



**DPAA Family/VSO Quarterly Call and Update Notes**  
**Thursday July 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:**

- Disabled American Veterans: Mr. Justin Hart
- Korea-Cold War Families of the Missing: Ms. Melody Raglin
- Korean War Veterans Association: Mr. Rocky Harder
- National League of POW/MIA Families: Mrs. Ann Mills Griffiths
- Special Operations Association: Mr. Wade Ishimoto

**The agenda includes:**

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

**Director's Update**

**Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Budget.** The FY 2022 President's Budget request was delivered to Congress on May 28th, and Committee mark-ups have commenced. Our portion of this year's request is \$130.7 million (M) and consists of two separate programs: \$130.2M of Operations & Maintenance, and \$500,000 of Procurement. This funding level is close to the FY 2021 budget request, which benefitted greatly from a \$25M program increase from the Congress.

**COVID-19 Update.** We continue to adapt to the evolving pandemic, and we have pursued operational opportunities whenever they arose. On June 1st, we transitioned to Phase 2 of the DPAA Return to Work Plan. This phase has allowed us to safely return personnel back into the office at each of our facilities with the flexibility to adjust occupancy based on the applicable Health Protection Condition levels at each of our locations. In alignment with Federal Government guidance, we also continue to leverage telework advantages.

**POW/MIA Chair of Honor:** We were finally able to have a dedication ceremony of a POW/MIA Chair of Honor in the lobby of our Virginia office. Speakers at the ceremony included U.S. Air Force Captain and former Vietnam War POW, Ralph Galati, and Colleen Shine, daughter of USAF Lt Col Anthony Shine, missing from the Vietnam War and accounted for in 1996. There are also Chairs of Honor at our Hawaii and Nebraska facilities.

**Poster Unveiling:** This past Tuesday, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks officiated at a ceremony unveiling this year's National POW/MIA Recognition Day Poster. The poster's message is "America's Commitment / Globally Fulfilled" and the central feature is a watermark of the iconic POW/MIA silhouette, which was designed by National League of Families members and has its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, as well as photos displaying the POW/MIA flag. The poster can be ordered via a link on the DPAA website.

**Support to VSO Conventions:** This summer, we are supporting Veterans Service Organization meetings as requested. I video-recorded a DPAA update that will be shown at the VFW's modified National Convention next week. Our Principal Deputy Director, Fern Sumter Winbush, will address the POW-MIA Seminar at the DAV Convention on August 1 in Tampa, FL. And we will speak and have a DPAA booth at the American Legion National Convention in Phoenix, August 28.

**Key Personnel Announcements.** We bid farewell to our Senior Enlisted Leader, SGM Kerrick Loyd, who is headed to Fort Lee, VA. His replacement, SGM Delonica Boyce, will arrive in early September and is an experienced Sergeant Major and career logistician. Earlier this month, our General Counsel (GC), Shelley Young, retired after an 18-year Federal Civilian career, a third of which was with DPAA. Our Deputy GC, Ryan Wischkaemper, was selected as her replacement.

**Change to Family Meeting:** Improving COVID trends back in April led us to plan the first in-person family meeting since February 2020 for the August 5-6 Korea/Cold War Annual Government Briefings. Despite mitigation measures being followed throughout the planning process, recent declining COVID conditions and the inability for the hotel to provide the necessary safety protocols for the more than 500 registrants, we had to switch to a virtual conference.

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

**Operations Outlook.** Similar to our last update, the pace and scope of DPAA and partner field operations continue to increase worldwide. 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.

**Key Leader Engagements.** In the last three months, we have hosted several senior leaders, including: United Kingdom (UK) Defence Secretary Wallace; the new Commander, United Nations Command/Combined Forces Command/US Forces Korea, GEN LaCamera; Army Chief of Chaplains, MG Solhjem, among others, at our Hawaii facility. Similarly, in Nebraska, we hosted the Air Force Personnel Center Commander, Maj Gen Craige; and the Air Combat Command Surgeon, Brig Gen (Dr.) Bogart. These visits afford us the opportunity to highlight our personnel and mission, and visitors gain a richer understanding of our worldwide humanitarian efforts.

**Republic of Korea (ROK) Engagements.** Over the past several months I've had several engagements with the Director of the Ministry of National Defense Agency for KIA Recovery and Identification (MAKRI), with Honolulu Consul General Hong, as well as the UNC Chief of Staff. These meetings continue to build upon DPAA's relationship with the ROK, while strengthening collaboration and developing plans for joint DPAA/MAKRI field operations.

**New Indo-Pacific Directorate Leader.** Lastly, I want to extend a warm welcome to Col Matt Brannen, USMC, who has taken the reins as the Indo-Pacific Regional Director. Matt comes to us with nearly 24 years of dedicated service, and recently completed the senior level course at the Naval War College. He brings a wealth of operational and staff experience, to include serving on staff of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

## **Regional Teams Overview**

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

**Field Operations.** Over the last 90 days, we accomplished six Joint Field Activities. An investigative team returned from Thailand and nominated two aircraft sites for excavation work. An investigative mission to South Korea and the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) concluded in late May, gaining valuable information about Hill 111 losses. In early July, a Laos mission commenced with two recovery teams (RTs) and in-country investigation efforts with the Defense Intelligence Agency's Stony Beach. In May, a joint underwater RT, three terrestrial RTs, two host nation RTs, and one investigation team (IT) conducted operations in Vietnam. We successfully deployed four RTs to Laos from mid-April to mid-June. Lack of access led to the deferment of multiple missions in the Solomon Islands, but we remain optimistic about returning in FY 2022.

**Research and Analysis.** In July, we hosted Case Coordination Conferences for Southeast Asia and World War II (WWII) Pacific. The first included DIA Stony Beach analysts, while the second focused on Papua New Guinea (PNG), Marshall Islands, and partner research, and will determine the follow-on steps on more than 400 cases. We also conducted new research work for USS *Houston* losses and Finschhafen, PNG Unknowns. The Vietnam War geographer arrived on March 28 and has produced approximately 107 geospatial products for 52 incidents in Vietnam, 47 geospatial products for 23 incidents in Laos, and 9 geospatial products for 7 incidents in Cambodia.

**Disinterment Operations.** With 48 disinterments occurring over the last 90 days, Phase Three of the Korean War Identification Project nears completion in August. The fourth of the seven-phase project is anticipated to commence around January 2022. In the interim, we will begin executing Myitkyina 47, recently approved, in the first quarter of FY 2022. We were able to disinter two priority Unknowns from the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial (MACM) and exceeded our goal there.

**Planned Field Operations.** In August, an IT will return to the DMZ to pursue a joint investigation with MAKRI of Hill 111 in addition to work further south in the vicinity of Mount Baekseok and Mount Daeu. Two RTs and a site assessment will continue through early September in Laos. Unfortunately, due to a major COVID-19 outbreak and tighter restrictions in Vietnam, we had to cancel the three RTs and one IT that were set to depart later this week. But it appears the Vietnamese will be able to conduct three unilateral recoveries.

**Planned Disinterments.** MACM disinterments are complete for FY 2021 and will not resume until November. National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP) disinterments will finish out the first week of August and continue in October with a series of WWII Unknowns, which were recently approved.

**Detachment Recognition.** LTC Selmer Santos has joined our Detachment in Hanoi. Additionally, our Detachment in Hanoi was awarded the Department of State's Meritorious Honor Award, in recognition of their efforts coordinating the arrival of three RTs and one IT which was the first DoD activity and first non-diplomatic flight of U.S. technical experts to Vietnam since the onset of COVID. On July 7th, they commemorated the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the office in Hanoi, which also pre-dated the U.S. Embassy by four years.

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

**Field Operations.** Field operations continue, with two recovery missions concluding in Austria and Belgium since the April update, and an ongoing RT in Germany.

The Austria mission serves as an excellent example of the tremendous partners we have and the impact of the mission. The Austrian government at all levels and U.S. Embassy team spent almost a decade working with the landowner to gain access to the site, and after completing work at the site the landowner was so impacted by the mission and team's professionalism, he hosted a luncheon and offered to assist in efforts with other landowners who may be reluctant to allow excavations on their property.

We also completed investigation missions in Germany and Hungary, generating several leads for cases and increased access to burial records in Catholic Church archives, facilitated by support from the Vatican.

**Planned Field Operations.** As we look to the remainder of the FY, conditions appear favorable to conduct research and site investigations in Germany, Poland, Great Britain, Italy, Luxembourg, Belgium, and France. We also continue coordination and planning for an investigation mission on behalf of the U.S. Navy of the crash of an A-6 in Panama during a training mission in 1985.

**Disinterment Operations.** Since the April update, disinterments at American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) cemeteries in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands occurred. We have completed 62 disinterments to date and remain on track to exceed our goal of 85, with upcoming disinterments at ABMC cemeteries in France and Italy.

**NARA Access Restored.** After extensive engagements and negotiations over the last several months, officials at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) restored access for DPAA researchers in early May 2021. While NARA has not resumed shipment of imagery records stored in Kansas, researchers from both Regional Directorates have resumed work in the College Park facility – after a 14-month pause due to COVID protocols and continue to coordinate for the access to the records needed to enable field investigations and recoveries.

**U.S.–Russia Joint Commission (USRJC).** While strains in the bilateral relationship remain, the effects of the pandemic are what continues to constrain USRJC operations and limit executing the

humanitarian work of the commission. The Russian Side continues to support efforts to conduct research in the Russian Ministry of Defense Archives, while the U.S. side enabled Russian researchers to resume work at the NARA facility. Regular calls at all levels of the commission continue to discuss the ability to conduct technical talks and the 23rd Plenum, as well as two proposed field operations in Eastern Russia, but rising COVID-19 rates in Russia have prevented any of these being finalized.

## **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. Currently, we have a team from Middle Tennessee State University excavating a site in France; a team from the University of New Orleans partnered with the University of Innsbruck excavating a site in Austria; a team from the American Veterans Archaeological Recovery excavating a site in the UK; a team from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania excavating a site in Germany; and a team from the University of Wyoming excavating a site in Croatia. In the next several months, we are planning to launch 16 more partner missions: 11 in Europe (3 Italy; 2 Poland; 3 France; and 1 each in Denmark, Austria, and Croatia) and 5 in the Pacific (2 PNG; and 1 each in Palau, Marshall Islands, and Australia). Some of these missions were previously postponed due to COVID restrictions.

On the historical research front, PI continues to make significant progress on 49 research projects, largely through our Hub & Spoke Program. As discussed in previous calls, Hub & Spoke involves major military history programs around the country. We have also incorporated this year new fellows with a wide array of skills and interests that will help advance DPAA's research efforts. These efforts run 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. For instance, the fellow at Texas A&M now has 12 students that are assisting with some of the larger research projects.

In May, we entered into a formal partnership with the National Forensic Sciences University, which is a preeminent institution in India and will facilitate our investigation and recovery efforts there. PI also spent the past quarter codifying new procedures, developing new guidelines for partners, and working to enhance orientation and field preparation processes, and we have improved our data integration capabilities to incorporate more effectively partner-generated material into the Agency. Of course, data sharing goes both directions, so our efforts have also expanded DPAA's ability to prepare partners for success on our collaborative projects. One such venture, with Ancestry.com, has allowed us to share limited information with them with the goal that we will be able to accelerate the rate of contacts between the Service Casualty Offices and potential family members for purposes of obtaining case-related information and even DNA family reference samples (FRS). Although only at the initial stages, we are enthusiastic about the prospects for dramatic success.

## **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 ahead of FY 2020 and FY 2019.

On May 24, we hosted a Virtual Scientific Symposium to present best practices, exchange ideas, and strengthen our network of partners. Representatives from counterpart organizations in Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Palau, PNG, the Philippines, ROK, and Vietnam participated. Our presentations and ensuing dialogue generated enthusiasm from our partners.

On June 29, two ceremonies marked the transfer of the unidentifiable remains from the USS *Oklahoma* from our Nebraska lab to our lab in Hawaii. The project commenced in the summer of 2015 with the disinterment of 13,000 highly commingled bones. Remarkably, to date, 346 Sailors and Marines, who had been buried as Unknowns, have been accounted for. We anticipate making several more identifications due to new Family Reference Samples (FRS) obtained by the Navy. The unidentifiable remains will be interred at the NMCP on the 80th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Two of our anthropologists, Dr. Veronica Keyes and Dr. Katie Rubin, recently passed their board certification exams. They are now in line to be the next members of the DPAA scientific staff who have been certified by the American Board of Forensic Anthropology. This represents the pinnacle of achievement for professionalism in the field of forensic anthropology. Today, DPAA has 20 board-certified anthropologists.

The third quarter of FY21 included a major software update to our Laboratory Information Management System. The new features have been tested by a small team of staff, and we expect full release into production by the next quarter. This system has fully modernized our approach to analysis and documentation but has required considerable efforts to design and correct the system as we are using it.

### **FY2021 Identifications (Newly Accounted for) as of July 19**

Total = 119

WWII = 105

Korean War = 13

Vietnam War= 1

(Additional Portion IDs) = 207 (extremely high number mostly due to the USS *Oklahoma* close out)

## **AFMES-AFDIL Update**

After 16 months of running an AM/PM shift, AFMES-AFDIL returned to normal operations in June with 100% of the staff in the building between 7:00 AM and 7:00 PM. This was accomplished due to our safety mitigation strategies and having more than 98% of our staff vaccinated.

Our FY 2021 goal is 4,400 DNA Analyses and as of June 30, we have reported 2,521 analyses to the DPAA. This is an average of 280 analysis per month, which is below the 366 analysis per

month needed to reach this year's goal. The drop in the number of analyses per month was caused by an international supply shortage of filtered pipette tips, which was caused by a number of factors:

1. The cotton needed to make the filter that goes inside the tip to reduce contamination events was a critical material also being used for masks and lab coats.
2. The raw material to make the plastic was in short supply due to a fire at the major manufacturing plant in Mexico.
3. The tips are the same ones that COVID testing laboratories use.

Although April and May saw a reduction in samples, working with major manufactures, we were able to get a supply of tips in May after a 6-month delay and in June reported out 360 analysis.

Year-to-date, this has led to 120 first-time named Believe-to-Be Reports (first time an FRS is consistent with an unknown sample submitted by DPAA for DNA testing).

## **Outreach and Communications**

**Virtual Family Member Update.** On May 22, we hosted our fourth virtual FMU for 213 family members, representing 143 losses of missing personnel, around the Oklahoma City area. Of this number, 83 were first-time attendees. The livestream reached approximately 4,500 viewers.

**Memorial Day Coverage.** Memorial Day media engagements included - CBS This Morning, The Today Show, Military.com, and the VFW Podcast.

**News Releases.** Our analytics show that more than 300,000 articles were published mentioning DPAA in the past 90 days. Besides identifications, top stories focused on partnerships, including a B-24 recovery that the Daily Mail UK already covered with a superb story, and National Geographic and CBS Evening News will follow. Our partnership in India also spurred heavy media interest internationally, despite that nation being in the midst of a COVID-19 outbreak.

**Annual Family Meetings.** On August 5-6, we will host the Annual Korea/Cold War Government Briefings as a virtual event due to the degrading COVID environment. To date, 524 family members have registered, of which 181 are first-time attendees. We then look forward to providing briefings to the 51st National League of Families Annual Meeting September 15-18

**National POW/MIA Recognition Day.** On Friday, September 17, ceremonies will be conducted here in Washington, in Hawaii, and at our Southeast Asia Detachments.

## **News Articles of Note:**

Vietnam Veteran coming home after 54 years MIA, KULR

[https://www.kulr8.com/news/vietnam-veteran-comes-home-after-54-years-mia/article\\_41e1139c-e9ba-11eb-a2b8-bf197cda7c88.html](https://www.kulr8.com/news/vietnam-veteran-comes-home-after-54-years-mia/article_41e1139c-e9ba-11eb-a2b8-bf197cda7c88.html)

Reach: 219K

Korean War Vet, Formerly MIA, Returned to Texas Ahead of Burial, NBC DFW  
<https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/texas-news/korean-war-vet-formerly-mia-returned-to-texas-ahead-of-burial/2680674/>

Reach: 1.78 million

More than 70 years after he left rural Pa., this Korean vet's remains were ID'd and returned home  
[https://www.uniondemocrat.com/lifestyle/article\\_dd09aa48-dba3-11eb-8468-c331746f4e3f.html](https://www.uniondemocrat.com/lifestyle/article_dd09aa48-dba3-11eb-8468-c331746f4e3f.html)

Reach: 163K

US veterans launch dig for missing World War II airmen in England, CNN  
<https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/30/europe/us-veterans-dig-gbr-scli-intl/index.html>

Reach: 25.8 million

## Questions & Answers

**Korea-Cold War Families of the Missing:** The Korean War Memorial is delayed again due to 36,000 names not being released by DoD. Please expedite whatever you can do to get these names released.

**Answer:** We completely agree with you. We have validated and provided the names of all the unaccounted for. According to the Wall designer – delays will begin costing \$36,000 per month. We are pushing the DoD office responsible for the other names.

**National League of Families:** We would like to see your faces; you can see our faces. Make this as much person-to-person as possible. Virtual are not as productive or personal as in-person meetings. Appreciate the briefing --- the Operational presentations were the hardest to hear. Heard nothing from Partnerships on the Vietnam War partnerships. Are there any happening related to the Vietnam War?

**Answer:** We are limited due to bandwidth and can only project video when someone is speaking. For our Vietnam War efforts, we are working together to establish sound, sensible partnerships that comply with host nation requirements, while also supporting PI's efforts to arrange cost-effective partner contributions for Vietnam War-related cases. In the third quarter, despite severe travel restrictions and safety concerns, the University of Illinois at Chicago sent a team to Cambodia for an excavation at Koh Tang. Despite having had to cancel planned partner missions in Vietnam and Laos, due to COVID, we have partner mission planned for FY 2022. We also continue to build out the partner research program by increasing and enhancing projects with, for instance, Texas Tech University.

**Disabled American Veterans:** Thank you for your service.

**Vietnam Veterans of America:** Good to hear everyone has been able to get out and work. National Office is closed during this pandemic. We are concerned about getting into NARA; glad to hear DPAA is able to get in. Starting to get more calls on our Veterans initiative; going to Portland next week; hope to get more information that you can give to the Vietnamese.



**Answer:** To offer a perspective on NARA, we negotiated with them for months, offered various means of mitigation, and finally got them to agree to a pilot program which has garnered trust and confidence. Hopefully these small steps will allow you and the public restored access at some level. (Post-meeting note: Beginning on August 2, the research rooms will reopen to the public on a limited basis, but by appointment only and requires a virtual consultation prior to the onsite visit. The detailed information with points of contact for the different branches to request the virtual consultation and to set up an appointment is at College Park link: [The National Archives at College Park, Maryland | National Archives](#). Individuals should also monitor the site for updates as the COVID-19 situation remains fluid.

**Special Operations Association:** No comments other than my concern over the budget; we'll see how that turns out.

**Answer:** We share your concerns. We are monitoring the appropriations process and are hopeful there will be something tangible as there has been the last three years.

**National League:** Have you heard anything further on the MOU being signed in Hanoi where they mistakenly described the Vietnamese war dead as missing in action? Serious concerns!

**Answer:** We have not. We have not had a role in that engagement; it has been taken on by the US Agency for International Development and the Defense Attaché Office in Hanoi, working on behalf of the US Embassy.