

## ACCOUNTING FOR REMAINS INTERRED IN VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES

**1. PURPOSE:** This notice outlines the processes involved in interring remains of eligible decedents and final marking of gravesites in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) cemeteries. In order for NCA to uphold the national shrine commitment, all NCA staff must ensure these procedures are followed each and every time.

**2. DEFINITIONS:** For the purposes of this notice, unless otherwise specified:

a. The terms 'interred,' 'interring,' and 'interment' cover all types of disposition of human remains including inurnment or scattering of cremated remains. In this notice, the initial interment is referred to as a 'first,' and any interments made after the initial interment are referred to as 'subsequent.' (If multiple decedents are interred at one time, the veteran is considered to be the 'first' interment.)

b. The term 'gravesite' refers to any in-ground or above-ground space (e.g., gravesite, columbaria niche, scattering garden) that is used for the placement of remains.

c. The term 'headstone/marker' includes all types and styles of Government-furnished headstones, markers, and niche covers/markers of marble, granite, or bronze.

d. The term 'committal service' refers to a brief service where members of the immediate family and/or friends gather at a designated area of the cemetery to honor the decedent before interment. The decedent's next of kin or representative may arrange for private religious rituals or readings, and/or military funeral honors. Under Public Law 106-65, the Department of Defense is responsible for providing Military Funeral Honors at committal services (information available at [www.militaryfuneralhonors.osd.mil](http://www.militaryfuneralhonors.osd.mil)).

e. The term 'cemetery-designated personnel' is used to describe the individuals (cemetery staff or contractors) who the Cemetery Director has made responsible for ensuring that specific required actions are carried out appropriately, regardless of title.

### 3. POLICY

a. NCA must ensure that those we have the honor to inter are accurately accounted for from the moment a decedent's remains are met by a cemetery-designated individual. Each final interment location within a VA national cemetery will be permanently marked with a correct Government-furnished headstone, marker, or niche cover.

b. Decedent remains will be accompanied by cemetery-designated personnel at all times in VA national cemeteries from the moment the funeral party is met at the designated point until final interment action takes place. The only exception is for unaccompanied cremated remains that are held in a designated secured area while waiting for committal service and/or interment.

c. The procedures in this notice will be followed at all VA national cemeteries and NCA-administered facilities.

d. Any requests to deviate from the standard procedures described in this notice (e.g., gravesite assignment, container labeling) must be submitted through the Memorial Service Network (MSN) office, with a written justification/explanation, to the Office of Field Programs for decision.

#### 4. DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY

a. NCA uses the electronic Burial Operations Support System (BOSS) to establish cases, document eligibility determinations, schedule interments, and order Government-furnished headstones/markers/niche covers. BOSS contains the official Record of Interment (ROI) and the final Burial Register that document for each gravesite/niche/scattering of cremated remains in a cemetery the individual(s) interred, date of interment(s), and other relevant data.

b. All interments require determination of eligibility before a committal service and/or interment is scheduled through BOSS by the National Cemetery Scheduling Office or cemetery staff.

(1) BOSS assigns a unique case number to each request for interment associated with that decedent. Case files for requests for subsequent interment under same veteran eligibility are linked based on the veteran's information.

(2) The BOSS-generated 'Schedule by Date' report will indicate decedent name and identification number, committal service time and location (if scheduled), type of interment, and other pertinent information.

#### 5. GRAVESITE ASSIGNMENT/PREPARATION

a. Before assigning a gravesite, cemetery-designated personnel must review each interment request against current hard copy gravesite layout maps and electronic records to determine if there is a prior interment based on that veteran's eligibility by:

(1) Manually checking any hard copy ROIs (including burial ledgers) maintained at the cemetery; and

(2) Running BOSS queries to check for Social Security Number (SSN), Service Number, and first/last names. Queries that do not result in a match should be resubmitted using a wildcard character ("%") to ensure that all potential matches are found (see *BOSS User's Guide*).

b. First interments will be placed only in unoccupied/uncommitted sites within first interment sections. Decedents will be interred in occupied burial sections only if there is a subsequent interment in an occupied gravesite based on the same veteran eligibility, or the decedent is interred in a gravesite previously committed (reserved or set-aside) specifically for that individual. Any requests to use gravesites within occupied burial sections must be submitted (with reason for request and documentation that gravesite availability has been verified) through the MSN office to the Office of Field Programs for approval.



c. First interments of cremated remains will normally be placed in a burial section (in-ground or columbaria) devoted to cremated remains. Cemetery staff will scan into BOSS the signed VA Form 40-4987 (Agreement for Burial of Cremated Remains - available electronically at [vaww4.va.gov/vaforms/](http://vaww4.va.gov/vaforms/)).

(1) By signing the form, the next of kin/authorized representative agrees that if there is a subsequent interment of the casketed remains of an individual based on the original veteran's eligibility, the cremated remains already in place will be relocated to the gravesite where the casketed remains are placed. The appropriate case files will be updated in BOSS with information in the Remarks section about the relocation (specifying vacated and used sites).

(2) If the cemetery has been closed to new interments since the first cremains were interred and there are no available gravesites for casketed remains, only cremated remains will be accepted for subsequent interments.

(3) In the case of divided cremated remains, follow the directions of Field Programs Policy Memorandum NCA-41A-2008-01 "Interment of Cremated Remains at VA National Cemeteries."

d. Designated personnel will verify all scheduled interments with grave assignments when gravesites are assigned the night before. While scheduling of interments may take place on a weekend or holiday, cemetery assignment of gravesites generally will not take place until the first workday morning after the weekend/holiday.

e. For all interments, BOSS creates an Interment Notice (also referred to as a Dig Slip) that informs the interment crew of the section, row, and gravesite number to be opened, the depth and position of the new interment, and type of outer container (if appropriate). The Interment Notice will specify depth, position, and type of container for any previous interment(s). The Interment Notice will be verified and signed off for every interment as part of a daily interment process checklist, and again at the end of day check.

f. The gravesites to be used on a particular day will be clearly marked on the cemetery gravesite layout map using a consistent form of temporary physical notation. The appropriate section and gravesite/niche number will be entered into BOSS when a gravesite is assigned to a specific decedent. Occupied or committed gravesites will be permanently marked on the map – see End of Day.

g. If a scheduled interment has to be postponed or rescheduled because of weather conditions, or other unforeseen circumstances, the funeral director, decedent's next of kin or representative, MSN office, and Office of Field Programs will be notified that the interment cannot take place at the scheduled date/time and must be rescheduled. (A committal service may be held, depending on the circumstances.) The gravesite layout map must be corrected as soon as possible (no later than end of day). **NOTE:** *Any pertinent information regarding rescheduling must be entered in the Remarks section of the BOSS decedent entry as soon as possible.*

h. Designated personnel will also refer to the 'Schedule by Date' report to determine the gravesites to be excavated for use on a specific day, including any details necessary to allow subsequent interments in occupied gravesites.

i. Cemetery-designated personnel will create a Temporary Grave Marker (VA Form 40-4960) through BOSS (or typewritten/hand-lettered as necessary) before the scheduled committal service/interment. Temporary Grave Markers will be used in accordance with NCA Notice 2010-03 - Temporary Grave Markers and Placement.

j. Interment containers must be labeled to allow for positive identification of remains during interment activities (and disinterment, if necessary). A casket/container label that specifies the full name of the decedent, the section and grave number, and the date of interment, will be prepared by cemetery-designated personnel in accordance with paragraph 12 ("Labeling Interment Containers") of this notice.

## **6. DOCUMENTATION**

a. Upon receipt of remains by NCA, cemetery-designated personnel will obtain any records required for interment, such as burial or transit permits, cremation certificates, or other appropriate paperwork in accordance with State and local requirements. As of the date of publication of this notice, all pertinent documentation (including VA Form 40-4987 if appropriate) must be scanned into the BOSS decedent record. If documentation is insufficient or inconsistent, cemetery-designated personnel should take appropriate action.

b. Cemetery-designated personnel must compare the decedent paperwork provided by the funeral home, next of kin, or representative (and any labeling on the container) to the schedule, Temporary Grave Marker, and cemetery-prepared casket/container label to confirm that the gravesite number is accurate and decedent information is consistent. If this cannot be determined before the service, it must be done before the remains are taken from the committal shelter or taken to the gravesite. Verification of decedent identity and gravesite assignment takes place again at interment.

c. Normally, cremated remains will be interred within 48 hours (2 days) of receipt. Unaccompanied cremated remains delivered directly to a cemetery should be accompanied by appropriate paperwork. The cremated remains will be logged in, labeled, and held in a designated secured area to allow the family time to schedule a committal service. Unaccompanied cremated remains may be held for seven calendar days (if there are exceptional circumstances, the Cemetery Director may request MSN Director approval, in writing, to hold for a specified time period). After that time period the Cemetery Director will work with the MSN and Office of Field Programs on appropriate steps to take to return the cremated remains to the funeral home or family to hold until a committal service/interment is scheduled.

d. Since BOSS requires a time (for committal service and/or interment) to be specified on the cemetery's daily schedule, interment of unaccompanied cremated remains may be indicated on the schedule outside of normal interment hours; however, actual interment will take place at an appropriate time based on cemetery workload. The cremated remains and Temporary Grave Marker will be picked up from the secured area by appropriate cemetery personnel or contractor employee.

## **7. COMMITTAL SERVICE**

a. The cemetery's daily schedule will indicate all committal services scheduled to take place on a particular day.

b. If a funeral party arrives at a national cemetery prior to the determination of eligibility for interment, and facilities are available, a committal service may be permitted if approved by the MSN Director. No interment will be allowed. The family must arrange removal and storage of the remains elsewhere (at their expense) until eligibility has been verified. Cemetery-designated personnel will attend the service and escort the funeral party out of the cemetery.

c. Committal services are usually held for all interments within national cemeteries, unless the next of kin or representative has requested that no service be held or there is a direct interment of unaccompanied cremated remains. Funeral parties will be met by cemetery-designated personnel at a designated point within the cemetery (e.g., Administration Building, Public Information Center, committal shelter, staging lanes, etc.). Cemetery-designated personnel will verbally confirm with funeral home staff/director that the remains are those of the eligible decedent as specified in the paperwork that is provided to the cemetery.

d. Committal services are normally held in shelters designed for that specific purpose. Cemetery-designated personnel will escort the funeral party to the designated committal shelter.

e. If the Next of Kin of record asks to have a casket opened in a national cemetery, follow the guidance in Field Programs Policy Memorandum NCA-41A-2009-01 "Opening Caskets in National Cemeteries."

f. Prior to, or at the end of, the committal service, cemetery-designated personnel will provide the next of kin or representative with information that includes a map with gravesite location for future visitation. If the family requests to view the actual interment, follow the guidance in Field Programs Policy Memorandum NCA-41A-2006-01, "Interment Viewing."

g. After the committal service is over and the attendees have departed, cemetery-designated personnel will:

- (1) Ensure the container is labeled in accordance with procedures specified in paragraph 12; and
- (2) Arrange for escort of the remains to the designated gravesite.



## 8. INTERMENT PROCEDURES

a. Prior to placing the casket/urn into the assigned gravesite/niche:

(1) Designated personnel will use a daily interment processing checklist to confirm that the section and gravesite number of the gravesite/niche to be used matches the information on the Temporary Grave Marker, interment schedule, the casket/container label (and the vault number for pre-placed crypts), in accordance with NCA Operational Standards and Measures. Designated personnel will initial/date the checklist once all required actions are confirmed and completed.



(2) Designated personnel performing interment operations will visually check and audibly confirm that the label is affixed to the container after placement in the gravesite and that the decedent name and grave number information is correct.

b. Each gravesite/niche will be closed and marked with a correct and aligned Temporary Grave Marker by close of business each day.

## 9. END OF DAY

At the end of each day when interment activity has occurred at the cemetery, cemetery-designated personnel will:

a. Permanently mark the cemetery gravesite layout map to indicate each gravesite that has been occupied or committed as a set-aside gravesite (e.g., for married veteran interment);

b. Update BOSS (as necessary) to indicate:

(1) Position of burial container (upper/lower, left/right, depth, etc.); and/or

(2) If adjacent gravesite is reserved under the Adjacent Gravesite Set-Aside program; and

c. Use the gravesite layout map, Interment Notices, and interment schedule to check accuracy of all Temporary Grave Markers placed that day.

(1) For subsequent interments, verifying site location also includes checking the numbers and inscriptions of the gravesites in front of, behind, and to the left and right of the gravesite (or above/below/left/right of the niche).

(2) Designated personnel will sign off on a checklist to verify that the section and gravesite numbers and decedent information on the Temporary Grave Marker match the information that appears on the interment schedule and that the Temporary Grave Marker Holder is placed at the correct gravesite.

## 10. MARKING OF GRAVES

a. Cemetery-designated personnel will check temporary markers daily for correct placement until the permanent headstone/marker is set in place.

b. Cemetery-designated personnel will check BOSS data for accuracy when confirming headstone inscription data with the family. NCA staff will order and approve the permanent headstone/marker/niche cover through BOSS within seven calendar days of interment.

c. Permanent headstones/markers received at the cemetery will be checked for quality and inscription accuracy against the Monument Order Acknowledgement Receipt in accordance with NCA Handbook 3320 – Receipt and Inspection of Government-Furnished Headstones/Markers.

d. Permanent headstones/markers will be set within ten days of receipt in accordance with NCA Operational Standards and Measures for accuracy and visual appearance. BOSS will be updated to reflect placement of permanent headstone/marker/niche cover.

## 11. FINAL RECORDS/REPORTING

a. BOSS produces a final Burial Register and ROI, for each cemetery, to document by gravesite: decedent(s) interred, date(s) of interment, and other relevant data.

b. Cemetery Directors are responsible for ensuring that gravesite layout maps are maintained and updated daily to reflect gravesites and memorial sites used, and transmitting that information to appropriate MSN staff at least once every six months. MSN Offices are to return updated maps to the cemetery on a semi-annual basis.

c. MSN Directors are responsible for maintenance of accurate gravesite layout maps that document the current status of each gravesite for each cemetery within the MSN.

d. VA national cemeteries undergo annual Organizational Assessment Improvement (OAI) self-assessments (Gravesite Assessment Reports are conducted semi-annually). Also, periodic on-site reviews are conducted to measure adherence to standards in NCA Operational Standards and Measures related to layout of burial sections, verification and handling of remains, appearance of gravesites and active burial sections, headstone/marker/niche cover application/order, and delivery/inspection/storage. Cemetery Directors are responsible for the annual Certification of Gravesites.

## 12. LABELING INTERMENT CONTAINERS

a. Labels (also referred to as 'tags') are used to identify all types of containers used as receptacles for remains and/or cremated remains (including caskets, urns, outer burial receptacles (e.g., graveliners, crypts, or vaults), and other types of inner or outer containers. Unless a container or outer burial receptacle is pre-placed in the gravesite prior to interment, it must be tagged with a separate – but matching – label.



b. Label and tie standards:

(1) All VA national cemeteries will order container labels from supplies stocked at the VA Service and Distribution Center in Hines, IL. Follow the same process used to order forms and request Casket Tags, stock number F07600, in lieu of a form name and number.

(2) Labels will be white and of a non-biodegradable material that will not deteriorate due to corrosion or prolonged contact with water, soil, or chemicals. The finished size is 3 inches by 5½ inches with a hole in the left margin for placing the tie. (A plastic tie wrap similar to that used to bundle wires is an acceptable means of permanently affixing it to the container.)

(3) Data will be recorded on the label in a permanent and lasting manner. Indelible ink/permanent marker should be used and care should be taken to ensure the label is legible (whether handwritten or typed) and will remain so after prolonged exposure to ground and soil conditions.

c. The following **identifying information** is required for the permanent record and will be noted on the container label: full name of the decedent, section and grave number, and date of interment. **NOTE:** *For unnamed infant interments, the label will be completed with the veteran's identifying information and the annotation 'infant (son) (daughter) of (name of veteran).'*"

d. Labels will be **affixed to all containers:**

(1) In most cases, the label will be inconspicuously affixed to the container at the committal shelter after attendees have departed the committal service area, but before the remains are removed from the committal shelter.

(2) When outer burial receptacles are used, matching labels should be affixed to the inner and outer containers prior to completing the interment. Pre-placed crypts may have the gravesite number marked on the inside and on the lid at the head of the gravesite.



(3) Cremated remains shipped to the cemetery will be labeled upon receipt with a container label and placed in a designated secured area pending interment.

(4) In the case of small or uniquely-shaped containers (such as urns) where using a tie to affix the label is not practical, a dime-size dollop of clear silicone is the preferred method to affix the label to the bottom of the container. Clear packing tape is also permissible.

**13. REFERENCES:** *All referenced materials are available electronically to NCA staff at <http://vawww.nca.va.gov/> as noted:*

a. Department of Memorial Affairs Manuals:

- M40-2 "National Cemeteries Administration, Operation and Maintenance" (under *Field Programs - M40-2*)
- M40-3 "Headstones and Markers" (under *Memorial Programs Service - M40-3*)

b. NCA National Shrine Commitment Operational Standards and Measures (Version 4.0, October 2009) (under *Business Process Improvement - National Cemetery Administration Operational Standards and Measures*)

c. Organizational Assessment and Improvement Program (OAI) Guide (Version 4.0, National Cemeteries, October 2009) (under *Business Process Improvement - Organizational Assessment and Improvement Program (OAI) Guide*)

d. NCA Handbook 3315 - NCA Procedures for Ordering Government-Furnished Headstones/Markers (August 14, 2009) (under *Legislative and Regulatory - NCA Directives and Handbooks*)

e. NCA Handbook 3320 - Receipt and Inspection of Government-Furnished Headstones/Markers (August 14, 2009) (under *Legislative and Regulatory - NCA Directives and Handbooks*)



f. NCA Notice 2010-03 - Temporary Grave Markers and Placement (June 10, 2010) (under *Legislative and Regulatory - NCA Notices*)

- g. Field Programs Policy Memoranda (under *Field Programs - Policies*)
- NCA-41A-2009-01 "Opening Caskets in National Cemeteries" (February 2, 2009)
  - NCA-41A-2008-01 "Interment of Cremated Remains at VA National Cemeteries" (April 10, 2008)
  - NCA-41A-2006-01, "Interment Viewing" (March 4, 2006)
  - NCA 2004 - 41A-01 "Ordering Headstones, Markers, and Niche Covers" (November 18, 2004)

h. BOSS User Guides (under *Quantico Information Technology Center Web Portal*)

**14. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** NCA, Office of Field Programs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, is responsible for the contents of this notice.

**15. RESCISSIONS:**

a. Department of Memorial Affairs Manual M40-2 - National Cemeteries Administration, Operation and Maintenance:

- Chapter 5, paragraph 5.05 - Burial Permits, subparagraph a., and
- Chapter 8, paragraph 8.01 - Cremated Remains, subparagraphs d., e., and j.

b. NCA Office of Field Programs Policy Memorandum NCA-41A-2008-02 "Labeling Interment/Inurnment Containers" (February 10, 2008)

**16. EXPIRATION:** The information in this notice will remain in effect until incorporated in an NCA directive or handbook or formally rescinded.

/s/  
Glenn Powers  
Deputy Under Secretary  
for Field Programs

Distribution: Electronic