

March 16, 2011

The Honorable Richard Burr
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Burr:

I recently read about the "Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day" Resolution that you introduced in the Senate. As a former 33 year veteran of the US Navy, I wanted to personally say thank you. As the Ranking Member on the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, I also wanted to ask for your support on another very important issue affecting some 2,300 abandoned, forgotten and forsaken veterans and their families who have served in every conflict since the Spanish American War - - restoration of the Clark Veterans Cemetery located in Pampanga, Philippines at the former US Air Force base previously known as Clark Field.

The Clark Veterans Cemetery was historically budgeted, maintained and administered by the US Air Force from 1947 to 1991 when the US Government closed the bases in the Philippines. At the time of the base closure negotiations between the US and the Philippines, perpetual management and care of the cemetery fell through the cracks. Due to lack of proper resources the cemetery quickly fell into a state of dishonorable disarray. In 1994, after observing the terrible condition of the cemetery, the local VFW Post took it upon themselves to clean it up and administer it. They do this solely through voluntary contributions and efforts as it receives no US Government or Philippine government funding. I also would like to point out that this is an active Veterans cemetery with 3-4 burials per month being administered and conducted by VFW Post 2485.

Since January 1st of this year, the VFW has buried seven veterans and one Filipino Scout (Filipino Scouts served on active duty in the US Army), including Sergeant Major Frederick Edward Smith, a highly decorated Vietnam War veteran who was interred in January. Sergeant Major Smith's two daughters and brother flew in from the US for the services. A copy of his obituary along with several other testimonials have been attached to this correspondence, including a profile in courage that was written about S/SGT Clarence Gaspar Jr. who served in WWII as a highly decorated Tail Gunner during WWII.

This cemetery was formed after WWII when some 5,000 remains, headstones and markers were moved from other Philippine military cemeteries, including the Fort Stotsenburg, Fort McKinley in Manila and the Sangley Point Naval cemeteries to the cemetery at Clark Field. While records are lost on many, there are some 2,300 known veterans from all services who served in the Spanish-American War, WWI, WWII, Korean War, Vietnam War and Iraq War. This includes some 640 Filipino scouts who served on active duty in the US Army. Additionally there are many more dependents of these veterans and scouts buried there. It is a travesty that the US Government has abandoned and forgotten these veterans and their families.

My company, Peregrine Management Corporation, an American company performing work at Clark and comprised primarily of veterans, have joined forces with VFW Post 2485 to try to improve the status and physical condition of the cemetery. Just this year, we were able to donate and construct a new perimeter fence, to replace the one that was rusting with over half of it pilfered by vandals for scrap metal, and an expanded parking area and provide 24x7 security to reduce the effect of vandalism. We also created a not for profit organization to help increase

public awareness and to seek the necessary change in legislation and regulations such that the US Government rightfully assumes responsibility for its perpetual maintenance and administration. The not for profit organization is the Clark Veterans Cemetery Restoration Association (CVCRA). We have a very informative and interactive web site at www.cvcra.org that has a wealth of history and background including a searchable data base of the veterans interred there.

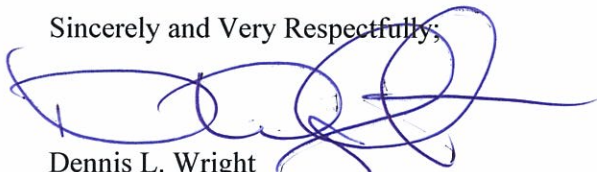
While these efforts are commendable, the real solution for the cemetery is to be managed by either the US American Battle Monument Commission (ABMC) which maintains the US cemetery in Manila and the Cabanatuan memorial just north of Clark or the Department of Veterans Affairs. Both entities have been reluctant to accept any responsibility for the cemetery due to increase in responsibility with no increase in budget, although any budget impact would be quite minimal, considering that the cemetery today is totally maintained and administered through voluntary donations and VFW volunteers.

There often are other excuses. ABMC state they do not manage active cemeteries or on foreign soil, but upon closer look at their own web site, you will see they do manage and administer cemeteries in Mexico and Panama, and Panama is still in use and most analogous to Clark. The VA state they do not manage cemeteries outside the US. While various agencies may all claim self serving rationale for not accepting responsibility, it is not fair to those veterans and their families, who for the sake of an oversight in the base closure negotiations, have been abandoned by the government they served. On behalf of these 2,300 forgotten and abandoned veterans, I am personally asking for your support and help to correct a wrong. Just as our war fighters will "Leave No One Behind", so too do we have an obligation to **"Let No Veteran Be Forgotten"**!

I know you are actively searching for budget cuts, and no one wants to see budgetary increases. In this particular case, the amount is insignificant, certainly less than \$100,000 a year in annual maintenance and administration costs, which is not measurable in the national debt debates, and we certainly should not be trying to balance the budget on the backs of our deceased comrades in arms, so I am asking for your help in sponsoring the necessary legislation to right this wrong.

One of our members of CVCRA is former Navy Captain Ike Puzon. Ike is the Director of Government Affairs/Legislation for the Association of the United States Navy and located in Washington DC. I have asked Ike to stop by and brief your staff on this matter.

Sincerely and Very Respectfully;



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cc: Captain Ike Puzon, USN (Retired)