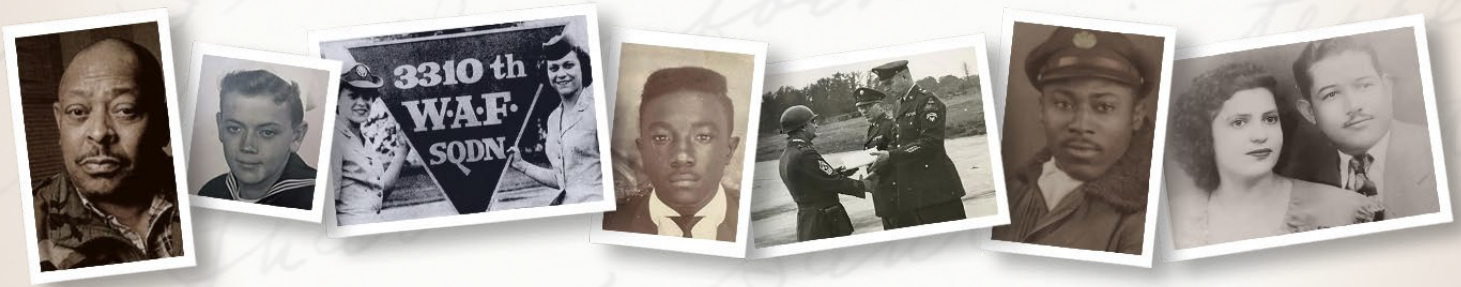


National History Day®  
**Silent Heroes®:**  
**Untold Stories from the Korean War**



**HOW TO SELECT A SILENT HERO**



**NHD**  
NATIONAL  
HISTORY DAY

## About the Program

Since 2011, National History Day® (NHD) has led a variety of programs to engage teachers and students in the study of Silent Heroes®. Silent Heroes are the untold stories of history. While the majority of historical scholarship focuses on the leaders, NHD recognizes the value of studying the history of ordinary people.

In *Untold Stories from the Korean War*, NHD students and teachers study the stories of Korean War Veterans—their lives before the war, their communities, their military service in the Korean War era, and their experience as Veterans in their communities. This process helps students understand the role of the military and the conflict through the eyes of a Veteran. This is a powerful opportunity to personalize history and help students see the past through the eyes of those who lived it.

The program engages students and teachers in historical inquiry, using secondary sources to establish historical context and content. Students and teachers seek primary sources to help document their Silent Hero's life experiences. This can include manuscript census pages, birth certificates, school records, military files, newspapers, photographs, oral histories, materials from local libraries, historical societies, or families, and obituaries. When possible, students and teachers connect with family members, and with their consent, interview them to learn details about their loved ones that are often only recorded in the memories of those who knew them.

Throughout the process students and teachers learn how to identify sources, determine the validity of sources, supply evidence to support their claims, and properly track and cite their sources. Their research is synthesized and the students and teachers visit the cemeteries where their Silent Heroes are interred to offer eulogies to honor their lives. Sometimes family members will accompany the students. Their work is synthesized and cross-listed on NHD's Silent Heroes website ([NHSilentHeroes.org](https://NHSilentHeroes.org)) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Legacy Memorial ([vlm.cem.va.gov](https://vlm.cem.va.gov)).

This program is a powerful tool to help connect students with their home communities. As citizens of that community, they learn the importance of recognizing and honoring those from that community who served and sacrificed for the good of others.

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**Need help? Have questions?**

**Please reach out to your research mentor! We're happy to help you through this process.**

# Introduction

National History Day® (NHD) is proud to partner with the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), part of the Veterans Administration (VA), to develop *Silent Heroes®: Untold Stories from the Korean War*. This program will engage educators working with their students to identify, research, and honor underrepresented Korean War Veterans buried or memorialized at a VA National Cemetery or a VA-funded state, territorial, or tribal cemetery. This program is supported by a Veterans Legacy Grant Program grant as part of the Veterans Legacy Program.

## What is an Underrepresented Veteran?

The Veterans Administration defines an underrepresented Veteran as someone who **meets at least one of the following criteria**:

Veterans from historically underrepresented groups. This can include:

- ▶ Race (African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, etc.)
- ▶ Ethnicity (Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Chamorro, Filipinos, etc.)
- ▶ Religious minorities (Jews, Muslims, Mormons, Buddhists, Hindus, etc.)
- ▶ Women
- ▶ Members of the LGBTQ+ community
- ▶ Veterans with a significant connection to the local community.

A **community leader** is a broad term that can include anyone who made a positive difference in their community. This could be someone who was an entrepreneur or someone who was a leader in civic, religious, educational, or community organizations.

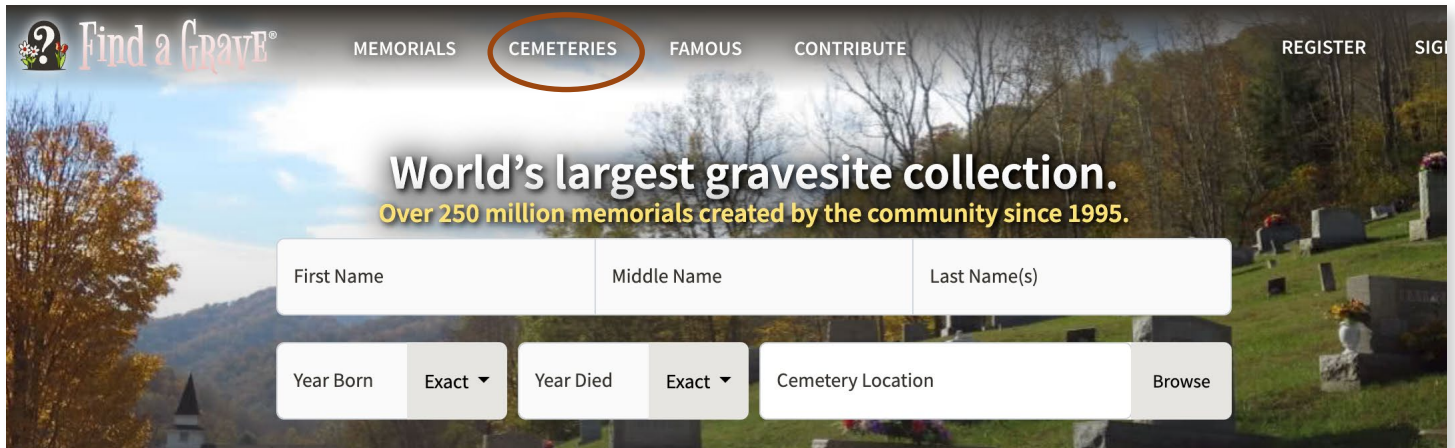
There are multiple ways to identify a Silent Hero. No option is right or wrong—they are pathways to historical research. To move forward, consider your students and the stories that will compel them as they work with this research.

- ▶ Will your students want to focus on a particular group of people within the military (i.e., Native Americans, African Americans, female Veterans)?
- ▶ Will your students want to focus on a particular branch of the military (i.e., Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Army, etc.)?
- ▶ Will your students want to focus on a particular job within the military (i.e., nurses, pilots, sailors, etc.)?
- ▶ Can we identify Veterans connected to your school, town, county, city, or community?

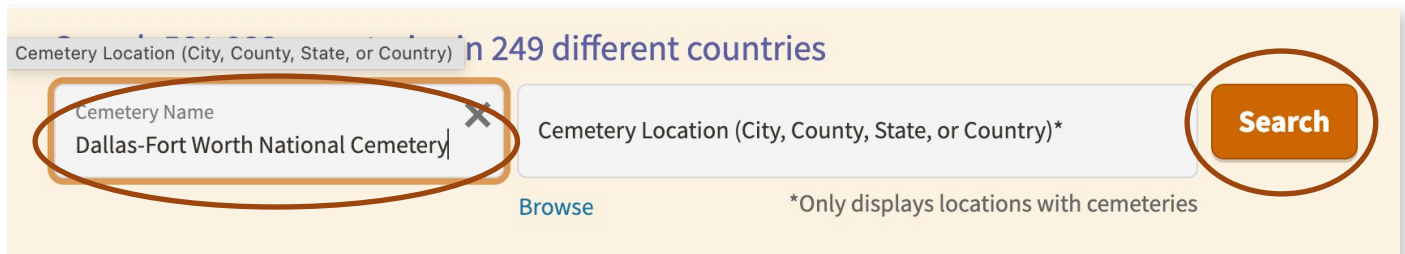
There are no right or wrong questions, but it is up to you to use these criteria (and others) to limit your search. Remember, each name on the list is a fantastic story. There are no bad choices.

## Research Pathway One: Using Find a Grave to Identify Possible Veterans

Find a Grave ([findagrave.com](http://findagrave.com)) is a website that catalogs cemeteries. Go to the website and click on “cemeteries” tab at the top of the website.



Enter the name of the cemetery to which you have been assigned and click “search.”

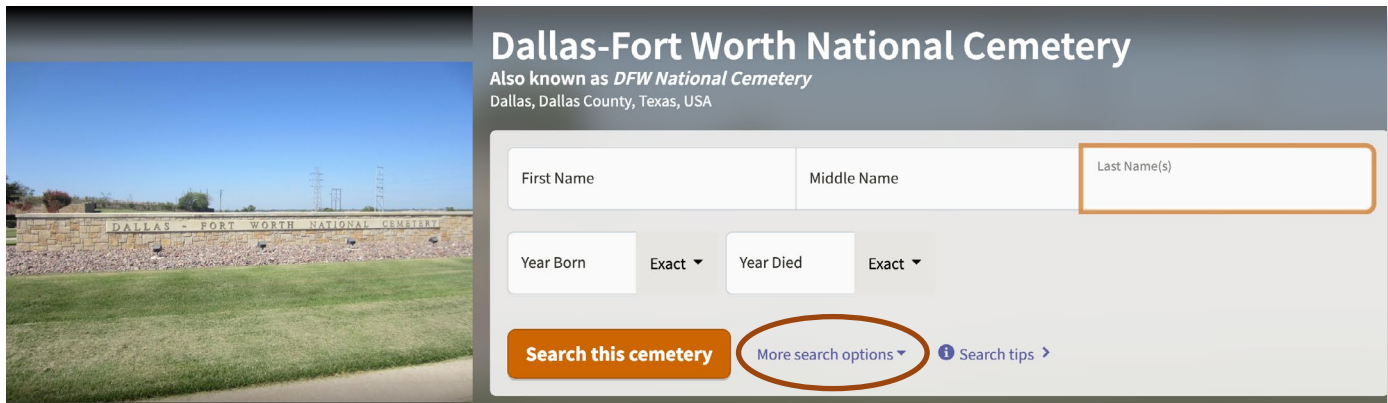


Select the cemetery from the list that appears.



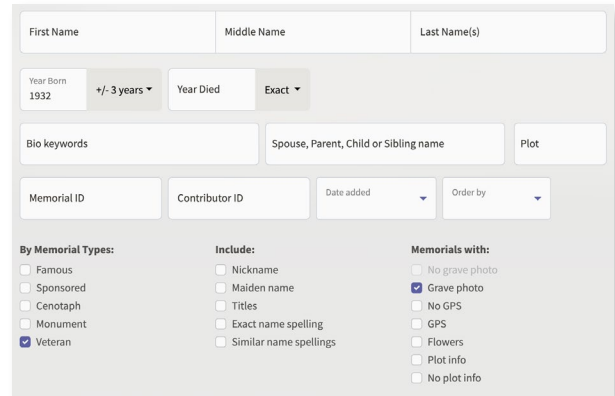
### Option A: Advanced Search on Find a Grave Using Photographs

Once you are at the cemetery landing page, there are a few ways to search. Begin by clicking the “more search options” button.

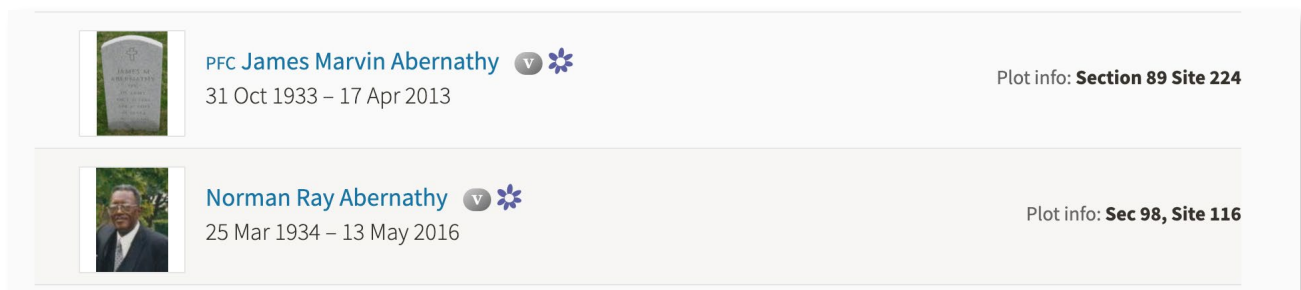


This will expand the search bar. Enter the following criteria:

- ▶ Year born: choose 1932, and in the drop-down box next to the year, choose +/- three years (a person born in 1932 would be 18 years old in 1950, the year the Korean War began).
- ▶ Click the box for “Veteran” (while these are Veteran Cemeteries, spouses, and dependent children are also buried and memorialized here).
- ▶ Click the box for “Grave photo.”



Now we need to scan the list. Let’s suppose that we are seeking African American Veterans. We can either scan for photographs of individuals or surnames (more on this strategy later). Early on the list, I noticed the photograph of Norman Rae Abernathy.

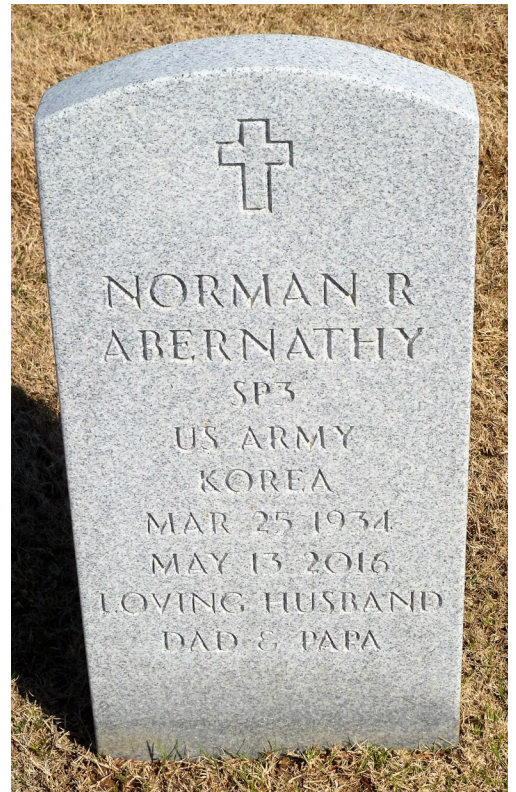


When I click on his post, the first thing I need to do is to confirm if he served during the Korean War era. The best way to do that is to look at the photograph of his grave. The grave clearly denotes that he served as a Specialist Third Class in the U.S. Army during the Korean War era.

**IMPORTANT:** It is important that we do not assume that because someone looks a particular way or has a particular last name, they identify with a particular group of people. This is a start. The next step is to corroborate this information with other sources.

From Mr. Abernathy's Find a Grave page, we know some key details, including:

- ▶ The date he was born: March 25, 1934
- ▶ The date he died: May 13, 2016
- ▶ The names of his parents: James Hovie Abernathy and Mamie Bell Mitchell Abernathy
- ▶ The names of five of his siblings: James Ray Abernathy, Robert Oreece Abernathy, Mamie Lee Abernathy McKnight, Virginia Pearlie Abernathy Douglas, and Gary Richard Abernathy.



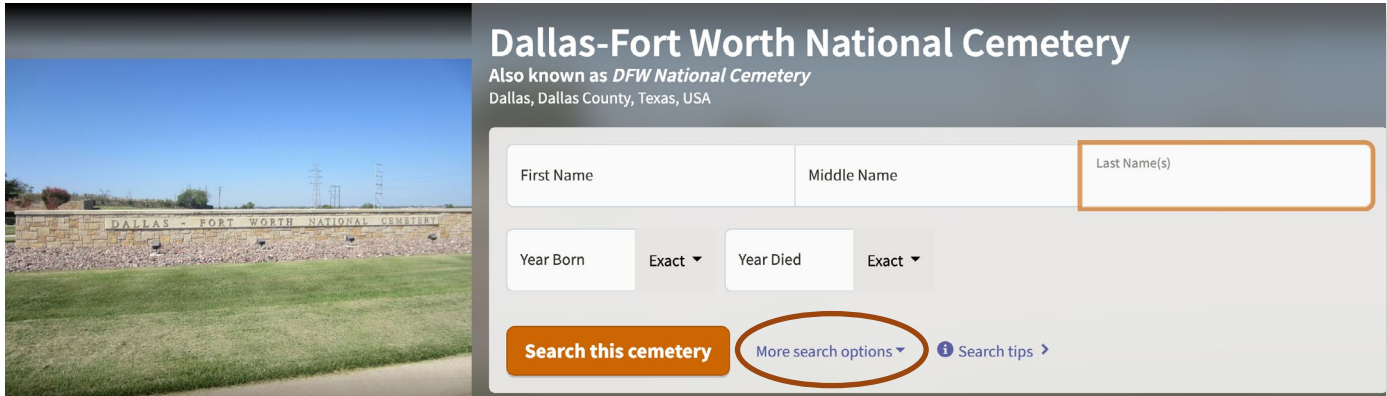
Now, let's take this information into Ancestry or Ancestry Classroom. Do an advanced search, using the Veteran's name, year of birth, and year of death. From there, we can find Mr. Abernathy in the 1950 U.S. Federal Census. We see a 16-year-old Norman Rae Abernathy listed living with his parents (James and Mamie) and six other siblings. We know this is the correct family because the names of the siblings and parents line up. In this census, the family's race is listed as "Neg," an abbreviation for "Negro," the term used for African American families in 1950.

Abernathy, James H	Head	Neg	M	48	Mar
—, Mamie	wife	Neg	F	46	Mar
—, James Ray	son	Neg	M	25	Nev
—, Robert O	son	Neg	M	23	Nev
—, Mamie Lee	daughter	Neg	F	21	Nev
—, Virginia P	daughter	Neg	F	18	Nev
—, Norman Ray	son	Neg	M	16	Nev
—, Gary R	son	Neg	M	12	Nev
—, Arthur O	son	Neg	M	3	Nev

## Option B: Advanced Search on Find a Grave Using Surnames

Another way to identify possible racial or ethnic minority Veterans is to search your cemetery for common surnames (last names). It is important to remember that possible identifications must be corroborated with other sources to verify that information. On page nine, you can find a list of common surnames for different groups of Americans. While these lists are far from complete, they can often produce leads to follow.

To use this strategy, on the landing page for your cemetery on Find a Grave, click the “more search options” button.



**Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery**  
Also known as *DFW National Cemetery*  
Dallas, Dallas County, Texas, USA

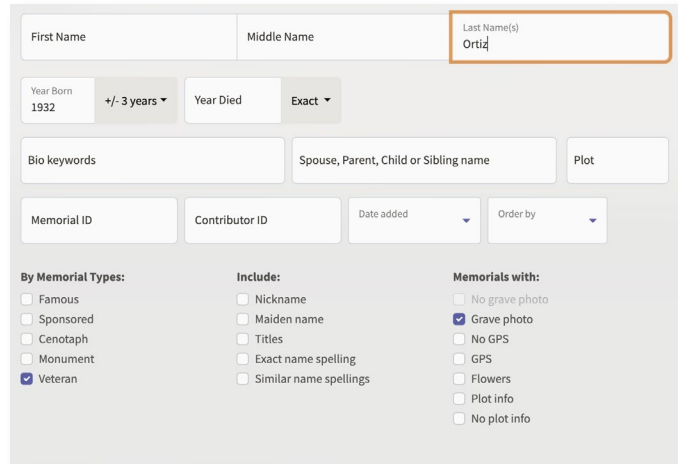
First Name Middle Name Last Name(s)

Year Born Exact Year Died Exact

Search this cemetery More search options Search tips

This will expand the search bar. Enter the following criteria:

- ▶ Year born: choose 1932, and in the drop-down box next to the year, choose +/- three years (a person born in 1932 would be 18 years old in 1950, the year the Korean War began).
- ▶ Click the box for “Veteran” (while these are Veteran cemeteries, spouses, and dependent children are also buried and memorialized here).
- ▶ Click the box for “grave photo.”
- ▶ Enter a last name from the list (or one common in your community) and click “search this cemetery.”
- ▶ Let’s suppose that we are seeking a Latino Veteran. Using the list of common surnames, enter the last name “Ortiz” and click “search this cemetery.”
- ▶ Two Veterans meet this criteria. Click on the first Veteran, Technical Sergeant (Retired) Delfino “Del” Ortiz.



First Name Middle Name Last Name(s)  
Ortiz

Year Born 1932 +/- 3 years Year Died Exact

Bio keywords Spouse, Parent, Child or Sibling name Plot

Memorial ID Contributor ID Date added Order by

**By Memorial Types:**  
 Famous  
 Sponsored  
 Cenotaph  
 Monument  
 Veteran

**Include:**  
 Nickname  
 Maiden name  
 Titles  
 Exact name spelling  
 Similar name spellings

**Memorials with:**  
 No grave photo  
 Grave photo  
 No GPS  
 GPS  
 Flowers  
 Plot info  
 No plot info



 TSGT (Ret) Delfino “Del” Ortiz V  
2 Nov 1932 – 4 Sep 2018

 Jose Angel Ortiz-Bula V  
24 May 1931 – 2 May 2023

When we look at the photograph of his grave, we see that he was a Seaman Recruit (SR) in the U.S. Navy and a Technical Sergeant in the U.S. Air Force. He served in both the Korean War and the Vietnam War eras.

Technical Sergeant Ortiz’s [Find a Grave page includes a photograph and the transcription of an obituary](#) from the *Star-Telegram* newspaper from September 9, 2018. In this obituary, we learn his parents’ names (Ambrosio and Victoria Ortiz), his service (three years in the U.S. Navy and 20 years in the U.S. Air Force), and the names of his wife and children.

Just like in the previous example, we need to corroborate with other sources. Using Ancestry or Ancestry Classroom, we find the Ortiz family living in Victoria, Texas. Seven-year-old Delfino lives with his parents (Ambrosio and Victoria), siblings Bruno, Victoria, Andra, Rosaria, Jeronima, and Martina, and his grandmother Epitasia. The 1940 Federal Census classifies the family as “White.” The option for “Hispanic” did not appear on the U.S. Federal Census until 1970. However, we see that both Delfino’s father and grandmother (his mother’s mother) were born in Mexico. Today, we would likely refer to this family as Hispanic, Mexican American, or Latino.



Ortiz, Ambrosio	Head	M	W	40	M	1902	Mexico
Ortiz, Victoria	wife	F	W	33	M	1903	Texas
Ortiz, Bruno	son	M	W	12	3	1944	Texas
Ortiz, Victoria	daughter	F	W	11	3	1942	Texas
Ortiz, Delfino	son	M	W	7	3	1942	Texas
Ortiz, Andra	daughter	F	W	5	3	1940	Texas
Ortiz, Rosaria	daughter	F	W	3	3	1940	Texas
Ortiz, Jeronima	daughter	F	W	1	3	1940	Texas
Ortiz, Martina	daughter	F	W	2	3	1940	Texas
Ortiz, Epitasia	mother	W	39	W4	1910	Mexico	

**TSGT (Ret) Delfino "Del" Ortiz**

**BIRTH** 2 Nov 1932  
Victoria, Victoria County, Texas, USA

**DEATH** 4 Sep 2018 (aged 85)  
Hurst, Tarrant County, Texas, USA

**BURIAL** Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery  
Dallas, Dallas County, Texas, USA [Add to Map](#)

**PLOT** SECTION 94 SITE 431

**MEMORIAL ID** 19297507 [View Source](#)

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**MEMORIAL** **PHOTOS** **FLOWERS**

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**Sponsor this memorial with an exclusive premium layout and no ads.**

**NHRS**-Delfino "Del" Ortiz, 85, of Hurst passed away Tuesday, Sept. 4, 2018, surrounded by his loving family.

**MASS:** 10 a.m., Thursday, Sept. 13, at St. Michael's Catholic Church in Bedford followed by a church reception provided by St. Michael's Funeral Ministry. Interment follows at 1:15 p.m. in Dallas Fort Worth National Cemetery in Dallas. Visitation: 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 12, at Lucas Funeral Home in Hurst with a prayer vigil beginning at 7 p.m.

**MEMORIALS:** Memorial donations may be made to the non-profit group, Emily's Smile Boxes, at emilysmileboxes.com.

Del was born in Victoria, Texas, on Nov. 2, 1932, to Ambrosio and Victoria Ortiz. He grew up in Victoria and left home at the age of 17 to join the Navy. At the end of three years, Del signed up with the Air Force and never looked back. He spent the next 20 years making the military a career.

He transitioned into his second career with the same skills learned in the military as a technical precision measure equipment technician. Upon military retirement, he began working with Reliance Telecom (R-TEC) in Euless and retired a second time after 20 years.

A few of Del's favorite pastimes were playing golf and dominoes.

One note about Veterans who also served in the Vietnam War. The National Personnel Records Center (part of the National Archives and Records Administration) holds the Official Military Personnel Files (OMPFs) of twentieth-century service members. **Due to privacy concerns, they will only release records to researchers for members discharged from the military 62 years earlier.** That means that to access the records in 2024, the person must have left military service before 1962. OMPF files for service members who left military service after 1962 can only be requested by the person themselves or their next of kin. If you choose one of these Veterans, we can only make this request with the consent and assistance of a next of kin.

# Common Surnames for Various Ethnic Groups

Compiled from U.S. Census data and various genealogical websites

African American	CHamorro <sup>1</sup>	Chinese Americans	Filipino Americans	Japanese Americans
Banks	Aguon	Chen	Aquino	Kato
Booker	Blas	Guo	Bautista	Kaneshiro
Brown	Borja	He	Castillo	Kimura
Charles	Camacho	Hu	Castro	Kobayahi
Davis	Castro	Huang	Cruz / de la Cruz	Higa
Dorsey	Cruz	Lee / Li	de León	Ito
Green	Duenas	Liang	Flores	Matsumoto
Jackson	Flores	Lin	Francisco	Nakamura
Jefferson	Guerrero	Liu	Garcia	Nakano
Johnson	Leon	Luo	Gonzales	Sasaki
Jones	Manibusan	Ma	De Guzmán	Saito
Joseph	Mendiola	Song	López	Sato
Lewis	Meno	Sun	Mendoza	Shimabukuro
Moore	Perez	Wang	Najera	Shimizu
Mosley	Quinata	Wu	Pérez	Suzuki
Rivers	Reyes	Xie	Ramos	Takahaski
Robinson	Sablan	Xu	Reyes	Tanaka
Smith	Salas	Yang	Rivera	Wantnabe
Taylor	San Nicolas	Zhang	Sánchez	Yamaguchi
Washington	Santos	Zheng	Santos	Yamada
White	Taitano	Zhao	Torres	Yamamoto
Williams	Torres	Zhou	Villanueva	Yoshia
Wilson		Zhu		

Native Hawaiian	Jewish Americans	Mexican American	Native American <sup>2</sup>	Puerto Rican
'Akamu	Abrams/Abramson	Aguilar	Abieta	Álvarez
Akana	Becker	Cruz	Begay / Begaye	Bentacourt
Alana	Blau	Díaz	Becenti	Burgos
Hale	Cantor	Flores	Benally	Colón
Hekekiā	Cohen	García	Bia	Cruz
Iona	Diamond	Gómez	Chee	Díaz
Ka'anā'anā	Epstein	González	Etsitty	Gómez
Kahinu	Fishman	Gutiérrez	Locklear	Hernández
Kahuila	Friedman	Hernández	Harjo	Jiménez
Kalawaia	Geller	Jiménez	Jim	López
Kalawai'a	Gold	López	Largo	Martín
Kameāloha	Goldberg	Martínez	Manygoats	Morales
Kahale	Goldstein	Mendoza	Nez	Narvaez
Kehaulani	Horowitz	Morales	Oxendine	Ortíz
Kelekolio	Kaplan	Pérez	Platero	Pérez
Kekoa	Katz	Ramírez	Poitra	Ramos
Mahi'ai	Leiberman	Reyes	Shorty	Rivera
Māhoe	Levin / Levine	Rodríguez	Tso	Rodriguez
Nakamura	Lewin	Ruíz	Watchman	Ruíz
Palakiko	Perlman	Sánchez	Wauneka	Sánchez
	Rosenberg	Torres	Yazzie	Santiago
	Shapiro	Vásquez	Yellowhair	Vásquez







<sup>1</sup> The CHamorro people are the Indigenous people of the Mariana Islands, where the U.S. territory of Guam is located. Traditionally, CHamorro people did not always use surnames, which accounts for the adoption of Spanish surnames.

<sup>2</sup> Indigenous surnames will vary geographically. Consider names common in a particular community, or search for common last names connected to a particular tribe or nation when trying to identify individuals.

### Option C: Identifying Members of Religious Minority Groups

Identifying members of religious communities is another research pathway. One pathway (particularly to identify Jewish Americans) is to search using surnames. Veterans (or their families) have the option of adding an emblem of belief to the top of a Veteran's resting place. For example: Sergeant Gerd Katzenstein's grave at Washington Crossing National Cemetery in Pennsylvania contains a Star of David, a symbol of the Jewish faith.

Some symbols that would identify members of religious minorities could include (but are not limited to):

<p><b>Buddhism</b></p> 	<p><b>Judaism (Star of David)</b></p> 	<p><b>Hindu</b></p> 
<p><b>Mormon (Angel Moroni)</b></p> 	<p><b>Muslim</b></p> 	<p><b>Shinto</b></p> 



A full list of the options available to Veterans and their families can be found at [cem.va.gov/hmm/emblems.asp](http://cem.va.gov/hmm/emblems.asp).

### Option D: Identifying Women Who Served in the Military

During the Korean War, more than 120,000 American women served on active duty in the U.S. military. While women were barred from serving in combat roles, approximately one-third of those who served provided health care (mainly nurses and medics), and two-thirds served in capacities ranging from clerks and communications to military police and engineering.

While there are many women buried in U.S. National Cemeteries, most are military spouses or dependent children. Some clues for identifying women who served:

- ▶ Look for a military title (Sergeant, Second Lieutenant, etc.) in front of their name in the listing.
- ▶ Look for listings that show women in military uniform in the photograph.
- ▶ Look for lists of identified women who served and search them in Find a Grave to see where they are buried (remembering that some of these people are still alive).

When researching women, remember that most women served before they were married, so you might need to search using a maiden name AND/OR a married name(s).

To learn more about women in the Korean War, visit this page from the Korean War Legacy Project: [koreanwarlegacy.org/chapters/the-role-of-women-in-the-korean-war/](http://koreanwarlegacy.org/chapters/the-role-of-women-in-the-korean-war/).

### Option E: Identifying Members of the LGBTQ+ Community Who Served in the Military

During the Korean War, members of the LGBTQ+ community needed to live in secret to serve in the U.S. military. Members who engaged in same-sex relationships could face criminal charges and could be discharged from service. Openly gay or lesbian people were banned from enlisting. While gay men and women were not explicitly banned from service until 1982, they often served in silence (both during their time in the military and after). To learn more about the evolution of these policies, see this article: [militaryonesource.mil/relationships/support-community/lgbtq-in-the-military/](https://militaryonesource.mil/relationships/support-community/lgbtq-in-the-military/).

It is extremely difficult to identify these individuals. Often they are identified in one of these ways:

- ▶ Veterans who died in more recent years who married their same-sex partner. Evidence of this union can sometimes be identified through newspaper announcements or family histories.
- ▶ Sometimes, same-sex spouses or long-time partners are identified in obituaries. Sometimes they are identified clearly. Other times they are described as a “special friend” or a similar euphemism.
- ▶ Veterans who are buried with a same-sex partner. The first same-sex spouse to be granted burial rights was Nancy J. Lynchild, the wife of U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Linda J. Cambell, a Vietnam-era Veteran. They are buried at Willamette National Cemetery in Portland, Oregon. Learn more: [abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/02/va-grants-first-burial-rights-for-same-sex-couple](https://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/02/va-grants-first-burial-rights-for-same-sex-couple).



## Research Pathway Two: Identify Community Leaders

The second pathway is to identify someone who returned to their community (or settled in a new community) and became a community leader. A community leader is a broad term. It can include anyone who made a positive impact in their community. This could be someone who was an entrepreneur or someone who was a leader in civic, religious, educational, or community organizations.

Consider connecting with local Veteran organizations (Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Honor Flight) or community organizations (Rotary or Kiwanis Clubs) to see if any of their past members might meet this criteria. Also, ask around! Maybe there is a student who has a family member who would qualify (please be sure that that family member is deceased and is buried at your assigned cemetery). If you find someone, check the National Cemetery Administration's Nationwide Gravesite Locator ([cem.va.gov/nationwide-gravesite-locator/](https://cem.va.gov/nationwide-gravesite-locator/)) to confirm where this person is buried.

**STOP YOUR RESEARCH PROCESS AT THIS POINT**

## Once You Identify a Possible Silent Hero

Once you have identified a possible Silent Hero, stop and do two checks:

- ▶ Go to NHD's Silent Hero site at [nhd-silentheroes.org/](https://nhd-silentheroes.org/). Click on "gallery" in the top right-hand corner. Search by name to be sure that your Veteran was not profiled in a past project.
- ▶ Go to the Veterans Legacy Memorial at [vlm.cem.va.gov/](https://vlm.cem.va.gov/). Search by name and cemetery to be sure that your Veteran was not profiled. Note—if a profile exists, but there is no information added, it is fair game.

Now, go to Ancestry or Ancestry Classroom and do a basic search to see if you can find information about this person.

Go to Google Classroom and follow the link to enter as much information as possible about your proposed Veterans. NHD will cross-check the list, confirm there are no duplicates, and share the full list with the group. Teachers will narrow down their team's selection to the final two.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):

- ▶ What if my Veteran served in the Korean War, but did not serve in Korea (maybe they served stateside or in Europe)? Are they eligible for consideration?

Yes.

- ▶ What if a Veteran is a family member of one of the (teacher or student) participants? Can we select that person?

Yes, if they are buried in your assigned National Cemetery or state-funded Veterans Cemetery.

- ▶ If a person from our community served in the Korean War, died during the war, and was buried in a National Cemetery, are they eligible for this program?

No. This project is focused on Veterans who served their communities after the war.

- ▶ Can we profile a family or community member who is still living?

No, but this person could provide an oral history as part of the research for this project.

- ▶ Does NHD have any lists to help us get started?

Yes. We have been working this summer and have some people tentatively identified (note: these are tentative, you will need to confirm these details). We have linked these lists on Google Classroom. If you identify Silent Heroes that you do not select, please add their information to this list for future teams to consider.

**This guide was funded by a grant from the National Cemetery Administration, a component of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.**

## Learn More

To learn more about Silent Hero programs offered through National History Day visit [nhd.org](https://nhd.org) or email [programs@nhd.org](mailto:programs@nhd.org).

National History Day  
4511 Knox Road, Suite 205  
College Park, MD 20740  
301-314-9739  
[nhd.org](https://nhd.org)

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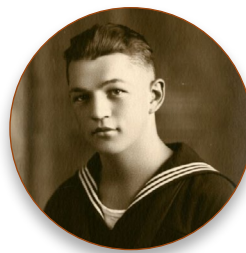
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# SILENT HEROES

National History Day® (NHD) is honored to help students and teachers across the nation to honor and tell the stories of American men and women who served their nation and lost their lives either in service to the United States of America or after living as Veterans. We seek to teach the historical research process through these biographical profiles. The stories contained on [NHDSilentHeroes.org](https://www.nhdsilentheroes.org) are gathered from NHD programs from 2012 to the present. To learn more about the program and discuss bringing it to your classroom, contact [programs@nhd.org](mailto:programs@nhd.org).



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