

# VETERANS CEMETERY COMMITTEE

## of BEAUFORT (VCCOB)

### Dedicated to expanding the Beaufort National Cemetery

BY BOB FREEMAN

**W**e're the Veterans Cemetery Committee of Beaufort (VCCOB), and we're dedicated to expanding the Beaufort National Cemetery by acquiring more land for it. For the past 4 years, we've been working on creative ways to latch onto the last available property contiguous to the cemetery, a parcel of land that's almost 5 acres (it's the apartment complex adjacent to the back fence). We'd like to do it "soon," before it becomes unavailable due to commercial development. We recently partnered w/

fundraising gurus, Community Foundation of the Low Country, specifically to raise money to buy the property. We'd also like some cooperation from the VA!

Actually, technically we're the VCCOB II, 'cause the first committee to call itself the VCCOB operated in the mid-to-late 2000s. Back then, A MOAA guy, the late Col. Jimmie Leach, was the driving force behind the committee. In 2007, the committee honchoed a federal/state land-swap & private property donations to give BNC an additional 15 acres THAT THE CEMETERY DESPERATELY NEEDED! The cemetery was running out of burial space and was faced with having to REFUSE INTERMENTS, BEGINNING AS EARLY AS 2008!

The VA really appreciated what the first Veterans' Cemetery Committee had done, but overestimated how long that 15 acres would last; as late as May 2013, VA officials were saying that the burial needs of Beaufort area veterans were taken care of "...for the foreseeable future," and the former VA Director said, "...extends the cemetery's capacity to 2050 and beyond." Well, half the 15 acres already has been used. Furthermore, our calculations, using the VA's own Beaufort interment data, show the cemetery running out of burial space around 2030! (To their credit, the VA has revised its estimate of when the cemetery will be full; officials are now claiming 2041, or maybe 2045--still wrong, but closer to the truth.)

The second Veterans Cemetery Committee of Beaufort was formed about 2010, when it became pretty clear to local veterans who keep an eye on burials in BNC that space was being used up faster than anticipated and the prospects for acquiring the coveted parcel of land seemed to improve. Five acres won't last very long, but it's the last adjacent lot and better than nothing. We need to go after the land NOW and we'd like the VA to work with us to acquire it, but the VA estimate of 2041 gives the VA an excuse to do nothing. It's VA "policy" to "begin to look at" acquiring additional property 15-20 years out from turning away burials. "As you can see, we are not at that point for Beaufort National Cemetery," said Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Steve Muro in May.

The VA's expansion policy is driven by need, rather than availability of land, officials explained. The VA's "estimate" is not realistic and so is their 15-20 year lead time for land acquisition; WHEN CONFRONTED W/HAVING TO SHUT DOWN INTERMENTS AS SOON AS 2008, THE VA DID NOTHING UNTIL 2007 AND ONLY BECAUSE OF PROMPTING BY VETERANS! Their expansion policy that's "...driven by need, rather than availability..." is a policy that all-but-guarantees land won't be available when needed! Why doesn't the VA seem to "get" that it needs to anticipate its burial requirements as far in advance as

possible and acquire land whenever it becomes available? In the case of the five acres adjacent to the cemetery's back fence, if it is not purchased soon, it will almost certainly be sold to a commercial developer and NEVER BE AVAILABLE AGAIN TO THE NATIONAL CEMETERY!

The Veterans Cemetery Committee of Beaufort II has offered its grassroots financial, technical, legal and political assistance to the VA in securing the property, BUT THE VA SAID

IT IS COMPLETELY UNINTERESTED IN ACQUIRING THE PROPERTY (OR ANY PROPERTY) FOR BNC AND HAS OFFICIALLY DISASSOCIATED ITSELF FROM ANY ASSISTANCE FROM THE VCCOB !!

It is remarkable in and of itself that the VA has totally rebuffed help from local veteran-volunteers, but especially confounding at this time, because right now, nation-wide. THE VA IS IN THE MIDST OF THE LARGEST VETERANS CEMETERY EXPANSION SINCE THE CIVIL WAR! The VA is acquiring land in a large number of states to establish new veterans' cemeteries or expand existing ones, but for some reason, NOT in the Lowcountry. WHY NOT IN THE LOWCOUNTRY, TOO, WHERE THERE IS A VETERANS' GRASSROOTS EFFORT TO SECURE THE LAST NEXT-DOOR LOT AND DEFRAY COSTS?!

**For more information on this very worth while effort contact;**

Art Foster, retired USMC, is the committee chairman. He's been a tireless veterans' advocate for the 7 years. I've known him. His institutional knowledge is like the Treasure of Sierra Madre. Following in the footsteps of Col. Jimmie Leach, he's also been fighting for this last adjacent piece of property tooth & nail for years. He's brought lots of allies to the field of battle who want to help, like Mayor Billy, Donnie Beer (both members of the committee), Joe Wilson, Tim Scott & Lindsey Graham. foster71@embarqmail.com

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Tom Latendresse Tom's another "doer," like Art, only maybe even more compulsive. He's done a yeoman's job in getting our committee off on the right foot to raise money, w/media releases, talking points, an "elevator speech," etc. Even better, he's persuaded folks to actually open their wallets!

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