



DPAA Family/VSO Quarterly Call and Update Notes
Thursday Apr 29, 2021, 2:00 PM EDT
'Fulfilling Our Nation's Promise'



Summary: Keeping the families of our missing as well as veterans informed is a primary objective of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's (DPAA) mission. This update is intended to provide an overview of efforts during the previous quarter to account for our missing.

Family Group/Veterans Service Organization Participants:

- Coalition of Families: Mr. Rick Downes
- Disabled American Veterans: Mr. Justin Hart
- Korea-Cold War Families of the Missing: Ms. Sherra Basham
- Korean War Veterans Association: Mr. Rocky Harder
- National League of POW/MIA Families: Mrs. Ann Mills Griffiths
- Special Operations Association: Mr. Mike Taylor

The agenda includes:

- Director's Update (Mr. Kelly McKeague)
- Deputy Director for Operations Update (RDML Darius Banaji)
- Operational Update (Euro-Med COL Jon Lust/Indo-Pac Col Brian Peterson)
- Partnerships and Innovations Update (Dr. Tom Holland)
- Scientific Analysis Update (Dr. John Byrd)
- Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) Update (Dr. Tim McMahon)
- Outreach and Communications Update (Mr. Todd Livick)
- Questions & Answers

Director's Update

Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Budget. The Department of Defense (DoD) FY2022 budget is not expected to be sent to the Congress until next month. Final details are being worked, but the overall topline assigned to the department is slightly above the notional budget formulated by the previous Administration. What it specifically means for DPAA is still to be determined.

COVID-19 Update. We are encouraged that several more countries are allowing both DPAA and partner team (s) entry to conduct operations. Our teams fulfill all health and safety protocols to include testing and quarantine. Close to 60% of DPAA personnel who have volunteered for the COVID vaccination have received both doses, with the first priority being those scheduled for operational missions. Also, with evolving CDC and DoD guidance, we will be updating our in-office and travel policies and plans.

Congressional Staff Briefings. Last month, as required by legislation, I briefed House and Senate staff on DPAA's plans for expanding partnership arrangements with research universities focused on our World War II (WWII) efforts. I emphasized that these and other universities comprise approximately 31% of our active and developing partners (approximately 100), as well as having many more non-university partners. Two points especially resonated with the staffers: our partner activities are increasingly being integrated and expanded in all operational aspects of the Agency; and that partner capabilities augment, but do not replace, DPAA capabilities.

20th Anniversary Commemoration. On April 7, commemoration ceremonies were held at the Pentagon, our Hawaii facility, and at the memorial near the crash site in Vietnam, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the loss of 7 U.S. and 9 Vietnamese personnel killed in a helicopter crash in Vietnam while surveying sites for the next operational mission. The son of one of the U.S. Servicemen attended the DC ceremony and relatives of 7 of the Vietnamese men attended the ceremony there. Providing remarks at the Pentagon ceremony were the Vietnamese Ambassador to the U.S and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, both of whom lost friends in the crash. Videos of the DC and HI ceremonies are archived to both our website and Facebook page.

Artifact Turn-over. In the past, U.S. Secretaries of Defense presented to their Vietnamese counterparts wartime artifacts VFW members turned in. From the last turnover, I passed to Vietnam's Ambassador to the U.S. a wallet and a letter. Deeply moved by both, he said they will bring great comfort to the respective soldiers' families and passed on his gratitude to the VFW.

Key Personnel Announcements. Historical information is critical to our mission, which is why our Case Management System is vital to storing and accessing it. A few years back, we established a Chief Data Officer position to manage this and Cheryl Holm, who has extensive experience in both Outreach and IT, is our new CDO. Stew Holbrook, formerly the Indo-Pacific Deputy Director has been tapped to be the Agency's first Senior Operations Officer to assist in management of the operations enterprise. Lastly, the Joint Staff approved our request to extend RDML Banaji's tour with DPAA another year, so he will continue to serve this mission through next September.

VFW Podcast: I participated in an audio podcast this morning with Rob Couture, the VFW's Communications Director. In providing a wide-range of updates on the mission, the Agency, nation and private partners, and diplomatic opportunities, I appreciate the VFW including us on the podcast, which will air Memorial Day.

Deputy Director for Operations (DDO) Update

Operations Planning Increasing. Since our last update, the pace and scope of DPAA and partner field operations have increased dramatically. We remain vigilant in applying our force health protection measures, before, during, and after missions, to ensure the safety of our teams, partners, and host-nation counterparts. One very tangible success of our efforts was the four teams, totaling 58 persons, who all had negative COVID tests upon entering and leaving Vietnam after completing their 60-day mission. When these teams arrived in Vietnam in mid-February, there were several senior Vietnamese officials present at the airport for our arrival, which was lauded by Vietnamese officials. Now, when our underwater recovery team arrived in mid-April, there were less officials present, comfortable in knowing how strictly we follow COVID protocols.

Key Leader Engagements. In the last three months, we have hosted several senior leaders, including the Director of the Defense Health Agency (DHA), LTG Place, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley, among others, at our Hawaii facility. Tomorrow, we have the privilege of hosting Secretary of Defense Austin. These visits give us an opportunity to express our appreciation for the staunch support they provide DPAA, as well as showcase the remarkable work our men and women accomplish every day. DHA, through the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System, provides us with our Medical Examiner (without whom we could not make identifications), and provides us 24 joint service medics who support global missions.

Republic of Korea (ROK) Engagements. Last month, I spoke with the United Nations Command Chief of Staff, and the Director of the Ministry of National Defense Agency for KIA Recovery and Identification (MAKRI). And this month, I met with Consul General Hong Seok-in of the ROK Consulate here in Honolulu. We discussed the Joint Field Activity (JFA) currently underway near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), reaffirmed our shared commitment to recovering and identifying both American and Korean service members lost during the war and to re-invigorating information sharing and joint operations as COVID restrictions allow.

U.S. Ambassador Site Visit. As he has done several times in previous roles, the U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia visited the DPAA Recovery Team (RT) at their remote site in northeastern Cambodia. Ambassador Murphy participated in the day's work and appreciated how the joint U.S.-Cambodia efforts strengthen the bilateral relationship.

Indo-Pacific (IP) Directorate Leadership Change. Lastly, there is a significant change within our IP Region. After over 27 years of faithful and honorable service, Col Brian Peterson, USMC, will transition from active duty. We appreciate Brian's service for nearly three decades and for his leadership and determined efforts with us the past years in support of this noble mission. Later this summer, we will welcome Col Matt Brannen, USMC, who will be joining us in early July, after completing the program at the Navy War College.

Regional Teams Overview

Europe-Mediterranean (EM) Region

Field Operations. We resumed field operations since the January update, with RTs currently operating in Austria and Belgium, as more moderate weather conditions took hold in Europe and the implementation of force health protection measures mitigated the impact of COVID trends in Europe and the U.S. Additionally, we were able to resume archival research at the Army War College in Carlisle, PA, and conducted coordination in Panama required to proceed with any future recovery, on behalf of the U.S. Navy, of two pilots, lost in a 1985 training accident.

Disinterment Operations. We conducted no additional disinterments since completing the 11 at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery, Italy, during October 2020, due to the normal pause in operations during the winter months at our primary cemeteries. However, we continue efforts to partner effectively with the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) and Department of Veterans Affairs, and streamline operations at the many different cemeteries in our area of operations.

Planned Field Operations. We continue deliberate planning for a recovery in Germany, and field investigations in Germany, Hungary, Poland, Italy, Belgium, and Panama from May to September.

Planned Disinterment Operations. We anticipate resuming disinterments in June at the ABMC's cemeteries in Europe. Through the summer, we have planned operations at 11 different cemeteries in the U.S and Europe, and are on pace to exceed our target for FY2021.

Vatican Assistance. Advance Vatican notification to individual Catholic churches for our archival research of burial records in local parishes of U.S. service members is in place for the upcoming mission in Hungary. We look forward to working with the Holy See to refine any lessons learned for future missions.

Austrian Recovery Mission. The U.S. Chargé d'Affaires (the Acting Ambassador) visited our recovery mission, and got to see first-hand the positive results of the work to gain access to the site over the last ten years. She and her staff worked on-site the entire day, and provided six personnel from the Embassy staff and Marine detachment on several other days. As part of the team's completion, the Austrian landowner hosted a luncheon on-site and an Austrian demonstration pilot conducted a flyover in his restored P-38 aircraft.

US–Russia Joint Commission (USRJC) Update. March 26 was the 29th anniversary of the USRJC, which was established by Presidents George H.W. Bush and Boris Yeltsin, and remains one of the few bright lights in the bilateral relationship. Despite the recent diplomatic tension between our two countries, archival research in the Russian Ministry of Defense Archives and regular calls between the U.S. and Russian Co-chairmen continue and demonstrate the strong commitment of both Sides to the humanitarian work of the commission. Although the Co-chairmen formally postponed the 23rd Plenum in their most recent call, both Sides agreed to continue coordination to execute virtual Working Group Technical Talks in 2021 and the Plenum as soon as COVID conditions allow.

Indo-Pacific (IP) Region

Field Operations. In Laos, country access restrictions necessitated the cancellation of the mission planned for late-February. However, with Defense Intelligence Agency Stony Beach and Detachment 3 already in-country, we were still able to complete 12 interviews in four different provinces. Our efforts with the Lao Government recently succeeded in securing approval for four RTs who departed on April 25 and are scheduled to excavate four sites in the Vilabouli cluster through late June. In Cambodia, our RT returned from a 70-day mission on March 23. In addition, Stony Beach POW/MIA debriefers conducted interviews concerning several incidents at the end of the JFA. In Vietnam, we conducted our first JFA in over a year, consisting of three RTs, two partner nation RTs, and one investigation team (IT). On March 28, an IT departed for the ROK. This mission introduces the first-ever investigative work in the southern half of the DMZ along with our MAKRI counterparts, and is incorporating investigations in the Central Corridor and Busan perimeter areas. On April 10, we sent an IT to Thailand to correlate two WWII aircraft crash sites. The underwater portion of our next Vietnam mission departed on April 14.

Research and Analysis. In late January, we conducted a virtual, two-day case information exchange with the People's Liberation Army-Archives Department. On the agenda were discussions on 16 cases spanning three conflicts (5 Vietnam War, 2 Korean War, 8 WWII, and 1 Cold War), as well as initial dialogue about future joint field work in the People's Republic of China.

Disinterment Operations. We disinterred 55 Unknowns, the largest number to date, from Manila American Cemetery and Memorial (MACM) in March, meeting this year's goal of 100 disinterments from Manila. We were limited to disinterring 24 Korean War Identification Project (KWIP) Unknowns over the last quarter due to heavy winter rains impeding efforts at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP). However, with these disinterments, over half of the original Korean War Unknowns interred in the NMCP after the Korean War have now been disinterred. Of note, the case of U.S. Army Chaplain Emil Kapaun, a POW Camp 5 casualty and Medal of Honor recipient, was resolved from a 2019 Punchbowl disinterment of Phase 2 of KWIP.

Planned Field Operations. The main body of the Vietnam JFA will depart mid-May. Consisting of more than 90 personnel, made up of three terrestrial RTs, two partner nation RTs, one IT, and the underwater RT that is already quarantining in Vietnam. The JFA includes five Midshipmen augmenting the mission from the U.S. Naval Academy, and will excavate sites in the Central Provinces, as well as an open underwater site which is nearing completion. We also continue to work with the U.S. Embassy in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG) in an effort to gain access into the Solomon Islands and optimize PNG in-country logistics for 4th quarter missions to both nations this FY. Planning continues for a June mission to Laos, assuming COVID-19 conditions remain stable or improve.

Planned Disinterments. We will continue disinterments at an average of 16 per month to complete Phase 3 of the KWIP, which should be accomplished in late summer or early fall of this year. NMCP WWII disinterments will occur as they are approved and will be interspersed with KWIP.

Partnerships and Innovations (PI)

With regard to fieldwork, PI continues to coordinate with U.S. and foreign institutions to push partner teams to the field during these strange times. In the last month, a team from Lund University (Sweden) finished an underwater survey of a site in Sweden, and the University of Illinois-Chicago completed excavating two suspected sites on [Koh] Tang Island in Cambodia. In the next several months, we are planning to push out nine missions in Europe (three Germany, two France, two Austria, one Croatia, and one Great Britain), many of them having been previously postponed due to COVID restrictions. We also are trying to finalize a tenth mission in Europe this summer---to a site in Italy. We also recently finalized an arrangement with the National Forensic Sciences University in India, which provides for a full-time university employee at that school to assist us in obtaining permits and gaining access to remote parts of that country. They are the world's first and only university dedicated to forensic sciences and recently received the status of an Institution of National Importance, which gives them more reach within this expansive country. We believe this has the potential to greatly facilitate our access to India for both investigations and recoveries.

With regard to historical research, as mentioned in previous updates, we continue to make significant

progress on 40 research projects, largely through our Hub & Spoke Program, which involves major military history programs around the country. Currently, the program consists of Ohio State, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, University of Southern Mississippi, George Mason University, University of Wisconsin, East Carolina University, Brigham Young University, University of Nebraska, Temple, University of Delaware, John Brown University, and the National WWII Museum. The support from these efforts really span the gamut of Agency needs and include information and analysis that DPAA staff can then use in further developing cases from WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. As the “spoke” part of the name implies, there are many other institutions, groups, and individuals that also are involved in this effort.

On the Innovation front, we have been working with DPAA’s General Counsel to identify some new mechanisms for improving information sharing with partners. Progress is slow, due to all the federal regulations that govern information sharing, but we are seeing some success. We have also been working with the National Security Innovation Network (NSIN), which is a DoD program aimed at finding innovative solutions to national security problems. We used NSIN previously on a potential recovery in Italy, and we hope to leverage them in the future to find low-cost, cross-disciplinary, crowd-sourcing solutions to some of our more-complex recoveries. We have also been working with the National Science Foundation to explore possible applications of the “Networked Blue Economy,” which is a broad-based effort by science institutions and government agencies to explore stewardship and sustainable uses of the world’s oceans. We hope that initiatives coming out of that effort may be applicable to our underwater search and recovery efforts.

Other examples of innovation include an on-going, multi-year project with the University of Utah to develop maps of strontium and oxygen isotopes in the U.S. These maps, or “isoscapes,” show concentrations of chemical isotopes in the soil and groundwater, and will assist the DPAA Laboratory in matching bone and tooth samples from remains in the lab to areas where individuals were born and grew up. We also are finalizing an agreement with the genealogical company, Ancestry.com, to assist the Agency and the Service Casualty Offices in locating potential family members.

Scientific Analysis (SA) Update

Our Laboratory System continued its balanced lab work/telework plan to maintain progress on identifications while mitigating risks due to COVID-19. We are on a pace that is on par with or ahead of FY20.

In March, Drs. Byrd and Jin traveled to South Korea and performed a Joint Forensic Review with MAKRI, the first since 2019. Our team was able to get access to South Korea without quarantine, thanks to help from the Korean Consulate in Honolulu and MAKRI. The team reviewed nine sets of remains and recommended three be repatriated for future analysis at the DPAA Lab. They also performed an archaeology site assessment in the DMZ at Arrowhead Hill. Drs. Byrd and Jin were able to participate in the dedication ceremony for a new laboratory building at MAKRI that houses both their Identification and DNA Labs. The facility is state-of-the-art and beautiful, reflecting many design features seen in the DPAA Labs in HI and NE.

As of April 21, 335 USS *Oklahoma* service members have been identified from the 394 unaccounted-for when the first disinterment occurred in 2003. To date, DPAA has accounted for

85% of the total missing population. In the second quarter of FY21, we had 39 new identifications, 23 of which were due to new DNA Family Reference Samples (FRS) obtained by the Navy, and 6 new cases have been added to the Cases for Identification (CFID) List (all are from new FRS). So far in third quarter FY21, we have 2 new identifications and 3 new cases have been added to the CFID list (2 from new FRS).

Ms. Laney Feeser, an anthropologist at our Omaha, NE, lab was the recipient of the prestigious 2020-21 Kerley Research Award, and was recognized at the February virtual American Academy of Forensic Sciences Annual Scientific Meeting.

FY2021 Identifications

Total IDs = 92 newly-accounted-for

WWII = 81 newly-accounted-for

Korean War = 10

Vietnam War= 1

(Additional Portion IDs = 146)

AFMES-AFDIL Update

FY21 Statistics as of March 31

DNA Results reported: 1997

First-time Named Believe to Be Reports (Support New identifications): 90

Total Believe to Be Reports: 717

Noteworthy Milestones. AFMES has through the training of additional Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) Teams has increased NGS testing capability from 45 samples per month to approximately 90 samples per month. AFMES is currently finalizing a staggered plan to increase NGS testing from 90 samples per month to 200 samples per month by January 2023. This will be done through a combination of training remaining staff and implementation of instruments that can run more samples at a given time.

COVID-19 Hurdles. Currently within the U.S. and internationally, there is a shortage of pipette tips used to perform DNA testing. AFMES is working with DHA and the Defense Logistics Agency to obtain the tips needed to perform casework. The tip shortage has led to extensive delays in obtaining supplies and is affecting clinical and local forensic laboratories as well.

Outreach and Communications

First Videos in New WWII Series. On February 19, we released the first videos in a series covering WWII Battles and Operations. These first three videos highlight and give historical perspective on our Hürtgen Forest Project, Enoura Maru Project, and WWII European-Mediterranean Disinterments. The videos are meant to facilitate conversations with families as well as help them understand what is being done to locate their missing loved one. The videos can be

found at <https://www.dpaa.mil/Resources/Briefing-Videos/>. As new videos are produced, they will be added to this page and announced on DPAA's homepage and social media.

National Park Service Visitor Center DPAA Information Display. We partnered with the Pearl Harbor National Memorial in Honolulu to create a display case of WWII artifacts and service member photos, which was unveiled in a ceremony March 8. The display includes four items DPAA teams recovered including a Marine Corps branch insignia, belt buckle, entrenching tool, and a canteen which still has its plastic lid. The fifth item is a watch found on the USS *Oklahoma* during a cell rescue and salvage operation after December 7, 1941. The Pearl Harbor Visitor Center is the number one tourist attraction in Hawaii with 1.8 million visitors a year.

Family Member Updates (FMU)

Virtual Las Angeles-Hawaii FMU. On February 20, the Agency hosted its second virtual FMU for 231 Los Angeles and 38 Hawaii family members, representing 185 cases of missing personnel. Of this number, 90 were first-time attendees (79 LA and 11 HI). The FMU livestream reached approximately 25,000 viewers with engagements (likes, comments, shares) of 4,929.

Virtual Albuquerque FMU. On April 17, DPAA hosted its third virtual FMU for 211 family members representing 128 losses. Of this number, 113 were first-time attendees. On Facebook, the live stream post has reached 4,664 people with 1,253 engagements.

Upcoming FMUs and Annual Briefings

May 22 Virtual Oklahoma City, OK FMU

October 23 Chicago, IL FMU

Tentative Korean/Cold War Annual Government Briefings

August 5-6 Arlington, VA

Vietnam War Annual Government Briefings

September 15-18 Arlington, VA

Media Engagements of Note. Seventy years after renowned Army Chaplain (Capt) Emil Kapaun died as a prisoner in the Korean War, his remains have been identified by the DOD. His nephew, Ray Emil Kapaun, told CNN the family received a call from the U.S. Army with the news on Thursday. "I almost started thinking it was a prank to begin with," Ray Kapaun said. "I would have been less surprised if somebody called and said, 'Hey, he's going to be a saint.'"

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/06/politics/emil-kapaun-us-army-priest-remains/index.html>

Other Coverage: 391 instances, reaching 1.59 billion

Growing up, David Bass knew his uncle Alfred "Fred" Turgeon only by the photo on his grandmother's dresser. The 23-year-old airman from Cordova was lost when his plane was shot down in 1943 over Romania.

<https://news.yahoo.com/78-years-alaska-airman-went-220300998.html>

eYahoo News – Reach 61 million (M)

Nearly eight decades after 24-year-old William Eugene Blanchard was killed during Japan's surprise attack against the United States at Pearl Harbor, his remains have finally been identified. <https://people.com/human-interest/remains-sailor-killed-pearl-harbor-identified-80-years-later-dna-testing/>

People – Reach 34M

In honor of Black History Month, U.S. Army North (Fifth Army) recognizes the 92nd Infantry Division (Buffalo) as the only African American infantry division to see combat in Europe during World War II, fighting in the Italian Campaign.

<https://www.radio.com/connectingvets/news/honoring-service-in-wwii-of-armys-buffalo-soldiers>

Radio.com – Reach 11M

Questions & Answers

National League of Families: Asked the next quarterly meeting be some form of a VTC or virtual event instead of a teleconference, similar to how you conduct FMUs virtually. September 15-19 dates for the League Annual Meeting includes POW/MIA Recognition Day. This year is also the 100th anniversary of the Tomb of the Unknown. And are there any updates on the *USS Oklahoma* Project?

Answer: Thanks for the suggestion --- we will implement it on the next update. Regarding the *USS Oklahoma*, there will be a reinternment on 7 Dec --- Navy will have a major ceremony in Hawaii. There will be a group identification of those remains that were unable to be identified representing the entire crew and will account for all.

Korea-Cold War Families of the Missing: No questions. Thank you to Col Peterson for his honorable service, and we wish him well in the next chapter of his life.

Coalition of Families: For Punchbowl Disinterments on the DPAA website, is it current? Would like to see an “as of” date for the posted information. Is Phase 2 still ongoing? What is the Administration’s status/position on DPRK? Are sanctions going to be lifted, particularly the travel restrictions?

Answer: We are in Phase 3 and should be complete late fall. To see what Phase we are in, you can go to:

https://www.dpaa.mil/Portals/85/Korean%20War%20Disinterment%20Project%20Phases%201220_1.pdf The National Security Council (NSC) is developing the DPRK policy and there is a review ongoing; we have contributed to the effort, but do not know the status. We shared Vietnam as an example of two former enemies coming together via the humanitarian POW/MIA mission. We continue to stress how this issue can build trust and confidence.

Disabled American Veterans: No questions. Thanks for the information.

Special Operations Association: Thanks to Col Peterson --- finger crossed for lifting the DoD travel ban so the League meeting can continue. What is the backlog or work queue in the Lab awaiting identification? How many are Vietnam War?

Answer: No Vietnam War cases are backlogged awaiting identification. There are a number of very old accessions in the Lab; all have been tested over and over whereby we always consider new

technology. We do not have any pending cases from the Vietnam War to be identified. Whenever a Vietnam War accession comes in, we work it expeditiously.

Korean War Veterans Association: It appears so far the Administration is still developing their position on DPRK; it appears there are no initiatives to talk to DPRK about resuming operations. Do we know or think the DPRK has remains to turn over like they did with the K-55? For disinterment of remains from Punchbowl, how many remains are left in the cemetery that still need to be excavated and how many Korean War remains are in the Lab in some form of identification?

Answer: Several overtures by the new Administration to talk with DPRK have gone unanswered. We continue to provide input to the NSC discussions how the POW/MIA issue can be a viable bridge. Of the 866 Korean War Unknowns originally interred in the Punchbowl, DPAA has exhumed 448, or 52% thus far. When we complete Phase 3 later this calendar year, we will have disinterred 501 graves to reach 58% of total disinterments. Due to this effort, there are 294 remains of Unknowns in the lab; with nearly 2/3 of these being exhumed within the past 2 years.