

VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials

VA



**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

National Cemetery
Administration

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CEMETERIES AND MEMORIALS**

May 5, 2020 – May 6, 2020

Washington, DC
1:00 pm – 4:30pm

MINUTES

Committee Members Present:

- Joey Strickland, Committee Chairman
- Gordon W. Lightfoot, Committee Member
- Heather Mitchell Braatz, Committee Member
- JoAnn Fisher, Ed.D., Committee Member
- Marianne A. Trussell, Committee Member
- Edward Saunders, Committee Member & Chairman of Access, Outreach, and Choice Subcommittee
- Kathleen Moakler, Committee Member
- Michael Figlioli, Committee Member
- Dino Teparra, Committee Member
- Michael Dover, Committee Member

Committee Guests:

- Leslie E. Beavers, Former Committee Chairman
- Edith Gilbert Smith, Former Committee Member

Ex-officio Members Present:

- Tom Sole, American Battle Monuments Commission
- Lt. Col. Mark O'Brian, Army National Military Cemeteries

Ex-officio Members Absent:

- National Park Service Representative

Office of the VA Secretary Attendees:

Jeffrey Moragne, Director, VA Advisory Committee Management Office

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

National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Attendees:

- Randy Reeves, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
- Tom Howard, NCA Chief of Staff
- Glenn Powers, Deputy Undersecretary, Field Programs and Cemetery Operations
- Gina Farrisee, Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
- Melissa Decker, Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
- Gerard Alvira, Executive Assistant to the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
- Daniel Devine, Executive Director, Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovations (OEMI)
- Timothy Nosal, Deputy Director, OEMI
- Les' Melynk, Chief of Partnerships and Outreach, OEMI
- Faith Hopkins, Improvement and Compliance Service
- Charmagne Scott, Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs
- Richelle Taylor, OEMI
- Larry Provost, OEMI
- Amerophan Callahan, Executive Director, Office of Field Programs
- Lisa Pozzebon, Executive Director, Office of Cemetery Operations
- Eric Powell, Director, Memorial Products Service
- Kenneth Holliday, Alternate Designated Federal Officer & Education Specialist, Veterans Legacy Program
- Christine B. Hamilton, Designated Federal Officer & Senior Program Analyst, Partnerships and Outreach

VA Office of Tribal Government Relations (OGTR):

- Stephanie Birdwell, Director, Office of Inter-Governmental Affairs
- Junita Mullen, Center for Minority Veterans

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Attendees:

- Debra Morgan, Designated Federal Officer, Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education

Public Attendees:

- John Kelly, Veteran

Tuesday, May 5, 2020

The semi-annual meeting of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials was held via teleconference. The session was open to the public; and the meeting information and teleconference number was published in the Federal Register announcement.

Opening Remarks and Introductions

The Committee Chairman, Colonel Joey Strickland, called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The meeting was opened with a moment of silence for Veterans, Servicemembers, Survivors, family members, and others afflicted by the Coronavirus pandemic.

He also welcomed former Chairman, General Leslie Beavers and former member, Ms. Edith Smith, as special guest attendees.

The Chairman briefly went over the topics for discussion and introduced Mr. Jeffery Moragne, Director of the Advisory Committee Management Office, which is in the Office of the VA Secretary.

Federal Advisory Committee Act 101

Mr. Moragne provided brief reminders about the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and best practice tips. The Advisory Committee sets the gold standard with 90% of recommendation enacted by the Secretary.

The Federal Advisory Committee Act is a Federal statute that governs the **establishment, termination and management** of Federal Advisory Committees (FAC). Enacted to promote openness and **transparency** and to regulate the number and duration of FACs.

FACA applies to all groups with at least one non-Federal employee established or utilized by an agency to obtain advice or recommendations, unless an exception applies.

Federal Advisory Committee requirements:

- Signed/filed Charter
- Designated Federal Officer (DFO)
- Public meetings with agenda announced in Federal Register 15 days in advance of the meeting and an opportunity for public to speak or submit written comments
- Balanced membership
- Records maintained and available for public inspection

A Notice of Meeting must be published in the Federal Register:

- A quorum must be met in order for the Committee to meet
- Majority (more than one half) of the committee's authorized membership including ex-officio members (i.e. 50% plus one)
- There must be an approved agenda

Committees may meet privately for:

- 1) Preparatory work.** A meeting convened solely to gather information, conduct research, analyze relevant issues, facts in preparation for a FAC meeting or to draft papers for deliberation by FAC; and
- 2) Administrative work.** A meeting convened solely to discuss administrative matters of the FAC or receive administrative information from agency

FAC meetings may also be closed in whole or in part under limited circumstances, such as when discussing trade secrets, personal information, and criminal matters. Office of General (OGC) must concur in the closure.

Testifying/Speaking on Federal Advisory Committee matters:

- If asked to testify, you may speak about Committee matters only in your personal capacity.
- Your testimony should clarify that you are providing your personal opinion and are not speaking on behalf of VA or the Committee.
- As a courtesy, we appreciate you informing the Committee's DFO if you are going to testify.

VA Federal Advisory Committee Best Practices:

- Master the Committee Calendar by planning meetings 18 months in advance
- Know your role by reviewing the Committee's Charter and guidance located in the VA Committee Members Handbook
- Formally establish subcommittees in accordance with the VA guidance to do the heavy lifting on research and assist with drafting recommendations
- Dedicate meeting time to discuss individual presentations and how they connect to the Committee's advice/recommendations
- Use Subcommittee to engage and cross-collaborate with other Advisory Committees. Note: There may be more leverage for support of a recommendation when the Secretary's sees cross-collaboration
- Use the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-specific) Template to achieve better results
- Recommend stakeholders for the Committee to engage with other Subject Matter Experts
- Conduct Annual field visits and Capitol Hill meetings to better understand Veterans, Caregivers, Survivors, Stakeholders and VA Employees challenges
- Ask Designated Federal Officer for guidance

Remarks from Mr. Randy Reeves, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs

Chairman Strickland introduced Mr. Randy Reeves and provided his biographical summary to attendees.

Mr. Randy Reeves began his remarks by thanking the members for their important work and accomplishments. He also stated that the work of NCA's team members have been heroic and exceptional. Mr. Reeves' key points about the state of NCA were as follows:

- Currently, NCA has streamlined customary committal services to keep everyone as safe as possible. Restrictions are based upon the Center of Disease Control, State, and Local Government guidance in order to stop the spread of the Coronavirus. Thus far, there hasn't been any reports of team members affected.
- As a way to honor Veterans during this public health crisis, NCA has established the Roll of Honor webpage at <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/roll-of-honor/> to pay tribute to Veterans. The site provides an opportunity to remember those Veterans interred during this crisis and reflects interments in our cemeteries starting on April 13, 2020. Each day, NCA will add the names; branch of service and location of burial for each Veteran interred in a national cemetery on the previous day. Also, Veterans interred before April 13th, are being honored on the Veterans Legacy Memorial webpage at www.cem.va.gov/remember, which is a permanent site. NCA uses a lot of social media platforms to educate, inform, and communicate to the external and internal customers.
- VA Secretary, Robert Wilkie has provided exceptional leadership throughout this crisis and routinely speaks about the important work of NCA team members.
- Memorial Day ceremonies will be modified. However, each cemetery, wreath laying ceremony with military honors. The cemeteries will not be open for public ceremonies with large groups. Live streaming will be shared on NCA Facebook and Twitter pages. The cemeteries will remain open during the Memorial Day weekend from dawn to dusk. None of the 142 cemeteries have been closed during the pandemic and NCA are interments daily. As stated earlier, committal services and large groups are not permitted at this time. Families are allowed to observe the interment from a safe distance away from the gravesite. NCA is keeping track of direct interments and delayed interments so proper memorial services can be held at a later date.
- Families can also place flags/ flowers on individual gravesites. Normally, volunteers, such as Boy Scouts of America, come out and place flags on every gravesite in the cemeteries. However, due to the current crisis, NCA cannot allow large groups on the premises.
- Mr. Reeves thanked the committee members for continuing to serve Veterans. He also thanked Chairman Strickland for his leadership and applauded for taking time to Chair, in addition to his other duties as the State Director of the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs. Louisiana's cemeteries and state homes have

been greatly impacted by the virus. Mr. Reeves' also expressed deepest gratitude to committee, especially in relation to topics about burial benefits for rural Veterans.

- Mr. Reeves' thanked Gen. Leslie Beavers, and Edith Smith, and Gordon Lightfoot for their service on the committee and acknowledged Gordon Lightfoot, whose term will expire in August. as a member who will be terminating in August. They each brought a unique perspective to the committee.
- Mr. Reeves concluded his remarks by thanking NCA Team Members and all NCA partners for service to Veterans and families. He stated: *"It is so important to take care of ourselves and we will come back together again to serve Veterans. We pull together and find different ways to continue the Mission and to ensure that we are serving Veterans as we should."*
- Chairman Strickland expressed appreciation for remarks and invited Committee Members to make comments to the Under Secretary.
- Member, Ed Saunders, asked for guidance to close the gap of hardest 5 percent of underserved Veterans. Mr. Reeves stated that he is looking for things that may be more out of the box. Currently, cemeteries are established in areas with a Veteran population within a 75-mile radius. For areas without a large population, adding a cemetery will not be practical. However, these Veterans cannot be excluded. Appropriate legislation will need to be crafted to provide better benefits for those in the catchment areas and to offset some of the costs. Mr. Reeves' asked if there are other things, we can do beyond building a cemetery to serve a small population of Veterans, who do not have reasonable access to national or state cemeteries.
- Member, Marianne Trussell thanked the Under Secretary for his visit at Tallahassee NC and meeting with the support committee. She also thanked the Director, Raymond Miller, for all of his support to the support committee and local community.
- Former Member, Edith Smith, thanked Mr. Reeves for the Pre-Need Burial Eligibility Determination application. She stated that pre-need has been a huge help for surviving spouses. Pre-Need claims have grown over the course of two years. Mr. Reeves thanked the Committee for their help and feedback on the benefit.

Status Update: Burial/Memorial Needs for Native American and Alaskan Veterans

Mr. Glenn Powers, Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations, began his discussion with a little information about his staff and responsibilities. He introduced Lisa Pozzebon, Executive Director, Office of Field Programs, who works in his office, and Ms. Gina Farrisee, Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs.

Mr. Farrisee is the Chairperson and Mr. Powers is the Deputy Chairperson of the Integrated Project Team. The team also consisted of the support from Stephanie Birdwell, Office of Inter-Governmental Affairs, Juanita Mullen, Program Analyst, Center for Minority Veterans, and Daniel Devine, Executive Director, Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovations.

Mr. Powers discussed some of the **key IPT initiatives**, which are already in progress:

- Veterans Cemetery Grant Program (VCGP) is now realigned under Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations within NCA.
- Working with Office of Tribal and Government Relations on improving communications with tribes.
- Reviewing standards of the NCA Compliance Review Program (CRP.)
- Legislation authorizing grant fund use for training state, tribal, and territorial cemetery employees.
- Developing a peer mentor training program that will link individual national cemeteries with tribal cemeteries.
- Creating a strategic outreach plan to leverage key shared outreach opportunities for the target audience.
- Developing an informational briefing for use when engaging at outreach events with the target audiences.

Member, Ed Saunders, stated he has personally visited four Native American veterans cemeteries, and has talked to six superintendents of these cemeteries. Saunders said that awareness and understanding of Native American culture, along with good communications on expectations for cemetery operations, has to be a foundation for trust and for Native American veterans cemeteries to succeed in honoring Native American veterans in burial. Saunders emphasized the VA should invite tribes to participate, not allow them. Tribal representatives told Saunders the federal government downgrades tribes by allowing them to participate. This marginalization causes an arousal of historical bitterness in the tribes against the federal government. Given the low number of annual tribal burials, the value of any VA-provided training for Native American veterans cemetery staff is largely lost. To capitalize on VA-provided training, Native American veterans cemeteries need the continual help and partnership of nearby national ceremonies. Saunders said the VA shouldn't use a standard VA operational and management template for Native American veterans cemeteries. These cemeteries are in the management-by-exception category. Saunders recommended the footprint for future Native American veterans cemeteries be small to reduce annual tribal operations and maintenance costs. Saunders asked if an operational and maintenance contract can be let for burials and maintenance of these cemeteries.

Ms. Lisa Pozzebon provided an update on the “***American Indian and Alaska Native Burials: Burial Ceremonies and Customs in U.S. National Cemeteries, May 2019***” submitted by Chairman Strickland and Ed Saunders. She provided comments on two of the recommendations that fall under her office. Her key points were as follows:

Recommendation: Create cemetery guidelines for American Indian burial ceremonies using procedures set by Black Hills National Cemetery, Santa Fe National Cemetery, and the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona, as models.

Consideration and Comments:

NCA appreciates the thorough review of our practices and for recognizing our Centers of Excellence for American Indian burials.

- Best practices on AI/AN burials will be shared at NCA’s upcoming training conference.
- NCA’s new regulation on “Committal services, memorial services, and funeral honors” effective on September 6, 2019.
- Reinforces long-standing practice of respecting and deferring to the expressed wishes of the personal representative/family in the conduct and content of committal/memorial services and accommodating requests for location and witnessing while ensuring safe, secure operations.
- National training programs incorporate and emphasize effective customer service concepts, to include accommodating burial requests based on religious and spiritual beliefs.

Recommendation: Create outreach programs to American Indian tribes describing cemetery operations and where compromise is based on American Indian beliefs for burial honors.

Consideration and Comments:

NCA provides outreach nationwide regarding burial benefits and services available to eligible Veterans and their families.

- NCA’s Office of Engagement and Memorials Affairs (OEMI) is coordinating with VA’s Office of Tribal Government Relations and Center for Minority Veterans to develop a Strategic Outreach Plan.
- OEMI is also developing a burial benefit briefing presentation directed toward American Indians and Alaskan Natives; an early version of the presentation was used at January meeting of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians.

Topics Related to October 2019 Recommendations

Please note: The October 2019 Recommendations are currently pending coordination in NCA. An official VA Response will be sent to the VA Secretary in the near future. The recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 1

The Burial Plot Discrepancies Workgroup of the Access, Outreach, and Choice Subcommittee presented recommendations to the full Committee based upon their research. Currently, VA will pay up to \$796 towards burial and funeral expenses for non-service connected deaths on or after October 1, 2019 (if hospitalized by VA at time of death), or \$300 toward burial and funeral expenses (if not hospitalized by VA at time of death), and a \$796 plot-interment allowance (if not buried in a national cemetery). An annual increase in burial and plot allowances for deaths occurring after October 1, 2011 began in fiscal year 2013 based on the Consumer Price Index for the preceding 12-month period.

Per the discussion in the October 2019 committee meeting, the burial plot allowance does not accurately reflect the increased costs for casketed burials. The goal of the State Department of Veterans Services is to extend little to no burial costs to Veterans and eligible dependents. However, due to budget constraints, Secretaries are forced to request state general funds to operate the cemeteries sufficiently. Furthermore, Veterans and family members are considering cremated burials more than ever due to lower costs. State Veterans Cemetery Directors are seeking increases in VA grants to build more columbarium space due to the rising trend towards cremated burials.

The Advisory Committee recommends that the Veterans Benefits Administration submits proposed legislation to Congress to increase the non-service connected burial plot allowance from \$796 to \$1000 (with an annual increase) to offset the burial fees incurred by Veterans, Surviving Spouses, and family members during their time of need.

VA Response: Pending

Recommendation 2

The Hardest Five-Percent Workgroup of the Access, Outreach, and Choice Subcommittee presented recommendations to the full Committee based upon their research. The workgroup's objective is to provide recommendations on strategies ensuring burial needs are met for Veterans and their eligible family members in unserved areas in America. After discussion at the October 2019 meeting, the Advisory Committee recommends that NCA:

1. Expand the Rural Veterans Burial Initiative emphasizing columbaria.

From more tolerant thought and cost savings, society presently accepts more cremation burials. Presently more than half of burials in national cemeteries are cremation burials.

2. Engage State Veterans' Departments to use columbaria-only options under the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program. Columbaria take less space and require less resources to operate and maintain than a cemetery. State Veterans' Departments can assess burial needs of their respective state's veterans and determine how best to apply the VA grant for veterans not presently served with burial options.

3. Propose legislation at the congressional level for efficient federal interagency land transfer policies and procedures. Present federal interagency land transfer process is too complex and difficult. Legislation should include, in layman's terms, simpler procedures on how federal agencies acquire and dispose of federal land for expanding burial options to Veterans.

VA Response: Pending

Mr. Mathew Sullivan, Chief Finance Officer and Deputy Under Secretary for Finance & Planning, presented on topics related to the Rural Burial Initiative. His key points were as follows:

- The purpose of the Rural Burial Initiative is to increase burial access to Veterans residing in rural areas.
- NCA targeted eight states that were not served by a national or state Veterans cemetery.
- To date, NCA has opened three of the eight national cemeteries. They are:
 1. Yellowstone National Cemetery, Montana
 2. Fargo National Cemetery, North Dakota
 3. Snake River Canyon National Cemetery, Idaho
- NCA will open six additional cemeteries, to include:
 1. Northwood National Cemetery, Wisconsin – CY20
 2. Cheyenne National Cemetery, Wyoming – CY20
 3. Acadia National Cemetery, Maine – CY20
 4. Morovis National Cemetery, Puerto Rico – CY21
 5. Cedar City National Cemetery, Utah – CY21
 6. Elko National Cemetery, Nevada – CY23

In regard to the recommendation to propose legislation at the congressional level for efficient federal interagency land transfer policies and procedures, Mr. Sullivan reported that legislation has been proposed in the FY2021 budget. The pending legislation includes stipulation for land to be transferred from the Department of Interior to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Member, Ed Saunders, expressed his gratitude for NCA considering legislation to increase access and additional capabilities for burial options for rural Veterans.

Mr. Glenn Powers commented on the recommendation for columbaria only options under the Veterans Cemetery Grant Program. NCA has received feedback in the past about columbaria-only cemeteries and not being as valued as cemeteries with headstones and markers. Columbaria-only cemeteries in rural areas may be not accepted as well as columbaria-only cemetery in an urban area.

Please Note: The October 2019 is still pending coordination 2020 recommendations will be reviewed after the meeting by the Committee to ensure that they are S.M.A.R.T (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-Phased) prior to submission to the Secretary for review and approval.

Public Comments:

No public comments were submitted during the meeting or in writing.

Adjournment:

Christine Hamilton provided dial-in instructions for the next day's meeting. Chairman Strickland thanked attendees and closed the meeting at approximately 4:30pm.

Wednesday, May 6, 2020

The semi-annual meeting of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials was held via teleconference. The session was open to the public; and the meeting information and teleconference number was published in the Federal Register announcement.

Opening Remarks and Introductions

- The Committee Chairman, Colonel Joey Strickland, called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The meeting was opened with a moment of silence for the sacrifices of Veterans and Servicemembers, and also for the first responders who care for Veterans.
- The Chairman mentioned a minor change to the agenda to include an update on Pre-Need Eligibility Determination applications. briefly recapped the meeting held on May 5th and minor change to the agenda.
- Designated Federal Officers, Christine Hamilton and Kenneth Holliday provided administrative announcements and rules of engagement for the meeting. They also shared a video, which showed photos of the members during meetings and site visits at cemeteries.
- Chairman Strickland provided a brief recap of the meeting held on May 5th. He stated that he was appreciative of reminders from the Jeffery Moragne, Director of the Advisory Committee Management Office and remarks from Mr. Randy Reeve, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs. The Chairman mentioned that State Cemetery Directors are following the NCA's guidance in response to managing streamlined operations during the pandemic. He also mentioned that the Roll of Honor webpage is a great way of honoring Veterans.
- The Chairman stated that he liked the recommendations coming out of the Integrated Project Team to address the burial needs of Native American and Alaskan Veterans. He would like for member, Ed Saunders, to continue to work with NCA and Tribes, and hopes for the appointment of another member, who is familiar with the Tribal relations.

Workgroup Report: Recommendations for Emblem of Belief (EOB)

The Emblems of Belief (EOB) Workgroup included:

Marianne Trussell, Lead -Esq., Chair, Support Comm. Tallahassee National Cemetery

Heather Braatz, LFD, Program Manager Worsham College of Mortuary Science

Michael Dover, Chaplain, USA (Retired)

Kathleen Moakler, Former Government Relations Director, TAPS

Joey Strickland, Colonel, USA (Retired), Secretary, LA Dept. of Veteran Affairs (current Chair of ACCM).

Ms. Trussell outlined the process the workgroup took to examine the current EOB regulation and decision-making procedures, as follows:

- EOB Workgroup teleconferences held once or twice a month through June, July, August, September, October, November, and December 2019, and January and March 2020.
- Each Workgroup member chose two “prohibited” words from the list in CFR §38.632(b)(2).
- Researched definitions and developed a definition for each word in CFR §38.632(b)(2).
- Developed an “implementation” statement for each word to assist reviewers in their task of assessing and approving or denying the request for a new emblem.
- Determined whether words should be added to or eliminated from the “prohibited” list.
- Developed a “balancing test” to assist reviewers in their task of assessing and approving or denying the request.

Section 38.632 of title 38, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) defines the Government-furnished headstone or marker application process, which includes request procedures and evaluative criteria for approving new Emblems of Belief (EOB) inscriptions. EOB's represent the deceased Veteran's religious affiliation or sincerely held religious belief system or a functionally equivalent belief system. The Next of Kin or a personal representative authorized by the decedent in writing may apply for a new EOB that is not depicted on the current VA Form 40-1330, Claim for Standard Government Headstone or Marker.

In the May 2019 meeting, the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs (USMA) asked the Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials to review what many have perceived as uncontrolled growth of new EOBs and make recommendations on how the approval of new emblems could be guided. The workgroup coordinated with NCA program managers and determined the best way they could influence EOB was to assess whether the current definition of what an EOB could and couldn't be was acceptable to them as a civilian advisory committee and determine how it could be refined to meet the USMA's intent.

Currently, VA will not accept any emblem that would have an adverse impact on the dignity and solemnity of cemeteries honoring those who served the Nation. The regulation also states **Emblems of belief do not include social, cultural, ethnic, civic, fraternal, trade, commercial, political, professional or military emblems**, but the regulation does not contextually define these terms to assist those who might apply for an EOB them and those who might adjudicate those applications.

The EOB workgroup recommended that two “prohibited types” be eliminated, two others be combined into one and that four prohibited types be added. Additionally, to aid those who are interested to know what an EOB is, they defined each type.

Prohibited Types of EOB (Recommended Changes)

- **Social** - Eliminated
- **Cultural** - Eliminated
- **Ethnic** - Defined
- **Civic** – Combined with Political and Defined
- **Fraternal** - Defined
- **Trade** - Defined
- **Commercial** – Defined
- **Political** – Combined with Civic and Defined
- **Professional** – Defined
- **Military** –Defined
- **Astrological/Zoological** – Added and Defined
- **Consumables** – Added and Defined
- **Plants** – Added and Defined
- **Sports/Hobbies** – Added and Defined

The Advisory Committee recommended that NCA consider amending the current regulation CFR §38.632(b)(2) and VA Form 40-1330 (Application for Standard Government Headstone or Marker) to reflect our proposed “prohibited” types of EOBs along with the definitions we propose for each.

Workgroup Report: Recommendations for Outreach Ambassador Program

Outreach Ambassador Workgroup Members:

Gordon Lightfoot, Lead -Support Comm. for the Tallahassee National Cemetery
Edith Smith, Gold Star Wife Advocate, former member, and longtime advocate for Survivor’s benefits

Dr. JoAnn Fisher, CEO, Women Veterans United Committee, Inc., female Veteran Advocate

Dino Teppara, Public Affairs Officer in the United States Navy Reserve, Attorney, U.S. Department of Defense

Mr. Lightfoot began the presentation by providing historical context for the recommendation. In May 2015, the Outreach workgroup was charged by the former Chair, John Kelly, to review NCA’s outreach efforts. The workgroup submitted

recommendations to the full Committee in the meeting held on October 2016. The recommendations were directed to three areas: outreach awareness, digital memorialization and weekend burials. The workgroup also reviewed outreach materials affecting outreach efforts to a diversified veteran population was a primary aspect of their recommendations.

In the meeting held in August 2017, the Advisory Committee recommended that NCA establish an NCA Outreach Ambassador Program which provides a model by which Committee members have increased access to outreach opportunities and receive suitable staff support (training; materials etc....).

In March 2018, NCA conducted an assessment of current outreach needs in the cemeteries. The workgroup analyzed the results and reported to the full Committee in the meeting held on May 2018. The Chair recommended the appointment of a new workgroup to collaborate with NCA's Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovations and to develop a plan to implement an Outreach Ambassador Program at three to five national cemeteries, with non-paid, community volunteers to support outreach efforts. He also recommended that the workgroup and NCA access the program after one year and will report back to the full Committee for a decision on a recommendation for national implementation.

In the meeting held in November 2019, the Outreach Ambassador workgroup was charged by the former Chair, Leslie Beavers, to revisit the 2017 recommendations for an Outreach Ambassador Program, to ensure the recommendations submitted to NCA were specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and time-phased (S.M.A.R.T.) In addition, a new workgroup was established to specifically work on all aspects of digital, printed and social media outreach materials.

Tim Nosal, Deputy Director, Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovations (OEMI) discussed the team's responsibilities and initiatives. Currently, OEMI staff is unable to sufficiently and effectively implement an Outreach Ambassador program due to the lack of resources and current circumstances. Juanita Mullen, Center for Minority Veterans, stated that a strategic outreach program currently exists and cemeteries have Minority Veteran Program Outreach Coordinators.

Ms. Edith Smith expressed her concerned about the quality of training for volunteers and return on investment for a formal training program. Former Chair, Leslie Beavers mentioned that in some cases, there has been a misunderstanding as to the intent of an outreach program. He also mentioned that the local community take ownership of cemeteries and regularly volunteer to help the cemeteries. He mentioned that each cemetery should have an outreach program at the local level. The volunteers will not be involved with operations but may be there to provide additional resources/support for the cemetery. He stated that there doesn't need to a national program but there should be a local, outreach program at the cemetery-level.

After thorough discussion between Committee Members and NCA staff, Chairman Strickland took up a vote to dissolve the recommendations for an Outreach Ambassador Program in its entirety.

Workgroup Report: Recommendations for Outreach Materials/Strategic Plan

Outreach Materials/Strategic Plan Workgroup Members:

Kathleen Moakler - Lead, Former Government Relations Director, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors(TAPS) Outreach Materials/Strategic Plan Workgroup Members:

Michael Figlioli, Deputy Director for Veterans Benefits Policy for the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) National Veterans Service directorate

Dr. JoAnn Fisher, CEO, Women Veterans United Committee, Inc., female Veteran Advocate

Heather Mitchell Braatz, LFD, Program Manager Worsham College of Mortuary Science

Mrs. Moakler provided an overview of the workgroup's objective below:

- To become more familiar with the NCA Media Products (Print and Social Media) as they apply to outreach efforts of the NCA
- To review and contribute feedback to the Communication Strategies of the NCA Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovations (OEMI)

She mentioned that in light of the recent Pandemic Crisis and the impact on burials being conducted at National Cemeteries, the outreach through social media is more important than ever in keeping veterans, their families, their survivors and the public informed.

Mrs. Moakler conducted a visit to OEMI on February 4-5, 2020. During her visit she met with OEMI staff, Juanita Mullen, Center for Minority Veterans, and Mr. Randy Reeves, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs.

The workgroup discussed the interim results based upon OEMI staff working collaboratively with the Committee to keep them informed about NCA initiatives and events.

Mr. Danny Devine, Executive Director, OEMI, mentioned in chat that VHA's Veteran News Network (VNN) is also available as an outreach resource online and at VA Medical Centers: <https://www.youtube.com/user/VeteransHealthAdmin>.

The Committee recommends that NCA:

- Provide a link to the "About NCA Fact Sheets and Brochures" section of the website and encourage developing a familiarity with the NCA social media and outreach products to the ACCM New Member Orientation
- Continue to brief the ACCM on new developments in outreach and media products
- Regularly brief the Committee on the schedule of national events, where NCA has a presence.

Departing Member Acknowledgements & Closing Remarks

Chairman Strickland expressed his appreciation and admiration for the commitment of former chair, General Leslie Beavers (ret) and Ms. Edith Smith. He also expressed his appreciation for Gordon Lightfoot, whose term expires in August 2020. General Beavers, Ms. Smith, and Mr. Lightfoot provide remarks and members also provided their best wishes to departing members.

Adjournment

Chairman Strickland adjourned the meeting at approximately 4:30pm.


Joey Strickland
Committee Chair

Note: This meeting was not transcribed. Questions may be forwarded to Christine.hamilton1@va.gov.