



September 15, 2021

Dear Governor Whitmer,

We were impressed and moved with your decision to lower Michigan flags on August 13, 2021, to half-staff to honor the sacrifice of Korean War veteran Army Sgt. Jesse “Johnnie” D. Hill, and then on August 22, 2021 to honor another Korean War veteran, Corporal Dale W. Wright. This public action serves as a necessary and important recognition of the ultimate sacrifice of these young men and their families. Sgt. Hill’s and Corporal Wright’s recent accountings made by the Korean War Identification Project of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) serve to bring to consciousness the meaningful and important work of the POW/MIA accounting movement which makes good on the promise that no one shall be forgotten. We write to you as a community of students, faculty and staff at Central Michigan University, all of whom are empowered by the moral energy of the POW/MIA accounting movement, and especially by the inspiring stories of those who spurred this movement during the Vietnam War such as Sybil Stockdale, Evelyn Grubb and other wives whose husbands went missing. As such, we feel compelled to bring to your attention another Michigander who went missing during the early days of the Korean War, and was accounted for in late 2019.

When he was only 19 years old, Private First Class (PFC) John Albert Shelemba of Hamtramck, Michigan went missing during the fierce Battle of Taejon in July of 1950. After the Armistice was signed, the American Graves Registration Services began the work of recovering remains of soldiers in South Korean battlefields. “Unknown X-251” was sent back to the U.S. and interred in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii. In October of 2018, the DPAA sent the remains of X-251 to laboratory analysis, and almost a year later on September 12, 2019, PFC Shelemba was identified, nearly 70 years after he went missing. When PFC Shelemba was accounted for, there were no immediate surviving relatives who knew of him. Eventually, contact was made with his niece, Michelle Vance of Grand Ledge, who felt to duty bound to work with the DPAA to determine his final resting place. Ms. Vance, who has signed onto this letter, planned to have him buried at Arlington but Covid presented many obstacles. The plan now is to bury PFC Shelemba at the Great Lakes National Cemetery in sometime in 2021.

On September 18, 2020, we at Central Michigan University marked our first ever POW/MIA Recognition Day with the raising of the POW/MIA flag in front of Warriner Hall. The story of PFC John Shelemba, as all stories that make up the POW/MIA accounting movement, greatly inspired those who helped to bring forth the recognition of POW/MIA Recognition Day at CMU. As part of our duty to remember, we elected to use PFC Shelemba’s story as a vehicle to educate our community about the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the way in which families - and especially women - have been instrumental in the development and implementation of more humane norms that not only govern armed international armed conflict such as the Geneva Conventions, but also our domestic practices in the United States. In 2021, we are continuing this

tradition and, on September 17, 2021, will raise the POW/MIA flag in front of Warriner Hall with the help of the local American Legion and VFW.

The remembrances of Army Sgt. Jesse “Johnnie” D. Hill, Corporal Dale W. Wright and PFC John Shelemba mark the incredible sacrifice made by each individual and his family. All of these stories resonate with a broader, interconnected web of narratives that comprise the POW/MIA Recognition Movement. To explore this complex issue by focusing on the life and experiences of singular individuals is a powerful and most meaningful way for persons to become educated of the movement's many broader themes.

We humbly request that you consider lowering the flag at half-staff to honor PFC John Shelemba. Doing so honors the sacrifice of this young man. Doing so demonstrates that no-one is forgotten. And doing so also places the memorials of Army Sgt. Jesse “Johnnie” D. Hill and Corporal Dale W. Wright into a more profound and meaningful context. With the formal recognition of these young mens' sacrifice, we are able to better comprehend the broad web of interconnected stories that comprise the POW/MIA accounting movement.

September 17, is POW/MIA Recognition Day this year. That would be an ideal date to lower the state flags to honor PFC Shelemba. An alternate date would be October 1, the 2 year anniversary of when the DPAA publicly announced PFC Shelemba's identification. The date of PFC Shelemba's internment at Great Lakes National Cemetery in Holly, Michigan, will soon be set and that date would also be a natural day on which to lower the flags. You can reach us at [hope@dutytoremember.com](mailto:hope@dutytoremember.com) for more information.

Respectfully,

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