

TESTIMONY  
TO  
THE HOUSE COMMITTEE  
ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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ORAL STATEMENT BY MR. DONALD PRETTOL, RESEARCH FELLOW,  
LOGISTICS MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE  
ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS, OCTOBER 16, 2002.

As cemeteries that are clearly military in nature, the 119 national cemeteries belonging to the National Cemetery Administration are—individually and collectively—national shrines to those who offered their lives in the defense of their country.

The “finest cemeteries in the world” vary in certain common visual characteristics. Although there is some variation, we developed a broad set of standards. NCA can feasibly use this set of cemetery standards of appearance throughout its system. We recommend that NCA consider a set of 113 standards taken from these cemeteries. (See Exhibit 1) The standards can be adjusted—to accommodate differences in geography, types of markers, ground cover, and burial activity—without making them overly complex or convoluted.

The standards of appearance we propose fall into two categories:

- ◆ Maintenance
- ◆ Burial operations.

The appearance standards apply to all cemeteries, whether active or closed. The standards are for headstones, turf and other groundcover, horticulture, facilities, floral tributes, neatness, personnel, and security. The burial operations standards minimize the negative effect of operations on families and visitors without unduly detracting from their efficiency. The standards are for interments and inurnments, committal shelters, and equipment.

In addition, we recommend using three determinative criteria (geophysical conditions, climate, and other conditions) when evaluating requests from the field for using flat grave markers in exception to public law.

Establishing the standards of appearance we recommend—and implementing the use of these standards in one of the ways we suggest—will certainly and predictably improve the appearance of the NCA cemeteries. Following our guidance about the requests for exception to the grave marker statute will help the review of cemeteries to proceed more smoothly and effectively.

# Standards of Appearance

## MAINTENANCE OF APPEARANCE

These standards apply to all cemeteries—active and closed. They fall into 10 subcategories.

### Headstones

One of the hallmarks of NCA cemeteries is the arrangement and uniformity of headstones and markers—whether flat or upright. Visitor expectations concerning headstones in national cemeteries are uniformly high. Therefore, meticulous attention to detail is required in this area in order for a cemetery to be judged among the finest.

1. Headstones are aligned in accordance with the section plan or historic pattern.
2. Headstones are set at the proper height.
3. Headstones are free of objectionable accumulations.
4. Headstones' natural surfaces have been retained.
5. Headstone inscriptions are visible and legible.
6. Damaged or illegible headstones and incorrect inscriptions have been identified and action taken for repair or replacement.

### Turf and Other Ground Cover

Lawn and turf maintenance involves more than cutting and trimming the grass. Other aspects include filling in sunken graves; maintaining a weed-free, healthy turf; repairing equipment and erosion damage in developed areas; and repairing erosion damage in buffer and non-gravesite areas.

#### CEMETERIES USING LAWN GRASS FOR GROUND COVER

Turf in burial and other public areas is maintained at a height of 1.5 to 2.5 inches and in no case more than 3 inches.

1. Turf in burial and other public areas is a uniform color of green.
2. Turf in burial and other public areas is 90 percent weed free.
3. Turf in burial and other public areas covers at least 95 percent of the area.
4. Grass is trimmed around the headstones and other monuments.
5. Turf does not encroach on flat grave markers.
6. Grass is trimmed on borders.
7. Turf is free of debris such as leaves, fallen branches, and trash.
8. Newly seeded or sodded areas where mowing is inappropriate are clearly identified to the public by signs.
9. Grass in areas other than burial and other public areas is kept cut and trimmed to maintain a good appearance and reduce danger from fire.
10. Sunken graves are identified and measures taken to reestablish the ground level and cover.

## CEMETERIES USING NATURAL VEGETATION FOR GROUND COVER

1. Natural vegetation in burial and other public areas is trimmed to maintain a neat appearance.
2. Natural vegetation is trimmed around the base of headstones and other monuments.
3. Natural vegetation is trimmed so that it does not encroach on flat markers.
4. Natural vegetation is trimmed at borders.
5. Natural vegetation is free of debris such as leaves, fallen branches, and trash.
6. Sunken graves are identified and measures taken to reestablish the ground level and cover.
7. Vegetation in areas other than burial and other public areas is controlled to maintain a good appearance and reduce the danger from fire.

## CEMETERIES USING SAND OR GRAVEL SURFACES

1. Sand and gravel surfaces in burial and other public areas are kept smooth and even.
2. Footprints and other markings in burial and other public areas are removed from the surface before they become unsightly or distracting.
3. Sand and gravel surfaces in the burial and other public areas are kept free from “volunteer” vegetation.
4. Surfaces are free of debris such as leaves, fallen branches, and trash.
5. Sunken graves are identified and measures taken to reestablish the ground level and cover.
6. Vegetation in areas other than burial and other public areas is controlled to maintain a good appearance and reduce the danger from fire.

## Horticulture

Trees, shrubs, and flowers are significant in any cemetery, and effective use of horticulture is consistently found in all finest-in-the-world cemeteries. Keeping plants both healthy and attractive calls for constant and relentless attention.

1. Horticultural displays, including (as appropriate for the location) trees, flowering trees, shrubs, and flower arrangements, are used to highlight the entrance, flag and assembly area, committal shelters, and administration facilities.
2. Trees and shrubs or other regional plants are used to delineate roads and burial areas and, when consistent with the overall plan, to soften the regimentation of the headstones.
3. Trees are pruned to maintain a healthy appearance and proper shape.
4. Fallen twigs and branches are not in evidence.
5. Flowerbeds contain healthy plants and are properly weeded.
6. Where annual plants are used, they are rotated when they have finished blooming.
7. Hedges and shrubs are properly trimmed and present a neat appearance.
8. Dead flowers and other plant materials are removed.
9. There is an active and effective program for controlling insect infestations and other blights and diseases on trees, shrubs, and plants.

10. Provision is made for the removal of clippings and other dead plant material.

## Woodlands

Woodlands are natural growth. They generally consist of a mixture of species and, with only minimal maintenance, should be self-sustaining. Attention is required to ensure they do not encroach on open space, are safe for people, and do not pose a fire hazard.

1. Woodlands are maintained within the boundaries prescribed by the plan and neither reduced in extent nor permitted to encroach on open land.
2. Fallen trees and branches over 4 inches in diameter are cleared from the woods.
3. Undergrowth is controlled to the extent necessary to keep the woods accessible to maintenance personnel and to prevent the buildup of combustible material.
4. Clinging vines, such as poison ivy, wild grape, and kudzu, are controlled so that trees are not overcome.

## Water Features

Water features include a range of forms, such as naturally occurring streams and ponds, man-made lakes, and formal pools and fountains. All require continuing attention if they are to make a positive contribution to the appearance of the cemetery.

1. The vegetation on natural banks of streams, ponds, and lakes is trimmed to the water's edge.
2. Reeds and other semi-aquatic plants are controlled to minimize the still water in which insects breed.
3. Aquatic plants and algae are not permitted to take over water features.
4. Floating debris is removed from water features.
5. Fountains and other water displays are kept in operable condition.
6. Fountains and other water displays are operated whenever weather conditions permit.

## Facilities

In most of the NCA cemeteries, the entrance, road network, and visitor facilities create an overall first impression that colors the reaction to everything else on the grounds. For cemeteries located near busy highways, the condition of the street-side facilities may serve as the only impression most of the public retains.

1. Restrooms are clean, sanitary, and supplied with soap and toilet paper. Trash is regularly removed.
2. Structures have a clean appearance, free from any staining or moss growth.
3. Exterior masonry surfaces directly visible to the public have no flaking paint.
4. Areas normally away from the public have no flaking paint in an area greater than 1 square foot.
5. No visible cracks, missing tile, missing shingles, or moss growth are evident on roof surfaces.
6. Metal roofs have no signs of corrosion.
7. Windows are clean and free of cracked panes.
8. Roads and paths are clean, safe, and in excellent repair.

9. The surface area of parking lots is smooth, crack free, and cleaned of debris.
10. Large capacity parking lots have clearly marked parking spaces and directional signage.
11. Gravel paths are raked and resurfaced as needed.
12. Support elements (infrastructure, service area, etc.) are screened from public view.
13. Reception rooms and office spaces open to the public present a comfortable, yet business-like, appearance.
14. The entrance and entrance sign are carefully maintained.
15. Signage is standard throughout the cemetery and in a style compatible with the architectural design.
16. Signage is clear, complete, and easy to read.
17. Hand-lettered temporary signs are not used.

## Floral Tributes

Floral tributes associated with burials and memorial flowers placed on graves (or in niches in columbaria) matter greatly to family and loved ones. The cemetery must handle these floral tributes carefully to allow timely operations for maintaining appearance without at the same time offending or unduly inconveniencing those providing the flowers. The cemetery should reasonably accommodate floral tributes and other forms of grave decoration, which are prevalent in some cultures within our society.

1. The rules for placing real and artificial flowers and other grave decorations are prominently displayed.
2. The times and conditions for the removal of floral tributes are clearly stated.
3. Times for removal of floral tributes are not made subject to change without notice.
4. Vases are accessible and available throughout the cemetery.
5. Containers for vases are well marked and in good condition.
6. Water is either available for the vases or due notification to the contrary is prominently displayed near the entrance to the cemetery.
7. Flower removal occurs in accordance with the schedule.
8. Wilted, unsightly flowers are promptly removed.

## Neatness

Neatness is a collective term for activities related to policing the grounds and picking up after visitors.

1. Trash receptacles are conveniently located throughout the cemetery.
2. Trash receptacles present a neat appearance consistent with the architectural features of the cemetery.
3. Trash receptacles are emptied before they are half full or stay too long in the sun.
4. Grounds are policed for trash and other foreign objects.
5. Tools and equipment used for grounds and other maintenance are not left unattended in public areas.

6. Spoil areas and organic disposal areas are located where, or shielded so that, they are not visible to the visiting public.

## Personnel

Personnel are not an appearance issue per se, but the appearance of the staff, both in the offices and on the grounds, does contribute to the overall impression of the cemetery left with clients and visitors.

1. Office staff and others responsible for dealing with the public wear the formal business attire appropriate for the location.
2. Personnel working on the grounds present a neat and uniform appearance such that visitors can identify them as cemetery staff members.

## Security

Cemeteries are not much frequented at night, and many of our cemeteries are either at remote locations or in declining neighborhoods. Both factors attract people who don't want their activities observed and youth bent on mischief. The nation expects the cemetery-shrines to be secure; family and friends expect that individual graves will not be desecrated.

1. Hours during which the cemetery is open to visitors are clearly posted.
2. Federal law with respect to the desecration of national cemeteries is clearly posted.
3. The cemetery is surrounded by an iron or stone fence as provided for by statute.
4. Gates, if provided, are shut at closing time.

## BURIAL OPERATIONS

These standards are intended to minimize the negative impact of burial operations and inurnments on families and visitors without unduly detracting from operational efficiency. They fall into the three subcategories that follow.

### Interments and Inurnments

These consider both first and second interments. Active operations have trace effects on appearance, ranging from spoil from freshly dug gravesites and fresh mounds of dirt over recently covered graves to heavy equipment awaiting work and the tracks and ruts caused by such equipment moving about the premises. Active areas where large numbers of first interments take place daily are a unique feature of active NCA cemeteries. We found no instances of similar practices in civilian or other military cemeteries. Because of the intensity of what is essentially a ground surface construction effort in these areas, the construction zone appearance is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid. The standards apply to the interment of both casketed remains and cremains.

#### FIRST INTERMENTS

The visitor should see a careful, planned progression of the section from open, working gravesites toward orderly ranks of headstones against a sea of neatly manicured turf, raked gravel, or natural local vegetation.

1. The number of open graves is kept to a minimum.
2. Open graves are identified and protected by guards and markers appropriate to cemetery operations, not those used in road construction.
3. Each day's graves are prepared on the previous day.
4. Each day's burials are covered, initially groomed, and marked before close of business.
5. Each gravesite is graded to blend with adjacent grade levels

6. Equipment not in use is parked out of the way in an orderly manner (not simply left where last used).
7. Casing awaiting installation and caskets awaiting burial are placed in an orderly manner.
8. The burial site has the appearance of a disciplined evolution and not of a construction site.
9. Boundaries are posted advising persons of the work in progress.
10. Subsections show evidence of progress toward completion.
11. Headstones are set by groups to avoid a gapped appearance in the section.
12. Sections awaiting seeding or installation of turf present a neatly groomed appearance.
13. Seeding or turf installation is carried out as quickly as climate conditions permit.

## SECOND INTERMENTS

Second interments should disturb adjoining graves as little as possible. When the interment is complete, no residual evidence should remain other than the fresh grave.

1. Precautions are taken to prevent heavy equipment from making ruts in the ground when working on the gravesite.
2. Precautions are taken to minimize spoil from the graves left on adjoining graves.
3. Precautions are taken to prevent damage to adjacent headstones and markers.
4. Spoil is removed from the site or covered with a green covering while the grave is open.
5. The open grave is covered and marked in an effective but unobtrusive manner using markers appropriate to a cemetery.
6. Equipment is removed from the burial area during the period between opening the grave and completing the interment.
7. After interment and before completion of the day's work, the grave is squared, tamped, and raked, ready for the application of topsoil or sod.
8. In climates where seeding or sodding must be delayed, the grave is covered with a green all-weather covering.
9. Marks left on adjacent sites are removed upon completion of the interment.
10. The new grave marker is set and appropriately aligned.

## INURNMENTS

The following concerns columbariums:

1. Columbarium niche covers are removed and placed unobtrusively out of direct sight in preparation for inurnment.
2. Columbarium niche covers are replaced after the funeral urn is placed.

## Committal Shelters

In association with any given funeral, the committal shelter is the part of the cemetery that most people see and where family and friends part with the loved one before interment.

1. Committal shelters are permanent structures of an architectural design appropriate to the overall cemetery design.

2. Committal shelters are policed after each service such that subsequent guests see no evidence of the previous service.
3. The bier appears to be permanent and is maintained in an as-new condition.
4. The committal shelter is scrupulously clean.

## Equipment

The state in which equipment is maintained and presented reflects on the professionalism of the staff and its attitude toward clients and work.

1. Equipment is not operated within direct sight or sound of a committal shelter while services are being held.
2. Equipment is clean and free from accumulations of mud, dirt, or oil other than that resulting from the day's work.
3. Equipment paint presents a good appearance and properly protects the equipment from deterioration caused by the environment.
4. Equipment is in proper repair and does not have a patched-together or jury-rigged appearance.

# Donald C. Prettol

## Education

M.B.A., Business Management, Syracuse University, 1972

B.S., Accounting, Colorado State University, 1967

## Recent Experience

1990–Present, Logistics Management Institute, Research Fellow

1989–1990, Automation Research Systems, Ltd., Program Director

1986–1989, Automation Research Systems Ltd., Project Manager

1981–1986, Office of the Comptroller of the Army, Staff Officer

1967–1981, U.S. Army, various operational and staff positions of increasing responsibility including command and staff planning positions

## Specific Technical Accomplishments

### ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

At the Logistics Management Institute conducted an organizational /workload analysis of the United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM). Collected workload on a 1,200 person staff, categorized the workload according to centralization/duplication issues. Loaded workload data into a workload database which portrayed the TRANSCOM baseline workload. Conducted process analysis and built process models on several stovepipe processes. Presented several alternative organization options to the management staff. The USTRANSCOM staff elected to implement our functional organization alternative which will result in a 15 percent reduction when fully implemented.

At the Institute conducted an organizational/workload analysis for the Federal Supply Service. Collected workload on over 2,200 employees, categorized the workload according to centralization issues and recommended a set of organizational alternatives to the FSS commissioner.

At the Institute, led an organizational/workload analysis for the Defense Supply Center Philadelphia (DSCP). The analysis showed that the DSCP was significantly understaffed due to increased mission workload. The analysis was instrumental in increasing the DSCP staffing.

At the Institute, participated in an organizational analysis for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff which resulted in recommendations for streamlining the organization. An action committee was formed to implement our recommendations.

At the Institute, led an acquisition analysis study that provided the National Institutes of Health (NIH) a comprehensive review of all positions and organization of the Institutes. The analysis report was presented to the Acquisition Management Steering Committee composed of representative stakeholders from the 28 institutes and centers. The study included a future assessment with trend analysis to predict workload and skills requirements. Based on our findings, the NIH instituted a workforce realignment for the acquisition community.

At the Institute, led an organizational analysis study for the Defense Supply Center Columbus which recommended organizational improvements for the command. Study considered the current workforce skill, current workload analysis, and future workload trends.

At the Institute, led an organizational analysis study that provided the Naval Supply Systems Command an objective review of workforce productivity. Study identified areas of workload duplication and operational inefficiencies. Provided the command a workload database detailing functions, activities, and level of effort for each individual in the command.

At the Institute, led a project that provided the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) with a detailed workload and core competencies analyses for their Human Resources Management Group. Identified the current on-hand competencies and projected competencies to the year 2005. Based on

this projection, the HCFA will develop a comprehensive plan on how best to attain required skills and competencies.

At the Institute, participated in an organizational analysis of the United States Special Operations Command, (USSOCOM). LMI conducted a thorough analysis of the USSOCOM headquarters organizational structure, staffing, and key functional processes. The analysis focused on increasing the efficiency and effectiveness with which USSOCOM's headquarters conducted its business-oriented processes. As a result of the analysis USSOCOM restructured from a traditional functional focus to a process centered focus.

At the Institute, led a project that provided the National Cemetery System (NCS) of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) with an objective review of its operations and strategic plans for future development. Identified to top management the need to assess the internal, external, and cultural environment that would impact the long-range plans for the locations of cemeteries.

#### STRATEGIC PLANNING

At the Institute, assisted the National Cemetery Administration in meeting the Congressional requirements as delineated in the Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act of 1999. We conducted a demographic analysis to determine the projected cemetery needs by location through the year 2030. The objective was to assist the NCS to locate cemeteries so that 90 percent of veterans could be serviced within 75 miles of their homes. We also conducted a facilities assessment of all 119 cemeteries to determine the one-time repair requirements needed to bring the cemeteries to a national shrine status. Finally, we did an assessment of the feasibility and estimated cost to establish standards of appearance commensurate with the finest cemeteries of the world. This task required coordination and briefings with the Veterans Service Organizations, Congressional Staff members, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the American Battle Monuments Commission and several related associations. The results of these analyses were used to justify additional resources to Office of Management and Budget and Congress.

#### INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

At the Institute led a task resulting in a Micro-Soft Access database containing the HCFA workload data and core competencies required by HCFA management. The database provided HCFA management with the ability to analyze current and future training requirements.

At the Institute, provided a databases containing demographic information at the zip county level of detail for VA's future planning requirements. This model provided top management with a new methodology for future strategic analyses. Also provided a detailed backlog of maintenance database for use by the NCA in future repairs analysis.

#### PROCESS MANAGEMENT

At the Institute lead a project for Department of Defense (DoD) analyzing the effect of applying scarce resources to the training requirements for the department.

At Automation Research Systems Ltd., developed a resource planning methodology and model for installation operations. The model predicts base operation resource requirements and relates them to meaningful output measurements. Was responsible for developing cost-estimating relationships, data quality, and model integrity. The model was used by the Department of the Army for planning, programming, and budgeting funds for installation operations.

#### BUSINESS RESULTS

At the Institute, conducted a study for DoD involving performance indicators for organizational readiness. The study analyzed current reporting mechanisms, and made recommendations on improving reporting systems.

At Automation Research Systems, Ltd., developed a planning methodology and model to project the resources required by the Army Medical Department. The model projected resource needs in 5-year increments and was based on critical workload units. Delivered the model to Health Services Command who used it in their planning, programming, and budgeting system.

### List of Relevant Publications

Logistics Management Institute, Study on Improvements to Veterans Cemeteries, Report VA101R3, Donald C. Prettol and Paul J. Glace, Jr. August 2001.

Logistics Management Institute, *Health Care Financing Administration: A Workforce Planning Methodology*, Report HC701R1, Donald C. Prettol and Mario Maculoso, January 1999.

Logistics Management Institute, *USSOCOM Organization and Staffing Analysis: Challenges and Opportunities*, Report SO701R1, Colin Halvorson et al., September 1997.

Logistics Management Institute, *Collective Unit Training: an Examination of the Training Resource Allocation Process*, Report FP 206MR1, Donald C. Prettol and Stephen L. Lieberman, November 1995.

Logistics Management Institute, *The Future of the National Cemetery System*, Report VA202R1, Donald C. Prettol, Dayton Picket, and John B. Jennings, February 1993.

*The Program Resource Methodology: In Direct Support of Management*, Resource Management Journal, Spring 85.

## Awards and Relevant Organizational Memberships

LMI Presidents Award for helping change the process and management practices of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2000.

American Society of Military Comptrollers

## Security Clearance

Secret

## RELATED FEDERAL CONTRACTS

Task Title: National Cemetery Administration Study

Contract Number: 973A.P329.VA101

Customer: Veterans Affairs

Project Leader: Donald Prettol, Logistics Management Institute

Period of Performance: 12/27/2000–04/30/2002

Funding: \$2,504,082