

**Testimony of**

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**

**Presented by**

**Patrick Eddington,  
Associate Director  
Vietnam Veterans of America**

**Before the**

**House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

**Regarding**

**H.R. 3423**

**To amend the United States Code, to enact into law eligibility of certain  
veterans for burial at Arlington National Cemetery**

**December 13, 2001**

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Evans, and other distinguished members of the Committee, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is pleased to have this opportunity to provide our comments for the record on our concerns regarding H.R. 3423, which would amend Title 38 of the U.S. Code to allow the burial of a current or former member of the reserve component of the Armed Forces of the United States, as well as their dependents, to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery, even if said reservist did not meet the current age and time in service eligibility requirements of existing law.

This bill is a response to the tragedy that affected the family of Captain Charles Burlingame (the pilot of Flight 77 which crashed into the Pentagon on September 11, 2001) from receiving full burial rights at Arlington. We concur fully with your view that reservists like Captain Burlingame who die as a result of enemy action should be accorded burial at Arlington, if that is their or the choice of their survivors. We would respectfully suggest, however, that Captain Burlingame's case helps illustrate a point VVA has made to this Committee on prior occasions: Arlington Cemetery can and must be expanded.

As we have testified previously before this Committee, the lack of burial space for our veterans—at Arlington and across the country—is yet another example of the distortions in resources within the VA system, brought on by years of underfunded budgets. At present, we are deeply skeptical that VA's existing and planned cemeteries will be able to handle the number of World War II and Korean War veterans who will leave us over the next decade. Simply put, acquiring burial space requires: a) an available property, and b) the funds to purchase the property, as well as build and maintain the cemetery. We have some concrete suggestions on this topic that we would like to share with you.

VVA is perplexed at why the Navy Department continues to use the aging, deteriorating buildings at the Navy Annex adjacent to Arlington when more modern office space is available in the Washington metro area. If the Navy Department were to vacate the Navy Annex and cede the land to Arlington, thousands of additional burial plots would become available. We believe that this Committee and its Armed Services counterpart should hold hearings into the feasibility of this proposal early in 2002.

Secondly, VVA believes that it would also be possible to create a new national cemetery in the city of Washington. We are aware that there are unused tracks of land in need of redevelopment within the District, specifically in the areas near the Takoma or Rhode Island Avenue Metro stations. Turning these unused or underutilized spaces into one or more appropriately landscaped and maintained national cemeteries would create new national shrines to provide final homes for our honored dead, as well as ease the overcrowding in Arlington Cemetery that is worsening on a daily basis.

Outside of the national capitol region, we would respectfully suggest that sites identified as excess by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission be evaluated for their suitability for conversion to national cemeteries. We understand that Congress often

prefers to see such excess property sold to private developers as a way of enhancing revenues. However, given the expected increase in veteran burials over the next 15 years, we believe each facility slated for closure under BRAC should be carefully evaluated for its suitability for conversion to a national cemetery.

Vietnam Veterans of America sincerely appreciates the opportunity to present our views on these extremely important issues, and we look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, and your distinguished colleagues on this Committee to address and resolve these and other important matters of concern to our nation's veterans.

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA  
Funding Statement  
December 13, 2001**

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is a national non-profit veterans membership organization registered as a 501(c)(19) with the Internal Revenue Service. VVA is also appropriately registered with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives in compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995.

VVA is not currently in receipt of any federal grant or contract, other than the routine allocation of office space and associated resources in VA Regional Offices for outreach and direct services through its Veterans Benefits Program (Service Representatives). This is also true of the previous two fiscal years.

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