



DPAA Family/VSO Quarterly Call and Update
Aug 3, 2023, 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 provides an overview of the multi-faceted 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
- Korean War Veterans Association
- Honor Release Return
- Special Operations Association/Special Forces Association
- Veterans of Foreign Wars

Director’s Update

Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Budget. Our FY 2024 President’s Budget Request is \$196 million (M) in Operation and Maintenance, a \$46M increase from FY 2023. Most of this significant increase was justified and approved to enable increased field investigation and recovery operations. All four Congressional Defense Committees issued full marks of our requested budget amount. As has been the case in recent times, should there be a Continuing Resolution, funding will be capped at the prior FY level until the Appropriations Bill is passed by the Congress and signed by the President.

Republic of Korea (RoK) President’s Visit. A highlight of President Yoon’s April visit to Washington, was the Joint Announcement with President Biden of the identification of Corporal Luther Story, a recipient of the Medal of Honor, who was buried as an Unknown. The announcement exemplified the strength of the US-RoK Alliance, which is commemorating its 70th anniversary this year. Both Presidents also presented a wreath along with Corporal Story’s niece at the Korean War Veterans Memorial.

Southeast Asia Trip. In June, I completed a productive trip to Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. Engagements in each country primarily were with senior government officials from the partnered nations and the U.S. Embassies. In Vietnam and Laos, there was strong support for our significantly increased operations plan for FY 2024 as well as from the respective veterans group requesting more access to their members for wartime information. In Vietnam, I also was able to visit with our underwater recovery team and help commemorate the 50th anniversary of our counterpart agency there and the 35th anniversary of sustained operations. Although the number of unaccounted-for in Thailand is small, public interest on last year’s successful recovery of a World War II (WWII) Airman has not waned.

Annual Meetings. We conducted the Vietnam War Annual Government Briefings (AGB) in June in Washington, DC, the first in-person of these in 4 years. The Korean/Cold War AGB is scheduled for August 17-18 in Arlington, VA. On the VSO front, our Principal Deputy Director spoke at the VFW National Convention in Phoenix and our booth had a lot of traffic. I look forward to speaking at DAV's upcoming convention in Atlantic City. We appreciate all of these opportunities to provide updates on our mission and to connect with family members and veterans.

Unique Agreement. In May, I signed an Education Partnership Agreement with the President of the University of Nebraska System, the first of its kind for DPAA. This agreement will mutually broaden the partnering opportunities and benefits across the System's universities to include their Medical Center and will aid in the educational experience of the University System's participants in leveraging DPAA's unique expertise and facilities in furthering scientific disciplines.

Impressive Gift. DPAA has the authority to accept monetary and in-kind service gifts. Three years ago, Jeremy Mathieu, a Michigan high schooler and then-President of the Michigan State Society--Children of the American Revolution, contacted us about his statewide project to increase awareness of and raise funds for the POW/MIA mission. After a July 2021 visit to our HI Lab, he crisscrossed the state over the next year, speaking to groups about the work of DPAA. Ultimately, his dedication resulted in a \$11,500 gift to DPAA, which Mr. Mathieu presented to us at the Memorial Day Observance at Pine Grove Park War Memorial, in Port Huron, MI. Jeremy is a student in marine biology and deeply interested in our underwater activities.

Acting Deputy Director for Operations Update

Operations Overview. In the past 3 months, we deployed 23 DPAA and partner field missions to 16 countries and conducted disinterment missions in Hawaii, France, and Belgium. This past April, we successfully completed an underwater recovery mission in Papua New Guinea for *Heaven Can Wait*, a B-24 lost during WWII, which was particularly noteworthy. Partnering with the Navy's Experimental Diving Unit (NEDU), it is the deepest underwater mission (220 feet) we have conducted to date; it was also the first time NEDU worked on this type of operation. With this capability, our underwater teams will be able to dive deeper and stay underwater longer. In commemorating the 50th anniversary of Operation HOMECOMING, our team participated in events in Vietnam, Hawaii, and California.

Korea War Identification Project (KWIP). Based on several factors driving our disinterment plan, Phase 5 is scheduled to begin in October 2023. One of the primary drivers of this timeline is the requirement to use Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) for DNA analysis of KWIP remains. Our priority is processing the KWIP remains already in the labs before beginning Phase 5 to ensure we are maximizing our effectiveness and efficiency of both AFDIL and DPAA labs as well as meeting milestones in progressing cases to identification for KWIP and other existing projects like the *Enoura Maru* that require NGS testing.

Europe Trip. From 15 to 23 July, the Europe-Mediterranean Director, Senior Enlisted Leader, and I had a successful trip to Europe. We first visited our Detachment in Germany and met with American Battle Monuments Commission officials at Ardennes American Cemetery in Belgium and observed disinterment operations there. Our travel to Italy included a visit to a partner working

a highly complex site associated with the crash of a B-24H bomber into a duck pond in Northern Italy with 6 crew members still unaccounted-for and a DPAA Recovery Team (RT) in Sicily excavating a B-25C site with 5 crew members missing.

Key Leader Engagements. Among the key leaders visiting the Hawaii Lab was one Congressional Delegation, the respective Deputy Defense Ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea (RoK), the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, three Staff Delegations, United Nations Command Deputy Commander, SOA's President, and the AMVETS National Commander. We were privileged that the Coast Guard Commandant (Vietnam), VFW National Leaders (Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand), and VVA (Vietnam) visited our teams in Southeast Asia. These engagements provide visitors with a better understanding and appreciation of our noble mission.

Regional Teams Overview

Europe-Mediterranean (EM) Regional Directorate Update

Field Operations. This period is typically our busiest. In the last quarter, we completed our excavation in France, as well as initiating and completing two recovery missions in Hungary and one which just concluded in Italy. The execution of the Hungary missions required extensive coordination to gain access to the country and set conditions for success, as we had not conducted a recovery in Hungary since 2009. Our recovery on the island of Sicily was the third excavation related to the incident; prior recoveries included both partner and DPAA-led teams. We also conducted three investigation missions in Germany, Poland, and Italy, as well as a research trip to Britain's National Archives focused on uncovering information for some of our losses in Poland.

Planned Field Operations. Our last DPAA-led recovery mission for the FY begins in August at a site associated with the loss of a B-24 from which all crew members are still unaccounted-for. We conducted two prior investigations of the site, including detailed remote sensing work by a Scientific Recovery Expert which allowed us to both delineate the crash site in detail and create a plan to excavate safely in an area with active natural gas lines running through it. In addition, we will close out FY 2023 with investigation missions to Germany, Poland, and Belgium.

Disinterment Operations. We plan to conduct a total of 80 disinterments from nine American Battle Monuments Commission Cemeteries in Europe, having completed 52 of them by the end of July. The majority of our disinterments this year concern individuals lost as a result of land-based combat in Germany, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, and buried as Unknowns.

Lifesaving Care. In July, while traveling to their excavation site on Sicily, the 10-person Recovery Team (RT) came upon a major accident that had just occurred. The team rendered medical aid to the injured drivers and the motorcycle passenger while also managing the local crowd that gathered while they worked. A local newspaper lauded their lifesaving care until paramedics arrived to take the injured to the hospital.

US–Russia Joint Commission (USRJC). In April and again in July, the Chairmen of the U.S. and Russian Sides of the Commission spoke via telephone to sustain communications. To try to affect

information to progress cases of unaccounted-for Service members, the U.S. Side provided in June a paper articulating specific research objectives for each conflict and requesting they obtain the records necessary to further research. The U.S. Chairman emphasized that information received from the Russian Side is very important to the family members of those still unaccounted-for.

Indo-Pacific (IP) Regional Directorate Update

Field Operations. Vietnam War. Since the last update, we completed 1 Joint Field Activity (JFA) in Laos consisting of 1 Investigation Team (IT) and 1 RT; 2 JFAs in Vietnam with a total of 4 RTs, 1 Underwater RT, 2 ITs, 1 IT-Light, and an Underwater IT by the Scripps Institute of Oceanography. Korean War. We sent 1 IT to the RoK and continue to press the RoK government for a joint recovery operation at Hill 111 in the DMZ. WWII. We successfully concluded the underwater recovery in Papua New Guinea involving the NEDU and deployed 1 RT to the Solomon Islands.

Ambassador Knapper Visit. In July, the U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam observed the Underwater RT operations off the coast of Nha Trang City, shared lunch with U.S. and Vietnamese leaders aboard the support vessel, then had dinner with the U.S. team.

Planned Field Operations. Vietnam War. Closing out the year, we are conducting two small JFAs, one each in Vietnam (2 Host Nation ITs) and Laos (2 RTs and 1 IT-Light). Korean War. DPAA is actively planning its first underwater mission in RoK in the vicinity of Busan for later September. WWII. We are planning to deploy one IT to Indonesia in August and one IT to Malaysia in September. Both are the first missions since each memorandum of agreement was signed.

Research and Analysis. The Korean War Team conducted an archival research visit to DC in June, with research focused at the National Archives and Records Administration and the Library of Congress, where they collected numerous records to support FY24 field operations and priority research projects. The Korean War Team also conducted its semi-annual Case Coordination Conference in June. The Southeast Asia Team conducted its semi-annual Case Coordination Conference in April at which they coordinated on next steps for 575 individual cases representing 356 distinct incidents. An analyst attended the Search and Rescue Exhibit Opening at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force in June which included members of various pararescue organizations and analysts conducted oral history interviews pertaining to several pending cases.

Disinterment Operations. Six separate disinterment efforts, totaling 261 Unknowns from the *Enoura Maru* Hellship Project, were conducted at the National Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP) for accession into the lab for analysis. All planned disinterments for FY 2023 were completed in March at the Manila American Cemetery & Memorial (68 total Unknowns) and in July at the NMCP (445 total Unknowns). Disinterment planning for FY 2024 is in progress.

Partnerships and Innovations Update

Field Activities. We reached a truly noteworthy milestone -- the 200th partner field mission since standing up the new PI Directorate 6 years ago -- which exemplifies the commitment to increasing Agency capacity and capabilities by leveraging expertise outside the Department of Defense. We

have successfully planned and completed 34 field missions thus far in FY 2023. Several partner field projects are currently active in France, Italy, Palau, Belgium, Guam, and Croatia, and an additional 36 field activities are preparing to launch during the remainder of the FY. There has been extensive coordination and collaboration within DPAA as well as with partner institutions and with host nations as the scale and scope of these activities continues to increase.

Research. We are planning 7 new partner research projects to begin before the end of the FY, and after closing 2 research projects this quarter, we now have 68 active research projects. By the end of FY 2023, we will have 73 active partner research projects that include the University of Nebraska, Brigham Young University, Temple, Florida State, and the University of Southern Mississippi. A recent example of a new research partner project is the WWII Air Search Rescue Log Data Entry and Indexing project for the Mediterranean. Our partner for this effort is Temple University and this project will generate Analytical Research, Data Set Development, Data Visualization and Geospatial Analysis with follow-on mapping to assist EM researcher.

New Arrangements. We established 6 new formal partnerships through signed Memoranda of Understanding in the last quarter, taking the total number of DPAA's active partners to 106. New partners include Healing Through History, Terracon, Gray & Pape, University of North Carolina-Charlotte, Cedarhawk, and MSDS Heritage. More than 70 partner or prospective partner personnel have participated in the DPAA Academy, our orientation program, during the FY.

Scientific Analysis Update

Milestones. In June 2023, we identified the 200th Korean War Unknown. Of these, 2 were Medal of Honor recipients—Army Chaplain (Captain) Emil Kapaun and Army Corporal Luther Story.

Accessions. There have been 268 batches of evidence accessioned into our laboratory system, consisting of skeletal, dental, and/or material evidence for FY 2023. The accessions originated from disinterments (69%), DPAA excavations and investigations (13%), unilateral turnovers (14%), partner activities (4%), and covered three conflicts: WWII (78%), Korean War (14%), and the Vietnam War (8%).

Vietnam War Identification Project (VWIP). The VWIP is engaged in a data audit with members of the IP SE Asia, Records Management, and Case Management System Teams to validate records. VWIP has produced 3 first-time identifications, one individual identification for a Service member accounted-for historically by a group ID, and 7 additional portion identifications during FY 2023. The RTs operating in SE Asia repatriated 27 batches of evidence thus far this FY, all of which are currently undergoing forensic testing.

Enoura Maru Project. The project commenced this past January. From the 71 caskets out of the NMCP and 24 graves from the MACM, more than 25,000 bones have been inventoried, 1,600 of which have already been sampled and sent for DNA analysis. Inventory and DNA nomination will continue for the next 6-9 months. The majority of the remains (360 of 431 Unknowns) were transferred to our Nebraska Lab for analysis.

Joint Forensic Reviews (JFR). The JFR in Vietnam in June was followed by a visit to the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology. One in South Korea in June popped up due to the discovery of more possible American remains. The successful visit of Japanese scientists and staff from the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare to the Hawaii Lab resulted in over 1,250 DNA/isotope samples taken in support of their identification efforts. And in July, South Korean scientists visited to conduct a JFR which was followed by the repatriation of 7 ROK remains, which was co-officiated by the RoK Vice Minister of Defense and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Commander.

Facility News. The Offutt AFB engineers completed the required land survey for the replacement Nebraska Lab, the site has been approved, and Military Construction documents are being prepared to begin planning and design this FY. All evidence, collections, and personnel from our lab in Ohio have relocated to our Nebraska Lab. The evidence and collections are being integrated into our digital evidence chain and the synoptic collection is being reorganized in its new space.

FY 2023 Identifications to date.

Total IDs = 111 (Newly accounted for = 100 / Previously accounted for = 11)

WWII = 68

Korean War = 29

Vietnam War = 3

**Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) –
Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) Update**

Year to date, AFMES-AFDIL has received 2,674 specimens, representing 574 individual cases, to include samples from *Enoura Maru*, Tokyo Prison Fire, European and Pacific disinterments, Korean War Identification Project (KWIP), and others.

For chemically treated samples, specifically Cabanatuan POW Camp disinterment samples, AFMES-AFDIL has gone back and started processing individuals with common mitochondrial (mt) DNA sequences for whole mtDNA genome, and where appropriate, for Short Tandem Repeat (STR) testing. Currently, STR testing is providing a 16% success rate with a new extraction method brought online. Although success rates are low, previously we were not getting any results, so this is assisting with new identifications.

For KWIP samples, AFMES doubled the number of Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) samples to 100 samples per month on average last year and has been maintaining this. One-year supplemental appropriations enabled the purchase of additional higher throughput instruments and the retrofitting of additional laboratory spaces for NGS processing.

AFMES-AFDIL is still advising the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), who is assisting Vietnam with establishing their past accounting DNA Laboratories. Recently, we have provided our new extraction and NGS methods.

FY 2023 Statistics to date:

DNA Results Reported = 2,688 (on track to hit the 3,600 analyses per year goal)

First-time Named Believed-to-Be Reports = 121 (supporting new identifications)

Outreach and Communications Update

Family Member Update (FMU). On April 22, we hosted an in-person FMU in Chicago where 275 family members attended, 162 of whom were first-time attendees (59%). Of the 143 cases represented, 88 were from WWII, 44 from the Korean War, and 11 from the Vietnam War. Throughout the day, DPAA analysts/historians and Service Casualty Officers conducted 122 Case Summary Reviews (CSR) to individually update family members on their loved one's loss. The AFMES-AFDIL team collected DNA family reference samples from 3 of the 5 family members who were lacking an FRS on file.

Annual Government Briefing (AGB). On June 29 and 30, we completed a successful AGB for families whose loved ones are unaccounted for from the Vietnam War. The meeting was held in downtown Washington, DC and we had 147 family members, representing 68 cases, attend. There were 58 CSRs provided. The Korean/Cold War AGB is scheduled for August 17-18 in Arlington, VA. We currently have 583 family members representing 283 cases registered to attend.

POW/MIA National Recognition Day Poster. In June, this year's poster was unveiled in a ceremony at the Pentagon POW/MIA Corridor. The Secretary of the Army officiated and among the attendees were a former Vietnam War POW, Gold Star family members, and representatives from a few VSOs. Designed by two DPAA NCOs, the poster can be ordered from the DPAA website.

Memorial Day Engagements. With Memorial Day inextricably linked to DPAA's mission, we leveraged this to message the Department's extensive commitment to its MIAs and their families and provided speakers to 29 Memorial Day commemoration events, 26 of which were at Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemeteries across the country.

Media. Among the major media coverage this last quarter was the first honorable carry at Offutt AFB since 2018; the Chicago FMU; the joint announcement of CPL Luther Story by the U.S. and RoK Presidents; the *Heaven Can Wait* mission and its Repatriation Ceremony in Singapore; Memorial Day coverage; and the Vietnam AGB. We published 31 Releases and 819 photos/videos/stories.

Stories of Note

CBS Evening News

<https://www.cbs.com/shows/video/GxB3VVPGArsGVHNtuVWWX3NksnXOCJHi/>

(Corporal Story Featured)

Austin KVUE

<https://www.kvue.com/article/news/history/heaven-can-wait-wwii-bomber-recovery-mission/269-46a19830-5754-4690-8c0c-9325268f472c>

(Heaven Can Wait Featured)

NBC BAY AREA News

<https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/peninsula/bay-area-vietnam-vet-mia/3259893/>

(AF Col Desoto Featured)

Questions and Answers

KWVA: *What is the current number of remains estimated to be in North Korea?*

Answer: 5,300 of the 7,500 total unaccounted for from the Korean War are estimated to be in North Korea.

Is there any indication from any source that we may be able to recover remains again?

Answer: Unfortunately, our last communication from DPRK was in March 2019. They are not responding to any overtures from all levels of the U.S. Government.

For operations at the DMZ, you said you were waiting for permission to conduct operations; who are you waiting for permission from?

Answer: Following up on the first joint investigation at Hill 111, which is on the RoK side of the Military Demarcation Line, we are waiting for approval to conduct the joint excavation. Since the area must be demined, the South Korean Ministry of Defense must first conduct a security and safety review.

SOA/SFA: *What are the active operations / field missions in Laos and Cambodia?*

Answer: In Laos, we have 5 JFAs scheduled in FY 2024, 1 per quarter with the second quarter having 2 JFAs. They total 12 RTs and 7 ITs, with 3 Partner RTs. In Cambodia, we are planning for two partner Pre-deployment Site Surveys for next FY and two RTs.

Honor Release Return: *No questions.*

Mission POW-MIA: *Thanks to the DPAA team for all the work that went into the poster as well as the AGB. In April, I raised the list of artifacts in museums, where we stand with that?*

Answer: This is still being worked.

What is the status of the hiring process for the new analysts? At the AGB, several analysts said they were not the analyst of record and waiting on the new hires.

Answer: We have 12 Research Analyst positions dedicated to the Vietnam War - 11 are filled and 1 has a current hiring action. There are also 3 Historian positions - 2 are filled and 1 hiring action is underway. We are pleased with the hiring actions as many were former contractors and are now moving to Federal Service so they come with experience.

We lost Joseph Stuart. His son, an Active Duty Marine, will become the PNOK.

Answer: We were heartbroken to learn of his passing, his commitment to the mission and his father's case was remarkable.

Clarify if the MEL includes just Vietnam or all wars? How many are Vietnam?

Answer: The Master Excavation List (MEL) includes all conflicts of which 123 sites are associated with the Vietnam War.

Of the current research projects, how many are Vietnam War-era focused?

Answer: At the moment, we have 68 total active Partner research projects. Of these, 10 are focused on the Vietnam War. We are currently pursuing an additional research effort, the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association Database Project and have additional ones we plan to initiate next FY.

Curious which universities you are going to for research?

Answer: We are working with Texas Tech and Ohio State for 9 of these projects and the 10th is with an individual, Mr. Bob Teal, who assists with preparing SE Asia case narratives.

Coalition of Families

Regarding the USRJC, the arrangement was Russia would work with the U.S. on accessing their Archives if the U.S. in turn helped with their MIAs in Afghanistan --- is that in any way impacting?

Answer: In the past, the Russian Side has requested our help with information concerning Soviet military members missing from the conflict in Afghanistan (1979-1989). They have not tied it to U.S. Side requests for access to Russian archives and do not anticipate negative impacts to USRJC work as a result of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. Both sides have linked their requests to continued access that continues to be centered around the ability of both sides to have researchers in place with access to each other's open archives. They have two individuals here in Washington, DC, who access NARA and we continue to maintain an archival research contract through which two Russian nationals access the Central Archives of the Russian Ministry of Defense.

For the China MOU regarding archival research, their Ministry of Security says they will not allow access to any of those records due to classification. Does anyone know if China has reached out to the DPRK on this and if so, what was the answer and when was it done?

Answer: It has been more than three years since we had any contact with the People's Liberation Army (PLA)-Archives Bureau as there have been no military-to-military engagements. The Department of Defense continues to reach out, but to no avail. Also, U.S. Ambassador to China Burns actively looks for opportunities as a "door opener" to dialogue with the Chinese. We do not know if China approached North Korea.

These records are held by the Ministry of Security, not PLA Archives?

Answer: We have not dealt with this ministry because our interlocutors in China are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and PLA-Archives Bureau. We do not know.

Could that be a path pursued with Ambassador Burns? And can you keep us apprised on when that visit might come to pass?

Answer: We will raise it with the Ambassador who seeks ways to leverage this mission and will share outcomes from his visit.

SOA: *The SOA President and I had an opportunity to visit the DPAA facility in Hawaii; compliments on the level of professionalism and commitment of the staff.*

National League of Families: *Are there Vietnamese researchers at NARA now?*

Answer: As far as we know, Vietnam only has embedded researchers at Texas Tech and Harvard, all of which is through the DoD program to support their efforts to recover their missing. NARA does allow foreign researchers the same access parameters as U.S. researchers.

What are the numbers of cases on the MEL/MIL?

Answer: The MEL has 315 sites (for which an excavation would be planned) with 123 from the Vietnam War. On the Master Investigation List (MIL) are 556 cases, of which 180 are associated with the Vietnam War; for these, a field investigation would be the next step.