



**Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Benefits Administration
Outreach, Transition and Economic Development (OTED)
Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War (ACFPOW)**

Hybrid Meeting – June 2024 Minutes

Date: Tuesday, June 18, 2024

Time: 11am-4:00pm (ET)

Facilitators: Julian Wright, Designated Federal Officer (DFO), OTED
E. Maquel Marshall, Alternate DFO, OTED

*This is a hybrid meeting.

Start Time: 11am, meeting is not recorded

Meeting Opening: Mr. Julian Wright, 11:00am

- Mr. Wright opened the meeting with a phone call from former ACFPOW Committee Member Mr. Harry Corre. Mr. Corre shared his recent VA interactions, how his life has been since stepping away from the committee, and his views of life after turning 100 and 101 years old. Mr. Corre expressed his appreciation of working on the committee, acknowledged several members for their work, and gave his appreciation to Mr. Wright and Mr. Marshall for overseeing the committee, their leadership, and guidance.
- Due to the meeting being hybrid, Mr. Wright, Mr. Marshall, and Chairman Newsome checked the attendance of committee members to ensure there was enough for a quorum.
- As the quorum is established, Mr. Wright briefs the committee documents were sent to their email providing a summary and overview of the committee's efforts over the last few years. The meeting is officially opened. Mr. Wright introduces Mr. E. Maquel Marshall.
- Mr. Marshall thanked Mr. Wright for the introduction and rendered remarks to the members who will be leaving the committee and welcomed the new members who have been asked to serve the committee moving forward. Mr. Marshall turns the meeting over to the Committee Chair, Mr. Earl Newsome.
- Mr. Newsome greeted the committee and thanked them for attending the meeting. Mr. Newsome introduced the new committee members and gave them a quick summary of what is expected of the ACFPOW. Mr. Newsome stressed the importance of following the VA Directive which is the policy guideline VA is to follow regarding FPOWs. Mr. Newsome gave his appreciation to the National Cemetery Administration, in his experience with NCA as Chairman, NCA has "done a great job" ensuring they follow the guideline and beyond. Mr. Newsome

requests the committee overlook the documents they have been sent, try to best understand the role and purpose of the committee and turns the meeting back over to Mr. Wright.

Committee Member Roll Call and Introduction, Julian Wright, 10:29am

Committee Members attending the meeting – Norm McDaniel, James Williams, Jessica Lynch, Dr. Marion Sherman, John Albano, Teresita Smith, John McGrath, Earl Newsome

- Dr. John Albano – Program Director for Robert E. Mitchell Center for POW Studies in Pensacola, Florida.
- Jessica Lynch – new committee member; states its an honor to be on the committee. POW in 2003 when her unit was ambushed in Nazarene, Iraq. Her unit lost 11 service members that day, and she was one of the six that got to return home. Currently serves as the West Virginia Women Veteran Coodinator.
- John “Mike” McGrath – former Navy Captain, five-year, eight-month POW, and current Historian for NAM-POWs which covers POWs who served in Vietnam and Desert Storm. Has contact with all POWs.
- James W. Williams – Member of the committee since 2018, welcomes the new members, and states he looks forward to working with them.
- Norm McDaniel – Motivational Speaker, 7-year POW, former instructor at Defense Acquisition University, Fort Belvoir, Virginia. North Carolina native and current resident.
- Dr. Marion Sherman – celebrating a birthday, retired VA, welcomes the new committee members.
- Teresita Smith – new committee member. No introduction due to technical error.
- Earl Newsome – ACFPOW Chairman, retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, former Deputy Director, Center for Minority Veterans
- Mr. Wright thanks the committee members for their introductions and expresses his gratitude for their work forthcoming on the committee with their experiences and knowledge shared. Mr. Wright preps the meeting for the first presenter.

Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) – Michael Fowler 11:10am

Mr. Fowler gives the committee his introduction and background.

Mr. Fowler provides his presentation giving an overview of DPAA’s history, current projects and future plans.

DPAA has adopted “phases” and is currently in phase 5. The agency has a seven-phase program and is currently working hard to identify the unknown Veterans; however, technological limitations make it difficult.

DPAA projects there are 81,247 unknowns lost to campaigns, service members and government employee civilians, from World War II up through Iraq wars. WWII is the largest. “Half of those were deep sea over water losts as either ships, submarines or

aircraft, and those are frankly not recoverable due to the depth, etcetera.”

For North Korea, DPAA’s path of progress other than the remains in its lab are as yet unidentified, which is not many are the Korean War unknowns that we’re working through Vietnam.

There are no unknowns from Vietnam since the disinterment back in the 90s of the unknown and identification is Captain Michael Blassie, Vietnam.

- Question: Earl Newsome: The 82,000 people, I was stationed in DC for a long time, and there’s a World War II Memorial, Korean War Memorial, and Vietnam Memorial. Are there any memorials anywhere that you know of, that list the names of the unaccounted for?
 - Response: Mike Fowler: There are, but they are more so done in private. There is a POW MIA Museum in Cecil Field, which features all the wars, but not sure of the name list.

DPAA has 51 investigative teams, 53 recovery teams. DPAA has merged with POW Mia Accounting Command in Honolulu, the defense prisoner of War Missing Personnel Office in Arlington, VA, and the Life Science Equipment Laboratory in Ohio.

DPAA works with universities, with archaeology and anthropology programs, history programs, and then other entities that that go out and they do recoveries on behalf of DPAA.

DPAA uses historical things to make identifications. DNA. Archaeology. Forensic odontology. We use material evidence and then forensic anthropology. All of these have specialties that allow you to distinguish remains. DPAA uses isotopic, to tell where one was raised. The teeth of someone from Kansas will have different isotopes from a local person in Vietnam or Laos or Cambodia because of the minerals present and whatnot.

- Question: Earl Newsome: When you’ve identified a POW’s remains, does (DPAA) SOP outline how to notify the family members?
 - Response: Mike Fowler: Once the identification is made, those documents and all the relevant information goes to the service casualty offices and the service casualty offices conduct the briefing. All that information gets explained by their office, benefits, medals, burial options, and all that.
- Question: Marion Sherman: Do you have an estimate of the 82,000 of how many might be POWs?
 - Response: Mike Fowler: We probably have that data, but not in an easily retrievable fashion, or at least I don’t think – I will see if we can pull that out of our database. I can tell you a number of Vietnam POWs died in captivity. I think most of those, the Vietnamese and the early

stages of the thawing relations turned over those remains. I am not sure if there are many still. Where there will be the larger numbers are going to be Korea and Vietnam because we, you know, we know the treatment in the POW camps in North Korea was so horrific that not only did the Chinese come and take over because they were killing too many, not letting people languish and die of disease and malnourishment that the Chinese said we'd better take this over. There were still a lot that died and then there's still WWII. Cabana Taiwan, which we are working through those mass graves and making identifications of those. I would say probably, but I don't have a specific number, but it's World War II, probably the Pacific, the Japanese, the death rate was very bad for POW. I will see if I can find an estimate, and get that back to Julian.

Mr. Fowler reveals a story of Lemuel Dent, a Buffalo Soldier native to Maryland, who died in a battle near the Cinquale Canal, north of Viareggio, Italy, and he had been buried after the war. Dent's remains were identified, and he will be buried in Chetlenham, Maryland, in the near future.

Mr. Fowler shares the DPAA website link, contacts, and asks if there are more questions. Mr. Fowler thanks the committee, exchanges his gratitude and appreciation and offers an open invitation to the committee to visit DPAA or invite DPAA again during the in-person meeting held in Washington D.C.

Mr. Marshall places the meeting on break. **12:13pm**

FPOW Pocket Card Update – Eddie Thomas and Florinda Balfour 12:16pm

Mr. Eddie Thomas, Department of Veterans Affairs Analytics Service Director and Florinda Balfour, Management and Program Analyst, Analytics Service are presented to the committee by Mr. Marshall.

Mr. Thomas advises the committee that there has been an update in Analytics Service's (AS) efforts to add POW estimates to the quarterly pocket card as recommended by previous recommendation of the ACFPOW.

The first update was the FY24 quarter release of the pocket card has the estimates. The second update, is that the numbers of POW had gone up, opposed to going down.

Data reflecting these POWs came from VBA and Performance and Integrity. Data also came from VHA.

Mr. Thomas breaks down how AS compiles their data, the common issues which arise, and data coming from outside sources having to be authenticated.

Mr. Newsome states he accessed the website the evening prior and overlooked the numbers which were provided. Mr. Newsome also acknowledged this update request came from a ACFPOW recommendation from 2020.

Mr. Newsome stated the reason the committee requested this recommendation is “to identify the population of POWs and give people a target to go back and see if they were following the VHA Directive.”

Mr. Newsome and Mr. Thomas discuss the numbers being reflected as Mr. Newsome states he feels there are discrepancies.

Mr. Newsome also states the current VHA Directive for outreach to POWs is not being followed. Requests Mr. Wright provide Mr. Thomas with VHA Directive 1650, dtd July 28, 2023 to show the VHA Directive for the outreach to be conducted.

- Question: Marion Sherman: Mike McGrath has been fighting this number, but the numbers coming back are incorrect.
 - Response: Earl Newsome: Is this because the data is reflecting surviving spouses?
 - Response: Eddie Thomas: We have to break down the data, but we will do and get back to you.

Mr. Wright thanks Mr. Thomas and Ms. Balfour on their time and presentation to the committee and fulfilling a ACFPOW recommendation.

Mr. Thomas and Ms. Balfour’s presentation is completed.

Joint Personnel Recovery Agency (JPRA) – Joseph Afanador

Mr. Wright introduces Joseph “Joe” Afanador.

Mr. Afanador introduces himself and gives a brief overview of the JPRA.

Mr. Afanador is an 18 year active-duty Army clinical psychologist and the Department of Defense’ lead SERE psychologist.

JPRA focuses on current military operations.

JPRA also forecasts possible conditions for the next conflict, so preparing the force, and we do, we support service members who are isolated or have been captured by an adversary.

JPRA has jurisdiction over all of DOD’s survival schools.

Mr. Afanador continues his brief, and mentions he knows ACFPOW Member Dr. Albano.

Chairman Newsome suggests JPRA should speak with members who are POWs to help the research of JPRA.

- Question: Marion Sherman: How does JPRA forecast there will be more POWs?
 - Response: Mr. Afanador: We are unsure how many, but if (USA) ever went to war, there could possibly be POWs. We also anticipate a large number of casualties, and when there's a large number of casualties, then there would be anticipated POWs.

- Question: Marion Sherman: Are there concerns of a war being fought on American soil? Also, do you forecast there will be POWs in this scenario?
 - Response: Mr. Afanador: OK, while that's always a possibility with our organization, anytime there's anyone a service member that's held by a foreign power, once we get them back, that's what we do to support them, regardless of where they're held.
 - Response: Marion Sherman: I was just asking if there were if there in the future because I'm looking at these large numbers that you're potentially predicting and could that happen on American soil if we were at war with a foreign enemy, but there was fighting here, which we haven't experienced, like France and Germany.

Committee Open Discussion – Chairman Earl Newsome 1:50pm

The Chair started the discussion with highlighting the proposed recommendations that was drafted last meeting in August 2023. There were six proposed recommendations that were voted on by the ACFPOW.

The Alt. DFO noted that the proposed recommendations would need to be voted on again since there are new members on the committee.

Committee Break 2:00 – 2:15 PM

Committee Open Discussion About Recommendations 2:15 – 3:00 PM

The Chair and Committee Members agreed that the proposed recommendations will need to be emailed to the group and the vote will take place during the August 2024 meeting. The Chair indicated that he would send the recommendations to each member to review

Preparing/Writing Recommendation – Alt DFO Maquel Marshall 3:00 – 4:00 PM

Mr. Marshall explained that when writing the recommendations, a criteria using the acronym SMART (Specific/strategic, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic/results oriented, and Time framed) must be met. The discussion continued to determine if the recommendations meet the SMART criteria.

Mr. Marshall also explained that there are three responses that program offices assigned the recommendations can respond – Concur, Concur in Principle, and Non concur. The discussion will continue in preparing the recommendations.

Public Comments – DFO Julian Wright 4:00 – 4:15 PM

Mr. Wright informed the ACFPOW that there were no public comments submitted in the Federal Register before the end of comment period ended

Meeting Closeout/Reminders for Next Meeting – DFO Mr. Wright and Alt. DFO Maquel Marshall 4:15 – 4:45 PM

Mr. Wright informed the Committee Members that he's still in the process of requesting presenters for the August meeting so let him know if there's a presenter you would like to brief the Committee.

Mr. McDaniel indicated that he would like to get more information about being buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Mr. Marshall reminded the ACFPOW about the administrative meeting that's scheduled for July 11th at 2:00 – 4:00 PM.

MEETING ADJOURNED - Julian Wright – DFO, ACFPOW closed the meeting with thanks to all.

/s/Julian Wright
Designated Federal Officer
Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War

/s/Earl S. Newsome, III
Chairman
Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War