

VA Secretary Announces Opening Alabama National Cemetery

WASHINGTON (July 6, 2009) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) officially opened its 129th national cemetery June 25 with the first burials at Alabama National Cemetery in Montevallo.

"With the opening of this new national shrine, many thousands of Alabama Veterans and their families will have a no-cost burial option nearby, in a setting that is worthy of their service," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "Providing lasting tributes to their sacrifice is one of VA's most honorable missions, one we are proud to fulfill."

The new 479-acre national cemetery in the Birmingham area will serve Veterans' needs for at least the next 50 years. The cemetery is located on State Highway 119, 15 miles south of Birmingham, just north of the town of Montevallo and west of Interstate Highway 65.

In October 2008, VA awarded a construction contract for \$3.7 million to BSI Contracting Inc., a service-disabled, Veteran-owned small business in Birmingham, to develop a small burial area. That 12.7-acre section, with

1,095 casket gravesites and nearly 1,000 in-ground cremation sites, will provide approximately two years of burials, enabling VA to begin providing services while the remainder of the cemetery's larger first phase of development is completed.

When complete, the first phase will consist of approximately 45 developed acres with more than 6,000 additional gravesites and 2,700 columbarium niches, as well as facilities needed to operate and to provide burials for approximately 10 years. The new cemetery will include an administration and public information center complex, including an electronic gravesite locator and public restrooms, a maintenance building, an entrance area, a flag assembly area, a memorial walkway and two committal shelters for funeral services. Other infrastructure elements include roadways, landscaping, utilities and irrigation.

The new cemetery serves approximately 200,000 veterans in the region and will be the third national cemetery in Alabama. The state's other national cemeteries are in Seale and Mobile.

Veterans with a discharge issued under conditions other than dishonorable, their spouses and eligible dependent children can be buried in a VA national cemetery. Other burial benefits available for all eligible veterans, regardless whether they are buried in a national cemetery or a private cemetery, include a burial flag, a Presidential Memorial Certificate and a government headstone or marker. Families of eligible decedents may also order a memorial headstone or marker when remains are not available for interment.

In the midst of the largest expansion since the Civil War, VA operates 130 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. More than three million Americans, including veterans of every war and conflict, are buried in VA's national cemeteries on nearly 18,000 acres of land.

Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the Internet at

<http://www.cem.va.gov> or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at (800) 827-1000.

For information on the Alabama National Cemetery, call the cemetery office at (205) 665-9039. To make burial arrangements at the time of need, call the national cemetery scheduling office at (800) 535-1117.