



Mountain Home National Cemetery



A CENTURY OF SERVING...

A LIFETIME OF CARING

1903 - 2003

James H. Quillen VA Medical Center
Department of Veterans Affairs
Mountain Home
(Johnson City), Tennessee
2003

National Cemetery Administration – General History



In the summer of 1862 thousands had already died in a terrible war that few believed would last more than several months. On July 17 Congress enacted legislation authorizing the President to purchase "cemetery grounds" to be used as national cemeteries "for soldiers who shall have died in the service of the country."

Fourteen cemeteries were established that year, including one in the sleepy Maryland town of Sharpsburg where 4,476 Union soldiers were laid to rest after a day of slaughter known as the Battle of Antietam.

By 1870 the remains of nearly 300,000 Union dead had been buried in 73 national cemeteries. Most were located in the Southeast, near the battlefields and campgrounds of the Civil War.

It was in 1873 that all honorably discharged veterans became eligible for burial in national cemeteries.

In 1973 Congress transferred 82 national cemeteries from the Department of the Army to the Veterans Administration, now the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Joining with 21 VA veterans cemeteries located at hospitals and nursing homes, the National Cemetery System, now the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), comprised 103 cemeteries after the transfer.

Today more than 130 years after the first national cemeteries were established, the National Cemetery Administration is responsible for 120 national cemeteries in 39 states (and Puerto Rico) as well as 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. More than two million Americans, including veterans of every war and conflict - from the Revolutionary War to the Gulf War - are honored by burial in VA's national cemeteries.

(Condensed from the VA National Cemetery Administration website
<http://www.cem.va.gov/history.htm>)

Mountain Home Cemetery – General History

Mountain Home Cemetery was established in **1903**. Although not all buildings of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS) – Mountain Branch were completed at the time, interments began. The earliest interments of veteran residents of the Home were Francis Conaty, on Sept 18, 1903, (Section B Row 1 Grave 1) and William H. Garland on Dec 11, 1903, (Section A Row 1 Grave 1). The oldest sections of the cemetery (Sections A through H) surround Monument Circle and were referred to as "The Silent Circle" in a local newspaper article from 1915.

Mountain Home Cemetery did not become part of the VA National Cemetery System until 1973. Until that time hospital patients and residents of the domiciliary were the primary persons interred. In addition there were some individuals who were not volunteer soldiers who were interred also.



Congressman Walter P. Brownlow and his wife, Clayetta are interred in **Monument Circle**, on which an obelisk monument (like the Washington Monument in our nation's Capitol) was erected.



Congressman Brownlow was Representative of the First District of Tennessee and responsible for seeking funding for the NHDVS – Mountain Branch. In 1900 he made a request of the Board of Governors of the NHDVS to locate the ninth branch in his district. The Board had established a policy of no new branches, instead encouraging individual states to fund such endeavors. Mr. Brownlow requested five minutes to present his argument to the Board, actually using only three to make his case. He pointed out to the Board that (1) A Branch was established in Virginia, a state that had not one volunteer Union soldier of record. (2) Eastern Tennessee had furnished 30,000 volunteer soldiers to the Union and there were 18,000 Union pensioners living in the First District at the time of this request. (3) Congress had just authorized \$1,000,000 for construction of a federal prison in Atlanta. “Didn’t volunteer soldiers deserve at least as much as convicts?” argued Brownlow. The Board voted unanimously to approve the construction of the Mountain Branch in the First District.

In addition to the marker for Congressman Brownlow, there are additional memorial grave markers in the section referred to as Monument Circle. These markers are from the time period 1942 to 2002. They are in memory of veterans for whom no remains exist. These individuals are missing in action, declared dead, buried at sea, or donated their bodies to science. Future plans are to relocate this memorial section.



“**Special Section**” (located between sections E and I) contains individuals who were connected in some manner with Mountain Home, but were not always veterans. The area is readily identifiable by ornate markers that are not the standard tombstone shaped markers used for the veterans.

The resting place of **John Powell Smith** and his wife Florence Alexander Smith may be easily located. They have the distinction of being buried in the only gravesite marked with a double marker. Mr. Smith was the first “Governor” (manager) of NHDVS - Mountain Branch. He served as Governor from 1903 to 1917 and died in 1918.

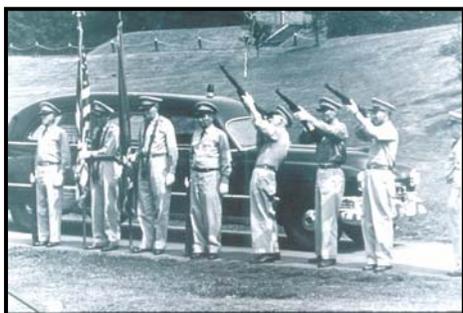
Carl Anderson has one of the least ornate markers in this section. The rough-hewn block of granite is polished on the side bearing his name, and dates of birth and death (b. 6/29/1887, d. 6/12/1908). He was the landscape architect responsible for the original landscape design for Mountain Home’s grounds. He and his family lived on the grounds.

The marker for the **Rev. John K. Larkin** (d. 7/13/1910) is readily identifiable by a large ornate cross on top of a marker. He served as chaplain from 1907 to 1910. His importance to Mountain Home and the local community was evident by the appearance of his death notice and funeral



arrangements on the front page of the Johnson City Comet July 14 and 15, 1910. The notice in the July 14 article stated that the Reverend Father John K. Larkin was “the big brained, big hearted, brilliant Catholic Chaplain at the Soldiers’ Home.” In the July 15 article it was stated that “the remains of the distinguished priest, robed in his mass vestments and holding the chalice in his hands, will lie in state...” in the chapel.

Some children of staff are buried in the special section, including Clover Wadsworth (d. 1/1/1908), young daughter of C.W. Wadsworth, who had been adjutant on the staff at Mountain Home. Her simple square marker has a clover on its top, as well as birthplace and place of death on one of its faces (Cumberland Gap, TN; Brooklyn, NY). (In 1931 Col. Wadsworth served as Director over the National Homes Service of the Veterans Administration). Two other children of employees, infant son Parish (d. 2/2/1926), and infant son Mackey (d. 3/17/1927), are buried in this section of the cemetery. On infant Mackey’s marker is the inscription “Budded on earth to bloom in heaven.”



As you drive through the cemetery you will notice that the faces of some of the veteran’s gravestones are different. There were specified styles of markers during different periods of time. (These styles will be explained more fully in the section titled “Cemetery markers.”) You may also notice that grave markers for the same period appear to be different. In National Cemeteries all gravesites are marked permanently. In the event those markers aged poorly or were badly damaged in some manner they are replaced. It is not possible to recreate the original style used for the oldest markers, but as close an approximation of the style possible is used. The oldest markers

in the cemetery are for veterans of the period of the Civil War.

Following incorporation of the Mountain Home Cemetery into the National Cemetery System in 1973, **spouses of veterans** were permitted to be interred in the same gravesite as their veteran spouse. Graves in sections having upright markers containing veteran and eligible dependent are marked with the veteran’s information on the front side and the dependent’s on the reverse; in flat marker sections the veteran’s information is on the first 3 lines and the dependent’s on the next 3 lines. In either case, the dependent’s name and information is not added until time of demise. The cemetery underwent an expansion project in 2003. Over 4,000 additional gravesites were added which will permit use of the cemetery until 2025.

Persons Interred

There are currently over 10,000 gravesites in Mountain Home Cemetery. All of the persons interred are “notable” with special stories to tell. As with most military cemeteries only certain information is retained in cemetery office records. Older markers include name, branch of military service, as well as the “company” and state regiment in which the veteran served. Newer markers contain names, branch of military service, as well as date of birth and death. As record keeping became more detailed the cemetery began to maintain records specifying inclusive dates of military service, as well as the place of death. The NCA maintains a computerized system that cemetery personnel may use to locate any individual buried in a Department of Veterans Affairs cemetery. As of the writing of this brochure in 2003 there is also a website that the general public may use to identify interees in our cemetery. The listing is complete through 2000. The Internet address is:

<http://www.interment.net/data/us/tn/washington/mountnat/>.

Following are just a few of the stories we have been able to reconstruct from the brief information maintained in Mountain Home National Cemetery's office:

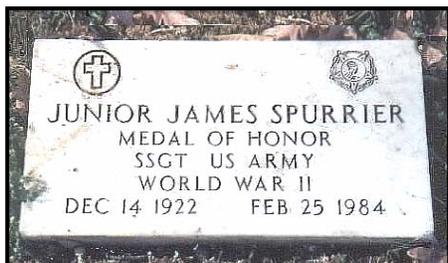
Medal of Honor recipients



1. **Buhrman, Henry G.** b. Cincinnati, Ohio. d. 06/01/1906 **Civil War**. Sgt (Private?) U.S. Army Co H 54th Ohio Infantry Medal issued July 12, 1894. Citation: "for gallantry in the charge of the volunteer storming party" at Vicksburg, MS, May 11, 1863.
Section C Row 2 Grave 12

2. **Buck, Frederick C.** b: Hartford, Conn. d. 07/15/1905 **Civil War** Lt (Corporal?) U.S. Army Co A 21st Connecticut Infantry. Medal issued April 6, 1865. Citation: "Although wounded, refused to leave the field until the fight closed" at Chapin's Farm, VA on September 29, 1864.
Section F Row 1 Grave 9

3. **Spurrier, Junior James.** b. Russell County, Ky d. 02/25/1984 **World War II**. Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company G, 134th Infantry, 35th Infantry Division. Issued March 15, 1945. Citation: "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty in action against the enemy at Achen, France, on 13 November 1944.



At 2 p.m., Company G attacked the village of Achen from the east. S/Sgt. Spurrier armed with a BAR passed around the village and advanced alone. Attacking from the west, he immediately killed 3 Germans. From this time until dark, S/Sgt. Spurrier, using at different times his BAR and M1 rifle, American and German rocket launchers, a German automatic pistol, and hand grenades, continued his solitary attack against the enemy regardless of all types of small-arms and automatic-weapons fire.

As a result of his heroic actions he killed an officer and 24 enlisted men and captured 2 officers and 2 enlisted men. His valor has shed fresh honor on the U.S. Armed Forces" at Achen France Nov 13, 1944.

Section HH Row 15 Grave 8

Other Notables

The first female veteran interred at Mountain Home was **Florence Hampton**, Sgt. U.S. Army (b. 10/19/1911 - d. 8/17/1965). Ms Hampton died in Asheville (Oteen), N.C.

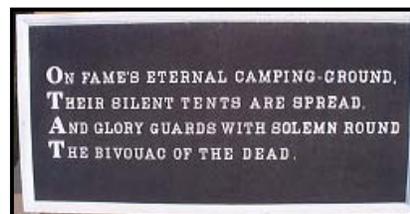
Section CC Row 4 Grave 14

George Maledon (d. 05/06/1911) was nicknamed the "Prince of Hangmen." He earned this title while serving as executioner for the Federal Court for the Western District of Arkansas during Judge Isaac Charles Parker's time. (Judge Parker was known as "The Hanging Judge.") He was an ex-Union soldier who delivered assembly line frontier justice. It is said that he had Kentucky hemp shipped all the way to Fort Smith and oiled it and stretched it with sandbags to thin it down to a single sturdy inch. That way it made a nice knot. During his time as hangman he hanged 60 men, sometimes in multiple hangings.

Section E Row 5 Grave 1

"Bivouac of the Dead"

Stanzas from Theodore O'Hara's elegiac poem, "Bivouac of the Dead," are inscribed on iron tablets found throughout some of the oldest units of this country's national cemeteries, including Mountain Home Cemetery.



O'Hara served in the Confederate Army as a Colonel in command of the 12th Alabama regiment, and subsequently saw action at Shiloh and Stones River in Tennessee.

The iron plaques provided to the national cemeteries do not credit any author for "Bivouac." The most logical explanation is that since O'Hara fought on the Confederate side, it would be unseemly to record his name in the cemeteries occupied by Union dead.

During the renovation of our cemetery our iron plaques were removed to protect them. As of the writing of this pamphlet (2003) our cemetery staff is awaiting direction from VA Central Office concerning placement of the plaques that are in storage.

(Condensed from the VA National Cemetery Administration website)

Cemetery Markers

The original standard grave marker antedates the establishment of the National Cemetery Administration in 1862 and actually has its origin in the frontier days of this country prior to the Civil War. A wooden board with a rounded top, and bearing a registration number or inscription, became the standard. No centralized system for recording burials existed at that time.

Two months after the first battle of Manassas the War Department issued General Orders #75, September 11, 1861, which made commanders of national forces responsible for burials and marking graves. In the same General Orders, the Quartermaster General of the Army was directed to provide headboards as well as blank books and forms for the preservation of burial records. War Department General Orders #75 created the first organized system of marking graves.

In 1873 Secretary of War **William W. Belknap** adopted the first design for stones to be erected in national cemeteries. For the known dead, the Department adopted a slab design, which was polished and slightly curved at the top. The number of the grave, rank, name of the soldier and the name of the state were cut on the front face. This original design for the permanent headstone was referred to as the "Civil War" type, and was furnished for members of the Union Army only. The stone featured a sunken shield in which the inscription appeared in bas-relief.



The question of permanently marking graves of Confederate deceased in national cemeteries and Confederate burial plots resulted in the Act of March 9, 1906 (P.L. 38, 59th Congress, Chap. 631-34 Stat. 56). This Act authorized the furnishing of headstones for the graves of Confederates who died, primarily in Union prison camps, and were buried in federal cemeteries. The design varied in that the top was pointed instead of rounded and the shield was omitted. On May 26, 1930 the War Department implemented regulations for Confederate headstones that also authorized the inscription of the Confederate Cross of Honor in a small circle on the front face of the stone above the standard inscription of the soldier's name, rank, company, and regiment.

Following World War I, a board of officers composed of Assistant Secretary of War J.M. Wainwright, Army Chief of Staff General John J. Pershing, and Quartermaster General Harry L. Rogers adopted a new design to be used for all graves except those of veterans of the Civil and Spanish-American Wars. This stone was of the slab design referred to as "General" type, slightly rounded at the top, of American white marble. The inscription on the front face would include the name of the soldier, his rank, regiment, division, date of death and state from which he came.



Christian
Cross



Star of
David



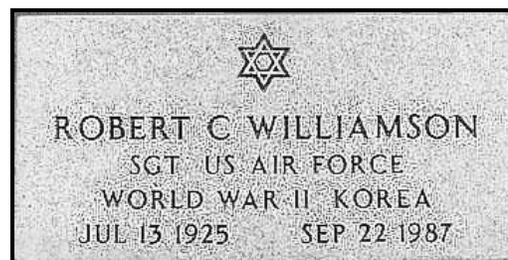
Russian
Orthodox
Cross



United
Moravian
Church

For the first time a religious emblem was adopted for use on the "general" type stone. The choice of emblem was limited to the Latin Cross for the Christian faith and the Star of David for the Jewish faith. Since that time 33 additional emblems have been approved for use on grave markers. Current "Emblems of Belief" may be found at the following VA website <http://www.cem.va.gov/hmemb.htm>.

Use of the flat granite marker in National Cemeteries was not adopted until September 13, 1939. Shortly thereafter an act of April 18, 1940, authorized the use of other materials, and the standard flat bronze marker was adopted July 12, 1940.



In 1944 the Secretary of War authorized an inscription on the grave marker that indicated in which war the veteran served. Since 1973, when Congress transferred 82 national cemeteries from the Department of the Army to the Veterans Administration, the decision concerning which conflicts (Korea, Panama, Granada, etc.) may be listed on markers has been at the discretion of the VA.

On January 19, 1994 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs authorized the reintroduction of upright headstones specifying that they should be used in newly opened sections of cemetery. Upright headstones made of marble are visible in the most recently opened section of Mountain Home National Cemetery, Section RR.

(Condensed from the VA National Cemetery Administration web site
<http://www.cem.va.gov/hmhist.htm>)

Created and Compiled by Nancy Dougherty and Carolyn Whaley, James. H. Quillen VAMC