

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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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee...

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. Since the Administration has not cleared me to discuss the detailed Fiscal Year 2010 Appropriation Request, I can only talk about the work that is ongoing within the Commission.

The Commission has served as guardian of America's overseas commemorative cemeteries and memorials since 1923. Our mission is 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 who fought at their side.

The FY 2009 appropriation of \$59.5 million for Salaries and Expenses allows us to execute our mission, and supports our 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 is 409 Full-Time Equivalent positions.

The FY 2009 appropriation of \$17.1 million into our Foreign Currency Fluctuation Account has brought that balance up sufficiently to defray losses resulting from changes in the value of foreign currencies against the U.S. Dollar, and allowing us to maintain purchasing power in an uncertain financial environment—a critical factor when eighty percent of our annual appropriation is spent overseas using foreign currency.

Last year you wrote language into our appropriation for this account that reads "such sums as may be necessary." We thank you for your visionary leadership in making this fundamental change in how this critical account is managed.

We have always taken our stewardship responsibilities seriously, and "such sums" language does not lessen that responsibility. It does, however, reduce the risk to our operations, ensuring access to the funding

we need, when we need it, to maintain buying power if the U.S. Dollar becomes weaker than originally estimated—for that we are grateful.

As you have seen on your visits, our overseas cemeteries and memorials are tangible representations of American values—of our nation’s willingness in two world wars to come to the defense of our own freedoms and the freedoms of others. These magnificent national treasures instill patriotism, evoke gratitude and teach important lessons of history to all who visit.

ABMC’s first chairman, General of the Armies John J. Pershing, promised that “Time will not dim the glory of their deeds.” To fulfill that vision, we have a responsibility beyond simply maintaining beautiful and inspirational commemorative sites—we also must perpetuate the stories of competence, courage and sacrifice that those we honor can no longer tell for themselves.

We reported to you last year on the opening of the Normandy Visitor Center. Following completion of that project, the Commission recognized that the war dead at Normandy are not the only American war dead buried overseas that deserve to have their stories told. In that spirit, we plan to adapt the interpretive techniques used so effectively at Normandy to our other visitor buildings around the world.

We do not intend to build new facilities like at Normandy. Instead, we will renovate existing visitor buildings to accommodate the types of exhibits and visitor services that have been so well received at Normandy. We recently conducted site surveys of five prototype cemeteries to help us determine how best to do this and where to start.

We are well into exhibit design for Pointe du Hoc, where the emphasis will be on low-profile panels placed along a self-guided walking tour of the battle ground, which appears much as it did when the Rangers captured the Pointe on June 6, 1944. Minimal displays and interactive programs will be placed in the small French-owned visitor building.

Concurrently, the Pointe du Hoc restoration project is advancing well. The French government made a public announcement of the project on March 3rd that emphasized support from the French and American governments. On April 15th, we submitted the required environmental

impact study and construction permit request to the French to begin the official permit process.

By French standards, this project is moving very quickly, and we continue to enjoy tremendous support from French officials. We will keep you and your staff apprised of our progress as we move forward.

In concert with these important initiatives, we continue to work to attract many more American and foreign visitors to personally experience these educational and inspirational commemorative sites.

As always, we welcome and encourage your visits, to see for yourselves the manner in which we use the resources you provide to us, and to experience firsthand the pride of living in a nation that so honors those whose service and sacrifice has kept us free.

I would like to close my remarks by introducing the members of my staff that accompanied me here today:

- 1) Brigadier General Bill Leszczynski, U.S. Army (Retired),
Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer;
- 2) Tom Sole, Director of Engineering and Maintenance;
- 3) Mike Conley, Director of Public Affairs;
- 4) Alan Gregory, Director of Finance; and,
- 5) Matthew Beck, Budget Officer.

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