

There were no June 2020 Executive Board and Post meetings due to restrictions on social gatherings related to the COVID-19 outbreak; Post and Executive Committee meetings are suspended until further notice. The South Montgomery County Community Center has advised that they will remain closed until August, 31, 2020. We will advise if there are any updates.

I have received communications from some of the boys who attended the online Boys State event and they enjoyed their participation. This is our favorite activity and it is much appreciated that the American Legion did an outstanding job to make this year's virtual event a success.

I visited the National Cemetery on Memorial Day. Although official ceremonies had been canceled there was still a good turnout of folks visiting with and remembering our departed veterans. I visited with my father who was a Navy aviator in WWII. He saw action in both the Atlantic and Pacific Theaters and was awarded the Bronze Star, multiple Air Medals and the Distinguished Flying Cross. I also spent some time with Win Salter, our past historian and mentor who is in the area next to my father so it was easy to walk over there.

The COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed our activities so there isn't much to report. I encourage you to continue to use good judgment in your upcoming activities. Please follow the guidelines for mask use and social distancing.

One of the topics I am interested in is news about our MIAs. Below is a link to a website that documents recovery of MIAs:

<https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/>

This is an impressive listing that showcases the diligence of our Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

Some interesting military news:

Pentagon leaders face grilling today on use of military in unrest

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon's top leaders are going before Congress for the first time in months to face a long list of controversies, including their differences with President Donald Trump over the handling of protests near the White House last month during unrest triggered by the killing of George Floyd in police hands.

The House hearing Thursday will provide the first congressional testimony by Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, since March 4, when they appeared to discuss the administration's defense budget proposal.

That was before the full impact of the coronavirus pandemic became apparent and before nationwide civil unrest threw the Pentagon's relations with Trump into crisis.

Trump's push for an aggressive response to the civil unrest led to an extraordinary clash with Esper and Milley, who on June 1 accompanied the president when he walked from the White House to St. John's Church on Lafayette Square, where he held up a Bible for photographers. That day, a National Guard helicopter was flown at extremely low altitude to help disperse protesters from the capital's streets, prompting a Pentagon investigation into whether that was a proper use of military resources.

Esper drew Trump's ire for telling a Pentagon news conference that he opposed invoking the Insurrection Act to permit the president to use the armed forces to put down domestic civil unrest. Esper said he saw no need for such an extreme measure, a clear counterpoint to Trump's threat to use force.

Esper also made known his regret at having accompanied Trump to the presidential photo opportunity in front of St. John's on the day of the Lafayette Square confrontations.

Milley later expressed public regret that he also had been part of the scene with Trump. He said he had been wrong to stride in uniform with Trump past protesters who had been cleared from Lafayette Square. Milley said his presence "created a perception of the military involved in domestic politics."

"I should not have been there," he told a National Defense University commencement ceremony.

Esper and Milley also are likely to be grilled by members of the House Armed Services Committee on a simmering debate over removing the names of Confederate Army officers from U.S. Army bases and banning other Confederate symbols. That also puts them potentially at odds with Trump, who has said he opposes removing the Confederate names from bases like Fort Bragg in North Carolina.

The House and Senate versions of the 2021 defense budget legislation require name changes at those 10 Army bases. Trump has said he will veto the bill if it reaches his desk with that provision intact.

Neither Esper nor Milley has spoken publicly about two other controversies likely to be raised at the House hearing — intelligence reports that Russia may have offered bounty money to the Taliban in exchange for killing American and coalition troops in Afghanistan, and reported White House resistance to permitting the Army to promote Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman to the rank of colonel.

Vindman, who played a central role in the impeachment case against Trump, announced Wednesday that he will retire. A statement by his lawyer accused Trump of engaging in a "campaign of bullying, intimidation, and retaliation" that meant Vindman's future in the Army would "forever be limited."

Vindman's name was on a promotion list sent to Esper earlier this year, according to two U.S. officials familiar with the matter. But that list was delayed for weeks because the White House asked for an investigation of Vindman, one of the officials said. The Pentagon did a review and found that any suggestion of misconduct was unfounded. One official said the list was resent to Esper about a month ago, but again was delayed.

A senior defense official said the list was held up by a routine personnel review not related to Vindman. Esper received the final promotion list on Monday and approved it, with Vindman's name included, and it was expected to be sent to the White House in the next day or two, the defense official said.

The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss an internal personnel matter.

Here's how the Air Force is remembering its first female pilots

Retired Lt. Col. Kathy LaSauce got "hooked on airplanes" when she became one of the Air Force's first female officers in aircraft maintenance — a field previously barred to women in the service — after joining the service in 1972

"How many young people get to start a life where they are trained about airplanes?" LaSauce told Air Force Times.

That was just the beginning for LaSauce's aviation career.

LaSauce, originally from New York, also became one of the first female pilots in the Air Force after the service unveiled a test program in 1975 that allowed her to complete undergraduate pilot training at Williams Air Force Base in Arizona.

She credited her good reputation and maintenance background for why she was tapped for the selective program. That experience also provided a solid foundation as she launched into her aviation career, she said.

"The fact that I had the aircraft maintenance, and the technical training, really came in handy as a pilot," LaSauce said. "It made me a better pilot, it made me a better commander to understand how airplanes work."

LaSauce wasn't the only woman who graduated from UPT that year. Nine other women were also in her class: Kathleen Cosand, Victoria Crawford, Mary Donahue, Connie Engel, Mary Livingston, Susan Rogers, Carol Scherer, Christine Schott and Sandra Scott.

Today, there are more than 800 female pilots and nearly 350 female navigators in the service, according to the Air Force.

To recognize these pioneers' accomplishments, the Air Force Education and Training Command renamed the Martin Hall Conference Room to the Trailblazer Room at the AETC headquarters at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph in Texas last month.

"The women of Class '77-'08 truly broke barriers," Lt. Gen. Brad Webb, AETC commander, said during a virtual ceremony on June 29, according to an Air Force news release. "They lived the fact that glass ceilings were a reality simply because they were women. These trailblazers paved the way for future generations of female pilots and their influence on our Air Force is still felt today."

"There is no denying the trailblazing women of Class '77-'08 were set up in such a way that failure would have been easy," Webb said. "But that's not what airmen do. Through grit and determination, not only did they succeed, they excelled."

In addition to becoming the first women to complete UPT, they also continued to accomplish significant milestones for women during their Air Force careers. For example, Donahue was the first female instructor pilot at the Air Force Academy, Schott was the first woman to become an aircraft commander on the C-9A Nightingale aeromedical evacuation aircraft, and LaSauce was the first female pilot for the C-141 Starlifter aircraft.

"The fact that they named that room after us trailblazers — they couldn't have named it any better, because there are a lot of folks that know nothing about us," LaSauce said.

Although LaSauce knew at the time they were part of a test program and understood what was at stake for the future of women in the Air Force, she said she has since come to further recognize the gravity of completing UTP and the lasting impact it would have on women in the service.

"Even now, it took a while for me to realize how significant this really was," LaSauce said. "I knew we needed to do well. I knew we needed to do well for the women that would follow after us and that they didn't want to live down a bad reputation."

As "exciting" as UPT was, LaSauce said she enjoyed the rest of her career much more. Some of her career highlights also included becoming the first female presidential support pilot with the 89th Airlift Wing, and becoming the first woman to command an aerial port squadron.

"The Air Force afforded me a wonderful career," said LaSauce, who retired from the service in 1992.

“They trained me, they let me use my mind, they let me use my management skills, they gave me an opportunity to show what women could be capable of, and they allowed me to serve my country to the best of my ability,” she said. “What more could you ask for?”

Army Reviewing 'Confederate Memorial' Featuring Slaves at Arlington National Cemetery

9 Jul 2020

Military.com | By Richard Sisk

The frieze on the Confederate Memorial in Section 16 of Arlington National Cemetery depicts a "Mammy" cradling the infant of a rebel soldier and a slave following his master off to war.

The inscription in Latin on the 32-foot high monument, one of the tallest on the cemetery's hallowed grounds, also pays homage to the "Lost Cause" of secession from the United States.

Read Next: Retired General Accepts Plea Deal, Avoids More Jail Time in Rape Case

Since it was dedicated in 1914 by President Woodrow Wilson, the monument's presence on the grounds of what had been the estate of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee and Mary Custis Lee has been the target of periodic calls for its removal, and now it could be again.

In a statement Tuesday, the Army, which has jurisdiction over Arlington National Cemetery (ANC), confirmed that the service is working with the Defense Department "on guidance for display of divisive symbols. Any review would include this memorial."

The Army's action, first reported by The Washington Post, made the monument in Arlington part of the national debate on Confederate symbols, statues and military base names that was fueled by the May 25 killing in Minneapolis of George Floyd in police custody and the following mostly peaceful protests for racial justice.

Both the House and Senate Armed Services Committee recently passed amendments to the \$740 billion National Defense Authorization Act requiring the military to come up with new names for bases now honoring Confederate generals, such as Fort Bragg, North Carolina; Fort Benning, Georgia; and Fort Hood, Texas.

In addition, a pair of House Appropriations Committee bills would block funding for military construction projects at bases named after Confederate leaders unless a renaming process had begun, and would also provide \$1 million in funding for the Army to rename the bases.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-New York, with the backing of 35 other Democratic senators, has also put forward a stand-alone bill called the "The Removing Confederate Names and Symbols from Our Military Act."

The bill would require the secretary of defense "to remove all names, symbols, displays, monuments, and paraphernalia that honor or commemorate the Confederate States of America, or any person who served voluntarily with the Confederate States of America, from all assets of the Department of Defense."

In a June 30 Twitter post, President Donald Trump threatened to veto the entire NDAA if provisions "which will lead to the renaming (plus other bad things!) of Fort Bragg, Fort Robert E. Lee, and many other Military Bases from which we won Two World Wars, is in the Bill!"

Any steps to remove or replace the Confederate Memorial in Arlington would inevitably spark controversy and resurface the scars of history. Even the dead at Arlington were segregated until 1948, when President Harry Truman ordered the desegregation of the military.

The monument, topped by the figure of a woman representing "The South" and extending a laurel wreath from her left hand toward the south, is ringed by the gravestones of more than 400 Confederate troops arranged in concentric circles.

The headstones are distinct, coming to a point at the top as opposed to the rounded headstones in the rest of the cemetery.

After the Civil War, Arlington initially barred Confederate soldiers from burial there, but the ban eventually was lifted.

A history of the monument posted on the cemetery's website notes that the Confederate Memorial "embodies the complex and contested legacy of the Civil War at Arlington National Cemetery, and in American culture generally."

In 1900, in the spirit of reconciliation, Congress authorized Confederate remains to be reinterred at ANC. Two years earlier, President William McKinley had kicked off his "Peace Jubilee" tour at the end of the Spanish-American war with a speech in Atlanta.

"In the spirit of fraternity, we should share with you in the care of the graves of Confederate soldiers," he said. "Sectional feeling no longer holds back the love we feel for each other. The old flag again waves over us in peace with new glories."

On June 7, 1903, the first Confederate Memorial Day ceremonies were held in Arlington's Confederate section. President Theodore Roosevelt sent a floral arrangement in tribute, beginning a tradition followed by nearly every succeeding president.

In 2009, President Barack Obama altered the tradition. He sent two wreaths -- one to the Confederate Memorial, the other to Washington, D.C.'s African American Civil War Memorial, a historical description on the Arlington website said.

In 1906, President William Howard Taft gave approval to the United Daughters of the Confederacy to begin raising funds for the erection of a monument in the Confederate section.

Moses Jacob Ezekiel, a sculptor and a Confederate veteran, was chosen as the designer.

"The elaborately designed monument offers a nostalgic, mythologized vision of the Confederacy, including highly sanitized depictions of slavery," the ANC website states.

In 2017, descendants of Moses Jacob Ezekiel called for the removal of the Confederate Memorial from the cemetery.

In a letter to The Washington Post, they said the monument "glorifies the fight to own human beings and, in its portrayal of African Americans, implies their collusion."

"As proud as our family may be of Moses' artistic prowess, we -- some twenty Ezeziels -- say remove that statue. Take it out of its honored spot in Arlington National Cemetery and put it in a museum that makes clear its oppressive history," the letter said.