

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

April 21, 2021

Representative Paul Evans
Chair, House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Management
900 Court St. NE, H-471
Salem. OR 97301

Dear Chair Evans and Committee Members.

Re: SB 441A Roadside Markers for Deceased Veterans Who Were POWs and Returned MIAs

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 441A.

SB 441 like HB 2700 complements the newly dedicated Oregon **POW/MIA Memorial Highway** (HB 3452) across Oregon on US Hwy 26 honoring Oregon's over 900 Prisoners of War (POW) and almost 1,000 veterans and civilians who still remain Missing in Action (MIA) from all wars since WWI.

Among the 923 POWs are 133 Oregon civilians who became POWs as a result of the Japanese attack on Wake Island on the same day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Thirty two (32) or about 25% of the 133 died as POW under brutal conditions. One civilian remains Unaccounted For. Eight of the 32 would be eligible for roadside markers if SB 441A clearly provided for them and any future similarly qualified civilian POWs and MIAs.

The Navy's WWII civilian construction contractors at Wake Island operated under the name "Contractors Pacific Naval Air Bases" (CPNAB). The Secretary of Defense designated "**Civilian employees of Pacific Naval Air Bases who actively participated in Defense of Wake Island during WWII**" as "**having performed active military service**" during WWII (Federal Register, page 4823 January 30, 2004). CPNAB employed 1,145 civilians with 133 from Oregon who performed that honorable "active military service" more than 7 decades ago.

The Summary for SB 441A states "*Modifies criteria for erecting roadside memorial signs for deceased veterans who were formerly prisoners of war or unaccounted for*". The Summary specifies "veterans" and does not provide for civilians in either category. SB 441A was passed by the Senate on April 1.

SB 441A defines the requirements to be met: "**The Legislative Assembly adopts a concurrent resolution that recognizes the individual killed in the line of duty was formerly designated as either a prisoner of war or unaccounted for by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency and the remains of the individual have been recovered, identified and returned to Oregon;**"

Notwithstanding the Summary statement, it is still not clear that Oregon's civilian POWs are included in "individual" as stated in SB 441A. Would the Legislative Assembly process a concurrent resolution for a civilian based on SB 441A as it is now written? To ensure civilian Ex POWs and MIAs are included, I recommend SB 441A be revised to include "civilians who were prisoner of war or unaccounted for by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency or other federal and recognized entities and/or designated by the Secretary of Defense as having performed active military service during war".

SB 441A covers 2 groups of veterans: POWs killed in the line of duty and deceased veterans still Unaccounted For (MIA). Using data from DPAA, National Archives Research Administration and American Battle Monuments Commission, I was able to estimate how many veterans (and civilians) would be eligible for roadside markers.

POWs KIA IN THE LINE OF DUTY: Of the 922 Oregon POWs of all wars since WWI, 167 were killed in the line of duty.

Of the 159 WWII POWs who died in captivity, 99 would be eligible for markers. Two Korean War POWs and 1 Vietnam POW would also be eligible for roadside markers bringing the total to 102.

UNACCOUNTED FOR: Oregon is home to 998 “Unaccounted For” veterans of all wars according to DPAA and Doughboy MIA. DPAA states half of our nation’s 72,000 WWII MIAs will not be recovered because they were lost or buried at sea. That translates to about 440 Unaccounted For WWII veterans from Oregon will not be covered by SB 441A. ABMC data indicate 82 WWII veterans were buried at sea. ABMC reports no burials at sea for other wars nor does ABMC report “lost at sea” casualties for any war.

OREGON’S UNACCOUNTED & ACCOUNTED FOR

<u>WAR</u>	<u>UNACCOUNTED FOR</u>	<u>ACCOUNTED FOR</u>
WWI *	21	unknown
WWII	885 (includes 1 civilian)	19
Korea	56	5
Vietnam	34	18
Cold War	2	1
TOTAL	998	43
• Doughboy MIA		

Over the last 30 years, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) and predecessors have returned the remains of only 43 Oregonians who were previously Unaccounted For. The overall rate of return of MIAs is about 4%.

Using DPAA and family information one could determine if the 43 “Accounted For” were in fact returned to Oregon making them eligible for roadside markers. Their families should confirm that if they choose to request concurrent resolutions for roadside markers.

That would mean in addition to the 43 already Accounted For, about 550 more veterans (440 WWII Oregon MIAs and 113 MIAs from all other wars) or almost 600 veterans would be eligible for roadside markers if their remains have been or will be recovered, identified and returned to Oregon families or others.

SUMMARY OF TOTAL VETERAN POWS AND MIAS ELIGIBLE FOR ROADSIDE MARKERS:

Combining the POWs and MIAs, about 700 veterans would be eligible for roadside markers if all conditions are met. ODOT records indicate 45 concurrent resolutions have been approved by the Legislature for roadside markers.

WAKE ISLAND CIVILIAN POWS: According to Bonnie Gilbert, historian, author, educator and daughter of Theodore Olson/Portland a Wake Island POW survivor, 1,145 CPNAB civilian construction workers were employed at Wake Island when Japanese air and naval forces attacked and eventually captured Wake Island beginning on Dec. 8, 1941 - 133 were Oregonians. Thirty two (32) Oregonians died while defending Wake Island or subsequently as POW slave laborers at Wake Island and at several POW camps elsewhere – mostly Sasebo, Japan.

Twelve (12) Oregon civilians were among the 98 civilian POWs brutally executed by the Japanese at Wake Island on October 7, 1943. One Oregonian was lost at sea during the attack and remains MIA according to Gilbert and DPAA. Sixteen civilian POWs were laid to rest in a mass grave at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl). Bonnie Gilbert's "**Building For War: The Epic Saga of the Civilian Contractors and Marines of Wake Island in WWII**" is an excellent resource on the civilians employed at Wake Island.

Gilbert also reports the remains of 8 civilian Wake Island POWs were returned to Oregon for burial in 4 Oregon cities: Portland (4), Canyon City (2), Canby (1) and Newburg (1). The remains were identified and returned to families by predecessors of DPAA. I recommend SB 441A be revised to designate those 8 civilians as eligible for roadside markers as they "performed active military service".

DPAA does not list Oregon's WWII Wake Island POWs and MIAs although DPAA lists the names of 874 "Unaccounted For" WWII civilians from across our nation including the 1 Oregonian lost at sea. NARA lists only 9 of the 133 civilian POWs. Therefore we must depend on Bonnie Gilbert's thorough research and be thankful for it.

Almost one year ago, I requested the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs to honor Oregon's 32 WWII civilian Wake Island POWs who died in captivity while performing active military service by engraving their names on the Oregon WWII Memorial on the state Capital grounds. ODVA has verbally assured me that request will be honored pending ongoing administrative actions. That recognition and roadside markers for the 8 Accounted For civilians will treat Oregon's WWII civilian heroes as equals to their Armed Forces comrades in arms.

MORE CIVILIAN POWs and MIAs: DPAA lists Jack Douglas Erskine as an Oregon civilian contractor and POW who remains "Unaccounted For" in **Vietnam**. Mr. Erskine served during WWII and Korean War. Mr. Erskine would be eligible for a roadside marker if his remains are returned and if civilians are included in SB 441A.

DPAA also lists recovered and returned civilian MIAs from the **Cold War** and **Vietnam War**. The remains of Robert Snoddy (Cold War), Edward Weissenbach (Vietnam War) and Henry F. Blood (Vietnam War) were identified and returned by DPAA and its predecessor. Mr. Snoddy was laid to rest in Eugene. Mr. Weissenbach's funeral was held in Eagle Point on July 5, 2020 according to DPAA. As both were employed by the CIA, a federal government agency, they too should be eligible for roadside markers in a revised SB 441. Both served previously in the Armed Forces during war (Snoddy/WWII, Weissenbach/Vietnam)

before their service with the CIA. Mr. Blood was a missionary in South Vietnam and became POW in 1968. His remains were recovered by DPAA's predecessor 30 years later in 1998. He was born in Portland, OR and his remains buried in Texas. He was awarded the Prisoner of War Medal posthumously. He does not appear to have any prior military service.

Altogether, 11 civilians (8 WWII, 3 SE Asia) would be eligible for roadside markers if SB 441A included civilians.

SB 441A should provide for remains of MIAs returned to families in Oregon as well as returned to Oregon as families may choose to have remains delivered to and laid to rest in cemeteries in other states such as Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia (Norvin Brockett).

RECOMENDED REVISIONS TO SB 441A:

1. Include civilian POWs and MIAs
2. Include a provision for return of remains to family as well as to Oregon

I thank this committee for the opportunity to testify on SB 441A. I will try to respond to any questions the Committee might have.

Respectfully submitted,



Dick Tobiason
Chairman, Bend Heroes Foundation
LTC US Army, Retired
dtobiason@bendcale.com, 541-390-9932

cc: BHF, Bonnie Gilbert