

[VA Platform Harnesses Data to Memorialize Veterans Digitally](#)

The Veterans Legacy Memorial is a pilot project with a targeted release date in late 2019.

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Photo credit: U.S. Army

An upcoming digital platform from the Department of Veterans Affairs harnessing existing data from the National Cemetery Administration will allow loved ones of deceased veterans [to honor them through interactive](#) virtual profiles. The platform, called Veterans Legacy Memorial, is built using existing 25-year-old NCA records. The first phase has begun testing for a planned public release later this year.

The project has been two years in the making, when it was first conceptualized under NCA's Veterans Legacy Program. In addition to providing the ability to leave

messages in honor of deceased veterans buried at VA cemeteries, VLM will improve the on-site cemetery experience and provide academic opportunities to scholars and research professionals to obtain background information on veterans.

VLM was inspired by [NCA's Bryce Carpenter](#) who noticed the difficulties traveling to a deceased service member's memorial site can be for various reasons, according to a post on the Federal Data Strategy's website. Carpenter proposed developing "digital counterparts" to the memorials, and thus VLM was born.

The project was recognized in President Trump's [May 28 Memorial Day proclamation](#)

For project contributor Traci Evans Rowe, this initiative hits close to home.

"I felt ownership of the project almost immediately because I could see how useful it would be and impactful for my family," she said. Evans Rowe of GovernmentCIO has been involved in the initiative since March to validate the requirements for the minimum viable product toward VLM's roll out this year.

Evans Rowe plans to use the platform herself. She explained her personal connections to deceased veterans, including her father-in-law who was stationed at Pearl Harbor Dec. 8, 1941, two days after starting military service and the day after Japan's infamous attack. Her mother-in-law's father served in World War I. Her uncle, John Clay Smith Jr., served in the U.S. Army and later went on to serve as interim chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission under President Jimmy Carter. Smith is buried in Quantico National Cemetery.

All these stories and more are those that can be commemorated through VLM. Evans Rowe is currently working on gathering her father-in-law's medals to upload to his profile on the platform.

The platform has been in its pilot phase with existing veterans' families to test the user experience and develop more customization. The first phase is meant to allow the public to search for the profiles of about 3 million veterans. Upcoming features will allow for next of kin to create pages and add photos and stories. In the future, VA will plan to include on the platform veterans interred at other non-VA cemeteries, such as those maintained by state and local governments and private ones as well.

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