

INTERMENT AREA LAYOUT

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise NCA Directive 3120 - Interment Area Layout (March 8, 2001) to reflect updated interment area layout policy.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** The content has been revised to update interment area layout policy and to reflect updated organizational responsibilities. Procedural information has been removed and is covered in the existing handbook. Publication titles and citations have been updated.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** NCA, Office of Field Programs and Office of Construction Management, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420, are responsible for the material contained in this directive.
- 4. RELATED HANDBOOKS:**
 - a. NCA Handbook 3120 - Interment Area Layout (March 8, 2001)
 - b. NCA Directive 3000 - Operational Standards for National Cemeteries (June 10, 2003)
 - c. NCA Handbook 3140 - Management and Decision Support System Procedures (May 27, 2004)
- 5. RESCISSION:** NCA Directive 3120 - Interment Area Layout (March 8, 2001)
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This publication is scheduled for recertification on or before November 2007.

/s/
J. W. Nicholson
Under Secretary for
Memorial Affairs

Distribution: Electronic

INTERMENT AREA LAYOUT

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This directive outlines current National Cemetery Administration (NCA) policy and responsibilities for layout of interment and memorial areas, and accommodation of remains of eligible individuals in national cemeteries. Procedures for implementing the policies in this directive are found in the current NCA Handbook 3120 - Interment Area Layout. The statutory authority for this directive is stated in title 38 United States Code, Sections 307 and 512a, and Chapter 24.

2. POLICY

The National Cemetery Administration is committed to providing burial benefits to as many veterans and eligible dependents as possible, to achieving the maximum development of gravesites and other interment options, and to maintaining national cemeteries as national shrines.

a. Cemetery Plans

(1) Master Plans: Cemeteries will be developed in accordance with a Master Plan. The Master Plan will show real estate information including property boundaries, easements and rights-of-way, physical features such as topography, water bodies and burial areas, and improvements such as columbarium and scattering gardens, buildings, structures, utilities, vehicular and pedestrian pavement, flagpoles, fences, and gates. Master Plans will indicate future phasing of cemetery development, and proposed infrastructure and burial areas at final cemetery development build-out.

(2) Site Plans: Each national cemetery will have a cemetery Site Plan showing the cemetery property and existing conditions. The Site Plan will show property boundaries, impediments to cemetery development such as easements, rights-of-way, and underground utilities; land features including water bodies, vegetation, and grading; and, all built features such as structures, roads, walks, memorial areas and developed burial areas.

(3) Gravesite Layout Plans: Each national cemetery will have Gravesite Layout Plans that indicate every individual gravesite and burial section. The purpose is to show all the pertinent spatial information necessary to accurately establish the layout of burial sections and to precisely locate specific gravesites.

(a) Gravesite Layout Plans will identify benchmarks or survey reference points for registering the grid of gravesite layout control markers.

(b) Burial sections may be of varying sizes and shapes. They will be visually separated from each other and from other features by vegetation, roads, walks, or changes in slope.

b. Interment Area Layout (In-ground casketed and cremated remains)

(1) Layout and Orientation:

(a) All interments in national cemeteries will be within designated gravesites in burial sections or in areas designated for cremated remains such as scattering gardens.

(b) Gravesite layout control markers to guide the establishment of gravesite sections will be installed at each burial section and their accurate position verified prior to the use of any interment area (burial, cremains, or memorial).

(c) To assist in locating gravesites, each burial section will be clearly identified by section markers bearing the number and/or letter assigned to that section in accordance with the current NCA Handbook 3120 - Interment Area Layout.

(d) To facilitate visitors reaching gravesites, each burial section will not exceed the size limitations identified for burial areas in the current NCA Handbook 3120 - Interment Area Layout.

(e) A single burial section should have one predominant slope. Topography will be the primary factor in determining the direction graves face within a burial section. Where the topography is not significant, road layout and accessibility will determine the direction graves face. The head of a gravesite will not be lower than the foot of a gravesite. Headstones will be either parallel to or face in the direction of at least one road which accesses the particular burial section.

(f) Each interment will be marked in accordance with the requirements of applicable statutes and NCA policy. Headstones and markers will be placed in accordance with layout standards stated in the current NCA Handbook 3120 - Interment Area Layout.

(g) The practice of establishing reserved sections for certain categories of individuals is not permitted. Gravesites in previously established reserved sections may be used only with the written permission of the Director, Office of Field Programs.

(h) Every interment shall be documented in accordance with procedures for the mandatory uniform electronic inventory control of gravesites as stated in the current NCA Handbook 3140 - Management and Decision Support System Procedures.

(2) Interment of Casketed Remains:

(a) Burial section areas containing casketed remains will be no larger than three acres (1.2 hectares).

(b) Full-casket remains will be accommodated in below-grade burial sites.

(c) Casketed remains in new gravesites will be placed in an outer container or pre-placed crypt/vault in order to prevent sunken graves.

(d) The size of full-casket gravesites will adhere to the standards stated in the current NCA Handbook 3120 - Interment Area Layout.

(3) Interment of Cremated Remains:

(a) NCA will strive to provide sites for cremated remains in all cemeteries, including those closed to the interment of casketed remains.

(b) Cremated remains will be accommodated through in-ground burial, columbarium inurnment, or in designated landscape areas such as scattering gardens. Exceptions to permit

the use of cremation crypts for commingling cremated remains must be authorized in writing by the Director, Office of Field Programs.

(c) In-ground cremation sites or columbarium niches will adhere to the standards stated in the current NCA Handbook 3120 - Interment Area Layout.

c. Memorial Section Layout

(1) Under the provisions of title 38, United States Code, Section 2403, the VA Secretary shall set aside, when available, suitable areas in national cemeteries to honor the memory of members of the Armed Forces and veterans and other eligible individuals whose remains are not available for burial.

(2) The size and configuration of memorial sections will depend on the terrain, the network of roads, walks, etc., the size of the individual memorial site, and the demand at a particular cemetery for memorial sites. Memorial sections may be located in areas of a cemetery not suitable for casketed interments because of terrain or landscape features.

(3) Memorial gravesite sizes will adhere to the standards stated in NCA Handbook 3120 - Interment Area Layout.

(4) Each memorial gravesite shall be marked with the appropriate memorial marker in accordance with applicable statutes and NCA policy.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. The **Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs (DUSMA)**, is responsible for:

(1) Establishing gravesite sizes;

(2) Approving which cemeteries will use pre-placed crypts/vaults;

(3) Approving which cemeteries will have scattering gardens for the interment of cremated remains; and

(4) Approving which cemeteries will have columbaria constructed for the inurnment of cremated remains.

b. The **Director, Office of Field Programs**, is responsible for:

(1) Establishing standards for placement of gravesite headstones and markers on the burial site;

(2) Establishing standards for placement of gravesite layout control markers;

(3) Authorizing Cemetery Directors to use gravesites in previously reserved sections;

(4) Recommending to the DUSMA which cemeteries will have pre-placed crypts/vaults;

(5) Authorizing in writing the use of crypts for commingling cremated remains; and

(6) Forwarding to the Director, Office of Construction Management, all inquiries and requests regarding the establishment of easements and utility service or use agreements for NCA property.

c. The **Director, Office of Construction Management**, is responsible for:

(1) Preparing cemetery Master Plans showing long-term design and phasing of development through final build-out of cemetery property;

(2) Developing detailed cemetery Site Plans showing all cemetery development features, designated areas for interments, and designated memorial sections;

(3) Maintaining the official record copy of cemetery development studies and drawings (Master Plans, Site Plans, and construction documents) for reference and planning purposes;

(4) Preparing development plans that follow interment area layout policy for new national cemeteries and expansions in existing cemeteries;

(5) Recommending to the DUSMA which cemeteries will have pre-placed crypts/vaults in new gravesite developments;

(6) Recommending options to accommodate the interment of cremated remains; and

(7) Entering into authorized easements and right-of-way agreements affecting NCA real property interests.

d. The **Chief, Centralized Contracting Division**, is responsible for the timely procurement of section markers based on Memorial Service Network (MSN) requests.

e. Each **Memorial Service Network Director** is responsible for:

(1) Maintaining accurate gravesite layout plans for each cemetery within the MSN and documenting the current status of each gravesite (occupied, reserved, obstructed, or available) based on information from the Cemetery Director;

(2) Providing Cemetery Directors with copies of the current cemetery Master Plan and Site Plan(s);

(3) Providing the Director, Office of Construction Management, updated plans and information regarding physical changes and discrepancies between plans and actual field conditions;

(4) Consolidating all cemetery section marker requests into a single MSN request for the Centralized Contracting Division;

(5) Recommending to the Director, Office of Field Programs, which cemeteries will have pre-placed crypts/vaults;

(6) Following the cemetery Master Plan and Site Plan(s) to lay out interment areas and memorial section areas; and

(7) Forwarding to the Director, Office of Field Programs, inquiries and requests regarding the establishment of easements and utility service or use agreements for NCA property.

f. Each **Cemetery Director** is responsible for:

(1) Notifying the appropriate MSN staff without delay of physical changes or discrepancies between plans and actual field conditions;

(2) Reviewing cemetery section marker inventory and notifying the MSN Director of anticipated section marker needs so that timely, large, economical orders may be placed;

(3) Maintaining and updating Gravesite Layout Plans daily to reflect gravesites and memorial sites used and transmitting this information to the appropriate MSN staff monthly;

(4) Maintaining current records for all existing agreements affecting cemetery property including easements, rights-of-way, and use agreements. Cemetery Directors will be aware of all easements in effect at their assigned cemetery and should familiarize themselves with the specific provisions of the easement(s). The Cemetery Director must safeguard the U.S. Government's interests and honor the rights of the other party. Interments may not be performed on easement property. All easements must be shown on all cemetery plans, wherever gravesite layout is depicted;

(5) Forwarding all inquiries and requests regarding easements and utility service or use agreements for NCA property through the appropriate MSN Director to the Director, Office of Field Programs;

(6) Maintaining accurate positioning of gravesite layout control markers and arranging for repair and replacement of damaged or disturbed markers;

(7) Maintaining accurate identification of burial sections with associated section markers;

(8) Verifying and updating cemetery gravesite inventory in the Management and Decision Support System (MADSS) on a monthly basis;

(9) Ensuring that interment operations conform to the current NCA Directive 3000 - Operational Standards for National Cemeteries;

(10) Recommending to the MSN Director the installation of pre-placed crypts/vaults; and

(11) Requesting authorization from the Director, Office of Field Programs, for the use of crypts that commingle cremated remains.

4. REFERENCES

a. Burial Operations Support System (BOSS) Users' Guide. Available electronically at <http://vaww.cem.va.gov/>, select "Guides & Documents," then "BOSS Users' Guide"

b. NCA Directive 3000 - Operational Standards for National Cemeteries (June 10, 2003, or updated publication). Available electronically at <http://vaww.cem.va.gov/>, select "Management Information System," followed by "Legislative & Regulatory," and "NCA Directives and Handbooks"

c. NCA Directive 3140 – Management and Decision Support System Procedures (May 27, 2004, or updated publication). Available electronically at <http://vaww.cem.va.gov/>, select “Management Information System,” followed by “Legislative & Regulatory,” and “NCA Directives and Handbooks”

d. Title 38 United States Code, Sections 307 and 512a, and Chapter 24. Available electronically at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/>

5. DEFINITIONS

a. **Columbarium.** A columbarium is an above-ground structure with vaults or niches for the inurnment of cremated remains. Generally in national cemeteries, each niche is designed to accommodate a standard government niche cover. Columbarium sites are inventoried in MADSS as “niches”.

b. **Scattering garden.** A scattering garden is a designated landscape area referenced on the cemetery Site Plan where cremated remains are scattered in the landscape. Sites used for the scattering of cremated remains are not individually marked, but each deceased is acknowledged in an appropriate manner by a communal or individual inscription at a location in the cemetery designated for that purpose. Scattering gardens are not interment areas for the purpose of inventorying gravesites in MADSS, however, each remain scattered will be counted as an interment performed in MADSS.

c. **Easement.** For the purpose of this directive, an easement is a written legal document through which the U.S. Government, holding title to a national cemetery, grants authority to a second party to use part of the land or airspace above the land, as a matter of convenience for the second party. A “right-of-way” is similar to an easement but is used only for granting permission for passage or access across land. Prior to laying out burial areas, any restrictions, e.g., easements or “rights-of-way”, must be researched. No gravesites shall be located on any portion of cemetery property that is not free of easements, “rights-of-way”, or other legal restrictions.

d. **Section Marker.** Section markers are permanent section identification labels and part of the overall site signage system. They serve to identify the corner or boundary of gravesite and memorial sections by inscribing the alpha-numeric identification of the burial or memorial section into granite, marble or concrete posts placed adjacent to roads or access paths. When located between sections, the markers are inscribed on each side with the appropriate section label.

e. **Gravesite Layout Control Marker.** Gravesite layout control markers are permanent survey markers installed in a grid in each burial section and used to assist in the accurate layout of gravesites. These are typically concrete posts with an embedded metal pin, installed flush with the ground to minimize interference with mowing operations.