

Remarks of LTG (ret) Thomas G. Rhame to:

House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Natural Parks, Forest, and Public
Lands
May 22, 2019

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee on Natural Parks, Forest, and Public Lands. It is an honor for me to appear today to speak to you on the need to update and modify our First Division Monument.

My name is LTG Thomas G. Rhame and I had the honor to command the First Infantry Division from July of 1989 until July of 1991. During that time, I was very privileged to lead the Division during the very successful Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm war in Iraq and Kuwait. After retirement, I served for 10 years as the President of the Society of the First Division, and I currently serve as a Vice President of the society.

The First Division Monument is located in President's Park, west of the White House and South of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building at the corner of 17th Street and State Place N. W. The monument was conceived by the Society of the First Division to commemorate the lives of those member of the Division who were killed during WW I. The monument was dedicated on October 24th of 1924. The names of 5,516 First Division soldiers were placed at the base of the monument to commemorate their sacrifice to the Division and America.

On August 24th of 1957, West of the WW I column, the monument was modified to place the names of those First Division soldiers that were killed during WW II. A total of 4,325 names were added to the monument. These soldiers were killed at such places as North Africa, Sicily, Normandy, The Hurtgen Forest, The Siegfried Line, and countless other places as the Division fought to liberate Western Europe.

On August 20th of 1977, a mirror image of the WW II addition, was dedicated to add the names of those First Division soldiers that were killed during the Viet Nam War. This addition was placed East of the WW I column. The names of 3,079 soldiers were added to the monument.

On May 29, 1995, The Desert Storm Plaque was dedicated to commemorate the sacrifice of 29 soldiers killed during that war. The plaque was placed in the flower bed just East and adjacent to the WW I column.

The First Division has served our country proudly for over 100 years of continuous service. At present, a total of 12, 949 names of fallen soldiers are inscribed and commemorated on the monument. These fallen have followed our commitment and Division Motto of “No Mission too Difficult, No Sacrifice too Great, Duty First” as they fell on operations in combat of the Division.

It is time to update and add names to the monument. We need to add 439 names of soldiers of the Division who were killed during Operation Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn (Iraq) and the names of 192 soldiers killed during Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan). Additionally, we plan to place the names of the 29 soldiers from Desert Storm on identical plaques adjacent to the new names added for Iraq and Afghanistan. This will make the repairs to the Desert Storm addition and add symmetry to the monument. Adequate space is available for this redesign without expanding the current footprint of the memorial. Our goal is to complete a comprehensive design so that these and future additions can be undertaken in a consistent and respectful way.

HOK architects of Washington, D.C. is our architect. The cost for the design is most reasonable and has been discounted for the Society. HOK architects gave us several options to work with. The Society has decided on an option, and HOK will finalize the drawings as soon as the project is approved.

As in the past, the Society of the First Division, the veterans of the Division, have stepped up to bear the cost of adding the new names to the monument. Our veterans and friends of the division have been very generous with the donations needed to fund this upgrade to the monument. We have the resources to fund this project and are ready to proceed once approval is granted.

The members of the Society, the veterans of Division, and the First Infantry Division based at Ft. Riley, KS strongly support this project. We are committed to it's completion. We owe it to our recently fallen soldiers of the Division to have their names placed on the monument along side the others that were killed before them.

We strongly encourage this subcommittee to support the approval of HR 1088 First Infantry Recognition of Sacrifice in Theater Act (First Act). We cannot proceed forward without your support. We encourage you to permit us to add the names of these brave soldiers to the monument. We owe it to them to honor their service and sacrifice to the nation. Thank you for listening and thank you for what you do for America. I am prepared to answer any question the subcommittee members may have.