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May 26, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

I am writing today in response to disturbing reports that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will not take action to remove references to Nazi Germany from headstones in cemeteries maintained by the National Cemetery Administration. I call upon the VA to work swiftly to remove these offensive symbols from its cemeteries.

Recent media reports indicate there are at least three grave sites of German military personnel from World War II at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery and Fort Douglas Post Cemetery that contain the swastika, the Iron Cross and an inscription which translated states, "He died far from his home for the Fuhrer, people, and fatherland."

Nazi Germany was responsible for millions of deaths and unspeakable atrocities prior to and during World War II. It is unfathomable for the VA to allow its imagery to remain in places where American service members are laid to rest. Their loved ones who visit Department cemeteries should not be subjected to the pain of seeing these signs of hatred.

The VA has claimed it lacks the authority to remove these symbols from the headstones citing the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.ⁱ However, the Department has not explained which provision of the law prevents it from acting.

As such, please provide responses to the following questions:

1. How many headstones are there in VA cemeteries that display Nazi symbols? Please provide the number of headstones at each cemetery.
2. What specific statutory or regulatory provision prohibits the VA from taking action to rectify this issue?

Nazi symbols have no place in cemeteries maintained by the VA using taxpayer dollars. I urge in the strongest possible terms for the Department to take immediate action to remove them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large "R" and "M".

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

ⁱ <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/05/12/nazi-swastikas-at-veterans-cemeteries-prompt-outrage-but-va-calls-them-protected-history/>