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COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD OF
MAJOR GENERAL KELLY MCKEAGUE
COMMANDER, JOINT POW/MIA ACCOUNTING COMMAND
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND CONTRACTING OVERSIGHT

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Introduction

Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Johnson, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, it is a privilege to appear before you today. When I took Command of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), almost ten months ago, I realized that JPAC could be operating more efficiently and effectively. Since then, my staff and I, in concert with DASD Winfield and all our partners in the personnel accounting community, have worked hard to improve how we account for our missing personnel from past conflicts. I am pleased to address and highlight with you some of the improvements and challenges of JPAC.

As JPAC's Commander I have the honor to lead over 239 joint service members, 265 civil service civilians, 41 Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education (ORISE)¹ fellows and 4 contractors. They are all talented and dedicated to bringing home America's missing from our nation's past conflicts, and in doing so providing answers for families who have waited decades for information on their loved ones.

Our mission is global in scope, and with investigations marked by painstaking research, recoveries challenged by inhospitable environments, as well as a remarkable scientific enterprise. As responsible stewards of federal funding, we are continuously seeking efficiencies and optimizing cost-effectiveness.

The weight of our sacred obligation is no better captured than in a remark a sister of an Army helicopter pilot missing in Vietnam said to me after this past June's National

¹ ORISE is a U.S. Department of Energy institute dedicated to strengthening our nation's research and development enterprise through education and research participation programs; they also educate the next generation of scientists. JPAC and its predecessor CILHI have benefited from the ORISE program since 1999. JPAC currently has anthropologists from Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Hungary, Cyprus, Japan, and South Korea working as ORISE fellows to help recover and identify unaccounted-for Americans from past conflicts.

League of POW/MIA Families Annual Meeting. “The vast majority of the families who are involved have tremendous trust in your mission and in those who work our cases.”

The fulfillment we at JPAC receive in accomplishing our mission is unmatched. The fulfillment of our mission is unmatched. To experience the fervent interest and staunch support of the leadership and members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars at their national convention last week was both humbling and inspiring.

JPAC Today

To enhance command and control, streamline processes and procedures, and provide the fullest possible accounting for our missing from past conflicts, JPAC was established in October 2003 by the merger of the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory-Hawaii (CILHI) and the U.S. Pacific Command’s (PACOM) Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (JTF-FA). In Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, Congress established an “ACCOUNTING FOR GOAL...to increase significantly the capability and capacity” to account for at least 200 missing persons annually beginning in FY 2015. The Department provided resources to achieve the goal of increasing our capacity and capability. Towards this goal, JPAC has endeavored to provide equitable treatment and application of our resources across all conflicts -- World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cold War and the Persian Gulf War.

JPAC’s three primary missions consist of searching for, recovering and identifying the remains of missing Americans from our past conflicts. Historians and analysts conduct both archival and field research. Recovery teams are comprised of civilian scientists and technicians as well as military specialists, most of whom are

combat veterans. JPAC's² scientists comprise some of the world's best forensic anthropologists.

In addition to our fielding the optimal mix of these missions, much of my focus over the past ten months has been on improving communication, coordination, and collaboration both within the command and with our external partners; ensuring JPAC is structured to effectively and efficiently accomplish our mission; establishing processes which will sustain and improve the organization and mission into the future; and providing a quality work environment. There are some specific efforts we have undertaken to improve capabilities to account for Americans from our nations past conflicts.

Capabilities Improvements

JPAC maintains a very high operational tempo (OPTEMPO) consisting of on average 68³, 45-day research, investigation, and excavation missions per year and individuals deploying approximately 160 days per person annually. We have conducted 80 missions in FY2013⁴, an increase of 18 percent from our average. While maintaining this high mission OPTEMPO, JPAC identifies on average 77⁵ fallen heroes per year, providing long awaited answers to families, fellow Veterans, and the American people. Although JPAC is a Direct Reporting Unit of the U.S. Pacific Command, we have a world-wide mission, deploying teams to more than 22 countries in the past year. We

² The CIL is the only skeletal identification laboratory to be accredited by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors -- Laboratory Accreditation Board, a distinction achieved in 2003, and most recently renewed, this past April. In 2008, it was also the first DoD forensic laboratory to be accredited to the International Standard (certificate ISO 17025).

³ FY2007-2012 average.

⁴ As of 26 July 2013; includes, investigation and recovery team missions and field/joint forensic reviews.

⁵ This is a FY2008-2012 running average per FY.

have long-standing partnerships with the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam accomplishing a total of 36 Vietnam War-related missions in FY2013.

Unquestionably, there are areas within JPAC that offer opportunities for improvement. We make consistent efforts to identify and address these areas. Given the complexities of our worldwide mission, we regularly evaluate our processes and procedures so as to improve our efficiencies and performance. As a result of this self-evaluation, we identified internal areas which, with reorganization, have provided improved functional alignment and efficiencies.

In October 2012, JPAC reorganized internally to create efficiencies to better align functions, and delineate roles and responsibilities. This has improved interaction within JPAC and our work with the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO). Realizing the need for streamlined command and control, logistics planning, communication and synergy among all deploying support personnel, a major aspect of the reorganization was combining the primary sections which comprise the typical Investigation Team and Recovery Team into a single division.

We modified the structure of our Investigation Teams to improve their efficiencies and effectiveness. This consisted of two key functions: a Recovery Leader⁶ to provide site assessment and mapping capabilities, and a military Team Leader to provide logistics capability similar to what we historically have had on our Recovery Teams.

⁶ A Recovery Leader is a civilian scientist, either Anthropologist or Archeologist from JPAC's Central Identification Laboratory who leads efforts associated with the specific site once the Investigation Leader has pinpointed the area where the incident occurred.

These two additions, along with the Investigation Leader⁷, form the nucleus of our investigative efforts.

Additionally, JPAC instituted an Investigation Decision Board, which provides greater command oversight and ensures cross-functional coordination for all investigation missions. Since FY 2010, using this process, more than 40 sites have been added to our excavation list from our investigations in Europe, which will enable recovery missions in countries such as Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Germany, the Netherlands, and Poland.

JPAC also instituted innovative concepts in the area of field investigation. Earlier this year, after a seven-year hiatus of operations in Burma, we established a formal outreach program to reach local citizens who may have information related to a U.S. loss incident from World War II. In less than two months, we received more than 1,000 calls, which preliminarily appear to comprise at least 350 solid analytical leads. This program was only possible with the cooperation of the Burmese government and has been so successful that we hope to expand the program in 2014 to be operational 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

Every country is unique and what works well in one country does not necessarily translate to another. Using lessons learned from the early years of our Vietnam War accounting, in more remote areas such as the jungles of Papua New Guinea, where communications are more austere, we are developing a program to hire local Papuans to engage the villagers so as to learn about loss incidents, photograph aircraft wreckage, and take GPS coordinates of potential sites. They have greater access and

⁷ An Investigation Leader is a civilian historian who leads the investigative effort.

can move about the countryside better than our JPAC teams. We provide training and oversight for these initial investigative efforts and by analyzing the information they provide, at a much reduced cost, we can better determine where to focus JPAC's resources.

Recent innovations in technology have resulted in scientific advances which have accelerated our Korean War identifications. These innovative methodologies, developed by JPAC's scientific staff, are a direct result of collaboration with academic institutions and civilian laboratories to capitalize on forensic solutions to identify unknown remains where traditional DNA methods are not possible and conventional scientific principles cannot be applied. Radiographic comparisons and an image recognition program are two such examples, and the first innovation has enabled us in the last two years to identify 25 Korean War servicemen buried as Unknowns at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific.

Our investigative process has also incorporated technology improvements. We use the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to create geospatial analyses of Tarawa and Papua New Guinea to overlay historical imagery, maps, and information with current field activities to improve our accuracy in locating sites for field investigation.

JPAC contracted with a private U.S. firm to conduct research on the November 1943 Battle of Huertgen Forest where thirty-seven servicemen from the 112th Infantry Regiment remain missing. The goal of this project is to provide an archaeological survey proposal to narrow the scope of the battlefield to enable targeted field investigation efforts. It also provides a pilot to learn from for future contracts.

Capacity Improvements

To improve our coordination with U.S. European Command (EUCOM), JPAC established a Liaison Office in EUCOM to better coordinate activities such as complex issues of permitting and logistics arrangements in advance of arrival by our Investigation and Recovery Teams and provides a direct interface with the range of U.S. and foreign agencies.

Although operations in DPRK remain suspended due to the safety and security of U.S. teams and North Korean behavior, we established and have sustained a forward element in Seoul to conduct continuous investigation operations in South Korea, seeking answers on the more than 800 unaccounted-for personnel within and south of the demilitarized zone. This specialized investigation team works directly with our South Korean counterpart organization, leveraging their extensive in-country expertise and streamlining our resource requirements.

JPAC is fortunate to have third-party researchers, professional and amateur historians, and citizens around the world who are interested in assisting with the U.S. accounting mission. We leverage these non-government (NGO) entities to the maximum extent possible. Last fall we led a “no-host” NGO conference providing a forum to establish a working relationship with these various private groups and promote an exchange of information.

JPAC opened a laboratory annex at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska; renovations⁸ were completed on 1 June 2013. The annex provides office and forensic

⁸ The JCA facility was a recapitalization of a vacated space within a large facility on Offutt AFB.

laboratory analysis space. This state-of-the-art facility will allow greater ability to examine larger and more complex cases.

Additionally, our new headquarters building under construction in Hawaii is approximately 60% complete. This facility will include staff and operations offices and a forensic laboratory, greatly improving JPAC's capacity and capability.

Planning Efforts and Challenges

Like other military operations, execution of JPAC mission activities involves an extensive planning process which requires a long lead-time, affected by other governments' policies; geographic and weather conditions; local permitting; and availability of supplies, transportation, and services in remote regions of the world. Much of my job requires working with foreign governments to maintain access and build partnerships. Weather conditions present significant challenges and in some regions limit when we can conduct operations. Increasingly, we find mission costs on the rise. Other factors affecting the mission planning process include underwater and high altitude sites, both requiring highly specialized skills and external support from other DoD organizations. The process and procedure improvements noted above enable JPAC to meet these challenges in a coordinated and fiscally responsible way.

A key challenge to identifying missing personnel is obtaining sufficient forensic evidence and materials by which to make the identification. Evidence is obtained through multiple means (unilateral turnovers, third parties, investigation and recovery operations, disinterment, etc.). Researching and investigating cases to determine location of loss for subsequent recovery operations is currently the primary alternative to unilateral/third party turnovers. Given the difficulty of finding these sites, which is

compounded by the global scale and the passage of time, JPAC works with DPMO and others to narrow leads as much as possible before an investigation team goes to a potential site. The DASD and I focus a lot of our attention in this area. We optimize our resources to address these complex challenges to accomplish our mission.

Fiscal Impacts

While we are pleased with these improvements and will continue the process of self-assessment and correction as necessary, we face challenges in the future as a result of the Budget Control Act and sequestration, and the civilian hiring freeze and furloughs. JPAC is working to sustain our tasks with fewer resources and to balance requirements to meet mission objectives.

Key to fulfilling our commitments made to foreign governments who assist with our accounting mission is timely availability of funds. We are heavily reliant on such things as contracted helicopter and logistical support, both of which require funding in advance of the mission and the uncertainty of funding availability adversely impacts all contracting efforts and jeopardizes mission schedules. Our deployments are also dependent on key military specialties like medical and explosive ordnance disposal. These individual augmentee requirements -- 450 this coming FY -- have been superbly supported by PACOM and its Service components, but they, too, are having to make fiscal and operational trade-offs.

In addition, JPAC has been severely affected by the civilian personnel hiring freeze. The loss of temporary or "term limited" employees and hiring freeze hits the scientific staff particularly hard. I continue to work with PACOM and others to find solutions to the hiring problem.

The civilian furlough has hindered research efforts, coordination with foreign governments, operational planning, and mission execution. More than half of the JPAC staff is civilian, and all are subject to furlough. Consequently, we lose the equivalent of 265 days of productivity each week the furlough is in place. We cannot sustain our historical OPTEMPO under such a restraint.

Conclusion

Although we face significant challenges today and into the future due to the current fiscal climate, with the dedicated professionals at JPAC, I am confident we will continue to overcome the challenges, and while we may no longer have the flexibility to respond as rapidly as we would like, we will not waver in our commitment to the families of our missing heroes, our Veterans, the American people – a moral obligation to seek the fullest possible accounting of those who lost their lives in service to this great nation.

Madam Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you again for this opportunity to appear before you, and more importantly, for your support of this noble and critical mission which defines us as a nation. Prominently on a wall in JPAC's headquarters is President Calvin Coolidge's sage advice, "The Nation which forgets its defenders will be itself forgotten." The dedicated and talented professionals of JPAC endeavor to see that this never happens.

I welcome the questions you might have.