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Thank you to Representative Lewis and members of the Oregon House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans for inviting me to testify in support of HCR 23. I am Bonnie Gilbert, the daughter of Wake Island WWII survivor, Ted Olson, and author of *Building for War: The Epic Saga of the Civilian Contractors and Marines of Wake Island in WWII*. I worked with Dick Tobiason on the resolution that became HCR 23 and compiled the list of 134 Oregon civilians on Wake Island in WWII, including thirty-one who died in the war. I commend the committee for considering to publicly honor these defense workers who were caught by war in 1941 and endured its horrors until the end of the war or the end of their lives – whichever came first.

The Wake Island civilian workers were contracted by a consortium of construction companies under U. S. Navy contract to build naval air stations on islands in the Pacific and other facilities in Hawaii. Draft boards granted the civilians draft deferment for the duration of their work in the national defense. My grandfather, Harry Olson, was the superintendent for all field work on Wake, and my father Ted was a structural steel worker. Harry was off the island when it was attacked by Japanese forces December 8, 1941. My father survived the 16-day siege and final invasion and battle on December 23. The civilian battle survivors were classified with the military defenders as POWs – captured enemy combatants – and sent in “hell ships” to POW camps in occupied China and Japan. The Japanese occupiers retained 98 civilian POWs on Wake and brutally massacred them on October 7, 1943.

As a historian I was intrigued by my family’s story and the outlines of the Wake saga, and after both Harry and Ted had long since passed away, I began to dig into the project in 2006. Long story short, my research took me far and wide, including the most rewarding experience of standing on Wake Island itself in 2011. I was honored to be invited by the USAF air support group in charge of Wake to spend four days on the island and provide a historical tour for visiting generals and staff of the Pacific Command before departing with them back to JBPHH on Oahu. My website (above) features photographs from this trip and over a hundred blog posts on Wake-related events, themes, and topics.

In recent years I have remained deeply involved in Wake research and close connections with survivors and families. I aided the DOD Joint POW-MIA Accounting Command (now DPAA) and Central Identification Laboratory at Dover AF in locating and contacting family members of the 98 massacre victims for DNA reference samples to ID remains found on Wake in 2011. Because my visit to Wake occurred so soon after I began this project, I was able to find the exact location on the north beach where JPAC had recovered the human remains and collect shells and pieces of coral to share with family members of the 98. I also work regularly with colleagues at the Center for Research: Allied POWs under the Japanese and the Pan Am Historical Foundation, and have shared data and information with many officials, agencies, and individuals.

Living Wake civilian survivors finally became eligible for U.S. Navy discharges, war medals, and VA benefits in 1981 – far to late for the 250 who were KIA or died as POWs during World

War II or the hundreds of survivors who passed away in the next thirty years. Most of the war dead are laid to rest in national cemeteries including the comingled remains in the Wake Island mass grave in Punchbowl cemetery, where I have paid my respect many times. All 1,715 military and civilian men on Wake Island in December 1941, including 134 Oregonians, have passed away now according to my records, but the Wake Family lives on and continues to honor their memory. Thank you to the members of this committee for your consideration to carry that honor forward at the Oregon state level. I believe Oregon would be the first state to do so.