

Bend Heroes Foundation  
1900 NE 3<sup>rd</sup> St. Ste 106, #205  
Bend, OR 97701

March 30, 2021

Senator James Manning Jr.  
Chair, Senate Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness  
900 Court St. NE S-205  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Manning.

Ref: HB 2700 Roadside markers for POWs and MIAs

HB 2700 relates solely to members of the Armed Forces. HB 2700 should be revised to also include Oregon's civilians who were working under US Navy contract building Navy facilities in the Pacific and who became POW and MIA during WWII. The Navy's civilian construction contractors operated under the name "Contractors Pacific Naval Air Bases (CPNAB)".

The CPNAB workers were given military status in 1981: *"Individuals and groups designated by the Secretary of Defense as having performed active military service: Civilian employees of Pacific Naval Air Bases who actively participated in Defense of Wake Island during World War II. Recognized effective January 22, 1981"*. Federal Register Vol. 69, No.20, page 4823, January 30, 2004.

Of the 1145 civilian construction workers employed at Wake Island when the Japanese attacked and eventually captured Wake beginning on Dec. 8, 1941, 133 were Oregonians. Thirty two (32) Oregonians died while defending Wake or subsequently as POW slave laborers at Wake Island and at Japanese POW Camps elsewhere. One Oregonian still remains MIA. Recognizing their role in defending Wake Island, 16 civilian POWs were laid to rest in DVA's National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl) in Honolulu. Sixty more were laid to rest in Oregon.

Also recognizing their military actions at Wake Island 7 decades ago, I requested the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs to engrave the names of the 32 civilian POWs on the Oregon WWII Memorial on the Capitol grounds.

Each year the US Navy conducts a memorial service at Soto Dam in Sasebo, Japan honoring the 53 civilian POWs taken at Wake Island and who died as slave laborers building the dam during WWII. Twelve of the 53 were Oregonians. The US Navy honors them as fellow veterans.

The remains of 8 civilian Wake Island POWs were returned to Oregon for burial in 4 Oregon cities. With a revision to HB 2700, those 8 would be eligible for roadside markers.

DPAA does not list Oregon's WWII Wake Island POWs and MIAs although DPAA has listed names of recovered and returned civilian MIAs from the Cold War and Vietnam War.

DPAA has recently recovered and identified the remains of an Oregon Army veteran who became MIA during the Korean War. The remains are being stored in Hawaii due to COVID-19 with burial at Arlington National Cemetery planned for some time this year. According to his next of kin, It is not clear if the remains will be returned to Oregon or sent directly to ANC. HB 2700 should also be revised to include remains returned to family or next of kin as well as "returned to Oregon".

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Tobiason". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue highlight behind it.

Dick Tobiason  
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