**Department of Veterans Affairs**

# Memorandum

Date: November 1, 2007

From: Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs

Subj: Policy on Recitations on the Meaning of Folds of an Honor Guard Funeral Flags

Thru: Director, Office of Field Programs
Each MSN Director

To: Each Cemetery Director

A recent complaint concerning the text of a recitation which was read at a committal service, attendant publicity of NCA practices concerning such recitations, expressions of concern by Members of Congress, the news media, and the public, and the existence of various texts which purport to identify the meaning of the thirteen folds of the flag, have caused me to review NCA policy with respect to the reading of recitations relating to the purported meaning of the thirteen folds of the flag, and to issue this clarification of NCA policy. Accordingly, this clarifying memorandum supersedes the NCA memorandum dated September 27, 2007, which previously provided guidance to the cemetery directors on this subject matter. Effective immediately, the following principles, developed in consultation with the General Counsel, will govern NCA practice with respect to this issue:

1. NCA will allow the reading of "Thirteen Fold" Flag Recitations at committal services, but it will do so only if such recitations are requested by the deceased's survivor(s).

2. NCA employees, including VA-sponsored Volunteer Honor Guards, may read such recitations at committal services, but only if the recitation to be read is presented by the deceased's survivor(s). NCA employees, including VA-sponsored Volunteer Honor Guards, shall not provide texts of any such recitations to the deceased's survivors for consideration.

3. NCA employees, including VA-sponsored Volunteer Honor Guards, will not be selective in determining which recitations on the meaning of the thirteen folds will be read. The deceased's survivor(s), and only they, will identify the text to be read. Subject to paragraph 4, NCA will accept for reading at its committal services any such texts including those which reflect any, all, or no religious traditions on an equal basis.

4. VA will not accept for reading any texts that would, as determined by the cemetery director, have an adverse impact on the dignity and solemnity of a cemetery honoring those who served the Nation. Among the texts that would not be read would be those that are obscene, racist, are "fighting words," or are coarse, abusive, or politically partisan.

William F. Tuerk