

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

Jan Thompson

President

American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society

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AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR OF JAPAN
LEARNING FROM THE HISTORY OF WORLD WAR II
VETERANS OF THE PACIFIC

Chairmen Isakson and Roe, Ranking Members Tester and Waltz, and 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 as well as scholars, researchers, and archivists. Our goal is to preserve the history of the American POW experience in the Pacific and to inspire future generations by teaching the POWs' sacrifice, courage, determination, and faith—the American spirit.

Today, I want to speak to you about how integral the American POW history with Japan is to our greater understanding of how we need to treat and remember all our veterans. Further, like the veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, the POWs of Japan share a legacy of not only grappling with the physical and mental effects of their service, but also the multi-generational foreign policy consequences of their country's wars.

Our history

This year is the 75th anniversary year of the Bataan Death March, the fall of the Philippines, the end of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet, and the destruction of the U.S. Far East Air Force. These were the greatest military setbacks in American history. All were in the Asia-Pacific where WWII started for the United States.

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. While the aim of the December 7th 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 the Asia, the other strikes were preludes to full-scale invasions and military occupation.

On December 8th nearly 300 American Marines, sailors, and diplomats stationed in China became the first American POWs of Japan. On December 10, over 600 military personnel and civilians on Guam became the next group of Americans imprisoned by the Japanese. Wake Island fell on December 22nd after a historic and heroic two-week fight by 400 Marines and a handful of civilians against a Japanese Armada. Over 1,600 Marines, Navy and Army personnel as well as civilian contractors from Morrison-Knudsen became prisoners.

By March 1942, over 1,000 sailors, soldiers, airmen and Marines were captured on or off Java—survivors of the sinkings of the USS *Houston* CA-30, of several U.S. Navy supply ships, and of the submarine USS *Perch* (SS-176); soldiers from a Texas-based U.S. Army Field Artillery battalion; and the wounded left behind from an evacuated U.S. Army Air Corps squadron.

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

The daring April 18th Doolittle Raid over Tokyo netted the Japanese eight more aviators who were captured in China. Finally in early May 1942, over 11,500 Americans were surrendered on Corregidor, a fortress island in Manila Bay, and at bases on the Southern Philippine Islands. The surrender of American and Filipino forces on the Philippines Islands was the largest surrender in U.S. military history.

By June 1942, most of the estimated 27,000 Americans ultimately held as military POWs of Imperial Japan had been surrendered. If Filipino soldiers, who were released before the end of 1942, and American civilians in Japan and throughout the Pacific are also counted, this number is closer to 36,000. By the War's end, 40 percent or over 12,000 Americans had died in squalid POW camps, aboard fetid "hell ships," or as slave laborers for Japanese corporations.

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 this number was 40 percent as POWs of Japan) and in the first six years after liberation Nazi POW camp survivors deaths were one-third as great at those who survived Japanese POW camps.

Meet the special needs of all veterans

As the representative of veterans with the highest rate of post-conflict hospitalizations and psychiatric disorders, we encourage all the veterans' service organizations to fight for adequate

medical care, disability benefits, housing, and job training. We are especially supportive of the DAV's efforts to expand access to the VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) to severely disabled veterans injured before September 11, 2001. This cut-off date seems oddly dismissive of members of our Greatest Generation. Surviving POWs of Japan know well that their caregivers—their families—were instrumental in their reintegration into their communities and their ability to achieve the highest levels of recovery and quality of life. Family caregivers are critical members of every veteran's health care. The American POWs of Japan and their families know intimately the difficulty of re-incorporation into civil society with little support. My members would welcome opportunities to discuss with you their caregiving experiences so that Senators and Members of Congress can better understand the importance of expanding caregiver assistance to all generations of veterans.

Progress Toward Remembrance, Reconciliation, and Preservation

An important aspect of showing respect and acceptance to returning service men 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, 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 the 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" 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 seven trips, one each in the fall of 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and two in 2015. In 2016, due to the advanced age of surviving POWs, only widows and children participated in the program. In all, 43 former POWs, all in their late-80s or 90s, as well as seven widows and three descendants have made the trip to Japan.

The year 2015, the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, was particularly significant. Our last National Commander, 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, was also the birthday holiday of the wartime Emperor Hirohito. Later that year, Dr. Tenney was a guest of President Barack Obama at the White House's annual Veterans Day breakfast.

On July 19, 2015, the Mitsubishi Materials Corporation (MMC) became the first, and only, Japanese company to officially apologize to those American POWs who were used as slave laborers to maintain war production. The historic apology was to those who were forced to work in the mines operated by Mitsubishi Mining, Inc., the predecessor company of MMC. This apology was followed by a \$50,000 one-time 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 2nd 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 14th 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, the President was photographed embracing 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, another former POW of Japan, Airman Dan Crowley of Connecticut was a guest at President Obama’s Veterans Day breakfast. On December 28th, the ADBC-MS vice president and I were guests of the President to witness Prime Minister Abe’s condolences at Pearl Harbor.

As you can see the American POWs of Japan have been recognized as integral to the history of America’s war in the Pacific.

To remember all our veterans

Yet, there is little recognition from the U.S. Congress. The ADBC-MS was dismayed in 2012 when none of the 70th anniversaries of historic battles at the beginning of World War II were officially recognized. Surprisingly, December 7, 1941, “a date that will live in infamy,” has not been commemorated with a Congressional resolution for decades. Nor have the April 9, 1942, Fall of Bataan and the start of the infamous Bataan Death March been remembered as they were in past Congresses.

Few in Congress note the annual National Prisoner of War Remembrance Day held every April 9th or the National POW/MIA Recognition Day held every third Friday in September. We hope that on April 9th, which is also the 75th anniversary of the start of the Bataan Death March, Congress will adopt a resolution memorializing sacrifices made by the Americans and Filipinos who defended the Philippines and other American Pacific outposts against all odds and no hope of reinforcements.

We also want to protect the language of the POW experience with Japan. Too often, we find the word “death” removed from the historic designations of the Bataan “Death” March and the Thai-Burma “Death” Railway. There is also no other label for “hell ships”—unmarked freighters that held POWs in lower holds with little food, water, ventilation, or sanitation—than “hell ship.” The majority of POWs died on these ships or from their sinking. These vessels of inhumanity were far removed from being troop transports and should not be dignified as such.

Most important, we believe that a Congressional gold medal for the American POWs of Japan is long overdue. 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 gold medals were Americans. In this 75th anniversary year of the Bataan Death March and the fall of the Philippines, it is time to recognize *all* those who fought the impossible and endured the unimaginable in the war against tyranny in the Pacific.

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.

It has also strengthened the bonds between our two countries. A former POW who was forced to be a miner in a dangerous, Mitsubishi copper mine declared it "a glorious day" when he accepted the company's apology. The Mitsubishi executives were surprised by their own emotions of remorse.

But we are concerned about 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 a line-item budget for it. We know that despite the tens of millions of dollars being focused by Japan on "Takehashi" exchange programs in the United States, the funds for the POW Friendship exchanges may be slashed. If true, we view this as shortsighted.

The Program should not end with the ability of the nonagenarian POWs or their widows 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. The original written understanding was that the former POWs, their widows and their descendants would be invited to participate. Widows, children, and other descendants have all been profoundly affected by the POW experience of their relatives, and they too should be eligible for future programs.

We want this program to include funds to create visual reminders of history through educational groups 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" delivered their sick, dying, and dead human cargo to the Japanese mainland to be used as slave labor.

Concerns with moving backwards

To our dismay, there appears to be backtracking in Japan regarding the American POWs history. It was not until February 2016 that the 2014 biographical film *Unbroken* about American Olympian and aviator Louis Zamperini's ordeal as a POW was shown in Japan. It was preceded by a venomous campaign of misinformation and slander denouncing the scenes of abuse and torture as untrue. In contrast, surviving POWs believed the film did not show the full depravity and squalor of their imprisonment.

We are concerned by the 2015 inscription of the Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution: Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding and Coal Mining on the UNESCO World Heritage List. In five of the 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.

Japan stated on July 4, 2015, that it "is prepared to take measures that allow an understanding that there were a large number of Koreans and *others* [emphasis added] who were brought against their will and forced to work under harsh conditions in the 1940s at some of the sites." However, we do not know how the Japanese government interprets "others" and U.S. government officials have not asked. Frankly, we have not seen any effort toward including the history of the 13,000 Allied and American POWs held at the UNESCO sites.

Many of the 60 companies that requested and acquired POW slave laborers during still exist and are members of Japanese consortia—headed by JR East and JR Central—that want to participate in high-speed rail projects in the United States. None have acknowledged nor apologized for their use of POW slave labor. By contrast, their French (SNCF) and German (Siemens) competitors have been held accountable for their roles in WWII war crimes. Yet, the Japanese companies have not yet been held accountable by either American legislators or the public to their predecessors' victims. Nor have they acted unilaterally to make amends. We want to see this attitude change.

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 and extended to include widows and descendants. We want Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to publicize the program, its participants, and its achievements.

We ask Congress to encourage Japan to turn its POW visitation program into a permanent Future Fund supported by Japanese government and industry for research, documentation, reconciliation, and people-to-people exchanges that are not subject to the Japanese government's yearly budget review. This Future Fund would underwrite the creation of visual reminders of Imperial Japan's war history with the United States through museums and monuments. These would include national memorials and public exhibitions about the POWs who slaved and died on Japanese soil and territories as well as aboard the "hell ships." Funding would be available for explanatory texts in both English and Japanese.

We ask Congress to demand and legislate that the U.S. State Department represent vigorously 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 stewards of the Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution take seriously the UNESCO mandate to produce meaningful educational materials at the Heritage sites that will include their dark history of forced and slave labor during World War II.

We ask Congress to press the Japanese government to give a permanent, visible affirmation of the POW history in Japan with a memorial at the Port of Moji. It was here where most of the “hell ships” docked and unloaded their sick and dying human cargo. Like the statues at the three major ports of the slave trade—Liverpool, Richmond, and Cotonou—this memorial can be both a symbol of reconciliation and an impetus for a program of education and exchange.

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. They do not ask for 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 that their American history be preserved accurately.

The ordeal of the American POWs of Japan is not just another facet of war history. Nor is it simply another saga of WWII suffering. It is a history of resilience, survival, and the human spirit, good and bad. And it has become an example of a path toward mutual understanding 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. Today’s strong alliance between Japan and the United States rests on how well we honor the memory of those who liberated Japan and its colonies.

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

My members are not the distant past; rather they represent all veterans’ future.

Thank you for this opportunity to address your committees.

Ms. Jan Thompson

President

American Defenders of Bataan & Corregidor Memorial Society

Daughter of PhM2c Robert E. Thompson USN

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

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