



“ACCOUNTED FOR”

By
Sara W. Bock

DPAA Strives Never to Leave A Fallen American Behind

For as long as Robert Patterson can remember, his father, Willis, carried a tattered old photograph in his wallet. It was a portrait of a young Marine private first class, one who held a special place in his heart—his cousin, Herman W. “Dick” Mulligan Jr., who was killed during the Battle of Okinawa. PFC Mulligan’s name was listed among the approximately 79,000 Americans unaccounted for at the end of World War II.

As the decades went by, Willis Patterson held on to the photo—and to the hope

that he’d live to see the day his cousin’s remains were disinterred, identified and given a final resting place on American soil.

The two grew up together in West Greenville, S.C., and they were more like brothers than cousins, said Robert. Dick’s death at the age of 21 didn’t deter Willis from following in his older cousin’s footsteps several years later when he enlisted in the Marine Corps and served during the Korean War.

When Robert continued the family’s

tradition of service in the Corps and shipped off to Vietnam in 1967 with the 1st Marine Division, his unit stopped briefly on Okinawa where his father asked him to look for possible sites where Dick may have been buried. It wasn’t really a feasible request—Robert didn’t have the time, and in hindsight, he said, his efforts would have proven futile.

What Willis Patterson didn’t know at the time was that in 1948, a set of unidentified remains from Okinawa, classified as “X-35,” was disinterred by the American Graves Registration Service (AGRS) from one of six cemeteries that had been set up on the island shortly after the battle began. But at the time, their ability to identify remains was rudimen-

DPAA and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command conduct an honorable carry ceremony at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, Aug. 1, 2018. The transfer cases pictured above contain the remains of U.S. servicemembers killed during the Korean War. North Korea recently turned over the remains to the U.S.



SSGT LEAH FERRANTE, USAF

Above: Dr. Laurel Freas, a forensic anthropologist with DPAA, consoles Amy House, wife of the late Capt John A. House II, USMC, at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, during House's visit to the facility to receive her husband's remains at a chain of custody ceremony, Sept. 13, 2018. Capt House went missing in action in Vietnam in 1967 when his helicopter went down on a reconnaissance mission; his remains were recently identified and buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

SRA MIKALEYKLINE, USAF



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tary at best—scientific breakthroughs like DNA analysis wouldn't be made for decades—so the remains were deemed un-identifiable and subsequently were buried in the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial in the Philippines.

Mulligan, who was killed on May 30, 1945, while serving with Company L, 3rd Battalion, 22nd Marine Regiment, 6th Marine Division, during a period of heavy fighting against the Japanese at Hill 27 on the northern bank of the Kokuba Estuary, was one of dozens of casualties resulting from the large explosion of a crypt loaded with ammunition.

Officials with AGRS had made an effort to bury the fallen in the cemetery assigned to their respective divisions, but the nearly three-month battle became one of the deadliest in American history, and there-for a number of the deceased, Mulligan included, were buried with other units without documentation or any indicators of their identity.

Mulligan's family members weren't the only ones holding out hope for resolution. Author and Columbia University journalism professor Dale Maharidge wrote the Department of Defense jointly

A Marine sergeant carefully handles the remains of a servicemember from the Vietnam War during a repatriation ceremony in Laos in June 2016. These remains and others were returned to the U.S. and examined by DPAA for possible identification.

Local villagers assist DPAA staff during excavation operations in Khammouane Province, Laos, in January 2017. Working at as many as 80 sites worldwide each year, DPAA often hires local villagers to assist at recovery sites.



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CPL JOHN TRAN, USMC

Army SGT Travis Walker removes loose dirt from an excavated area in August 2016 while searching for the remains of tank crewmen who were killed in action in LeMesnil-Tove, France, during WW II.

a book, "Bringing Mulligan Home: The Other Side of the Good War," published in 2013. His father, Marine Sergeant Steve Maharidge, served in Mulligan's unit and seemed plagued by his death, keeping a photo of the two of them on his wall for years. After his father's death, Maharidge tracked down other members of the unit to hear their stories, which he compiled in the book, and even traveled to Okinawa to see the site where Mulligan died.

Willis Patterson passed away in 1994, the photo of Dick still in his wallet, a

tangible reminder of the answers he longed for and never received.

But this year, on Feb. 20, closure finally came.

Robert Patterson, now Mulligan's closest living relative, received the news his father had hoped to one day hear: "Accounted For." After 73 years, Mulligan's remains finally would be returned to his family for burial.

A positive identification had been made by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), an organization within

manned by soldiers, airmen, Marines, Sailors and DOD civilians who are responsible for providing the fullest possible accounting for missing DOD personnel from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, the Gulf War and other recent conflicts.

Headquartered in Washington, D.C., with major laboratory facilities in Hawaii and Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska, DPAA employs more than 100 service-members and civilians in its laboratories alone, who work to identify the remains of those unaccounted-for Americans whose families wait patiently, often for decades, with the hope that their loved ones will be returned for proper burial.

By the time Mulligan was accounted for, there were no longer any living relatives who personally knew him. Willis Patterson's brother (Robert's uncle and a first cousin of Dick's) passed away in 2017 just months after he provided a DNA sample that would be a key contributor to the identification.

This type of situation is common, according to Sergeant First Class Kristen Duus, USA, DPAA Chief of External Communications.

"We often have families that are second and third generation carrying on the search that their loved ones were never able to complete in their lifetime," Duus said. "Identifying these remains provides such a sense of closure to the families that many of them are desperately searching for—if not for themselves, then for their grandmother, mother, father, cousin, who never saw closure themselves."

In May 2017, after extensive research of historical accounts and unit documentation, "X-35" was disinterred from the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial in the Philippines. Lab personnel used mitochondrial DNA and anthropological analysis to identify the remains as Mulligan's, as well as circumstantial evidence which, according to Patterson, included evidence of a leg injury in the exhumed skeletal remains that correlated with documentation that he had been shot in the leg a month before his death. After that injury, he elected to stay with his unit.

To the outward observer, the process of deciding which remains buried as "unknown" are to be disinterred, and when, may seem unsystematic, but it assuredly is not. The process of recovering and identifying the missing begins with a significant step: research.

Experts at DPAA study all known information for each unaccounted-for American and develop a case file that is kept open until a positive identification is made. They conduct interviews, review



SSGT MICHAEL ONEAL, USA

Robert Marzo of DPAA secures the remains of the late PFC Joe S. Elmore, USA, during a chain of custody event at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, Aug. 14, 2018. The remains were received by Elmore's great-nephew, Marine Cpl Nathaniel Walters, who escorted the remains of his great uncle, killed during the Korean War, to his final resting place in a cemetery near the family's home in Kentucky.

records and analyze all available information before the decision is made to disinter servicemembers buried as "unknown." Often, site investigations are conducted as part of the research process in an attempt to correlate a specific site with missing Americans prior to making a decision to excavate.

Recovery sites can be small, in the case of known burial areas, or large, in cases of aircraft crashes. Anthropologists take the lead on the recovery site, similar to the way in which a detective operates in a crime scene. Local workers are frequently hired by DPAA to assist with the excavation, providing manpower as well as inside knowledge specific to the area of the recovery sites—up to 80 each year—which often are situated in extremely remote locations.

Sometimes, remains are inadvertently uncovered by local residents or by individuals working for non-governmental organizations such as History Flight, a nonprofit organization whose mission aligns closely with that of DPAA. Those remains are then transferred to DPAA for testing and identification.

Recently, the remains of numerous U.S. Marines were identified after being



TSGT KATHRINE DODD, USAF

Taro Kono, Foreign Minister of Japan, right, views a demonstration of the identification process by a forensic anthropologist with DPAA during a tour at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, Aug. 22, 2018. The agency relies on agreements with more than 50 foreign nations in order to conduct excavation operations abroad.

either recovered from Betio Island in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, or disinterred from the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, often referred to as the "Punchbowl," in Honolulu, Hawaii, based on newly discovered evidence.

In order to conduct its work on foreign soil, DPAA has agreements with nearly 50 nations that assist in its missions.

According to Duus, the agency routinely carries out technical negotiations and talks with representatives of foreign governments in order to ensure positive and safe in-country conditions for its staff.

From underwater sites to mountaintops and remote locations in the jungle, DPAA recovery teams work tirelessly across the globe to bring fallen Americans home.

"As you can imagine, these efforts do not happen overnight," said Duus. "The agency makes every effort to reach sites in jeopardy as soon as possible ... some sites are in danger of being lost due to urbanization and/or environmental, regulatory or political issues beyond the control of the agency."

In recent years, due to new DNA testing methods developed by the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System DNA Lab, identifications can be made from very

degraded samples that previously were unidentifiable, said Dr. John E. Byrd, the DPAA Lab Director at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. In addition, DPAA has developed radiographic matching methods that use chest radiographs—or X-rays—once required of Americans who served in early conflicts as part of a tuberculosis screening. The records were stored by the DOD and now can be used by DPAA to compare the X-ray in an individual's medical record to an X-ray they take of found remains. Other newer developments also include stable isotope testing to understand the geographic histories of the deceased and new computer applications for analyzing large quantities of data, particularly from commingled remains, Byrd added.

"Everything is always changing in science," said Byrd. "We make a concerted effort to be innovative, with an eye towards developing new methods to solve specific problems we encounter in our work."

Byrd also pointed out that DPAA's laboratory staff is responsible for introducing many methods that are broadly used in forensic science today—a tradition

that dates back to World War II, when the U.S. military began hiring scientists who virtually created the science of identification.

"Our work follows that legacy today," Byrd added.

Dental records have long been a mainstay in making identifications, and mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) analysis, used today in the majority of cases, is a vital piece of the puzzle. Samples from bones and teeth are taken from disinterred remains and sent to the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, where they are analyzed and compared with sequences from family reference samples provided by living individuals who are maternally related to the deceased.

Forensic anthropologists and other laboratory personnel at DPAA not only analyze the remains of each individual, but also examine personal effects that may have belonged to the fallen as an additional means of gathering evidence.

No individual line of evidence is used to identify remains; rather, each line of evidence—chest radiographs, DNA analysis, dental records and so forth—is

correlated with all known historical evidence. DPAA then makes the identification when all evidence points to the same individual.

A relatively new agency within the Defense Department, DPAA became fully operational in January 2016 following a merger of the former Defense POW Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), located in Washington, D.C.; the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) in Honolulu; and the applicable personnel from the Life Sciences Equipment Laboratory in Dayton, Ohio.

According to Duus, a 2013 comprehensive review of the Personnel Accounting Command led to the decision to reorganize personnel accounting efforts into a single, accountable, responsive and transparent organization with comprehensive oversight of personnel accounting resources, research and operations.

"This new organization increased training, cutting-edge research and awareness to help execute our missing more effectively and efficiently, improved personnel accounting efforts means, establishing long-term efficiencies across the department for future generations," said Duus.



Servicemembers with DPAA conduct a disinterment ceremony at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, Honolulu, Hawaii, Aug. 20, 2018. The ceremony was part of the agency's efforts to disinter the remains of unknown servicemembers lost during the Korean War in order to possibly identify them as new evidence is discovered.



SEAN KIMMONS



SEAN KIMMONS

At the DPAA laboratory at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, March 12, 2018, Army SFC Jennifer Owen, a morgue noncommissioned officer for DPAA, examines personal effects that may have belonged to a fallen servicemember. During the identification process, DPAA personnel examine all available evidence and compare it to what is known or recorded about the unidentified servicemember in question.

The agency's role in identifying missing and unaccounted-for servicemembers was recently brought to national attention in August when 55 boxes of servicemembers' remains from the Korean War were returned to the U.S. by North Korea, where they had been held since 1950. The repatriation of the remains made headlines worldwide, given the historically volatile relationship between the two nations.

Further, DPAA announced Sept. 21 that with the permission of the State Department, the agency had begun negotiations with North Korean officials to restart joint excavations in the near future.

The DOD previously had been allowed to conduct recovery missions in North Korea between 1996 and 2005, but a decline in diplomatic relations in the region necessitated the suspension of those operations.

By September, two American soldiers had been identified from the returned remains, and DPAA officials believe the boxes contain the commingled remains of far more than 55 servicemembers. They expect to identify others over the next several months; although, Byrd added, some could take years.

"The process is generally to curate the remains into the lab, inventory and measure them, take DNA samples and send to the AFMES [Armed Forces Medical Examiner System] Lab, get DNA results back, re-assess and identify remains," said Byrd, who added that the size of DPAA's Korean War Project team has been increased due to the workload brought on by the returned remains, and will not impact the agency's ability to continue work on other cases from other wars and conflicts.

In an effort to provide transparency and keep waiting family members informed, DPAA conducts routine "family member updates," a program the DOD began in 1995 that has since reached more than 26,000 family members face to face. Each update is tailored for the family members attending and includes overviews of all aspects of remains recovery operations taking place around the world as well

as the forensic identification work being conducted. Most importantly, family members have the opportunity for one-on-one discussions with casualty officers from the military services and specialists with DPAA. According to Duus, these discussions include receiving the latest information about the work being done on their individual case.

It's important that individuals who have

For Family Members of the Missing, Services' Casualty Office is First Point of Contact

Is there a missing or unaccounted-for servicemember from a past conflict or war in your family tree? Do you want more information about their case or to find out if you qualify to provide a DNA sample that could help identify their remains? Your first point of contact is the service casualty office for the branch in which your family member served. They can provide information about the personnel accounting process, DNA and future family member updates and other events.

U.S. Marine Corps

Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps
Manpower and Reserve Affairs
(MFPC)
Personal and Family Readiness
Division
2008 Elliot Road
Quantico, VA 22134
(800) 847-1597

U.S. Navy

Navy Personnel Command Casualty
Assistance Division (PERS-13)
5720 Integrity Dr.
Millington, TN 38055
(800) 443-9298

U.S. Army

Department of the Army
Attn: Past Conflicts AHRC-PDC-R
1600 Spearhead Div. Ave., Dept. 450
Fort Knox, KY 40122
(800) 892-2490

U.S. Air Force

HQ AFPC/DPFCM
550 C Street West
JBSA-Randolph, TX 78150
(800) 531-5501

State Department

U.S. Department of State CA/OCS/
ACS/EAP
SA-17, 10th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20522
(202) 485-6106



A Marine casket team transports PFC Mulligan's remains through heavy rain to his burial site in Section 12 of Arlington National Cemetery, Aug. 21, 2018.

a missing or unaccounted for servicemember in their lineage provide a DNA reference sample that DPAA can keep on file in the event their family member's remains are uncovered. While DNA samples exist for 92 percent of U.S. servicemembers who served during the Korean War, only 6 percent of the families have DNA samples on record for those missing from World War II.

In total, more than 82,000 Americans from World War II to present remain unaccounted for, with 34,000 of those believed by DPAA to be recoverable.

"It is so important to be able to return these Americans to their families for proper burial," said Duus, who emphasized how rewarding DPAA's work is for those employed by the agency. "Our nation owes it to these heroes who gave their lives for our country."

It was pouring rain in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 21, when Robert Patterson, an amputee who was medically retired from the Marine Corps when he returned home

from Vietnam, put on his uniform for the first time in decades to honor his father's cousin as he was laid to rest in Section 12 of Arlington National Cemetery.

The interment was well-attended by family. Robert's adult children and grandchildren were present, including his granddaughter, Elizabeth Baumbarger, who recently left active-duty service in the Marine Corps as a corporal. And there were also a few who, while not family, made the day particularly meaningful. Dale Maharidge, the author who spent years searching for answers about Mulligan's death, and 94-year-old Joe



Inset: PFC Herman W. "Dick" Mulligan Jr., USMC, was killed during the Battle of Okinawa at the age of 21. (USMC photo)

Below: Members of "The President's Own" United States Marine Band honor Mulligan as his remains are laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery, Aug. 21, 2018.



SFC KRISTEN DUUS, USA



SFC KRISTEN DUUS, USA

Leonardi, who served alongside Mulligan at the Battle of Okinawa and was one of the Marines who carried him down the hill after he was killed. He traveled from New Jersey to pay his final respects to his brother in arms.

"If he had been around, my dad would have been ecstatic to know him," said Patterson of Leonardi.

With his mother and aunt at his side, Robert accepted the folded flag presented to him on behalf of a grateful nation, and believed that his father was looking down on them.

"I'm sure he was pleased," he said.



SFC KRISTEN DUUS, USA

PFC Mulligan's cousin, Robert Patterson, accepts condolences from a Navy chaplain following the burial of Mulligan's remains at Arlington National Cemetery, Aug. 21, 2018. Patterson, Mulligan's closest living blood relative, said he is thankful to DPAA for providing his family the closure that his late father had always wished for.

And in the middle of the deluge, the Marines fired three volleys and the band played on as they honored one of their own who finally had returned home.

"Watching his [Mulligan's] casket come out of that hearse and go onto that caisson was just—it was so emotional," said Patterson. "To think he's finally back

home on American soil, and the Marine Corps did such a good job honoring him."

To the individuals at DPAA who were involved in the recovery and identification of his second cousin's remains, Patterson struggled to find the words:

"Thanks just don't seem like enough."

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