

## Historic Preservation Supporting Veterans National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific Honolulu, Hawaii

The National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific overlooks Honolulu from Puowaina Crater, an extinct volcano widely referred to as the “Punchbowl.” Puowaina has a deep association with ritual and commemoration. It was a place where native Hawaiian royalty (*alii*) were secretly buried and where people who broke certain taboos (*kapus*) were sacrificed. Today it is known world-wide as a cemetery and memorial for U.S. war dead from World War II, the Korean Conflict, and the Vietnam Conflict.

There are over 33,000 gravesites in the cemetery, which is filled to current capacity. Its Courts of the Missing memorialize 28,745 individuals who die in battle but whose remains were never recovered. Its landscape, statuary, and memorials add to the cemetery’s unique character. The cemetery has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1976. The Puowaina landscape is a traditional cultural place that plays an important role in Native Hawaiian culture.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is undertaking a series of projects to extend the cemetery’s capacity. These include relocation of the Administrative Office and Visitor Center, construction of 12,500 columbarium niches in three locations, and a memorial wall. New landscaping will complement the construction.



Entrance detail, 1949  
National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific  
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Inside the crater, the existing Administration Building, 1949 (top), will be replaced with Columbaria Court 13 (middle); a new Administration Building will be constructed outside the crater (bottom)

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Redeveloping such a treasured place required detailed collaboration with interested organizations and members of the public. Following procedures set up under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) consulted with the Hawaii State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Historic Hawaii Foundation, the Outdoor Circle, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, and a local Native Hawaiian organization – the Papakolea Community Development Corporation (PCDC).

Changes and adjustments were made in response to their concerns, and a memorandum of agreement (MOA) committed VA to implementing them. Under the MOA, Native Hawaiians are actively engaged in designing interpretive panels for the new administration building and public information centers, telling the story of the crater and its role in traditional lifeways and culture. Simulated volcanic stone will be used in the columbaria and memorial wall, and landscaping will be compatible with the crater’s historic character.