



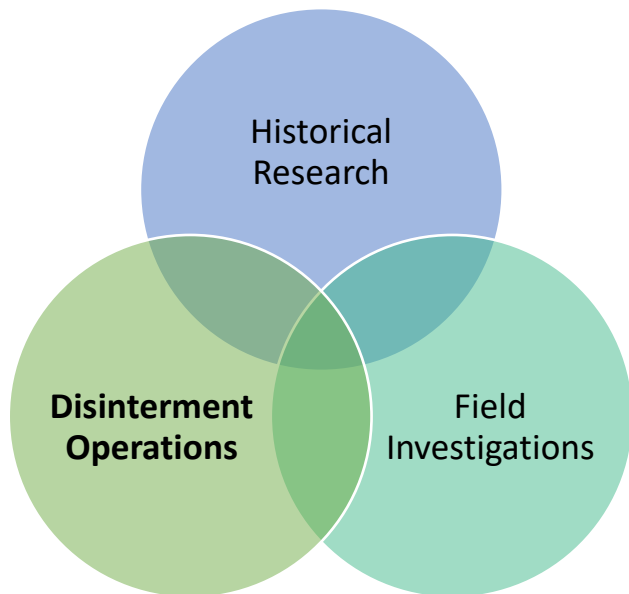
# World War II Disinterment Operations in the Pacific

*DPAA Indo-Pacific Directorate*

Dr. Aelwen Wetherby



# An Introduction



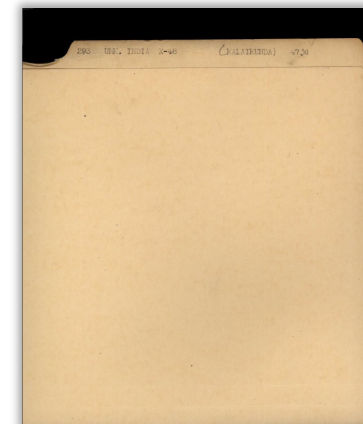
*An Unknown can consist of as little as a single bone fragment from one person, or many hundreds of bones from multiple individuals*

## What is an Unknown?

- A believed-to-be U.S. Service member recovered during or after past conflicts determined to be “unidentifiable”
- A group/set of remains that, for a variety of reasons, was unidentifiable at the time of recovery

## What is an X-File?

- The file of documentation for each Unknown
- Ideally, a record of the recovery of the remains and what the AGRS did to try to identify them





# Historical Background

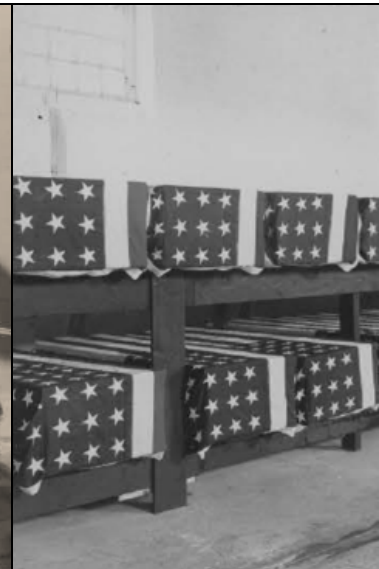
An Introduction to the American Graves Registration Service



# World War II Identification Efforts



World War II Unknowns went through a multi-stage process of review and analysis in an attempt to identify as many remains as possible.



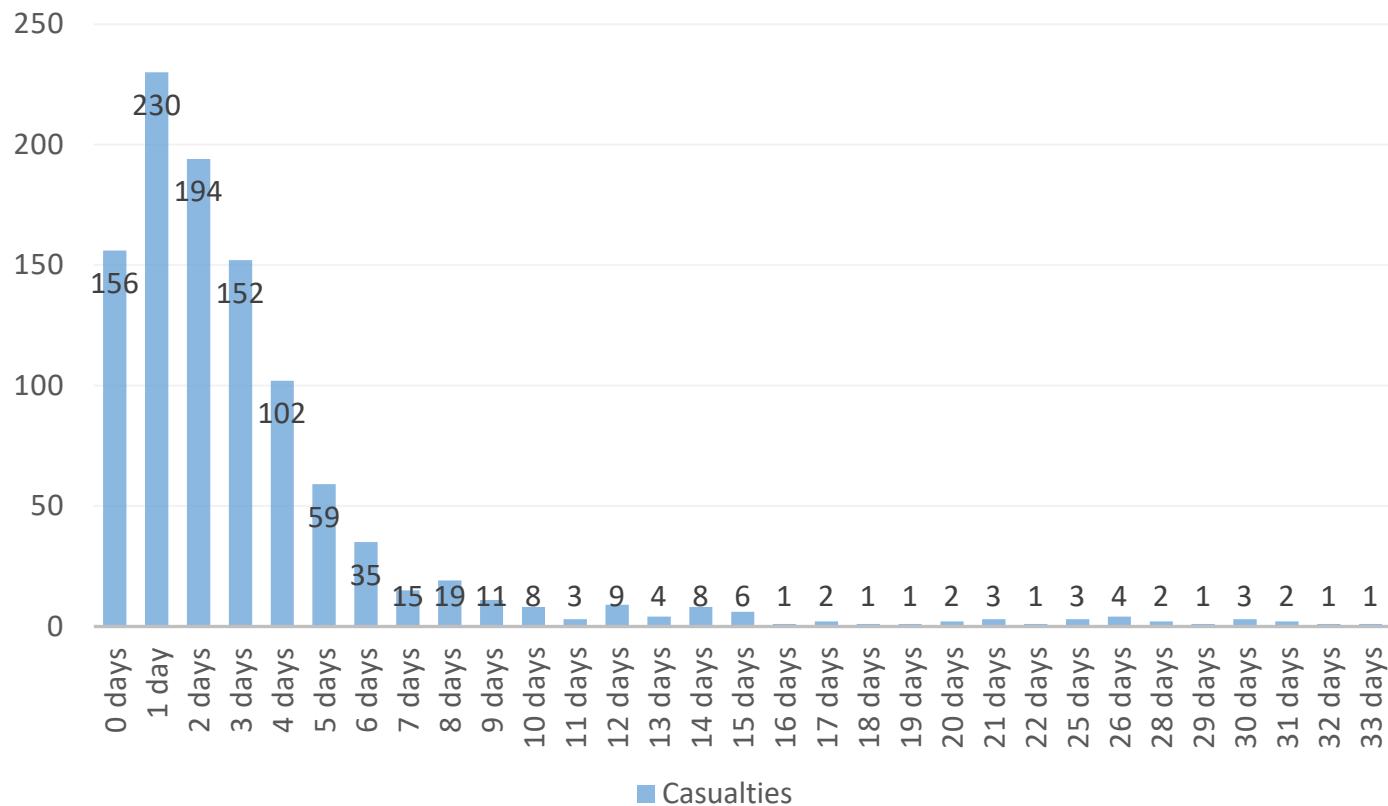


# Time and Identification

## *The Battle of Saipan*



Interval between time of death and identification



*The sooner remains were recovered, the easier it was to make an identification*





# The Return of World War II Dead Program



*Eventually, all remains recovered across Asia and the Pacific and deemed unidentifiable both by scientific analysis and a Memorial Division Board of Review, were buried in one of two U.S. cemeteries as World War II Unknowns.*



# Naming the Unknowns



- The first Unknown buried in (or recovered from) a cemetery starts with X-1
  - In Cabanatuan, these initial designations were usually written as C-1
- Unknowns are initially tracked this way
  - Example: C-708 Cabanatuan
- Some numbers were changed when remains were transferred to a different cemetery
  - Example: C-708 Cabanatuan became X-1790 Manila #2
- Most unknown files have documentation explaining the original designation and the new designation and numbering

C-708  
Cabanatuan

X-3051  
Manila Mausoleum

X-1790  
Manila #2



*All the same unknown!*





# The CIP and the CIL



## Central Identification Point (CIP)

Manila, Philippines



## Central Identification Laboratory (CIL)

Honolulu, Hawaii



Examining the body with a fluoroscope. The fluoroscope detects any part of metal that might be in the remains. Many identification tags are recovered in this manner. Teeth that have been filled and become dislodged are recovered by this means, also bone fractures show up readily. All of these points are clues that may lead to positive identification.







# How were Unknowns identified?



*Initial Recovery*

*Across the Asian and Pacific Theaters of World War II, AGRS laboratories reported that over 94% of recovered Unknowns were successfully identified in the 1940s.*

- Witness statements
  - Confirmation of identity by someone who knew the person
- Identifying media
  - Dog tags, wallets, other identifying documentation
- Association with a known incident
  - Recovery from the wreckage a clearly identified aircraft (often a group identification)
- Discovery of hidden identifying media
  - Found through laboratory methods
- Skeletal and dental analysis
  - With dentition being particularly important in individual identifications

*Laboratory*



# Why weren't Unknowns identified?



- *There are a number of reasons why remains were not identified at the CIP or CIL, these include:*
  - The circumstances, location, and timing of loss (or lack of available information on such details)
  - Challenges with the recovery of the remains, either in terms of who recovered the remains or the condition in which they were found
  - Contradictory “identifying” media, e.g. material evidence found with the remains belonging to a resolved casualty or a survivor of the war
  - Issues with incomplete, or inaccurate historical and/or personnel records
  - Limitations of scientific methods at the time

DESCRIPTION OF TATTOOS OR SCARS ON BODY AND/OR SUCH INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM OTHER SOURCES

**U N I D E N T I F I A B L E**

BY REASON OF LACK OF SUFFICIENT IDENTIFYING DATA

F. H. WATERS		
Capt. Sp. S. 0-240085	<i>F.H. Waters</i>	<i>21 Feb. 1949</i>



# Historic Name Associations



HEADQUARTERS  
AMERICAN GRAVES REGISTRATION SERVICE  
INDIA-BURMA ZONE  
APO 465  
c/o Postmaster, New York, N.Y.

12-WCH/se  
Calcutta, India  
1 February 1947

314.6 (1 Feb 47)  
SUBJECT: Examination of human remains.

TO : The Commanding Officer,  
American Graves Registration Service, India-Burma Zone,  
APO 465.

1. The remains of a U.S. Soldier, No. 1 of 4, and classified as X-386 (BILLIE WORKMAN or CHARLES W. WELLS) for burial in the U.S. Military cemetery, Barrackpore, India, were examined on 30th January 1947 and the following were identified:

- Fragment of a skull
- Mandible
- Right and left clavicles
- Right and left scapulae
- Right and left 1st rib
- 20 Other ribs
- 1st and 2nd Vertebrae
- 17 Other vertebrae
- Right and left humeri
- Right and left radii
- Right and left ulnae
- 3 Metacarpals
- 3 Phalanges
- Sacrum
- Right and left Os innominatum
- Fragment of a right femur
- Left femur
- Right tibia
- Upper half of a left tibia
- 8 Metatarsals
- Right and left Os calcis
- Right and left tali
- 2 Dog tags of: Charles W. Wells, 35695912  
T43-44 B P and Billie Workman, 39018160  
T42-43A were found.

2. Dental identification chart was accomplished.

3. There is no evidence of remains of more than one individual. The individual was about 6ft tall and weighed about 160 lbs.

*W. C. Hildebrand*  
W. C. HILDEBRAND,  
Captain, M.C.  
Surgeon.

*Many x-files make reference to a specific casualty or name the AGRS was investigating as a possible association for the unknown.*

*Sometimes name associations may provide a valuable investigative lead to researchers today, but often there was a good reason that such associations didn't lead to an identification in the 1940s.*

These remains were disinterred from an isolated Common Grave and could easily be separated into two skeletons because of the difference in bone structure, and reinterred as Unknowns X-385 and X-386.

Two Identification Tags were recovered with the remains, one bearing the name of CHARLES W. WELLS and the other BILLIE WORKMAN. Since BILLIE WORKMAN has been reported as "Alive and Well", it is the belief of this headquarters these remains may be those of

REMARKS: CHARLES W. WELLS and one "Unknown American Soldier".



# Unknowns Today

Recoveries from the Asian and Pacific Theaters of  
World War II



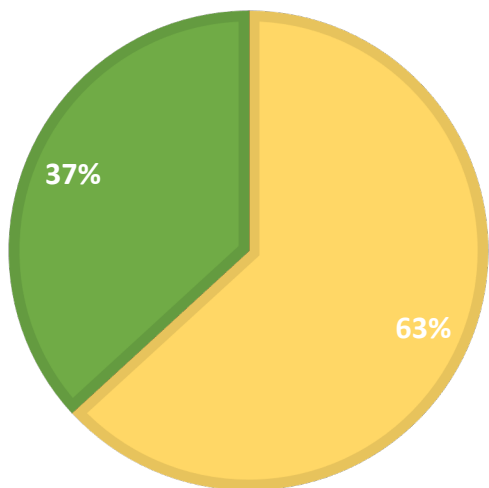
# World War II Unknowns

## Post-War Totals



### OVER 8,600 UNKNOWNNS FROM WORLD WAR II

■ Indo-Pacific ■ Europe-Mediterranean



#### *Indo-Pacific*

- 5,752 WWII Unknowns
- 2 cemeteries (ABMC & VA)

#### *National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific*

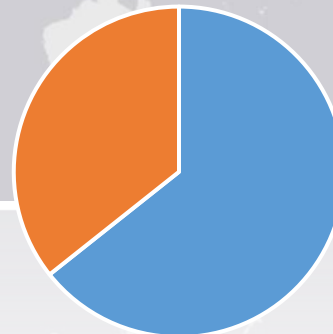
Veterans Administration cemetery

~2,000 WWII Unknowns

#### *Manila American Cemetery & Memorial*

American Battle Monuments Commission cemetery

~3,700 WWII Unknowns



■ Manila ■ Honolulu



# WWII Unknowns in the NMCP



- About **2,052 WWII Unknowns** in Honolulu, Hawaii
- WWII Unknowns at the NMCP came from all over the Pacific, including:
  - *Hawaii (Pearl Harbor, West Loch)*
  - *China*
  - *Burma*
  - *India*
  - *Formosa*
  - *Indonesia (Java, Borneo)*
  - *Gilbert Islands (Tarawa, Makin Island)*
  - *Solomon Islands (Guadalcanal)*
  - *Vanuatu*
  - *Marshall Islands (Kwajelein)*
  - *Australia*
  - *New Caledonia*
  - *Papua New Guinea*
  - *French Indo-China*



To date, about 608 WWII Unknowns have been disinterred from the NMCP.



# WWII Unknowns in the MACM



- About **3,700 WWII Unknowns** in Manila, Philippines
- 3,000 of these were recovered from the Philippines
  - Of these, approximately 1,000 are believed to be American POWs from Camp O'Donnell and **Cabanatuan POW Camp**
- The remaining 700 Unknowns were recovered from:
  - **Palau**
  - **Solomon Islands**
  - **Celebes, New Britain, and Wewak**
  - **Guam**
  - **Okinawa**
  - **Iwo Jima**
  - **Japan**
  - **Saipan**
  - **Papua New Guinea**



To date, about 326 WWII Unknowns have been disinterred from the MACM.



# DPAA Strategy



- Review and make recommendations to disinter all World War II Unknowns that have the potential to be disinterred based on DoD requirements
- Must meet DoD disinterment thresholds
- Must work with the capacity of the services (responsible for collecting FRS), AFMES, and the cemeteries
- Numerous full-time researchers dedicated to disinterment operations, organized geographically







# Disinterment Recommendation



- DPAA researchers generate disinterment recommendations for cases assessed to meet DoD thresholds

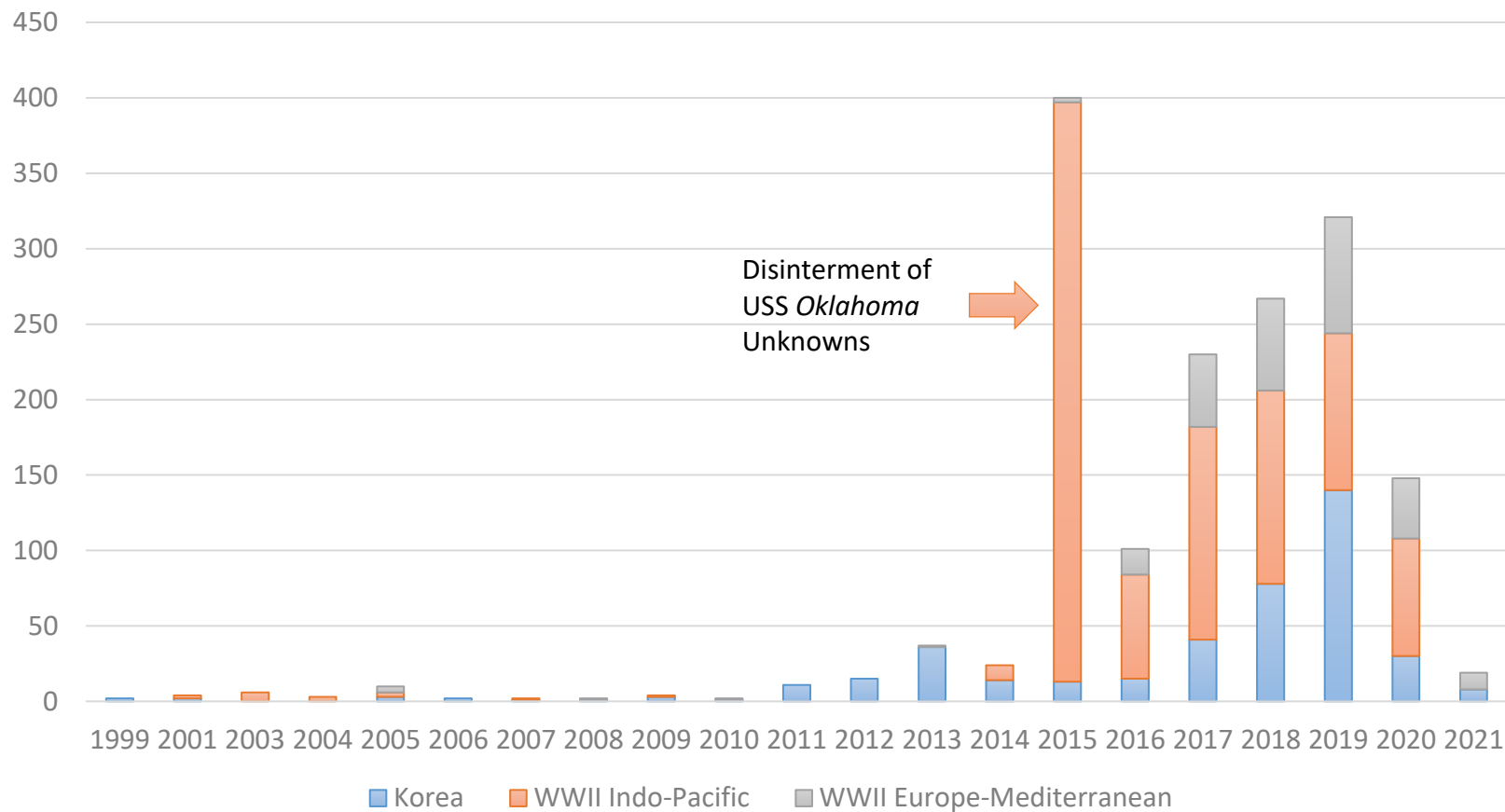
Table 5. Final list of unresolved U.S. casualties associated with X-number and summary of analytical options.

Rank	Name	Historical	Biological	Dental	Chest radiograph*	FRS on file
1	Name	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

- For World War II Unknowns, agency researchers prioritize family disinterment requests over those that are internally generated
- Disinterment requirements:
  - More than 50% for single unknowns
  - More than 60% for groups of unknowns or commingled remains



# Disinterment Operations 1999-2021





# Identifications



- The identification of disinterred unknowns is an ongoing process
- The disinterment of WWII Unknowns recovered from the Indo-Pacific regions have led to more than 400 identifications to date
- Updates to DPAA identifications are regularly published to:
  - [www.dpaa.mil](http://www.dpaa.mil)
  - [www.facebook.com/dodpaa](http://www.facebook.com/dodpaa)



RM3c Thomas  
Griffith



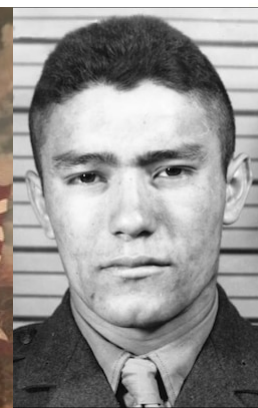
CMMP Lada  
Smisek



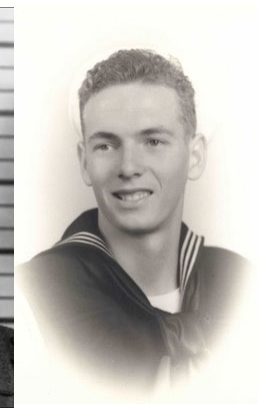
F3c William L.  
Barnett



S/Sgt Lewis S.  
Doddo



Pvt Jacob Cruz



S1c Carl S.  
Johnson



Pvt Howard E.  
Miller