



News Release

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AIRMAN MISSING IN ACTION FROM WWII IDENTIFIED

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

Army Air Forces Technical Sgt. Robert S. Wren, 25, of Seattle, will be buried on March 11 in Issaquah, Wash. Wren, along with 11 other crew members, was ordered to fly a reconnaissance mission in a B-24D Liberator, taking off from an airfield near Port Moresby, New Guinea, on Oct. 27, 1943. Allied plans were being formulated to mount an attack on the Japanese redoubt at Rabaul, New Britain. American strategists considered it critical to take Rabaul in order to support the eventual invasion of the Philippines. The crew's assigned area of reconnaissance was the nearby shipping lanes in the Bismarck Sea. But during their mission, they were radioed to land at a friendly air strip nearby due to poor weather conditions. The last radio transmission from the crew did not indicate their location, and searchers that day and the following weeks were unable to locate the aircraft in spite of multiple searches over land and sea areas.

Following World War II, the Army Graves Registration Service conducted investigations and searches for 43 missing airmen, including Wren, in the area but concluded in June 1949 that all were unrecoverable.

In August 2003 a team from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) received information on a crash site from a citizen in Papua New Guinea while they were investigating another case. He also turned over an identification card from one of the crew members and reported that there were possible human remains at the site of the crash. Twice in 2004 other JPAC teams attempted to visit the site but were unable to do so due to poor weather and hazardous conditions at the helicopter landing site. Another team was able to successfully excavate the site from January to March 2007 where they found several identification tags from the B-24D crew as well as human remains.

Among other forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used mitochondrial DNA—which matched that of Wren's niece—in the identification of his remains.

Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, more than 400,000 died. At the end of the war, the U.S. government was unable to recover and identify approximately 79,000 Americans. Today, more than 74,000 are unaccounted-for from the conflict.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703) 699-1169.