

# Black Hills National Cemetery: An Introduction



Black Hills National Cemetery is located three miles east of Sturgis, S.D., in the shadows of the Black Hills.

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# Eligibility for Burial at a National Cemetery

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\*National cemeteries honor veterans and their families for their service to their nation by providing beautifully maintained burial grounds and lasting memorials. Gravesites and burials are provided for the veteran's family at no cost.

\*The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration maintains 131 national cemeteries, one national Veterans burial ground, and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites in 40 states and Puerto Rico.

\*The head director at each national cemetery is responsible for reviewing the paperwork and qualifications of each veteran to determine eligibility for burial.

# Who is Eligible?

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\*Any member of the Armed Forces of the United States who dies while on active duty is automatically eligible for burial at any national cemetery.

\*Any Veteran who was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable is eligible for burial.

\*Persons with 20 years of service in the National Guard or Reserves who are entitled to retired pay are also eligible for a government headstone or marker.

\*Active duty service (other than active duty for training) while in the National Guard or Reserves also establishes eligibility.

\*Spouses and certain eligible dependents may also be buried in national cemeteries.

# Fast Facts about Black Hills National Cemetery

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- The Black Hills National Cemetery was established in 1948, with the first interments (burials) occurring that year.
- Spanning over 100 acres, it is the final resting place for over 24,000 of our veterans and their families.
- US flags line the roadways between sections and are flown from May through October, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Three memorials can be found in front of the committal shelter: a Blue Star Memorial, the Pilot Training Class 52 Charlie from May of 1952 Memorial, and the Korean War Memorial.

# Notable Burials at Black Hills National Cemetery

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# Application of New Knowledge:

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Let's take a look at some of the notable burials at Black Hills National Cemetery.

Listen carefully to each biography. After each veteran's story, write down reasons why you think that person was eligible to be buried in a National Cemetery.

Be sure to support your thinking with specific reasons using information we have just learned from the National Cemetery Association, as well as information from these veterans' stories.

# Senator Francis H. Case

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Senator Francis H. Case, originally from Iowa, moved to Sturgis, South Dakota, with his family when he was thirteen. He attended Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell, South Dakota, before enlisting and serving as a private in the United States Marine Corps during World War I, and later served in the United States Army and the United States Marine Corps Reserves. After his service, he worked as a writer, editor, and publisher of multiple newspapers before being elected to the South Dakota State Regents of Education in 1931. By 1937, Case was serving South Dakota in Congress, and was ultimately elected to the United States Senate, serving from 1951 until his death on June 22, 1962, at the naval hospital at Bethesda, Maryland. His body was later transferred and interred at Black Hills National Cemetery on December 3, 1981.





# John Bear King

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John Bear King of South Dakota enlisted in the U.S. Army on May 18, 1943. PFC Bear King was one of eleven known Lakota Code Talkers in the Pacific Theater during World War II. During the war, the Japanese were intercepting vital communications from American soldiers, so Lakota soldiers were recruited to develop coded messages in Lakota to help the Army move troops and supplies safely. The 2008 Code Talkers Recognition Act honored all Code Talkers from World War I and World War II and awarded the Congressional Gold Medal to American Indian tribes whose members participated in the top secret program; individuals would receive a Congressional Silver Medal. In 2013, the Lakota Code Talkers received their medals. Bear King died September 2, 1949, and is one of two Lakota Code Talkers interred in a VA national cemetery.



# Clarence Eugene Wolf Guts

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Clarence Eugene Wolf Guts, native of South Dakota, enlisted in the U.S. Army on June 17, 1942. He was one of eleven known Lakota Code Talkers in the Pacific Theater during World War II. He served in the army until January 13, 1946, as the personal Code Talker for Gen. Mueller. The 2008 Code Talkers Recognition Act honored all Code Talkers from World War I and World War II, and awarded the Congressional Gold Medal to American Indian tribes whose members participated in the top secret program; individuals would receive a Congressional Silver Medal. In 2013, the Lakota Code Talkers received their medals. PFC Wolf Guts was the last living member of the Oglala Lakota Code Talkers from World War II. He died June 16, 2010, and is the only other Lakota Code Talker interred in a VA national cemetery.



# Brigadier General Richard E. Ellsworth

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Photo credit of Brigadier General Richard E. Ellsworth: South Dakota Air and Space Museum.

# Richard E. Ellsworth

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Many will recognize Ellsworth's name, as he is the namesake for the Ellsworth Airforce Base in Rapid City, South Dakota, the base named by President Eisenhower himself. Ellsworth served in the Pennsylvania National Guard from 1929-1931, at which time he entered the U.S. Military Academy, training as a pilot at Randolph and Kelly fields in Texas. By February 1942, Ellsworth had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and had earned a master's degree in meteorology at the California Institute of Technology. He served in many capacities during his time in the service, including 400 combat missions for the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Air Forces in the China-Burma-India Theater. For his bravery, he received battle stars for eight different campaigns, and also earned the Legion of Merit, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, three Air Medals, and the Chinese Air Force Wings.

Ellsworth returned to the U.S. after the war for assignment to the Air Weather Service in Washington as chief of Operations and Training Division. From August 1946 to August 1949 he was commanding officer of the 380th air bases in Florida and California. He graduated from the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, in July 1950, and went to Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, as chief of plans for the 2nd Air Force. He was promoted to brigadier general in September 1952 at Rapid City Air Force Base, South Dakota where he was wing commander and later commanding general of the 28th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing from November 1950 to March 1953.

He was killed in a simulated combat mission near Nut Cove, Newfoundland, on March 18, 1953, and was interred at Black Hills National Cemetery. In the aftermath of the crash, an accident investigation board recommended new procedures for flight safety for pilots.

# William Samuel “Sam” DeCory

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In the late 1950s, Sam DeCory enlisted in the United States Marine Corps where he served in Korea. He later signed up for the U.S Army and completed four and a half tours in Vietnam. During his time in the Army, he was captured and held as a prisoner of war for a brief amount of time before escaping. For these tours and his endless bravery, DeCory earned five Purple Hearts for being injured, a Combat Infantry Badge, several Bronze Stars, multiple Silver Stars, a Distinguished Service Cross, Army Master Jump Wings with one gold star denoting combat jump, Expert Rifleman and Pistol, as well as other Vietnam service medals. He had hoped to serve longer for his country, but was forced to take a medical retirement after being wounded several times as well as being exposed to Agent Orange, which is a dangerous chemical.

After DeCory returned from Vietnam, he worked to better his community by becoming a police officer in Rapid City and Pine Ridge, South Dakota. He later decided that his passion in life would be helping others in a different way. Therefore, he decided to return to college; he studied at Black Hills State University and received his bachelor's degree in sociology and psychology. He later went on to receive his master's degree in counseling and guidance from South Dakota State University. Using his degree, he worked as an independent counselor with the youth and their families, but mostly with young males who struggled with substance abuse. He also worked with other veterans to help them try to overcome their post-traumatic stress disorder. DeCory passed away on May 24, 2002, at the age of 65. Even after his death, his legacy carries on. He changed many lives by being an advocate for veterans, a healthy life, and racial harmony. Sam DeCory is buried along with his parents at Black Hills National Cemetery in Sturgis, South Dakota. His headstone is covered with his many prestigious battle awards, but most importantly, the words “Beloved Father.”



## Samuel DeCory's Many Medals:

DeCory earned five Purple Hearts for being injured, a Combat Infantry Badge, several Bronze Stars, multiple Silver Stars, a Distinguished Service Cross, Army Master Jump Wings with one gold star denoting combat jump, Expert Rifleman and Pistol, as well as other Vietnam service medals.