

January 24, 2012

**Testimony of Edwin L. Fountain
Director, World War I Memorial Foundation**

on H.R. 938

**Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
of the**

House Committee on Natural Resources

Chairman Bishop and members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Edwin Fountain. I am an attorney in private practice here in Washington, and the grandson of two World War I veterans. I am a co-founder and director of the World War I Memorial Foundation. I am pleased to appear today to testify in support of H.R. 938, the "Frank Buckles World War I Memorial Act."

Until he passed away last year at the age of 110, Mr. Buckles was the last surviving American veteran of World War I. The Foundation was proud to have Mr. Buckles serve as its honorary chairman.

In 2008, Mr. Buckles came to Washington for a ceremony in his honor at the Pentagon. During that trip he visited the District of Columbia War Memorial, located on the Mall between the World War II and Korean War memorials. He was distressed to see that it was only a memorial to the veterans of D.C., and not a national memorial.

Throughout our country's history, towns and cities have erected their own war memorials, be they to local veterans of the Civil War, or of World War I, or of all the nation's wars collectively. In Washington, there are of course numerous memorials to generals and statesmen of the Revolution and the Civil War. But until the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated thirty years ago, there were no national war memorials.

Today we have on the Mall national memorials to three of the four great wars of the 20th century, located in what has become a de facto "war memorial park" around the Lincoln Reflecting Pool.

There is, however, no national memorial to World War I. With the irony of hindsight, that war was at first called "the war to end all wars." In retrospect, we now know that "the Great War" was but the first time that American soldiers would go overseas in defense of liberty against foreign aggression. Over 4.7 million Americans

served in uniform, and 116,516 gave their lives -- more than in Korea and Vietnam combined.

World War I was also the first great conflict of what has come to be known as “the American century.” It led directly to the Second World War, and its consequences are still felt today in ongoing conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Israel and Palestine, and Iraq.

Few Americans today know this history, and the absence of a national memorial to World War I on the Mall in Washington has become a glaring omission, all the more so because the centennial of the war is less than three years away.

H.R. 938 would fill that void, by authorizing the re-dedication of the District of Columbia War Memorial as a “National and District of Columbia World War I Memorial.”

The D.C. War Memorial was dedicated in 1931 as a memorial to the 499 residents of the District who died in the war. President Hoover spoke at its dedication, and John Philip Sousa conducted the Marine Corps band. It stood alone for fifty years, until it was joined by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and then later by the Korean War and World War II memorials.

As indicated on the attached map, together with those three other memorials, it comprises a quartet of memorials to the major wars of the 20th century. Yet alone among those memorials, it lacks national status. Few residents or visitors are even aware of the memorial, much less know what it is. Most maps and signs do not even refer to the memorial.

H.R. 938 would authorize its re-dedication as a national memorial, and thereby give honor to the veterans of World War I that is equal to that bestowed on the veterans of the other major wars, while helping future generations of Americans to know the complete history of American’s 20th-century struggle against aggression and totalitarianism.

Re-dedication of the D.C. memorial would not be contrary to the Commemorative Works Act. That Act prohibits the location of any new commemorative works on the Mall. However, H.R. 938 does not authorize a new commemorative work, but rather the re-dedication and enhancement of a memorial that already exists on the Mall.

Moreover, the local character of the existing memorial would be preserved. While Section 10(b)(3) of the proposed bill permits the addition of an appropriate sculptural or other commemorative element, in order to give the memorial a national character, it also specifies that any such feature shall “complement and preserve” the existing memorial and its landscape. In this way the sacrifice of District residents in the war will continue to be honored, and the peaceful and secluded character of the site will be preserved.

We emphasize that H.R. 938 is not meant to somehow “federalize” the District’s memorial. Rather, it will bring attention to the memorial by elevating it to the same status enjoyed by the surrounding war memorials. At the same time, the memorial will provide visitors a lesson in the history of our memorials, while calling their attention to their own memorials back home.

The Foundation also supports the designation of the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City as a national World War I memorial. While it may be unconventional to have two national memorials, there is no reason why there cannot be two, and there is every reason to commemorate a profound national event such as World War I more widely, rather than less.

Finally, the Foundation supports the provisions in H.R. 938 to establish a World War I centennial commission.

Twenty-five million people, from around the country and across the world, visit the Mall each year. As we have heard from thousands of students, veterans and citizens around the country who support our cause, those visitors expect to honor the nation’s veterans in the nation’s capital -- as evidenced by the location of the other great war memorials in Washington.

Congress would be minimizing the sacrifice of Frank Buckles and almost five million other Americans in World War I, including 116,000 dead, if it did not honor them on the Mall in the same manner as the veterans of the wars that followed.

We ask the House to pass H.R. 938. On behalf of the Frank Buckles family and the Foundation, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Respectfully submitted,

Edwin L. Fountain
Director, World War I Memorial Foundation
(202) 879-7645
info@wwimemorial.org
www.wwimemorial.org



Ellipse

White House Visitor Center
National Aquarium
Department of Commerce
Future National Museum of African American History and Culture

Future Vietnam Veterans Memorial Center

VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

CONSTITUTION GARDENS

WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL

WASHINGTON MONUMENT

KOREAN WAR VETERANS MEMORIAL

DC WAR MEMORIAL

U.S. PARK POLICE STABLES

Future Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial

Tidal Basin

U.S.D.A. Forest Service
U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL

THOMAS JEFFERSON MEMORIAL

National Mall and Memorial Parks Headquarters

GEORGE MASON MEMORIAL

395

395