



STATEMENT

of the

MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

POLICY POSITION

on

The FUTURE of ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

115th Congress

before the

MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE of the
U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE on ARMED SERVICES

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Presented by

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CHAIRMAN COFFMAN, RANKING MEMBER SPEIER, and other distinguished members of the Military Personnel Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, on behalf of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), I am grateful for the opportunity to present MOAA's position concerning the future of Arlington National Cemetery.

With finite years of capacity for new burials remaining at Arlington National Cemetery, it is important to maintain the dignity of burial at the cemetery, respect end-of-life plans for the currently eligible veteran population, and, if possible, take reasonable steps toward extending the life of the cemetery for future servicemembers.

MOAA commends the secretary of the Army, Dr. Mark Esper; congressional committees; the Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery (ACANC) members; and other cemetery officials for making significant efforts to include all stakeholders in the discussion about capacity concerns. Though not required, soliciting opinions from the military and veteran communities is greatly appreciated.

MOAA does not receive any grants or contracts from the federal government.

PRESERVING THE PROMISE AND DIGNITY OF ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY (ANC)

It is fitting the committee named today's hearing "Preserving the Promise." We believe that to be a common goal of all interested parties on this matter. To MOAA, preserving the promise of the cemetery is to resolve to allow those in the currently eligible population with expectations of interment or inurnment at those hallowed grounds to execute their end-of-life plans. No promise exists that the cemetery will remain open for new burials forever. Nor is there a promise that future servicemembers, even retirees, will have the option for burial there. While we may all wish for such longevity in burial opportunities, physical realities lead us to several conclusions about the future of ANC.

A formal, dignified setting exists at ANC, developed through many years of deliberate upkeep and through the virtue of those buried at the site. While many other cemeteries across the nation serve a similar purpose in honoring those who served, ANC has a special connotation. It is our desire to see such aura of reflection and remembrance preserved to the greatest extent possible.

The sacred history of ANC must not be tarnished by burial practices inconsistent with the current honors. Trends in burial preferences have changed in recent years; with more individuals preferring inurnment, the establishment of endless niche walls – though an option for maximizing burial opportunities – would detract from the aesthetics and aura of the grounds. Further, inurnment does not necessarily mean significantly less space is

consumed, as the ACANC has indicated a majority of inurnments are still in-ground burials. As burial preferences change, we expect ANC to accommodate those wishes within reason.

EXTENDING THE LIFE OF THE CEMETERY

Expansion

MOAA is pleased with the efforts to analyze contiguous parcels of land for potential expansion opportunities. Several parcels of land seem like logical and reasonable options for further investigation, namely properties adjacent to the cemetery owned by the National Park Service, Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, and the Department of Defense (DoD). Option 2B of the February 2017 ACANC report to Congress (Public Law 114-158) supports the transfer of additional adjacent federal lands to ANC. With every four acres of land adding roughly one year of life to the cemetery, this could realistically delay reaching capacity for another decade or more, which is an estimated one-third of the current lifespan.

Nonetheless, we recognize the fiscal and temporal limits of pursuing such an option. And, in the end, expansion to the available contiguous land would provide only marginal extension of the cemetery's lifespan in terms of new burials when looking out well into the future, which the ACANC has taken to mean more than 100 years.

Noncontiguous land acquisition and development merits further discussion and consideration as well. Locations such as Gettysburg, Pa., or Quantico, Va., easily could serve as dignified burial sites with the same degree of repute bestowed upon the original ANC. While such a cemetery admittedly would not possess the same feel as ANC proper at the outset, there is potential to develop such an aura over time. After all, the ANC we know today did not develop overnight. Option 2C of the February 2017 ACANC report to Congress (Public Law 114-158) suggests the establishment of a new DoD national cemetery at a new location. This could serve as the starting point for noncontiguous expansion.

As shown in the initial ACANC and MOAA survey results, there is no single dominant reason why individuals choose to be buried at ANC compared to other veteran cemeteries. This is significant because it illustrates the difficulty in creating an analogous cemetery option if Congress decides to restrict eligibility.

Other national cemeteries run by the Department of Veterans Affairs clearly satisfy the needs of a significant portion of the veteran population, and MOAA is pleased to see the continued development of those cemeteries as well. Yet these alternative resting places for retirees, veterans, and those killed in action do not necessarily hold the same

connotation as ANC, whether because of the rites and ceremonies performed at ANC or the special nature of the location. Thus, any acquisition of noncontiguous land would need a thorough rubric to come close to matching the aesthetic appeal and historical meaning of the original cemetery.

Expansion of the cemetery grounds, contiguously or not, is a viable path forward and is the preferred method of extending the life of ANC. While a costly and time-consuming undertaking, this clearly is preferable to significantly restricting eligibility, as indicated by MOAA members. There is urgency in deciding and acting on any option that will extend the life of the cemetery by means of adding land. With the current burial plots expected to run out in roughly two to three decades, the land acquisition and development process must begin in the very near future.

Eligibility Restrictions

MOAA does not oppose reserving a select number of gravesites for those who are killed in action or earn a particular award of high honor. However, the expectation and earned right to be laid to rest at ANC for the currently eligible population should not be exchanged for an active duty servicemember who dies from a noncombat-related incident 80 years in the future.

The ACANC's plan to carry out a second survey in spring of 2018 is of great interest to MOAA. The targeted survey will provide fantastic perspective on what a broad segment of the military and veteran community perceive to be an appropriate cut-off point, if any, in terms of eligibility.

MOAA believes that if the survey results show eligibility restrictions are desirable, there should at a minimum be a reinstatement of a reservation system for plots and columbarium spaces to allow those who already have made plans to have their wishes honored.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

MOAA's position on the future of ANC is informed by engagement with our membership on the issue. We conducted a survey of our membership in 2016 to better understand our members' preferences on the topics of restricting eligibility and the eventual unavailability of space for new burials.

The results provide good perspective on the difficulty policymakers have in deciding how to go forward. The variance in preferences underscores the divisiveness of the topic, particularly when it comes to eligibility.

The survey, summarized in the following graphic, provided data reflective of MOAA's position on how best to handle the future lack of new burial sites at ANC. Participants overwhelmingly rejected the idea of restricting military retirees, with the significant majority preferring expansion options as the initial course of action. Further, most participants favored continued current eligibility, at least in the near term, even if that means closing ANC to future burials once it reaches capacity.

Arlington National Cemetery

Congress is trying to decide what to do about Arlington National Cemetery's capacity dilemma, and MOAA asked for your opinion.

Over 6,800 people participated in MOAA's survey.

Arlington National Cemetery could reach capacity in 25 to 35 years under the current rules.



Should ANC procure additional land before making eligibility restrictions?



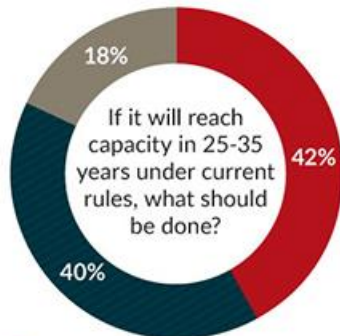
Are you comfortable with ANC closing to future burials when it becomes full?



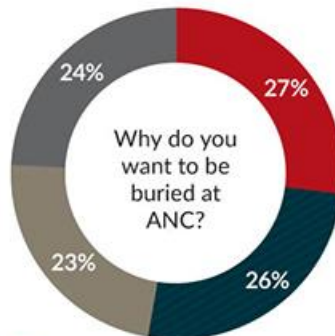
Do you plan to be buried at ANC?



There is no clear consensus on the future of ANC:



- Eligibility should stay the same
- Rules should change
- Undecided



- Military connection
- Special nature of the location
- Rites and ceremonies
- Other

Should ANC be restricted to active-duty deaths or MOH recipients only?



What if retirees remain eligible?



While the ACANC is tasked with exploring ways to extend the life of ANC well into the future, we believe there exists a certain level of comfort and understanding that, whether changes are made or not, space for new burials will run out at some point.

Although ACANC members made valuable and necessary evaluative forecasts about the life of the cemetery with different eligibility standards, there is reason to doubt any projection many decades into the future. To assume there will be no major escalating conflict in the next century, while we may wish it to be true, would disagree with our nation's military history. Further, the nature of warfare is likely to change over the duration of these projections. Therefore, we cannot summarily conclude that any particular option will guarantee an extension well into the future.

To best honor the promise of ANC, MOAA recommends:

- ***Congress not take action restricting eligibility for the military retiree population, other than reserving a set number of plots for specific honorees, such as those killed in action or those who receive a Medal of Honor;***
- ***Congress appropriate funds to undertake acquisition and development of adjacent land, including funding of the Southern Expansion project currently underway; and***
- ***Congress appropriate funds for the study and eventual acquisition of noncontiguous land to be used as an Arlington annex.***

CONCLUSION

MOAA appreciates the Subcommittee on Military Personnel for holding this hearing to examine the options for extending the promise and meaning of ANC. We are grateful for the full commitment to exploring all potential courses of action on this issue and eagerly await the advisory committee and secretary of the Army's final recommendation to Congress thereafter. Similarly, we look forward to seeing the results of a second survey, which will more clearly delineate burial eligibility preferences for a broad, interested population. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of our membership.