



La Fondation du Mémorial de l'Escadrille La Fayette
(*The Lafayette Escadrille Memorial Foundation*)

Fondation reconnue d'utilité publique

5, Boulevard Paymond Poincaré

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France

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June 29, 2016

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Chairman
United States Senate
Committee on Veterans Affairs

By email: heather_vachon@vetaff.senate.gov

Re: Written testimony by the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial Foundation about pending legislation concerning the ABMC

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your letter of June 17, 2016, and this opportunity to offer written testimony in support of the proposed legislation to authorize the American Battle Monuments Commission to acquire, operate and maintain the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial (the "Memorial") in Marnes-la-Coquette, France, a suburb of Paris.

The Memorial is both a monument and a burial crypt that pays tribute to the 38 members of the Lafayette Escadrille but also to the 241 other American pilots of the broader "Lafayette Flying Corps" who flew under French command between April 1916 and February 1918, when many of the American pilots transferred to the U.S. Air Service of the American Expeditionary Force. A total of 269 American pilots flew under French command during this period, and of these 68 died in the war and have tombs in the Memorial crypt, though 17 tombs are empty. Of the 49 pilots buried in the crypt, all died after April 1917, and many of them died in American uniform after having transferred to the U.S. Air Service.

The memorial to these air combat pioneers is a private memorial inaugurated on July 4, 1928, and owned by the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial Foundation (the "Foundation"), a French non-profit that operates the Memorial site. The Memorial is located just outside Paris in the 1130 acre "Parc de Saint Cloud" nature reserve, and sits on 12 acres of land donated by the French government.

The Foundation, however, does not have the financial resources to take care of the Memorial, the crypt and the grounds, and over the last fifteen years has relied increasingly on the financial assistance of the French and U.S. governments, as well as French regional and municipal governments, to cover the expenses of maintaining the site. The Foundation has just completed a renovation of the Memorial that was financed by the French government, by the limited funds of the Foundation, and by private donors in the United States. But the Foundation has no endowment or regular source of income that can cover the costs of ongoing maintenance or future renovation projects.

The Foundation has worked very closely with the ABMC over the past 18 months of renovation, and is convinced that the transfer of the Memorial site to the ABMC is the best way to preserve the Memorial for future generations.

Indeed, on April 19, 2016, the Foundation Board voted unanimously to offer the site to the ABMC, by gift or in exchange for a symbolic consideration. Importantly, the April 19 resolution was reviewed and approved by the French Ministry of the Interior, which has oversight over the activities of all non-profits in France, including the Foundation. Also, representatives from both the French Ministries of Interior and Defense sit on the Foundation's Board, participated in the discussion about the transfer to the ABMC, and approved the resolution. I meet regularly with the Ministries of Interior and Defense, and have received assurances that these ministries will do everything they can to facilitate the transfer of the site to the ABMC. The French government is more than just supportive of this transfer; they are enthusiastic, much like we are at the Foundation.

The Foundation's close cooperation with the ABMC will hopefully extend well beyond the renovation of the Memorial and the transfer to the ABMC, and we look forward to working closely with the ABMC regarding the organization of ceremonies at the Memorial site. The Foundation organizes several large ceremonies each year and dozens of French and American associations attend these events with their members, and lay wreaths beneath the triumphal arch of the Memorial, most often accompanied by local school children and US girl and boy scouts troops. We will coordinate with the ABMC and this network of associations so that the Memorial can continue to play a central role in the community by commemorating the Lafayette pilots, the birth of the US Air Force, French-American military cooperation, and the central role of the United States in bringing WWI to an end.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Blumrosen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alexander Blumrosen
President