

163 VETERANS FOUND BURIED IN THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

Group seeks to identify all veterans buried in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park

A local group has launched a project to identify all veterans buried in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The project will span both Tennessee and North Carolina sides of the park. So far the group has identified one hundred sixty-three veterans spanning the Revolutionary War to the Vietnam War, and both sides of the Civil War.

Of the one hundred sixty-three veterans buried in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, the team has identified one hundred three buried in Tennessee: twenty-six in Blount County; thirty-eight in Sevier County; and, thirty-nine in Cocke County. And, in North Carolina there are sixty known veterans buried: forty-nine in Swain County and eleven in Haywood County.

Currently, the team intends to build a publicly available interactive database of all the veterans buried in the national park to include: biographical data, cemeteries where they are located, and the wars and unit records in which they served. Listed separately will be cenotaphs (headstones in a location without a body buried) and for cremated veterans, only the scattered ashes of individuals registered with the GSMNP will be included. Also, veterans originally buried in the Park but whose bodies were moved to a new location from their original resting place before Fontana Dam flooding, will likewise be listed.

“Our goal is to honor and protect the valor of those who served and not let their memory be erased because of where they are buried,” stated Joe Emert, a member of the National Parks System Advisory Board and former president of the East Tennessee Historical Society. “We are putting this initial list out for review by the public to ensure we are not missing any veterans who are buried in the national park. All currently listed veterans have been verified through military records or historic books and documents listing their military service. Any new additions will have to be verified and documented through the same process before being added to the list.”

The project began when Emert, a sixth generation Blount Countian, gave a lecture about Sam Houston’s youth in Maryville at the Tennessee Veterans Business Association (TVBA) in January. After his speech, Marilyn Childress, president of the Veteran Heritage Site Foundation, asked him if there was a list of all the veterans buried in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. He did not have an answer but told Childress he would find out.

However, after discussions with National Park officials, he discovered no such list exists. Nevertheless with the help of GSMNP Spokeswoman Dana Soehn, Emert was connected with Frank March, co-author of *A Field Guide to Cemeteries of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park* with Bob Lochbaum, who had recently worked with

the Park on his 2020 book about cemeteries in the Smokies. After their meeting, March contacted Sheila Evans of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Cocke County, Tennessee and Don Casada, with Friends of the Bryson City Cemetery in Swain County, North Carolina for their help in starting the project. With the team now in place, they set out to identify and honor the veterans buried in the Park.

Sheila and Don took the lead in identifying veterans in the two states, with assistance offered from multiple local sources and organizations. The listings assembled are the result of those efforts. Yet, despite best efforts, in older cemeteries, in particular, many graves are marked with nothing more than a field stone with no engravings or written records of who is buried. As a result, even with careful research, there are bound to be omissions.

The list can be viewed on Great Smoky Mountain Heritage Center website, gsmheritagecenter.org and also on the Friends of the Bryson City Cemetery website, friendsofthebccemetery.org.

To add a veteran who is buried or whose remains have been scattered in the GSMNP to the list, share photos or to provide support in development of a biographical sketch, please contact Don Casada at: don.casada@friendsofthebccemetery.org.