

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 28, 2024

The Honorable Eugene Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G St., NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro,

We write to request a Government Accountability Office (GAO) review of the Army's maltreatment of the Arlington National Cemetery's Caisson Platoon horses, which led to a suspension of horse-drawn funeral processions and the deaths of two horses. We also ask to include a study into how the Army can resume the program, ensuring that the horses are properly cared for and continuing honoring those who bravely served our country.

Unfortunately, in February 2022, two horses, Mickey and Tony, that belong to the 3rd Infantry Regiment, had to be euthanized within days of each other due to colon impaction. This led to an immediate suspension of all horse processions, which is still in place.¹

After conducting an investigation, the Army reported that the horses had very little grass in the field in which they lived, forcing many to consume sand and gravel. In fact, one of the horses that was euthanized was found to have had 44 pounds of gravel and sand in his gut, which likely caused his death. Separate testing found that nearly 35% of the horses has "moderate-high" levels of parasite eggs in their stool.²

Furthermore, the field was covered in construction debris and manure, with only enough room to support six to seven horses. This was nowhere near enough to support the 64 horses within the field.

After the suspension of this program, 18 out of the 64 horses had to be retired leading to a shortage in the number of horses required to conduct the six to eight eligible burials per day. Since then, the Army has been using funeral home hearses and other vehicles.

Given the honorable, selfless service of those who are being laid to rest at the Arlington National Cemetery, we must ensure that they receive a proper, honorable burial. We must also ensure the horses who have worked tirelessly to provide for these brave service members are taken care of in a humane manner.

Therefore, we would like the GAO to conduct a study that addresses the following issues.

1. What steps has the Army taken to examine and improve the factors that contributed to the deaths of Mickey and Tony?
2. What facility and trainers should be in place where the horses reside when not participating as part of the caisson?
3. What training programs can be established for soldiers to properly care for the horses when part of the processions?

¹ Lawrence, D. F. (2024, May 31). *Anguish, uncertainty: 66 families wait to Bury loved ones amid suspension of horse-drawn funeral services at Arlington*. Military.com.

² Lawrence, D. F., & Lillis, K. B. (2022, April 7). *Army report finds horses that carry the caskets of America's heroes live in "unsatisfactory" conditions, after 2 die* | CNN politics. CNN.

4. How long should the horses participate in the platoon before retiring?

We look forward to working with you through this review.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,



Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



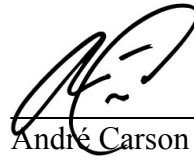
Christopher H. Smith
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