



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON
November 4, 2008

Mr. John A. Kelly
Chairman
Advisory Committee on
Cemeteries and Memorials
3645 Kanawha Street, NW
Washington, DC 20015

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for the biennial activities and recommendations report for fiscal years 2007-2008 of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials.

I appreciate that the work of the Committee provides me with another perspective of the issues relevant to the operations of our national cemeteries. We welcome the opportunity to implement the Committee's recommendations that are in accordance with National Cemetery Administration (NCA) program objectives, policies, and the mission to maintain these sacred grounds as a fitting tribute to our Nation's veterans.

I encourage you to continue collaborating with NCA staff to ensure that we benefit from the Committee's valuable guidance. Thank you for your continued support of our Nation's veterans and their families through this important work.

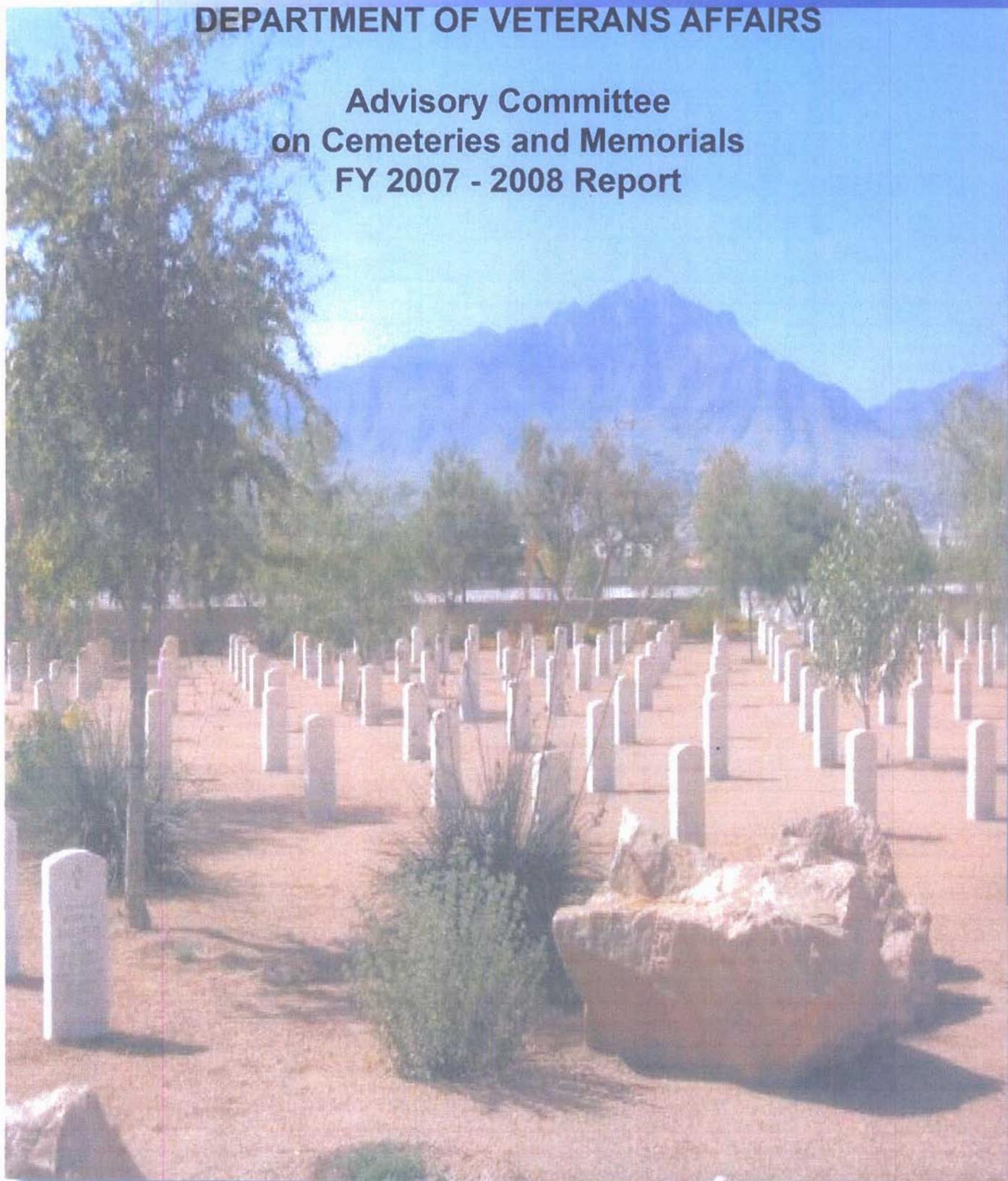
Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James B. Peake", is written over a large, stylized flourish that loops back to the left.

James B. Peake, M.D.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

**Advisory Committee
on Cemeteries and Memorials
FY 2007 - 2008 Report**



Fort Bliss National Cemetery

**Report of the
Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials
FY 2007 – 2008**

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 2007 and 2008. 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 that reads "John A. Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "K" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John A. Kelly
Chair

October 2008

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 2007 and 2008.

Advisory Committee Meetings

During the period covered by this report, the Committee held four meetings. The first meeting was held in Washington, DC, November 8-9, 2006, 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, NCA's new outreach initiatives, history on the American Battle Monuments Commission on Cemeteries overseas, history on the National Park Service National Cemeteries, budget and performance/veteran demographics, and the impact of the National Shrine Commitment on families who visit national cemeteries. Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs William F. Tuerk began by welcoming the Committee, including its two newest members, Brigadier General "Les" Beavers and Mr. Fred Boyles. Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable R. James Nicholson delivered remarks as well. The Committee visited Crownsville Veterans Cemetery, where they participated in a wreath laying ceremony at the cemetery. The Committee also toured Annapolis National Cemetery and the U.S. Naval Academy.

The second meeting was held in Atlanta, GA, May 16-17, 2007, 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, budget and NCA's volunteer program. Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs William F. Tuerk began by welcoming the Committee, including its two newest members, Mrs. Judith Young and Mr. Donald E. Loudner. The Committee toured Georgia National Cemetery, where they participated in a wreath-laying ceremony. They also toured Marietta National Cemetery.

During the third meeting held in Washington, DC, October 31 - November 1, 2007, 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, and the NCA budget. Acting VA Secretary Gordon H. Mansfield, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs William F. Tuerk and White House Liaison Phil Riggan addressed the Committee as well. The Committee toured Quantico National Cemetery, where they participated in a wreath-laying ceremony.

The fourth meeting, was held in West Palm Beach, FL, April 29- 30, 2008, 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, the American Customer Satisfaction Index survey for 2007, field operations, the NCA budget and participated in a workshop regarding Public Law 110-157, Dr. James Allen Veteran Vision Equity Act of 2007, pertaining to the design of a medallion or other device to signify the status of a deceased as a veteran, to be attached to a privately-furnished headstone or marker. Under Secretary William F. Tuerk provided operational updates to the Committee. The Committee toured South Florida National Cemetery, where they participated in a wreath-laying ceremony at the cemetery's flagpole.

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 requested the opportunity to review and provide comments on the draft VA Burial Benefits Program Evaluation and if feasible for the author to conduct outreach to the Committee; recommends that NCA contact the "Trust for Public Lands" to study strategic opportunities to purchase land for future national cemeteries; recommends that NCA develop a Public Service Announcement regarding burial benefits that may be used to highlight memorial benefits where new national cemetery dedication ceremonies are taking place; the Committee also recommends that VA, through an award from the Secretary of VA, acknowledges Worcester Wreath Company for their philanthropic efforts in organizing their Wreaths Across America (WAA) program. Additionally, that all VA national cemeteries support and participate in Wreaths Across America.



VA agrees that the Wreath Across America program has promoted volunteerism and goodwill, and raised awareness of veterans, NCA, and VA. All VA national cemeteries currently participate in Wreaths Across America. Each VA national cemetery has a WAA ceremony and prepares a media advisory and news release to generate public and media interest.



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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.



In November 2007, members of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials toured Quantico National Cemetery, where they participated in a wreath-laying ceremony.

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 15 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 2007 - 2008

(November 8, 2006 - April 29, 2008)

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 8-9, 2006

The Advisory Committee held its first meeting of FY 2007 in Washington, DC, at VA Central Office (VACO). Acting Chairman Mike Nacincik presided over the meeting. Under Secretary William F. Tuerk began by welcoming the Committee, including its two newest members, General "Les" Beavers and Mr. Fred Boyles. General Beavers is now Commissioner for the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Boyles is the Superintendent of Andersonville National Historic Site, under the administration of the National Park Service. Mr. Boyles is serving as an Ex-Officio member of the Advisory Committee. This meeting focused particularly to the growing role of State veterans' cemeteries in meeting the needs of veterans and their family members. State Cemeteries provided more than 22,000 burials in fiscal year 2007, which equated to about 18% of the total interments that were conducted at National and State Veterans Cemeteries last year. With 18 new state veterans cemeteries currently in various stages of planning, state cemeteries will only increase in their importance in the future. NCA senior leaders briefed the members on initiatives to continuously improve services and operations through the National Cemetery Administration, the status of new national cemeteries, expansion of existing State cemeteries funded by State Cemetery Grants, and budget. Tom Sole of the American Battle Monuments Commission (AMBC) briefed the Committee on the history of AMBC, and Fred Boyles of the Andersonville National Historic Site, briefed the Committee on the history the 14 National Park Service National Cemeteries. The Committee toured Crownsville Veterans Cemetery and participated in a wreath-laying ceremony at the cemetery. The Committee also toured Annapolis National Cemetery and the U.S. Naval Academy.

May 16-17, 2007

The Committee's second meeting of FY 2007 was held in Atlanta, GA. Acting Chairman Mike Nacincik presided over the meeting. Under Secretary William F. Tuerk began by welcoming the Committee, including its two newest members, Mrs. Judith C. Young and Mr. Donald E. Loudner. Mrs. Young became active with the Gold Star Mothers following the loss of her son. Mr. Loudner is a veteran who volunteered for military joining the U.S. Army. He is now serving a two-year term as National Commander of National American Indian Veterans, Inc. The Under Secretary presented both Mrs. Young and Mr. Loudner with their Certificates of Appointment. The Committee was briefed on current initiatives within the National Cemetery Administration to include demographic facts which led Congress to direct - and NCA to oversee and manage - the expansion that is now underway in the Nation's veterans' cemeteries. VA is now committed to establishing six additional national cemeteries, each with initial sections open for burials by the end of 2008, in the regions of: Bakersfield, California; Birmingham, Alabama; Columbia, South Carolina; Jacksonville, Florida; Sarasota, Florida; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In addition to national cemeteries, a State veterans' cemetery in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Saipan Veterans Cemetery has opened. Since 2001, 22 State veterans' cemeteries in 17 states have opened. The Committee was also briefed on basic benefits and eligibility criteria; the importance of pre-placed crypts; the State Cemetery Grants program; budget and performance; major and minor construction updates; an historical overview of NCA; the headstone and marker program and the Presidential Memorial Certificate Program. The Committee toured Georgia National Cemetery, where they participated in a wreath-laying ceremony. They also toured Marietta National Cemetery.

October 31 - November 1, 2007

The Committee's first meeting of FY 2008 was held in Washington, DC, at VA Central Office (VACO). Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs William F. Tuerk hosted the meeting. Acting Chair, Brigadier General Robert (Bob) Cardenas presided over the meeting as the Acting Chair. Under Secretary Tuerk welcomed the Committee and introduced Frank Salvas, the new director of the State Cemetery Grants Program. The Under Secretary then announced that since 2005, five new national cemeteries and six new state veterans cemeteries had opened, bringing the burial option statistic to 83% of veteran population being served within 75 miles of their homes - a remarkable achievement, and NCA's commitment to expand. The Committee was also briefed on, processing burial claims; new national cemeteries; statistics on fiscal year 2007 funerals at Arlington National Cemetery; headstone and marker program and the Presidential Memorial Certificate program; Legislative and Regulatory; and budget. VBA's Darlene Jones, Chief, Procedures and Development Staff briefed the Committee on Compensation and Pension service. Remarks were given by the Honorable Gordon H. Mansfield, Acting VA Secretary and Mr. Phil Riggan, VA's Advisory Committee Management Officer. The Committee toured Quantico National Cemetery, where they participated in a wreath-laying ceremony.

April 29-30, 2008

The Advisory Committee held its second meeting of FY 2008 in West Palm Beach, FL. Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs William F. Tuerk hosted the meeting. Committee Chairman Jack Kelly presided over the meeting. The Under Secretary welcomed the Committee and extended greetings to General "Jack" Nicholson and Committee member, Wil Ebel, as great leaders who set the precedents that NCA is achieving today. The Committee members were briefed on a comprehensive review of VA's burial benefits, now under construction, including the policy to establish new cemeteries within a 75-mile service area with a 170,000 veteran threshold as well as the impact of travel time and geography on access to our cemeteries and updates on new national cemeteries, the State Cemetery Grants program, the headstone and marker program and the Presidential Memorial Certificate program. The results of a report, expected in the summer of 2008, will be used to assess the need for any policy changes and legislative proposals that define burial benefits. The Committee also received pertinent information on the results of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) survey. ACSI surveyed next of kin satisfaction with: accessibility, clarity, and helpfulness of information; courtesy and professionalism of NCA staff; respectfulness of service provided; and National Shrine status. The results were a score of 95 out of a possible 100 points, which is the highest ever scored in ACSI of both the public and private sectors. The ACSI is an internationally accepted method of measuring customer satisfaction that is used by more than 200 of the largest private companies. Almost all Federal agencies participate.

Committee Chairman Jack Kelly, Lindee Lenox, director of Memorial Programs Service, and Thomas Casciaro, chief of the Technical Production Division of the Institute of Heraldry, conducted a Medallion Workshop for the Committee to obtain their ideas and recommendations for the new device. Background: In 2007 the Committee was briefed on proposed legislation that would give VA authority to provide a "V" device that could be affixed to a privately purchased headstone to designate the grave of a veteran buried in a private cemetery. At that time the Committee expressed concern that use of a "V" could be misconstrued as meaning Valor rather than Veteran. As a result of the concerns expressed by the Committee, the proposed legislation was revised, and the final language in Public Law 110-157 (signed in December 2007), Section 201 (5), states that the VA may: "furnish, upon request, a medallion or other device of a design determined by the Secretary to signify the deceased's status as a veteran, to be attached to a headstone or marker furnished at private expense." Responsibility for implementation of P.L. 110-157, Section 201 (5), including the design and distribution of the new Veteran device, falls with NCA's Memorial Programs Service.

On the second day of the meeting, the Committee toured South Florida National Cemetery, where they participated in a wreath-laying ceremony at the cemetery's flagpole.

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.

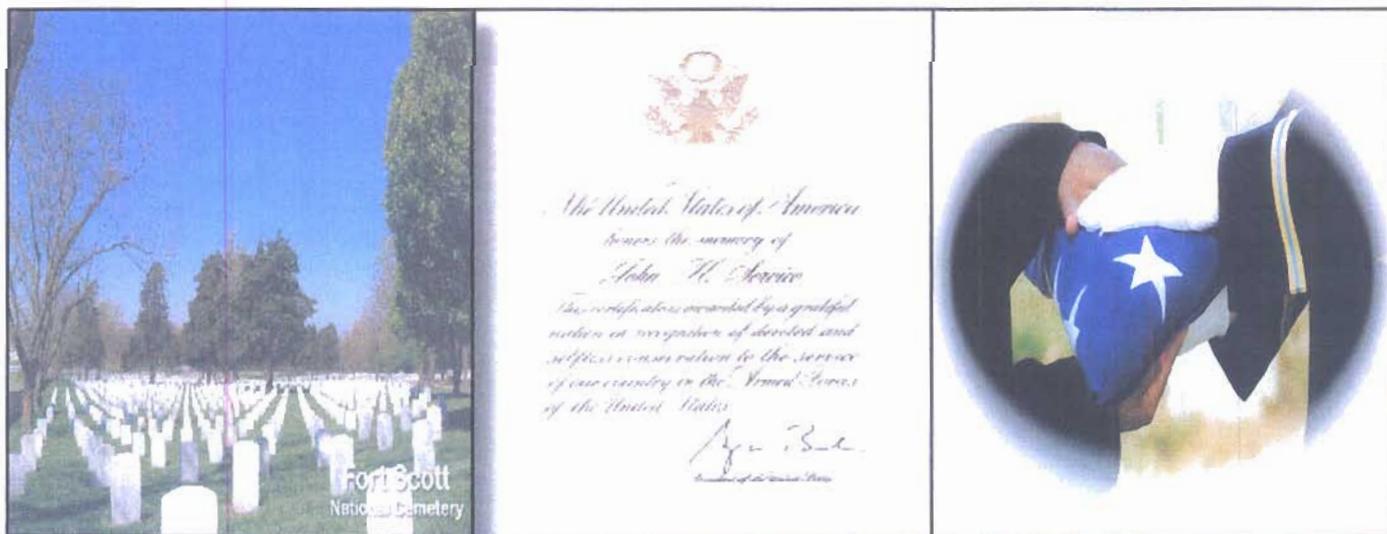
NCA will continue to provide headstones and markers for graves of eligible persons in national, state, and other public and private cemeteries. Delivery of these benefits is not dependent on interment in a national cemetery; more than 70 percent of all headstones and markers are provided for graves in 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.



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

Recommendation 1.1: The Committee asks that VA contact the Federal Aviation Administration on behalf of VA, the National Park Service and State veterans cemeteries to develop policies to reduce increasing noise levels at veterans cemeteries due to the low flying aircraft.

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

Recommendation 1.2: The Committee recommends that NCA determine the feasibility to produce 10"x4"x42" shields and raised letter headstone to replace Civil War era headstones.

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

Recommendation 1.3: The Committee recommends that the burial allowance be increased to further off-set the cost of veterans' burial in State veterans cemeteries under the provisions of the State Cemetery Grants Program.

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

Recommendation 1.4: The Committee recommends that the State Cemetery Grants Program funding be increased from \$32 million to \$50 million, beginning in FY 2009.

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

Recommendation 1.5: 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 goal.

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

Recommendation 2.1: Acknowledge the Committee's support of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) "Veterans Pride Initiative," in which veterans are encouraged to wear their military medals on Veterans Day, Memorial Day, and other national holidays.

VA Response: The Department appreciates the Committee's support. Endorsement by Committee members and other influential citizens will be needed to help build recognition, support, and participation in this initiative.

Recommendation 2.2: The Committee suggests that the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) advise Congress to review the proposed use of a "V" device attached to private markers of veterans interred in private cemeteries as described in H.R. 797 Bronze "V" Marker Option. The Committee feels that the public will be confused by the "V" or not understand what it represents and suggests that instead of a "V" that the word "Veteran" be considered. The military uses a similar "V"-device with military medals to denote valor.

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

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 commends NCA and the National Park Service for their joint Global Positioning System mapping of Alexandria, Virginia, National Cemetery and recommends that this be considered for future use by NCA.

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

Recommendation 3.2: That NCA investigate the possibility of developing cooperating associations to allow for retail sales of theme related products to further the support by the public for national cemeteries.

VA Response: Although VA is not interested at this time in pursuing retail sales at VA national cemeteries, we will look into possible products appropriate for sale at our facilities. However, legislation would be required to provide authority for NCA to sponsor or endorse sale of retail items.

Recommendation 3.3: That NCA cooperate with individuals or organizations that may want to publish positive, favorable or informative books about NCA.

VA Response: NCA is happy to assist individuals or organizations who want to publish positive books, magazine articles and film products about NCA burial and memorial benefits and facilities. For example, NCA recently provided guidance to Mr. Tom Ruck to help his efforts to publish his book "Sacred Ground; A Tribute to America's Veterans." NCA provides access, as appropriate, to our facilities and information for legitimate and positive projects. However, NCA cannot conduct research for those wishing to publish materials about NCA. NCA's ability to provide support is limited and individual authors are responsible for developing and verifying the accuracy of their content.

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: Explore the possibilities of providing the Intranet BIRLS/BDN Access (BBA) system to the Department of the Interior, National Park Service national cemeteries, Anderson National Historic Site, and Andrew Johnson National Historic Site to enhance burial eligibility verification.

VA Response: The matter was researched and the initiative declined. Governance for access to BIRLS is covered in 38 CFR 14.640-14.643, the Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act. In 1998, the issue was raised, researched, and declined with respect to access by State veterans cemeteries. After consultation, the restrictions that prohibit granting access to NPS entities continue to apply. The Department recommends that NPS cemeteries establish relationships with their nearest VA national cemetery for assistance with eligibility determinations.

Recommendation 4.2: That NCA consider an outreach program that encourages veterans to pre-register for eligibility for VA veterans burial benefits.

VA Response: Eligibility for burial in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national cemeteries and for providing headstones or markers and Presidential Memorial Certificates are made at the time of need. Eligibility determinations are made at the time of death of a veteran or his or her eligible dependents in accordance with the current statutory and regulatory authority. At the time of need, the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) is expeditious in responding to family schedules. Currently, about 83 percent of veterans have access to a burial option within 75 miles of their residence. VA's strategic goal is to serve 90 percent of veterans with a burial option at a National Cemetery or State Veterans Cemetery within 75 miles of their residence by Fiscal Year 2010. These burial options are addressed in current NCA outreach materials and programs and a new fact sheet, in development, on End of Life Considerations that further address the necessary documents a veteran and their family should have so that eligibility for VA memorial benefits can be made quickly at the time of need.

Recommendation 4.3: 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 4.4: 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 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 4.5: 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 is to be completed in FY 2008.

Recommendation 4.6: That VA, through an award from the Sec VA, acknowledges Worchester Wreath Company for their philanthropic efforts in organizing their Wreaths Across America (WAA) program. Additionally, that all VA national cemeteries support and participate in Wreaths Across America.

VA Response: VA agrees that the Wreath 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.

LEGISLATION

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

Enacted on December 26, 2007, Public Law 110-157, Dr. James Allen Veteran Vision Equity Act of 2007.

Sec. 201 - Amends section 2306(d) of title 38, United States Code, to allow the Secretary to provide, upon request, a medallion or other device of a design determined by the Secretary to signify the status of a deceased as a veteran, to be attached to a privately-furnished headstone or marker.

Sec. 202 - Amends section 2408 of title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary to make a grant to any State for operating and maintaining a veterans cemetery owned by the State. Limits the total amount for all operations and maintenance grants in any fiscal year to \$5 million and requires the Secretary to issue regulations on implementing this new authority no later than 180 days following enactment of the Public Law.

Sec. 203 - Amends section 2306(d) of title 38, United States Code, to make permanent and retroactive to November 1, 1990, VA authority to furnish Government headstones or markers for previously-marked graves of veterans interred at private cemeteries.

Sec. 302 - Amends section 3485 of title 38, United States Code, to extend to June 30, 2010, the authority of the Secretary to provide a work-study allowance to individuals performing qualifying work-study activities including those at national and State veterans cemeteries

Enacted on June 29, 2007, Public Law 110-41, Army Specialist Joseph P. Micks Federal Flag Code Amendment Act of 2007.

Amends section 7 (m) of title 4, United States Code, to authorize the Governor of a State, territory, or possession, or the Mayor of the District of Columbia, to proclaim that on the death of an active duty member of the U.S. Armed Forces from that State, territory, possession or District, the U.S. flag will be flown at half-staff at all Federal facilities (including VA national cemeteries) in the area covered by *the proclamation*.

Enacted on December 22, 2006, Public Law 109-464, Respect for the Funerals of Fallen Heroes Act.

Adds section 1388 in chapter 67 of title 18, United States Code, to expand the prohibition of demonstrations at military or veteran funerals in any cemetery that is not under VA or Arlington control, including State veterans cemeteries.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials FY 2007 and 2008

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 8/31/2010
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 expired 01/2008
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.

Leslie (Les) E. Beavers
Term expires 8/31/2010
Kentucky

Brigadier General Beavers served in the U.S. Army for over 27 years of commissioned service. He has 46 years of experience leading high-performing organizations within government and private sector. He currently serves as Commissioner for Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs. He is also very active in civic and veterans service organizations.



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 8/31/2010
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 Distinguish Service Medal, Legion of Merit with oak leaf cluster, Bronze Star Medal, and other awards. He retired from the Air Force in 1983.

Robert L. (Bob) Cardenas
Term expires 8/31/2009
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.

Wilfred Ebel
Term expires 8/31/2010
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, Chair
Term expires 8/31/2010
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 8/31/2010
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
Term expires 8/31/2010
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 8/31/2009
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 8/31/2010
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.

Donald E. Loudner
Term expires 8/31/2009
South Dakota

Mr. Loudner served 32 years in the U.S. Army and is part Hunkpati Dakota Sioux Indian. Following his retirement from military service, he was hired by the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, as the Federal Administrator Agency Superintendent to oversee the Yankton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota, the Iowa Tribe, the Kickapoo Tribe, the Potawatomi Tribe, and the Sac and Fox Tribes all in the State of Kansas. After retiring for a second time, he was appointed to serve on the South Dakota State Veterans Affairs Commission in 1984. In addition, he serves on the National Census Advisory Committee representing the American Indian and Alaska Native populations for the U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C., as well as serves as the 1st National Commander of the National American Indian Veterans, Inc., of the United States.

Joseph J. Martory
Term expires 8/31/2009
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 8/31/2009
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.

Judith Young
Term expires 8/31/2009
New Jersey

Mrs. Young joined the American Gold Star Mothers in 1985 and has served as the department president of New Jersey since 2000. She is the co-founder of the "Beirut Connection," a support group for the families and veterans who served in Lebanon from 1982-1984. She has produced a newsletter for 13 years for the families and veterans before merging with the Beirut Veterans of America (BVA), and has served on the Board of Directors for the BVA as the family liaison for 10 years. Other capacities served include past president of the Business & Women's Professional Association and chairwoman of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board.



Ex-Officio Members

Fred Boyles

Representing the National Park Service

Mr. Fred Boyles is the Superintendent of Andersonville National Historic Site, National Park Service. The 515-acre park consists of the historic prison site and Andersonville National Cemetery. Andersonville National Cemetery is one of two open National Park Service national cemeteries. Anderson National Historic Park is the only park in the National Park System to serve as a memorial to all American prisoners of war throughout the nation's history.

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.