

WRITTEN STATEMENT
OF
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AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION
BEFORE
THE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON
DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Introduction

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee...

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the mission, operations and programs of the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC).

As has been my practice, I begin with a statement that serves as the foundational vision for all that we do:

Time will not dim the glory of their deeds

These words of our first chairman, General of the Armies John J. Pershing, speak eloquently to the Commission's purpose since its creation in 1923—to honor our Nation's fallen overseas, at sites entrusted to our care by the American people.

ABMC's core mission is commemoration – honoring service and sacrifice by maintaining magnificent shrines to our Nation's war dead and preserving their stories so that the glory of their deeds is not diminished by the passage of time.

We execute our mission by maintaining commemorative sites to an unparalleled standard of excellence, and by providing historical context for why our monuments and cemeteries were established, why those memorialized within them died, and the values for which they died.

Telling Their Story

Maintaining our monuments and cemeteries is our core mission and top priority. But we also have a responsibility to tell the stories of those we honor.

HONOLULU MEMORIAL

On November 11, 2012, during the Veterans Day Ceremony at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific – the Punchbowl – ABMC dedicated Vietnam Battle Maps that now complete the story told at our Honolulu Memorial. While the cemetery is maintained by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Honolulu Memorial is one of the 25 memorials that ABMC maintains worldwide.

When the memorial was built in the 1960s, it included Battle Maps and Courts of the Missing commemorating World War II in the Pacific and the Korean War. In the 1980's, while serving as the Administrator of the Veterans Administration, I asked ABMC to add Vietnam War Courts of the Missing to the memorial. ABMC honored this request, but battle maps commemorating the war were not part of that project.

That oversight is now corrected, and those Americans who served during the Vietnam War are appropriately honored at our most visited memorial. We believe this is the only memorial tribute to our Vietnam veterans paid for with Federal funds.

The message of the memorial is expressed in the haunting words of the poet Archibald MacLeish, words now inscribed on the outside stone face of the Vietnam Pavilion:

*We Leave You Our Deaths
Give Them Their Meaning*

The Vietnam Battle Maps are just part of the extensive restoration and renovation work completed and planned at the Honolulu Memorial. With 2010 and 2011 funding we added lifts to make all of the Courts of the Missing accessible, and additional renovation and repair was funded in 2012 and is planned for 2013.

VISITOR CENTER PROJECTS

In Europe, we have three visitor center projects under construction: at Cambridge American Cemetery in England, at Sicily-Rome American Cemetery in Italy, and at the Pointe du Hoc Ranger Monument in France. All will be completed this year, enhancing the visitor experience at these sites.

We recognize our responsibility to program our interpretive efforts to fiscal and visitation realities. None of these three sites have the visitation of Normandy American Cemetery, which receives one million visitors annually. But Pointe du Hoc receives nearly 500,000 visitors a year, benefiting from its proximity to Normandy; likewise, the proximity of Cambridge and Sicily-Rome to major tourism cities provides visitation growth potential that their new visitor centers can capture.

WEBSITE AND MOBILE APPS

Most of our cemeteries, however, receive far fewer visitors. To better tell their stories to a broader audience we have been turning to technology.

Our first mobile app—a tour of the Pointe du Hoc battlefield—was released in December; a web version should be launched later this month. Our long-term objective is to produce apps and virtual tours for all of our sites, so we can bring these national historic assets to life on our website and in our classrooms.

Our website is undergoing a complete redesign, with more robust educational resources planned. We expect to go live with the new website by Memorial Day.

Concurrently, we are working to form partnerships with the education community. Our objective is to develop curricula that matches content based on military campaigns to core standards used in our school systems – all in keeping with our foundational vision that “Time Will Not Dim the Glory of Their Deeds.” With the approaching Centennial of World War I, our initial focus will be on World War I curricula.

Pacific Memorials

Turning to the Pacific, there are several projects underway that deserve mention.

UN CEMETERY MEMORIAL IN KOREA

The only United Nations cemetery in the world is located in Pusan, Korea. Eleven countries have members of their armed forces interred at the cemetery, including the United States. Most of those nations have memorials in the cemetery honoring their armed forces—the U.S. does not. We are fixing that.

Last fall, the design of the new monument was approved. We will begin construction this spring and plan to dedicate the monument in July on the 60th Anniversary of the signing of the Korean War armistice. It will be a long overdue tribute to those Americans who fought and died during “the forgotten war,” built on land they helped defend.

THE PHILIPPINES

We have a long term plan to bring Manila American Cemetery and the Pacific Memorials up to ABMC standards. Master plans for the cemetery and four memorials are complete and under review. With fiscal year 2013 funding, we are addressing encroachment issues at the cemetery and renovating the Cabanatuan Memorial.

To protect the cemetery and address security concerns, the Commission is replacing the current chain link fence, which defines the border, with a robust perimeter wall. Unless marked by a substantial “permanent” wall, local culture ascribes a “temporary” definition to the boundary that will continue to subject our commemorative site to degradation by such intrusions as local highway projects, development, and squatters.

The memorial at the site of the Cabanatuan Prison Camp honors those who died during internment in the Second World War. The Commission accepted responsibility for its operation and maintenance in 1989. The renovation includes replacing and upgrading cladding materials, addressing deficiencies in the memorial text, and making site improvements.

WEST COAST MEMORIAL

The West Coast Memorial on the grounds of the Presidio overlooking the entrance to San Francisco Bay was erected in memory of those who died in the American coastal waters of the Pacific Ocean during World War II. A project to address *Americans with Disabilities Act* upgrades and landscaping improvements is underway and should be completed by Memorial Day.

Clark Cemetery

Public Law 112-260, the *Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012*, directs that ABMC restore, operate and maintain Clark Veterans Cemetery in the Philippines. As required by law, the U.S. Government is negotiating an agreement with the Philippine Government to allow ABMC to begin maintaining the cemetery.

If and when such an agreement is reached, we intend to use existing funds to—

- begin minimum maintenance with crew from our Manila cemetery, about an hour from Clark, and
- contract for a full assessment of the site to determine restoration and annual maintenance requirements.

The Congress authorized \$5 million for restoration and amounts necessary to operate and maintain the cemetery. However, we have no prior involvement at this cemetery, and are not able to estimate the true costs until we complete a comprehensive site assessment.

We again applaud the dedicated efforts of U.S. veterans in the Philippines who have been maintaining Clark cemetery for many years. The mission has now been assigned to ABMC. We will work toward executing that mission when an agreement allowing us to do so has been reached with the Philippine Government.

Sequestration

Under sequestration guidance, ABMC's budget authority of \$77.1 is subject to a 5 percent reduction - \$3.9 million - which would leave us with a budget authority of \$73.2 million.

The Commission's budget for fiscal year 2013 requested \$3.5 million less than fiscal year 2012 – from \$77.1 million to \$73.6 million. The Commission, beginning October 1, 2012, chose to operate at the \$73.6 million estimated funding level. The effect of this cautious approach to spending is that the actual operational impact of sequestration is \$400,000.

Our mission is to ensure that our commemorative cemeteries and memorials remain fitting shrines to those who have served our Nation. In meeting the requirements of sequestration, the Commission is not planning to furlough staff – staff that maintains our cemeteries to the highest standards that reflect this Nation's core values – staff that keeps our grass green and our headstones white.

The majority of reductions will come from areas with the least impact on cemetery operations.

Conclusion

The essence of the Commission's mission success does not change from year to year: keep the headstones white; keep the grass green; and tell the story of those we honor.

With the support of the Administration and the Congress, we will continue to ensure that the Commission's overseas shrines to American service and sacrifice remain unparalleled in their beauty, reflecting our Nation's willingness to sacrifice to protect our freedoms and the freedoms of others, and our Nation's commitment to honoring those who made that sacrifice on our behalf.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, as always I invite you to visit these inspirational sites during your overseas travels. You will never forget the experience.

Thank you for allowing me to present this summary of our mission, operations and programs.