



## FY19 Fort Snelling Site Visit Report



**Date:** April 18, 2019

**Location:** Fort Snelling Nat'l Cemetery

**Dept. Rehab Committee Members:** Wilson Spence, Gary Munkholm, Bill Brockberg, Roy Bressler and Dan Tengwall. Dept. Service Officer, Jeremy Wolfsteller.

**RE:** The American Legion Dept. Rehabilitation Committee is tasked with staying engaged with agencies that aid Minnesota veterans. The committee does this by conducting System Worth Saving Site Visits throughout the year. These locations include Sioux Falls, Fargo, St. Cloud and Minneapolis VA Health Care Systems, St. Paul and Fargo Regional Offices, Minneapolis, Hastings, Luverne, Fergus Falls and Silver Bay Veterans Homes. Additional Site Visits are conducted at VA CBOC's, Vets Centers, and Minnesota nonprofits that serve veterans when the budget allows.

**Meeting Attendance:** Chairman Bill Brockberg, Roy Bressler, Wilson Spence, Gary Munkholm, Dan Tengwall and DSO Jeremy Wolfsteller. Bob Rosen and John Knapp

## **Fort Snelling Nat'l Cemetery Overview:**

Fort Snelling National Cemetery is located in Minneapolis, Minn. The original Fort Snelling was established in 1805 near the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. However, it was not until 1820 that a permanent post named Fort St. Anthony was constructed under the supervision of Col. Josiah Snelling. Gen. Winfield Scott was so impressed with the conditions at Fort St. Anthony during his first inspection in 1824 that he recommended the installation be renamed Fort Snelling.

Its original purpose was to keep peace on the western frontier, but in 1855 as the frontier moved further west, troops were withdrawn from Fort Snelling. With the outbreak of the Civil War, the fort was reopened and functioned as both an assembly ground and training camp for Minnesota volunteers. It remained open at the end of the Civil War and continued to be used as a training center. In 1947, the Fort Snelling Military Reservation was deactivated as a post, although it continues to function today as the headquarters for the 88th Army Reserve Command.

The Fort Snelling cemetery was established in 1870 to serve as a burial ground for the soldiers who died while stationed at the post. Following World War I, as new legislation expanded the eligibility requirements for burial in a national cemetery, the citizens of St. Paul organized a petition to designate a national cemetery in their area. In 1937, Congress responded with legislation that authorized a portion of land at Fort Snelling Military Reservation for this purpose. Fort Snelling National Cemetery was established in 1939 with the first burial on July 5, of Capt. George H. Mallon, whose acts of heroism at Meuse-Argonne in France were recognized with the Congressional Medal of Honor. Following the dedication of the new cemetery, arrangements were made for the exhumation of the remains of those buried at the older post cemetery and the reinternment of the 680 soldiers who served from 1820-1939 buried in Fort Snelling National Cemetery. The 1930s were also a major boom era for national cemetery growth. Fort Snelling National Cemetery is one of seven NCA properties developed during the period between World War I and World War II to serve large veteran populations in cities across the country.

In May 1960, Fort Snelling Air Force Station transferred 146 acres of land to the national cemetery. One more land transfer of 177 acres followed in 1961, bringing the cemetery to its present size. Because of the frigid winters, about 1,000 graves are dug each fall to be used for winter interments.

Fort Snelling National Cemetery was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2016.

### **Monuments and Memorials**

Fort Snelling contains a memorial pathway that is lined with a variety of veteran's memorials from various organizations. As of the end of 2015, there are 75 memorials at Fort Snelling National Cemetery — most commemorating soldiers of the 20th-century wars.

## **Fort Snelling National Cemetery Site Visit**

- Ft. Snelling has on average 50 employees and an estimated \$7 million-dollar budget annually.
- Ft. Snelling has 436 acres, 341 developed and 95 undeveloped 173,000 gravesites maintained.
- 6 committal shelters which offer memorial services rather than at the physical grave site to help preserve the site and for safety purposes.
- Ft. Snelling recently awarded a National shrine contract for keeping a high standard.
- Ft. Snelling will be operating and overseeing two new National cemeteries, Fargo, ND and Rhinelander, WI.
- 136 National Cemeteries within 5 Districts and Ft. Snelling is the 4<sup>th</sup> busiest cemetery nationally with Riverside, CA being the number 1 busiest interment sight totaling 8,450 per year.
- Ft. Snelling was recently certified by Minnesota Department of Health to provide education and training to funeral home directors earning them 2 continuing education units (CEU).
- Data provided from FY17 NCA had an estimated 133,000 interments (veterans or family members), 361,000 headstone/markers/medallions and 670,000 presidential memorial certificates.
- Ft. Snelling is rated in the top 5 internments sites averaging 5,000 per year. FY19 5,091 interments, 1,424 casketed, 2,839 in-ground cremated remains, 824 columbarium and 4 scatter cremains.
- Weekend burials pilot for 18 months – 6 cemeteries top 5 fort bliss. Currently stopped and being looked at for continuation. Was it bringing in more clients because burial offered on weekends? Was it averaging out the workload?

## Fort Snelling National Cemetery Site Visit

- Infrastructure Improvement Projects: FY19 1.3 million for Interment Maintenance Building, the memorial rifle squad ready room and armory received upgrade alarm system, video surveillance, and access card entrance keypads. Grounds Maintenance Building will see upgrades in electrical, mechanical, plumbing, heating, public restrooms, employee lunch room est.
- NCA is modernizing memorialization by implementing online memorialization platform. This allows family and friends to pay respects and share photos in an online memorial space. This became available May 1, 2019.
- NCA is now offering Presidential Memorial Certificates to families on the day of the internment at the five largest national cemeteries which includes Ft. Snelling.
- Ft. Snelling engaged in numerous outreach events, provided 7 bus tours for veterans and local schools, 12 UVLC meetings, JRAD, 4 VA Town Halls etc.
- DOD provides per-diem to VSO's like The American Legion to provide honor guard service.
- Ft. Snelling has the last active rifle squads. Organized in 1979 by all volunteers
- NCA Pre-need applications are only for those veterans that are unsure that they qualify for burial in a national cemetery.

### **Meeting Minutes:**

**Chairman:** *Bill Brockberg*

**Secretary:** *Jeremy Wolfsteller*