



Written Testimony
of
The National Association for Uniformed Services (NAUS)
prepared for the Senate Committee on
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight
Submitted by Rick Jones, NAUS Legislative Director

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Room 342, Dirksen Senate Office Building

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Chairman McCaskill, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Subcommittee:

The National Association for Uniformed Services (NAUS) is pleased to submit written testimony to the Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight on the mismanagement of contracts at Arlington National Cemetery and related matters.

As you know, the National Association for Uniformed Services, founded in 1968, represents all ranks, branches and components of uniformed services personnel, their spouses and survivors. The Association includes personnel of the active, retired, Reserve and National Guard, disabled veterans, veterans community and their families. We love our country and our flag, believe in a strong national defense, support our troops and honor their service.

For the record, NAUS has not received any federal grant or contract during the current fiscal year or during the previous two fiscal years in relation to any of the subjects related to this statement.

Arlington National Cemetery

Madam Chairman, Arlington National Cemetery is hallowed ground and a very important symbol to our Nation, our military families and our friends and allies around the world. From the Memorial Entrance at the gates of Memorial Bridge to the Tomb of the Unknowns, simple white headstones outline the rolling hills across the Potomac and define the final resting home of America's fallen heroes.

Arlington National Cemetery not only honors the past service of the men and women of our Armed Forces, these sacred grounds continue to serve as an active burial place for today's military men and women.

While the administration of this historic place is the responsibility of the U.S. Army, Arlington belongs to the American people. It is indeed a national treasure.

U.S. Army Inspector General Report

The recent findings of mismanagement raise serious questions about the competency of Arlington's administration and has caused great discomfort to our members, their families and patriotic Americans across the country. The release of the Inspector General's report citing the problems and failures in the cemetery is emotional and upsetting.

It is hard on families and friends to read reports about unmarked gravesites, improper handling of cremated remains and problems in day-to-day management and operation of this national shrine.

Last November, Secretary of the Army John McHugh directed the Army Inspector General to examine alleged improprieties at Arlington National Cemetery. The release of the completed report was posted online in June and revealed shocking mistakes in the operation and administration of the cemetery.

According to the Inspector General's report, mistakes included the loss of accountability of remains, remains found in gravesites believed unoccupied, unmarked gravesites, discrepancies in burial documentation, improperly marked gravesites, improper handling of cremated remains and failure to notify next-of-kin about changes in gravesites.

The investigation substantiated persistent failures by the administration of the cemetery to establish corrective action or to take any positive, timely action on matters of unmarked graves.

In one troubling instance, a family member reported to the cemetery that there was no headstone or marker on his loved one's gravesite. He received a letter saying that a headstone had been ordered but on returning a year later, there was still no headstone. When he called, he was told the matter would be attended to and to expect a return call on the issue. Another year passed with no response. Evidence established that the grave went unmarked for more than seven years from 2002 until the placement of a headstone around January 2010.

In another emotional case, the wife of the interred visited her husband's gravesite only to find the headstone marked by the name of another decedent. The IG examination showed that, again, no action was taken to either determine what caused the double burial or to prevent the occurrence of a similar situation. In further mismanagement, the cemetery failed to notify the next of kin when the double interment was corrected.

In another part of the IG report, the Inspector General investigation reveals that an examination of three sections of the cemetery found more than 211 gravesites unmarked. The report finds 117 gravesites with remains, but with no headstone. In addition, it finds 94 improperly marked with headstones but not occupied. There have been more than 330,000 individuals buried since the Civil War with more than 100,000 interred since 1990.

Army Inspector General Reports Failed Contract

In a deeply disturbing report, the Army Inspector General reveals repeated failures from 2003 to 2010 in contracts aimed to establish reliable programs to computerize Arlington burial records. The IG report discloses that despite seven years of multiple contracts, Arlington still prepares and maintains manual records.

In an early effort to digitize burial records, Arlington paid a contractor in 2004 at least \$800,000 for work that resulted in the delivery of approximately 60 CDs that contained scanned files of hand-written documents. The IG reports that the records were not presented in a standardized format, were not put into a database and six years later, the IG reports that the CDs "had neither been used nor implemented as part of any ANC function."

Though ANC let numerous IT contracts, there was a systemic disregard for preparing technical requirements to the contractors or for the involvement of key personnel in the development of the systems. NAUS is informed that more than \$5.5 million was spent over the past seven years in unsuccessful contracts to computerize burial records.

NAUS supports Appropriate IT Plan to Automate Operations

It is past time that Arlington National Cemetery update procedures and use Informational Technology (IT) to support and maintain administrative systems. There is a clear need to establish appropriate burial processes, to upgrade Arlington's systems' infrastructure and to hire the right people needed to operate them.

While the National Association for Uniformed Services does not, repeat, not recommend transferring management responsibility to another department, we do recommend that the Army confer and collaborate with officials at the Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration (NCA). The NCA has been using a computerized system to manage interment records for many years. Since 2004, one of the NCA systems, the Nationwide Gravesite Locator, available online, contains more than 3 million records of veterans and dependents buried in VA's more than 120 cemeteries. A great deal can be learned in the various contracts that developed VA systems, if the bureaucratic stovepipes that serve to separate inter-departmental information sharing are effectively removed.

The National Association for Uniformed Services also appreciates Secretary McHugh's leadership to establish of a call center to immediately address family member concerns regarding burial discrepancies at the cemetery. The phone number is (703) 607-8199 and is presently available from 8 a.m. until 9 p.m.

NAUS also wishes to recognize the dedicated staff that remain devoted to their mission and to keeping Arlington maintained as one of the most sacred grounds on earth. During this time, funeral operations continued and the workload increased as World War II and Korean veterans were buried and casualties from Iraq and Afghanistan were received with dignity and respect.

Appreciation to Present Written Testimony

Madam Chairman, The National Association for Uniformed Services appreciates the Subcommittee's hard work to look into these troubling matters. We ask that you continue to work in good faith to strengthen the programs at Arlington National Cemetery. Your attention to the details on how this system expended and justified payments to contracts deserves close inspection.

We must not allow the whole system at ANC to remain untended. Secretary McHugh and various congressional committees are working toward responsible action, which we fully support. These matters cannot be allowed to melt down or to grow in size, amplified to a point where they may run beyond corrective response.

As you conduct your review, the National Association for Uniformed Services is committed to work with you and your colleagues. We look forward to help straighten out the activities at the cemetery and to restore the integrity of the system damaged by these operational mistakes.

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