**TOP 10 MOST ACTIVE CEMETERIES**

Annual Number of Interments Conducted

- **Riverside, CA** 8,391
- **Florida National Cemetery** 6,333
- **Calverton, NY** 5,714
- **Ft. Snelling, MN** 5,343
- **Jefferson Barracks, MO** 4,930
- **Ft. Logan, CO** 4,302
- **Dallas-Ft. Worth, TX** 4,293
- **Ft. Sam Houston, TX** 4,095
- **Great Lakes, MI** 4,105
- **Willamette, OR** 3,874

**FY2017 AT A GLANCE**

- **133,798** At National Cemeteries
- **37,762** At State and Tribal Cemeteries
- **361,892** Headstones and Markers
- **13,206** Bronze Medallions
- **670,995** Presidential Memorial Certificates

**ANNUAL SURVEY OF SATISFACTION**

Every year, NCA mails out a survey to next-of-kin and funeral directors to measure customer service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY16</th>
<th>FY17</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cemetery Appearance</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Service</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>96%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommend to Other Veterans</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
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On July 17, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed legislation, which states that the President of the United States shall have power, whenever in his opinion it shall be expedient, 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. From this one sentence, the National Cemetery System was born.
On November 8, 2017, I was confirmed by the United States Senate as the 6th Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs at the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). It is a genuine honor to lead NCA’s team members as we care for, in perpetuity, over 4.5 million Veterans and family members interred at our 135 VA national cemeteries and to provide support for state, territory, and tribal Veteran grant-funded cemeteries. We have provided millions more with headstones, markers, bronze medallions, and Presidential Memorial Certificates.

Since 1978, we have empowered states, territories, and tribal governments to provide vital burial services to Veterans and their families with grants totaling almost $800 million dollars. The 109 state, territory, and tribal Veteran cemeteries across the Nation partner with our VA national cemeteries to provide Veterans with a dignified burial option within 75 miles of their home. Working together, currently 92% of America’s Veterans have access to a national, state, or tribal government cemetery, but we are not done yet.

All the while, we have maintained our Sacred Trust with those that mean the most to us—Veterans and their families. This commitment is demonstrated in our world-class customer service and reflected annually in our customer satisfaction numbers which routinely score in the mid-90s. We are proud of this achievement and we will always work to reach even higher. Our goal is perfection for every family member, every time. It is worth noting that almost 76% of our team members are Veterans. As I visit and talk with team members in the field, I am reminded of this solemn fact—we are taking care of each other, just like we would a family member.

As I look to the future, I am committed to empowering our partners and stakeholders. 2018 is the 40th anniversary of the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program. We are going to celebrate this partnership with the state and tribal government leaders. We are going to continue to pursue burial options for the remaining 8% who do not have burial access in a national, state, or tribal cemetery within 75 miles of their home. Finally, through the Veterans Legacy Program, we will continue to redefine and modernize how we memorialize our Veterans and to inspire younger generations to ensure that our Veterans are never forgotten.

Randy Reeves
Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
Continuing Their Legacy: National Medal of Honor Day

In 1990, Congress signed legislation designating March 25 as National Medal of Honor Day. Riverside National Cemetery is home to the National Medal of Honor Memorial, one of four sites recognized as a National Medal of Honor Memorial Site. Dedicated in 1999, the Medal of Honor Memorial features the names of all medal recipients.

On March 25, 2017 the Riverside National Cemetery held its inaugural National Medal of Honor Day event. The observance included a reception for the families of Medal of Honor recipients, a ceremony, and a walking tour. Family members of six Medal of Honor recipients attended the reception and shared photos and other mementos of their loved one. Approximately 100 people attended the ceremony.

“This is the first of many National Medal of Honor Day observances to come at Riverside National Cemetery,” said Riverside National Cemetery Executive Director, Peter Young. “It’s another example of how we remember Veterans service to our nation.”
Facility Management Pilot

In support of the National Cemetery Administration’s long-range goal for increased stakeholder trust via enhanced accountability, the Continental District (CND) implemented a new Facility Management Program to continuously assess, protect, preserve, sustain, and improve the Capital Assets at our cemeteries. CND’s program enhances NCA’s Facility Condition Assessment program by empowering the cemetery staff with tools, such as inspection checklists, schedules, and templates to manage their own facility inventory. NCA-CND debuted the program with a new District Policy and Standard Operating Procedure and held a two-day training session at Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) National Cemetery. In addition to DFW staff, maintenance personnel from four other cemeteries attended to provide feedback and expertise, and once trained, to become ambassadors at their respective sites. The training emphasized standardization and consistency in inspections, documentation, and analysis of trends to restrain the cycle of break-down maintenance. The critical feedback received from class participants will further improve our mission readiness and ultimately customer and employee satisfaction.
Rendering the Final Salute

The highest level of volunteer service to the nation is found at Fort Snelling National Cemetery (FSNC). FSNC is home to the first and longest running all-volunteer full-time Memorial Rifle Squad (MRS) in the NCA. Continuously operating since 1979 with 130 volunteer members, the squad fields volunteer members each day of the week to perform funeral honors for Veterans. The MRS personnel are all Veterans and members of a local Veteran Service Organization. They perform up to 17 services per day and have never missed a scheduled service during their existence because of inclement Minnesota weather. Each funeral honor ceremony includes a color guard, a rifle volley, the folding and presentation of the flag, and a live bugler playing “Taps”. MRS funeral honor ceremonies are provided at no cost to the family. MRS provides their own transportation, uniforms, and other equipment at no cost to the US Government. Annually, MRS logs over 40,000 hours of volunteer services, uses personal vehicles to travel 175,000+ volunteer miles, and provides honors for 2,500+ American Military Veterans. MRS is expected to eclipse a historic milestone in May 2018 when they are expected to render the final salute for the 75,000th time.
Eleven–year-old Preston Sharp and scores of volunteers honored Veterans at Quantico National Cemetery (QNC) by placing 1,000 American flags at their gravesites. Preston earned acclaim for placing U.S. flags and flowers at the graves of veterans since 2015 near his home in Redding, California. He was one of a number of presidential guests at President Trump’s State of the Union speech in January 2018. He attended the address at the invitation of Donald and Melania Trump and sat in the House of Representatives gallery with the first lady during the speech. He was recognized for his work honoring veterans at military cemeteries and elsewhere. At QNC, each person who placed a flag and flower at the gravesite thanked the Veteran buried for his/her service and mentioned their name aloud.
No Veteran Should Ever Be Forgotten

POW-MIA-OREE is an Outdoor Remembrance Educational Event created by Joshua Katz (an Eagle Scout in the Gulf Stream Council) to annually read the names of all the Veterans interred at our National Cemeteries. Following the reading of their names, a custom challenge coin is placed on each Veteran's headstone or marker for family members, as a keepsake, to let them know that no soldier should ever be forgotten.

Since its inaugural year at the South Florida National Cemetery, this event has been gaining the support needed to become a national event. In 2017, POW-MIA-OREE conducted services along the eastern coast of Florida and has scheduled more to cover the rest of Florida. Joshua is planning events at other VA national cemeteries across the country.
More than Glad to Do It

As Hurricane Irma approached Florida in September 2017, U.S. Army Veteran Delbert Grush went to Tallahassee National Cemetery, where his 6-month-old son, Ezra is laid to rest. Grush wanted to pick up the flowers at his son's gravesite so they wouldn't be strewn all over the cemetery when the high winds came. He looked around and noticed flowers at other gravesites—including a friend’s wife. Having deep respect for the NCA staff and the sacred grounds, he had an idea. Why not pick up all of the flowers?

As Chairman of the 82nd Airborne Division Association, 508 PIR Chapter, he placed a few calls. Others were eager to help. “About 20 people came out, picked up all of the flowers, then bagged and labeled them,” said Grush. “It took us about two hours.”

After Irma passed through, Grush, other volunteers, and the cemetery staff returned and placed the flowers back at their respective sites.

“This was a first for me as well as the staff at Tallahassee,” remembered Cemetery Director Raymond Miller. “It's something I'll never forget.”

Grush was more than glad to do it.

“I’m grateful for the people at Tallahassee National Cemetery for taking care of my son,” said Grush. “It’s where I’ll be when it’s my time.”

US Army Veteran Delbert Grush visits his son’s grave at Tallahassee National Cemetery in Florida.
Much of how we interact with information and people is through smart devices. Sound bites, tweets, and texts are how people consume information. By harnessing this same technology to connect cemetery visitors with Veterans’ histories, we are bringing the stories of these men and women to the public in a way that is familiar to them.

—Dr. Amy Giroux, University of Central Florida’s Center for Humanities and Digital Research
Digital Modernization-The National Cemetery of the Future

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) made some significant improvements to our digital landscape to better serve the Veterans and their families.

Mobile Redesign

So long, basic html, hello easy interface and mobile-friendly buttons; NCA redesigned the mobile site. The new NCA mobile site, launched in September 2017, is designed to be more modern and to provide a more mobile-specific experience. This mobile redesign has easy-to-understand language, intuitive file paths, a sleek design, and a user-friendly interface.

To complement the new mobile design, NCA created a fresh new and functional look. Some of the improvements to the mobile site and to the overall user experience include:

- Integration with maps, such as Google or Bing
- Link or display a cemetery map
- Integration with the new cemetery lookup feature

Legacy and Education

FY2017 was a year of growth for the Veterans Legacy Program (VLP). The first three university partnerships came to a close in September, 2017. In each, students worked under the guidance of their professors to conduct research on Veterans interred in national cemeteries in their community.

Black Hills National Cemetery

Students at Black Hills National Cemetery worked with Cemetery Director Adriene Benton to present their historical research in a way that helps visitors understand more about the experience of Veterans in rural South Dakota, and especially the experience of Native American Veterans.

Golden Gate and San Francisco National Cemeteries

Kathy McCall, cemetery director of Golden Gate NC and San Francisco NC, has been an invaluable resource for the team from San Francisco State University. They made 12 short films about Bay Area Veterans interred in those two cemeteries. Their films memorialize Veterans from a variety of periods and backgrounds.

Florida National Cemetery

A team of historians from the University of Central Florida worked with NCA’s Kurt Rotar and Roberto Pizarro, director and assistant director of Florida NC, to develop a new way to share the students’ research on Veterans through digital exhibits.

American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) and the Library of Congress

VLP partnered with the American Battle Monuments Commission on the Understanding Sacrifice program of teacher education. Teachers from all over the country participated in this program to learn about the Pacific theater of World War II and to do research on hometown heroes of that war who are interred in NCA and ABMC cemeteries. ABMC and VLP will continue their partnership in a new program in FY2018.

VLP, ABMC, and the Library of Congress worked with the Department of the Army to host cadet-interns from the United States Military Academy at West Point, NY. They spent their first three days in Washington, DC, learning the basics of Veteran research, and then they went to Fort Snelling NC and Santa Fe NC, where they worked with executive cemetery director Ame Callahan and acting cemetery director Jared Howard on researching Veterans in those cemeteries.
A Year of Powerful Hurricanes

Under Secretary Randy Reeves visits with employees at the Atlantic Gardens Veterans Cemetery in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico.

Employees at Puerto Rico National Cemetery work on clean-up after Hurricane Irma.

Water overflow at Houston National Cemetery after Hurricane Harvey
After a Year of Powerful Hurricanes, NCA is Stronger than Ever

Natural disasters can wreak havoc on the normally pristine and serene grounds of a national cemetery. While tornadoes, droughts, and earthquakes are climatic disasters that can cause damage, a hurricane has many damaging effects including high winds, storm surges, flooding, and mudslides.

Preparation is an annual ritual for national cemeteries located in hurricane zones. While Florida and the Caribbean absorbed much of Hurricane Irma and Maria's impact, its national cemeteries had varying degrees of damage. Hurricane Harvey dumped an estimated 27 trillion gallons of rain over Texas and Louisiana during a six-day period and also set a record for the most rainfall ever from a tropical cyclone in the continental U.S., at 51 inches of rain. Houston National Cemetery (HNC) was closed for three days due to this flooding.

Mat Williams, HNC Director, said the cemetery received very little damage but the flood waters and damage in the surrounding area posed a significant threat to cemetery employees and their families.

“We had three employees whose homes were flooded, which had a major impact on their lives,” Williams said.

While many of the states in Harvey’s path recovered quickly, Puerto Rico, was hit by Hurricane Irma and then Maria within two weeks. Maria barreled through Puerto Rico as a Category 4 with winds up to 155 mph.

David Hollis, NCA Current and Integrated Operations Supervisor, said Puerto Rico National Cemetery (PRNC) employees were at work the day after Hurricane Maria, with some employees spending the night at NCA facilities.

“Hurricane Maria brought a lot of wind and a tremendous amount of rain over Puerto Rico. Most of the island still has little to no electricity,” Hollis said. “PRNC conducted their first burials within 48 hours of the hurricane.”

The employees dedication to duty extended well beyond burial services. In absence of Department of Defense service members, Veterans on the cemetery’s staff conducted military funeral honors for the families and local funeral homes to ensure Veterans and their families received prompt burials.

“Our cemetery performed exceptionally well. The cemeteries and their staff set the examples for mission accomplishment within the VA,” he said. “Our employees did a phenomenal job.”
Innovation to Support Veterans and their Families

Weekend Burials

One Saturday per month at six VA national cemeteries (Fort Bliss National Cemetery in Texas, Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis, Ft. Snelling National Cemetery in Minnesota, Riverside National Cemetery in California, Florida National Cemetery, Florida and Calverton National Cemetery in New York) NCA began offering limited weekend cremation burials in an effort to improve customer service through scheduling flexibility.

VA will continue its practice of honoring special requests for weekend burials for religious purposes in cases of service members killed in action, and burial on at least one day of any three-day Federal holiday weekend.

Pre-Need Eligibility Determinations

Planning in advance for the final resting place of a Veteran or a loved one can eliminate unnecessary delays and reduce stress on a family at a difficult time. NCA began providing eligibility determinations for interment in a VA national cemetery prior to the time of need. Veteran families will have increased confidence that their loved ones are eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery at their time of need. https://www.cem.va.gov/pre-need/

Daily Online Burial Schedules

Launched in March 2017, the online Daily Burial Schedule (DBS) for all VA national cemeteries allows families and loved ones to quickly find time and location information for those being interred, via its NCA website.

Digital Information Platform

NCA is transforming its customer services through multiple digital information systems for customers. This consists of an improved Nationwide Gravesite Locator designed for mobile devices, a digital cemetery guide offering research on Veteran history, and an online memorialization site that allows the public to share sentiments, photographs, and memories of Veterans. The former was developed in partnership with the University of Central Florida, the latter with the VA Center for Innovation and NASA.

NCA Resources Guide

This year, NCA released a live, online resource guide to help Veterans and their eligible family members learn more about VA Memorial Benefits. Whether looking for a cemetery, trying to find a grave, seeking to understand burial benefits, or anticipating what to expect at a committal service, the information is now on the Internet at https://www.cem.va.gov/resources.asp.
The National Cemetery Scheduling Office serves all national cemeteries, seven days a week, 362 days a year. Toll Free Number 1-800-535-1117.
Victor Vasquez, Continental District

Fort Bliss National Cemetery

Victor is a U.S. Navy Veteran and joined NCA in 2015. He is a key contributor in helping the Fort Bliss National Cemetery improve the experience of its Veterans, community members, and stakeholders. He began his career as a Contract Work Therapy (CWT) patient and has successfully achieved increased levels of responsibility, including Caretaker Work Leader and Cemetery Caretaker Supervisor overseeing 17 employees plus active CWT patients. Victor is also the full-time Safety Manager.

“It’s a pleasure working for NCA, but it can get emotional at times working with grieving families. We help them as best we can to ensure their loved one receives a dignified burial.”

Rachel Charles, Pacific District

National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona

Rachel joined NCA in 2008 as a temporary caretaker. She has worked her way up through NCA as a Cemetery Caretaker and Cemetery Representative, and she was selected for the prestigious year-long Cemetery Director Intern program at NCA’s National Training Center in St. Louis. She’s now the Assistant Director of the 12th busiest cemetery in the NCA system.

“It’s a pleasure working for NCA, but it can get emotional at times working with grieving families. We help them as best we can to ensure their loved one receives a dignified burial.”
Felix Monet, Southeast District
Cape Canaveral National Cemetery
Felix is a U.S. Army Veteran and joined NCA in 2015 after five years at Arlington National Cemetery. As a Cemetery Caretaker, Felix plays a critical role in ensuring that Cape Canaveral National Cemetery remains a place of dignity, honor, and respect for Veterans, their families, and the public.

In response to Hurricane Maria that devastated Puerto Rico, Felix raised $2,000, and along with his friend Demetrius Hicks, flew to Felix’s hometown in Cieba to help his family and his community in recovery efforts.

“It was sad to see so many people without food, water, and power. We tried to do as much as we could in the time we had.”

Tegan Godfrey, Midwest District
Fort Snelling National Cemetery
Tegan Godfrey joined NCA as a Cemetery Representative in August 2017. He is a U.S. Air Force Veteran, having served from 2007-2011, with combat deployments in Qatar and Afghanistan.

In May 2017, Tegan graduated from the University of Minnesota with a B.A. in History. He found an immediate interest in NCA’s Veterans Legacy Program. “I’m surrounded by history here at Fort Snelling and I’m excited about what NCA is doing.” He hopes he can use his history background to support the Legacy Program. “I’m also interested in being a Cemetery Director one day.”
Jeffrey Taveras, Northeast District

Calverton National Cemetery

Jeff is a U.S. Army Veteran and joined NCA in 2010. He began his career as a Cemetery Caretaker, and then served in various positions as a Cemetery Technician, Program Support Assistant, and now as a Management Program Analyst. Jeff was instrumental in developing the Equipment Tracking System for the Northeast District, an equipment matrix that accounts for all equipment, needs usage, repairs, and schedules for replacement of equipment. Jeff’s design for the NCA Recognition pin recognizing superior Customer Service tied for First Place in an NCA-wide competition. He currently holds a Yellow Belt in Lean Six Sigma.

Peggy Jensen, VA Central Office

Washington D.C.

Peggy joined NCA in 1982 and serves as a Project Manager in the Design and Construction Service at the National Cemetery Administration's Central Office. She is one of 15 professional staff members involved in architectural, planning, and engineering support of 135 VA national cemeteries. She is primarily responsible for Pacific District design and construction projects.

Over the past 36 years at NCA, Peggy's work has comprised of brick-and-mortar projects as well as heart-of-the-mission projects. She has participated on teams to design Master Plans for the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona, Bakersfield, Dallas-Fort Worth, Florida, and Tahoma National Cemeteries, among others. Her portfolio includes projects at more than 40 national cemeteries. Raised in Alexandria, Virginia, she grew up exploring Arlington National Cemetery with her mother, an avid horticulturist.
Frances Frederick, VA Central Office
Washington D.C.

Frances joined NCA in 1990. She has spent her entire 27-year career in service to Veterans and their families. Frances works as a team member in the Applicant Assistance Benefits Call Center for Memorial Products Service assisting funeral directors, Veterans Service Officers, cemetery staff, and next-of-kin on all matters concerning headstones, flat markers, and bronze medallions. Her role is critical to helping NCA sustain its reputation for world-class customer service.

Her interests include interior decorating and designing, traveling, cardio boxing, and volunteering. She's been to England, Hawaii, and Costa Rica. As far as retirement, she says, “I’m can’t see it, I’m not ready.”

Rufino Arbas Jr., National Cemetery Scheduling Office (NCSO)
St. Louis, Missouri

Rufino joined NCA in 2014 as a Scheduling Agent after a 31-year career in the U.S. Air Force. He is a Veteran of the Global War on Terrorism with numerous deployments during combat operations. At NCSO, Rufino supervises 47 Scheduling Agents and three Lead Scheduling Agents who schedule burials for eligible Veterans and their dependents at 135 VA national cemeteries. In FY17, NCSO received over 136,000 calls for burials.

His daily responsibilities include managing team members, coordinating training, and writing policies in support of NCSO’s mission. The National Cemetery Scheduling Office in St. Louis plays a critical customer service role and serves as the Gateway to NCA.
Granite monuments raise visibility for flat marker burial sections at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery.

**OCTOBER 15**
Veterans, military family, and civilians visit Great Lakes National Cemetery to clean headstones.

**NOVEMBER 3**
NCA intern publishes story on Navaho Code Talker, Chester Nez.

**DECEMBER 17**
VA national cemeteries across the country participate in the 11th Annual Wreaths Across America.

**JANUARY 3**
Local teens in Long Beach, Mississippi serve as pallbearers for a Veteran with no family.

**FEBRUARY 16**
NCA awards three universities contracts to research and share local history.
MARCH 9
Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David Shulkin tours South Florida National Cemetery.

APRIL 6
VA National Cemeteries commemorate World War I Centennial.

APRIL 12
No One Deserves to Go Unclaimed volunteers give dignified burial to two female homeless Veterans.

MAY 29
NCA airs Veterans Legacy Program video.

JUNE 15
Houlton Band of Maliseet Tribe receives a $250,000 grant from NCA to construct a Veterans Section within the existing tribal cemetery.

AUGUST 21
$6.6m North Mississippi Veterans Memorial Cemetery dedication. The state cemetery provides a burial option for 22,000 unserved Veterans.

JULY 13
Thirteen members of the Cemetery Director Intern Class graduate.
Be sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/nationalcemeteries

Twitter: https://twitter.com/VANatCemeteries