



**Department of
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News Release

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VA Reburies “Buffalo Soldiers” in Santa Fe National Cemetery

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A ceremony memorializing 64 soldiers and their family members who protected southwestern New Mexico from Apache attacks in the mid-1800s was held July 28 by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Interior. The remains of the Fort Craig residents originally buried at the fort’s cemetery and disinterred by the Interior Department in 2007 were recently reburied with full military honors at VA’s Santa Fe National Cemetery.

“This ceremony marks a fitting final resting place for these courageous people,” Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said. “After more than 100 years, they are finally recognized with the honors earned for their honorable service to their country.”

The ceremony included a color guard, playing of Taps and a 21-gun salute by the New Mexico National Guard. Officials of VA and Interior were principal speakers.

Fort Craig, built in 1854, played a major role in the Civil War and Indian Wars. Located on the west side of the Rio Grande River, approximately 40 miles south of Socorro, N.M., it was permanently abandoned in 1885.

After an investigation by Interior’s Bureau of Reclamation revealed looting of the unmarked graves at Fort Craig’s cemetery, the Bureau worked with VA’s National Cemetery Administration to move them to Santa Fe National Cemetery.

Through analysis and military records, archaeologists identified three of the soldiers as Private David Ford, Private Levi Morris and Private Thomas Smith. These men were "Buffalo Soldiers," members of units established by Congress as the first peacetime all-black regiments in the regular U.S. Army. They were buried in separate graves marked with individual headstones.

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Fort Craig Repatriation Ceremony 2/2/2

The remains of the 61 unidentifiable people were buried as a group in Santa Fe National Cemetery in June, and the site was marked with a historical monument.

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 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 130 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. More than 3 million Americans, including Veterans of every war and conflict, are buried in VA's national cemeteries on nearly 18,000 acres of land.

For information on the Santa Fe National Cemetery, call the cemetery office at (505) 988-6400.

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.

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