

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
National Cemetery Administration

History and Development of the National Cemetery Administration

National cemeteries were first developed in the United States during the Civil War. Due to mounting war casualties, on July 17, 1862, Congress empowered President Abraham Lincoln, "to purchase cemetery grounds and cause them to be securely enclosed, to be used as a national cemetery for the soldiers who shall die in the service of the country." This small but significant new presidential power was given in "An act to define the pay and emolument of certain officers of the Army, & for other purposes," also called an omnibus act. This was the first U.S. legislation to state and solidify the concept of a national cemetery.

The Army's long-established system for soldiers' burials was inadequate for the large-scale need of soldiers dying during the Civil War. Before the creation of national cemeteries, military personnel were buried at the place of death, such as in a military post cemetery, or were transported to a private cemetery selected by the soldier's family. In 1861, however, Congress created special burial benefits for defenders of the Union.

The Civil War was the disastrous result of passionate and divergent philosophies surrounding many issues concerning citizens, slaves, states' rights, economics, and the nation's welfare and future. As a result, an unprecedented number of men enlisted for military service in both the Union and Confederate armies. Neither side were prepared for the tremendous volume of death or ready to provide support for so many burials.

Early in the war, on Sept. 11, 1861, the War Department issued General Orders No. 75 and directed that the Army's Quartermaster General be given responsibility for the burial of officers and enlisted soldiers. The order dictated that a register of all burials be kept. The order also directed that a wooden headboard be placed at the head of each grave. The headboards were painted white and the name and other information was to be painted in black. The wooden boards did not last long in the outdoor environment.

The urgent nature of the war necessitated burial of soldiers on battlefields, near hospitals or camp-sites, long before the government could acquire titles to these lands. For this reason, burial dates of individuals often pre-date the legal dates of establishment or designation as a national cemetery. These following 14 cemeteries (listed alphabetically) were the first national cemeteries officially established in 1862:

Alexandria National Cemetery, Alexandria, Va.
Annapolis National Cemetery, Annapolis, Md.
Antietam National Cemetery, Sharpsburg, Md.
Camp Butler National Cemetery, Springfield, Ill.
Cypress Hills National Cemetery, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Danville National Cemetery, Danville, Ky.
Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.
Fort Scott National Cemetery, Fort Scott, Kan.
Keokuk National Cemetery, Keokuk, Iowa
Loudon Park National Cemetery, Baltimore, Md.
Mill Springs National Cemetery, Nancy, Ky.
New Albany National Cemetery, New Albany, Ind.
Philadelphia National Cemetery, Philadelphia, Pa.
Soldier's Home National Cemetery, Washington, D.C.

Before the Civil War, the land where Arlington National Cemetery is now situated was inhabited by Robert E. Lee and his wife, Mary Anne Randolph Custis, granddaughter of George and Martha Washington. Mary inherited the property from her father and it was known as Arlington Mansion. In May 1861, after Virginia ceded from the Union, the Union Army occupied the Custis property and used it as an encampment site as part of the fortifications in defense of Washington, D.C.

As burial spaces at the Soldiers and Sailors Home National Cemetery, in Washington, D.C., and nearby Alexandria National Cemetery depleted, Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs recommended that the some of the grounds of the Custis property be made available as burying grounds for the war dead. The first burial at Arlington occurred on May 13, 1864, for Private William L. Christman of the 67th Pennsylvania Infantry, Company G. A month later, on June 15, 1864, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, officially ordered that the Arlington Mansion and a maximum of 200 acres be used as a cemetery.

Immediately after General Lee's surrender to General Grant on April 9, 1865, the Quartermaster Department embarked on an ambitious program to search for, recover, and identify the remains of all Union soldiers. Quartermaster staff spent four years searching major and minor battlefield sites, hospital and prison sites, entrenchment sites, lines of march, and miles of shoreline looking for bodies. All military remains found were moved to national cemeteries unless claimed by friends or family for private interment elsewhere. This program was commonly referred to as the Reburial Program or the Federal Reburial Program. From the outset the task was challenging.

Due to the chaotic nature of war and the time elapsed since many of the burials, the U.S. Army could not account for all its dead. Many men were hastily buried between battles with little or no means of identification. Numerous naval tragedies occurred in which bodies were not recovered. Many make-shift or shallow burials were desecrated by "the enemy" or destroyed by animals. Landscapes changed drastically by the ravages of war often failed to yield the clues recorded earlier by a fellow soldier of where his friend or comrade was buried. Some quartermaster and hospital staff kept poor death and burial records. As a result, records were often contradictory, incomplete, missing, or erroneous.

Statements made by soldiers to quartermaster staff during the reburial program indicated that some remains were witnessed to have been eaten by alligators or the bodies or coffins had floated out to sea. Additionally, war atrocities occurred that prevented some soldiers from ever being found. Government-issued “dog tags” or identification tags did not exist during the Civil War, so soldiers often fashioned their own means for identification: some wrote their names on paper, placed the paper in a sealed bottle and carried it in their pocket; some made handwritten name tags on cloth or paper and pinned them to their uniforms; some carved information on a piece of board or wood. Sadly, most make-shift forms of identification were created on impermanent substances and consequently, the soldier’s identity was lost forever. Civilian provisioners, known as sutlers, offered commercially manufactured identification tags for sale, but few soldiers purchased them.

As a result of reports from quartermaster staff during the first year of the Reburial Program, on April 13, 1866, a Joint Resolution of the Senate and House of Representatives authorized and required the Secretary of War “to take immediate measures to preserve from desecration the graves of soldiers of the United States who fell in battle or died of disease in hospitals; to secure suitable burial places in which they may be properly interred; and to have the graves enclosed so that the resting places of the honored dead may be kept sacred forever.” Quartermaster staff encountered many obstacles in trying to locate Union remains, especially in the Deep South.

The first National Cemetery Act was enacted by Congress on Feb. 22, 1867. It was the first substantive legislation to provide funds and specific guidance for the national cemeteries. The law included an appropriation of \$750,000 for the construction of national cemetery features to include superintendents' lodges, perimeter walls, fencing and headstones. It provided funds for superintendents' salaries and to purchase cemetery land. The act also declared that “any person who shall willfully destroy, mutilate, deface, injure, or remove any monument, gravestone. . . or shrub within the limits of any said national cemetery” would be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor. Superintendents, placed by the Army to direct and oversee cemetery care, were empowered and authorized by this act of Congress to arrest any violators.

The Reburial Program concluded in 1870, nearly five years after Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, Va. The program succeeded in locating and re-interring the remains of 299,696 Union soldiers and officers in 73 national cemeteries. Despite concerted efforts by quartermaster staff to find and identify all Union dead, only about 58% of Union bodies could be identified.

Generally, locations for the national cemeteries were selected by assistant quartermaster generals within the regional departments of the Army. National cemeteries established at battle sites include, Cold Harbor National Cemetery, Mechanicsville, Va., Mill Springs National Cemetery, Nancy, Ky., Port Hudson National Cemetery, Zachary, La. , and Springfield National Cemetery, Springfield, Mo. National cemeteries established near field or general hospitals include Beverly National Cemetery, Beverly, N.J., Loudon Park National Cemetery, Baltimore, Md., and New Albany National Cemetery, New Albany, Ind. Burial grounds affiliated with former prisoner-of-war prison facilities became national cemeteries, including, Andersonville National Cemetery, Andersonville, Ga., Florence National Cemetery, Florence, S.C., and Salisbury National Cemetery, Salisbury, N.C., and Woodlawn National Cemetery, Elmira, N.Y. Former post or garrison cemeteries including Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery, Fort Leavenworth, Kan., Fort Gibson National Cemetery, Fort Gibson, Okla., and Fort Donelson National Cemetery, Ridge, Tenn., rounded out the grouping.

By 1870, nearly all of the discovered Union dead had been interred in national or private cemeteries. Counted among the first 73 national cemeteries was an American military cemetery established in Mexico City, Mexico on Sept. 28, 1850, as a result of the Mexican War.

Congress passed several amendments to the National Cemetery Act of 1867 during the 1870s to accommodate the needs of aging Union Civil War Veterans. On June 1, 1872, the act was amended so that "all soldiers and sailors honorably discharged from the service of the United States who may die in a destitute condition, shall be allowed burial in the national cemeteries of the United States." The following year, on March 3, 1873, Congress again amended the act to permit "the interment of honorably discharged Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines" in national cemeteries.

As a result of these changes to the National Cemetery Act, a number of new facilities were established beyond the Civil War battlefields predominantly in the East and Southeast. The new cemeteries included Fort McPherson National Cemetery, Maxwell, Neb., Santa Fe National Cemetery, Santa Fe, N.M., and San Francisco National Cemetery, San Francisco, Calif. San Francisco National Cemetery, located on the grounds of the historic Presidio, was the first of its kind established on the Pacific Coast.

In 1865, a concurrent program created by the federal government established "homes" to care for disabled and indigent Civil War Veterans. Known briefly as the National Asylums for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, the name was changed to National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS). The homes were designed as campuses that featured dormitories, kitchens and bakeries, hospitals, theaters and a public transportation stops in a park-like setting. The first National Home was built at Togus, Maine. Homes followed in Milwaukee, Wis., Leavenworth, Kan., Bath, N.Y., Dayton Ohio, and Hampton, Va. Veterans often died while in residence so cemeteries were developed on site. These cemeteries were later designated as national cemeteries.

The 1870s marked a significant period of change for national cemeteries. Not only were 47 new national cemeteries established during this period, improvements were made to the existing properties that cemented their permanence in America's cultural landscape. Make-shift burial grounds created in haste of war were supplanted by conscientious planning that created reverent national cemeteries. One major change was the replacement of original wooden headboards with permanent and durable marble headstones.

National cemeteries had been supervised largely by Army Quartermaster staff until the 1870s when Congress authorized the hiring of Veterans to serve as national cemetery superintendents. Superintendent offices and quarters for the superintendent, known as "lodges," were authorized.

Temporary, and generally inadequate, lodges built before 1870 were simple one-story wooden structures with two to three rooms. Starting in the 1870s, these were replaced by permanent and fashionable French Second Empire-style buildings made of stone or brick. The original frame lodges were moved elsewhere on the cemetery property and were used as storage, maintenance, or kitchen buildings.

In 1870, Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs consulted with noted landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, regarding the appearance of national cemeteries. Olmsted suggested that they be “studiously simple . . . the main object should be to establish permanent dignity and tranquility . . . a sacred grove--sacredness being expressed in the enclosing wall and in the perfect tranquility of the trees within.” Perhaps as a result of Olmsted’s recommendations, abundant and diverse trees, shrubs, and flowers beds embellished the grounds of national cemeteries through the nineteenth century.

During this time, greenhouses were constructed at some national cemeteries to maintain a constant supply of plantings for cemetery landscapes. Wooden picket fences were replaced by stone or brick walls with iron gates. Excess artillery from the war were installed as “gun monuments” and decorative private headstones and monuments were erected to honor fallen comrades.

With the brief Spanish-American War (1898) and the Philippine Insurrection (1900-1901), America spread its military involvement and commitments beyond the continental United States, following suit, national cemeteries expanded, as did challenges for the Army’s Quartermaster Burial Corps. On June 11, 1899, Secretary of War Russell Alger interpreted current laws and customs to extend the right of burial in a national cemetery to honorably discharged Veterans of the Spanish-American War. For the first time, the remains of soldiers who died abroad—specifically in Puerto Rico and the Philippines—were repatriated to the United States for burial.

The first official advocacy for systemic use of identification tags took place during the Philippine Insurrection. Army chaplain Charles C. Pierce, who was tasked with establishing the Quartermaster Office of Identification, recommended that an identity disc be included in each soldier’s combat kit. Not until 1913 did Army regulations make identification tags mandatory.

As the end of the 19th century approached, a spirit of national unity and reconciliation between former Union and Confederate soldiers gained momentum. This sense of national healing was felt in Washington, D.C., and it was made evident in 1901 when 264 Confederate soldiers were re-interred into a newly created “Confederate section” at Arlington National Cemetery. This inspired Ohio Senator Joseph B. Foraker to introduce a bill the following year that would authorize the Federal government to mark the graves of Confederates soldiers, as they had done for Union soldiers a quarter of a century before.

Although the “Foraker Bill” was introduced in 1902, haggling over appropriations delayed its passing into law until March 9, 1906. This was the first legislation to allow marking the graves of former Confederate soldiers—but only “those who died as prisoners of war in Federal prisons and military hospitals in the North.” Confederate headstones were designed to be distinguishable from the Union soldiers and were similar to the Confederate Veteran-designed markers erected at Arlington National Cemetery. Confederate soldiers interred at Woodlawn National Cemetery in Elmira, N.Y., were the first to receive the new government-issued Confederate headstones in October 1907. The government maintained other Confederate Cemeteries at former prison sites located at Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery, Columbus, Ohio, Crown Hill Cemetery Confederate Plot, Indianapolis, Ind., Confederate Stockade Cemetery, Sandusky, Ohio, North Alton Confederate Cemetery, Alton, Ill., Rock Island Confederate Cemetery, Rock Island, Ill., and Point Lookout Confederate Cemetery, Ridge, Md.

The United States' participation in World War I further extended the rights to burial in national cemeteries. Legislation approved on April 20, 1920, provided that:

"all soldiers, sailors or marines dying in the service of the United States . . . or who served or hereafter shall have served during any war in which the United States has been or hereafter be engaged, and, with the consent of the Secretary of War, any citizen of the United States who served in the Army or Navy of any government at war with Germany or Austria during the World War and who died in such service or after honorable discharge therefrom, may be buried in any national cemetery free of charge."

American soldiers had been buried on foreign soil since the Mexican War, but it was not until after World War I that a program was developed to provide permanent government burial spaces for U.S. soldiers who died abroad. In 1923, Congress created the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) to establish control of the construction of military monuments and markers erected to honor Americans killed on foreign soil and, in particular, those who died in Europe during World War I.

The 1930s brought about the first realignment in America's system of military and national cemeteries. Because of Presidential Executive Orders 6166 and 6228 (June 10, 1933 and July 28, 1933) the following eleven national cemeteries associated with Civil War battlefields were transferred from the War Department and Army to the National Park Service (NPS) under the Department of the Interior:

- Antietam National Cemetery, Sharpsburg, Md.
- Battleground National Cemetery, Washington, D.C.
- Chattanooga National Cemetery, Chattanooga, Tenn.
- Fort Donelson National Cemetery, Dover, Tenn.
- Fredericksburg National Cemetery, Fredericksburg, Va.
- Gettysburg National Cemetery, Gettysburg, Pa.
- Poplar Grove National Cemetery, Petersburg, Va.
- Shiloh National Cemetery, Shiloh, Tenn.
- Stones River National Cemetery, Mufreesbuo, Tenn.
- Vicksburg National Cemetery, Vicksburg, Miss.
- Yorktown National Cemetery, Yorktown, Va.

The Army resumed management of Chattanooga National Cemetery in 1945 due to its continued volume of interments. The NPS acquired four additional national cemeteries in later years: Andrew Johnson National Cemetery, Tenn., (1942), Chalmette National Cemetery, La., (1939), Custer Battlefield/Little Bighorn National Cemetery, Mont., (1940) and Andersonville National Cemetery, Ga. (1971). The NPS continues to maintain these 14 national cemeteries.

The Army continued to maintain cemeteries abroad until Feb. 26, 1934, when Presidential Executive Order 6614 transferred custody of eight World War I American military cemeteries located in Europe to ABMC. An early American military cemetery in Mexico City became part of ABMC in 1947. Fourteen World War II-era military cemeteries established in Europe, Africa and the Philippines, were transferred to ABMC in 1949. Finally, ABMC assumed responsibility of the cemetery at Corozal,

Panama on June 5, 1982. ABMC continues to maintain 24 American military cemeteries in 10 foreign countries.

The generation from 1930-1950 marked the second significant period of change and expansion for the national cemetery system. It was the last while under the Army's jurisdiction. Between the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II, the Army built seven new national cemeteries. The military realized the need to accommodate a growing Veteran population after the war in Europe. Locations were chosen based upon the first analysis of Veterans' demographic trends. The new interwar cemeteries were focused in and near urban centers, reflecting the growing urban pattern of the U.S. Construction of these cemeteries was funded by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program and work supported by the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

The Quartermaster Corps placed new importance on cemetery setting, landscape, and building design. Following the trends of regionalized architecture on military bases, the superintendents' lodges and service buildings reflecting geographically distinct and popular styles; Mediterranean Revival in Texas and California, Spanish Eclectic in Southern California, and a range of Colonial Revival forms along the East Coast.

The seven interwar cemeteries are:

- Baltimore National Cemetery, Baltimore, Md. (1936)
- Fort Bliss National Cemetery, Fort Bliss, Texas (1936)
- Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery, San Diego, Calif. (1934)
- Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, San Antonio, Texas (1937)
- Fort Snelling National Cemetery, Minneapolis, Minn. (1939)
- Golden Gate National Cemetery, San Bruno, Calif. (1938)
- Long Island National Cemetery, Farmingdale, N.Y. (1936)

The interwar period was also significant for the Veteran's Administration (VA). Established by Congress in 1930, the VA assumed responsibility for the National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS), and cemeteries on those properties. The new administration continued the work of the former NHDVS by constructing many new medical facilities across the country. These new medical facilities, however, did not have associated cemeteries.

Cemeteries at the former NHDVS facilities were later designated as national cemeteries. The dates given below indicate when they became part of the VA system; those marked with an asterisk (*) were originally NHDVS (listed alphabetically):

- Bath National Cemetery, Bath, N.Y. (1930)
- Bay Pines National Cemetery, Bay Pines, Fla. (1933)
- Biloxi National Cemetery, Biloxi, Miss. (1934)
- Danville National Cemetery, Danville, Ill. (1930)*
- Dayton National Cemetery, Dayton, Ohio (1930)*
- Fort Bayard National Cemetery, Fort Bayard, N.M. (1930)
- Fort Lyon National Cemetery, Fort Lyon, Colo. (1930)
- Hampton (VAMC) National Cemetery, Hampton, Va. (1930)*
- Hot Springs National Cemetery, Hot Springs, S.D. (1930)*

Kerrville National Cemetery, Kerrville, Texas (1943)
Leavenworth National Cemetery, Leavenworth, Kans.(1930)*
Los Angeles National Cemetery, Los Angeles, Calif. (1930)*
Marion National Cemetery, Marion, Ind. (1930)*
Mountain Home National Cemetery, Mountain Home, Tenn. (1930)*
Prescott National Cemetery, Prescott, Ariz. (1931)
Roseburg National Cemetery, Roseburg, Ore. (1933)
Togus National Cemetery, Togus, Maine (1930)*

The battlefields of World War II were virtually everywhere—Europe, Asia, India, Africa, Russia and U. S. territories. The required use of “dog tags” greatly aided the Army Graves Registration Service in its geographical and logistical challenges. The use of dog tags, fingerprinting, and a temporary grave marking and registration system implemented during the 20th century wars ensured that the number of “unknowns” was kept to a minimum.

After World War II, two existing military cemeteries - in Alton Ill., and at Fort Logan in Denver, Colo., - expanded through the acquisition of addition of acreage. They were designated national cemeteries in 1948 and 1950, respectively.

The Army designed and built four new national cemeteries during the post World War II period:

Black Hills National Cemetery, Sturgis, S.D. (1948)
National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, Honolulu, Hawaii (1948)
Puerto Rico National Cemetery, Bayamon, Puerto Rico (1948)
Willamette National Cemetery, Portland, Ore. (1950)

On May 14, 1948, Congress passed Public Law 80-526 which authorized four classifications eligibility for the privilege of burial in national cemeteries:

- 1) those who died while serving honorably in the armed forces of the United States;
- 2) former members of the armed forces who were honorably discharged;
- 3) U.S. citizens who have served honorably or may serve in the armed forces of a nation allied with the United States during war; and
- 4) the wife, husband, widow, widower and minor (or dependent) children of those who meet the basic requirements.

This law was amended on Sept. 14, 1959, as Public Law 80-260, to permit national cemetery burial for any member of a reserve component of the armed forces and any member of the Army National Guard or Air National Guard whose death occurred under honorable conditions while serving on active duty training, authorized inactive duty training, or whose death occurred while hospitalized for injury or disease contracted on that duty or service. The 1959 amendment also extended eligibility for burial in a national cemetery to any member of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) of the Army, Navy, or Air Force, whose death occurred under honorable conditions while attending authorized training camp or an authorized practice cruise, while performing authorized travel to and from camp or cruise, or who died while hospitalized or while undergoing treatment for injury or disease contacted while in attendance at the camp or cruise.

Ironically, the changes that expanded eligibility for national cemetery burial occurred just as the Army adopted a “non-expansion” policy for the same properties. The Army built no new national cemeteries after 1950. Instead, on Oct. 1, 1961, it implemented a “one-gravesite-per-family-unit” policy at Arlington National Cemetery. Under this policy, initial interments were excavated to a seven and one-half foot depth instead of the customary five-foot depth. The change allowed the same grave space to accommodate future decedents. The rule was implemented throughout the Army’s system of 85 national cemeteries in 1962 - the centennial anniversary of the first national cemeteries. In addition, the Army continued to maintain several soldiers’ lots and government lots, monument sites and Confederate cemeteries.

The next year, VA set a precedent when it broke ground on what would be its largest Veterans cemetery to date. The Houston Veterans's Cemetery in Texas, in excess of 419 acres, was also unique in that it was not physically connected to the medical campus. It was loosely modeled on Arlington National Cemetery, complete with a hemicycle. At the time Houston Veterans' Cemetery was built, it was not a national cemetery, so criteria for burial there differed from national cemetery eligibility. Veterans were those eligible for hospitalization in VA hospitals, who died while hospitalized and indigent Veterans who died and were not claimed by their family.

The Army’s cemetery non-expansion policy continued through the Kennedy Administration. In January 1967, President Lyndon Johnson tasked the VA administrator to conduct a survey of all Veteran’s programs—including national cemeteries managed by both VA and the Army.

On March 18, 1968, President Johnson and the Veteran Advisory Committee, a committee tasked with ensuring public engagement, submitted their report to Congress. It contained recommendations 1) that the Army transfer its cemetery functions to VA; 2) that VA study methods for convenient burials; 3) the VA administrator establish uniform burial eligibility criteria. As a result of these recommendations, most national cemeteries would be transferred out of the Army’s hands.

On July 1, 1971, Congress approved the transfer of Andersonville National Cemetery, along with the “prison park,” from the Army to NPS. This reduced the number of Army-operated national cemeteries to 84.

As a result of the 1968 report, the National Cemeteries Act of 1973 (PL 93-43) was signed into law in June 18, 1973. It transferred 82 of the Army’s 84 national cemeteries to the custody of the VA. The law ordered the Army to continue maintenance and responsibility for Arlington National Cemetery and Soldiers’ Home National Cemetery. VA was given jurisdiction over 32 soldiers’ lots imbedded in private cemeteries, Confederate cemeteries, monument sites and government cemetery lots that the Army had maintained. The law transferred the procurement and supply of government headstones and markers to VA as well.

As new steward for the 111-year-old national cemetery system, VA elevated the status of its own 21 cemeteries to that of national cemeteries. The former VA and Army cemeteries were combined into one seamless system within VA’s newly created Department of Memorial Affairs. The official transfer took effect on Sept. 1, 1973. The new system consisted of 103 national cemeteries composed of 4,136 acres. Of this land, 2,663 acres or 64% had been developed for burial purposes.

The 1973 Act mandated other things: it permanently established the Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials, a group responsible for selection of cemetery sites, erection of memorials, and ensuring adequacy of burial benefits. The committee directed the VA administrator to conduct a government study and develop criteria for operating a national cemetery network within VA; it authorized VA to acquire land so the existing cemetery system could grow to meet the recommended criteria.

The VA study recommended that the network expand by constructing regional national cemeteries in each of the 10 Standard Federal Regions, and creating a grant program to expand state Veterans' cemeteries. The grant program was to offer a 50% funding match against the state government monies to establish, develop, and expand and otherwise construct Veterans' cemeteries run by states.

The study reaffirmed that Arlington National Cemetery and Soldiers' Home National Cemetery should be excluded from the VA National Cemetery System (NCS), and that a more restrictive eligibility criteria should continue at Arlington. Beginning in the late 1960s, burial eligibility at Arlington was limited to those who died on active duty or were retired military personnel. Family members could be buried with the service member in the same plot, and the plot sizes were reduced. To allow for continued burial in the nation's capital, the study also recommended that a new national cemetery be established in or near the District of Columbia.

Burial criteria for a NCS national cemetery remained largely unchanged. Previously, the Veteran's last military service must have discharged the Veteran under honorable conditions. The new NCS burial-eligibility criteria stated that any Veteran discharged from active service under conditions other than dishonorable, was eligible.

As a result of the 1973 Act and the VA study, four existing national cemeteries met the criteria for service as a Standard Federal Region facility and were so redesignated:

- Fort Logan National Cemetery, Denver, Colo.
- Houston National Cemetery, Houston, Texas
- Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, St. Louis, Mo.
- Willamette National Cemetery, Willamette, Ore.

Within its first decade of operation under VA, the consolidated system of national cemeteries underwent its largest expansion, in terms of acreage, almost doubling the size of the administration's cemetery portfolio. Six new regional national cemeteries, individually larger than their predecessors, were established:

- Calverton National Cemetery, Calverton, N.Y. (1978)
- Fort Custer National Cemetery, Augusta, Mich. (1981)
- Fort Mitchell National Cemetery, Seale, Ala. (1987)
- Indiantown Gap National Cemetery, Annville, Pa. (1976)
- Massachusetts National Cemetery, Bourne, Mass. (1980)
- Riverside National Cemetery, Riverside, Calif. (1978)

Quantico National Cemetery (1977), Triangle, Va., was developed to serve the Washington, D.C., area, but it was not considered a regional facility. In addition, a number of previously closed cemeteries were re-opened and expanded through donations of land. In 1978, VA transferred the Perryville National Cemetery to the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Compared to the first 14 national cemeteries established in 1862 whose combined acreage was about 137 acres, VA cemeteries developed by NCS were enormous. The former averaged about 10 acres each: the largest was Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery at 36.1 acres. The smallest was Loudon Park National Cemetery with only 1.12 acres. The largest cemetery constructed by the Army was Long Island National Cemetery at 364.72 acres.

The smallest national cemetery constructed by NCS in the 1970s was Indiantown Gap National Cemetery at 677.1 acres. The largest was Calverton National Cemetery at 1,045 acres. Combined acreage for the first five national cemeteries was 3,938.3 acres.

The larger cemeteries take on a park-like appearance and incorporate features such as columbaria and committal shelters, and omit lodges and traditional rostrums. The late 1980s memorial pathways or trails were designed in national cemeteries in order to provide unified, commemorative spaces to place memorials donated by Veterans groups.

The Veterans' Benefits Improvement and Health Care Authorization Act of 1986 (PL 99-576) ordered that VA conduct a demographic study to identify geographic areas within the United States where the greatest burial needs for Veterans existed. The report, submitted to Congress in 1987, identified the top 10 as: Albany, N.Y., Chicago, Ill., Cleveland, Ohio, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas, Detroit, Mich., Miami, Fla., Oklahoma City, Okla., Pittsburgh, Pa., Greater San Francisco, Calif., and Seattle, Wash.

NCS continued to grow through land transfers as well as new construction. In 1984, the Army donated its post cemetery at Fort Richardson, Alaska, to the VA; in turn, VA elevated it to national cemetery status. The following facilities were built and opened in 1987:

Florida National Cemetery, Bushnell, Fla.
West Virginia National Cemetery, Pruntytown, W.Va.

The state-operated Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery, Phoenix, Ariz., was transferred to the VA and it became a national cemetery on April 15, 1989, renamed the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona. In 1991, VA transferred the Fort Phil Kearny Monument Site to the State of Wyoming. It was one of 32 miscellaneous sites transferred to VA from the Army in 1973.

As a follow-up to the 1987 report, VA conducted a future burial needs assessment in 1994 using a revised methodology. As a result, the list of states in need of Veteran burial space identified in the original 1987 report changed. The 1994 report stated:

"Oklahoma City and Pittsburgh were identified in the 1987 Report to Congress. Based on current demographic data, these areas are not on the list of 10 most in need. However, in the time since the release of the 1987 report, Congress has earmarked funding for advance planning and completion of Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) at these sites. VA has proceeded with EIS contracts and plans to include these areas in the NCS planning process for future consideration."

The new methodology ranked the areas based on Veteran population. It was clear that demand would be greatest in the coming decades to serve aging Veterans of World War II, Korean and Vietnam War. The 1994 report revised the list of the 10 areas most in need of Veteran burial places: Atlanta, Ga., Albany, N.Y., Chicago, Ill., Cleveland, Ohio, Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, Detroit, Mich., Miami, Fla., Sacramento, Calif., St. Louis, Miss., and Seattle, Wash.

Following the recommendations of the 1987 and revised 1994 reports, seven new national cemeteries were constructed between 1992 and 2001:

- San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery, Santa Nella, Calif. (June 1992)
- Tahoma National Cemetery, Kent, Wash. (October 1997)
- Gerald B.H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery, Schuylerville, N.Y. (July 1999)
- Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, Elwood, Ill. (October 1999)
- Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery, Dallas, Texas (May 2000)
- Ohio Western Reserve National Cemetery, Rittman, Ohio (June 2000)
- Fort Sill National Cemetery, Elgin, Okla. (November 2001)

On Nov. 11, 1998, President Bill Clinton signed into law the Veterans Programs Enhancement Act of 1998 (PL 105-368). This law officially designated the National Cemetery System (NCS) the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). It elevated the NCS/NCA position from director to the Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Memorial Affairs. The law also extends burial eligibility in a national cemetery to qualified Merchant Marine Veterans.

The following year, the Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act (PL 106-117), was signed into law on Nov. 30, 1999. This ordered VA to undertake additional studies to assess future burial needs for Veterans and mandated that six new national cemeteries be built in the following areas (listed alphabetically):

- Georgia National Cemetery, Canton, Ga. – Opened 2006
- Great Lakes National Cemetery, Holly, Mich. – Opened 2005
- South Florida VA National Cemetery, Lake Worth, Fla. – Opened 2007
- Fort Sill National Cemetery, Elgin, Okla. – Opened 2001
- National Cemetery of the Alleghenies, Bridgeville, Pa. – Opened 2005
- Sacramento Valley VA National Cemetery, Dixon, Calif. – Opened 2006

Based on 1990 census statistics, annual Veteran deaths would peak at 620,000 in 2008 and the need to plan for burial space was corroborated in the 1987 and 1994 reports. To meet this need, on Nov. 11, 2003, Congress authorized the establishment of six new national cemeteries through the National Cemetery Expansion Act of 2003, (PL 108-109). These were opened as follows:

- Bakersfield National Cemetery, Arvin, Calif. – Opened July 2009
- Alabama National Cemetery, Montevallo, Ala. – Opened June 2009
- Fort Jackson National Cemetery, Columbia, S.C. – Opened January 2009
- Jacksonville National Cemetery, Jacksonville, Fla. - Opened January 2009
- Sarasota National Cemetery, Sarasota, Fla. - Opened January 2009
- Washington Crossing National Cemetery, Newtown, Pa. – Opened January 2010

The Veteran's Benefits Act of 2003, which became law on Dec. 16, 2003, made changes to benefits and administrative activities. The law extended burial benefits to new Philippine Scouts residing in the U.S., authorized a burial plot allowance for each Veteran interred in a state Veterans cemetery; allowed surviving spouses of Veterans who later remarry non-Veterans the right to burial in a national cemetery based on their former marriage; and provided permanent authority for the NCA's State Cemetery Grants Program.

As reflected in the above descriptions, 17 new millenium-era national cemeteries were constructed between 1997 and 2010. This marks the fifth significant period of growth and development for America's national cemeteries and marks the largest expansion period for the system, in total acreage, since the Civil War era.

Since 1862, more than 3.8 million burials have taken place in national cemeteries that are now overseen by NCA. The existing 133 national cemeteries, 33 soldiers' and government lots, and Confederate lots contain more that 20,000 acres. Approximately 100,000 burials or 2% of the graves in NCA national cemeteries are categorized as unknowns - most are from the Civil War.

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