

TESTIMONY

On

HB 3452

POW/MIA MEMORIAL HIGHWAY ON US HIGHWAY 26

SENATE COMMITTEE ON RULES

By

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CHAIRMAN, BEND HEROES FOUNDATION

June 29, 2019

Thank you for this opportunity to submit my testimony to this distinguished committee today.

I am Dick Tobiason, LTC US Army Retired, Chairman, Bend Heroes Foundation and requestor of this long overdue legislation.

Bend Heroes Foundation mailing address is 1900 NE 3rd St., Suite 106 #205, Bend, Oregon, 97701.

I would like to thank Senate Tim Knopp, Representative Jack Zika, Representative Cheri Helt and Representative Rick Lewis for co-sponsoring HB 3452. Thanks to testimonies by Representative Zika, Representative Helt and Representative Evans to the House Committee on Rules, the full House voted 56 to 0 in support of HB 3452 on June 25.

I request passage of HB 3452 honoring Oregon's 789 POWs and 1,000 MIAs and any future POWs and MIAs, their families and educating the traveling public on Prisoners of War (POWs) and veterans still Missing in Action (MIAs) via prominent highway signs on U.S. Highway 26 funded by veterans' and other private groups.

The enormity of the numbers of our nation's and Oregon's POWs and MIAs is mostly unknown to the public and many veterans as well.

Since the Revolution 244 years ago, 355,200 Americans have become POWs, 18,300 of them died in captivity and 86,500 still remain MIA today. Total is equivalent to 110% of all American WWII war deaths and 44% of all 1.1 million war deaths! There are still 86,500 MIAs (WWI – Present), all declared dead: 84% are WWII veterans.

I have a personal connection with POWs: I helped repatriate 27 POWs in S. Vietnam during "**Operation Homecoming**" in 1973. Six of my unit's flight crew members are still MIA in North Vietnam. I have met 2 Ex POWs and siblings of 2 Oregon POWs from the Vietnam War.

During WWII, 770 Oregonians became POW with 598 (78%) returned to friendly forces and another 172 (22%) died in captivity by wars end. About half of the 172 were executed by the enemy and the other half died of disease and malnutrition. Almost 200 Oregonians have died as POW in captivity in 3 wars:

WWII	172
Korea	16
Vietnam	3
TOTAL	191

Today 1,000 Oregon Veterans still remain MIA and were declared dead:

WWI	21
WWII	887
Korea	57 (was 61, remains of 4 returned)

Cold War	2
Vietnam	33 (was 49, remains of 16 returned)
TOTAL	1,000

On September 21, 2018 I requested Senator Ron Wyden to request the **Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency** for a summary of all actions taken and planned to be taken to recover and return the remains of Oregon's 1,000 MIAs. The MIAs represent 1 out of 6 or 17% of Oregon's 5,965 war dead from the Civil War to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

During WWII, 981 veterans from Oregon were buried overseas in **American Battle Monuments Commission** (ABMC) cemeteries overseas. Together with the 887 MIAs, they represent almost half of Oregon's 3,832 WWII war dead. Including all wars from WWI to Vietnam, there are 1,205 overseas burials and another 940 MIA war dead honored on "Tablets of the Missing" and "Courts of the Missing" plaques at ABMC Cemeteries. **That means almost 40% of Oregon's 5,965 war dead cannot be honored by their families, friends and veterans by visiting their graves or placing flags and wreaths on their graves near home while the other 60% enjoy that privilege.**

At 471 miles in length, U.S. Highway 26 is a scenic highway as well as the longest highway in Oregon. It stretches between the Oregon Coast and Oregon/Idaho border. It intersects the 7 existing veterans memorial highways as does the new **Oregon Medal of Honor Highway** all created by the Legislature and Bend Heroes Foundation over the last 10 years.

At present, there is no **POW/MIA Memorial Highway** in Oregon honoring Oregon's nearly 200 POWs who died in captivity, 1,000 MIAs who remain missing and declared dead and at least 600 POWS who were returned alive.

Seven (7) other states have dedicated POW/MIA Memorial Highways in Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Montana, New York, Washington and Wisconsin. None are border to border. The closest is Montana's 177 mile highway connecting Helena and West Yellowstone. The POW/MIA Highway signs display the well-recognized POW/MIA logo and motto designed by a member of the National League of POW/MIA Families.

Oregon's POW/MIA Memorial Highway on U.S. Highway 26 would be the first such border to border highway in our nation just as the Oregon Medal of Honor and Persian Gulf/Afghanistan/Iraq Highways are.

U.S. Highway 26 stretches from the Oregon coast to Ogallala, Nebraska, a distance of 1,485 miles. If HB 3452 becomes law, I will request veterans' groups in Idaho, Wyoming and Nebraska to seek similar legislation just as we are doing for the national **Medal of Honor Highway** across America. Oregon set the precedent!

Today we honor and remember Oregon's POWs and MIA by:

Names of MIAs on ABMC Tablets/Courts of the Missing overseas

POW/MIA Flags at USPS, other public buildings, Veterans memorials, cemeteries

+ plus symbol engraved in front of Bend's 17 MIA names. The + plus symbol is used on the Vietnam War Memorial in DC to indicate MIA war dead.

<> diamond symbol engraved in front of Bend's 1 WWII MIA whose remains were recovered and returned to family. The <> diamond symbol is used on the Vietnam War Memorial in DC to indicate the remains of an MIA were returned to family.

POW/MIA plaques at Bend Heroes Memorial dedicated on June 14 – Flag Day and other memorials. OVMA was responsible for those honors.

Oregon EX POW license plates

National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremonies

Proclamations issued by the President, Governors and Mayors

On Jan. 9, 2019, I requested the Capitol Foundation to identify Oregon's 887 WWII MIAs with + symbols added in front of their names engraved on the **Oregon WWII Memorial** here at the Capitol. I requested the same for 49 Vietnam War MIAs (33 MIA, remains of 16 returned) to be honored at the proposed **Oregon Vietnam War Memorial** on the Capitol grounds (HB 2195).

That might be worth pursuing at the **Oregon Fallen Heroes Memorial** in Central Point where the names of Oregon's almost 6,000 war dead (Civil War to Iraq/Afghanistan) are displayed on granite panels. That memorial was created under the leadership of the late Dennis Richardson.

We have the names of Oregon's 191 POWs who died in captivity and the names of Oregon's 1,000 MIAs who were declared dead. As there is no POW/MIA memorial in Oregon displaying their names and as an advisor to the Vietnam War Memorial (HB 2195), I have requested those names be displayed at that memorial here on the Capitol grounds. That memorial would also honor POWs who were returned alive and became Ex POWs.

Families, friends and veterans cannot honor 1,000 Oregon MIAs with flags and wreaths on graves as others can whose loved one's remains were returned to them during wars and often long after wars. The POW/MIA Memorial Highway signs should help raise hope and hopefully provide a degree of closure.

Including the POW/MIA logo on highway signs is consistent with the displays of the **Purple Heart Medal** and **Medal of Honor Medals** already displayed on signs on I-5 and U.S. Hwy 20. I think 8-10 POW/MIA Memorial Highway signs would be sufficient. We veterans will raise the necessary funds to pay ODOT to fabricate and install the signs as we did for 79 signs on 7 other veterans memorial highways across Oregon.

While many will give the **Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency** (DPAA) high marks for finding and returning the remains of MIAs, about 100 are recovered with great effort and returned to families each year. In the first 6 months of this year, the remains of 50 MIAs were recovered and returned to families. For example Edward J. Weissenback was an Oregon civilian captured in Laos on December 27, 1971. His remains were returned to his family on December 20, 2018, almost 47 years to the day he became POW, MIA and dying in captivity. Mr. Weissenback had

previously served in in the Army in Vietnam. Bend's Bennie Lee Dexter, SMSGT USAF still remains MIA after being captured and dying in captivity in South Vietnam 53 years ago. Families still hold out hope that they will be able to welcome home their loved one's remains.

I believe "special markers" (page 2, line 11) means the POW/MIA logo to be displayed on POW/MIA Memorial Highway signs. That logo is prominently displayed on many public buildings and memorials and is well recognized by the public.

The motto on the **National POW/MIA League of Families** logo is "**You Are Not Forgotten**" We have an opportunity now to support those families with designation of U.S. Highway 26 in Oregon as the **POW/MIA Memorial Highway**.

I would like to close with a quote attributed to famed Roman orator and philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero: "**Poor is the nation that has no heroes, but poorer still is the nation that having heroes, fails to remember and honor them.**"

Someone must speak for Oregon's POWs and MIAs and that high honor and privilege is ours.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you. I respectfully request your unanimous AYE votes on HB 3452.