

WRITTEN STATEMENT

BEFORE

THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

ON

**MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS,
AND RELATED AGENCIES**

BY

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SECRETARY

AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

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Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee...

On behalf of our Chairman David Urban and our Board of Commissioners, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before this Subcommittee. I appreciate very much this opportunity to share with you the mission and operations of the American Battle Monuments Commission, and to report on our progress since we last appeared before the Subcommittee in March 2015.

Our Fiscal Year 2020 budget request is for \$75.1 million, the same request level as Fiscal Year 2019. It is \$28.9 million less than our Fiscal Year 2019 appropriation. We are asking for a 22 FTE employment level increase, from 422 to 444. Details of the request will be released next week.

Since the establishment of the Commission in 1923, our purpose has not changed, but our focus has evolved, in keeping with the changing demographics of our constituencies. Our mission is and always has been to commemorate the service and sacrifice of United States armed forces. We do so by maintaining our commemorative sites to the highest of standards and by seeking new opportunities to preserve the stories and legacies of those we honor.

We execute that mission in part by creating memorials worldwide where U.S. forces have served. We dedicated our 30th memorial, in New Zealand, in December. We also administer 26 cemeteries worldwide, the most recent addition being the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial Cemetery outside Paris, France, which we assumed ownership of in January 2017.

These shrines to our war dead, and those that fought at their side, reflect the vision of our first Chairman, General of the Armies John J. Pershing, who promised that *“Time will not dim the glory of their deeds.”*

It is so easy to forget ... or take for granted ... those that came before us. For the past 96 years, General Pershing’s vision has inspired and guided our work. It has led us to rethink how we do our work. When our cemeteries were built, following the world wars, it wasn’t necessary to share stories of service and sacrifice ... the widows and orphans and parents of our war dead knew all too well those stories. They came to grieve, not to learn.

Not so today. While we still have opportunities to escort next of kin to a gravesite, those visits become fewer with each passing year. It is important, today, to recognize the importance of preserving and sharing the stories of service and sacrifice that our sites represent; to adapt to the changing expectations of visitation and visitor services; and to take steps now to ensure the relevance and legacy of our Nation’s war dead and veterans, long after the families of those we honor – and the generations that lived their history – are gone.

Since we last appeared before you in March 2015, the face of our agency has changed.

- We had 25 cemeteries then – we have 26 now.
- We had 26 monuments – today we have 30.

- We had opened 4 interpretive centers by 2015 – we have 7 open today, with 2 under construction and 2 more in development.
- We published a *World War I Battlefield Companion Book*, to guide visitors to significant battlefields, monuments and cemeteries in Europe.
- In partnership with the National Park Service, we published a collection of essays titled *World War I Remembered*, to document the events of the war and reflect on its importance.
- We are in final editing of a World War II volume titled *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe in World War II*, a companion to ABMC’s World War I book, published at the direction of General Pershing and authored in part by Major Dwight D. Eisenhower.

I am pleased to report that a \$5.0 million restoration of Clark Veterans Cemetery in the Philippines is complete. ABMC obtained the authority to maintain Clark Veterans Cemetery when a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of the Philippines was signed in December 2013. The accession of the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial Cemetery outside Paris, France, by the Commission has gone smoothly. After we partnered with the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial Foundation to restore this important memorial, using private funds, the Foundation deeded the memorial to ABMC to ensure its future care.

Our newest monuments are the Midway Monument, completed in 2015; the Dartmouth Monument and XI Amphibious Force Marker in Dartmouth, England, dedicated in 2017; and the New Zealand Memorial in Wellington, dedicated in 2018.

Since our last appearance here, we have opened new interpretive centers at the Flanders Field American Cemetery in Belgium; the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in France; and the Chateau-Thierry Monument, close by Aisne-Marne American Cemetery in France. We have new interpretive centers under construction at the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial Cemetery and at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines, and new interpretive centers are in development for the Netherlands American Cemetery and our Honolulu Memorial within the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific.

Our first interpretive center was opened at Normandy American Cemetery in 2007. Those exhibits are now 12 years old, so we have a complete refreshing to the exhibits in the building underway, which will be completed prior to this June’s 75th Anniversary commemoration of the D-Day invasion.

These interpretive centers are vital to reaching generations not personally connected to the war years, providing historical context for the visitor. But it is important to remember that they are not destinations unto themselves; the cemetery burial plots and Walls of the Missing remain the destination. We located the new interpretive center in Manila, for example, in the immediate vicinity of the central memorial, which contains the names of 36,000 missing, all surrounded by burial plots of 17,000 war dead, allowing the visitor to be immersed in the stories of those honored while standing in their midst — a powerful connection and visitor experience.

This year we will complete development of our World War II educational program, “Understanding Sacrifice.” More than 50 middle and high school teachers from across the country have participated in the program, creating lesson plans based on core learning standards in our schools. We previously completed a World War I program called “Bringing the Great War Home.” All of the lesson plans and individual profiles from this program are available online at www.ABMCeducation.org.

We remain grateful, as always, for the support of the Subcommittee in providing the financial resources needed to undertake these many initiatives.

The two-year temporary increase in our Reception and Representation Funds has been critical to our ability to host several major World War I Centennial events. These included events at St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne American Cemeteries, commemorating the largest U.S. battles fought during the war, and the dedication of our Chateau-Thierry Monument Interpretive Center on Memorial Day in May. The World War I commemorations culminated when ABMC hosted President Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo at Suresnes American Cemetery in November, on the 100th Anniversary of the Armistice that ended the First World War.

We now are turning our attention to World War II 75th Anniversary events scheduled this year:

- We marked the anniversary of the Anzio/Nettuno Landings in January at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery in Italy.
- The D-Day Landings commemoration will take place on June 6 at Normandy American Cemetery, an event expected to attract an audience in excess of 10,000.
- Commemoration of the Southern France landings is scheduled at Rhone American Cemetery in August.
- And the anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge will be remembered at events in Bastogne, Belgium and the Luxembourg American Cemetery in December.

Sadly, fewer and fewer World War II veterans are able to attend these commemorative events, to visit and pay respects to their comrades in arms. We expect fewer than 150 at Normandy; a compelling reminder of our responsibility to preserve and share their stories, through our on-site interpretive centers, virtually through Web-based educational materials, and through publication of narrative histories and guidebooks.

I also acknowledge with gratitude the \$28.9 million increase we received in our Fiscal Year 2019 Appropriation. We reported previously to you our plan for those funds. The increase will fund three high priority Commission initiatives—

- An interpretive center at the Honolulu Memorial, within the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. The increase provides the funds needed to complete this important project, which will tell the stories not only of those from three wars honored on the Memorial’s

Courts of the Missing – World War II, Korea, Vietnam – but also those interred within that iconic national cemetery. We hope to open this facility by 2023.

- An interpretive center in development at Netherlands American Cemetery, our second most visited site, with visitation exceeded only by Normandy. This facility is expected to be completed in 2021.
- Replacement of an outdated and inefficient irrigation system at Manila American Cemetery, our largest cemetery and only commemorative cemetery in the Pacific.

In conclusion, I want to assure you that we remain committed to maintaining the highest standard for our cemeteries and memorials; that is and will remain our core mission, for anything less falls short of appropriately honoring the sacrifice those sites represent. At the same time, we will continue to seek new avenues for providing inspirational and educational visitor experiences at each of our sites and online.

Chairwoman Wasserman, we look forward to opportunities to host you and other Members of the Subcommittee at our overseas sites, when you will have the opportunity to assess for yourselves our stewardship of the resources you provide. Those resources enable us to carry on our noble mission on behalf of the Administration, the Congress, the American people and, most importantly, those we honor, fulfilling General Pershing's promise that "Time will not dim the glory of their deeds."

Thank you.