



**DPAA Family/VSO Quarterly Call and Update**  
**January 29, 2025, 1:00-2:00 PM EST**  
*Fulfilling Our Nation's Promise*

**Summary:** Keeping the families of our missing personnel and veterans informed is a key component of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's (DPAA) mission. This update summarizes our efforts from the last quarter to account for our missing personnel.

**Family Group/Veterans Service Organization Participants:**

- American Legion: Ariel De Jesus
- Disabled American Veterans: Marty Pennock
- Korean War Veterans Association: Rocky Harder
- Special Operations Association/Special Forces Association: David Gordon
- Vietnam Veterans of America: Grant Coates
- Coalition of Families of Korea/Cold War POW/MIAs: Rick Downes
- Mission: POW-MIA: Dave Huffman
- National League of POW/MIA Families: Aaron Ahlstrom
- Sons and Daughters in Touch: Colleen Shine

**Director's Update (Mr. Kelly McKeague)**

**Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Budget.** For the current FY, the government is still operating under a Continuing Resolution (CR) through March 14. There are no impacts expected to our funding because it is apportioned at our higher FY 2024 budget amount, so we are able to continue to fund our increased operations plan and attend to other requirements.

**Laos Issue.** As you know, the Lao Government did not agree to provide diplomatic protections to our US employees (and their families) who are permanently assigned to our detachment (DET) there. In resuming Joint Field Activities (JFA) last fall, we also instituted mitigation measures to protect our personnel. Recognizing the latter is not sustainable, we have begun steps that will eventually relocate all US personnel from our Laos DET by 2028. The U.S. personnel supporting operations in Laos will do so TDY from our DET in Bangkok and our dedicated Lao employees will continue to work at the DET in Vientiane.

**PRC MOU Signed.** In late October 2024, the 2008 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DPAA and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Archives Bureau was renewed and promulgated with the signatures of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for China and the Deputy Director of the People's Republic of China (PRC) Office for International Military Cooperation. The MOU will enable a potential expansion of our joint activities with the PLA.

**Continued Denial of Access.** Having conducted very successful excavations year-round on Tarawa for several years, our partner teams were understandably pulled out at the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020. Since then, and despite active engagements from various Department of Defense (DoD)

and State Department levels, the Kiribati Government continues to take no action on our requests to have our access restored; this is due to their foreign policy changes with the U.S. and with the PRC.

**Organization Engagements.** In October, I was privileged to speak at the Special Operations Association Reunion (SAOR) in Las Vegas and the Mission: POW-MIA Annual Meeting in Norfolk. We very much appreciate these opportunities to provide updates on our mission and to connect with your members. Our Southeast Asia analysts were able to develop leads in interviewing several SOAR attendees.

**Member's Passing.** In December, Dr Jim Connell passed away from an illness he had been battling. He was our Senior Cold War Analyst for the US-Russia Joint Commission, which he began supporting in 1992 as a member of Task Force Russia, working from Moscow until 2001. Jim also served as Acting Executive Secretary for the US Side of the Commission from 2012 to 2018. He had a gentle spirit, was passionate about our mission, and loved interacting with families. Jim's obituary is here and highlights his life and lifelong commitment to public service: <https://remembermyjourney.com/memorials/james-goodman-connell?id=3mp9rBL8>

### **Acting Deputy Director for Operations Update (Mr. John Figuerres)**

**Operations Outlook.** To date in FY 2025, we have deployed 13 Investigation Teams (ITs) and 11 Recovery Teams (RTs). We initiated the West Loch (the 1944 explosion at Pearl Harbor) Disinterment Project where our first disinterment in October drew a larger-than-usual gathering, with members from Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (JBPHH) and the Obama Hawaiian Africana Museum joining us.

**Key Leader Engagements.** We continue to highlight our people and mission by hosting influential leaders to see our work firsthand here in the Hawaii Laboratory. Notable visits included the Lithuanian Chief of Defense; the Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army; the Coast Guard District 14 Commander; the Asia Pacific Center for Strategic Studies Director; the DoD Education Activity Director; and national leaders from the American Legion and VFW. These engagements help inform key stakeholder, explore potential partnerships, and build advocacy for our mission.

### **Regional Teams Overview**

#### **Europe-Mediterranean (EM) Region (LTC Joe Smith)**

**Field Operations.** Two historians and a linguist conducted research and investigations of incidents located on the Italian Island of Sardinia, the first time we have conducted field activities there. They established excellent contacts with host nation officials at all levels; conducted research in village, town, and church archives; and interviewed many residents with knowledge of the incidents. The next action will be to send a full IT to conduct archaeological surveys of identified locations and continue research to locate other incidents.

**Disinterment Operations.** We conducted no disinterment operations in Europe during this period.

In coordination with American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) personnel, we established our planned disinterment calendar for the rest of FY 2025. We plan to conduct disinterments of 51 graves of Unknowns from 10 ABMC cemeteries across Europe.

**Research and Analysis.** Our researchers provided support to scientists traveling to conduct Field Forensic Reviews (FFR) aimed at coordinating with host nation officials for release of evidence and possible remains of U.S. World War II (WWII) casualties from recent excavations, and to a team from our DET and DPAA Laboratory conducting a site visit in preparation for a complex excavation we will conduct in Poland in June.

**Planned Field Operations.** There are no field operations planned for the EM Region until an investigation mission to Italy which begins in March.

**US–Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs.** Mr. Taylor Call is the new Commissioner for the Defense Intelligence Agency. In addition, the U.S. Side Chairman has continued discussions to secure two new Congressional Commissioners to replace Senator Manchin and Representative Wenstrup, who both retired. In a hopeful development, after a long silence, the Government of Russia designated a new Executive Secretary for the Russian Side of the Commission.

### **Indo-Pacific (IP) Region (Mr. Chris Phelps)**

**Field Operations.** Since October, we continued operations in Laos, completing one JFA consisting of 3 RTs, 2 of which were part of our northern cluster initiative. In Vietnam, we completed a JFA consisting of 2 RTs, 3 Host Nation RTs, an IT that investigated 12 different sites, 3 Pre-Deployment Site Surveys (PDSS), a Host Nation IT which investigated 18 sites, and a Joint Forensic Review (JFR). Last quarter, we conducted underwater recovery operations (60+ days) in the Solomon Islands.

**Disinterment Operations.** We conducted 5 disinterment missions from the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP) resulting in the disinterment of 40 WWII Unknowns related to West Loch losses. This week, we completed a mission to Manila American Cemetery and Memorial (MACM) where 35 WWII Unknowns were disinterred and repatriated to HI.

**Research and Analysis.** Vietnam War: Last month, we conducted our 68th Southeast Asia Case Coordination Conference. The week's discussions brought together personnel from IP, other DPAA Directorates, and DIA's Stony Beach to review and advance case progression, research, and operations for the coming year. Korean War: On October 29, we briefed the Korean War Veterans Association at their Annual Meeting in Las Vegas; while there, conversations with attendees helped to advance research and casework. In November, we conducted the annual trilateral U.S.-South Korea-Australia Research Case Coordination Meeting in Seoul to synchronize and collaborate regarding research best practices and strategies, and potential field operations. The team also held meetings with 8th Army Mortuary Affairs and United Nations Command to facilitate future planning operations. WWII: The over 100 Case Summary Reviews briefed at the Portland, ME, Family Member Update (FMU) was the largest FMU to date for the IP WWII team.

**Planned Field Operations.** During this quarter, we have 2 JFAs planned in Laos (5 RTs, 1 IT, and 1 Laos Joint Investigation Element visiting 10 sites). We also will conduct a JFA in Vietnam (3 RTs, 1 IT, 1 PDSS, and 1 IT-Light). We also have planned an IT each in South Korea and Solomon Islands, and an RT scheduled for Thailand.

**Planned Disinterments.** This quarter, we have scheduled 5 NMCP disinterment operations and another MACM disinterment mission. On March 10, we are scheduled to begin disinterring the first sets of remains associated with Phase 6 of the Korean War Disinterment Project from the NMCP, an effort that will continue into FY 2026.

**Vietnamese Approval.** After a decade of advocacy, Vietnam approved DPAA conducting research at 9 museums and libraries in the Thua Thien Hue Province, the first research allowed outside of Hanoi since 2012. This province is a priority given the 105 unresolved cases in the Central Provinces.

**First-time Augmentees.** The Oregon National Guard is the state partner to Vietnam. We have been coordinating with them to provide augmentees to RTs operating in Vietnam. The upcoming Vietnam JFA will have two Oregon Army National Guard augmentees, and this will be their first contribution to a full-scale DPAA mission.

**Mobile Investigation Unit.** Our DET hosted our Vietnamese partners for a meeting on January 16 as a follow-up discussion of the Stony Beach MIU concept. The Vietnamese Office for Seeking Missing Persons was receptive to the concept and stated they will provide additional feedback to the DET after further review.

**Indonesia Engagement.** Last month, we conducted our annual Advance Coordination Meeting in Jakarta with our Indonesian counterparts and the U.S. Embassy team. These meetings are designed to define requirements for upcoming field activities in Indonesia.

## **Partnerships and Innovations (Mr. Rocky Gillette)**

**Field Activities.** In the first quarter and through January, we conducted 11 partner field activities across Cambodia, France, Germany, Solomon Islands, the Philippines, and United Kingdom (UK). In November, we completed our last recovery in Europe for the 2024 calendar year, with our partner *Cranfield University* working through cold, wet, and muddy terrestrial conditions to find evidence from a B-17 that crashed in Dreifelden, Germany. We also conducted multiple terrestrial ground sensing and subsurface testing projects in France and the UK to prepare for recoveries scheduled this summer. We continue to use partners who have firm relationships with and reside in the countries we search for our missing. For example, an Australia-based partner, *Sealark Explorations*, has members who grew up in the Solomon Islands, maintain deep connections, and speak the language. We were able to leverage this partner to conduct an underwater investigation in the outer Solomon Islands for a missing F4U-1 Corsair aviator.

**Research.** In the first quarter, we initiated new partner research projects related to WWII and the Korean War. The PI Research team expanded its support for case research on losses associated with air strikes from Tinian Island. Partners are also increasing their support of DPAA's efforts to

recover Korean War unaccounted-for by establishing new projects centered on map collection and analysis. These projects are now included in 92 active research projects. In addition to this work, we facilitated the 5th Annual Hub and Spoke Fellows' Research Symposium last month. Attended by 90 DPAA researchers and other experts, this symposium centered on research conducted by 16 research partner fellows, and included sessions on specific campaigns that unaccounted-for were involved in and utilizing digital research methods that can serve the mission.

**Innovation.** We currently have 13 active innovation studies, many of which are multi-year efforts. At the end of FY 2024, 5 were approved for pursuit and Innovation personnel began working with DPAA staff and partners on these efforts. The innovation studies will expand Agency efforts in 3 strategic focus areas – Advanced Accounting Methods, Decision Intelligence, and Integrated Communications.

**New Arrangements.** We established new partnerships through signed MOUs with the Kassel Mission Historical Society; Sterling Geoscientific; University of California-Davis; Major Projects Foundation; ASM Affiliates; University of Otago (New Zealand); Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute; German War Graves Commission (Germany); U.S.-ASEAN Business Council; Chief Rick Stone and Family Charitable Foundation; and Australian National University. The total number of active partners is 109.

## **Scientific Analysis Update (Dr. John Byrd)**

### **FY 2025 Identifications to date**

Total IDs = 21 newly-accounted-for

WWII = 14 newly-accounted-for

Korean War = 6

Vietnam War = 1

**Accessions.** Thus far in FY 2025, 64 batches of evidence have been accessioned into our laboratory system, consisting of skeletal, dental, material evidence, and/or life support. The evidence originated from disinterments (40), DPAA field activities (7), partner activities (9), and unilateral turnovers (8). The distribution of evidence received by conflict is WWII (86%), Korean War (2%), and Vietnam War (12%).

**Vietnam War Identification Project.** The VWIP team is continuing its data audit to validate records. This audit includes quantifying identification metrics to better understand the quantity and quality of remains recovered from SE Asia to develop a predictive model of remains recovery from future field operations. We received 6 new accessions from the first quarter JFA and with Vietnamese forensic experts, performed a JFR that recommended 2 cases be repatriated to the U.S. for further analysis.

**Korean War Identification Project.** The KWIP team has identified 712 unaccounted-for Service members, with 243 coming from disinterments. They have completed triage and inventory on Phase 5 of the Korean War Disinterment Project and planning on Phase 6 commencing in March.

**Nebraska Lab MILCON.** We held a kick-off meeting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on January 10, which marked the official start of the planning and design phase for construction of our new laboratory at Offutt AFB, NE. The new facility is projected to double the lab's footprint with most space being allocated to the laboratory floor.

**Unique ID.** Last month's accounting of Army SGT Roger Duquesne, a Korean War loss, was unique. After having disinterred an unknown set of remains 13 years ago from the NMCP and not having had a unique DNA match to make an identification (SGT Duquesne was adopted), our scientists used the advancement of photo superimposition to account for him.

**Japanese Collaboration.** We collaborate closely with the Japanese Government who utilize non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in searching for their missing. Among several sets of remains one such NGO recovered on Peleliu this past summer, our scientists' FFR differentiated one set as American. Follow-on DNA analysis determined this to be a 1st Marine Division Corporal, and his identification is pending.

**West Loch Project.** DPAA completed the disinterment of 48 Unknowns from the NMCP, who are associated with the incident where 82 are unaccounted for from the 163 casualties of the May 1944 explosion at Pearl Harbor. With a majority of the unaccounted for being African Americans, having 73% of DNA Family Reference Samples (FRS) on hand was a significant accomplishment to then have this project submitted for approval.

#### **Armed Forces Medical Examiner System-Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory Update (Dr. Tim McMahon)**

**New and Emerging Technology.** After 7 years of development, AFMES-AFDIL completed the forensic validation of its novel Single Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP) and extended kinship methods for human identification this past December. Currently, SNP-qualified scientists are processing cases promoted by DPAA for SNP analysis and will be reporting out results this month. AFMES-AFDIL will become the first accredited forensic laboratory to provide an accredited SNP method that provides a statistical match and can be used to identify human remains. We are extremely excited about this new method as it was developed to meet the challenging nature of samples submitted by DPAA for DNA testing. This effort resulted in multiple peer-reviewed journals as well as demonstrating that current commercially available Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy SNP testing methods do not work when applied to DPAA-type samples. Like the Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) mtDNA for chemically treated samples, AFMES-AFDIL plans over the next year is to increase the number of trained scientists, monitor and assess success rates, and optimize testing as needed to increase success rates and sample throughput.

**Training Requests.** In the coming months, AFMES-AFDIL will host two visiting scientists, one from University of Innsbruck (Austria) and one from the Institute of Forensic Medicine at the University of Zurich (Switzerland). Both are coming to learn about AFMES-AFDIL and the advanced next generations genomic sequencing methods developed and utilized to assist with human remains identifications.

**FY 2024 End-of-Year Statistics.** In FY 2024, we reported 4,020 DNA analyses to DPAA, a 10% increase over 3,600 analyses reported in FY 2023. This increase was accomplished utilizing our existing staff, instruments and budget. Major contributors to this increase have been the implementation of higher throughput NGS instruments, new optimized DNA processing methods, and the cross-training of additional scientists. Additionally, we increased NGS sample testing and reporting by 20%.

#### **FY 2024 Summary**

1. DNA Results Reported: 4,020 (averaged 335 analysis per month)
  - a. NGS results: 1,456 samples (this is 121 samples per month)
2. First-time Named Believed-to-Be (BTB) supporting new identifications: 159
3. Total BTB Reports (first time + additional samples): 270

**First Quarter of FY 2025 (October-December)\*.** Capitalizing on the FY 2024 growth, we have sustained a 20% increase in the total number of samples reported to DPAA over FY 2024. This includes increasing the number of NGS samples reported by an additional 10%. The increase equates to approximately 400 DNA analysis reported per month (last year, it was 335 per month), which includes about 134 NGS samples per month (FY 2024 was 120 per month). We are looking to sustain this throughput for the remainder of the FY.

#### **FY 2025 Statistics (December 2025)\***

4. DNA Results Reported: 1,211 (averaging 400 samples per month; 20% increase currently over FY 2024 testing)
  - a. NGS: 403 samples (averaging 134 samples per month; currently, a 10% increase over FY 2024)
5. First-time Named BTB (supporting new Identifications): 38
6. Total BTB Reports (First time + additional samples): 56

\* AFMES-AFDIL closes monthly metrics on the last working day of each month and collates them all by the 15th of the next month.

#### **Outreach and Communications (Mrs. Jennifer Nasarenko)**

**Family Member Updates.** On November 2, we held an in-person FMU in Portland, ME, which included 292 family members (representing 165 cases), of whom 237 were first-time attendees (81%). The meeting was livestreamed on our DPAA Website as well as Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn social media sites and the archived videos can be found at [www.dpaa.mil/Livestreams](http://www.dpaa.mil/Livestreams). The next FMU will be on February 22 in Sacramento, CA.

**2024 Year in Review.** Each year, we publish a Year in Review that chronicles the breadth and depth of the DPAA mission. The FY 2024 booklet is being printed, but you can find an electronic version on our website and social media platforms. Copies will be sent to your organizations when we receive them.

**Poster Unveiling.** We are accelerating the timeline for the annual National POW/MIA Recognition Day Poster unveiling in order to leverage more opportunities to draw attention to the

commemoration. This year's unveiling will be sometime in February in the POW/MIA Corridor of the Pentagon and all of you will be invited to attend; more information will be forthcoming soon.

**2025 Vietnam War AGB.** The Vietnam War Annual Government Briefings will be held in Omaha, NE, June 26-27. Originating from family members requesting a non-DC location, we assessed various cities and settled on Omaha, where attending family members will have an opportunity to visit our laboratory and the city's new Vietnam War Memorial.

**Public Affairs.** We kicked off October highlighting some major accomplishments including the 700th Korean War identification and the 100th Cabanatuan identification. We continued to push DPAA messaging through a multitude of media engagements at local, national and international levels. Our official podcast, *Missing and Not Forgotten*, is up to 7 episodes and is available for listening on all major platforms; please help us spread the word. Also, we published more than 730 photos, videos and stories; pushed 74 press releases out about IDs; and answered 32 media queries.

#### **News Articles of Note.**

NBC - [U.S. serviceman finally laid to rest, more than 50 years after being killed in Vietnam](#)

CBS - [Remains of American pilot who vanished during Vietnam War spy mission finally identified - CBS News](#)

DPAA - [Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Makes 100th Cabanatuan Identification](#)

#### **Q&A Session**

**American Legion:** Departed the call prior to the Q&A session.

**Disabled American Veterans:** *No questions but best regards from the DAV Director and our appreciation for everything DPAA does.*

**KWVA:** *Can you tell us when Phase 6 will begin. KWVA Board of Directors meeting is 18 April at the Crystal City Hilton. Would like to ask for a DPAA update.*

**ANSWER:** Phase 6 will begin on or about March 10, but rain delays are always possible, which typically occur three times each FY. DPAA will certainly support your Board of Directors Meeting with a speaker.

**SOA:** *No questions, but thank you for all the terrific work and also want you to know that next year, SOAR will cohost the annual convention with SFA at the Orleans Hotel in Las Vegas. Also, I plan to get to Hawaii to coordinate the Spring Symposium and SOA plans to have a representative in Omaha for the AGB.*



**VVA:** *No questions, but thank you for the terrific support during a recent visit to your facility in Hawaii. Also noted the DPAA website has a lot of good information and employees are great.*

**Coalition of Families:** *Will the MOU with the PRC be a pathway to get access to the DPRK archival records and will you ask the PRC if they inquired with the DPRK to see if they would grant permission to share archival records?*

**ANSWER:** The update of the MOU with the PRC was something the PRC asked for and it does allow for more engagements. DPAA is currently the only entity within DoD that has a military-to-military contact with the PRC. During this year's Archival Exchange with the PLA, we will ask about archival engagements with the DPRK.

*DPAA used to have a wonderful fact sheet on the Korean War and there is nothing equivalent, so can you bring back the fact sheet?*

**ANSWER:** The fact sheets were indeed pulled down and are being revamped. We are in the process of reformatting and updating them; they will be back up in the not-too-distant future.

*How many sets of remains still need to be identified from Phase 3?*

**ANSWER:** On Phase 3, we exhumed 101 Unknowns and have made 21 IDs to date.

*The new Administration seems to be wiping out whole organizations. If you ever feel there is a threat to DPAA, please let the families and Veterans know. Jim Connell was a gentle soul and very dedicated; he will be missed a great deal.*

**Mission: POW-MIA:** *Do you have a current number of cases on the MEL? Were any sites closed out this year in SEA?*

**ANSWER:** There are 119 sites on the Master Excavation List and 211 cases on the Master Investigation List. We closed 8 Vietnam War sites this FY.

*We have registered for the FMU in New Orleans and will be in Hawaii in June, right before the AGB, and would like to visit DPAA. Also, we have received positive feedback from family members on having the AGB in Omaha.*

*Can we get an official statement from DPAA on the Laos issue.*

**ANSWER:** We are relocating our permanently assigned U.S. employees and their families from Detachment Three office in Vientiane, Laos. This decision comes as the Lao Government has not agreed to provide diplomatic protections for these U.S. employees and their families. There will be no degradation to our mission in Laos as our personnel will be based in Bangkok, Thailand, and have a temporary duty rotation in Laos while our dedicated team of Lao nationals at Detachment Three will continue to support our day-to-day activities in the country.

**National League of POW/MIA Families:** *What hotel will the AGB in Omaha be held at?*

**ANSWER:** We are still waiting on the contracting process and may not know the location until a couple of months prior to the event. We are looking at a hotel in downtown Omaha to make it easy for families to walk to meals. Once we have finalized the location, we will send an update letter to all families of the unaccounted-for.

*How many original status LKA cases are still active?*

**ANSWER:** Of the original 196 individuals “Last Known Alive” in Vietnam (those who survived or may have survived their loss incident and were either alive on the ground, in captivity, or in immediate proximity to capture, but did not return), DoD has confirmed the death of 177, with 19 still unresolved. There are 6 in Cambodia and 16 in Laos for a total of 41 LKA.

**Sons and Daughters in Touch:** *Is DPAA on the new Administration’s radar?*

**ANSWER:** We provide talking points for all meetings senior officials have with senior foreign government officials, and there is an awareness and appreciation for our mission.

*What is the timeline for the Omaha lab expansion?*

**ANSWER:** We envision an FY 2027 Military Construction Project with a 21-month construction timeline and are hoping to open the facility in FY 2029.

*Is there an update on the policy on additional remains?*

**ANSWER:** The commingled remains issue was brought up at the Central Joint Mortuary Affairs Board (CJMAB) this month. However, they only make recommendations, the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel & Readiness) is the decision authority. The CJMAB is reviewing the issue, but it may be six months or more until a decision is reached.

*Regarding DPAA partners, is there a list of partners you can share with us?*

**ANSWER:** The current listing of our partners is included as a separate attachment.