



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

**Virtual Meeting – December 2024 Minutes**

**Date:** Wednesday, December 4, 2024

**Time:** 11a.m. - 4:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)

**Facilitators:** Julian Wright, Designated Federal Officer (DFO), OTED

**Attendees:** Earl S. Newsome, III, (Chairman), Jessica Lynch, Dr. John P. Albano, Norman A. McDaniel, Dr. Joseph Milligan, Dr. Marion Sherman, James Williams, Marion "Tony" Marshall, John "Mike" McGrath, Dr. Kailyn Bobb, Teresita Smith, Arlene Duncan

**Start Time: 8:00 a.m. ET, meeting is not recorded**

**Meeting Opening: Mr. Julian Wright, 11:00 a.m. ET**

- Mr. Wright opened the meeting by thanking committee members, leadership and provided a brief history of the need for the meeting.
- Some members indicated that they were having issues with joining the Microsoft Teams meeting, but they rebooted their computers and was able to join.
- Mr. Wright acknowledged that there were several ACFPOW members whose terms will expire in December: Earl S. Newsome (Chairman), James Williams, and Dr. Marion Sherman. Mr. Wright thanked Mr. Williams, Dr. Sherman, and Chairman Newsome for their years of service on the Committee.
- Introduced Mr. Umar Awan, OTED FPOW Program Manager, currently serving as the Acting Supervisory Program Analyst for Outreach.
- Mr. Wright turned the meeting over to Chairman Newsome.

Chairman Newsome addresses the committee, and he stated that he recognizes the work the committee has done to assist FPOWs and their surviving spouses. Chairman Newsome thanked the committee for all the work they have done over the years, and he encouraged the ACFPOW to continue their efforts to assist FPOWs. Chairman Newsome delivered his final opening remarks and prepared for the official Roll Call.

**Committee Member Roll Call and Introduction, Julian Wright**

Committee Members attending the meeting – Norm McDaniel, Marion "Tony" Marshall, James Williams, Joseph Milligan, Jessica Lynch, Dr. Marion Sherman, Dr. John Albano,

Dr. Kailyn Bobb, Teresita Smith, John McGrath, Earl Newsome, and Arlene Duncan

- Jessica Lynch – new committee member; states it's 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 Coordinator.
- 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 – Retired VA, welcomes the new committee members.
- Dr. John Albano – Program Director for Robert E. Mitchell Center for POW Studies in Pensacola, Florida.
- Teresita Smith – Retired Army and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) analyst.
- Arlene Duncan – Marine Corps Veteran,
- Earl Newsome – ACFPOW Chairman, retired Army Colonel, former Deputy Director, Center for Minority Veterans

Chairman Newsome confirms to Mr. Wright there are enough committee members present for a quorum. Mr. Wright addresses the committee on the current recommendations and ensure the newer members review and vote on those recommendations for them to be presented to SECVA. Mr. Wright discusses the proposed agenda for the committee. Mr. Wright preps the meeting for the first presenter.

Mr. Wright and Chairman Newsome agree since the last ACFPOW meeting (June 2024) was held virtually and having the committee together in person with three new members, to allow the new members to introduce themselves to the rest of the committee.

Mr. Wright and Chairman Newsome states how the committee members are selected, and the process VBA takes to place members on the committees. Mr. Newsome states why the committees are important, his experiences and the successes, obstacles, and the objectives of serving on committees such as ACFPOW.

The committee prepares for their first presenter.

### **VBA Outreach, Transition and Economic Development Executive Director – Melissa Cohen**

Ms. Cohen greeted the committee and provided opening and welcoming remarks. Ms. Cohen thanked the ACFPOW for all their efforts to support FPOWs and their surviving spouses, and she offered a special thank you to the members who terms end in December.

Ms. Cohen thanks the committee for their time and ends her presentation.

### **VBA Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits, Mr. Mike Frueh**

Mr. Frueh greeted the committee, and he specifically thanked the three committee members whose terms expire in December. Mr. Frueh indicated that the ACFPOW is his favorite committee.

### **VBA FPOW Coordinator Roles and Responsibilities, Nashville Regional Office**

- Efrain Arce-Perez is introduced as the VBA FPOW Coordinator and a coach at the Nashville Regional Office.
- Mr. Arce-Perez indicated that in the Tennessee Valley Health Care System there are 15 FPOWs enrolled in care: WWII – 1, Korea – 4, Vietnam – 9, and Gulf War – 1.
- Mr. Arce-Perez informed the ACFPOW that the FPOW National Workload Claims Pending is pending 180 days, the National average days pending is 113.5 days, FPOW claims pending in Nashville is 3 days.
- Mr. Arce-Perez indicated that he works closely with the FPOW Advocate, Shawn Richardson, at the Tennessee Valley Health Care.
  - Question: Chairman Newsome - How often do the VHA FPOW Advocate and you have contact with the FPOWs on an annual basis?
  - Answer: Mr. Arce-Perez indicated that he reaches out to FPOWs in the catchment area twice a year. They are working to increase outreach on a quarterly basis.
  - Question: Tony Marshall - Are you currently serving any MIA families?
  - Answer: Mr. Arce-Perez indicated that he is not aware of any outreach to families of MIA Veterans; however, Shawn Richardson-FPOW Advocate may have more information.
- Mr. Wright informed the ACFPOW that the Nashville RO and Tennessee Valley Health Care System were selected for the virtual site visit because the VAMC had a large number of FPOWs receiving care.
  - Question: Teresita Smith – WWII Veterans who are FPOWs may not have it designated on their headstones. Will you provide some assurances that the WWII Veterans will get that put on their markers?
  - Answer: Mr. Arce-Perez informed Mrs. Smith that NCA takes care of markers and headstones, and the Veteran's family usually makes that request.
- Chairman Newsome also informed Mrs. Smith and the newer members of the committee that there was a recommendation to add FPOW to the VA Form 40-1330, Claim for Standard Government Headstone or Marker. NCA completed/closed that recommendation pretty fast.

### **VHA FPOW Advocate Roles and Responsibilities, Tennessee Valley Health Care System**

- Shawn Richardson is introduced as the FPOW Advocate at the Tennessee Valley Health Care System.

- Mr. Richardson indicated that 14 out of 15 are connected to VA Primary Care
  - All FPOWs are receiving disability compensation benefits except 2.
- Mr. Richardson indicated they work with the Nashville RO to determine Tennessee FPOWs not accurately charted as an FPOW in Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS).
- Mr. Richardson also reported that in 2019, there were 38 FPOWs who passed away, and in 2017, 27 FPOWs passed away in Tennessee.
  - Question: Chairman Newsome – Are there are any FPOWs living in State Veterans Home in Tennessee.
  - Answer: Shawn Richarson - Not in the State Veterans Home
  - Question: Mr. Wright – Does VHA have a flash in the system if the Veteran is a FPOW?
  - Answer: Shawn Richardson – Yes, the information is placed in CPRS.
  - Question: Mike McGrath – What’s the name of that called again?
  - Answer: Shawn Richardson – It’s called CPRS, which is computerized patient record system

#### **Health Eligibility Center Director, Stacey Echols**

- Mr. Echols indicated the verification process for FPOW is from VHA is fairly concise.
- Mr. Echols said that they also access the Defense Personnel Records Management Retrieval System, SHARE, and Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) to determine if a Veteran is a FPOW.
  - Question: Chairman Newsome – How are does VHA communicate with VBA to verify a FPOW status?
  - Answer: Stacey Echols – We coordinate with VBA on a regular basis.

#### **Committee Discussion on Recommendations – DFO Julian Wright and Chairman Newsome**

#### **ACFPOW Proposed Recommendations**

The following seven recommendations were discussed, voted on, and approved by the ACFPOW Committee Members for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs review.

1. The Department of Veterans Affairs shall establish Cognitive Impairment as a presumptive for Former Prisoners of War (FPOW).

Reasoning: Research “Prisoner of war status, posttraumatic stress disorder, and dementia in older veterans” has shown that FPOW combat Veterans demonstrate increased cognitive impairment as compared to non-FPOW combat Veterans.

Recommendation Completion: By end of 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter FY2025.

2. The Department of Veterans Affairs shall establish Trauma and Stressor-Related Disorders as a presumptive for Former Prisoners of War (FPOW).

Reasoning: PTSD and other trauma disorders have been reclassified under the category "Trauma and Stressor-Related Disorders".

Recommendation Completion: By end of 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter FY2025.

3. The Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Health Administration shall provide timely inpatient or residential care, in a Veterans Affairs medical center or contracted facility, for cognitively impaired Former Prisoners of War (FPOW).

Reasoning: The Department of Veterans Affairs does not have sufficient long-term memory care facilities and staff capacity to meet the need for cognitively impaired (FPOW), a rapidly aging cohort.

Recommendation Completion: By end of 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter FY2025.

4. Care Management and Social Work Services (12CMSW), Office of Patient Care Services shall develop and implement a web-based assessment tool for compliance with VHA Directive 1650, with quarterly reporting.

Reasoning: VHA Directive 1650 does not require monitoring or measurement of the assigned responsibilities of the Former Prisoners of War Care and Benefit Team. See Minority Veteran Program Coordinator's report as an example. The desired result is to leverage best practices.

Recommendation Completion: By end of 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter FY2025.

5. Care Management and Social Work Services (12CMSW), Office of Patient Care Services shall provide VISNs periodic updated listings of Former Prisoners of War (FPOW) in their catchment areas to facilitate implementation of VHA Directive 1650.

Reasoning: To properly manage the program at the local level coordinators need accurate listings of FPOWs in their catchment areas. VACO staff offices are best equipped to secure periodic updates of FPOWs in the VA system.

Recommended Completion: By end of 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter FY 2025.

6. Care Management and Social Work Services (12CMSW), Office of Patient Care Services shall modify VHA Directive 1650 to include dedicated hours for the Former Prisoners of War (FPOW) Advocate. The number of dedicated hours shall depend on the local VA medical center's FPOW population.

Reasoning: VHA Directive 1650 requires assigned responsibilities for the FPOW Advocate but does not provide the FPOW Advocate with time allotted to accomplish these important FPOW tasks.

Recommendation Completion: By end of 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter FY2025.

7. The VHA Caregiver Program Manager at each VA medical center will coordinate with the Former Prisoners of War (FPOW) Advocate to ensure that FPOWs and spouses are aware of the benefits and services of the Caregiver Program.

Reasoning: There is a lack of awareness of the Caregiver Program benefits and services in the FPOW community.

Recommendation Completion: By end of 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter FY2025.

### **Public Comments – DFO Julian Wright**

Mr. Wright informed the ACFPOW that he didn't receive any questions from the public. Mr. Wright used the time to discuss potential sites for upcoming ACFPOW meetings. Some of the sites

### **Committee Open Discussion and Takeaways for virtual meeting**

Mr. Wright closed out the meeting by again thanking Chairman Newsome, James Williams, and Dr. Marion Sherman.

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

**/s/Julian Wright, Designated Federal Officer (DFO)  
Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War (FPOW)**

**/s/Earl S. Newsome III , Chairman  
Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War (FPOW) Chairman  
Dated: March 4, 2025**