



News Release

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SOLDIER MISSING FROM WWII ACCOUNTED FOR

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing from World War II, have been accounted for and are being returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

Army 2nd Lt. Vernal J. Bird, 26, of Lindon, Utah, will be buried Sept. 28, in Springville, Utah. On March 12, 1944, Bird, a member of the 5th Air Force, 3rd Bombardment Group, 13th Bombardment Squadron, was the pilot of an A-20G Havoc aircraft on an attack mission over the island of New Guinea. Other airmen in the formation saw Bird's aircraft lagging behind, and reported the last known location of the aircraft was "about half way down the run over Boram Airstrip." Bird's aircraft did not return to base and attempts to locate the aircraft, both during and after the war, were unsuccessful.

In 2001, a team from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) located an aircraft crash site in a remote area of Papua New Guinea. A local resident gave the JPAC team human remains and four aircraft data plates that correlate to Bird's A-20G aircraft, which he claimed to have recovered from the wreckage. All of the evidence was taken to JPAC's laboratory in Hawaii, for analysis.

In 2011, JPAC relocated the crash site, which contained significant amounts of aircraft wreckage. JPAC has not yet completed a full excavation of the site.

To identify the remains, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools including mitochondrial DNA, which matched Bird's sister.

Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, more than 400,000 died. At the end of the war, the U.S. government was unable to recover and identify approximately 79,000 Americans. Today, more than 73,000 remain unaccounted-for from the conflict.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703) 699-1127.

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