

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

News Release

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Focus continues on accountability, state-of-the-art technology, and fiscal stewardship at Arlington National Cemetery

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Executive Director of the Army National Cemeteries Program testified today before the House Armed Services Joint Military Personnel and the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittees, along with the Department of the Army Inspector General, and the Government Accountability Office Director of Defense Capabilities and Management and Director of Acquisition and Sourcing Management regarding the progress that has been made at Arlington National Cemetery, as well as findings from requirements of Public Law 111-339.

Kathryn A. Condon, executive director, Army National Cemeteries Program, testified to the joint subcommittees regarding the standards and corrective actions that she and Patrick K. Hallinan, cemetery superintendent, instituted to address previous issues.

“There still are challenges at Arlington – but the Army and the entire cemetery staff are working daily to address those challenges and significant progress has been made – progress as a result of our concerted focus on establishing repeatable standards, measures, and operating procedures that emphasize safety, proficiency, professionalism and accountability,” said Condon.

In December 2011, in accordance with PL 111-339, the Secretary of the Army John McHugh released to Congress the results of a year-long effort to ensure accountability of gravesites and records at Arlington National Cemetery. The Gravesite Accountability effort resulted in the first-ever review, analysis and coordination of all Arlington records that included more than 147 years of varying records. The cemetery’s Gravesite Accountability Task Force physically examined and photographed 259,978 gravesites, niches and markers and cross-referenced each with all available records. At the time the report was submitted to Congress in December, the Task Force validated 195,748 cases.

“In just over six weeks, the Accountability Task Force reviewed and validated an additional 16,926 cases – bringing the total validated gravesites without any burial discrepancies in evidence to 212,674, which is 82 percent. We are working diligently to continue to close the remaining 18 percent of the cases to bring our efforts to completion,” said Condon.

The result of Arlington’s accountability effort will be the creation of a single, verifiable database that will serve as the foundation for several technology-related tools under development. The Army is currently testing an application that will enable the families and other stakeholders to locate gravesites in the cemetery, acquire directions to the gravesite, and view grave markers on their smartphones, or through the Arlington’s state-of-the-art website either at home or using the on-site kiosks.

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Arlington's new website will also be the platform for the new "Headstone Formatting" application that is currently being evaluated for release. This technology will enable families with Internet access to input their loved one's inscription on the headstone or niche cover on-line, for approval prior to the burial service, reducing the time spent on administrative matters the day of the service.

Another area of focus covered at the hearing was fiscal stewardship. As part of the new financial management controls and oversight process, Arlington National Cemetery's resource managers meticulously reviewed years of financial records and recovered funds that were sent to Department of Defense agencies that support the cemetery. To date, Arlington National Cemetery recovered \$26.7 million from prior fiscal years that was obligated but not disbursed. The recovered funds were used to fully fund the construction of the ninth Columbarium Court, as well as maintenance and repair backlogs.

"Practicing sound fiscal stewardship and displaying transparency in cemetery operations is paramount in our effort to restore the faith, trust and honor our veterans and their families so rightfully deserve," said Condon. "You have my commitment that we will continue to examine our prior year financial records to see if more dollars can be recovered," she said.

Among the national cemeteries in the United States, Arlington National Cemetery is unique. It is the only national cemetery that routinely holds graveside services and provides full military honors for eligible veterans. It is a national military shrine, hosting 4 million visitors annually, as well as ceremonial functions involving foreign heads of state and other dignitaries. As the second largest cemetery in the country, Arlington National Cemetery oversees approximately 27-30 funeral services per day, five days a week. To better serve the needs of families, Arlington recently began supporting services on Saturdays for which military honors are not required or requested.

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