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NEWS RELEASE
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Ex POW Reunion, Honolulu, Hawaii. From Los Angeles, Sharlene and Paul Ono, Tom Tanaka, Past VFW California State Commander – Henry Wadahara, and organizer Nick Nishimoto.

The Last Ex POW Reunion in Honolulu, Hawaii

April 6 a perfect day to begin a week of festivities honoring Ex-POWs. It has been a long journey for this group of ex-POWs. Event organizer, Nick Tsuyoshi Nishimoto is both happy and sad to see it come to an end. For Nishimoto, this particular pilgrimage marks both a celebration and a final farewell.

For the past decade, Nishimoto along with Tommy Tahara and Francis Yasutake have spent the better half of their years organizing Ex-POW Reunions. Each year, Ex-POWs come from around the United States to Hawaii to meet up with old friends, recall memories and honor those who never returned home.

The festivities began with a picnic at the Hale Koa on Waikiki beach on [What day?]. Ex-POW Bill Norwood said grace and many of the local Korean War Veterans prepared food and brought drinks. The following day began at 6:00 AM with a bus ride to the USS Arizona. Each year, Nishimoto organizes a private tour of the USS Arizona as well as a tour of Pearl Harbor. This year, Nishimoto greeted all the Ex-POWs with continental breakfasts before he rushed off to the hospital for 4 hours of dialysis. After the tour, we went to Ford Island to visit the Pacific Aviation Museum and visited Hickam Air Force Base for a beautiful lunch on the beach.

For Paul and Sharlene Ono, from Los Angeles, California it was wonderful to be included in the Ex-POW family. Retired Sergeant Major Paul Ono said, "I am glad that we came to this last reunion, our EX-POWs are our real-life heroes and it was an honor to be among them." The day concluded with a private tour of the Joint Pacific Accounting Command (JPAC) Identification Laboratory (not open to the public). For Jim and Yoshie Tanabe from Hawaii Kai, this was their first tour of this facility; they found it educational.

Friday, April 9, 2009 was officially Ex-POW/MIA Recognition Day. Punchbowl National Cemetery hosted a Memorial Day service; organizations from all over the islands offered flowers. Joni Albao danced the hula to "What a Wonderful World." Lunch was provided by the volunteers of the Korean Christian Church.

Saturday culminated with the Sayonara Banquet at the Hale Koa. This was the second year Japanese American Living Legacy was invited to be a part of this celebration. For CEO, Susan Uyemura it was deeply moving to listen to the stories of each POW's survival. *"I am glad I live in a country that honors those willing to suffer the injustices of war; they are all heroes."* Uyemura has formed a strong bond with many of the Ex-POWs. Although there will no longer be any formal reunions for this group, Punchbowl National Cemetery will continue to honor April 9th as Ex-POW/MIA Recognition Day.

Japanese American Living Legacy is a nonprofit (501c3) organization based out of California State University, Fullerton. All of the board of directors, staff and advisors are volunteers. For more information on Japanese American Living Legacy, please visit their website at www.jalivinglegacy.org or call them at (714) 278-4483.

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