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## News Release

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# Prisoners Of War (POW) Remembrance Day honored

*Ceremony held at VA Hospital in Madison*

(MADISON) – At a ceremony held at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital on April 9th, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) honored 40 former Prisoners Of War (POWs), their widows and spouses. A proclamation signed by Governor Jim Doyle declaring April 9, 2004 as Prisoners of War Remembrance Day in Wisconsin was presented by WDVA Secretary John A. Scocos, to the Veterans Hospital-Madison Acting Director Allen R. Ackers.

Scocos was the opening speaker. He talked about his father, John G. Scocos, who was shot down and taken prisoner in Germany during World War II. Scocos told the story of Captain Scott Speicher, shot down more than 13 years ago during Operation Desert Storm, and how Cpt. Speicher was the first American service member ever to be switched from a status of Killed In Action - Body Not Recovered to Missing In Action. Efforts to find Speicher continue.

Scocos also explained that April 9 marks the start of the infamous Bataan Death March in the Philippines, during World War II. Thousands of American prisoners of war and Filipino allies died or were killed. About 40,000 former prisoners of war are still alive in the United States, with close to 600 of them from Wisconsin.

One of the guest speakers, Herb Hanneman, is a World War II veteran in his eighties, who was an ex-POW captured on Bataan and held for three-and-a-half years in the Philippines and Japan. Hanneman told his story to the audience of about 150, including how he and his fellow soldiers were captured by the Japanese when their boat did not make it to shore on the Bataan Peninsula. At times fighting emotion, Hanneman detailed how they were forced to bury their own dead, the daily work details, the types and small amounts of food they had, and how grateful the U.S. soldiers were to finally make it back home at the war's end and be reunited with their families.

Also grateful to be alive and present to tell others about the conditions of his captivity was ex-POW Karl Rannenberg of Janesville, a veteran of World War II who was captured in 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge and force-marched for four months as a POW in Germany. Rannenberg, like Hanneman, lost much weight due to having little food, and suffered extreme conditions of deprivation. The soldiers marched during winter with only their uniforms, boots, and overcoats.

"Let me tell you," Rannenberg said, "there is no way you can imagine what it is like to be cold all the time."

In a recent article called "Reaching Out to Our Former Prisoners of War," William McLemore, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental and International Affairs of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, states that: "Since World War I, more than 142,000 Americans, including 85 women, have been captured and interned as prisoners of war (POWs)...more than 90 percent of living former POWs were captured and interned during World War II, and over 21,000 former POWs are in receipt of compensation for service-connected injuries, diseases, or illnesses. Yet, thousands more of America's POWs may be eligible for VA benefits but have not applied for them. Their advanced ages mean time is running out for them to apply for benefits for which they may be eligible. They may not be aware that recent legislation may make them and their dependents eligible for VA compensation."

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McLemore wrote that in 1981, Congress passed Public Law 97-37 entitled, "Former Prisoners of War Benefit Act," establishing an Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War and mandated medical and dental care.

Former POWs can apply for Compensation for service-connected injuries or illnesses and are eligible for VA health care, including hospital, nursing home, and outpatient treatment. Former POWs who do not have a service-connected disability are eligible for VA hospital and nursing home care, without regard for their ability to pay.

A major benefit for survivors of former POWs is a monthly Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). There are other VA benefits that certain veterans may be entitled to also, such as disability pension, education and training, home loans, and burial benefits. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides fact sheets of information about these and many other benefits.

The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) outreach campaign -- "I Owe You" -- reaches out to veterans and their families and educates them about the benefits and services they've earned. The WDVA will host two one-day *Supermarkets of Veterans Benefits* in May. These "one-stop shops" at a convenient location provide the opportunity for veterans to apply for benefits and receive information about programs. The next *Supermarkets* will be held on May 8, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Alliant Energy Center in Madison and on May 15, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove.

Veterans and families can apply for benefits by contacting us at the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, at <http://dva.state.wi.us>, by calling us at 1-800-947-8387 (WIS-VETS), or by contacting a local County Veterans Service Office.

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Secretary Scocos addresses the audience of more than 150 people at the POW Remembrance Day observance at William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Madison on April 9, 2004



Ex-Prisoners Of War Herb Hanneman, talking at left, and Karl Rannenberg at right, recount their experiences as POWs during World War II.