



System Worth Saving Site Visit Report

- **Date:** April 28, 2021
- **Location:** Virtual Meeting
- **Attendees:**
 - Rehab Committee Members*- Chairman Wilson Spence, Gary Munkholm, Daniel Tengwall, Carol Gilbertson and Jim Finley
 - *Department Service Officer*- Jeremy Wolfsteller
 - *Fort Snelling National Cemetery Administrative Officer*- Bob Rosen
- **Purpose**

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 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.

Fort Snelling National Cemetery Overview:

Fort Snelling National Cemetery is located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. 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original purpose was to keep peace on the western frontier, but in 1855 as the frontier moved further west, troops were withdrawn from Fort Snelling.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.





Fort Snelling Overview Continued:

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 reinterment 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

General Updates:

- o 136 National Cemeteries within 5 Districts and Fort Snelling is the 4th busiest cemetery nationally with Riverside, CA being the number 1 busiest interment sight totaling 8,450 per year.
- o Fort Snelling National Cemetery is considered an “open” cemetery providing a full array of burial options.
- o Fort 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).
- o National Cemetery Administration 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.
- o National Cemetery Administration is now offering Presidential Memorial Certificates to families on the day of the internment at the five largest national cemeteries which includes Fort Snelling.
- o Department of Defense provides per-diem to VSO's such as, The American Legion to provide honor guard service.
- o Fort Snelling has the last active rifle squad. Organized in 1979 by all volunteers.

Two New Rural Initiative Cemeteries (*Fargo and Northwoods National Cemeteries*)

- o Fort Snelling is now operating and overseeing two new National cemeteries, Fargo, ND and Rhinelander, WI.
- o These rural initiative cemeteries serve 25,000 veterans, spouses and eligible family members located within 75-mile radius of each site.
- o Fargo was dedicated September 7, 2019. First internment was October 15, 2019.
- o Northwoods was dedicated on August 14, 2020. The first internment took place October 26, 2020.





Facility Demographics:

- Fort Snelling's footprint consists of 436 acres, 341 acres are developed, 95 acres are undeveloped with approximately 173,000 gravesites maintained.
- Administering an average of 5,000 interments per year.
- Operating Budget Plan estimated to be around \$7M annually.
- 6 committal shelters which offer memorial services rather than at the physical grave site to help preserve the site and for safety purposes.
- Internments include, casketed, in-ground cremations, columbarium's, and scatter cremains.
- FY20 there were 29% casket internments and 71% cremains. Total 4,375
- FY20 Interments: WW2/479/20.66%, Korea/618/26.66%, Vietnam/875/37.75%, Active Duty/9/0.39%, non-Vets/2,057/47.02, Vets/2,318/52.98%.

Staffing:

- Robert Roeser has been the Cemeteries Administrative Officer for 7 years. Some of his responsibilities include overseeing the cemeteries scheduling, determining eligibility, ordering grave markers, and sending out correspondence.
- Fort Snelling has on average 50 employees to manage the National Shrine.
- Fort Snelling partners with Hastings State Veterans Home employing residents on the work therapy program. The workers primarily work on the grounds crew keeping the perpetual care a National Shrine requires. Ft. Snelling was recently awarded a National Shrine contract for keeping a high standard.





Contracted Services & Estimated Annual Costs:

- Mowing/trimming/edging/sod/herbicide/fertilization (\$887K)
- Grave liner & installation (\$345K material/\$455K labor)
- Onsite Headstone/Marker Inscription (National MPS Contract)
- USDA Wildlife Contract (\$20K)
- Trash & Garbage (\$42K)
- Janitorial (\$70K)
- Copy & Print Services (\$12K)
- Irrigation system/maintenance (\$74K)
- Uniform Services (\$31K)
- Salt/sand (\$12K)
- Black dirt (\$16K)

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 lunchroom est.

- FY19 Wayfinding Improvement Project was awarded to Fort Snelling National Cemetery indefinitely. Fort Snelling National Cemetery has 411 various types of signs and section markers which need updating, replacing, and improving. This project was active for Summer of FY21.

- FY21 roads were repaired and resurfaced.

Department Rehabilitation Chairman: Wilson Spence III

Department Service Officer & Committee Secretary: Jeremy Wolfsteller

