



**DPAA Family/VSO Quarterly Call and Update**  
**Monday April 3, 2023, 2:00-3:00 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
- Mission: POW-MIA
- National League of Families
- American Legion
- Disabled American Veterans
- Korean War Veterans Assn
- Korean War POWMIA Network
- Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Vietnam Veterans of America

**Director’s Update**

**Money Matters.** The President signed the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Appropriations Act on December 29, 2022. DPAA’s funding primarily consists of \$150 million (M) of Operations and Maintenance (O&M). As approved by the Department of Defense (DoD), the \$20M increase from the prior FY funds Partnerships and Innovations (PI), Case Management System (CMS), and Public Portal initiatives. On March 9<sup>th</sup>, the FY 2024 President’s Budget was submitted to Congress; it includes \$196M of O&M. Again approved by DoD, the \$46M increase from FY 2023 will fund additional research and analysis, and field and laboratory activities. Congress has already commenced its review of the budget request.

**Indonesia Access.** On March 9, I signed the Framework Arrangement document with the Government of Indonesia that will allow DPAA access to conduct field activities there. It was a 7-year saga marked by numerous DPAA engagements as well as advocacy by DoD, Department of State, and Congressional senior officials. The first DPAA team will deploy to Morotai Island for an investigation/survey in June.

**NE Asia Trip.** My February trip included the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan. Meetings in Seoul were with U.S., United Nations Command, and ROK officials. Both the UNC Commander and U.S. Ambassador have been strong advocates for the first U.S.-ROK joint excavation within the Demilitarized Zone. I also participated in a repatriation of an American set of remains our ROK counterpart recovered. Through successful engagements with officials from the Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Health, Labor & Welfare, as well as with eight Members of the Diet, we advanced collaboration, information sharing, and scientific exchanges with Japan.

**U.S. Ambassadors Engagement.** In January, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command hosted a Regional U.S. Ambassadors Conference in Hawaii. Eight of the attendees (the Chiefs of Mission to India, ROK, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Kiribati) requested to visit DPAA, where invaluable strategic and operational discussions with each ensued.

**Other Engagements.** During the last quarter, other successful engagements occurred with the Hungarian Ambassador to the U.S.; Deputy Chief of Mission to the Indian Embassy; the new Secretary of the American Battle Monuments Commission; and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Discussions either advanced DPAA's partnership and collaboration with each or solicited their assistance.

**Bilateral Discussions.** On March 30, I participated in the U.S.-Vietnam Political, Security, and Defense Dialogue at the State Department. The senior Vietnam official was the Vice Foreign Minister, who was previously their Ambassador to the U.S. and also a former Director of DPAA's Vietnamese counterpart organization. The latter was established within the Paris Peace Accords 50 years ago. Vietnam's cooperation on the American MIA issue began 10 years after the war and 10 years before normalization between the two countries, and was the foundational building block to today's comprehensive partnership. Our in-progress Joint Field Activity, with 41 personnel deployed on 2 Recovery Teams (RT) and 1 Investigation Team (IT) is the 151<sup>st</sup>.

### **Acting Deputy Director for Operations (DDO) Update**

**Korean War Disinterment Project.** I want to correct one point from the December update as it relates to this project. We stated our Phase V disinterment should commence in Spring 2023. However, based on several factors driving the KWIP, Phase V will likely begin in October. One of the primary drivers is the requirement to use Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) for DNA analysis of these remains. NGS takes more time, and our priority is processing the KWIP remains already in the lab before beginning the next phase to ensure we are progressing all cases for identification.

**Operations Overview.** In the past 3 months, we deployed 34 DPAA and partner field missions to 18 countries and conducted disinterment missions in Hawaii, the Philippines, and France.

**Kiribati Access.** Kiribati reinstituted entry restrictions due to COVID-19. As such, we have yet to receive approval for our scientists to conduct a joint forensic review (JFR) of the significant amount of remains recovered prior to the pandemic nor has our private partner, History Flight, been able to return to re-start its year-around excavations (their team that commenced post-pandemic operations last November had to depart in January). The U.S. Embassy continues to work entry approvals.

**Key Leader Engagements.** We were privileged to host at our Hawaii lab the Secretary of Defence for Papua New Guinea; one Congressional Delegation (4 Members) and two Staff Delegations; the DAV National Commander. The American Legion Auxiliary President visited our Nebraska lab. And in-progress is the Southeast Asia trip of the VFW National Commander, Senior Vice Commander, Executive Director, and Communications Director to Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos, where they will also visit the Recovery Teams (RT) in the latter two countries.

## **Regional Teams Overview**

### **Europe-Mediterranean (EM) Region**

**Field Operations.** January through March is typically a quiet period for recoveries in Europe due to winter weather, but there were three investigations. An underwater IT, strongly supported by Kuwaiti Naval Forces, searched for the wreckage of an A-6E lost during Operation DESERT STORM (the one pilot is still unaccounted-for). The team is currently processing survey data to assess the need for and focus the area of additional investigation activities. Another IT surveyed three sites associated with aircraft crashes in Italy for potential future excavations. U.S. Embassy support helped overcome landowner resistance at one site. As a result of observing the DPAA team in action, the landowner affirmed any necessary future access. Also, during this investigation, the team was able to brief a family member who lives in Rome about the just completed investigation of his brother's loss, an opportunity the IT leveraged. An IT is currently working in Germany, focused on exploring ground losses in the Hürtgen Forest. As we have disinterred and identified Unknowns associated with this battle, we have learned much about which Soldiers might still be buried where they fell within the forest. In addition, a small RT began operations in France at a site in Normandy associated with the 4 unaccounted-for Soldiers from a bunker explosion.

**Disinterment Operations.** Disinterments for FY 2023 began in March with the disinterment of 4 Unknowns from Rhone American Cemetery. They will resume in earnest after Memorial Day, with 65 disinterments across the remainder of the FY.

**Planned Field Operations.** Next month, we will launch 2 RTs to Hungary to begin excavations of two sites associated with the losses of Army Air Forces personnel and an IT to Poland.

**US–Russia Joint Commission (USRJC).** In December, the U.S. Side Chairman met with Department of State and National Security Council officials, and two Congressional Commissioners to continue discussions about the way ahead for the USRJC. In addition, the U.S. and Russian Chairmen had a phone call in January and are planning to hold another one this month. These discussions focus on coordinating actions to allow the USRJC to continue progressing cases within the humanitarian exemption that permits interactions with Russia. Field activities in Russia are currently restricted, however research in the Russian archives continues.

### **Indo-Pacific (IP) Region**

**Research and Analysis.** In January IP researchers, analysts, and historians conducted their semi-annual Case Coordination Conferences, along with DPAA scientists and mission planners, and DIA Stony Beach personnel, with separate sessions for the four major conflicts. These conferences are the driving process for analytical and archival efforts and lead directly to field investigations. The Geographic Information Systems (GIS) section continues to create, integrate, and manage spatial data from various source documents, archival data, field data collection efforts, wartime imagery, and current imagery. Wartime imagery analysis and 3D analysis in GIS produce visualization products for Vietnam War Veteran witnesses to interpret which helps DPAA and Stony Beach researchers identify investigation locations. New enhancements to Field data collection technology using near real time data collection applications are providing greater situational awareness and 8cm accuracy during missions.

**Field Operations.** Vietnam War. Three RTs conducted excavations in Laos, with each recovering possible osseous material and possible life support equipment; two of the teams recovered ID media belonging to the unaccounted-for Service member. Field operations are currently underway in Laos and Vietnam. In Laos, there are one RT and one Investigation Team (IT) investigating 12 cases; we are fortunate to have the assistance of a Vietnamese veteran as a firsthand witness participating in the trilateral investigations. Two RTs and one IT (investigating 12 cases) are in Vietnam; our Vietnamese counterpart reported these recovery sites were in jeopardy of being lost to economic development. World War II (WWII). One IT operated in the mountains of northern Thailand, conducting a site survey and establishing logistical plans for a future recovery effort. In the Solomon Islands, one RT is underway and working on a field burial site in Guadalcanal and in Papua New Guinea (PNG), a large underwater recovery mission is underway in Hansa Bay in conjunction with the Navy's Experimental Dive Unit. Korean War. No field activity occurred regarding the Korean War.

**Disinterment Operations.** Three separate disinterment efforts, totaling 124 Unknowns (mainly from the *Enoura Maru* Hellship) were conducted at the National Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP), and we completed one at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial (MACM) in March where 33 Unknowns were disinterred for accession into the lab for analysis.

**Planned Field Operations.** In April, an IT is scheduled for joint work with our ROK counterpart on two cases with leads uncovered by them. In May, two RTs, one IT, one partner IT with Scripps Institute of Oceanography, and one underwater RT with the U.S. Army's 7th Engineer Dive Detachment will operate in Vietnam.

**Planned Disinterment Operations.** Four disinterment events totaling 198 Unknowns (again, primarily from the *Enoura Maru*) are planned for NMCP in the upcoming quarter.

**Detachment (DET) Activities.** DET-3 in Laos, conducted a repatriation ceremony for three separate sets of potential osseous material recovered; the U.S. Ambassador officiated. The DET also facilitated a total of 17 U.S. and Lao officials visiting the three RTs in northern Laos. DET-2 in Hanoi hosted the U.S. Ambassador's first visit to a recovery site, where he worked the screening station and had lunch with the team.

## **Partnerships and Innovations (PI) Update**

**Field Activities.** The PI team has successfully arranged, planned, and completed 13 field missions thus far in FY 2023 across the world; 6 partner field projects are currently active in Cambodia, Micronesia, Northern Mariana Islands, the Philippines, PNG, and Italy, and an additional 57 field activities are preparing to launch across the remainder of the FY. Extensive coordination and collaboration within the Agency, with partner institutions and their collaborators, and with host nations underwrite each of these activities as the scale and scope of these activities continues to rapidly develop.

**New Arrangements.** PI established 10 new formal partnerships through signed Memoranda of Understanding, taking the total number of DPAA's active partners to 100. Orca Maritime, Inc.; the Institute of Maritime History; Southern Methodist University; and Flinders University are some of

our newest partners. The total number of other organizations being considered for partnership potential currently stands at 82, and more than 50 partner or prospective partner personnel have participated in the DPAA Academy (our orientation program) during the FY thus far.

**Research.** We have initiated 12 new partner research projects, resulting in a total of 73 active research projects with our research partners that include The Ohio State University, the University of Wisconsin, Texas Tech University, Texas A&M University, the University of Illinois Chicago, and the National WWII Museum. These partners are now producing thousands of deliverables annually. Two recent examples of innovative research efforts include the Chuuk Research Project with Project Recover (who has previously partnered with us primarily for field projects) and the German Shoot Down Records Project with our partner Texas A&M.

The Chuuk Research Project is a 12-month, short-term project whereby Project Recover will complete 20-30 Case Narratives of Service personnel missing from Chuuk State, Micronesia. It capitalizes on Project Recover's extensive knowledge of losses and history of fieldwork experience in the region. The German Shoot Down Records Project, is a long-term effort and that involves the translation of over 10,000 WWII Downed Allied Aircraft Reports from the Captured German Records Collection and extracting crash locations, aircraft details, and incident data into a filterable database for later GIS integration. It will provide foundational research on German shoot-down activities and support case-specific research for field investigations.

### **Scientific Analysis (SA) Update**

**Accessions.** There have been 114 batches of evidence accessioned into our laboratory system, consisting of skeletal, dental, and/or material evidence for FY 2023. The evidence originates from disinterments (67%), DPAA excavations and investigations (18%), Unilateral Turnovers (12%), Partner activities (3%), and covers 3 major conflicts: WWII (62%), Korean War (31%), and the Vietnam War (7%).

**Vietnam War Identification Project.** The VWIP produced one first-time identification, one individual identification for a Service member accounted-for historically by a group ID, and four additional portion identifications during FY 2023. The RTs operating in Southeast Asia repatriated 6 accessions thus far, all of which are currently undergoing forensic testing.

**Enoura Maru Project.** The project commenced in January. From the 15 caskets from the NMCP and 24 graves from the MACM, more than 5,000 bones have been inventoried, 350 of which have already been sampled and sent for DNA analysis. The remaining 32 caskets at the NMCP associated with this Hellship will be disinterred over the next few months. Our Nebraska Lab will be leading the required forensic analysis.

**Other Activities.** Since the last update, 2 JFRs of potential American remains have been conducted by board-certified forensic anthropologists from our lab and participants from the ROK and Hungary. In addition, one Field Forensic Review was conducted at the U.S. Army Mortuary in Germany, reviewing recovered osseous material from field operations across Europe.

**Professional Conferences.** Our scientists participated in the Society of Historical Archaeology Conference in January, where 3 research papers were presented, and the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) Conference in February where 7 papers were presented. Our lab managers, in conjunction with AFDIL, presented a day-long workshop at AAFS on the resolution of cold cases utilizing a multi-disciplinary team and multiple lines of evidence, which received significant positive feedback.

**Relocation.** We are in the process of relocating the material evidence lab in Ohio to our Nebraska Lab. The two personnel have relocated, and the evidence and synoptic collections are being scheduled to move later this month.

**FY 2023 Identifications to date:**

Total IDs = 44 (Newly accounted for = 42 / Previously accounted for = 2)

WWII = 25

Korean War = 17

Vietnam War = 2

Additional Portion IDs = 6

**AFMES-AFDIL Update**

**Budget.** The Armed Forces Medical Examiner System-Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory past accounting budget was cut by 10%. We did receive \$4 M as part of the FY 2023 Appropriations, which offset the cut and is allowing us to purchase additional NGS instruments to replace older equipment, and additional reagents.

**New Method.** The shortage of a critical chemical used in the extraction of DNA continues this year, however, we have completed the validation of a new method to extract the DNA. Known as the Dabney Method, it allows us to capture more of the smaller, damaged DNA molecules. The easiest way to think about this is using a spaghetti strainer to strain rice. Although that strainer works, due to the hole size, a lot of rice flows through the strainer and is lost. We basically modified an extraction method used for Neanderthal and other ancient DNA samples to analyze DPAA samples. We have gone back to samples that did not work previously, and in some, we have been able to get mtDNA results. We are currently testing this method to see if we can optimize to get nuclear Short Tandem Repeat results.

**Progress.** The validation of AFMES' Identity Single Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP) efforts are progressing, and the full team of scientists dedicated to it have been optimizing the software and methods to work with all types of DPAA samples (chemically and non-chemically treated) as well as family references. We are still on track to bring it online by the end of the calendar year, but will always caveat that priority will be on letting the science dictate what needs to be done.

**FY 2023 Statistics to date:**

DNA Results Reported = 1,452 (on track to hit the 3,600 analyses per year goal)

First-time Named Believed-to-Be Reports = 61 (supporting new identifications)

## **Outreach and Communications**

**Family Member Update.** On February 25, we hosted an in-person FMU in Orlando. We had 252 family members attend; 162 were first-time attendees. Of the 123 cases represented, 75 were from WWII, 37 from the Korean War, and 11 from the Vietnam War. Throughout the day, DPAA analysts/historians and Service Casualty Officers (SCO) met individually with the family members of 103 cases to update them on their loved one's loss. The AFMES-AFDIL team collected DNA family reference samples (FRS) from 5 of the 8 family members who were lacking an FRS on file.

**Dallas FMU.** On March 25, we had 367 family members attend; 197 were first-time attendees. Of the 171 cases represented, 102 were from WWII, 46 from the Korean War, 22 from the Vietnam War, and 1 from the Cold War. DPAA analysts/historians and SCOs conducted 171 Case Summary Reviews and 5 FRS were collected from the 5 family members who were lacking an FRS on file. We very much appreciate DAV's Department of Texas for sponsoring the food and refreshments for family attendees, generously donating \$8,600.

**Singapore Engagement.** Although there are no unaccounted-for in Singapore, last month, along with the Navy Experimental Dive Unit, we hosted for the first time in DPAA history a Mission Preview Event overseas. It showcased the exciting proof of concept underwater mission to PNG, where the underwater will excavate the "Heaven Can Wait" B-24 site (11 crewmen), which at 220 feet is the deepest DPAA has ever attempted and the first time this specialized unit has worked on this type of operation.

**Operation HOMECOMING.** We supported events commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Operation HOMECOMING flights that repatriated 591 American POWs in Spring 1973: a joint U.S. Embassy-Vietnamese Government event in Hanoi, hosting the Hawaii event at DPAA's facility, and providing speakers to the California event. Although there are no current POWs, DPAA purposely retained POW in its name in acknowledgement of the inextricable link between POWs and MIAs.

**Year in Review.** We have published the FY 2022 Year in Review and will be mailing copies to your organizations.

**DAV Mid-Winter Conference.** In February, we presented at DAV's conference in Arlington, VA providing mission updates to the attendees. We appreciate these opportunities to connect and communicate with Veterans, whose comrades-in-arms are whom we search for.

**Media.** The Washington Post captured a story of how the local military community in the National Capital Region showed up for a USS *Oklahoma* Sailor whose son was unable to attend his funeral due to health issues. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2023/02/24/arlington-cemetery-pearl-harbor-sailor-burial/>

## Questions & Answers

**American Legion:** *No questions.*

**DAV:** *Will be sending an official invite to our national conversation in August (first week) for the POW/MIA seminar. One of our committee members will tour Offutt – thanks for that support.*

**KWVA:** *Did you have the opportunity to talk to anyone about resuming operations in DPRK?*

**Answer:** The new South Korean administration has not taken a reproachment stance with the DPRK like the previous one. North Korea's continued provocations are concerning to the South Koreans so there is no appetite to expand the terms of their 2018 Comprehensive Military Agreement, which included recovery operations in the DMZ. The DPRK's repeated violations of that agreement render any operations in North Korea to be moot.

*We are concerned that eventually the Korean War Identification Project remains will all be identified and are worried about new remains coming into the lab and not being able to get remains out of DPRK. How many remains do you have that are currently under forensic review?* **Answer:** We have approximately 600 Korean War remains in the lab today with 200 more coming in the next 2 Phases from the NMCP. The number of active cases from all conflicts we are analyzing is in the thousands.

**VFW:** *We appreciate the assistance provided to their leaders who are returning from Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. The support from the DPAA detachments was outstanding.*

**Collation of Families:** *What are President Biden and the administration doing to break the impasse with DPRK and look for air losses?* **Answer:** There are frequent overtures at all levels, but there has been no response or reaction from the DPRK government except harsh rhetoric and provocative actions.

*Can you speak to the US/China MOU and are the Chinese doing their part on archival research?*

**Answer:** To date, we have not received any deliverables from our last archival exchange discussion (which was virtual) in 2021. DoD leaders still view DPAA's mission as a humanitarian exception and is supportive of allowing communications with the PLA to occur. However, the PRC continues to rebuff DoD attempts to schedule a Defense Dialogue, which last occurred almost two years ago.

*Have you tired going through Ambassador Burns?* **Answer:** Yes, but he has not been successful in bringing the PLA to the table to discuss our mission.

*Two recent Camp 5 losses (White and Hartman; White even had a chest radiograph) were recently identified, but why did its take three year? Do you need more equipment, more people? Where can we help?* **Answer:** There are a lot of reasons for it to take three years or more. Punchbowl remains were chemically treated which creates many challenges, among which AFDIL is forced to use the more time-consuming NGS process to get DNA from the samples. There is also comingling; that must be dealt with systematically and more carefully. Other challenges for Camp 5 remains is



because the pool of candidates is much larger to compare against and we do not have FRSs on many. AFDIL has increased their NGS success rate to 62%, but studies have shown these chemically treated samples are more damaged than 40,000-year-old Neanderthal DNA.

**VVA:** *The two sites mentioned to be in jeopardy due to economic growth, what country were they in?* **Answer:** They are in Vietnam and DPPA teams just completed excavations there and are scheduled to return in Spring 2023. Our detachment in Hanoi works closely with Vietnamese officials to identify sites in jeopardy, which then informs mission prioritization, planning and execution.

*VVA will be sending folks to SE Asia 5-15 June, and might be talking with Vietnamese veterans who may have information. This program is in its infancy, and we will keep you posted. Three former Vietnamese Ambassadors have been helpful for our trips, but we are losing our normal contact who has just been promoted to their ambassador to Brazil.*

**Mission POW/MIA:** *Two of us attended the Dallas FMU and we appreciate how it was conducted and the many family members we met. Thanks for the questions about the Korean War; they help educate us.*

*When will the press release be going on the latest two Vietnam War identifications?* **Answer:** Next week should be the initial release after the two families have been notified; that will be a short release. After the families have been briefed on the identification package and the military funeral, the more detailed press release will come out.

*How far up the coast of Vietnam have you gotten and how much of the data has been analyzed?* **Answer:** There is one open underwater excavation site in northern Vietnam, one off the coast of Khanh Hoa Province, and another pending excavation off the Ba Ria-Vung Tau Province coast. Teams completed underwater surveys of reported crash sites from Nghe An Province to Ben Tre Province in southern Vietnam, but many of the surveys did not locate any possible physical evidence to warrant further work. Several other locations require that teams go back with divers to confirm whether the possible physical evidence is aircraft wreckage. Last month, an American citizen living in Vietnam reported that a Vietnamese fisherman recovered the engine that exclusively correlates with one of our unaccounted-for crash sites off the coast of Phu Yen Province.

*Regarding MIA artifacts in museums, is there a list of all potential artifacts in the museums?* **Answer:** There is an extensive list of artifacts that were in museums, but it probably does not contain all the MIA artifacts. Vietnamese officials have a list of MIA artifacts that they are working on to get released, but this is a very costly project.

*Is there an overall database that correlates location of loss? We use the DPAA website, and we love it; is there any way it can be narrowed down more. Will it become public* **Answer:** There is a GIS database that correlates to the locations of loss; this is how you see the locations on the DPAA website. A lot of the locations get updated after each JFA or when an analyst/historian determines

that the current report of loss needs to get corrected. We will look into whether we can add province and town information to the display on our public facing website.

**National League:** *The USRJC Chairmen spoke in January; can you elaborate on what was discussed and what has been accomplished in archival research in Russia?* **Answer:** These periodic telephone calls occur quarterly. Despite the US Chairman continuing to press, the Russian Side is not open to engage in resuming the Conflict Technical Talks, even virtually, and are opposed to field activities. We have two contractors who are working regularly in the Ministry of Defense Archives in Moscow. The Russian Side has two researchers working in our National Archives.

**Korean War POW/MIA:** *No questions.*