



**Department of
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News Release

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Miramamar National Cemetery Begins Burials *New Facility to Serve San Diego Area Veterans*

WASHINGTON – Miramar National Cemetery in San Diego officially opened today by providing its first burials of Veterans and family members at the new facility.

“This is a special day for California’s Veterans,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “By building a national shrine in San Diego, we will provide a final resting place and lasting tribute to the men and women who have faithfully served our Nation.”

Military honors at the opening ceremony included a rifle salute and the playing of “Taps.” Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Steve Muro gave remarks and was joined by VA and local officials in the interment of cremated remains. Casket burial options will be available in early 2011.

The 313-acre Miramar National Cemetery will offer in-ground gravesites for caskets and cremated remains as well as a columbarium, providing a full range of burial alternatives to approximately 235,000 Veterans in the San Diego County area. Nearby Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery closed to casket burials in 1966, although it stays active with casketed interments of family members of those currently interred and inurnments of cremated remains. Riverside National Cemetery, located approximately 90 miles from San Diego, was until now the nearest national cemetery offering full burial options.

When completed, the first phase of construction will include approximately 11,500 casket gravesites; 4,900 in-ground cremation sites; 10,000 columbarium niches; an administration building and maintenance complex; two committal service shelters; and a public assembly area. The project will also incorporate systems for water distribution, roads, utilities, signs and landscaping.

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Kirk Leopard, the director of the new cemetery, will remain the director of Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery, a position he has held since 2007. Prior to this appointment, he was the director of Baltimore National Cemetery in Maryland and assistant to the director at Fort Mitchell National Cemetery in Alabama. In June 2006, he completed 12 months of training as a cemetery director intern at the NCA National Training Center in St Louis, Mo. Leopard is a 21-year Veteran of the U.S. Navy, serving as a hospital corpsman, medical laboratory technician and medical research technician during his military career.

Veterans with a discharge issued under conditions other than dishonorable, their spouses and eligible dependent children can be buried in a VA national cemetery. Also eligible are military personnel who die on active duty, their spouses and eligible dependents. Other burial benefits available for all eligible Veterans, regardless of 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 131 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. More than 3.5 million Americans, including Veterans of every war and conflict, are buried in VA's national cemeteries on more than 19,000 acres of land.

Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the Internet at www.cem.va.gov or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 800-827-1000. To make burial arrangements at the time of need at any VA national cemetery, call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117. Additional information about the Miramar National Cemetery is available by calling the Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery office at 619-553-2084.

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