



Fort Snelling National Cemetery Site Visit Report FY 2022



Date: October 18, 2021

Location: St. Cloud VA Health Care System (SCVAHCS) (Virtual Meeting)

Dept. of MN VA and Rehabilitation Committee Members: Chairman Wilson Spence, Jeremy Wolfsteller, Gary Munkholm, Dan Tengwall, Mike Rosecrans, and Jim Finley.

The American Legion Dept. of MN VA and 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 CBOCs, Vet Centers, and Minnesota nonprofits that serve veterans when the budget allows.

Meeting Attendance

Chairman Wilson Spence, Dan Tengwall, Jim Finley, Mike Rosecrans, DSO Jeremy Wolfsteller, VA&R Benefits Coordinator Sarah Sturner, and Bob Rosen, Administrative Officer.

Fort Snelling National Cemetery Overview

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purpose was to keep peace on the western frontier, but in 1855 as the frontier moved further west, troops were withdrawn from Fort Snelling.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

Meeting Minutes

- **General Updates:**

- FSNCC contains areas that are lined with a variety of veterans' memorials and monuments from various organizations. Additionally, there are memorial circles for other specific memorials, such as "Airborne Circle" (30 monuments), Medal of Honor, World War I, Chaplains, and the Memorial Rifle Squad. As of March 2021, there are 77 monuments at the cemetery, most commemorating soldiers or the contributions of various units or branches of service of 20th-century wars.
- The cemetery was declared a National Historic Place in 2016 by the Department of Interior.
- 136 National Cemeteries within 5 Districts and Ft. Snelling is the 4th busiest cemetery nationally with Riverside, CA being the number 1 busiest interment sight totaling 8,450 per year.
- FSNC is considered an "open" cemetery providing a full array of burial options.
- Ft. Snelling was recently certified by the Minnesota Department of Health to provide education and training to funeral home directors earning them 2 continuing education units (CEU).
- NCA is modernizing memorialization by implementing an 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.
- DOD provides per-diem to VSOs like The American Legion to provide honor guard service.
- Ft. Snelling has the last active rifle squad. Organized in 1979 by all volunteers

- **Budget for last two fiscal years**

- FY2021: Authorized Allocations

- (50) Full-time Permanent
 - (2) Over-Ceiling
 - (5) NTE 13-month Term
 - FY2021 FUNDING ALLOCATION:
 - 11/12/13 Salary \$4,606,192
 - 21 GSA Vehicles \$19,000
 - 22 Transportation \$53,000
 - 23 Rent, Communications, & Utilities \$100,000
 - 25 Other Contractual Services *includes CWT \$1,725,000
 - 26 Supplies \$268,000
 - TOTAL FY2021 ALLOCATION \$6,771,192

- FY2020: Authorized Allocations

- 50 FTE Permanent (894)
 - 1 FTE Permanent (939)
 - 1 FTE Permanent (940)
 - 3 Over Ceiling (894)
 - 3 NTE 13 Month Term (894)
 - 2 NTE 6 Month Temp (3rd Qtr) (894)
 - FY2020 FUNDING ALLOCATION:
 - 001 PAYROLL \$4,166.083
 - 21xx GSA Vehicles \$18,983
 - 22xx Transportation \$52,000
 - 23xx Rent, Communications, Utilities \$115,000
 - 25xx Other Contractual Services *
 - (amount includes CWT) \$1,620,000
 - 26xx Supplies \$328.954
 - 31xx Equipment \$0
 - 32xx NRM \$205,725
 - TOTAL FY20 ALLOCATION \$6,506,745

- **Contracted Services & Est. Annual Costs:**

- FSNCC is considered an "open" cemetery providing a full array of burial options. However, the following cemetery operations are contracted (approximate annual costing noted):
 - Mowing/trimming/edging/sod/herbicide/fertilization (\$894K)
 - Grave liner & Installation (\$900K)

- Onsite Headstone/Marker Inscription (National MPS Contract)
- USDA Wildlife Management (\$20K)
- Trash and Garbage (\$55K)
- Janitorial (\$50K)
- Copy and print services (\$16.8)
- Irrigation system/maintenance (\$75K)
- Uniform services (\$23.4K)
- Salt/sand (\$8K)
- Black Dirt (\$12K)
- Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) with Hasting VA Home (\$26K)

- **Two New Rural Initiative Cemeteries**

- FSNCC is also responsible for two NCA rural initiative cemeteries. Fargo National Cemetery in Harwood, North Dakota, and Northwoods National Cemetery, Harshaw, Wisconsin.
- These rural initiative cemeteries serve an estimated 25,000 veterans, spouses, and eligible family members located within a 75-mile radius of each site.
- Fargo was dedicated on September 7, 2019. The first interment was on October 15, 2019.
 - This cemetery serves 24,388 Veterans, spouses, and other eligible family members located within a 75-mile radius of Fargo.
 - Fargo National Cemetery was dedicated on September 7, 2019.
 - The first interment took place on October 15, 2019.
 - Major services are contracted at this cemetery for Grounds and Maintenance and Interments (\$120K)
- Northwoods was dedicated on August 14, 2020. The first interment took place on October 26, 2020.
 - This cemetery will serve 24,286 Veterans, spouses, and other eligible family members located within a 75-mile radius of Rhinelander, Wisconsin.
 - The cemetery was dedicated on Friday, August 14, 2020.
 - The cemetery was open for interments on October 26, 2020

- The first interment took place on October 26, 2020
 - Major services are contracted at this cemetery for Grounds and Maintenance and Interments (\$90K)
- **Staffing:**
 - Robert Roeser has been the cemetery's Administrative Officer for 8 years. Some of his responsibilities include overseeing scheduling, determining eligibility, ordering grave markers, and sending out correspondence.
 - Ft. Snelling has on average 50 employees to manage the National Shrine.
 - Ft. Snelling partners with Hastings State Veterans Home employing residents in 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.
- **Facility Demographics:**
 - Ft. Snelling's footprint consists of 436 acres, 341 acres are developed, and 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, columbariums, and scatter cremains.
 - FY20 there were 29% casket internments and 71% remains. 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%.
- **Infrastructure Improvement Projects:**
 - Signage project to be completed this year, this project was started in FY20 and will finally be completed and installed early this summer.
 - Developing a new Public Information Center and Administrative building scheduled for FY25
 - Public Information building remodel new purpose

- Shelter staining
- Fire Hydrant Repair
- Pond Aeration
- Irrigation for the entire cemetery
- 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, etc.
- FY19 Wayfinding Improvement Project was awarded to FSNC indefinitely. FSNC has 411 various types of signs and section markers that need updating, replacing, and improving. This project was active for the Summer of FY21.
- FY21 roads were repaired and resurfaced.

Comments:

Fort Snelling National Cemetery Complex has incorporated a vision and mission statement.

Our Vision statement is that our pride is only surpassed by our excellence.

Our Mission statement is, to ensure every patron who enters our haven is afforded a place of beauty and solemnness so they may honor their deceased loved ones according to their fashions and beliefs.

Committee Chairman: *Wilson Spence*

Committee Secretary and MN DSO: *Jeremy Wolfsteller*