

INTRODUCTION

SUBJECT OF THE STUDY

The study of Former Prisoners of War is a comprehensive study of the health-care and compensation needs of veterans who are former prisoners of war (POWs). The study was required by the Veterans' Disability Compensation and Survivors' Benefits Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-479) enacted October 18, 1978. Section 305 of the Act contains the requirement for the study:

(a) The Administrator of Veterans' Affairs, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, shall carry out a comprehensive study of the disability compensation awarded to, and the health-care needs of, veterans who are former prisoners of war. The Administrator shall include in such study---

- (1) descriptions and analyses of the repatriation procedures, including physical examinations, for former prisoners of war and the adequacy of such procedures and the resultant medical records of former prisoners of war;
- (2) the types and severity of disabilities that are particularly prevalent among former prisoners of war in various theaters of operation at various times;
- (3) a description and analysis of procedures used with respect to former prisoners of war in determining eligibility for health-care benefits and in adjudicating claims for disability compensation, including an analysis of the current use of statutory and regulatory provisions specifically relating to former prisoners of war; and
- (4) a survey and analysis of the medical literature on the health-related problems of former prisoners of war.

(b) The Administrator shall transmit to the Congress and to the President a report on the results of such study not later than February 1, 1980. Such report shall include recommendations for such administrative and legislative action as the Administrator considers may be necessary to assure that former prisoners of war receive compensation and health-care benefits for all disabilities which may reasonably be attributed to their internment.

There has been continuing concern over the years for the health and welfare of former POWs and the aftereffects of their incarceration. The requirement for this study reflects the current congressional concern, particularly by the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees, over whether the health-care and compensation needs of former POWs are being adequately met.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to recommend actions necessary "to assure that former prisoners of war receive compensation and health-care benefits for all disabilities which may reasonably be attributed to their internment."¹ A principal concern is whether former POWs are able to prove service-connection for disabilities attributable to the conditions of capture and internment. Some

former POWs claim that their ability to prove service-connection for disabilities is hampered because there are inadequate medical records, they received only cursory physical and psychological examinations at repatriation, and certain disabilities which were originally considered to be minor are now progressively debilitating. Other issues include whether former POWs, when compared with their non-POW counterparts, have excessive death rates or a higher incidence of such things as cardiovascular disease, "K-Z" (concentration camp) syndrome, tuberculosis, infective and parasitic diseases, nutritional disorders, nerve disorders, intestine and liver diseases, genitourinary and bone diseases.² The study attempts to resolve these issues and focuses on the most current information available on the physical and psychological effects of the POW experience.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study addresses former POWs repatriated from World War I, World War II, Korean Conflict and the Veteran Era. The most recent estimate indicates that there are nearly 100,000 American former POWs living today. Table I below shows the number of POWs from each conflict.

TABLE I

NUMBER OF AMERICAN POWS

	TOTAL	WWI	TOTAL WWII	WWII PACIFIC	WWII EUROPE	KOREAN CONFLICT	PUEBLO	VIET NAM
CAPTURED & INTERNED	142,307	4,120	130,201*	34,648	95,532	7,140	80	766
STILL CLASSIFIED AS POW	7							7
DIED WHILE POW	17,026	147	14,072*	12,935	1,124	2,701		106
REFUSED REPATRIATION	21					21		
RETURNED TO U.S. MILITARY CONTROL	125,253	3,973	116,129*	21,713	94,408	4,418	80	653
ESTIMATED NO. RETURNEES ALIVE ON JAN. 1, 1979	98,494	800	93,128	16,237	76,891	3,844	80	642

*These "Total WWII" figures represent more than the sum of the corresponding "WWII Pacific" and "WWII Europe" figures - i.e., the 130,201 POWs captured and interned during WWII includes 21 POWs captured prior to arrival in the Pacific and European Theaters; the 14,072 POWs who died while held as POWs includes 13 of these 21 POWs captured enroute to the theater of operation; the 116,129 POWs returned to U.S. military control includes the remaining 8 of these 21 POWs.

Source: Charles Stenger, "American POWs in WWI, WWII, Korea, and Vietnam - Statistical Data", Veterans Administration Central Office, Washington, D. C., June 30, 1979.

Former POWs from World War I were excluded from formal analysis during this study but recommendations made in this report are intended to apply to them also. The decision to exclude this group from analysis was made largely because of the difficulty in obtaining reliable data. Contributing factors were the advanced ages and the small number of these former POWs estimated to be alive and the relatively short duration of the American involvement in the war and the period of internment.

Prisoner of War

Consistent with Section 305 of Public Law 95-479, this study covers veterans who were prisoners of war. Section 101, 38 U.S.C., defines a veteran as a "person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable." A prisoner of war for purposes of this study is defined as a member of the armed forces who was held by an enemy government or its agents during World War I, World War II, Korean conflict or the Vietnam Era.

Civilian Internee

American civilians who were captured and interned during the above conflicts were not included in this study for several reasons. First, they are not veterans who are former prisoners of war as specified in P.L. 95-479. Second, there were significant differences from the military prisoners in age, gender, health status and training prior to capture. Third, while some civilians were treated as military POWs, often they were detained separately and received markedly different treatment. Fourth, their exclusion is consistent with an earlier study which recommended that no controlled study of civilian internees be made and that the results of studies of POWs be considered as applying to civilian internees.³ Finally the VA has the information on veterans who are former POWs in computer systems, claims folders and medical records but possesses no information on civilian internees. Thus, civilian internees were not included within the scope of the study.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report is organized to generally follow the objectives of the study as stated in P.L. 95-479, section 305. The Methodology section explains the methodologies used in the study. The Historical Perspective and Conditions of Captivity sections provide the reader with a basic understanding of what it meant to be a POW in order to better comprehend why it caused problems later in life for the former POW. The Repatriation Procedures and Processing section describes the special procedures developed to repatriate POWs, analyzes how well they were followed, and assesses the effect on the former POWs medical records. The Types and Severity of Disabilities section assesses the information available on the types and severity of the disabilities particularly prevalent among former POWs. The Law and Procedures section reviews the statutory and procedural provisions specifically relating to providing health care and compensation benefits to former POWs. The Foreign Government POW Programs section reviews the special programs established by several governments for former POWs. The Review of Medical Literature

section reviews the medical literature relating to the POW experience and later effects. Finally, the Conclusions and Recommendations section assesses all of the information collected and analyzed in the preceding sections, provides the overall conclusions of the study and recommends actions to be taken to "assure that former prisoners of war receive compensation and health-care benefits for all disabilities which may reasonably be attributed to their internment."

FOOTNOTES

¹ Veterans' Disability Compensation and Survivors' Benefits Act of 1978, P.L. 95-479, sec. 305(b), 38 U.S.C. (1978).

² Sen. Rep. No. 95-1054, 95th Cong., 2d sess. 35-36 (1978).

³ Effects of Malnutrition and other Hardships on the Mortality and Morbidity of Former United States Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees of World War II: An Appraisal of Current Information, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1956.