DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CEMETERIES AND MEMORIALS

October 30, 2018 – October 31, 2018
Lakewood, CO
8:30 am – 4:30pm

MINUTES

Committee Members Present:

Leslie E. Beavers, Committee Chairman
Gordon W. Lightfoot, Committee Member
Edith Gilbert Smith, Committee Member
Michael Figlioli, Committee Member
Heather Mitchell Braatz, Committee Member
JoAnn Fisher, Ed.D., Committee Member
Marianne A. Trussell, Committee Member
Edward Saunders, Committee Member
Joey Strickland, Committee Member

Committee Members Absent:

Dino Teppara, Committee Member
Kathleen Moakler, Committee Member

Ex-officio Members Present:

Tom Sole, American Battle Monuments Commission

Ex-officio Members Absent:

Charles Sellars, National Park Service
Karen Durham-Aguilera, Executive Director, Army National Military Cemeteries

Office of the VA Secretary Attendee:

Jelessa M.H. Burney, Program Specialist, Advisory Committee Management Office

Public Attendees:

Patti Sampers, President, Gold Star Wives of America, Inc., Denver Chapter, Oct 30th
Margaret Sebern, Vice President, Gold Star Wives of America, Inc., Denver Chapter, Oct 30th
Brenda Beavers, Oct 31st
National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Attendees:

Randy Reeves, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
Glenn Powers, Deputy Undersecretary, Field Programs and Cemetery Operations
Tom Howard, NCA Chief of Staff
Steven Best, Executive Director, Continental District
Kimberly Wright, Executive Director of Field Programs (via telephone)
Eric Powell, Ph.D., Director, Memorial Products Service (via telephone)
Ginger Wilson, Director, National Cemetery Scheduling Office (via telephone)
Katy Mozingo, Executive Assistant to the Under Secretary
Bryce Carpenter, Educational Outreach Program Officer (via telephone)
Eve Neisen, Public Affairs Officer, Denver Regional Office
Kenneth Holliday, Alternate Designated Federal Officer
Christine B. Hamilton, Designated Federal Officer

Tuesday, October 30, 2018

The semi-annual meeting of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials was held at the Denver Regional Benefits Office in Lakewood, Colorado. The meeting was hosted by Steven Best, Executive Director, Continental District. The morning session was open to the public; and the meeting location and teleconference number was published in the Federal Register announcement.

Opening Remarks

- The Committee Chairman, Leslie Beavers, called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence to honor the lives and sacrifices of Veterans and Servicemembers.

- Chairman Beavers welcomed attendees and expressed gratitude to represent the committee as the new chair. He stated that his charge is to keep the committee on track and within bounds of the committee’s mission.

- Christine Hamilton, Designated Federal Officer, provided administrative announcements and an overview of the agenda.

- Ms. Patti Sampers, President, Gold Star Wives of America, Inc., Denver Area Chapter, and Ms. Margaret Sebern, Vice President, Gold Star Wives of America, Inc., Denver Area Chapter, were acknowledged as public guests.
Remarks from Mr. Randy Reeves, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs (USMA)

- USMA Reeves thanked members for agreeing to serve on the committee. He also thanked Patti Sampers and Margaret Sebern for their attendance and serving survivors in their capacity.

- USMA Reeves spoke about NCA’s mission and vision to honor and preserve the legacy of all Veterans; ensure that the memory of a Veteran never dies; and increase access to rural Veteran population.

"...I'd like you also to say the names of your loved ones who, from my heart, I appreciate the sacrifice and the gift that each of you and our families across the country have given us so that we have the freedoms we have today. And it's not a cliché when I say they truly did give up all of their tomorrows so that we could have today and so America could endure forever.” – USMA Randy Reeves

From left to right: Patti Sampers, USMA Randy Reeves, Margaret Sebern, Edith Smith

- USMA Reeves and Chairman Beavers presented Certificates of Appointment to two new members (Colonel Joey Strickland and Lieutenant Colonel Edward Saunders).

- Colonel Strickland and Lieutenant Colonel Saunders were charged with researching and reporting back to the full committee on the needs, customs, and tribal traditions of Native American Veterans.

- Attendees viewed the following video presentation:

  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsfWpod2vgM
  “Honoring Veterans at Los Angeles National Cemetery”

- NCA’s goal is to provide Veterans with dignified burial options within to 75 miles of their homes. USMA Reeves stated that NCA is currently at 92.3 percent and on track to meet 95 percent. Chairman Beavers charged the committee with determining ways to address the other 5 percent of Veterans in need of burial options.
Presentation on Transfer of Army Post Cemeteries to NCA

- Major Shannon Way attended the meeting via teleconference on behalf of ex-officio, Ms. Karen Durham-Aguilera, Executive Director, Army National Military Cemeteries (ANMC).

- Glenn Powers, Deputy Undersecretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations, assisted with the facilitation of the discussion.

- In December 2018, the ANMC will begin transferring eleven (11) Army post cemeteries to NCA for continued operation (for cemeteries with gravesites) and perpetual care. Once transferred, the cemeteries will fall under NCA’s authority and eligibility standards.

- Tom Howard, NCA Chief of Staff, pointed out that the transfer is consistent with NCA’s strategic plan, and there are some historic burials at these cemeteries. NCA is working closely with the Army to begin the transfer of historic documents. Also, NCA sent out a team of historians prior to the transfer to conduct a cultural resource assessment. The assessment will assist with stories produced by the Veterans Legacy Program, and will ensure that NCA is interpreting the lives of the Veterans buried in these locations in an honorable and educational manner.

- USMA Reeves clarified that this realignment effort is one of President Donald Trump’s top priorities for fiscal year 2019.

Background:

- The Army maintains 11 cemeteries that are no longer near an active Army installation but are geographically located in the vicinity of the Department of Veterans Affairs-National Cemetery Administration (VA-NCA) cemeteries.

- The VA-NCA is well positioned for the administration, operation, and maintenance of these cemeteries, due to large active national cemeteries geographically near the cemeteries proposed for transfer.

- Originally requested by US Army Reserve as a legislative proposal to divest their cemeteries, then expanded to include the Army Materiel Command and Installation Management Command cemeteries.

- ANMC engaged VA-NCA in December 2016 with the concept to transfer Army cemeteries as NCA has existing legal authority for land acquisitions.

- Executive Order 13781 issued on March 13, 2017, "Executive Order on a Comprehensive Plan for Reorganizing the Executive Branch" and on April 12, 2017, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued Memorandum M-17-22, published guidance to Executive Branch agencies to develop Reform Plans.
OMB published a comprehensive reform plan and recommendations on June 21, 2018, “Delivering Government Solutions in the 21st Century”. Included was this initiative to transfer 11 Army Cemeteries to VA-NCA.

On July 13, 2018, both VA-NCA and ANMC included the Army cemeteries transfer initiative within the, “VA/DoD Joint Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2019-2021”

Both Army and Interagency stakeholders have collaborated since early 2018 to coordinate the transfer of these cemeteries to VA-NCA commencing in 1st Quarter Fiscal Year 2019

Legal Authorities and Transfer Status

Scheduled transfers of cemeteries utilizing existing Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) authorities:
- Fort Lawton, WA by end of 1st QTR FY19
- Fort Missoula, MT by end of 2nd QTR FY19
- Fort Sheridan, IL by end of 2nd QTR FY19

Cemeteries with existing BRAC authorities but occupying withdrawn public land requires

- Department of Interior – Bureau of Land Management’s determination that they are not suitable for return to the public domain:
  - Vancouver Barracks, WA
  - Fort Douglas, UT

Cemeteries that require delegated authorities from GSA to Department of the Army for non-BRAC cemeteries:
- Installation Management Command: Benicia Arsenal, CA, Fort Stevens, OR, and Fort Worden, WA
- Installation Management Command/US Army Reserve: Fort Devens, MA
- Army Materiel Command: Fort McClellan Post and POW cemeteries, AL

Phased transfer of cemeteries from the Army to the National Cemetery Administration (NCA):
- Leverage existing BRAC authorities and funds to initiate and complete real estate transfer actions between Army and NCA
- Assistant Secretary of the Army (Installations, Energy and Environment) obtains unsuitable assessment to return withdrawn public land from Department of Interior – Bureau of Land Management (DOI-BLM) to transfer two additional BRAC cemeteries, and obtains delegation of authority from GSA to transfer six non-BRAC cemeteries (requested)
Remarks from Mr. Steven Best, Executive Director, Continental District

- Mr. Best welcomed the members and provided an overview of cemeteries under the jurisdiction of the Continental District. He mentioned that the two rural cemeteries (the members visited on October 30th and 31st) are on different ends of the spectrum in terms of operation. One cemetery, Fort Logan National Cemetery, is the sixth largest cemetery in terms of the number of interments within NCA; and the other cemetery, Pikes Peak National Cemetery, is a new cemetery. The first interment was held the next day after the members’ site visit.

- The Continental District office is co-located with the Denver Regional Benefits Office and there are other Veteran Service Offices in the building, as well.

- Mr. Best gave a personal account of why he serves Veterans and their families. Mr. Best served 39 years in the Army, and retired with the rank of General. His father was a World War II Veteran, who is interred in a national cemetery. He stated, “We have the honor and the privilege of continuing to provide oversight for our cemeteries, as well. So, I consider it to be a personal honor as well to be a part of this.”

- Chairman Beavers asked Mr. Best to explain the complication of his district’s alignment. Mr. Best explained that when he first came aboard five and half years ago, the cemeteries were aligned under Memorial Service Networks (MSNs). However, the VA Secretary, at that time, reorganized VA under Districts. As a result, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas were realigned to the Midwest District, and New Mexico was realigned to the Pacific District. The Continental District picked up Utah, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi; and is also responsible for cemeteries in Colorado, Oklahoma, Arizona, Texas, Montana and Louisiana. Mr. Best stated that it has been a smooth transition and he is glad to have played a major part in the reorganization. The roles and responsibilities to provide oversight and support for cemeteries remain the same.

Video Presentation on VA’s Veterans Cemetery Grants Program (VCGP)

Attendees viewed the following video presentation:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1J59e0KOU0U
Open Discussion and Public Comments

- Chairman Beavers reiterated that the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program is funded one hundred percent by NCA for establishment of state and tribal cemeteries, and the state or tribal cemeteries have the overall responsibility for their operation. In Fiscal Year 2018, there were 38,000 burials in tribal and state cemeteries, which account for 22 percent of total interments in the system.

- USMA Reeves stated, “Our Veterans across the Nation wouldn’t have access that they have and they would not have the benefit of a Veteran cemetery without our state and tribal partners.”

- Chairman Beavers presented two challenges covered in the State Assembly. He stated that the plot allowance in the state cemeteries are only for the Veterans. Consequently, the state cemeteries charge family members, which in his opinion, is an inequity in plot allowance benefit. Chairman Beavers also pointed out that budget constraints sometimes make it difficult for state cemeteries to meet the standards established by NCA.

- Patti Sampers, President, Gold Star Wives of America, Inc., Denver Area Chapter, and Margaret Sebern, Vice President, Gold Star Wives of America, Denver Area, expressed comments of gratitude for the support provided by VA, and specifically the NCA Continental District.

- Chairman Beavers emphasized that the Vietnam Era was a very difficult time for our country. However, our country did not do well, during that time, to honor our Veterans or their family members. He stated (not verbatim) that it is incumbent upon the committee, and other individuals, to make sure that families know about death and burial benefits, for which they may be eligible to receive.

- Dr. JoAnn Fisher made a point that we [VA and Stakeholders] should also be sensitive to women and clearly focus on the information provided to women Veterans, active duty Servicemembers, mothers, and families. She stated, in part, “…When we plan all this, we have to have special programs to encourage the women who come in to know about benefits.”

- Edith Smith, who is also a member of Gold Star Wives of America, Inc., commended Mrs. Pampers and Ms. Sebern for attending the meeting and stated, in part, “…I see them not only as advocates for the families, but advocates for their husbands who are no longer here –”

- Ms. Sampers presented a challenge coin to Chairman Beavers commemorating their representation of the organization, “Gold Star Wives of America”, and all survivors of deceased Veterans.
Dr. Bryce Carpenter discussed the Veterans Legacy Program (VLP). He stated, in part, “...One of the strategic goals for Legacy has been to elevate the NCA brand... We find that people drive by our cemeteries daily with little understanding or no understanding of who gets interred there, how they earned that unique national tribute, or how it can relate to them if they don't have anybody in their own family interred there.”

Dr. Carpenter’s presentation included the following key points:

- VLP creates partnerships that engage students (at all levels), educators, and the American public with their local history through the diversity of the Veteran experience enshrined in our 136 national cemeteries.

**Strategic Goals:**
- Elevate NCA brand recognition
- Engagement at community level
- Extend memorialization

**Educational Outreach:**
- NCA creates university and public-school partnerships to focus on extending memorialization at national cemeteries
- Partnerships may include teachers across several schools and grade-levels in a single school district
- Public school teachers working with university faculty on a project that instructs and engages students on researching local Veterans

**Partnerships with Universities & Educational Organizations:**
- University of Central Florida (Orlando, FL)
- San Francisco State University (San Francisco, CA)
- Black Hills State University (Spearfish, SD)
- University of California-Riverside (Riverside, CA)
- California State Polytechnic University (Pomona, CA)
- University of Denver (Denver, CO)
- University of Tennessee (Knoxville, TN)
- George Mason University (Fairfax, VA)
- National History Day (everywhere)
- Interagency: ABMC, WW1CC

In 2018, there was 300% growth in the program: 26 NCA cemeteries + 2 state Veteran cemeteries + 3 tribal Veteran cemeteries + 5 ABMC American cemeteries = 36 sites covered (in 2017: 8 sites; in 2016: 2 sites)
- **Modernizing Memorialization:**
  
  - **Legacy** is leading the effort to modernize the cemetery experience for visitors, students, researchers, and the public.
  - **Legacy Partnerships:** Each university partnership contributes something new to Legacy’s product suite.
  - **Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM)** is an online memorialization platform: the first of its kind. **Allows family and friends to pay respects and share photos in an online memorial space.** For historic Veterans, a place for genealogists, scholars, and students to share research.
  
  - **VA Center for Innovation challenge:**
    
    - **Phase 1:** Spring 2018, prototype developed, socialized with stakeholder groups, compelling feedback received from DoD Survivors Forum and Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)
    - **Phase 2:** Fall 2018, currently building VLM for operation in secure environment on va.gov domain
    - **Phase 3:** Winter 2019, test, deploy, and sustain solution in development environment
    - **Phase 4:** Spring 2019, public launch for memorial portal
  
  - **Future State:**
    - Geospatial capture and integration
    - User-to-gravesite navigation
    - Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) capabilities
    - Full integration with Memorial Benefits Management System (MBMS)

  - Under the University of Denver program, students are looking at Veterans interred in Fort Logan National Cemetery. The students selected a variety of service periods, from World War I to more recent periods. To construct the public exhibit in their library, the students created short-form biographies, along with pictures. They will also create a parallel digital exhibit with more fully-developed biographies of these Veterans. In addition, the students will produce a documentary about what it has meant to do the research on Veterans and how they’ve shared it with the public-school community, notably at Arapahoe High School.

  - Prior to concluding his presentation, Dr. Carpenter demonstrated the VLM prototype.
Meeting Adjourned

- The Chairman concluded the open session of the meeting at 11:38am for lunch and site visits, which were closed to the public.

- During the site visit at Fort Logan National Cemetery, the committee toured the grounds and discussed operations with the Director, Mat Williams. They later visited the library exhibit located at the University of Denver. Members gained a firsthand knowledge about the Veterans Legacy Program; and research and biographies developed by students for the exhibit.

- Additional information about Fort Logan National Cemetery can be found at:

  https://www.cem.va.gov/cems/nchp/ftlogan.asp

Clockwise: Fort Logan National Cemetery, VLP Library Exhibits at University of Denver, Center: Undersecretary Reeves, Committee Members, and NCA Staff.
Wednesday, October 31, 2018

Opening Remarks

o Chairman Beavers called the meeting to order at 8:34 a.m. He commended Kenneth Holliday for his service and asked him to say a few words about himself. Mr. Holliday served six years in Iraq and Afghanistan, and participated in the Veterans Legacy Program as a student at the University of Central Florida.

o Members were asked to give a quick reflection of their visit to Fort Logan National Cemeteries and the Veterans Legacy Program at the University of Denver. Several members spoke highly of Fort Logan and the library exhibit produced by the students at the University of Denver. A few members reported that they initially had reservations due to privacy concerns. However, they now have a better perspective of the program.

o After all accounts were heard, attendees recited the Pledge of Allegiance and held a moment of silence for our country and lost family members. Ms. Hamilton provided administrative announcements and overview of the agenda.

Workgroup Status Update on National Cemetery Scheduling Office (NCSO)

o Chairman Beavers, workgroup lead, began the discussion by introducing Ginger Wilson, Director of NCSO. He also gave an overview of the challenges she faced at NCSO as the new director, which included backlog of pre-need cases, renovation at facility, organizational changes, and IT modernization changes.

o NCSO’s mission is to determine eligibility for interment and schedule committal and memorial services. The facility is divided into two divisions: “Scheduling” and “Eligibility”. Chairman Beavers visited the NSCO in May 2018. He discussed the issues in depth with Ms. Wilson, and observed the operations in both divisions.

o Chairman Beavers key findings were:
  o Dual-tasked resources to handle both time of need and pre-need work
  o Time consuming manual data entry
  o Lack of staffing and backup resources
  o Software glitches in newly replaced telephone system

o His recommendations were:
  o Add contract support to manually enter data to allow staff to manage scheduling of burial and process eligibility determinations
  o Add additional Full-Time Staff (FTEs)
  o Enlist the support of the National Training Center to develop lessons plans and train new personnel
Formalize the opening of calls to say, “Thank you for your loved one’s service” Note: Ms. Wilson stated that both the branded opening statement and closing statement were changed.

- Add on-site IT support to assist with modernization issues
- Convert paper fax to electronic fax
- Contract out inbound and outbound mail processing

**Below is the status update based on Chairman Beavers’ recommendations and NCA’s Mitigation Plan:**

**Scheduling Divisions Actions**

- Increased call queue capacity from 30 to 40 callers
- Implemented “Clear the Queue” program
- Decreased automatic wrap time between calls
- Transitioned telephone platform from Tadiran to Cisco
- Increased Scheduling Division full-time equivalent FTEs by twelve
- Expanded leadership team
- Decreased team supervisor-to-employee ratio

**Organization**

- Expand NCSO leadership and organizational structure
  - Increased ceiling from 81 to 93 employees
  - Added three Scheduling teams
- Onboard contract resources to augment Pre-Need staff
  - Awarded contract September 28, 2018
  - Expedited contract resource access

**Education**

- Coordinate employee development through National Training Center
- Develop and enhance training curriculum
  - New employee
  - Continuing education
  - Skills
  - Need based
  - Cross-functional
- Created internal training plan and schedule
- Implemented series of skills based training events for Supervisors, Leads, and employees
  - Targeted to identified errors, issues, and trends
Modernization

- Information Technology Systems
  - Information Technology System - transition to Memorial Benefits Management System
  - Fax system - convert to electronic fax to email
  - Inbound mail - contract postal mail, fax, and scan activities
  - Outbound mail - contract print, fold, and frank actions

- Processes
  - Pre-Need - automate application process
    - Online application soft-launched August 8, 2018 via Vets.gov
  - Time of Need - implement self-service scheduling
    - Scheduled for February 2019

**Note:** Glenn Powers clarified that Self-Service Scheduling will be available online for funeral directors, as opposed to family members. Funeral directors will still be able to schedule a burial by phone, if preferred.

Pre-Need Inventory Elimination Plan

- Pre-Need eligibility targets:
  - 120 days (15,800 applications) - no more than 15% of inventory to be pending greater than 120 days - 18,170 applications
  - 60 days (7,900 applications) - no more than 15% of inventory to be pending greater than 60 days - 9,085 applications

- Assumptions:
  - Monthly average inventory received - 3,950, based upon historical average
  - Applications processed in “First-in, First-out” order

**Note:** On the date of the meeting, there were 36,842 pending applications.

Renovation

- Facility
  - Update existing structure
  - Create open floor plan
  - Seat all employees together, regardless of division
  - Display call queue and employee status dashboard on monitors
  - Install new height adjustable desks for all employees

- Schedule
  - Phase 1 - November 9, 2018, ready for occupancy
  - Phase 2 - December 13, 2018, ready for occupancy
  - Phase 3 - March 15, 2019, ready for occupancy
  - Project - March 22, 2019, complete
Chairman Beavers applauded Ms. Wilson and her team for all their efforts. Ms. Wilson stated, “…the goal is to turn NCSO into a true Center of Excellence. And that can only be done through iterative, continual progress, and then reevaluation…”

Chairman Beavers asked Heather Braatz to report on the preparation of scheduling from a funeral director's perspective.

Ms. Braatz’ key points were as follows:

It is imperative for a funeral director do to the yeoman job of initial information gathering. For a “time-of-need” service, the funeral director is charged with:

1. Determining if the decedent was a Veteran
2. Gathering all of the necessary vital statistics data
3. Obtaining proof of service or discharge documents
4. Educating the family on service options at the National Cemetery
5. Contacting the National Cemetery Scheduling Office with the necessary documentation to verify eligibility and secure a scheduled committal time
6. Contacting the National Cemetery directly to convey the survivor’s desired Emblem of Belief (EOB), Terms of Endearment (TOE), and verifying local honor guard and flag origin
7. Performing funeral services as prescribed in accordance to the survivor’s wishes

Ms. Braatz mentioned that once the self-service application is available, a walk-thru video would be beneficial for funeral directors. The electronic fax will be very helpful, as well. Ms. Braatz also stated that it would be easier for Funeral Directors, if there was a button on the VA website specifically for them simply stating, “Funeral Directors Assisting Families with Burial”.

Presently, on the website, the resources for funeral directors are located under the tab “Assisting Families with Burial” (formerly labeled as the “Funeral Directors Kit”):
https://www.cem.va.gov/cem/funeraldirector.asp
Workgroup Status Update on Emblems of Belief (EOB)

- Marianne Trussell, workgroup lead, provided a status update on the workgroup’s findings and analysis of EOB regulation. She thanked Ms. Braatz for her assistance in reviewing and preparing the documents for the meetings in an expedient and efficient manner. She also thanked the other workgroup members for their input.

- Mr. Trussell’s key points were as follows:

  **Issue:**
  - 38 CFR 38.632 (g)-(h) provides the criteria for a new EOB as well as the application/decision making process.
  - Under this regulation, the applicant must demonstrate that there is an immediate need to inscribe the new emblem.

  **Purpose:**
  - The VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials (Committee) met in Washington, DC on May 15 – 16, 2018.
  - The Committee recommended the establishment of a working group to review the Emblems of Belief (EOB) regulation and definition of a “belief system”.
  - NCA specifically requested that the working group look at the current criteria and process for EOB determinations and offer advice before any proposed rule for regulatory action.

  **Background:**
  - Prior to 2007, the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Memorial Products Service (MPS) approved new emblems of belief (EOB) based on a request from a religious organization or a faith group.
  - After 2007, NCA began developing the regulation, which was approved and published in 2009.
  - Since 2009, the requestor for a new EOB must be the decedent’s next-of-kin (NOK), a person authorized in writing by the NOK, or a personal representative authorized in writing by the decedent and must:
    - **Establish** need
    - **Certify** decedent’s affiliation
    - **Submit** digitized emblem
Rational & Decision

- After clarification of the actual charge and thorough discussions, the Working Group recommended that NCA revise the regulation to:
  - **Clarify** the EOB application
  - **Clarify** certification requirements
  - **Clarify** the decision-making process
  - **Provide** a “Sunset Date” of seven (7) years for EOBs not requested

- There was some discussion regarding the definition of “belief” and the purpose of the “sunset date” for EOBs that are used by only one person within the seven-year timeframe. Dr. Eric Powell explained that the three rejected EOBs did not fall under the current criteria. There are currently 70 approved EOBs.

- Ms. Trussell stated that the wording for the eligibility requirements should be clearly defined. The way regulation currently reads seems to be more automatic and open to interpretation in terms of definition of a “belief”. Ms. Braatz stated that the way the regulation is currently written, it allows for almost any symbol that isn’t copyrighted or representative of a fraternal organization to be accepted.

- Colonel Strickland asked if an eagle feather would be considered as an EOB. He explained that the eagle feather, in the Native American religion, carries the Spirit of God upward. Dr. Powell stated that if the sample of the eagle feather was submitted along with a justification of what it meant to the Veteran spiritually, then it may qualify under the current regulation.

- Tom Sole suggested that NCA should focus on the purpose or intent of the EOB and look at whether the purpose of the EOB is for one individual’s belief system or for a group’s (nationally recognized symbol). Chairman Beavers stated that it’s all about honoring the Veteran, as an individual, at the time of death. Mr. Powers agreed that NCA leans toward what the family wants at the time of need.

- The committee decided to change the language in the final recommendation to NCA as follows:

  Revise the wording in the EOB regulation to:
  a. **Clarify** the EOB application
  b. **Clarify** the certification requirements
  c. **Research and Communicate** the purpose of the emblems
  d. **Clarify** the wording in the decision-making process
  e. **Consider** a “Sunset Date” of seven (7) years for EOBs not requested
Public Comments

- Michael Figlioli provided a public comment on behalf of Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and not as a committee member. VFW previously submitted a letter for USMA Reeve’s review and consideration. Chairman Beavers clarified that Mr. Figlioli’s public comment was for informational purposes only and not for committee action.

- VFW’s position is that there is a distinction between war-time service and war service era.

- In addition, VFW asserts that the instructions on VA Form 40-1330, Claim for Standard Government Headstone or Marker, does not clearly indicate whether it is required or optional to indicate war service. The instructions state that it is optional to provide the war service; whereas block 16, states to check a period of service.

- The instructions on VA Form 40-1330 state: War service includes active duty service during a recognized period of war and the individual does not have to serve in the actual place of war, e.g., Vietnam may be inscribed if the Veteran served during the Vietnam War period, even though the individual never served in the country. Supporting documentation must be included with the claim if you wish to include the highest rank and/or awards.

- VFW recommended that NCA rescind the current headstone inscription policy; update the instructions on the form; and issue new guidance.

- Chairman Beavers clarified that VFW is coming from the standpoint of their membership and the qualification and eligibility for that membership, which in -- which is war-time service. The 50th Commemorative Series going on for Vietnam right now is based upon war era for inclusiveness of that whole cohort of those who served during that time.

- The Chairman thanked Mr. Figlioli for bringing forth his comment on behalf of VFW.
**Charge and Recommendation**

1. The committee agreed upon the following **charge**:

   Colonel Strickland and Lieutenant Colonel Saunders were charged with researching and reporting back to the full committee on the needs, customs, and tribal traditions of Native American Veterans.

2. The committee submits the following **recommendation** for VA consideration and approval:

   NCA revise the wording in the EOB regulation to:
   a) **Clarify** the EOB application
   b) **Clarify** the certification requirements
   c) **Research and Communicate** the purpose of the emblems
   d) **Clarify** the wording in the decision-making process
   e) **Consider** a “Sunset Date” of seven (7) years for EOBs not requested

**Closing Remarks**

- Chairman Beavers asked the committee for a motion to submit the EOB recommendation and thanked the members for their participation.

**Meeting Adjourned & Site Visit to Pikes Peak National Cemetery**

- The open session of the meeting was adjourned 10:32am. During the closed session, the Committee conducted a site visit to Pikes Peak National Cemetery, which was facilitated by Mr. Pat LaGrange, Cemetery Director.

- The committee members toured the grounds and reviewed the plans for the cemetery. Pikes Peak National Cemetery is a new 374-acre Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national cemetery in the southeast portion of Colorado Springs. The cemetery will serve the burial needs of more than 95,000 Veterans, their spouses and eligible family members.

- The cemetery staff was preparing for their first interments on November 1, 2018. Additional information about Pikes Peak National Cemetery can be found at:

  https://www.cem.va.gov/cems/nchp/PikesPeak.asp
Committee members at Pikes Peak National Cemetery

Leslie E. Beavers
Committee Chair

Note: The verbatim transcription of this meeting is available upon request.