

Our Ever Changing National Cemeteries

John S. Heiser, Gettysburg National Military Park



Entrance to the Soldiers' National Cemetery, 1882. (GNMP)

It was a moving ceremony on November 19, 1863- music, speeches, poems, a complete eulogy to those Union dead who died at Gettysburg and would soon be forever resting “on fame’s eternal camping ground” on Cemetery Hill.¹ It took another seven years before the cemetery was complete and the monument honoring the dead was finished. Only then did the Soldiers’ National Cemetery at Gettysburg take its formal place among the many national cemeteries previously established in northern cities or places where Union dead had been interred on or near a battlefield. Like Gettysburg, the purpose of these cemeteries and others that soon followed was to provide the Union deceased from a battle the fitting and proper burial ground they deserved; the humble obligation of a nation that had sent her sons to war, for those who never returned home.

Long before the outbreak of the Civil War, soldier burials on remote battlefields and outposts were understood by most that a soldier’s death also meant that his remains would never come home to rest next to loved ones in a churchyard cemetery or family plot. Death on a battlefield meant burial on or near that site, with no hope of recovery other than with a family member taking it upon themselves to recover the remains or see to it via personal means that the burial site was properly marked. In many cases, especially during the American Revolution and the opening of the frontier, graves of fallen soldiers were all too soon forgotten. The United States War Department attempted to correct that issue during the War with Mexico, with mixed results. The proper burial of American soldiers had been a simple service with internment taking place

on a post cemetery or, at the request of family members, burial in a hometown plot if the remains could be identified and sent home, always at the family's expense.

Officials at the War Department quickly realized in the first months of 1861 that the scope for handling these cases was going to be much greater than imagined. On September 11, 1861, General Orders No. 75 specified the responsibility for soldier burials be assigned to the Adjutant General's Department, which found itself overwhelmed and unable to handle the demands of so many coupled with an influx of distraught family members requesting the remains of deceased loved ones be sent home. There simply was no system in place to handle such requests and no funds to accomplish such a task. Attention to this case was imperative but could not be accomplished through means within the War Department. Fortunately, Congressional legislation the following summer gave the president the authority 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 their country," and national cemeteries were born.²

The earliest cemeteries established by the War Department in 1862 were near towns and cities such as Alexandria, Annapolis, Philadelphia, Brooklyn, Springfield, Illinois, and adjacent to the Soldier's Home in Washington, places where troops were concentrated and disease caused the first major casualties of the war. Yet by war's end, these early cemeteries were deemed unreachable due to the broad scope of the conflict, especially in areas of the Deep South where the heaviest Union casualties had occurred and where countless graves dotted the landscapes of Virginia, Georgia, Tennessee and Mississippi. Using the initiative of the original 1862 legislation, the War Department authorized cemeteries at Chattanooga (1863), Shiloh (1866), and Vicksburg (1865), all of which were located on battlefield ground, but development and improvements to the grounds of each were extremely slow.

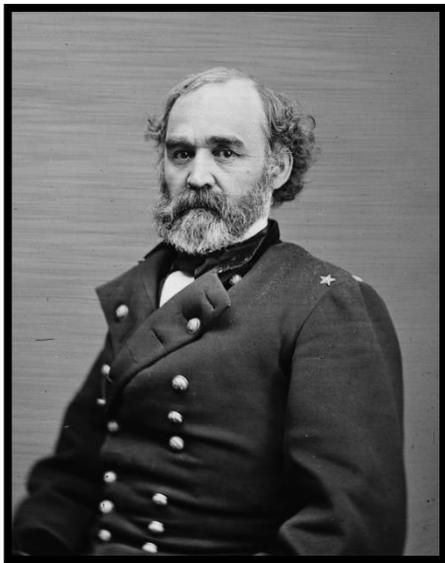


Entrance and gateway to Vicksburg National Cemetery, ca. 1872. (Library of Congress)

The Reburial Program, approved by a Joint Resolution of the Senate and House in 1866, initiated the recovery of Federal remains from battlefields and hospital sites, but where to bury so many? Shipping remains to the established cemeteries was costly and unfeasible. Following almost a year of debate, Congress passed the first National Cemetery Act on February 22, 1867, providing authority and funds necessary to establish national cemeteries with common landscape designs. Cemeteries were established at battlefield sites at Fredericksburg and Richmond, Virginia,

Chattanooga and Shiloh, Tennessee, and numerous other places where Federal dead still lay scattered in nearly forgotten graves. By the time the reburial process was completed in 1870, the remains of 299,686 officers and men had been successfully interred in 73 national cemeteries.³

Of the Civil War-era national cemeteries, the most famous and highly recognized is Arlington National Cemetery, situated across the Potomac River from Washington, DC. The huge estate owned by Robert and Mary Custis Lee was occupied by Federal troops on May 24, 1861, and was lost by the Lees three years later to the Federal government for non-payment of taxes. Four months after the auction of the land, the first burial took place on a section of the grounds denoted as the Lower Cemetery. Private William Christman, 67th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, was a farmer prior to becoming a soldier and never fired a shot in battle, succumbing to disease at Washington's Lincoln General Hospital on May 11, 1864, and buried with little or no ceremony at Arlington on May 13. It was during this period when Gen. Montgomery Meigs, a West Point classmate of Lee and Quartermaster General of the Army, found that the cemetery at the Soldiers' Home in Washington would be completely filled at the rate that deaths were taking place in Federal hospitals around the city. Eyeing the property that was Arlington, the general wrote to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton on June 15, 1864, recommending that "the land surrounding the Arlington Mansion, now understood to be the property of the United States, be appropriated as a National Military Cemetery, to be properly enclosed, laid out and carefully preserved for that purpose." Stanton immediately approved Meigs' proposal.⁴



Montgomery Meigs, 1816-1892. His unwavering determination to make the grounds of the Lee estate at Arlington into a national cemetery was admired by many though criticized by several who despised his hard-handed methods. (Library of Congress)

Gen. Meigs oversaw the burial procedures at Arlington with an overt amount of ruthlessness. Union officers occupying the main house complained of graves being placed too close to their quarters so Meigs had them evicted, replaced by an army chaplain and a lieutenant to oversee cemetery operations. He specified that prominent Union officers be interred where Mrs. Lee had her favorite garden near the house and other unknown remains be buried near the plot that once grew vegetables alongside flowers and blooming shrubs.



Arlington House during wartime. (LOC)

Among those buried on the grounds was Meigs' 22 year-old son Lieutenant John Rodgers Meigs, shot dead on October 3, 1864, while serving as an aide and scout for Gen. Philip Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley. The death of his beloved son deepened the general's hatred for southern "murderers", resulting in his particular attention to a symbolic punishing of Lee as burials continued on the grounds of Arlington. Meigs never forgave the southern commander or any of Lee's fellow officers for their part in the rebellion against the government of the United States and his strong

armed efforts continued long after the war, transitioning Arlington from a plantation to a vast memorial honoring not only the soldiers buried there but the statesmen that soon followed. The general himself was buried at Arlington after his death in 1892.⁵

As for the Lees, Mrs. Lee pursued her case for the return of Arlington to her family after the war though her pleas fell on deaf ears, including many of those in Congress who debated the case. Despite the consternation and deep rooted feelings of loss, she was able to visit her ancestral home once again in June 1873. Accompanied by an old friend, Mrs. Lee's carriage ride took her through the estate where she could see for herself how the place had been transformed and was no longer the home she remembered so lovingly. "The change is so entire that I have not the yearning to go back there & shall be more content to resign all my right in it," she wrote soon after her visit and four months before her death at the age of sixty five. Though efforts to reclaim the land for the Lee family continued after her passing, these, too, eventually ceased as Arlington became more and more of a symbolic shrine of sacrifice to the Union cause. It was not until 1883 that a settlement was finally reached and the estate formally transferred to the Federal government.⁶

Due to its location, its infamous birth as a cemetery and continuous burials of celebrated soldiers, sailors, and statesmen, Arlington National Cemetery is often referred to as *THE* national cemetery of the United States. Yet, it is the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg that is often remembered for its symbolism as the final burial place for not only those who gave "the last full measure of devotion", but for its famous address delivered by President Abraham Lincoln on November 19, 1863. Few other cemeteries have such a rich genesis of dedicatory history. Presidents and statesmen have indeed visited and spoke in other national cemeteries, but none are remembered specifically for the two minute long speech Lincoln gave that chilly November day. If anything, the national cemetery established in 1863 is better known for the Gettysburg Address than for its development as a memorial to the Union dead who fell on that great battlefield. Yet, the Soldiers' National Cemetery is no different than most national

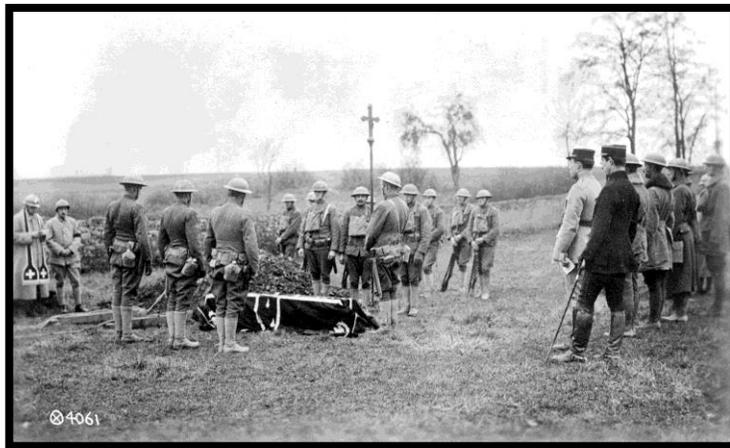
cemeteries in the United States as a final burial ground not only for dead of the Civil War, but servicemen and women from the wars since 1865.

The demands for burial space for soldiers who died while in service or after have placed an extraordinary burden on the National Cemetery System and the demand for space in Gettysburg's cemetery is a good example. Designed by landscape architect William Saunders, the simple plan of equality among the loyal states changed in the years following the transfer of the cemetery to the United States War Department. Superintendents and officials made improvements to the cemetery grounds, as memorials were placed within the boundary and additional improvements made to the cemetery design, all reflective of the Victorian period when the more elaborate (and often pretentious by today's standards) the design was, the better it appeared. But wars and the loss of lives in the military did not end in 1865- future wars and conflicts were a certainty, and the nation's obligations to its dead would compromise the simplest of the early cemetery designs, including Saunders' for Gettysburg.

It was during this post-war period when burial rights changed. National cemeteries were initially set aside to host the burial of United States soldiers killed in battle, though the policy changed in 1873. Pressure from the Grand Army of the Republic, the organization of honorably discharged Union veterans of the Civil War, persuaded Congress, a number of who were veterans themselves, to amend the cemetery act of 1862 with the Act of March 3, 1873, giving "the right to burial of all honorably discharged veterans of the Civil War." With that act, the purpose of national cemeteries changed to not only honor battle dead but all Union veterans of the Civil War who honorably served. Almost immediately, the focus changed with soldiers dying on the plains in conflict with American Indians and subsequent incidents elsewhere, outside of national boundaries. The War Department, which had the primary responsibility of maintaining the cemeteries, was forced to amend the policy to accept non-Civil War veterans after every military event both at home and abroad until the congressional act of April 3, 1920 when Congress revised the policy for burial "and extended its provisions to the veterans of all wars, past and future."⁷

The consequential changes in burial requirements did not deeply affect Gettysburg's national cemetery. Between the years 1865 and 1947, requests for burial at Gettysburg were limited in number to a mere handful. Most of the burials during that period, primarily veterans residing in the Adams-York County area, were at first among the Civil War burials in the original state plots of the cemetery until the Cemetery Administration decided to set aside a special plot outside of the Maine and Michigan sections for these more recent burials. Among the interments in this new plot were veterans of the Spanish-American War and World War I. Albert J. Lentz, the first Adams County resident to die in the First World War, was buried with honors in this section. Lentz, serving in the 18th Infantry of the 1st Infantry Division, was killed in action near Cantigney, France, on April 27, 1918.

Lentz's burial at Gettysburg represents one of the 45,588 bodies shipped home from France where these members of the American Expeditionary Force fell in battle or died from disease. The dilemma faced by the United States War Department after the close of World War I was what to do with these men who had died while in Europe. Secretary of War Newton D. Baker insisted that his department honor a commitment he made in 1917 to ship home the remains of American's sons from those foreign battlefields but a bitter debate ensued among politicians and officials overseas, including staff officers in the A.E.F. Among the latter was A.E.F. Chief Chaplain Charles Brent who believed the war dead should remain overseas buried in suitable A.E.F. cemeteries as "enduring monuments to the cause of freedom for which they died," and as everlasting symbols not only of America's commitment to a peaceful Europe, but as reflective of the "power and prestige of the U.S." that had grown greatly since the nation's entry into the war in April 1917.⁸



Burial of the first three "Doughboys" killed in action in World War I, November 1917. Temporary U.S. cemeteries were scattered throughout France by the end of the war a year later. (State Historical Society of Iowa)

While serving as an assistant to the Postmaster General in Washington, twenty-six year old Baker had volunteered for service during the Spanish-American War but was rejected due to his poor eyesight. Disappointed, he followed the conflict in Washington newspapers and remembered the post-war return of battlefield casualties to United States soil, coupled with the recovery of American dead from the subsequent Philippine Insurrection (1899 to 1902) and the Boxer Rebellion in China (1899-1900). A total of 5,931 remains of American soldiers, sailors and marines were interred at Arlington and the San Francisco National Cemetery or in private cemeteries as specified by family request. Baker felt this to be an honorable process and his commitment to the families of fallen Americans was personally and officially imperative- the final decision was based on the wishes of affected families. In the summer of 1919, the War Department issued a questionnaire to the next of kin stating options for the final burial of loved sons and fathers who had died while in service. The options were: return the soldier's remains to

the United States for burial at Arlington National Cemetery; return to the United States for shipment to a home address; return to the United States for burial in a national cemetery of the family's choice; or remain in Europe for internment in a permanent United States Cemetery. A majority of those asked requested for their loved one's remains to be shipped home to the States and by the end of 1921, 45,588 bodies had been returned, many of which were interred in the spacious Arlington National Cemetery.⁹ There, too, an act of Congress in 1921 designated Arlington as the final resting place of an unidentified United States soldier killed in the war, repatriated and buried under a marble sarcophagus in the front yard of the Lee home, not far away from the façade of the house facing Washington. Throughout America's wars, there had always been a high percentage of soldiers who died without proper identification. The number of unknowns, significantly high during the Civil War, had been a strong sentiment among veterans and officials but became a national issue during the repatriation process in 1919-1920. Representative of all unknown Americans killed in World War I and before, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier symbolizes more than the loss of identity of an individual but representative of the loss of many of the nation's sons, "known but to God".¹⁰



Burial of the "Unknown Soldier" in Arlington National Cemetery, November 11, 1921 (LOC)

The national cemetery at Gettysburg was minimally affected by the demands for American burials after World War I, as were other cemeteries at Civil War battlefields, the focus being placed on resources offered at several of the larger national cemeteries and those near metropolitan areas. During this time between the World Wars, the Federal government established the American Battle Monuments Commission to maintain American cemeteries overseas. Meanwhile, the need for expansion of national cemeteries at home became an issue as veterans and their families demanded proper burial

sites as promised when the veterans first went into service- much of it from veterans of the World War I suffering the lasting and fatal effects of exposure to deadly gas used on the battlefields of France. Lobbying by the American Legion helped push through legislation that contributed to the establishment of additional national cemeteries, primarily near cities where concentrations of veterans and their families lived. The Great Depression curtailed further expansion of Federal cemeteries though the Legion, which represented veterans of the Great War, reminded government officials constantly throughout the period of the guarantee made to former soldiers and that the promise could not be reversed.¹¹

It was during this time when major changes occurred at Gettysburg. In 1933, administration of the Soldiers' National Cemetery was passed from the United States War Department to the National Park Service, which immediately undertook a project to upgrade the cemetery grounds and correct maintenance issues. Enrollees from the Civilian Conservation Corps camp at

Gettysburg excavated and reset the original headstones in the Civil War section and backfilled the entire area to make the semi-circular stone markers flush with the ground, which accommodated mowing and trimming; but, unfortunately altered the original design of the stones to stand above ground. Likewise, pipe fencing marking the boundary of the national cemetery with the adjacent Evergreen Cemetery was removed and historic iron fencing that once stood on the park boundary on east Cemetery Hill was relocated to this boundary. Entry gates were widened, walkways removed, flower beds and shrubs eliminated, and roads through the cemetery improved for modern vehicles, giving the cemetery a more streamlined appearance and removing much of the Victorian-era appeal applied to the grounds prior to 1900. The major alterations to the Soldiers' National Cemetery removed much of the dignity that William Saunders' original plan for the cemetery guaranteed thanks for the need to "ease maintenance in the cemetery" and make it fully accessible to visitors as well as meet the demands for new burials.¹² With the alterations also went the original name, changed to The Gettysburg National Cemetery.

As evidenced at Gettysburg, the demand for burial space there during the 1930's period was relatively light. Veterans, primarily from Adams and York Counties, were buried in the added section on the north side of the cemetery, just outside of the Maine and Michigan sections so as not to intrude in the Gettysburg battle-related burials. A survey of church and private cemeteries in the Adams-York County area showed a higher concentration of veterans buried at those sites due to ties to family members and church affiliation rather than the desire to be buried in the national cemetery. The advent of World War II would heavily tax not only Gettysburg's national cemetery, but the entire national cemetery system as well.

By 1943, over eight million Americans were in uniform with a sizeable percentage serving overseas. The problem of dealing with battlefield dead from foreign lands simply could not be tasked by the undermanned Memorial Branch office under the Office of the Quartermaster General, and staffed primarily by civilian employees. In August of that year, Colonel R. P. Harbold, the newly appointed chief of the Memorial Branch, submitted a draft "Policy 34" stipulating a preference of repatriation of American casualties to the United States for internment in national cemeteries. More importantly, Harbold's report recommended the establishment of the American Graves Registration Service, or AGRS, a reorganization of the Memorial Branch that administered the disposition of remains both in the United States and overseas, which he termed a "most essential step in preparing for the comprehensive plans for return of the dead."¹³

It was a vexing problem for the Quartermaster General since all previous foreign wars where Americans had served were concentrated in Europe, specific places in the Pacific including China and the Philippines, and, closer to home, Cuba. World War II posed a larger problem with American forces spread over the entire globe and by 1943 combat-related deaths and those from other causes began to mount in all theaters except Europe.

Colonel Harbold's proposal included the establishment of twelve major zone commands of the AGRS with sub-commands in each to administer identification of remains and burials in

temporary cemeteries. His proposal included a Port Office under the command of a major with a staff to accomplish the mission of shipping remains home. The organization of these commands was based on the American Graves Registration Service of the Quartermaster Corps during World War I, but necessarily expanded with additional military and civilian personnel to handle the demands in each zone around the world. Finally, Harbold sternly recommended that the office not establish any new national cemeteries until the war had ended and everything had returned to a “pre-war normality.”¹⁴

Any plan for extension of the national cemetery system in the United States had to wait until the final shot had been fired and this was more than agreeable to War Department officials as well as politicians. During his administration, President Roosevelt had vehemently rejected the establishment of a new national cemetery on the west coast prior to World War II since the need for additional burial space in existing national cemeteries was thought to be adequate. As the 1943 report pointed out, eight of the larger national cemeteries had enough acreage to accommodate 160,000 graves. Likewise, “approximately 85 percent of the repatriated remains of World War I were interred in family plots or privately operated cemeteries, leaving only 5,300 for interment in the national (cemetery) system, and since there was no reason to believe that this ratio would be radically altered after World War II, it followed that existing space in the system could easily accommodate its share of a death roll far exceeding that of the first world conflict.”¹⁵ Thus the national cemeteries then in existence were considered adequate enough to bear the sad remains of the nation’s war dead, but the proposed policy also revealed the difficult circumstances under which it was composed at the height of a world war. No one at that time envisioned the final toll that World War II inflicted on America. Coupled with a spike in demand for burial space in national cemeteries from family members of aging World War I veterans, the national cemetery system was going to be severely tested. Likewise, officials could not predict the post-war desire for families to have their deceased kin buried where their graves would be cared for in perpetuity.

Colonel Harbold’s “Policy 34” proposal was met by the Quartermaster General’s office with general disapproval, while other reviewers contested the recommendation for organizing the American Graves Registration Service as impractical to fulfill, primarily due to Army regulations and lack of organizational review to transfer military personnel to the various offices and hire additional civilian personnel. While the Quartermaster General’s office wrestled with Harbold’s proposal, Congress became concerned with the issue that fall and requested additional information and statistics from the War Department that would go into legislation to address the issue of repatriation as well as the need to expand the national cemetery system. Pressure from individuals as well as the American Legion pushed congressmen to act in consideration of those who had lost loved ones in the first two years of the war and more would surely follow.

Policy and manpower squabbles delayed any action for another six months until April 1944, when the persistent Colonel Harbold fired off a series of memorandums to the Quartermaster General outlining the inadequacies of his department and failure to ensure proper care of burial

records. Harbold also proposed several alternatives to Policy 34, which were eventually accepted in May and barely a month before D-Day, when additional offices under the Memorial Branch were approved, the most important being the Planning and Requirements Section and the Graves Registration Section, both of which eventually provided the administrative support for post-World War II repatriation of American dead. And, just as the War Department had done since the time of the War with Spain in 1898, relatives of deceased servicemen were insured of the option of having their loved ones placed in one of the permanent United States cemeteries in Europe or brought home for burial, “involving an ambitious cemetery construction project in the United States,” while new American cemeteries overseas would be the responsibility of the American Battle Monuments Commission.¹⁶

When the war finally ended in August 1945, the process of caring for American dead began in earnest. Administratively, the Memorial Branch of the Office of the Quartermaster General was reorganized again and with additional branches created, the responsibility of fulfilling the mission of final internment fell upon the Quartermaster General.¹⁷ What followed was an administrative squabble between the Army and United States Navy over who was responsible for the final disposition of each branch’s dead, the United States Marines falling under the department of the Navy. It would take almost a year with some intense pressure from Congress before the issues were resolved and the first letters to the next of kin were mailed.



In a field designated for burials by Graves Registration, an army chaplain performs religious services over the bodies of GI's killed in action in France, June 1944. (NARA)

The primary task was locating individual identified remains buried in countless temporary burial yards scattered throughout the European and Pacific Theaters. Fortunately, the U.S. Army’s system of battlefield recovery and identifying remains for burial in designated temporary graveyards had worked as planned, exceeding expectations in both theaters. An Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF) was created by the Graves Registration Unit assigned to every division in service, with careful measure taken to inventory the dead soldier’s belongings and if possible, positively identify the

remains through identification tags (“dog tags”), one of which would remain permanently with the body. Buried in mattress covers or blankets, each body was marked by a grave marker with the name and service number attached to the marker. As temporary cemeteries were cleared, remains were placed in coffins and classified as to shipment to the U.S. or to one of a number of new United States cemeteries established through the courtesy of host nations such as Italy, France and Belgium. Of the 280,000+ identified remains of American servicemen overseas, approximately 171,000 were returned to the United States for burial.¹⁸ Of this number, approximately 90% went to national cemeteries.



Flag draped coffins of American GI's killed in Europe are unloaded at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, October 1947, while Military Police stand guard. (Courtesy Life Magazine)

On October 26, 1947, the Army Transport Ship “*Joseph V. Connolly*” docked in New York Harbor, its hold filled with metal caskets containing the remains of 6,248 servicemen disinterred in Belgium and the first shipment of American dead back home to the United States. The majority were casualties of the famous “Battle of the Bulge” that raged in Belgium from December 1944 through January 1945. On the top deck was a special funeral bier bearing the lone casket of an unknown G.I., a victim of the battle in Europe and destined to be buried adjacent to the original Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery after a somber funeral procession through Manhattan. The remaining caskets- each draped with a United States flag- were unloaded at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and placed aboard a special “Mortuary Train” composed of Pullman Cars with the windows blacked out, and guarded by armed sentries twenty four hours a day until the train was ready to leave.¹⁹ The arrival and departure of the precious cargo went smoothly and was repeated countless times over the next five years as the individual caskets, each tagged with identification information and destination, made the final journey to hometown cemeteries and national cemeteries, including Gettysburg.

Like other national cemeteries in the nation, the Gettysburg National Cemetery was deeply affected by the repatriation of American dead after World War II. During this time, the National Park Service was responsible for thirteen national cemeteries located adjacent to battlefield parks and historic battle sites. Transferred to the NPS by an executive order in 1933, the majority had been established after the close of the Civil War as Union cemeteries and still retained much of their authentic design.²⁰ The need to find space for burials, most of whose families wished for their loved ones to be buried near their homes or, at the very least within their home state, necessarily began an alteration of the landscape and design of every cemetery though there were a number that simply could not accommodate the demand. Established in 1865, the Fredericksburg National Cemetery in Fredericksburg, Virginia, is situated on Marye’s Heights

overlooking the city and very limited to open space due to its original design and enclosure. Burials during World War II filled the few available sites and the cemetery closed to new burials in 1945. Similarly, the ten-acre Richmond National Cemetery (not a National Park Service administered cemetery) was closed to new burials and unable to accept more during the repatriation project. Thus, other cemeteries close by such as Arlington to the north and Poplar Grove near Petersburg handled the majority of family requests in Virginia and Maryland. In Pennsylvania, there were fewer options- it was either Gettysburg or Philadelphia.

The Philadelphia National Cemetery, established in 1862 to accommodate deceased soldiers from Civil War-era hospitals near the city, was one of the most active national cemeteries in the nation and expanded its acreage in 1885 to a full thirteen acres to reinter remains from smaller cemeteries throughout the region.²¹ Special sections of the cemetery were designated to receive the new burials that began in 1947 while at Gettysburg, the National Park Service planned accordingly to expand the burial areas in that national cemetery. Thoughtfully, park officials decided from the beginning that the original Civil War-era burial plots should not be compromised. There were approximately 34 post-World War I burials in the special plot outside of the Civil War burial plots, but the stipulation for grave sites overburdened that plot. There was a general opinion in the Quartermaster General's office that World War II-era burials should be separate from previous wars and following this guideline, the National Park Service work with Army officials to survey outlying portions of the cemetery for the new arrivals. The precedent for separate sections/cemeteries voiced by the Quartermaster General led to the establishment of new national cemeteries overseas while Gettysburg National Cemetery's plan was developed on a much smaller scale with three new plots designated outside of the avenue that circled through the cemetery. Into these went 850 burials, each marked by an inscribed marble grave stone issued by the Veterans' Administration.²² Significantly, the plots circling the outer boundaries of the original cemetery grounds added a new perspective to the cemetery but did not take away anything from the original design envisioned by William Saunders' plan produced in 1863.

In the middle of the repatriation program, President Harry Truman signed Public Law 526 on May 14, 1948. It specified once and for all who could be buried in national cemeteries. The four classifications were those who died while in service, inclusive of all branches and both male and female service personnel, honorably discharged veterans who died subsequent to service, American citizens who served during a war in the armed forces of another nation, and specific dependents of "first degree eligibles," a direct reference to a spouse and dependent child. The law was reaffirmed seven years later under President Dwight Eisenhower, confirming national cemeteries, including the historic cemeteries at Antietam, Stones River, Chattanooga and other Civil War battlefields that were still open for burials, as guaranteed burial sites for any American veteran, spouse, and dependent child. With that law guaranteeing a veteran's benefit of a gravesite at no cost to the family, national cemeteries transitioned from memorial grounds to efficient burial grounds, the final honorable resting place for a serviceman and direct kin.

It was during the Korean Conflict when the United States Army changed its policy regarding battlefield removal of American casualties. Unlike World War II where temporary cemeteries remained in allied control, the constant exchange of territory in Korea caused concern for the sanctity of temporary allied graveyards if they fell under communist control. In the winter of 1950, the policy of “concurrent return” was initiated, where mortuary services would identify and prepare for shipment any deceased American soldier, a system still used by the military today.²³ Throughout the wars in Korea and Vietnam, steel caskets arrived in the United States in a constant flow of military aircraft. From central bases, the caskets accompanied by an honor guard arrived at national cemeteries throughout the nation, including those cemeteries established in the Midwestern and western states after World War II. Several came to Gettysburg at the request of family members who lived within a fifty mile radius of this area.²⁴

Inquiries for burial space at Gettysburg slowed significantly during the 1950’s until 1963 when a sudden surge of requests flowed into park headquarters. Park officials suggested it may have been on account of the stoic burial of President John F. Kennedy at Arlington in November 1963, while others believed it to be a renewed interest by an aging population of World War I and II veterans who sought to secure their final resting place at an honored cemetery. In either case, “inquiries from living veterans (had) increased rapidly since that time” and fifty six burials took place at Gettysburg in 1964 with additional burials following within the first two months of 1965. Considering that average, park officials predicted sixty to one hundred burials would occur that year at which rate the cemetery would be at capacity within two to three years.²⁵ The Gettysburg National Cemetery had reached its capacity.

Fortunately for the park, a five acre plot on the north side of the cemetery was transferred to the park by Bethlehem Steel Company in 1960 though plans for its use were delayed by cost figures and indecision. During the latter case, National Park Service planners considered using the site for a new Mission 66 visitor center and contact station, but that was rightly changed to a location on the northern tip of Cemetery Ridge adjacent to the historic Ziegler’s Grove, a significant landmark of the Union battle line. Instead, the original intent of the donated land was approved and the first burial in the Gettysburg National Cemetery Annex, designed to hold 1,666 graves in a semi-circular design similar to the Civil War section of the original cemetery, took place in 1968.²⁶ A majority of the reserved sites in the annex were for World War II and Korean War-era veterans of all branches of service, the majority being Army and Air Force. Though we would initially believe that deaths from the Vietnam War during that time would be some of the first in the annex, those remains that came to Gettysburg were buried in a special section set on the west side of the cemetery and outside of the drive.

Ten years later, the annex was at capacity with burials and reservations for future interments. The Gettysburg National Cemetery and Annex was officially closed to new burials that same year.

The aging national cemeteries that date back to the end of the Civil War survive as memorial gardens, most enclosed by stone or brick walls, some with their Victorian-era cemetery superintendent's office building still standing near the main entrance gates. They are so different in the appearance and design from our more recent national cemeteries that sport a sleeker, manageable-friendly design unencumbered by above ground grave markers and only a few memorials; efficient burial grounds where the deceased are interred with full honors and within days the ground-level marker is set and grass cover restored as if the excavation for the grave occurred many years before. The need for the new national cemeteries was directly attributable to the nation's obligation to its veterans of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, military operations in the 1970's and '80's, the Gulf Wars, the War on Terror; the fulfillment of Federal law to honor those men and women who have served our country in a time of war as well as a time of peace. While so modern in landscape design, each reflects the original solemn intent of those first Civil War-era cemeteries with signs denoting "Silence and Respect" while on the grounds. Several even have markers bearing familiar phrases from Theodore O'Hara's "Bivouac of the Dead" and Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" though these play a minor role in the newer commemorative setting. Still, for the honored dead who rest in our national cemeteries, both here and abroad, the wars and conflicts in which they served may have been different, but the purpose of these places of honor remain the same- "A Sacred Trust."²⁷

Endnotes:

¹ Theodore O'Hara, "The Bivouac of the Dead", ca. 1850.

² "History and Development of the National Cemetery Administration", U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, DC, 2014.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Robert M. Poole, "How Arlington National Cemetery Came to Be", *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 2009.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.; Edward Steere, "Early Growth of the National Cemetery System", *Shrines of the Honored Dead, A Study of the National Cemetery System* (Department of the Army, Office of the Quartermaster General, Washington, DC, 1954; copy at Gettysburg NMP).

⁷ Edward Steere and Thayer M. Boardman, "Final Disposition of World War II Dead 1945-51", U.S. Army, Quartermaster Corps, QMC Historical Studies, Series II, No. 4, (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch Office of the Quartermaster General, 1957), pp. 25-26. (hereafter cited as "Steere".)

⁸ Hebel, Udo J., editor, *Transnational American Memories* (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Company, Berlin, German, 2009) p. 189.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 188-189; Edward Steere, "National Cemeteries and Memorials in Global Conflict", *Shrines of the Honored Dead, A Study of the National Cemetery System* (Department of the Army, Office of the Quartermaster General, Washington, DC., 1954; copy at Gettysburg NMP), pp. 24-25.

¹⁰ Inscription on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Arlington National Cemetery. The Tomb of the Unknowns has been continually guarded a special detail of selected soldiers since April 6, 1948.

¹¹ Edward Steere, "National Cemeteries & Memorials in Global Conflict", *Shrines of the Honored Dead, A Study of the National Cemetery System*, (Department of the Army, Office of the Quartermaster General, Washington, DC., 1954; copy at Gettysburg NMP), p. 27.

¹² Reed Engle, *Cultural Landscape Report- The Soldiers' National Cemetery*, (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, National Park Service-Gettysburg National Military Park, 1994.), pp. 120-125. Copy at Gettysburg NMP Library & Research Center; Kathleen Georg, *The Birth and Evolution of the National Cemetery System*, (Gettysburg National Military Park, no date, GNMP Library; hereafter cited as "Georg, Birth and Evolution")

¹³ Steere, p. 3.

¹⁴ Steere, p. 6.

¹⁵ Steere, p. 6.

¹⁶ Steere, p. 11.

¹⁷ Steere, p. 12.

¹⁸ Yochi J. Dreazen and Gary Fields, "How We Bury the War Dead", *The Wall Street Journal*, May 29, 2010.

¹⁹ "Sergeant Comes Home", *Life Magazine*, November 17, 1947. Unfortunately, the "Joseph V. Connolly" was returning to Europe in January 1948 with a shipment of caskets when an uncontrollable fire broke out in the engine room and the ship had to be abandoned in the mi-Atlantic, eventually sinking approximately 900 miles out from the coast.

²⁰ Georg, *Birth and Evolution*, pp.16-18

²¹ *The Philadelphia National Cemetery*, Department of Veterans Affairs at <http://www.va.gov>.

²² Statistical Records of the Gettysburg National Cemetery- Soldiers' National Cemetery, Gettysburg NMP Library & Archives (hereafter cited as "Statistical Record") ; "National Cemetery Overcrowded", *The Reading Eagle*, Reading, Pennsylvania, March 17, 1965.

²³ Yochi J. Dreazen and Gary Fields, "How We Bury the War Dead", *The Wall Street Journal*, May 29, 2010.

²⁴ Marcella Sherfy, "History of Gettysburg National Military Park and Cemetery", 1974; GNMP Library (hereafter cited as "Sherfy")

²⁵ "National Cemetery Overcrowded", *The Reading Eagle*, Reading, Pennsylvania, March 17, 1965.

²⁶ Sherfy; Statistical Record.

²⁷ Slogan of the National Cemetery Administration, United States Department of Veterans Affairs at <http://www.cem.va.gov>.