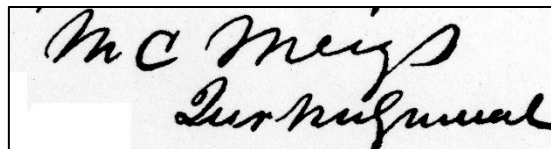
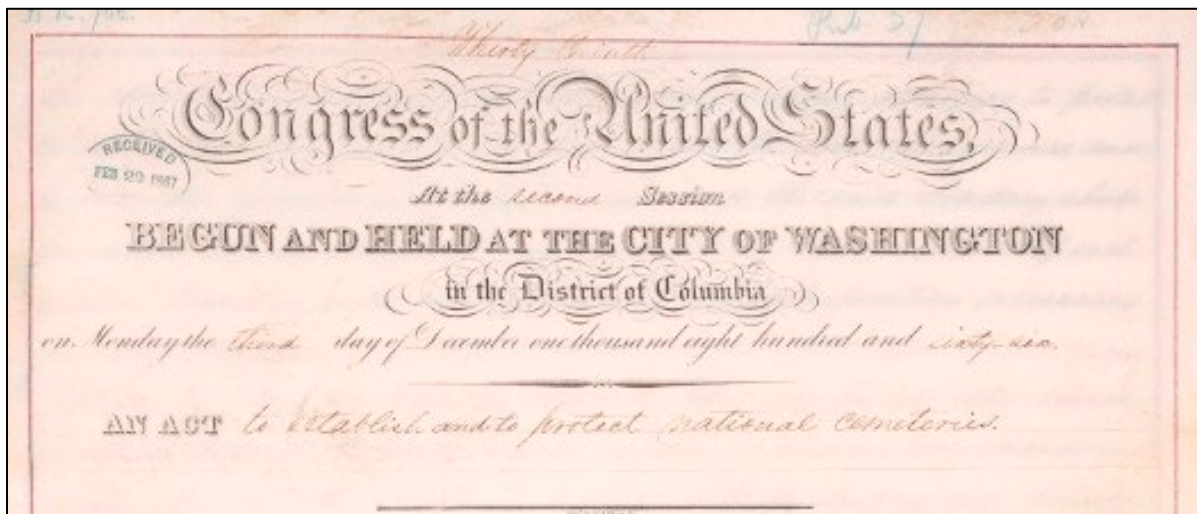


Superintendents of the National Cemeteries

Among its responsibilities to oversee the development and care of national cemeteries, the Office of the Quartermaster General appointed superintendents (now called directors) to manage the cemeteries beginning in the late 1860s. These appointments superseded custodial arrangements made locally during and immediately after the Civil War. The army's regulations directing the qualifications and duties of superintendents were a part of the emerging operational infrastructure for the national cemetery system developed by Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs and administered through his office.



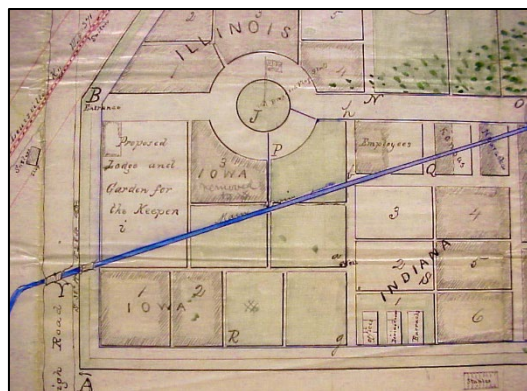
Mc Meigs
Quartermaster General



(Top, right) Signature of the Quartermaster General, Montgomery C. Meigs, 1871 (NCA) and preamble to *An Act to Establish and Protect National Cemeteries*, Pub.L. 39-61, 14 Stat. 399-401, 22 February 1867 (National Archives and Records Administration)

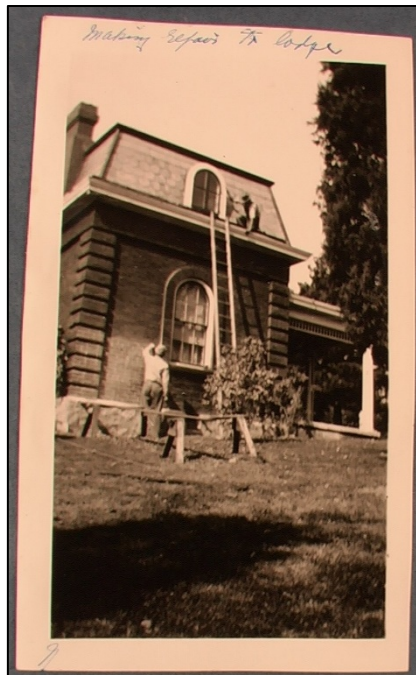
Qualifications for cemetery superintendents are traced to an 1867 law that directed the secretary of war to appoint a “meritorious and trustworthy” superintendent to manage each national cemetery. To be eligible for the position, an individual must have been an army enlisted man disabled in service. By 1931, changes in the law allowed any honorably discharged commissioned officer or enlisted man, who may have been disabled in the line of duty, to serve. Caveats included the provisions for physical and educational examinations to ensure an applicant could fulfill the requirements of the position, references to assure an applicant’s temperate disposition, and a probationary period for on-the-job experience and evaluation.

A superintendent’s responsibilities ranged from interments and maintenance of the cemetery to interactions with the public. The men conducted routine inspections of the grounds and arranged for laborers to assist with mowing the grass and repairing cemetery features. Housing was provided for a family in a lodge built at the edge of the burial grounds. No boarders were permitted; guests tended to be the visiting public. Vegetable gardens are evident in early plans, but farming, animal husbandry, and other “private enterprise” were prohibited. By the 1930s, superintendents’ housing varied in architectural style.



Memphis National Cemetery (NCA).

Many lodges were replaced or upgraded through funds provided by the New Deal work programs designed to mitigate the dire poverty of the Great Depression. Veterans of World War I lived in these buildings as stewards of the national cemeteries from the 1930s into the 1960s. Only four



superintendents live on-site today, yet their duties to oversee cemetery operations remain twofold – administrative and public facing as well as internal efforts to meet standards established for nationally significant historic properties under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended.

Twenty-three veterans of the World War I period returned to the Quartermaster Corps as civilian employees and oversaw national cemeteries administered by the War Department. Congress twice extended the period of service for World War I beyond April 6, 1917, when the United States entered the war, to November 11, 1918, when the armistice was signed: first, to include service in the former Soviet Union to April 1, 1920, and second, for service from the armistice through July 2, 1921, for any serviceman or woman who saw active duty in the war period. Several national cemetery superintendents' military service falls into the latter category.



(Top, left) Repair of the superintendent's lodge at Keokuk National Cemetery (Iowa) in the 1930s (NCA) and the funeral procession for the Unknown Soldier on November 11, 1921 (Library of Congress).

Who Were These Superintendents?

Mostly these men were born in the 1890s and they came from across the continental United States. Several were first-generation Americans. They were miners, ranchers, farmers, carpenters, automobile mechanics, watchmakers, glassblowers, printers or publishers, medical

practitioners, and office workers. Others made the military a career. One, Private Andrew Hill, followed his father into military service and into service with the Quartermaster as a cemetery superintendent. Another, Staff Sergeant James William Dell, was selected to be pallbearer for the unknown soldier buried in Arlington on November 11, 1921. Several were posted to the newest national cemeteries, the [seven established after World War I](#) in California, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, and Texas. These added to the eighty-four cemeteries under the War Department in 1929, although in the 1930s, eleven of the Civil War battlefield cemeteries were transferred to the Department of the Interior. The overall number of national cemeteries, and superintendents needed for their care, remained steady.

Brief biographies of the superintendents follow.

World War I Veterans, National Cemetery Superintendents

Arkansas native **Vivian Bell** (1893-1961) was born in Washington County and grew up the Fayetteville area. He listed his father, James, as next of kin on his draft card and enlistment rolls in the U.S. Army during World War I. Corporal Bell served overseas in 1918-1919 and returned home with the sick and wounded aboard the U.S.S. *Powhatan* in May. He qualified for a vocational training program in 1920 and married the next year. Bell served as the superintendent of several national cemeteries from this period through 1940s, including Fayetteville, Arkansas; Jefferson City, Missouri; and Annapolis, Maryland. By World War II, Bell and his wife Lattie were residing in Fayetteville. Bell died August 14 and is buried in Fayetteville National Cemetery (Section 2, Site 208); when his wife died in 1965, she was buried next to him.

John Bierman (1879-1962) was born in Germany and his family immigrated to the United States when he was a child to settle in the upper Midwest. Bierman joined the 15th Minnesota Volunteers before enlisting in the U.S. Army in 1899.

Captain Bierman served during the Spanish American War and afterward was stationed in the Philippines in 1900. He remained in the military through World War I. As a civilian Bierman was employed by the Quartermaster Corps as a cemetery superintendent. He managed Keokuk National Cemetery, Iowa, in the 1920s-1930s, and from 1938-1942 he oversaw Baltimore National Cemetery, Maryland, before returning to Keokuk, 1942-1943. Bierman died August 22 and is buried in Keokuk National Cemetery (Section E, Site 452).

William E. Brindley (1889-1943) was born in Nebraska and worked as a farmer. He enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War I and served in the 325th Guard and Fire Corps in 1918. He was honorably discharged with the rank of sergeant first class. Brindley married, had two children, and by the end of the 1920s moved to Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, where he continued to farm. Brindley was also the superintendent of Fort Gibson National Cemetery in 1930-1931. His son, Edwin (1922-1944), followed in his footsteps and enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War II. William Brindley died May 27 and is buried in Fort Gibson National Cemetery (Section 4, Site 2914).

(Below) Entrance,
Fort Gibson National Cemetery (NCA).



North Carolinian **Dewey S. Brown** (1898-1971) enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War I, joining Company E, 120th Infantry until June 1919. Sergeant Brown received the Mexican Border Service medal, as well as the Distinguished Service Cross, Purple Heart, and French Croix de Guerre for World War I service. As a civilian, he returned to North Carolina before entering the National Home for Volunteer Disabled Soldiers in Hampton, Virginia, in the 1930s. He met his wife, Gretchen, married in 1939, and moved to El Paso, Texas. There, Brown was employed by the Quartermaster Corps as superintendent of Fort Bliss National Cemetery, ca. 1940-1944. He left to join the El Paso Public Schools, where he worked for more than 25 years. Brown died June 10 and is buried in Fort Bliss National Cemetery (Section A, Site 1A).

Charles C. Church (1869-1936) was born in Pennsylvania, and by 1880 the family had moved to Kansas. Church worked as a printer before enlisting in the U.S. Army, 8th Infantry, in 1890. Church retired in 1920 with the rank of master sergeant. At the end of World War I, Church accepted a temporary commission with the Quartermaster Corps' 317th Service Battalion that promoted to him to captain and took him overseas (1918-1919). After the war, as a civilian, he worked for the Army Quartermaster. He was the superintendent of Baton Rouge National Cemetery, Louisiana, in 1926, and San Francisco National Cemetery, California, in 1927-1930. By 1934, he was living in Springfield, Missouri, where he died on June 8. Church is buried in Springfield National Cemetery (Section 24, Site 1331A).



(Left) Photograph of the private marker Church installed for his wife, and in anticipation of his death, in San Francisco National Cemetery, and (right) government-furnished headstone for Church, Springfield National Cemetery, where he was buried (NCA).

James William Dell (1876-1968) was born in Kentucky. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in October 1897 and fought in the Spanish American War and World War I. Cited for gallantry in action, Staff Sergeant Dell was selected to serve as a pallbearer for the interment of the Unknown Soldier of World War I at Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia, a ceremony held on November 11, 1921. Dell retired at the rank of master sergeant after 32 years of military service. As a civilian, Dell was appointed as the first superintendent of Zachary Taylor National Cemetery, Kentucky, and later he oversaw Saint Augustine National Cemetery, Florida. He died July 28 and is buried in Saint Augustine National Cemetery (Section C, Site 205).



Funeral Procession for the Unknown Soldier, 1921 (Keystone, Library of Congress).

Born in Arkansas, **Roy Bert Donnahoe** (1895-1960) was one of nine children. The family moved to Asheville, North Carolina. Donnahoe graduated from

the local high school and was working for the Goodyear Company when he was drafted into the U.S. Army for World War I. Private Donnahoe served in Company G, 322nd Infantry, 81st Division, from 1918-1919. Upon his return, he was elected an officer in Asheville's newly formed post of the American Legion. In the 1920s Donnahoe studied osteopathic medicine, married, and moved to Salisbury. In the 1940s he joined the civilian ranks of the Quartermaster Corps as the superintendent of Annapolis and Baltimore national cemeteries in Maryland through 1959. In August 1959, the family relocated to Franklin, Tennessee, where his wife's family lived. He died the next year and is buried in Nashville National Cemetery (Section KK, Site 998).

Carl O. Gruel (1892-1959) was the son of German immigrants who settled in Montana. Gruel and his siblings grew up in Red Lodge. He was drafted into military service during World War I, Private First Class Gruel enlisted in the U.S. Army, joining the Coast Artillery Corps in defense of Puget Sound from 1917 to 1919. After the war, he returned to Montana and worked in the coal mines. He married in 1925 and, by 1930, the family moved to Big Horn, near the Crow Reservation, to farm. Gruel's ranching endeavor ended by 1934 when he was hired as a civilian employee by the Quartermaster Corps. Between 1934 and 1959 he directed five national cemeteries: Fort Harrison and Seven Pines near Richmond, Virginia; Fort McPherson, Nebraska; Knoxville, Tennessee; and, for 14 years, Santa Fe, New Mexico. He died suddenly on June 2 and is buried in Santa Fe National Cemetery (Section N, Site 52).

Walter Hanns (1893-1964) was born in Philadelphia, and his parents immigrated from England to Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Hanns lived in Lower Bucks County for much of his life. He enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War I. Corporal Hanns was gassed during combat and returned home to Philadelphia in 1919. In the 1920s he worked as a carpenter and married, but in the mid-1930s he sought veterans' compensation and, by 1940, was hired by the government for his carpentry skills. Hanns then embarked on a 25-year career as a civilian cemetery superintendent with the Quartermaster Corps. He supervised national cemeteries at Little Rock, Arkansas; Beverly and Finn's Point, New Jersey; Corinth, Mississippi; and Mound City, Illinois. Hanns died June 17 and is buried at Little Rock National Cemetery (Section 7, Site 4103A).



Andrew K. Hill (NARA).

Andrew K. Hill (1892-1970) was born in Arkansas. His father, Richard B. Hill (1845-1920), who had immigrated from Ireland and joined the U.S. Army to fight in the Civil War, was the superintendent of Fayetteville National Cemetery. For nearly three decades, ca. 1890-1920, the elder Hill served as a cemetery superintendent; after his death, he was buried in Fredericksburg National Cemetery. Andrew K. Hill followed his father into the mortuary business by the mid-1910s. He was the superintendent of the American Military Cemetery in Mexico City, ca. 1915-1917, and his duties were interrupted by World War I. Hill enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1918. After the war, he worked as an embalmer in Washington, DC, and resumed his career with the Quartermaster Corps as a national cemetery superintendent, 1938-1962. Hill died May 23 and is buried in Beaufort National Cemetery, South Carolina (Section 34, Grave 47), where his father was once a superintendent.

George M. Hoswell (1885-1955) was born in Washburn, Illinois. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1904 and joined Company D, 11th Cavalry. His service included overseas duty in 1919-1920 with 42nd Company, Camp Meade Replacement Unit No. 10, with the American Expeditionary Forces. Technical Sergeant Hoswell retired from the military in 1937. He married soon after returning from France and settled in Baltimore, Maryland. There, he worked as a civilian employee of the Quartermaster Corps and, in 1945, as the acting superintendent of Baltimore National Cemetery. Hoswell died February 24 and was buried there (Section I, Grave 13034).

New Yorker **William C. MacMurray** (1893-1959) was born in Brooklyn and attended school in the city. He was drafted into the U.S. Army for World War I, and Sergeant MacMurray was stationed overseas in 1917-1919. As a civilian, MacMurray returned to New York and held jobs in the publishing and insurance industries before the Great Depression. By 1940 the veteran was employed as a stenographer for the Quartermaster Corps, which oversaw national cemeteries. MacMurray then became the superintendent at two national cemeteries, first at Mill Springs in Kentucky. MacMurray subsequently managed Finn's Point National Cemetery, New Jersey, for 11 years and retired there in 1954. He died November 9 and is buried in New York's Long Island National Cemetery (Section 2A, Site 45).

Anthony Joseph Nettke (1898-1961) was a first-generation American whose parents had immigrated from Poland. Nettke was born in Michigan and lived Detroit when he enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War I. Corporal Nettke served in the army from 1917-1919, and was severely wounded in 1918. After the war, he returned to Detroit and married. Starting in the early 1940s, Nettke was a civilian employee of the Quartermaster Corps appointed to manage national cemeteries at Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, and Fort Bliss, Texas. From 1945 until his death, Nettke was the superintendent of Golden Gate National Cemetery, California. He died April 20 and is buried there (Section C, Site C-1-24).

Son of German immigrants, **John Neukirch** (1890-1962) was born in Kansas. He worked as a farmer before enlisting in the U.S. Army in May 1917. He was wounded and was discharged with the rank of second lieutenant in 1918. Neukirch married in 1922 but was ill for several years. The Quartermaster Corps hired him as a civilian employee at the VA hospital in Muskogee, Oklahoma in the 1940s. By the end of the decade he was appointed superintendent of Fort McPherson National Cemetery, Nebraska, a position he held through 1957. During World War I, Neukirch and his family endured discrimination and slander due to their German heritage. However, commanding officers in the army and community leaders at home staunchly defended his character. Neukirch died August 7 and is buried in Fort McPherson National Cemetery (Section I, Site 61).



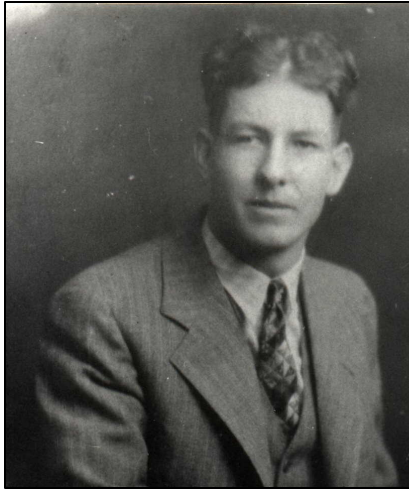
Warren L. Pierson, Superintendent.

Signature line (NCA).

Born in Idaho Territory, **Warren Leslie Pierson** (1885-1959) grew up there before enlisting in the U.S. Army in 1904. He served in the infantry and coast artillery until July 1933 and retired with the rank of master sergeant. His military career took him through the continental United States. He married in El Paso, Texas, and his son was born in Fort Monroe, Virginia. As a

civilian, Pierson returned to the West. By the end of the 1930s, he was in the San Francisco Bay Area and employed by the Quartermaster Corps as a cemetery superintendent. Pierson is remembered for his long tenure at the Presidio, from 1939-1955, but during that time, in 1941-1943, he also oversaw the newly-established Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Mateo County. Pierson was in Los Angeles briefly, but the reasons for the temporary relocation are unclear. He died May 6 and is buried in San Francisco National Cemetery (Section B, Site 685-A).

Kentuckian **Benjamin H. Pruitt** (1897-1955) worked for an automobile-supply company when he was drafted into the U.S. Army's Motor Transport Corps, a unit established in 1918, at the end of World War I. The Quartermaster sought recruits from automotive manufacturers who were skilled mechanics. Sergeant Pruitt joined the Repair Unit, 310th MTC, stationed in France in 1918-1919. After his tour, he returned to Kentucky and by the 1920s was married. Starting in the mid-1940s, Pruitt was again affiliated with the Quartermaster Corps. As a civilian, he served as the superintendent of two national cemeteries between 1945 and 1955: Natchez, Mississippi, and Camp Nelson, Kentucky. Pruitt retired in May 1955 and died November 11. Pruitt was buried in Camp Nelson National Cemetery (Section A, Site 467).



Benjamin H. Pruitt (Ancestry.com)

Tennessean **Shelby Atlas Robbins** (1880-1960) worked as farm laborer before enlisting in the U.S. Army in 1898. Robbins' military career spanned the Spanish-American War and World War I. He traveled around the world with the army, from the Philippines in 1900 to the Panama Canal Zone in 1926; his domestic posts included San Antonio, Texas. He retired in 1928 with the rank of technical sergeant. As a civilian, Robbins worked as a carpenter before his employment with the Quartermaster Corps. He was appointed as the superintendent of Fort Harrison, Virginia, and then Loudon Park, Maryland, national cemeteries. Robbins lived in Baltimore from the 1930s until his death in 1960. He died January 17 and is buried in Baltimore National Cemetery (Section I, Site 15281).

Fred Rover (1887-1960) was born in France and his father, glassmaker Eugene Rouvier, emigrated to the United States with the family in the early 1900s. Fred Rover was also a glassmaker by the time he enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1909. He served in 1st Infantry during World War I and retired with the rank of master sergeant in 1935; the same year he became a naturalized citizen. Rover then embarked upon a second career as civilian employee of the Quartermaster Corps. He held the position of superintendent at three national cemeteries: Camp Nelson, Kentucky, and Springfield and Camp Butler, Illinois. Rover moved to California in the late 1950s and died there on December 2. He is buried in San Francisco National Cemetery (Section B, Site 60-A).



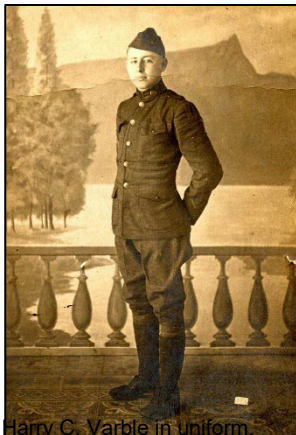
View to Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco National Cemetery (NCA).

Son of Norwegian immigrants, **Carl Joseph Sonstelie** (1889-1960) was born and raised in North Dakota. He enlisted in U.S. Army in 1917, married, and served overseas with the American Expeditionary Forces tank corps in France; he received the Distinguished Service Cross for actions at Bois-de-Cuisy. After World War I, Captain Sonstelie continued to serve in the National Guard when the family lived in Montana and he worked as a postmaster. From 1935 to 1956, Sonstelie's final and extended career was that of national cemetery superintendent. As a civilian employee of the Quartermaster Corps he worked at three national cemeteries: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Fort Rosecrans, California; and Fort Bliss, Texas. Sonstelie oversaw Fort Bliss for almost 11 years and retired in El Paso. He died October 24 and is buried in Fort Bliss National Cemetery (Section A, Site 118A).

Texas-born **Charles S. Stroup** (1895-1965) enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1917 and served during World War I. Private First Class Stroup completed his tour in March 1919. He married later that year and the couple had two children in the 1920s. Stroup supported his family as a watchmaker. After his wife's death in 1929, the young widower returned to his parents' house in Greenville, Texas. By 1942, Stroup was employed by the Quartermaster Corps in San Antonio as a civilian patrolman at Fort Sam Houston. Stroup then embarked on a career as a national cemetery superintendent. Between 1946 and 1962, he oversaw properties at Port Hudson and Alexandria, Louisiana, and at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Stroup died July 15 and is buried in Alexandria National Cemetery (Section E, Site 27).

King C. Tolles (1875-1951) was born in Michigan and worked as a blacksmith before enlisting in the U.S. Army in 1901. Master Sergeant Tolles made a career in the military, primarily serving stateside, and retiring from the army in 1925. He then accepted a commission with the National Guard. Tolles and his family were in Japan when the United States entered World War I, and they returned from Nagasaki in 1917 to settle in California's San Francisco Bay Area. Tolles became a civilian employee of the Quartermaster Corps by 1940, when he was appointed superintendent of Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego. In the mid-1940s he returned to San Francisco, where he died on July 4. Tolles is buried in San Francisco National Cemetery (Section OSA, Site 64-7).

Harry C. Varble (1892-1967) was born in Jeffersonville, Indiana, and he lived in this area for much of his life. He was a car inspector before enlisting in the U.S. Army during World War I, and joining Company H, 335th Infantry, 84th Division. Sergeant Varble served overseas in 1918-1919. In the 1930s he married, started a family, and launched a civilian career with the Quartermaster Corps. Varble was, in succession, a clerk, guard, and national cemetery superintendent. He oversaw Lebanon National Cemetery, Kentucky, ca. 1950-1958, and New Albany National Cemetery, Indiana, from 1958 to the early 1960s. He died on October 31 and is buried there (Section D, Site 280).



Harry C. Varble in uniform,
1918 (Ancestry.com).

Louisianan **Jacob (Jake) Wade** (1895-1977) lived most of his life on the Gulf Coast. He served in the U.S. Army in 1916-1919, honorably discharged with the rank of corporal. After World War I, Corporal Wade was active in Louisiana's American Legion Nicholson Post No. 38, Baton Rouge. From the 1940s through the 1960s, during his tenure as superintendent of Baton Rouge National Cemetery, Wade was instrumental in coordinating the post's participation in military funerals. Wade retired as superintendent in 1960, marked by what, at the time, was planned as the last interment in the 8-acre cemetery. A printer by trade

who worked with newspapers in Galveston, Texas, and Baton Rouge, he returned to that industry in the 1960s. Wade died on March 5 and he is buried at Baton Rouge National Cemetery (Section 15, Site 25).

Megan Pauly, B.A., Michigan State University, conducted the research and compiled the biographic information for the VA national cemetery superintendents for the NCA History Program through the Virtual Student Federal Service in 2018-19.