

OPENING 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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Introduction

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee...

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you to discuss the American Battle Monuments Commission's Fiscal Year 2011 Appropriation Request.

Honoring our Nation's fallen has been the focus of our Commission since its creation by Congress in 1923. Our purpose was eloquently stated in 1934 by the words of our first chairman, General of the Armies John J. Pershing, who wrote:

"...to relatives of soldier dead, and to every American citizen, I can give assurance that the United States Government has kept and will continue to maintain its trust in perpetuating the memory of the bravery and sacrifices of our World War heroes. Time will not dim the glory of their deeds."

The mission of the American Battle Monuments Commission—our purpose—is to honor the fallen by commemorating the service, achievements and sacrifice of America's armed forces.

This mission is as old as antiquity. In his history of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides quotes the Funeral Oration delivered by Pericles after the first battles of the war:

"For heroes have the whole earth as their tomb; and in lands far from their own, where the column with its epitaph declares it, there is enshrined in every breast a record unwritten with no tablet to preserve it, except that of the heart."

It is our responsibility to preserve for future generations the twenty-four cemeteries and twenty-five memorials, monuments, and markers we maintain around the world to honor America's war dead, missing in action, and those that fought at their side.

Appropriation Request

To execute this mission, our Fiscal Year 2011 request seeks \$64.2 million for our Salaries and Expenses Account and \$20.2 million for our Foreign Currency Fluctuation Account.

The funding we request for Salaries and Expenses supports Commission requirements for compensation and benefits; rent and utilities; maintenance, infrastructure, and capital improvements; contracting for services; procurement of supplies and materials; and replacement of equipment.

To support this level of effort our staffing requirement remains at 409 Full-Time Equivalent positions.

We estimate that we will need \$20.2 million to replenish our Foreign Currency Fluctuation Account.

The funds in this account defray losses resulting from changes in the value of foreign currencies against the U.S. Dollar, allowing us to maintain purchasing power in an uncertain financial environment—a critical factor when 70 percent of our annual appropriation is spent overseas using foreign currencies.

Two years ago, Congress wrote language into our appropriation for this account that reads "such sums as may be necessary."

We continue to be grateful for your leadership in providing this critical flexibility in how this account is managed. Be assured we also understand that "such sums" language does not lessen our stewardship responsibilities for the resources provided to us by the Administration and the Congress.

One of the public service ads produced for our World War II Memorial fund-raising campaign depicted a World War II helmet with a bullet hole through its side. The headline read, "Dying for freedom isn't the worst thing that can happen. Being forgotten is."

Future generations must never forget, nor fail to understand, the significance of what our fellow Americans have done for us and for others around the world.

We have a responsibility to continue the historical narrative for those who created it—to tell their stories at each of our overseas cemeteries. I would like to take a few minutes to highlight some of our current projects that will do just that.

Honolulu Memorial

On either side of the grand stairs leading to the top of the Honolulu Memorial are eight courts of the missing on which are inscribed the names of 18,096 American World War II missing from the Pacific, and 8,200 Americans missing from the Korean War.

At the top of the stairs is a chapel flanked by galleries containing mosaic maps and descriptions of the achievements of American armed forces in the Central and South Pacific regions of World War II and in Korea.

In the late 1970s, two half courts were constructed at the foot of the staircase that contain the names of 2,504 Americans missing from the Vietnam War. No battle maps for that war were added at the time, an oversight that must be corrected to properly balance our commemoration of the three wars.

Included in our appropriation request is \$3.5 million to construct two pavilions on the memorial plaza that will provide space for five Vietnam War battle maps and visitor orientation to the entire site. This is a one-time project cost.

Pointe du Hoc

At Pointe du Hoc, in France, we are well into exhibit design to complete the D-Day story begun at Normandy.

The emphasis will be on low-profile outdoor panels placed along a self-guided walking tour of the battleground, which appears much as it did when the Rangers captured the Pointe on June 6, 1944.

Concurrently, work to stop further erosion of the cliff and to preserve the observation bunker began this month.

We expect the site to open to the public in September 2010. This will be the first time since the year 2000 that the public will have access to the Ranger Monument and Observation Bunker.

The French government has been supportive of our efforts.

We hope you will mark your calendar to participate in a ribbon cutting ceremony on June 6, 2011, to commemorate these achievements. We would not be this close to preserving this iconic site, dedicated to American sacrifice and achievement, without your foresight and leadership.

Interpretive Program

The Commission reported to you in the past its intent to use the lessons learned in planning the Normandy Visitor Center to do a better job of telling the story of service and sacrifice at all of our overseas cemeteries. We are making progress on several fronts.

Architectural design work to renovate the visitor building at Cambridge American Cemetery in England has begun. And we soon will begin exhibit design at Cambridge, Sicily-Rome American Cemetery in Italy, and Oise-Aisne American Cemetery in France.

Within the next month, we also will begin development of several Web interactive programs based on military campaigns associated with those honored in our cemeteries.

Interactive programs on “The Normandy Campaign” and “The Battle of Pointe du Hoc” are available on our Web site today. We will add many more over the next several years.

The Commission does not aspire to become a national center of military history through these efforts—that is not our mission.

Our goal is to maintain the world's finest commemorative sites; and to provide our visitors, in person and online, the historical context for understanding why our overseas cemeteries were established, how and why those honored within them died, and the values and principles for which they died.

Reorganization

Finally, I wish to report on a new initiative to simplify, streamline and support our mission operations.

In July, I asked our senior staff in Washington, Paris and Rome to prepare a draft reorganization blueprint, which they did following an exhaustive bottom-up review of numerous proposals.

In October, I met with the senior staff and nine cemetery superintendents to review their recommendation, which I approved enthusiastically.

The organization is now streamlined into a Washington-based policy and support office and a Paris-based field operations center responsible for all overseas cemeteries and memorials.

This new structure will standardize operational responsibilities, improve supervision of our cemeteries, provide career growth opportunities for our superintendent staff worldwide, and move us meaningfully into the 21st century.

Conclusion

As always, we welcome and encourage your visits to our commemorative sites, to experience firsthand their inspirational nature.

When he dedicated the East Coast Memorial on the tip of Manhattan, President Kennedy said,

“...every generation of Americans must be expected in their time to do their part to maintain freedom for their country and freedom for those associated with it....there is no final victory, but rather all Americans must be always prepared to play their proper part in a difficult and dangerous world.”

We must promise that all of our warriors who fall in battle will not do so in anonymity, and that regardless of the outcome, their country will remember and honor their effort.

The poet Archibald MacLeish challenged us to do no less with these words,

“... We leave you our deaths: give them their meaning ...”

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This concludes my prepared statement. I will be pleased to respond to your questions.