

Consolidation of Federal Veterans Cemeteries Department of Veterans Affairs

Summary of Proposal: This proposal would transfer responsibility for perpetual care and operation of select military and veterans cemeteries located on Department of Defense (DOD) installations to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) – National Cemetery Administration. This transfer would increase efficiency, limit mission overlap, and ensure that these cemeteries are maintained to national shrine standards to continue the recognition of service of those interred therein.

THE CHALLENGE Currently, mission overlap exists in the oversight and operations of Federal military and veterans cemeteries. Specifically, VA maintains and operates 135 national cemeteries and 33 cemeterial installations, DOD is responsible for approximately 43 cemeteries located on active and inactive installations, the Department of the Interior (DOI) is responsible for 14 situated within national parks, and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) is responsible for one. In most cases, this mission overlap is inconsequential as the responsible agency has adequate infrastructure and support in place at each location, making each a suitable caretaker. However, at some facilities responsible agencies no longer maintain an active presence, presenting unique challenges for efficient oversight and warranting reconsideration of the status quo. This proposal recognizes an opportunity to transfer responsibility for the operation and care of select post cemeteries, 10 of which are located on inactive facilities formerly occupied by the Department of the Army (Army) and one on a re-missioned open garrison (Fort Devens), to VA by leveraging the expertise and capabilities of the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). This consolidation will enable the Army to utilize Operations and Maintenance resources for other critical mission needs while reducing duplication of effort across Government.

THE OPPORTUNITY For several decades, DOD has maintained “post cemeteries” on inactive bases shuttered as a result of various closure and re-missioning decisions – specifically, 10 former active Army facilities. In these cases, lack of an active Army presence makes efficient operations and maintenance challenging. The National Cemetery Administration (NCA), established by the Congress in the National Cemeteries Act of 1973 and one of the three administrations that make up VA, operates a large network of veterans cemeteries, making it better suited for this mission. In addition, one open garrison – Fort Devens, Massachusetts – has been re-missioned as an Army Reserve Forces Training Area and is included in this proposal. In addition to serving as the interface for the public in the delivery of VA burial benefits, NCA operates and maintains the network of national cemeteries to “national shrine” standards. These standards include headstone realignment, irrigation and grounds improvements, and other facility upgrades to improve accessibility and visitors’ experience. NCA’s performance is substantiated by consistently high customer satisfaction ratings from veterans, family members, and visitors. Consolidation will alleviate duplicative mission requirements and entrust operational control to an agency with more expertise in running cemeteries. This will allow more burial options for veterans and dependents at some of the transferred cemeteries by taking advantage of NCA’s operational experience in maximizing the use of available space.

WHAT WE’RE PROPOSING AND WHY IT’S THE RIGHT THING TO DO VA, DOD, DOI, and USDA maintain approximately 226 Federal cemeteries where the remains of veterans and dependents from various eras and conflicts are interred. The NCA is responsible for 135 national cemeteries and 33 other cemeterial

installations. The remaining 58 cemeteries fall under the collective responsibility of DOD, DOI, and USDA as listed below. Not listed are numerous other State and/or tribal veterans cemeteries. Further, this inventory does not include American Battle Monuments Commission installations as nearly all are overseas and currently maintained to guidelines commensurate with “national shrine” standards.

Department of the Army (post cemeteries proposed for transfer)	(active) Department of the Army	Department of the Interior National Park Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vancouver Barracks Cemetery, WA • Fort McClellan Post Cemetery, AL • Fort McClellan Prisoner of War Cemetery, AL • Fort Lawton Cemetery, WA • Fort Douglas Cemetery, UT • Fort Worden Cemetery, WA • Fort Missoula Cemetery, MT • Fort Stevens Cemetery, OR • Benicia Post Cemetery, CA • Fort Sheridan Cemetery, IL • Fort Devens Cemetery, MA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arlington National Cemetery, VA • U.S. Soldier’s and Airmen’s Home National Cemetery, Washington, DC • Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD • Fort Benning, GA • Fort Bragg, NC • Carlisle Barracks, PA • Edgewood Arsenal, MD • Fort Huachuca, AZ • Fort Knox, KY • Fort Leonard Wood, MO • Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA • Fort Meade, MD • Presidio of Monterey, CA • Fort Riley, KS • Fort Sill, OK • U.S. Military Academy, NY • Watervliet Arsenal, NY • Fort Campbell POW Cemetery, KY • Fort Drum POW Cemetery, NY • Fort Gordon German POW Cemetery, GA • Schofield Barracks, HI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gettysburg, PA • Antietam, MD • Battleground, VA • Fredericksburg, VA • Yorktown, VA • Poplar Grove, VA • Fort Donelson, TN • Andrew Johnson, TN • Stones River, TN • Shiloh, TN • Andersonville, GA • Vicksburg, MS • Chalmette, LA • Custer, MT
Department of the Air Force	Department of the Navy	Department of Agriculture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fort George Wright Cemetery, Fairchild Air Force Base, WA • U.S. Air Force Academy, CO • F.E. Warren AFB, WY • Fort Crook/Offutt AFB Cemetery, NE • Volk Field, Camp Douglas, WI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maine Memorial, FL • Captain Ted Conaway Memorial Navy Cemetery, VA • U.S. Naval Cemetery, Great Lakes Naval Base, IL • Cuzco Beach Naval Cemetery, U.S. Naval Base Guantanamo Bay, Cuba • U.S. Naval Academy, MD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fort Reno Cemetery/POW Annex, OK

Transfer of the 11 cemeteries italicized above from Army to NCA makes progress towards several Administration priorities, including, but not limited to: reducing redundancies and mission duplication across Government; streamlining operations and achieving efficiencies; increasing access to burial options for veterans and eligible dependents; and, providing veterans with benefits they have earned in service to the Nation. This consolidation will constitute the largest transfer of cemeteries to VA since the National Cemeteries Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-43) established the system in place today. The proposal is

limited to base cemeteries located on installations that no longer maintain an active personnel presence, as well as one re-missioned base (Fort Devens) where transfer would realize efficiencies. Although the effort is not conceived as a pilot, it will enable VA to develop and execute an implementation plan that could also inform future transfers. This proposal would not transfer cemeteries on other active DOD installations or those located within DOI national parks where support infrastructure and presence exists. Transferring these facilities to NCA is the optimal good-government strategy, and is consistent with the National Cemeteries Act of 1973. NCA leads the way in providing a variety of world-class burial and memorial benefits for veterans and their families and has received the highest customer satisfaction rating among the public and private sector from the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for six consecutive years. Upon transfer, these facilities will be maintained to the same high standards as other NCA cemeteries, which have garnered public praise. VA does anticipate that each of the 11 transferred cemeteries will need to undergo some minor infrastructure improvements (e.g., roads, irrigation and drainage, marker alignment, turf renovation, etc.).