

## **GRACE MEMORIAL DAY CEMETERY VETERANS DAY REMARKS**

**26 May 2024 by Maj Gen Dan Dick, USAF (ret)**

On Thursday we put American Flags on our 151 veterans in our cemetery.

Thanks to all who helped.

Our historic cemetery was started in 1883 and contains about 1076 burials and still has about 850 available lots for sale.

We have many folks in the cemetery who died earlier than 1883 and who were reburied in our cemetery. One of the earliest is little William Carver who died in 1853. He has a very small grave marker that just says "Here lies little Willy"

Our earliest burial, though, is the Reverend James Maury, who was our rector from 1751 – 1769. Reverend Maury was also Thomas Jefferson's tutor. He is buried at the spot of the pulpit of the old wooden colonial Church of England and marked by the obelisk just across the way out our front door.

Our earliest veteran is possibly buried between the two big old oak trees just outside the front door to the right. We have a name – M. Johnson - and a rumor he was a revolutionary war soldier. But research of Virginia's revolutionary war soldiers doesn't contain a M. Johnson. But we know Britain's Tarlton's Raiders came down the road in 1781 enroute to Monticello to try and capture Governor Jefferson. What if old M. Johnson just decided to die during that forced march? Tarleton had a dilemma on what to do with him, but he looked up and saw a little Church of England and said take Johnson out back and bury him. That is exactly where the grave of M. Johnson is located.

As I mentioned, we have 151 veterans in our cemetery. From reading their grave markers and looking at the cemetery computer tracking system we know at least 52 served in the Army, 14 in the Navy, 15 in the Marine Corps and 13 in the Air Force.

Their grave markers also reflect 21 were junior enlisted, 9 were non-commissioned officers and 28 were commissioned officers, including four lieutenant colonels, three colonels and one brigadier general.

Their war time service includes at least 9 who fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War, 13 who served during WWI, 61 during WWII, 9 during Korea and 7 during Vietnam.

The pride of the service of the confederate soldiers is reflected on their grave markers with comments of:

- Company B, 19<sup>th</sup> VA Infantry, CSA
- Carrington's VA Light Artillery, CSA
- Company A, 12 Battalion, VA Light Artillery, CSA
- 88<sup>th</sup> VA Military, CSA
- One of Mosby's Men, Company D, 43<sup>rd</sup> VA Cavalry
- Pegrams' Company, VA Light Artillery, CSA

We also have a VMI cadet who fought at the battle of New Market.

My favorite Confederate soldier is Capt George Geiger. He was the aide to General Kemper who was one of General Pickett's Brigade commanders who took part in Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg. They were both mounted and shot off their horses. Kemper wasn't wounded too badly and a couple days later was swapped for a Union General that the Confederates had captured. Capt Geiger's wounds were more serious and he died in a Union hospital a couple weeks later. But the story doesn't end there. When Virginia was allowed to rejoin the Union, General Kemper became the Governor of Virginia in 1874. He is buried in Orange County.

Reverend Dennis Whittle, who served as our rector from 1949 – 1950, was awarded the Military Cross from the British Expeditionary Force during WW I. Our highest award for heroism belongs to Lt. Col. Bert Page who won the Silver Star in Vietnam along with three Purple Hearts for combat wounds. The Silver Star is the Army's third highest award for heroism behind the Medal of Honor and Distinguished Service Cross. Additionally, we have at least two Distinguished Flying Cross recipients among other awards for heroism.

Other interesting inscriptions are:

- "World War Veteran". (He died in 1925 before WW II)
- "In service to his country"
- An Air Force pilot's grave marker that says "He has earned his wings twice"
- and Lt. Koch who died in 1944 and is "Buried with his comrades in France"

If you or your spouse are veterans, you are entitled to a number of benefits from the Veteran's Administration including the white veteran's headstone we associate with Arlington National Cemetery, which we have one in our cemetery, or the nice bronze flat grave markers which we have numerous throughout our cemetery. Veterans may also be eligible for help from the VA with burial expenses from a few hundred dollars up to

\$2000. The VA pamphlet in the cemetery section of the church website is a good place to start exploring what benefits may apply in your case.

The flags will stay in place until right after Farm Tour. Please take a stroll around our cemetery over the next couple weeks to look at the flag marked graves and to reflect on the service of our veterans who gave so much for our freedoms and way of life.