

**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
Honoring the Memory of World War II Veterans of the Pacific**

Chairmen Isakson and Miller, Ranking Members Blumenthal and Brown, Members of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees, thank you for allowing us to present the unique concerns of veterans of World War II's Pacific Theater to Congress. The American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society (ADBC-MS) represents surviving POWs of Japan, their families, and descendants. Our goal is to preserve their history and communicate the enduring spirit of the American POW experience in the Pacific to future generations.

We applaud the efforts of all the veterans' service organizations to fight for adequate medical care and disability benefits. Moreover, the incidence and intensity of post-traumatic stress for American POWs of Japan is believed to be the greatest of any World War II veteran and possibly of any American war. These veterans had to survive the sordid POW camps, unimaginable and capricious torture, "hell ships" to Japan or its colonies, and years of brutal imprisonment and slave labor. Upon returning from the Pacific War, they found a government reluctant to recognize and treat the mental and physical effects that were consequences of the deprivations suffered while POWs of Japan.

At the time, PTSD was not yet a medical category and VA doctors limited the POWs' access to disability benefits by dismissing the after-effects of years of abuse, disease, and malnutrition. That should not happen to any veteran, and thus, we strongly support the legislative goals of our fellow veterans service organizations to ensure medical and mental health care, as well as to expedite disability claims, to provide rehabilitation, and to establish job-training programs for all American veterans. The American POWs of Japan and their families know intimately the difficulty of re-incorporation into civil society with little support.

Our task today, however, is to address another issue of respect and acceptance of returning service men and women. This is to ensure that they are not forgotten. For the American POWs of

Japan this means that their unique history and the lessons of their experience with Imperial Japan is preserved. This is an urgent task. In the United States this history is being forgotten, and in Japan it is being revised.

Remembrance, Reconciliation, and Preservation

The ADBC-MS was dismayed in 2012 when none of the 70th anniversaries of historic battles during the beginning of World War II were officially recognized. Astonishingly, December 7, 1941, “a date that will live in infamy,” has not been recognized with a Congressional resolution for many years. This year, the 70th Anniversaries of the daring “Great Raid” that liberated Cabanatuan POW camp in the Philippines and of the Battle for Manila that freed thousands of American civilian internees and POWs were not acknowledged.

We hope that future Congresses will remember the events that started American involvement in World War II with resolutions memorializing the simultaneous attacks on Pearl Harbor and the Philippines Islands. And we hope that future Congresses will honor those POWs who were massacred by Imperial Japanese forces as American forces advanced to liberate territories once lost. These include the 98 Americans on Wake Island who were bound and machine-gunned to death on October 7, 1943 and the 139 on Palawan Island who were drenched in gasoline and set afire.

The former POWs of Japan leave many legacies and lessons. Among the most important is how they coped with the postwar traumas of inhumane imprisonment. They fought two battles. One was for recognition of their “battle fatigue” and the other for justice and remembrance. The former is now championed by all veterans’ service organizations. We ask Congress for support and to help our veterans in their unique quest for justice and remembrance.

In an interview published 23 January 2014 in *The Asahi Shimbun*, Japan’s second largest newspaper, U.S. Ambassador to Japan Caroline Kennedy said:

I want to take a moment to talk about history and reconciliation. This fall, there was an event that previously might have been thought unimaginable. A group of Americans who suffered as Japanese prisoners of war during the Second World War returned here at the invitation of the Japanese government. Participating took enormous amounts of courage for all those involved....It is not easy, but citizens in all countries should encourage and support leaders who reach across history to build a peaceful future. It took courage on the part of the participants to come back to Japan and learn how Japan has changed.

As background to the Ambassador’s words, in 2009 the Government of Japan, through its then-Ambassador to the U.S. Ichiro FUJISAKI, and again in 2010 through its then-Foreign Minister Katsuya OKADA, officially apologized 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 a Japanese Government apologized for a specific war crime nor had it done so directly to the victims. The Japanese Government further initiated the “Japan/POW Friendship Program” of trips for American former POWs to visit Japan and return

to the places of their imprisonment and slave labor. Thus far, there have been five trips, one each in the fall of 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014.

The benefits of this long-awaited act of contrition have been immeasurable for former POWs and their families. The Program, as Ambassador Kennedy has pointed out, is a great success, but we are concerned about its future. We are concerned that Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo ABE, may revise Japan's war apologies and end the POW/Japan Friendship Program. We are concerned that Japan has limited each trip to only seven former POWs. We currently have 26 men, all over 90-years old, eager to participate and waiting to hear when or if there will be another journey to Japan. Because of their advanced ages, many of these veterans may miss the opportunity.

We recall that in 1995 the Japanese government established the Peace, Friendship, and Exchange Initiative that included a multi-million dollar program of reconciliation and exchange with former POWs from all allied nations except the United States. From 1995 to 2009, the Japanese Government invited 904 ex-POWs from the United Kingdom, 507 from the Netherlands and 59 from Australia. The budgets allocated for those trips totaled over \$16 million. To date, only 31 American former POWs have been invited and the yearly budgets have ranged only from \$130,000 to \$230,000. One cannot help but get the impression that some in Japan count on time and advancing years to limit the costs and impact of the program. We view this as shortsighted.

Success should encourage more action

The success of this visitation program should encourage Japan to do more. The Program should not end with the ability of the nonagenarian POWs to visit Japan or with their deaths. A POW's captivity has multigenerational effects on families. The wives, children, and siblings of those who died suffered irreparable loss. The families of those who survived suffered from the long-term physical and mental health problems caused by the ex-POW's years of cruel captivity. Widows, brothers, sisters, children, and other descendants have all been profoundly affected by the POW experience of their relative and they too should be eligible for future programs.

We ask Congress to encourage the Government of Japan to preserve, expand, and enhance its reconciliation program toward its American former prisoners. We want to see the trips to Japan continued and extended to include descendants and researchers. We want the visitation program drawn into a permanent program of research, documentation, reconciliation, and a people-to-people exchange that is not subject to the Japanese government's yearly budget review. We want Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to publicize the program and its achievements.

We want this program to include funds to create visual reminders of history through museums and monuments. We want national memorials to the POWs who slaved and died on Japanese soil and territories as well as aboard the "hell ships." We want to see a Japanese government-funded memorial at the Port of Moji where most of the hell ships docked and unloaded their sick and dying "cargo."

We also want the many companies that brutally used POWs as slave labor and who now profit in the American market, to join with their government by acknowledging their use of forced labor and by offering their own acts of reconciliation. Over 60 Japanese companies, such as Mitsui,

Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, Hitachi, Toshiba, Kawasaki, Nippon Steel, Nippon Express, Nippon Sharyo, Ube Industries, Showa Denko, Aso Group, and Yawata Steel maintained war production by cruel exploitation of American and Allied POWs.

Prime Minister Shinzo ABE and his address to Congress

Prime Minister Shinzo ABE, who we understand may soon address a joint meeting of Congress, has a unique opportunity to acknowledge Japan's historical responsibilities. His past statements rejecting the verdicts of Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal that serves as the foundation of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan trouble us. We want Congress to only extend the invitation to Prime Minister Abe to speak at the podium of Roosevelt and Churchill if they are assured that he will acknowledge that Japan's defeat released the country from the venom of fascism and the inhuman goals of a criminal regime.

By doing so, the Japanese prime minister's speech to Congress can be a historic one of reconciliation of which the first step is acknowledgement. Tied to this, we feel, should be that he extends and enhances the POW visitation program as we have outlined. He can engender trust with his American allies by honoring their country's veterans. Here he can signal to Japan's other wartime victims that meaningful reconciliation, as Ambassador Kennedy pointed out, is possible. The POW/Japan Friendship Program is one that confronts the past while preserving the dignities of both Americans and Japanese.

It is our hope in addressing this hearing that we can encourage Congress to work with the Obama Administration and the State Department to persuade Japan to hold to its promises and responsibilities. Japan needs to be encouraged to do more. And it is our hope that members of Congress will encourage the many Japanese corporations that operate in their districts to acknowledge the history of the American POWs who slaved for them.

The American POWs of Japan and their families have paid a high price for the freedoms we cherish. What they ask in return for their sacrifices and service is for their government, even after 70 years, is to keep its moral obligation to them. They do not want their history ignored or exploited. They do not ask for further compensation. What they want most is to have their government stand by them to ensure they will be remembered, that our allies respect them, and their American history preserved.

Thank you for this opportunity to address your committees.

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President

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