

DPAA - the agency that works to find remains of MIAs/POWs

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) is an agency within the United States Department of Defense whose mission is to recover missing personnel who are listed as Prisoners of War (POW), or Missing In Action (MIA), from all past wars and conflicts and from countries around the world. It was formed on January 30, 2015, as the result of a merger of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office, and parts of the Air Force's Life Sciences Lab. It is headquartered in Washington, D. C., with a workforce of 500 employees, and an annual budget of US\$ 112 million (2016). The website is www.dpaa.mil

Vision

A world-class workforce fulfills our nation's obligation by maximizing the number of missing personnel accounted for while ensuring timely, accurate information is provided to their families.

Mission

Provide the fullest possible accounting for our missing personnel to their families and the nation.

Values

Compassion: We conduct our work and communication with empathy

Integrity: We live our lives with truthfulness and objectivity.

Teamwork: We are committed and willing to do all we can to assist each other, thereby strengthening our collective ability to partner with family organizations, veterans, public and private entities, foreign governments, and academia to achieve our mission.

Respect: We always demonstrate the utmost regard for one another, our partners, and our missing personnel and their families.

Innovation: We apply fresh thinking and continuously improve everything we do.

The following information is a list of frequently asked questions and answers about the DPAA.

AGENCY

1. What is personnel accounting?

When American personnel remain captive, missing, or otherwise unaccounted-for at the conclusion of hostilities, the DoD accounting community becomes the responsible agent for determining the fate of the missing and where possible, recovering them alive or recovering and identifying the remains of the dead.

For those killed-in-action, the accounting community is charged with locating, recovering and identifying their remains. More than 83,000 Americans remain missing from World War II, the Korean War, the Cold War, and the Vietnam War.

2. What is personnel recovery?

Personnel recovery is the sum of military, diplomatic, and civil efforts to affect the recovery and reintegration of isolated personnel.

Isolated personnel are those U.S. military, Department of Defense (DoD) civilians, and DoD contractor personnel (and others designated by the President or Secretary of Defense) who are separated from their unit while participating in a US-sponsored military activity or mission and who are, or may be, in a situation where they must sur-



Air Force Master Sgt. Thomas Ricketson, a medic with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency examines a piece of aircraft wreckage during an investigation in the Primorsky Krai region of Russia, May 20. In a similar mission, the agency brought home Sgt. Alfonso Duran's remains. (Sgt. Lauren Gramley/Marine Corps)

vive, evade, resist, or escape.

3. What defense agencies support personnel accounting?

The Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES), including the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL), provides critical support. The personnel components of the military departments, including the Service Casualty and Mortuary Affairs officers also provide key support serving as primary liaisons with family members. Other DoD entities, including intelligence community components such as the Defense Intelligence Agency bring together myriad specialties that are instrumental in support of achieving the fullest possible accounting.

4. Where do DPAA members deploy?

Agency teams deploy to countries throughout Asia, the Pacific and Europe, as well as to sites in the United States. The agency also performs humanitarian missions worldwide to recover and identify individuals as directed by Pacific Command.

5. Will the agency's work ever be finished?

Our mission will be achieved case by case, individual by individual, and family by family. The mission is not about numbers, it is about the fullest possible accounting of all Americans who are still missing from past conflicts dating back to World War II. We will stay the course with this mission until the job is done.

6. Are all of the unaccounted for American males?

There are missing females from the Vietnam War (civilian Red Cross nurses) and World War II (some were pilots, others were flight nurses or WASPs [Women's Air Force Service Pilots] that ferried airplanes back and forth across the U.S.).

7. Can the Agency provide historical information that has been gathered over the years to researchers, historians, or citizens seeking general information about wars, battles, or conflicts?

Generally, no. While the agency uses historical information to develop leads and to investigate losses, we are not the source or archive for information. To find these answers would require us to pull an analyst from his/her current case investigation work.

Unfortunately, we are not authorized to expend

resources for requests outside the scope of our mission and allocated assignments. Each military service maintains its own historical archive. The National Archives is a great source for historical documentation and research.

8. Does the DPAA conduct recovery operations in North Korea?*

The agency does not currently conduct operations in North Korea; however, through past operations we have recovered over 200 remains.

The U.S. remains committed to the mission of achieving the fullest possible accounting of missing service members. When conditions are deemed suitable, we will open discussions with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) regarding a restart of recovery operations. There are approximately 7,800 service members still unaccounted-for from the Korean War. Of that total, it is estimated that approximately 5,300 are located in North Korea. The majority of our missions in North Korea were in Ulsan and Kujang counties.

9. What and where is the Johnnie Johnson list?

In October 1950, a North Korean Army major took command of over 700 American service men interned as prisoners of war (POWs). Only 262 of these men returned alive. One of the survivors, Army Pfc. Wayne A. "Johnnie" Johnson, secretly recorded the names of 496 fellow prisoners who died during their captivity and had it published.

The agency is actively attempting to advise the families of the 496 men identified on the Johnnie Johnson List. We have direct contact with their organized group, "Tiger Survivors Association." This relationship has resulted in a very good exchange of information including our agency learning additional circumstances of loss and family locator information. Presently, we have a very good idea of when and where most of those lost eventually died, and the locations of their burials. We will use this information in the planning for future excavations in Korea.

To learn more about the heroic efforts of Pfc. Johnson and receive a copy of his list, visit the Johnnie Johnson page. (www.dpaa.mil/Our-Missing/Korean-War/)

10. Explain how the Agency can assist in humanitarian crises? What expertise can the Agency offer in these circum-

stances?

The agency mission and the experience of staff members uniquely suit the agency to assist in many crises around the world. The agency has the largest forensics anthropological laboratory and the largest staff of forensic anthropologists and odontologists under one roof anywhere in the world -- several of whom hold the highest board certifications in their fields.

11. Is there an award or medal for POWs?

Yes. Information regarding the Prisoner of War Medal can be found on www.dpaa.mil.

PROCESS

1. Does the Agency negotiate with host nations to gain access for recovery and investigation teams?

The agency holds technical, or consultative, talks with many different countries in a typical year. Generally, we present our requested schedule of investigations and operations in a given host country. We may show them which specific cases we're working on, and why it's important that we visit a certain area at a certain time of the year. We talk about logistics and how we plan to move our teams in-country, and the kind of support we would need from them at the national, provincial, or local levels.

2. How are sites prioritized?

Many factors are related to how recovery sites are prioritized. Weather, terrain challenges, site accessibility, and various logistical and operational concerns help determine the planning and staging of recoveries. The agency is also required to routinely carry out technical negotiations and talks with representatives of foreign governments in order to ensure positive and safe in-country conditions for today's agency service members.

As you can imagine, these efforts do not happen overnight. The agency makes every effort to reach sites in jeopardy as soon as possible, and that too is a factor in prioritization. Some sites are in danger of being lost due to urbanization, and/or environmental, regulatory, or political issues beyond the control of the agency.

3. How many and what types of teams does the Agency send out into the field?

We have one Research and Investigation Team (RIT) comprised of 10-14 members who are primarily

analysts and linguists. Their job is to research archives in the host nation (museums; government archives; etc); investigate any leads in Last Known Alive cases (still our number one priority); and obtain the oral history from host-nation military and governmental officials that may have broad information about a particular region or battle. They can develop 30-40 new leads through these means.

The agency can also form investigative teams (IT) consisting of four to nine members with specialized skills (team leader, analysts, linguist, medic, and sometimes anthropologists). Their job is to follow up on the leads of the RIT through interviewing potential witnesses, conducting on-site reconnaissance, and surveying terrain for safety and logistical concerns. Their goal is to obtain enough information to correlate or connect a particular site with an MIA. Their findings and recommendations determine what will be scheduled for recovery.

We have 23 recovery teams (RT) including one underwater and one mountaineering team and will increase each year until 2015. (The DPAA was formed January 30, 2015 thereby changing the procedure). Each team consists of 10-14 people comprised of a forensic anthropologist, team leader and sergeant, linguist, medic, life support technician, communications technician, forensic photographer, explosive ordnance disposal technician, and mortuary affairs specialists. Recovery teams use standard field archaeology methods in the excavation as directed by the on-site anthropologist.

4. I am a family member of a service member who is in missing in action or last known alive status. How can I get an update on the status of the search for my missing family member?

Family members can contact the appropriate Service Casualty Office for more information.

5. May the Agency release the names and address of family members?

DoD will protect the names and addresses of family members from release. In specific cases where the family member gives written authorization, DoD may release name and address information.

At Family Update meetings, family members receive the option to provide a written statement to release their personal information to fellow attendees.

DoD facilitates this release of information to help the families build a network of support.

6. What happens after the Agency identifies a service member?

Once we have an ID, we notify the appropriate service's Casualty Assistance Office. These offices are responsible for notifying the family and making logistics and burial arrangements. They also assist us by searching for families when there are none on record and/or soliciting family for the mtDNA samples we may need.

7. When is a family contacted concerning the initial discovery of remains or possible search mission that may be associated with their missing family member?

Typically, the Service Casualty Office (SCO) has had contact for years with the primary next of kin on cases that are being worked by agency investigators. When the agency finishes an investigation or an excavation, all of our field work is summarized in an after-action report.

A copy of that report is forwarded to the SCO, which gives it to the family. The Department of Defense works hard to keep family members fully informed, and let them know what the next steps might be with regards to their particular case, even if it's months or years ahead.

8. Which office contacts the family of a missing American once an identification is made?

Once the agency completes an identification in its laboratory, we prepare an extensive set of briefing materials and send them to the SCO of the branch of service of the missing person. Then, that SCO contacts the family to let them know an identification has been made.

They will schedule a convenient time to come to the families' home and brief them on the entire case. Often, the primary next of kin invite other family members to be present so all can get the same information at the same time.

The mortuary officer will have studied the case extensively before he/she visits with the family in order to best respond to any questions that might be asked by the family. If the family accepts the identification, their next decision is how the remains should be buried.

The mortuary officer will have several options available, including burial in a hometown cemetery, in a national cemetery, or burial at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington D.C. Of course, the military pays for all expenses associated with the transportation and burial of the remains. Though there are minor differences among the services, in general they also pay for two family members to fly to the location of the selected burial site, as well as for hotel expenses during the period of the funeral.

9. Why does it take so long to complete a recovery?

Many months (and often years) of planning and research go into a site before the actual excavation begins. An excavation cannot begin until we think we have pinpointed the possible location of an MIA or MIAs.

Here's how the process works: researchers and historians will examine

Remains: Teams conduct on-site reconnaissance and survey terrain

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host nation archives (museums, government archives, etc.); investigate any leads in Last Known Alive cases (still our number one priority); and obtain oral histories from host-nation military and governmental officials that may have broad information about a particular region or battle. Investigative Teams (IT) will follow up on leads through interviewing potential witnesses, conducting on-site reconnaissance, and surveying terrain for safety and logistical concerns.

Their goal is to obtain enough information to correlate a particular site with an MIA. Again, if they don't find evidence, then the process will continue until a point in the future when enough evidence is gathered to recommend an excavation. Once a recovery is approved, recovery teams (RT) will be scheduled to enter a country to conduct a forensic archaeological recovery to find the remains of an MIA or

MIAs. An agency forensic anthropologist on the recovery team designates the sites that will be excavated based on information provided from previous investigations.

Team members carefully sift through tons of soil by digging and screening plots of dirt in hopes of uncovering clues to the missing. Missions can last from approximately 30-65 days, with teams digging eight to 10 hours daily. Many factors can contribute to the length of time it takes to complete an excavation of a particular site. Sometimes, the recovery team finds nothing at a site. When this happens, the agency must return to the investigation phase in the hopes of pinpointing the actual location of a site (even if the initial investigation pointed to a particular location, sometimes the excavation team can find no further evidence).

Other times, it takes more than one trip to complete an excavation (which size-wise can range from

an individual burial site to an aircraft crash that spans a football field-sized area). Since the teams only have a set time period in which to work, often they have to suspend the excavation of the site until they return. Sometimes they can go back on the next scheduled mission (we try to do this whenever possible – our priority is to close sites where we have already begun excavation), but sometimes we can't go back immediately (due to weather conditions, other scheduled missions that need excavating and are already coordinated and planned for the fiscal year, etc.) The bottom line is that it can take months to years to completely excavate a site.

RESOURCES

1. How can I take a tour the Agency's facilities?

We offer periodic tours of our facilities on Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (JBPHH) in Hawaii. Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam was created Oct. 1, 2010,

when the former Naval Station Pearl Harbor joined Hickam Air Force Base. If you are interested in visiting our command, please contact Public Affairs .

2. What is personnel recovery?

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Isolated personnel are those U.S. military, Department of Defense (DoD) civilians, and DoD contractor personnel (and others designated by the President or Secretary of Defense) who are separated from their unit while participating in a US-sponsored military activity or mission and who are, or may be, in a situation where they must survive, evade, resist, or escape.

3. What resources are available to family members?

DoD provides family members access to:

- * Family Briefings
- * News Items

* Case Files
More information about each of these categories is available in the basic research information for family members page.

4. Whom is eligible to donate Mitochondrial DNA?

Maternal family members are eligible to provide blood samples for the purpose of establishing a comprehensive family reference DNA database.

A family reference database that includes an mtDNA sample for each of the unaccounted-for servicemen enables comparisons between remains in support of the identification process.

Families should contact their Service Casualty Office POC for details regarding sample provision. Also, a helpful eligible donor chart is provided on the possible donors page.

5. Whom should I contact regarding missing family members?

Your primary points of contact are personnel in one of the following Serv-

- ice Casualty Offices:
- United States Air Force
1-(800) 531-5501
 - United States Army
1-(800) 892-2490
 - United States Marine Corps
1-(800) 847-1597
 - United States Navy
1-(800) 443-9298
 - Department of State
1-(202) 485-6106

Once a relationship is established with the appropriate Service Casualty Office, the agency is able to provide access resources to help clarify the status of your missing family member.

www.dpaa.military

*At the Singapore summit (June 12, 2018), President Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un, North Korean Supreme Leader, signed a joint declaration committing to the "immediate repatriation" of already identified POW/MIA remains of U.S. troops. According to DPAA, more than 7,800 Americans have not been accounted for from the Korean War

(military.com)