

**RECORD VERSION**

**STATEMENT BY**

**MR. PATRICK K. HALLINAN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARMY NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERIES**

**BEFORE**

**THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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OF OUR NATIONAL CEMETERIES**

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Chairman Runyan, Ranking Member Titus and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on operations at Arlington National Cemetery and our efforts to sustain the sacred trust of our Veterans and Families. I'm honored and appreciate the opportunity to testify before this subcommittee today.

Since my testimony to this subcommittee a year ago, we continue to build upon our tremendous progress at Arlington National Cemetery. We are setting industry standards for best practices, becoming a center of excellence while working closely with our partner organizations that I testify with today. Over the past six months, while we have commemorated the rich history of the past 150 years since the first burial at Arlington National Cemetery, the team has identified and created industry-leading standards with auditable business practices and institutionalized them at Arlington. We have continued to improve the processes that have reduced the time for placement of headstones and niche covers from multiple months after a service to an average of 45 to 60 days. We have made additional improvements to our website and public facing applications design in order to enhance user experience and to provide interactive capabilities to the general public. We have updated our master plan to detail the strategy for repairing and replacing our aging infrastructure, and have two significant projects underway to increase burial capacity at Arlington and extend the active life of the Cemetery. Army National Military Cemeteries continues to refine their Organizational Inspection Program which will capture in Army policy the current standards and practices in place at Arlington. Our team is dedicated to improving the

Arlington experience for our visitors and perfecting our logistical and administrative best practices. We remain focused on our core mission – on behalf of the American people, lay to rest those who have served our Nation with dignity and honor, treating their Families with respect and compassion, and connecting guests to the rich tapestry of the Cemetery's living history, while maintaining these hallowed grounds befitting the sacrifice of all those who rest here. The pace of requests and burials at Arlington remains at an all-time high, and our workforce is meeting the challenge.

## **THE FOUNDATION OF EXCELLENCE IS IN PLACE**

### **Sustaining Accountability**

The Arlington National Cemetery team continues to refine and improve upon the foundation set by the 100% baseline accountability for all decedents interred at Arlington National Cemetery and Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery. Continual accountability process improvements and use of geospatial mapping technology allows cemetery personnel to certify each burial service conducted daily, using a duplicative verification of grave location and decedent remains. Additionally, we continue to digitally photograph every casket or urn that is interred or inurned, and digitally associate that image with the burial record in our authoritative and auditable system of record. Our current efforts include system and technology updates to enhance this process and automate the digitable photo transfer.

Continual accountability processes have allowed Arlington National Cemetery to reconcile and begin corrective actions for the 5,496 remaining administrative errors in headstone and niche cover commemorations. These include errors of fact impacting

the date of birth, date of death, spelling of names and the spouses of veterans not listed on headstones in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Updated system improvements allow for continual review of current interments, and have facilitated a review and validation of authorized grave reservations prior to 1962 for side-by-side interments. Additionally, a systematic validation of numerous available grave locations identified as previously obstructed by trees or utilities is currently underway. Arlington National Cemetery established a system that requires senior leaders to walk and review each section of the Cemetery two times per year to ensure proper care and maintenance.

The Arlington team conducted a baseline organizational self assessment in Spring 2014. This was followed by a validation, by the Army National Military Cemeteries in September 2014, of the baseline assessment in accordance with our Organizational Inspection Program. The staff at Arlington National Cemetery continues to use and improve our detailed Organization Inspection Program as well as the Standards and Measures Program to self-evaluate operations and performance measures at Arlington National Cemetery and the Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery. Arlington has instituted the process mechanics required to be a continually learning organization. Concurrently, with the completion of the initial inspection at Arlington National Cemetery, Army National Military Cemeteries' personnel began a systematic train, assist and inspect program across all 40 Army cemeteries, completing inspection of the United States Military Academy Cemetery at West Point and the Fort Knox Army Post Cemetery in Kentucky in September 2014. With additional personnel on-boarding to the Army National Military Cemeteries team, and an

aggressive inspection schedule, we should reach most, if not all, Army cemeteries in Fiscal Year 2016.

With our ongoing work the Organizational Inspection Program and updates to our authoritative regulations and policies, we also look to improve and expand our training programs. In April 2014, the staff of Army National Military Cemeteries established a training program for Army installation Cemetery Responsible Officials. This recurring training program, centered on Arlington National Cemetery's Standards and Measures Program, formed the backbone of an Army National Military Cemeteries-led training program for Cemetery Responsible Officials, and other personnel responsible for cemeteries that installation commanders desire to attend training. The training is conducted at Arlington National Cemetery, and provides authoritative training in best practices and standard procedures, complementing the information found in the Army Regulation (AR) 290-5 and Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 290-5. This in-person, on-the-ground training provides a clear picture of operational standards and norms for a national military cemetery. We established memorandums of agreements with the American Battle Monuments Commission and Department of Veterans' Affairs to share best practices and training opportunities. Arlington National Cemetery leaders meet on a regular basis with the leaders from the Department of Veterans' Affairs National Cemetery Administration and American Battle Monuments Commission. Furthering this cooperation, the American Battle Monuments Commission proactively assigned a liaison for the next three years to work alongside Arlington National Cemetery.

## **Interment Scheduling**

Interment scheduling remains a focus for improvement to provide Families an improved wait time. Demand for burial services at Arlington National Cemetery continues to increase. In Fiscal Year 2013, the staff scheduled 6,092 and conducted 5,823 committal services for Veterans and their loved ones. In Fiscal Year 2014, we scheduled 8,192 and conducted 7,163 committal services. This is a 15 % increase in services scheduled and a 19% increase in funeral services conducted. While offering inurnments on Saturday requiring no honor guard resources, wait times for scheduling services remain above preferred levels. As of November 10, 2014, Families awaiting burial for casketed remains wait less than two weeks from their first contact to schedule a funeral service. Those eligible and requesting the highest level of military funeral honors, in accordance with the Family's wishes, may wait several months for their service to occur. Families awaiting burial of cremated remains generally wait approximately 10 to 12 weeks to schedule a service during peak preferred burial months, but may wait up to six months for the highest level of military honors, if eligible. To reduce wait times, we have increased scheduling personnel, implemented an informational technology solution to more readily identify and offer the next available date in order to optimize resource utilization and availability. The auditable system of record requires supervisor review and approval of all funeral services, generates and then forwards all required confirmation documents upon approval to the primary next of kin. This process improvement ensures timely and accurate confirmation of the military funeral honors requested and a review of the headstone or niche cover template.

## **Government Headstones and Niche Covers**

Arlington National Cemetery continues to ensure quality and timely placement of government headstones and niche covers, electronically ordered from the Department of Veterans' Affairs contractor. Timely ordering ensures the primary next of kin or person authorized to direct disposition of the remains, is able to view the grave marker of their loved one using our public website and Arlington National Cemetery *Explorer* smart phone application. Our cemetery representatives continue to work with Families to finalize the headstone or niche cover prior to the interment using an automated headstone design tool to create a proposed headstone template. After the template is agreed upon, we wait a minimum of two weeks from the date of service to allow Families the opportunity to change terms of endearment or other items of personal preference on the headstone. Following this designed intentional wait time, our Interment Services Branch staff reviews, approves, and submits the order to the Department of Veterans' Affairs contractor. The average time from date of interment to setting of the stone remains constant at 45 days from the date of the actual interment, which is a significant improvement over the previous timeframe of 60 days to several months.

## **Technology at Arlington**

Arlington National Cemetery continues to refine the software for our Interment Services System to support cemetery administration and field operations. The system is our official system of record for burial information and is used for scheduling of interments, management and accountability of burial records, headstone ordering and

scheduling of resources associated with providing honors for each military branch of service. Over the last year we have refined process workflows into the scheduling system to increase our scheduling efficiency and accountability. Key improvements were made to headstone/niche cover documentation processes which automatically email the next of kin at key points in the scheduling process. These improvements have resulted in substantially reduced approval times versus the prior manual process.

Arlington National Cemetery continues to implement technology to streamline cemetery operations and improve our visitors' experience within this National Shrine. We have made improvements to Arlington's Interment Services System and our Geographic Information System (GIS) to manage day-to-day cemetery operations. We revamped our public facing applications to improve the visitors experience while they honor our Nation's heroes and explore the rich heritage of Arlington National Cemetery.

Arlington National Cemetery GIS mapping application, ANC Mapper, has made several key operational improvements within the past year. ANC Mapper is our system of record for grave location data that is designed to facilitate the assignment of burial locations, manage funeral procession routes, and generate excavation slips through Interment Services System web services. This past year we launched a Field Operations Dashboard capability allowing the staff to manage and track the operational status of each grave location (Scheduled, Open, Closed, And finalized). Supervisors now have the ability to track daily progress, and provide an automated method of assigning and reallocating field resources to maximize field crew resources. Audit logs were initiated to increase accountability to track the lifecycle of a location, and identify field crew personnel that completed each functional task. Other features such as

Cemetery Representative Call Signs, Active Duty and Group Burial indicators were added to the schedule panel to increase situational awareness and to round out the common operational picture.

Over two years ago, Arlington launched *ANC Explorer*, a web-based application that transformed how visitors explore the Cemetery. *ANC Explorer* allows Families and the public to locate gravesites, events or other points of interest throughout the Cemetery; to view and download photographs of the front-and-back of a headstone or monument; and receive walking directions to these locations. On May 22, 2014, we released version 2.0 of *ANC Explorer* that further enhanced the visitor experience at Arlington National Cemetery. The 2.0 release simplifies navigation, provides pertinent cemetery information, offers custom tour capabilities, and allows the staff to push emergency alert notifications to families and visitors inside of the Arlington National Cemetery's fence line. Most recently, we have added the search capability for mobile devices, allowing the general public to locate and explore the burial locations of Medal of Honor recipients buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Citing the "Congressional Medal of Honor Society", a user is presented with a brief description of the significance of the Medal of Honor, the citation explaining the prominent actions of the honoree while serving in the Armed Forces, and photographs of the front and back of their headstone. We are pleased to report that in two years, we have reached over 121,000 downloads an average of over 1.45 million decedent searches each month across *ANC Explorer* platforms.

On August 4, 2014, as part of Arlington National Cemetery's user experience based development methodology, we released the new website. The website is the main information portal for the Cemetery; users can find information on Veteran eligibility,

funeral planning, watch overview videos on what to expect throughout the funeral process, perform decedent searches, submit group requests for wreath laying ceremonies, and plan their visit to Arlington National Cemetery. The revamped website simplifies navigation, enhances information discoverability, provides custom alert functionality and maximizes compatibility with mobile devices. To keep information accurate, relevant, and current we deployed a content management system or CMS. The CMS functionality allows our Public Affairs Officer to update content to the website without reliance on contractors, or submitting help desk tickets which allows information to be disseminated within minutes instead of days or weeks.

### **Cemetery Expansion and Infrastructure**

The Army is committed to maintaining Arlington National Cemetery as the Nation's premier national shrine in perpetuity. We are also committed to keeping the cemetery active as long as possible to serve our Nation's Veterans and their Families. In line with those commitments, we continue to responsibly expand our capacity. After years of planning, in January of this year we broke ground on our Millennium Project to expand the cemetery to the North. With the support of the US Army Corps of Engineers - Norfolk District, this important project is currently within budget and on schedule to be completed in 2016, and will provide the Cemetery and the Nation an additional 27,282 burial opportunities.

Likewise, we continue planning for expansion of the Cemetery to the South. In July 2014, again through the US Army Corps of Engineers – Norfolk District, we hired an Architect and Engineering firm to begin formal planning and design efforts for our

intended “Southern Expansion.” This expansion will occur in the area formerly occupied by the Navy Annex. The Navy Annex is now demolished and the Army is negotiating the details of an appropriate transfer of land with Arlington County that will provide us the maximum contiguous burial space in this area. It will be a complicated project and requires close and continuous engagement with a myriad of interested stakeholders. In the final analysis, this project will appropriately honor and respect our Nation’s Veterans and ideally extend our first interment capacity out to the 2050’s.

The Cemetery staff also continues to make progress repairing and replacing much of our outdated utility infrastructure. We continue to replace the waterlines throughout the Cemetery and we have repaired or plan to repair many of the Cemetery’s roads in the next year. Tied to the repair of the roads is repair and update of our storm water drainage system to ensure that we are removing storm water in an efficient and environmentally appropriate manner.

We are also making great strides improving the infrastructure that supports our operational capabilities. Along this time of effort, the recently renovated public areas of our Welcome Center remain open while renovations on the visitor’s bathrooms and basement office space began in October 2014. Additionally, planning and design efforts are well underway for the establishment of an ossuary called the Tomb of Remembrance. This critical project will allow us to provide the Nation with a dignified place to provide final disposition of cremated remains which maybe comingled or unidentified. We are also focused on continuously improving the experience of each Family who arrives to inter their loved one. Redesigning and improving the manner in which we gather and escort our funeral processions is a critical goal for Fiscal Year

2015. A new Funeral Procession Queuing Area will make our funeral organization and lineup much more intuitive and easier to negotiate for the Veterans and Families we serve.

Lastly, but importantly, we recently completed an Americans with Disability Act accessibility study that will help us program and execute projects to ensure that our National Shrine is as accessible as possible to all those who wish to visit.

### **Section 60 Memorial Collection**

Engagements with Gold Star Families continued in April 2014 regarding the issues associated with cemetery maintenance and the Section 60 Mementos Pilot Program. As the Cemetery again entered the growing season this past spring and summer, when mowing of the grounds is more frequent, we continued to allow small photographs and small handcrafted items not affixed to the headstone to be left at gravesites. This effort was supported by Families and while items were removed when they became unsightly or disassociated with a particular grave site, Families continued to cooperate with the new policy.

Additionally, in accordance with the Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery recommendation to the Secretary of the Army, the items collected during the pilot program will be designated as a Memorial Collection. Arlington National Cemetery has begun management of items previously collected items of historical, artistic or intrinsic significance as we shift from collection phase at the end of hostilities in Afghanistan this winter. Between September 11, 2014 and November 7, 2014, the first

Memorial Collection exhibit was on display in the Welcome Center and the Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery.

### **Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery**

The Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery, a non-discretionary advisory committee Chaired by Former Senator Max Cleland, continues to provide strategic oversight and recommendations to the Secretary of the Army and Arlington National Cemetery. Current agenda items include monitoring of the Section 60 mementos memorial collection, review and assessment of the status of historic monument preservation, a review of actions associated with the recommendation to establish Arboretum designation at Arlington National Cemetery, as well as efforts to continue to enhance the visitor experience. Continued review and assessment of our expansion and maintenance projects has provided insightful and critical input to current actions underway.

The Committee now has eight of nine full members appointed and recently updated the committee Charter. Sergeant Major, United States Marine Corps Retired, Ronald Fetherson was appointed to the committee this summer. Additionally, currently we are working to ensure Gold Star Family member nominations to round out our subcommittees. We continue to assess possible candidates to nominate to this beneficial advisory role.

### **CONCLUSION**

Under the proactive support and leadership of the Secretary of the Army, through diligent efforts, adherence to established policies, repeatable processes, embedded technologies, and institutionalized standards, Arlington will sustain the sacred trust it

has reclaimed. In conjunction with the Military District of Washington and all our military service partners, the military service chaplains and the Arlington Ladies, along with the dedicated staff at Arlington National Cemetery can assure the Nation of this: Every burial service at Arlington National Cemetery will continue to be conducted with the honor and dignity our service members have earned, and their Families will be treated with respect and compassion.

We appreciate the support of the subcommittee and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.