge and expertise in a variety of fields. There are also three ex-officio members on the Committee. These individuals represent other entities that also maintain national cemeteries – the National Park Service, the American Battle Monuments Commission, and Arlington National Cemetery.

**James R. Adams**  
**Term expires 8/31/2006**  
**Texas**

Dr. Adams retired after 22 years of service as Director and Senior Army Instructor, JROTC Program, Dallas Independent School District, Dallas, Texas. Prior to this, he served over 20 years in the U.S. Army in various capacities. Dr. Adams was also Professor in the Military Science Department, Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama.

**James E. Altmeyer**  
**Term expires 8/31/2006**  
**West Virginia**

Mr. Altmeyer, a Vietnam War veteran, is a 1961 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York. Following his time at West Point, he went on to further his military training, including U.S. Army Airborne and Ranger schools. For the past 32 years, Mr. Altmeyer has been president and CEO of a family-owned business, Altmeyer Funeral Homes, Inc. During his tenure as the head of the firm, Altmeyer Funeral Homes has grown from three locations to 16 in Ohio, Virginia, and West Virginia. He is also president of Altmeyer Realty, a real estate holding company, and of Martin-Steadfast Insurance Company, a firm that specializes in pre-arranged funerals.

**Judy Bissinger**  
**Term expires 8/31/2006**  
**Iowa**

Ms. Bissinger is a homemaker, volunteer and community activist. She was “Bush for President County” Chair in 2000. She served six years on the Dallas County Planning and Zoning Commission, including two years as chairman. Judy currently serves on the Dallas County Republican Central Committee. She is a charter member of Faith Lutheran Church.



**Stanford E. Brown**  
**Term expires 8/31/2006**  
**California**

Brigadier General Brown, USAF, Retired, served in the Air Force for over three decades. He is a command pilot with more than 6,000 flying hours. He has qualified in and flown 15 first-line Air Force aircrafts. During the Vietnam War, he logged more than 800 combat flying hours. His military decorations include the Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit with oak leaf cluster, Bronze Star Medal, and other awards. He retired from the Air Force in 1983.

**Leo P. Burke**  
**Term expired 8/31/2005**  
**California**

Mr. Burke served from 1998 – 1999 as National Vice Commander of The American Legion. He served in World War II in the U. S. Marine Corps and has been a member of The American Legion since 1959. Although retired, Mr. Burke has chaired the California Veterans Board since 1986 and is active in many charity organizations.

**Robert L. (Bob) Cardenas**  
**Term expires 8/31/2006**  
**California**

Brigadier General Cardenas began his military career in the Army Coast Artillery and then became a pilot in the Army Air Corps. He became a test pilot in 1945 and was the Operations Officer and the command pilot of the B-29 that launched Chuck Yeager into supersonic flight. After serving in the Pentagon as Chief of the Aircraft and Missile Programs Division, he was made Chief of The Special Operations Division at U. S. Strike Command Headquarters. After retiring from the military, he worked in private industry. In September 2002, General Cardenas was inducted into the Air Commando Hall of Fame.

**Roland F. Cinciarelli**  
**Term expired 8/31/2005**  
**California**

Brigadier General Cinciarelli served in the U. S. Army and the Marine Corps. He served in many assignments, including Vietnam. In 1980, he was assigned as Special Assistant to the Commanding General, Marine Corps Logistics Base in California. Prior to being placed on the inactive Reserve status in 1982, General Cinciarelli's assignment was Deputy Commanding General, Marine Corps Logistics Base, Albany, GA.



**Wilfred Ebel**  
**Term expires 8/31/2006**  
**California**

Mr. Ebel served in political appointments in Washington, DC, under Presidents Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and George H.W. Bush. He retired from the military as a colonel in 1985 after 37 years of service in the U.S. Army, Army Guard and Army Reserve. He served as Director, National Cemetery System, 1987 – 1989.

**John A. Kelly**  
**Term expires 8/31/2006**  
**District of Columbia**

Mr. Kelly retired as a Major after 28 years of active and reserve service. He is a registered lobbyist in New York, North Carolina, Maryland, and Washington, DC and is currently CEO of Kelly and Associates, Inc., a Washington based government and public affairs firm that he founded in 1986. At present, he serves as the principal federal and state representative for Perdue Farms Inc.; BMW Group LLC; and BMW's three subsidiaries, the National Association of Settlement Purchasers, and the Academic Medicine Development Corporation, and he provides legislative and strategic counsel to Qwest Communications.

**Carl R. Kikerpill**  
**Term expires 8/31/2006**  
**California**

Mr. Kikerpill served as an officer in the U.S. Army and Army Reserve. He has been active in his community serving in church leadership positions and has participated in annual church mission trips to various developing countries around the world. He is a graduate of the US Military Academy at West Point and also earned a Master of Science Degree in Management from Troy State University. He is currently employed at Deloitte & Touché, LLP, as Business Development Manager where he is responsible for helping clients implement IT enabled business solutions.

**Mylio S. Kraja**  
**Term expires 8/31/2006**  
**Mississippi**

Mr. Kraja served in World War II in the Navy then had a career in private industry, including as a Registered Representative of the New York Stock Exchange. Mr. Kraja joined The American Legion in 1947. From 1981 to 1990, he served as the Executive Director of The American Legion's Washington, DC, office. He has also been active in several local civic and fraternal organizations.



**Jerry L. Laws, Chair**  
**Term expires 8/31/2006**  
**New Mexico**

Brigadier General Laws served in the U. S. Army for over 30 years in posts and positions all over the world. He retired from the U. S. Army in July 1998 with over 30 years of service. He was President and CEO of the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce until July 2000 when he took a job in private industry. He is very active in many local civic organizations.

**Rose Elizabeth Lee**  
**Term expires 8/31/2006**  
**Virginia**

Ms Rose Lee is the widow of C. M. Lee, U.S. Army, who served in Korea and in Vietnam. He died on active duty in Taiwan in 1972. Rose was Gold Star Wives National President 1991 – 1993 and Chairman of the Board 1998 – 2001. In 2004 she was elected Potomac Chapter President and is serving her second year. She is currently on a GSW sponsored Chat-Room for about 150 new widows of the War on Terror, the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars.

**Thomas G. Lockhart**  
**Term expires 8/31/2006**  
**Arizona**

Mr. Lockhart is a U.S. Air Force Veteran. During his 26-year military career, he held a number of operational assignments in tactical fighter units including two combat tours in Southeast Asia. He also served on the U. S. Air Force Inspector General Team and as chief of tactical evaluations and exercises for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Italy.

**Ronald H. Markarian**  
**Term expired 8/31/2004**  
**California**

Major General Markarian began his military career with the Army National Guard and subsequently entered the U. S. Air Force. After 30 years military service, he retired as a Colonel and became a member of the California State Military Reserve, where he served in several capacities. He later retired as Major General after nearly 46 years of military service. He has been active in county and state political affairs, as well as many military, veteran and public service organizations. He currently serves as the California State Director for the Selective Service System.



**Joseph J. Martory**  
Term expires 8/31/2006  
Florida

Mr. Martory served during the Vietnam War in the U. S. Navy. He then worked in private industry for many years. In 2000, he was elected chairman of the State of Florida Department of Veterans Affairs. He is active in many local civic and fraternal organizations.

**Benedict J. Spadaro**  
Term expires 8/31/2006  
New York

Mr. Spadaro served in the U. S. Air Force. He has been active in veterans groups for many years. For the past 38 years, he has been employed by the Town of Eastchester Veterans Service Agency. He is also active in local civic groups.

## **Ex-Officio Members**

**Edwin C. Bearss**  
**District of Columbia**  
**Representing the National Park Service**

Mr. Edwin "Ed" Bearss is a 48-year veteran of government service. He served during World War II with the 3rd Marine Raider Battalion and 1st Marine Division in the invasions of Guadalcanal and New Britain. He was wounded in the latter landing and was hospitalized for 26 months. He studied at Georgetown University where he received a B.S. in Foreign Service in 1949 and a Indiana University for his M.A. in History in 1955. He began his National Park Service career as Park Historian in Vicksburg, Mississippi. In 1981, after transferring to Washington, DC, he became the Service's Chief Historian. Throughout his career, he has been the recipient of numerous awards in the field of history and preservation. Currently, Mr. Bearss serves as Historian Emeritus, National Park Service.

**John C. (Jack) Metzler, Jr.**  
**Representing Arlington National Cemetery**

After being cemetery director of several VA national cemeteries, Mr. Metzler was Area Director of the National Cemetery System for the Northeast Region. In 1991, he was appointed Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery. He served in the US Army from 1966-69, including a tour of duty in Vietnam as a helicopter crew chief for which he received numerous awards and commendations.

**Tom Sole**  
**Representing the American Battle Monuments Commission**

Mr. Tom Sole joined the ABMC staff at Arlington Virginia on July 1, 2002, as the Director of Engineering and Maintenance. He is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, and the University of Chicago where he earned an M.A. He is also a graduate of the United States Army Command and General Staff College.