

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**  
**to the**  
**Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and House Veterans' Affairs Committee**  
**Joint Hearing**  
**To Receive Legislative Presentations of Veterans Service Organizations**

**By**

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**AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR OF JAPAN**  
**CEMENTING A LEGACY**

Chairmen Isakson and Takano, Ranking Members Tester and Roe, and Members of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees, thank you for allowing us to describe how Congress can meet the concerns of veterans of World War II's Pacific Theater. The American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society (ADBC-MS) represents surviving POWs of Japan, their families, and descendants, as well as scholars, researchers, and archivists. Our goal is to preserve the history of the American POW experience in the Pacific and to teach future generations of the POWs' sacrifice, courage, determination, and faith—the essence of the American spirit.

Today, I want to speak to you about what it means to “Never Forget” our veterans. The men and women who became POWs of Japan over 70 years ago fought the early desperate battles of WWII in the Pacific and suffered some of its worst consequences. Nearly 40 percent did not return home. Those who survived had the highest rate of post-conflict hospitalizations, deaths, and psychiatric disorders of any generation of veterans. Their families endured and inherited their trauma.

If this history is forgotten, so too will the sacrifices of today's veterans. It is an obligation to honor our veterans and to remember appropriately their contribution to our country's history.

Before the last American POW of Japan dies, we believe that the appropriate civic remembrance for them is a Congressional Gold Medal that recognizes their unique history of perseverance, valor, and patriotism.

**Our history**

On December 7, 1941, Imperial Japan attacked not only Pearl Harbor but also the Philippine Islands, Guam, Wake Island, Howland Island, Midway, Malaya, Singapore, Thailand, Hong

Kong, and Shanghai. Three days later, Guam became the first American territory to fall to Japan. At the same time, the U.S. Far East Air Force on the Philippines was destroyed. By March 1942, Imperial Japanese Armed forces had destroyed the U.S. Asiatic Fleet in battles off Java.

Although the aim of the December 7<sup>th</sup> surprise attack on Hawaii's Pearl Harbor was to destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet in its home port and to discourage U.S. action in Asia, the other strikes served as preludes to full-scale invasions and military occupation. Starting with the China Marines on December 8<sup>th</sup>, Americans throughout the Pacific became prisoners of war.

Only in the Philippines did U.S.-Filipino units mount a prolonged resistance to Imperial Japan's invasion. They held out for five months. Help was never sent. They were abandoned. On April 9, 1942, approximately 10,000 Americans and 70,000 Filipinos became POWs with the surrender of the Bataan Peninsula. April 9<sup>th</sup> also marked the beginning the 65-mile Bataan Death March. Thousands died and hundreds have never been accounted for from the March and its immediate aftermath.

By June 1942, most of the estimated 27,000 Americans ultimately held as military POWs of Imperial Japan had been surrendered. If American civilians in Japan, the Philippines and throughout the Pacific held as POWs or internees are also counted, this number is closer to 36,000. Nearly all remained captives until the end of the war. The Japanese paroled Filipino soldiers in June 1942. By the War's end, 40 percent or over 12,000 Americans had died in squalid POW camps, in the fetid holds of "hellships," or in slave labor camps owned by Japanese companies.

Surviving as a POW of Japan was the beginning of new battles: finding acceptance in society and living with serious mental and physical ailments. In the first six years after the war, deaths of American POWs of Japan were more than twice those of the comparably aged white male population. These deaths were disproportionately due to tuberculosis, suicides, accidents, and cirrhosis. In contrast, 1.5 percent of Americans in Nazi POW camps died (as noted above as the mortality rate for POWs of Japan was 40 percent) and in the first six years after liberation Nazi POW camp survivors deaths were one-third of those who survived Japanese POW camps.

### **Supporting today's veterans**

As the representative of veterans who faced often-insurmountable challenges obtaining adequate healthcare for their exotic ailments and severe PTSD, we are especially supportive of the DAV's efforts to expand healthcare for all service-related illnesses and mental health.

We were delighted to see the May 2018 passage of the VA MISSION Act of 2018 (Public Law 115-182), which contains provisions to support family caregivers of veterans severely injured before September 11, 2001. We join with the DAV in calling on Congress and the VA to further expand this program to include not just severely injured veterans, but also veterans whose serious disabilities were caused by service-connected illnesses. My veterans often suffered debilitating illnesses from the residue effects of vitamin deficiency, beatings, and exposure to dangerous toxins in lead and coal mines as well as chemical factories in Japan.

## **Progress Toward Remembrance, Reconciliation, and Preservation**

An essential element of showing respect and acceptance to today's servicemen and women is to ensure that they are not forgotten. This is the primary mission of the ADBC-MS. To this end, we have had a number of significant achievements in the last decade.

In 2009, the Government of Japan, through its then-Ambassador to the U.S. Ichiro Fujisaki (today an Outside Director to Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corporation), and again in 2010, through its then-Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada, issued an official apology to the American POWs of Japan. These Cabinet-approved apologies, first established as a Cabinet Decision on February 6, 2009, were unprecedented. Never before had the Japanese Government apologized for a specific war crime, nor had it done so directly to the victims.

The Japanese Government in 2010 initiated the "Japan/POW Friendship Program" that sponsors trips for American former POWs to visit Japan and return to the places of their imprisonment and slave labor. Thus far, there have been 10 trips, one each in the fall of 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and two in 2015, one in 2016, 2017, and 2018. In 2016 and 2018, due to the advanced age of surviving POWs, only widows and children participated in the program. In all, 46 former POWs, all in their late-80s or 90s, as well as nine widows and ten children have made the trip to Japan. A number of the caregiver companions were wives, children, and grandchildren.

The year 2015, the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II, was particularly significant. Our last National Commander, the late Dr. Lester Tenney, was invited to witness Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's address to a joint meeting of Congress and to join at his celebratory gala dinner at the Smithsonian, where the Prime Minister offered his personal apology. Significantly, that day, April 29<sup>th</sup>, was also the reinstated birthday holiday of the wartime Emperor Hirohito. Later that year, Dr. Tenney was a guest of President Barack Obama at the White House's (then) annual Veterans' Day breakfast.

On July 19, 2015, the Mitsubishi Materials Corporation (MMC) became the first, and remains the *only*, Japanese company to officially apologize to those American POWs who were used as slave laborers to maintain war production. Former diplomat, Yukio Okamoto, a member of MMC's board, helped facilitate this act of contrition. The historic apology was offered to the 900 Americans who were forced to work in four mines operated by Mitsubishi Mining, Inc., the predecessor company of MMC. This apology was followed by a \$50,000 donation to the National American Defenders of Bataan & Corregidor (ADBC) Museum, Education & Research Center in Wellsburg, West Virginia.

The leaders of both Japan and the United States acknowledged the American POWs and their contribution to the steady relationship between two countries in their war anniversary speeches. In his September 2<sup>nd</sup> VJ day statement, President Obama echoed President Harry Truman and remembered "those who endured unimaginable suffering as prisoners of war." Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in his war anniversary statement on August 14<sup>th</sup> recognized "the former POWs who experienced unbearable sufferings caused by the Japanese military."

On May 27, 2016, President Barack Obama journeyed to Hiroshima, the site of the first atomic bombing, to become the first American president to mourn the dead and grieve with the living.

There, as shown in a widely published photograph, the President embraced a survivor who had dedicated the greater part of his life to discovering the identities and honoring the memory of twelve American POWs who perished in Hiroshima.

In November 2016, a former POW of Japan, Airman Dan Crowley of Connecticut, was a guest at President Obama's last Veterans' Day breakfast. On December 28<sup>th</sup>, the ADBC-MS vice president Nancy Kragh and I were guests of the President to witness Prime Minister Abe's condolences at Pearl Harbor.

In August 2018, another historic ceremony was held in Hawaii remembering Pacific War veterans and POWs. After years of Department of Veterans Affairs cemetery administrators' objections to the use of "hellship" for the Japanese ships transporting POWs—they felt it might offend some tourists—the Department approved our application for a memorial stone for the 400 POWs buried as unknowns in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. The men died on January 9, 1945, in the sinking by American bombers of the hellship *Enoura Maru* in Takao Harbor, Formosa (today's Taiwan). Unknown to their families until 2001, their remains had been retrieved in 1946 and moved to Hawaii.

We thank Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs of the Department of Veterans Affairs Randy Reeves, Executive Director for Cemetery Affairs Lisa Pozzebon, and my Congressman Mike Bost, who is the ranking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, for their help and for understanding that "hellship" has been the term used since the Revolutionary War to describe the squalid vessels that held prisoners of war.

Over 100 family members, representatives of veterans' organizations, and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, attended the August 15<sup>th</sup> ceremony at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific to dedicate our memorial stone to the POWs on the *Enoura Maru* and to identify the men in graves marked "unknowns." Diplomats and military officials from the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, and the Czech Republic—countries that all had citizens who were POWs aboard the *Enoura Maru*—also participated. The Japanese consul general and the director general of the Taiwan Economic Cooperation Office were included. BGen Thomas Tickner, Commanding General, Pacific Ocean Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was the senior military official to address the gathering.

### **Success should encourage more action**

The benefits of Japan's long-awaited acts of contrition have been immeasurable for former POWs and their families. The visitation program is a great success. It has given the participating veterans a peace of mind and their families a connection to their fathers' challenges. For the Japanese people touched by these visits it is often their first introduction to the non-Japanese victims of the Pacific War.

But we are concerned for the future. There is no formal agreement between the U.S. and Japan to continue the visitation program, and Japan's Foreign Ministry must request annually its line-item in the budget. We know that despite the tens of millions of dollars being expended by Japan on

“Takehashi” exchange programs in the United States, the funds for the POW Friendship exchanges have been slashed. There is the possibility that the program may end altogether.

This is profoundly shortsighted. And it is something that should worry Members of Congress. Our relationship with such an important ally can only strengthen through reconciliation efforts. History does not end when the last witness dies. The proliferation of revisionist history in Japan is cause enough to encourage greater work to tell a multi-faceted history of the Pacific War.

For the POW families, it is clear that a POW’s cruel captivity was not merely an individual trauma—the pain has spanned several generations. The wives, children, and siblings of those who died suffered irreparable loss. The families of those who returned home became caregivers to survivors who suffered from long-term physical and mental health problems. Further, new research has found that trauma changes one’s DNA, which is then passed on to the victim’s progeny.

### **History Revisionists**

To our dismay, many in Japan – including elected leaders – are actively revising if not denying the history of American POWs. For example, last year the Japanese press stopped using the expression “forced labor” to describe the Koreans requisitioned by the Japanese late in the war and, thus, implicitly the POWs. The sites of Japan’s “Meiji Industrial Revolution: Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding and Coal Mining” on the UNESCO World Industrial Heritage list continue to ignore the POW slave labor there. In five of these eight new World Heritage areas there were 26 POW camps that provided slave labor to Japan’s industrial giants including Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, Aso Group, Ube Industries, Tokai Carbon, Nippon Coke & Engineering, Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corporation, Furukawa Company Group, and Denka.

Many of the 60 companies that requested and acquired POW slave laborers during the War still exist and are members of Japanese consortia—headed by JR East and JR Central—that want to participate in high-speed rail and other infrastructure projects in the United States. Neither has acknowledged or apologized for their use of POW slave labor. By contrast, their competitors on these very projects – the French (SNCF) and the Germans (Siemens)—have been held accountable for similar behavior in Europe during WWII.

It is also unsettling that no one has objected to the selection of Osaka as the host city for the G20 leaders’ summit in 2019 and of Fukuoka as the venue for the meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bank governors. Osaka will also be the site for the world Expo 2025. These internationally forward-focused events contrast sharply with the parochial, anachronistic views of the city’s leaders.

The recent mayors of Osaka have distinguished themselves as outspoken deniers of Pacific War history—even ending the sister city relationship with San Francisco over the American city’s refusal to remove a war memorial and rejection of the Osaka mayors’ false and pernicious construction of the war’s history.

Osaka and Fukuoka were areas of the greatest number of slave labor camps using American and Allied POWs in mines, factories, mills, and on docks, many of which have become UNESCO

World Industrial Heritage sites. It was at Fukuoka prefecture's Port of Moji where most of the POWs arrived in Japan. Fukuoka's international airport was originally an Imperial Army airfield (Mushiroda Airfield) built by British, Dutch, and American POWs. In Fukuoka, eight American aviators were vivisected at the local university. Hours after the Emperor declared the war over, seventeen Americans were beheaded on the slopes of the city's Mt. Abura.

We object strongly to American participation in any conference or Expo held by a city that publicly and willfully denies the established historical record and embraces a discredited, dishonest, and indecent historical narrative.

Only an active, ongoing, and public program of remembrance and education will guarantee Japan not falling into moral complacency.

### **What we ask Congress**

We ask Congress to encourage the Government of Japan to hold to its promises and responsibilities by preserving, expanding, and enhancing its reconciliation program toward its former American prisoners. We want to see the trips to Japan continued. We want Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to publicize the program, its participants, and its achievements. We want to see a commitment to remembrance. We believe that both countries will be stronger the more we examine our shared history.

We ask Congress to encourage Japan to turn its POW visitation program into a permanent Fund supported by Japanese government and industry. This "Future Fund," not subject to Ministry of Finance yearly review, would support research, documentation, reconciliation programs, and people-to-people exchanges regarding Japan's history of forced and slave labor during WWII. Part of the Fund's educational programming would be the creation of visual remembrances of this history through museums, memorials, exhibitions, film, and installations. Most important, the Fund would support projects among all the arts from poetry, literature, music, dance, and drama to painting, drawing, film, and sculpture to tell the story to the next generation.

We ask Congress to ask and to instruct the U.S. State Department to continue to represent rigorously the interests of American veterans with Japan. It is only the U.S. government that can persuade Japan to continue the visitation program, to create a Future Fund, and to ensure that the Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution include the dark history of POW slave labor.

We ask Congress to press the Japanese government to create a memorial at the Port of Moji, where most of the "Hell ships" docked and unloaded their sick and dying human cargo. The dock already features memorials to the Japanese soldiers and horses that departed for war from this port. Nowhere in Moji's historic district is there mention of the captive men and looted riches off-loaded onto its docks. This must change.

### **The Congressional Gold Medal**

Most important, we ask Congress to approve an accurate and inclusive Congressional gold medal for the American POWs of Japan. It is a long overdue symbol of our commitment to veterans of past generations that we will "never forget."

Over the past few years, there have been Congressional gold medals given to groups that included American POWs of Japan. Eight members of the Doolittle Raiders were POWs, at least one Nisei member of the Military Intelligence Service was a POW, and nearly all the officers of the Filipino troops who were awarded Congressional Gold Medals were American.

Unlike previous WWII Congressional Gold Medal award groups that honor specific service units or ethnicities, the American POWs of Japan are both men and women from many ethnic groups, religions, services, and regions. For example:

- The 200<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery (AA) on Bataan, the first to fire on the invading Japanese forces, was composed mainly of Hispanic Americans from New Mexico.
- The first tanker to die in WWII was Private Robert Brooks, a black man with the 192<sup>nd</sup> Tank Battalion from Harrodsburg, Kentucky, who was killed on Nichols Field, Philippines.
- Chinese-American, Eddie Fung, and Japanese-American, Frank Fujita, both fought on Java and were surrendered with the U.S. Army 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 131<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery, 36<sup>th</sup> Division (Texas National Guard).
- A statue before the St. Landry Catholic Church in Opelousas, Louisiana memorializes Army Air Corps Chaplain Father LaFleur who sacrificed his life while saving fellow POWs in the sinking of the hellship *Shinyo Maru*.
- The military nurses captured in the Philippines were the first large group of American women in combat and, counted with the Army and Navy nurses surrendered on Guam, comprised the first group of American military women taken captive and imprisoned by an enemy.
- Over 600 United States Merchant Marines, including one woman Mariner, became prisoners of Imperial Japan. Fifteen percent were killed by Japanese Imperial Navy officers during capture or died in Japanese POW camps.
- The first American POWs of Japan were Marines stationed in China and the last were Navy and Army aviators shot down over Japan.
- An Army Corps of Engineers Master Sergeant, Aaron Kliatchko, who died aboard a hellship is remembered as the “Rabbi of Cabanatuan” POW camp in the Philippines where he consoled Jew and gentile alike.

Seventy-eight years after the start of the War in the Pacific, it is time to recognize *all* those who fought the impossible and endured the unimaginable in the war against tyranny in the Pacific. Moreover, as I have described above, the Gold Medal would also recognize that we are the only American wartime group to have negotiated our own reconciliation with the enemy.

### **High price of freedom**

The American POWs of Japan and their families paid a high price for the freedoms we cherish. In return for their sacrifices and service, they ask that their government keep its moral obligation to them. They do not want their history ignored or exploited. What they want most is to have their government stand by them to ensure they will be remembered, that our allies respect them, and that their American history be preserved accurately for future generations.

Our history is one of resilience, survival, and the human spirit, good and bad. And it has become an example of a path toward reconciliation and justice between Japan and its former victims.

We ask Congress for support and to help our veterans in their unique quest for justice and remembrance. Congress needs to encourage Japan to do more toward reconciliation and considering its past truthfully. Congress can cement our past in the national history with the awarding of a Gold Medal.

In the United States Pacific War history is being forgotten, and in Japan it is being revised. We cannot let this happen.

It is not enough that National Prisoner of War Remembrance Day is April 9, 1942, which marks the Fall of Bataan and the start of the infamous Bataan Death March.

Congress needs to embed this remembrance into the body politic with a gold medal.

Thank you for this opportunity to address your committee.

**Ms. Jan Thompson**

President

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Bilibid, Fukuoka 3B, & Mukden, POW# 2011

<http://dg-adbc.org/>