



News Release

Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (Public Affairs)
Washington, DC 20301-2900

Phone: (703) 699-1169

Fax (703) 602-4375

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MISSING WWII SOLDIERS IDENTIFIED

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the remains of three servicemen, missing in action from World War II, have been identified and are being returned to their families for burial with full military honors.

Army Pfc. Lawrence N. Harris, of Elkins, W.V., Cpl. Judge C. Hellums, of Paris, Miss., and Pvt. Donald D. Owens, of Cleveland, will be buried as a group, in a single casket, on July 20 in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C. In late September 1944, their unit, the 773rd Tank Battalion, was fighting its way east to France's eastern border, clearing German forces out of the Parroy Forest near Lunéville. For its combat service, the 773rd received the Presidential Unit Citation as the battalion had destroyed 125 enemy tanks by war's end. On Oct. 9, 1944, in the final battle for control of the region, Hellums, Harris, Owens and two other soldiers were attacked by enemy fire in their M-10 Tank Destroyer. Two men survived with serious injuries but Harris, Hellums and Owens were reported to have been killed. Evidence at the time indicated the remains of the men had been destroyed in the attack and were neither recovered nor buried near the location.

In November 1946, a French soldier working in the Parroy Forest found debris associated with an M-10 vehicle and human remains, which were turned over to the American Graves Registration Command. The remains were buried as unknowns in what is now known as the Ardennes American Cemetery in Belgium. A year later the AGRC returned to the Parroy Forest to conduct interviews and search for additional remains. Investigators noted at that time that all remains of U.S. soldiers had reportedly been removed in the last two years and that the crew was likely buried elsewhere as unknowns.

In 2003, a French citizen exploring the Parroy Forest discovered human remains and an identification bracelet engraved with Hellums' name, from a site he had probed occasionally since 1998. The information was eventually sent to the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC). In April 2006, the man turned over the items to a JPAC team working in Europe. A few months later a second JPAC team returned to the site and recovered more human remains, personal effects and an identification tag for Owens.

Historians at DPMO and JPAC continued their research on the burials at the Ardennes Cemetery, and drew a correlation to those unknowns removed from the 1944 battle site. In early 2008 JPAC disinterred these remains and began their forensic review.

Among other forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC used dental comparisons for the men and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used mitochondrial DNA, which matched that of each soldier's relatives in the identification of their remains.

More than 400,000 of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II died. At the end of the war, the U.S. government was unable to recover, identify and bury approximately 79,000 Americans. Today, more than 72,000 remain unaccounted-for from the conflict.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, call 571-422-9059 or visit the DPMO Web site at www.dtic.mil/dpmo.

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