

# ***VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES***

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STATEMENT OF

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NATIONAL SECURITY & FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
VETERANS OF FOREIGN OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL  
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO

**IMPROVING RECOVERY AND FULL ACCOUNTING  
OF POW/MIA PERSONNEL FROM ALL PAST CONFLICTS**

WASHINGTON, DC

APRIL 2, 2009

CHAIRWOMAN DAVIS, RANKING MEMBER WILSON, AND DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

On behalf of the 2.2 million men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW), the nation's largest combat veterans' organization, I thank you for the opportunity to share our views on this most important issue of accounting for America's warriors who are missing in action and whose fate is still unknown.

The VFW has long been deeply committed to achieving the fullest possible accounting for all U.S. military personnel missing and unaccounted for from all of our nation's wars. So committed that we have traveled to Vietnam and other Southeast Asia countries every year since 1991 to meet with host country senior government officials and press upon them the need for their fullest cooperation to recover America's missing. And over the last five years we have expanded that senior government level dialog by annually traveling to the Peoples Republic of China and the Russian Federation. We communicate regularly with the Defense POW / Missing

Personnel Office and attend their update briefings. We also visit with Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) headquarters staff, detachment commanders, and recovery teams in the field. From personal experience, I can say that these teams are made up of highly motivated and dedicated military men and women, and civilian professionals who are doing a remarkable job under the harshest of conditions. They deserve the fullest support of this Congress, not only in the field, but in the identification laboratories as well.

My testimony will focus on the areas of funding and ways, in our view, to improve or increase the timeliness of the full accounting process.

### **JPAC Funding**

First, I want to point out the current shortfall in funding for JPAC operations. It has come to our attention that once again JPAC has been shortchanged in their budget by \$2.35 million, which will translate into curtailing operations in Europe and canceling two recovery team missions. This is not the way the VFW expects the U.S. government to fund an American national priority. I said once again because in FY2006, JPAC faced a shortfall of \$3.6 million, which would have caused the cancellation and scaling back of many investigative and recovery operations. However, the VFW was able to mobilize key members of Congress and convince DOD to restore most of the funds so some of the operations were able to be reinstated and completed, although not all.

This points to a funding stream that flows from DOD, through the Navy and then from U.S. Pacific Command to JPAC, which puts their mission in competition with war fighting priorities when spending must be adjusted or reduced. Furthermore, when agencies are called upon to cut their spending by a fixed percentage, and that figure trickles down to JPAC, it equates to a disproportional mandate for a command with a relatively small budget. The VFW calls on Congress to demonstrate their resolve to keep this issue as a high national priority by creating a fully funded dedicated line item appropriation for JPAC in the DOD budget, and exempting them from agency mandated cost saving reductions. JPAC's mission is unique and, in our view, will be able to operate more efficiently and effectively under a direct and dedicated funding stream.

### **JPAC New Construction**

Another area that needs to be addressed is the new facility for JPAC. Currently, JPAC facilities are dispersed across five locations on the island of Oahu, consisting of 10 trailers and several temporary buildings. Congress has approved \$105 million for a 140,717 square foot facility that will triple its current lab size. Construction of the new facility, which was originally set for FY 2010, is now scheduled to begin in FY2011 with a completion in FY 2012. However, the Navy diverted construction monies to other priorities, which delayed the groundbreaking for a year.

This new facility is much needed and long overdue. The building will, for the first time, bring together all of the JPAC components into a single headquarters and would house state-of-the-art laboratories to speed up the identification process. It has come to our attention that a Navy Audit Team recently recommended reducing the size of the facility by 16,395 square feet. Such a reduction most likely will reduce laboratory space and have an adverse effect on identification efforts. This project is already underfunded at its original funding level due to inflationary costs as a result of the year delay.

If we truly believe in remaining resolute in our commitment to the goal of the fullest possible accounting of all U.S. military personnel from all of our nation's wars, then we need to ensure that JPAC is provided with the tools, funding and facilities needed to achieve that end. Therefore, we believe this project should continue to be fully funded and remain on the present groundbreaking schedule. The VFW recommends that the size of the new facility remain as originally designed and Congress appropriate the funding needed to account for inflationary costs as a result of the delay in the start of construction.

This new facility will increase JPAC's personnel accounting capabilities and improve JPAC's overall effectiveness.

Also, we are aware that some would like to see all JPAC facilities moved to the continental United States. We believe this move would be unwise, as over 90 percent of the investigative and recovery operations from all wars are in the Pacific region where JPAC is currently located and from where teams deploy.

### **Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory**

Last November, I visited the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) in Rockville, Maryland. They do remarkable work there and support a variety of agencies, including JPAC, in a cost effective environment. This lab is essential to the JPAC Central Identification Lab in their process to identify recovered remains.

Now, the VFW doesn't advocate one way or the other on the Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) recommendations approved by Congress. However, we are concerned when the BRAC process threatens to significantly delay the identification process and family notifications. That possibility is looming on the horizon as critical and timely decisions concerning facility and funding issues have yet to be made for the AFDILs BRAC move to Dover AFB, Delaware. The VFW asks Congress to look into this matter and extract from DOD how this process is moving forward in a manner that will provide adequate facilities and minimize the delay in DNA analysis for the identification of America's missing.

### **U.S. – Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIA Affairs**

The U.S. – Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIA Affairs was established in 1992 at the Presidential level to serve as a forum through which both nations can seek to determine the fate of their missing servicemen. The objectives are to determine whether American servicemen are being held against their will on the territory of the former Soviet Union, and, if so, to secure their immediate release and repatriation; to locate and return to the United States the remains of any deceased American servicemen interred in the former Soviet Union; and ascertain the facts regarding American servicemen who were not repatriated and whose fate remains unresolved. Unfortunately, the Russian President in 2005 reorganized the structure of its side of the commission, which has halted progress of the commission's work and restricted U.S. access to Russia's archives that hold many answers.

Commission members include two U.S. Senators and two U.S. Representatives representing both political parties. The House Democrat Commissioner post has remained vacant since January 2006. This sends a message to the Russian government that this body is not interested in the

workings of the Commission. While at the same time, the VFW is trying to convince the Russian government to reestablish the Commission at the Presidential level. VFW national leaders have traveled to Russia annually over the past five years. They meet with ministers and deputy ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs, as well as senior government officials of the Administration in an effort to impress upon them the importance of this humanitarian mission and the Commissions' work. We need your help. You must convince Speaker of the House Pelosi to appoint a qualified Member of the House to actively serve as the Democrat Commissioner.

Also, as the President works to "reboot" the U.S. relationship with Russia, the VFW asks Congress to encourage him to raise the importance of the Commission and insist that Russia elevate their side of the Commission back to the Presidential level and move forward with greater cooperation on the agreed upon objectives.

### **Bilateral Talks with North Korea**

In May 2005, the U.S. government suspended Joint Field Activity (JFA) recovery efforts in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), due to safety concerns for the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) JFA teams, and suspended bilateral talks with DPRK government officials. Previously, those teams conducted 33 Joint Field Activities consisting of investigative and recovery operations in North Korea resulting in the repatriation of 208 remains and the identification of 24 service members.

Recently North Korea has been removed from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list, thereby creating an opportunity for renewed bilateral talks with DPRK officials concerning investigative and recovery operations. Consequently, the VFW believes it is time to reestablish bilateral talks between the U.S. and DPRK in order to restore Joint Field Activities in North Korea and account for Americans still missing from the Korean War.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, I want to thank you, Madam Chair and all members of the committee for your interest, oversight, and support of America's national priority of accounting for our missing servicemembers. Your continued support will help to bring closure to the families of the missing who have been waiting so long for answers about their loved ones. You also send a powerful message to those who serve in harm's way today, that they will not be left behind; that this nation will do all in its power to find and return them to their family.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the views of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. I look forward to your questions.

**The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is not in receipt  
of any Federal grants or contracts**

**Michael H. Wysong, Director  
National Security and Foreign Affairs  
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U. S.**

Michael H. Wysong was appointed the Director, National Security and Foreign Affairs for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States in May 2005, and as such, is responsible for representing and promoting VFW interests, views, and goals before various U.S. government policymakers, elected officials, congressional committees, federal agencies, other veterans groups, and military/defense coalitions. He works closely with all branches of the armed services and the Departments of Defense, State and Homeland Security. The Director, in coordination with the VFW National Security Committee, Military Affairs Committee, and POW/MIA Subcommittee, develops the strategy and implements the National Security and Foreign Affairs program.

A native of New Jersey, Mr. Wysong enlisted in the Air Force in 1967 and served seven years on active duty as an aircraft weapons technician. His assignments included tours in Korea, Vietnam, and Thailand.

He entered the Air Force Reserve in 1974 and was assigned to McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey. He held the position of Aircraft Loadmaster Superintendent where he managed a department with over 50 reservists and civilians employees, responsible for training, evaluating and ensuring the wartime mission ready posture of all assigned personnel. He further served as a Flight Instructor and Flight Examiner Loadmaster on the C-141 aircraft.

As an aircrew member, he has amassed more than 8,800 flying hours and has participated in such operations as the Vietnam Babylift, the Evacuation of Vietnam, the Grenada rescue operation, and Operation Just Cause, the invasion and liberation of Panama. In 1990 he was recalled to active duty for 11 months in support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and served in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. Mr. Wysong retired from the Air Force Reserve in 2005, after 38 years of total service, with the rank of Chief Master Sergeant.

His many decorations include the Meritorious Service Medal with 5 oak leaf clusters; the Air Medal; the Aerial Achievement Medal with 1 oak leaf cluster; the Air Force Commendation Medal with 2 oak leaf clusters; the Air Force Achievement Medal; the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal with 3 campaign stars; the Korean Defense Service Medal; the Vietnam Service Medal with 8 campaign stars; the Southwest Asia Service Medal with 3 campaign stars; and the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal. In 1993, he was selected as one of the U.S. Air Force Twelve Outstanding Airman of the Year.

Mr. Wysong was employed by the Department of the Air Force from 1975 – 2005 as an Air Reserve Technician, a federal civil service position with duties comparable to his Air Force Reserve assignment, retiring in 2005.

He joined the VFW in 1978 at Post 9503 in Bayville, New Jersey where he maintains his Life Membership. Since that time he has served in a variety of leadership positions throughout the VFW at every organizational level, including All American Post Commander in 1983-1984 and District Commander in 1986-1987. He has held many VFW committee assignments at the state and national levels. Before assuming his present position he served as National Chairman of the VFW Political Action Committee, New Jersey VFW State Legislative Director, and as a member of the VFW National Legislative Committee. Appointed by the Governor, he served on the New Jersey Veterans Service Council for six years before coming to Washington, DC.

He is a member of many civic and fraternal organizations, including the American Legion, Air Force Association, and Air Force Sergeants Association.