



**California Central Coast Veterans Cemetery
Opening Ceremony Remarks**

CalVet Secretary Vito Imbasciani MD
Seaside, California
October 11, 2016

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. and the California Department of Veterans Affairs, I welcome you to the grand opening of our new California Central Coast Veterans Cemetery.

This is California's third State-run veterans cemetery. Our oldest is adjacent to our Yountville Veterans Home in Napa County, and dates from the 1890s. We also have our Northern California Veterans Cemetery in Igo, up north in Shasta County, which opened in 2005.

The seeds of the California Central Coast Veterans Cemetery were planted in 1992, when it became clear that the Fort Ord Army Post was destined for closure. The Retired Officers Association in Monterey proposed the idea of a cemetery on these grounds to the United Veterans Council, or UVC, which charged five local veterans with the mighty task of making this Veterans Cemetery a reality.

Those five veterans are well known to many of you from the Monterey area: William Williams, Jack McDonough, Charles Hopper, Malcolm Giblin, and Jack Stewart.

During the 1990s, these veterans enlisted the support of several politicians, notably State Senator Henry J. Mello, State Assemblyman Bruce McPherson, then-Congressman Leon Panetta, and Congressman Sam Farr.

Initially, despite their best efforts, they gained little ground in convincing either the federal government or the State of California to establish a veterans cemetery here. Yet the strong and vibrant veterans community in Monterey remained determined.

Five years ago momentum began to build and, finally, in 2013, the necessary funding came together.

- The National Cemetery Administration of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provided \$6.8 million
- The California State Legislature supplied \$2 million with support from Senator Monning and Assembly Speaker Emeritus John Perez
- The Capital Campaign and the Packard Foundation provided \$614,000
- And the Central Coast Veterans Cemetery Foundation provided \$200,000.

These efforts are the very definition of collaboration and teamwork. Thank you to everyone involved.

After construction began in March 2015, CalVet worked closely with the Monterey County Military and Veterans Office to receive and process applications. It took no time at all for CalVet and County staff to be overwhelmed by the community's interest in the cemetery.

This year, as we neared completion of construction, we found that we had additional needs to support our operations. Many organizations responded: and now we are extremely grateful to the Marina Foundation, the Fleet Reserve Association of Monterey, American Legion Post 31, the United Veterans Council, and many individuals and other groups in the Monterey area who stepped forward to provide us with:

- all of the flags you see flying here today
- the benches in the Committal Shelter
- the beautiful Navy bell we will use for Navy services
- and many other items integral to the proper functioning of this sacred place.

Thank you especially to Steve Emerson, President of the Marina Foundation, for this critical support.

Now that opening day is finally here, I want take a moment to talk about the extraordinary interest in the California Central Coast Veterans Cemetery since construction began.

Since July 2015, before we even opened, we have received more than 1,000 applications for interment for veterans and their dependents who intend to make the California Central Coast Veterans Cemetery their final resting place.

As of today, our opening day, CalVet has approved applications for 1000 veterans, 750 spouses, and 5 children of veterans. This is truly remarkable!

We have approved applications for veterans who served in nearly every major American conflict from the Spanish-American War to the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Our Spanish-American War veteran was a German immigrant who joined the Marine Corps in 1897 and served with the Marine detachment on the USS Baltimore in 1898, during the Battle of Manila Bay.

Even a tiny sampling of our applications, demonstrates the vast historical breadth that makes our new cemetery a landmark starting today:

- Our World War II veterans include Marines who fought across the Pacific
- Airmen who “Flew the Hump” over the Himalayas
- Soldiers from the famed 442nd Regiment who fought in Italy
- Nurses who patched up our wounded and care for the ill in France England and the United States
- Sailors who brought us victory at sea.

We are honored today to have several World War II veterans on hand, including several women who served in the Navy, the Women’s Army Corps, and the Marine Corps. Thank you very much for your service, and for gracing us today with your presence.

These grounds will also become the home for hundreds of veterans who served in conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Panama, the Persian Gulf, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, during the Cold War, and in numerous other expeditions around the globe.

This is truly sacred ground where for generations to come, people will remember and honor the brave men and women who answered our nation's call and served with honor.

As honored as CalVet is to provide a final resting place for our veterans, we are also proud to serve hundreds of their spouses. Many of the spouses were from the Monterey area, but some came from Austria, England, France, Germany, Japan, and Korea.

Spouses deserve our deepest gratitude, for it is often the spouse or partner who provides the front-line care to veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress, depression, traumatic brain injury, and other physical and mental wounds of military service and war.

In addition, we have approved applications for five children of veterans, who either died before the age of 21, or were permanently disabled. We are honored to provide them a final resting place alongside their parents.

As we open with a distinguished clientele of Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, Coasties, and Merchant Mariners, we think to the future. The plans for this cemetery call for eleven phases that will expand gradually into the large area behind me.

Today is the first day of our cemetery's perpetual life, and shortly we will begin operations by interring one of the founding fathers of this cemetery, Major William Williams and his wife, Maria Williams.

In closing, I want to thank again all of those who made this cemetery a reality, to thank the CalVet staff who have worked hard to support this project against numerous obstacles, and to thank all of you who have shown up today to show your respect and support for veterans and their families.

Thank you.