

# Pokin Around: Out-of-state security safeguards Confederate monument at Springfield cemetery

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(Photo: Steve Pokin/News-Leader)

A reader called Tuesday to tell me she has routinely walked the Springfield National Cemetery for 35 years and days ago for the first time was she stopped by someone in an unmarked car.

A man asked her intentions, she told me.

In turn, she asked him who his employer was. He told her he worked for an out-of-state security company.

It doesn't surprise me that there is added security at the cemetery.

In case you didn't know, there is a Confederate monument there, constructed in 1901, along with the graves of Confederate soldiers. Many of them died in the battle of Wilson's Creek on Aug. 10, 1861.

Union soldiers are buried nearby, as well as veterans from other wars.

Also in case you didn't know, states and cities across the nation have been removing Confederate monuments and, in a few cases, lawbreakers have taken them down.

These monuments, such as statues of Confederate General Robert E. Lee and [Roger B. Taney](#), the namesake of Taney County, have become flash points in a war between neo-Nazis and white supremacists and those opposed to neo-Nazis and white supremacists.



On the base of the Confederate Monument in the Springfield National Cemetery is the likeness of Confederate Major General Sterling Price. (Photo: Steve Pokin/News-Leader)

I drove to the well-kept, somber cemetery at Glenstone Avenue and Seminole Street. I put my press credential on a lanyard around my neck so it would be highly visible.

No one stopped me to ask my intentions. I saw no unmarked cars. No black helicopters.

But I did see a Greene County sheriff's deputy sitting in his squad car near the Confederate monument.

The monument has [a statue of an unknown Confederate soldier](#) on its top and the likeness of Confederate Major General Sterling Price on one side of its base. Price was the 11th governor of Missouri, a former slave state, from 1853-57.

On another side of the base is the likeness of a Confederate flag and the words: "They fought for the right of self government."

Of course, many Americans like me believe a more honest summary is that the Confederacy fought for a specific right — the right to own human beings as slaves, a barbarism that propped up the South's economy.

But I also believe that a cemetery honoring rank-and-file Confederate soldiers is an appropriate place for a Confederate monument. The one in Springfield should not be removed.

Now that I've upset everyone, let's get back to the Greene County sheriff's deputy.

He told me that he, indeed, was watching over the Confederate monument.

Sheriff Jim Arnott tells me the Greene County deputies working at the cemetery are off-duty and are paid by the cemetery, as in the federal government.

They have been working at the cemetery for about a week.

"They wanted deputies until they could arrange for other type of security," Arnott says.



**The Confederate monument in Springfield was built in 1901. The main figure is an unknown Confederate soldier. Lower on the base is the likeness of Confederate Major General Sterling Price. (Photo: Steve Pokin/News-Leader)**

Gary Edmondson, the cemetery's administrative officer, said an out-of-state security firm named the Whitestone Group has been contracted to provide security.

Edmondson said unpaid volunteers with a fondness for the Confederacy are not safeguarding the cemetery and have not been asked to safeguard the cemetery.

When I asked Edmondson how long the hired security would be there, he referred me to the bane of the journalist's existence — a spokesperson in Washington, D.C.

In this case, her name is Jessica Schiefer, public affairs officer with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration.

I called her and she politely asked me to send her my questions via email, which I promptly did.

I asked for the name of the security firm; where it's located; when the contract started; when it will end; how much the company is being paid; if the security guards are armed; and the purpose behind hiring security.

The only question she answered was the last one.

"In response to recent events, VA's National Cemetery Administration determined the need for additional security measures at certain facilities to ensure the safety of staff, property and visitors paying respect to those interred.

"VA has a responsibility to protect the federal property for which it's responsible, and we will continue to monitor and assess the situation going forward."



**A Greene County sheriff's deputy sits in his squad car as he provides security Tuesday for a Confederate monument at the Springfield National Cemetery at Seminole Street and National Avenue. (Photo: Steve Pokin/News-Leader)**

I googled Whitestone Group and found [The Whitestone Group](#) in Columbus, Ohio.

According to the company's website, "The Whitestone Group is a protective service provider with the industry expertise to deliver superior security solutions, vulnerability assessments and training.

"Whitestone's leadership is comprised of former law enforcement and military personnel with subject matter expertise in security management, training and anti-terrorism/force protection measures. Whitestone has an expansive experience base which includes contracts nationwide for high-profile, sensitive government facilities and critical infrastructures."

*These are the views of Steve Pokin, the News-Leader's columnist. Pokin has been at the paper 5½ years and over the course of his career has covered just about everything — from courts and cops to features and fitness. He can be reached at 836-1253, [spokin@gannett.com](mailto:spokin@gannett.com), on Twitter [@stevepokinNL](https://twitter.com/stevepokinNL) or by mail at 651 N. Boonville, Springfield, MO 65806.*

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