

14 July 2017

**Testimony for:**

**The House Natural Resources Committee,  
Federal Lands Subcommittee,  
H.R. 873 (Rep. Mike Gallagher), "Global War on Terrorism War Memorial Act"**

**Written Testimony of:**

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On behalf of the Global War on Terror Memorial Foundation, and the more than 20 national Veteran Service Organizations that have endorsed this bill, I want to thank you for accommodating a hearing amidst a very busy legislative schedule. I serve as the Executive Director of the nonprofit leading these efforts, and while I have a deep passion for this memorial becoming a reality, I am not unlike the nearly 3 million Americans who served abroad in support of this war over the last 16 years of sustained combat.

I do not claim to be an expert in the academic fields of history or sociology, but I do consider myself a student of both when it comes to Memorials, and I will rely on them today as I humbly request your support of this bill and its swift movement out of committee and onto the House floor.

One of the most common questions I receive from office staffers, committee staffers, and Members themselves revolve around the question of "How do we memorialize a war with no end in sight?" The common push back is that there exists no precedent in American history for starting work on a memorial when a war is still ongoing. However, that is not the case if I may bring your attention to the National Civil War Monument, known as Battle Monument, as a prime example. While Battle Monument clearly predates the process provided by the 1986 Commemorative Works Act, its foundation began in 1863 in the midst of the Civil War, when a young West Point Lieutenant, H. C. Hasbrouck, devised an idea for a memorial to honor the men who had died fighting alongside him in battle. The men serving in the Regular Army wanted so much to honor their brothers lost thus far in the war, that they raised the money for the memorial in one single month by way of a scaled rate based on rank; \$24 for a Major General down to \$1 for each enlisted man.

The curious, and somewhat ironic part of this historic vignette is that despite the memorial being entirely funded by the men themselves during the war, the monument ended up not being built and dedicated until May of 1897 at West Point,

32 years after the war ended. The reason: political and bureaucratic infighting. Many of the Veterans who attended the 1897 ceremony were infirmed and greatly advanced in years at its dedication, not unlike the situation we witnessed and continue to witness with our National World War II Memorial.

The second very recent vignette resides with our closest ally in the Global War on Terrorism; Great Britain. Their own SAS Operators earlier this month engaged ISIS fighters in hand-to-hand combat after being almost overrun during an ambush during intense fighting in Mosul, Iraq. This event occurred nearly four months after Great Britain dedicated a memorial for our ongoing war. Great Britain did not just approve a memorial, and they did not start work on a process to eventually build a memorial; as a nation they collectively recognized the need and benefits that come from memorializing the service and sacrifice of their citizens and soldiers, and they went ahead and dedicated it.

This event was attended by the Queen, the Royal Family, many Veterans and family members of their fallen. Lord Stirrup who served as Chief of Defence Staff from 2006-2010 said the following at the dedication:

"Literally hundreds of thousands of British military personnel and UK civilian citizens served this country in all sorts of various ways in support of those campaigns and we felt that it was extremely important that the way they had conducted themselves, carried out their duties and the service they had given to the nation was honoured and commemorated. So the memorial is exactly that, it's to commemorate duty and service, it's not about the campaigns themselves per se, it's about those principles which are important in any civilised society and have always been an integral part of who and what we regard ourselves to be as a nation."

As a student of history, I inherently know and understand the unquantifiable value that the Vietnam Wall brought to a generation of Veterans that were not welcomed home with ticker tape parades. Their memorial served as a validation of their service, which they did not feel from their countrymen upon coming home. Korea was our forgotten war, and their memorial also brought a great deal of appreciation for their service. While the World War II generation was welcomed home as victors with ticker tape parades, their memorial, 59 years later, still had an immense impact on those who were alive to see it. It also has impacted the family members of those from the Greatest Generation, who more often than not never spoke of the war, yet the National World War II Memorial gave these Veterans a license to open up about the war. It sparked conversations and the preservation of valuable oral histories that would have very likely been lost otherwise. The National Desert Storm War Memorial will do much the same for another generation of Veterans who were welcomed home as victors.

I have made this Memorial endeavor my personal mission over the last three years. It has certainly not been easy for my team and I, but I would like to share with you what gets me out of bed every morning to work diligently at this. As a Captain

returning home from Afghanistan, I had the privilege of being the senior ranking officer of our deployment flight home, and led a portion of my battalion into our aircraft hangar amidst a loud and thunderous applause from close friends and family. It was both a real and symbolic echo in that hangar due to the applause, because those there at the ceremony already understood the cost. They were the families and friends already close to our Nation's 1% who serve in uniform. It is a scene known and understood only by those who have witnessed it, and it is largely unknown by our citizenry. But I have this picture in my mind's eye that in summer 2024, when the National Global War on Terrorism Memorial is dedicated in our Nation's Capitol, a returning flight of troops from Fort Drum or Camp Lejeune will not land at their base of origin. Instead, that flight lands at Dulles or Reagan International, and that unit gets on a bus, and is welcomed home in a public fashion at their National Memorial. At that event, you may very well witness a now 63-year-old Veteran who seized the first airfield in Kandahar Afghanistan in 2001 reach his hand out and welcome home the 19-year-old Specialist who just finished doing their first duty abroad in support of our National interests and hear what is 23 years removed, a common saying from the Vietnam Era: "Welcome Home".

The last thing I would like to leave the committee with is this. The American people, as represented by our elected officials, have become quite comfortable with the idea of asking our all-volunteer force and their families to courageously continue to engage an ever-changing enemy in an ambiguous multi-generational war that has now spanned 16 years and will continue into the future. I humbly ask each of you on this committee to exercise the same courage in approving a memorial for those who have served, are serving today, and will serve in the future. Help this generation of warriors and their families Heal, Honor, and Remember, as we Educate our civilian counterparts about what service and duty entails in the 21st century. Please support the passage of HR 873.

Thank you and I welcome any questions you may have.