



Korean War MIA Meeting

Wednesday 9 December 2015

Venue – Russell Offices, Canberra

Summary of Key Outcomes

This is a summary of the key outcomes to facilitate working group members' ability to communicate with constituents and stakeholders. It does not cover all items discussed, nor does it replace the minutes which are distributed for members purposes. It deliberately does not document the full nature of discussions as it is considered that to do this would stifle open and honest working group discussion over time and is not in the common interest of working group members or their constituents.

Attendance

AHQ - DCOS COL Andrew Hocking

UWC-A - Mr Brian Manns, Mr Bradley Ebert, MAJ David Wilson

RAN - CMDR Geoffrey Fiedler

RAAF - WGCDR Peter Gibb, SQNLDR Gregory Williams

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - Korea Section, Mr John Williams

RAR Association – National Secretary LTCOL Ted Chitham MC OAM (Rtd)

RAAF Association - President AVM Brent Espeland AM (Rtd)

77 Squadron Association – GPCAPT Milton Cottee (Rtd)

Australian Council of Korean Veterans Associations - National President
RADM Ian Crawford AO AM (Rtd)

Korean Veterans Association of Australia – ACT Representative Mr Colin Berryman OAM

Family of MIAs - Mr Ian Saunders OAM, Mrs Jill Talty, Ms Julie Dorrington (via teleconference)

Welcome and introductory remarks – COL Andrew Hocking

COL Hocking thanked representatives for attending and outlined his aim for the meeting, which was to provide an environment for open dialogue in a face-to-face environment and to commence the process of improving engagement by the Defence community with key stakeholders representing Australia's Korean War MIAs.

As Chair of the meeting, COL Hocking indicated that the first two agenda items would enable Defence staff to provide relevant background information to attendees, but that the main focus of the meeting was to provide a forum for people to raise any issues that they wished to raise personally, or on behalf of the organisations that they represented, and for those issues to be discussed in an open and constructive manner.

UWC-A update – Mr Brian Manns

Mr Manns delivered a Powerpoint presentation that outlined the responsibilities and mission of UWC-A, including providing examples of past recoveries of Australian MIAs from different conflicts and parts of the world. This presentation provided context to meeting attendees on the wide range of activities undertaken by UWC-A.

Status of Korean War MIA projects – MAJ David Wilson

MAJ Wilson outlined the priority tasks being undertaken under the Korean War Project within UWC-A:

- Maintaining a family contact database;
- Collecting family trees for MIAs in order to identify suitable family reference sample (FRS) DNA donors;
- Collecting DNA FRS from appropriate family members of MIAs; and
- Liaising with families, counterpart organisations in other nations and other government agencies in relation to Australia's Korean War MIAs.

General business

COL Hocking then opened the floor to next of kin and representatives of veteran organisations to raise issues for discussion. There was wide-ranging discussion that has been distilled into the following Meeting Outcomes which will set the work agenda for the group for the immediate future.

Meeting Outcomes

Strategy regarding recovery and identification of Australian MIA

1. Liaise with American and South Korean authorities to determine whether any remains they currently hold are those of Australian servicemen.
2. Use diplomatic and defence networks to encourage other nations to assist in getting North Korea to cooperate with the international community regarding recovery of remains from their country. For example China, which has good relations with both North Korea and Australia, may be able to facilitate improved cooperation.

Relating to DPAA/AFDIL

3. Provide to the US Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) for inclusion in their database the set of FRS collected by UWC-A from the families of Australia's Korean War MIA. Provide to AFDIL future FRS collected from families at regular intervals as soon as practicable after collection.
4. Link the FRS collected by Mr Ian Saunders and provided to AFDIL (via JPAC) with the FRS provided by UWC-A.
5. Seek advice from AFDIL regarding the process they undertake when checking remains against its database of FRS and the notification protocol that is followed after a positive identification. This information will then be promulgated to families and other relevant stakeholders.
6. Seek advice from DPAA regarding the ongoing program for processing human remains (including both DNA testing and dental records) recovered from the Korean War held at their laboratory and within the "Punchbowl", noting the possibility that Australian servicemen may be included among those remains.

Relating to Counterpart Organisations

7. Consider raising with the United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission (UNCMAC) the possibility of exhuming the remains of certain unknown soldiers from the UN Memorial Cemetery in Korea in order to obtain DNA samples and dental records for distribution to relevant nations. It is noted that the proposal could require broader contributing nation agreement.
8. Consider the level and degree of formality of engagement with our counterpart organisations in relevant countries ie AFDIL, DPAA, MAKRI, JCCC and whether a Memorandum of Understanding or Statement of Intent would enhance our cooperation with these agencies.

Relating to families / veteran associations

9. Provide a fact sheet / list of frequently asked questions for publication on the UWC-A website and dissemination to families and other interested stakeholders.
10. Notwithstanding that they may have provided a FRS to AFDIL previously via Ian Saunders, encourage relevant family members to provide UWC-A with a further FRS so that the Australian Government can attempt to obtain a full set of mitochondrial and Y-STR FRS for all Australia's Korean War MIA over which it will retain custody and control.
11. Enhance communication and engagement with the families of Australia's Korean War MIAs and veteran associations.
12. Raise community knowledge and engagement regarding Australia's Korean War MIA.

13. Acknowledge that Mr Ian Saunders has a significant role in representing the general interests of the Korean War MIA family community. However, Ms Julie Dorrington and Mrs Jill Talty have also indicated they wish to continue to be involved in Korean War MIA issues and other family members will also be encouraged to become actively engaged.

Closing remarks - COL Andrew Hocking

COL Hocking advised that the outcomes of the meeting would be documented and sent to attendees for consideration and that Defence's engagement and communication with the Korean War MIA community would continue to improve.

Next meeting: Likely to be March 2016. Attendees agreed to consider the composition, location and frequency of future meetings.

List of Acronyms / Terms

AFDIL - Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (USA)

AHQ - Army Headquarters

DCOS - Deputy Chief of Staff

DPAA - Defense POW / MIA Accounting Agency (USA)

FRS – Family Reference Sample (of DNA)

MAKRI - Ministry for national Defence Agency for KIA Recovery and Identification (South Korea)

MIA - Missing in Action

Mitochondrial DNA – maternal DNA, passed from mother to all offspring

JCCC - Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (UK)

JPAC - Joint POW / MIA Accounting Command (now known as DPAA) (USA)

UNCMAC - United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission

UWC-A - Unrecovered War Casualties - Army

Y-STR - paternal DNA, passed from father to sons