

STATEMENT OF JOHN C. METZLER, JR.
TO THE
SENATE AD HOC SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONTRACTING OVERSIGHT
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

JULY 29, 2010

- As the Committee is well aware, I was Superintendent of Arlington Cemetery over the last 19 years. Prior to Arlington, I had 17 years of cemetery service with the VA.
- I also had 6 years of earlier Government service, including my active duty in the Army, with one tour in Vietnam as a helicopter crew chief with the 1st Aviation Brigade.
- Over my 42 years of service to the Nation, my respect, admiration and gratitude for our men and women in uniform and their families has only increased. And I hold them in the highest regard.
- Personally, it is very painful for me that our team at Arlington did not perform all aspects of its mission to the high standard required.
- I was the senior government official in charge, and I accept full responsibility for all my actions and for all of my team's actions. And I want to express my sincere regrets to any family for whom these failures may have caused pain.
- As you evaluate these issues, it is important to fully appreciate that the complexity and breadth of operations at Arlington National Cemetery are unique and extraordinary. This complexity and breadth only increased during my tenure.
- Of the more than 330,000 burials at Arlington, which have taken place over the 146 years of its history, over 110,000 took place during the last nineteen years. There are only 2 or 3 large private or Department of Veterans Affairs' cemeteries in the world that have the complexity and a comparable volume of burials – approximately 6000 to 7000 per year.
- None of those cemeteries, however, require the attendant ceremonial coordination and support that is routine at Arlington. None of those cemeteries have 3,000 non-burial ceremonies per year that occur regularly at Arlington. None have burial records which go back over 100 years. Finally, none have over 4 million tourist visitors per year.

- Activity at this level and of this sensitivity and importance. And it requires constant and exceptional attention and action. There are no timeouts or do-over's. Funeral ceremonies continue in virtually all circumstances.
- We conducted burial services at the Cemetery on 9/11 and the day after. During this year's record-breaking snowstorm, and with the Federal Government closed for 4 days, ANC continued with its burials as scheduled.
- It is undisputed that the overwhelming majority of funerals at Arlington have been conducted successfully, without error, and to the complete satisfaction of the families who grieve the loss of their loved ones.
- I do not highlight this point to excuse any possible findings that may have occurred. I understand that burial service at the cemetery must be as close to "zero defect as possible" every time. I understand completely that each burial is a sacred event for the families involved.
- An enormous amount of good has been accomplished in the tens of thousands of instances where all was done right.
- I know the Army is working hard to correct the IG findings at Arlington and to improve its operations. The task is a significant challenge in an environment of diminished staffing and resources.
- During the last 19 years, we did not receive all the funding we needed. And the dedicated staffing at the Cemetery was reduced about 35% - - from 145 to 95 federal civilian employees. And of these 95, only 35 persons performed administrative tasks.
- Those staffing losses were to be offset by increased opportunities for outsourcing to private contractors. As experience has shown, however, that approach does not always result in the most effective or efficient solution.
- There is no substitute for having dedicated staff in areas of particular importance – such as government contracting and information technology – which we did not have during my tenure.
- Future issues can be minimized and eliminated with both the funding and the staffing required to do this important work. In any event, I know the Army is committed to doing whatever it takes to make things right now and in the future.
- As difficult as it is for me to conclude my lengthy federal service under the current circumstances, I will always value the opportunity I have had to be the Superintendent of Arlington Cemetery.

I am prepared to answer any questions you may have as best I can.