



# PERSONNEL ACCOUNTING COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Developed by the Senior Study Group  
January 2009



## The Defense Prisoner of War/ Missing Personnel Office (DPMO)



January 2009

I am pleased to forward the Personnel Accounting Community Strategy for 2009. It provides direction for the community, laying out the strategic themes and goals propelling us toward our vision for the future, while illustrating the various ways in which we conduct our mission.

This strategy also emphasizes the need to understand the global environment in which we operate, for although we proactively work to shape future conditions to maximize mission effectiveness, external factors outside of our control will inevitably impact upon our chosen course. It is, therefore, important to keep a vigilant watch on the horizon, to analyze trends in order to navigate through the effects of significant shocks when they do occur.

Our community is driven by a tireless devotion to account for those missing from our nation's wars, and it is in this spirit that we have developed this strategy. It is my hope that this guidance will form the foundation for a more comprehensive and integrated community effort with a focus toward ever-increasing efficiency. This document recognizes the complexity of elements contributing to the mission, and it reflects the ongoing community theme of teamwork, dedication, and our unwavering commitment to keeping the promise.

Charles A. Ray  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense  
POW/Missing Personnel Affairs

*“There’s no more effective way of creating bitter enemies of the Army than by failing to do everything we can possibly do in a time of bereavement, nor is there a more effective way of making friends for the Army than by showing we are personally interested in every casualty which occurs.”*

*General George C. Marshall  
Chief of Staff of the Army*

*“The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive veterans of early wars were treated and appreciated by our nation.”*

*General George Washington*

## **FOREWORD**

This Personnel Accounting Community Strategy has three purposes. First, it explains the strategic themes underlying our mission, which provide the basis for our operations. Next, it describes current efforts to ensure the entire community has a common understanding of requirements and practices. Finally, it explores the possible mission environment in the near future, describing challenges we will face and goals we will pursue to adapt to emerging requirements.

This strategy describes the requirements placed upon us, the environment in which we operate, and the collective actions we must take to maximize mission accomplishment. Each agency should develop its own organizational strategy and operational plans that support these requirements within the constraints of our mission environment. Each organization has internal expertise to best conduct its own planning, but coordination between agencies is crucial to ensure requirements are met and no gaps are left unfilled.

The modern personnel accounting mission was shaped largely in response to public concerns raised during and after the Vietnam War. With the passage of time and our successes in accounting for thousands of Americans, many of those concerns have been overcome. Personnel accounting was organized consistent with a temporary operation but has since evolved into an institutional mission that will continue into the foreseeable future. It continues to serve as an engagement tool with countries around the world, and as such, supports the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy. With that in mind, and with agreement among community members that every unaccounted-for individual is equally important, this strategy reinforces personnel accounting’s role as an enduring mission for the Department of Defense.

## **VISION FOR PERSONNEL ACCOUNTING**

The fullest possible accounting of those who become missing due to hostile action while pursuing U.S. national objectives abroad.

## **MISSION OF THE PERSONNEL ACCOUNTING COMMUNITY**

Establish the most favorable conditions and conduct operations to account for those missing in past conflicts, and prepare to account for those who remain missing following current and future conflicts.

## **STRATEGIC GOALS AND REQUIREMENTS**

During the next five to seven years, we must maintain our current capability while adjusting our operations and shaping the environment. Our strategic goals lead to a number of requirements for the personnel accounting community that enable us to best accomplish our mission:

**Provide the most effective operational capability for the mission.** Resolving cases requires that the community collect the most useful all-source information and provide a comprehensive analytical and identification capability.

- Develop case prioritization criteria that take into account time passage, changing political and geographical conditions, and the probability of successful resolution.
- Identify new means of recovering remains and reprioritize those cases where remains are in danger of being lost or are already considered unrecoverable.
- Find alternative research methodologies for developing leads and collecting data as known sources of information are exhausted.
- Maximize information collection from witnesses from our older conflicts.
- Ensure a seamless transition to post-conflict accounting following current and future wars.
- Support research and development of technologies for identification.
- Minimize disruption to the personnel accounting mission as a result of Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission processes.

**Ensure the availability of adequate resources to accomplish our mission.** Our mission requires not only funding and facilities but also the appropriate human and intellectual capital.

- Establish the desired level of effort for the community, taking into consideration fiscal, political, and technological constraints.
- Procure resources for accounting community members consistent with their requirements.

- Ensure the community has the proper personnel and facilities to support a robust identification capability.
- Ensure proper communication of, and advocacy for, community resource requirements.
- Improve efficiency to adjust for potential resource constraints.
- Minimize the impact of changing economic conditions on the mission.

**Maintain unity of effort.** When unity of command does not exist, unity of effort must. Despite the fact that community elements fall under separate commands, we overcome such challenges as we work together to search for, recover, and identify as many Americans as possible. Maintaining unity of effort requires focus in key areas:

- Ensure requirements for strategic and operational international relationships are understood throughout the personnel accounting community.
- Find ways to maintain existing access to host nations, seek improved access where necessary, and leverage host nation capabilities where necessary or appropriate.
- Maintain effective relations among U.S. policy offices, operational organizations, and host nation representatives who assist us in our mission.
- Work with the personnel recovery community to incorporate lessons from personnel accounting into personnel recovery policies and doctrine.
- Maintain a strategic planning process that identifies future challenges and opportunities.

**Provide transparency in community efforts.** Our efforts must be transparent, not only to strengthen public trust but also to honor our fallen comrades and help to create opportunities to accomplish our mission. Transparency in community activities also fosters enhanced relationships with family advocacy groups and veterans service organizations.

- Maintain an effective program for presenting identifications to family members in a manner they can easily understand and accept.
- Speak to external audiences with a unified message.
- Conduct a coordinated communication program that effectively conveys the community's message to the American public, others in government, and appropriate foreign audiences.
- Continue to adapt family programs and other outreach processes to meet new demands caused by changing demographics.



The Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Ambassador Charles A. Ray (left), is interviewed by members of the media.

## STRATEGIC THEMES

We seek the fullest possible accounting of those Americans who become missing while supporting U.S. national objectives. Our goal is to understand what happened to the missing individual, search for and return the individual to U.S. control and, for deceased personnel, recover their remains and bring them home for interment when possible.

There are three ways in which we account for an individual:

- the person is returned to United States control alive;
- the remains of the person are recovered and, if not identifiable as those of the missing person through visual means, identified by a practitioner of an appropriate forensic science; or
- credible evidence exists to support another determination of the person's status.

There are factors that can limit the community's ability to recover remains, such as the circumstances surrounding the loss, passage of time, a lack of credible witnesses or records, or refusal by other nations to allow our teams access. We need to consider how to resolve satisfactorily cases in which remains are not recoverable. Still, where possible, we strive to access and fully investigate potential loss sites to find and return the remains of missing individuals. In conducting its activities, the community must keep in mind that:

### **We serve the interests of the missing individual.**

The men and women who go in harm's way in the service of the United States do so knowing this government will not leave them behind. Under the law, the Secretary of the Service in which the individual served is ultimately responsible for the service member. The personnel accounting community provides the policy, investigatory, operational, and scientific expertise necessary to help the Secretaries fulfill their responsibility.



A Soldier guards the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery.



Staff Sgt. Chicnee Brown from the Marine Corps Casualty Office talks with the family member of a missing serviceman.

**The American public has expectations that must be addressed.** Our nation was founded on the concept of a government accountable to the people. Americans feel a strong bond to those who serve the United States, and they want to know that those who go in harm's way on their behalf will be cared for as well as possible, to include accounting for them should they become missing. In particular, families who send their loved ones

to serve do so with the expectation that our government will do all it can to bring them home. Our community will meet all legislative requirements for meeting the needs of the families and of the general public, and we will be transparent in our efforts to the fullest extent possible.

**There are geopolitical limitations on this mission and desirable geopolitical outcomes that extend beyond the mission.** The United States views personnel accounting as a humanitarian mission and engages with other countries from that perspective. Despite the humanitarian nature of our work, however, there will be times when foreign governments deny us access or periods when the U.S. government considers it inappropriate to engage another government on any issue, including this one. We recognize that there will be potential loss sites, national archives, and other sources of information that will be off limits to us, but that does not mean our work will stop. We will make full use of our resources, information, and analytical capability to pursue cases when physical access is denied, in the hope that someday we will regain access and be well prepared when we do. At the same time, our humanitarian mission opens doors to other nations following a conflict and, at times, has been almost our only contact with a foreign government. Personnel accounting is an effective engagement tool that supports the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy, and we need to factor this into our planning.

## **CURRENT OPERATIONAL FUNCTIONS**

The personnel accounting mission has been ongoing for many years, and it is important to keep in mind those practices that work well and those activities that are required by law. Identifying and explaining our current operational functions helps us in the areas of:

**Common Purpose:** Ensure community members agree on what our mission is, how success is defined, and how to achieve it.

**Alignment:** Synchronize our individual organizational strategies and plans with the community's goals.

**Resources:** Identify required capabilities and resources, and engage the Department, combatant commanders, Services, and Congress to obtain appropriate resource allocation.

**Performance Measures:** Find ways to measure progress either qualitatively or quantitatively, and be able to answer "are we doing things right?" and "are we doing the right things?"

An appreciation for the different aspects of our mission fosters a unified approach toward common goals and helps ensure availability and efficient use of resources. An understanding of the complete accounting process allows us to explore the future of the mission.

**Case identification and evaluation:** For the tens of thousands of Americans that did not return from this nation's wars, many of their remains are not recoverable, and only a small percentage of cases can be actively investigated at any one time. The community's research and analysis elements identify cases for pursuit, develop plans that include collecting evidence from a variety of sources, and make recommendations on the status of stalled cases. Cases may become active based upon an analytical breakthrough, a report of information coming through a U.S. embassy, new evidence from family members, information from private recovery groups, or other means.



Analysts from accounting organizations discuss cases pertaining to service members missing from the Vietnam War.

**Interaction with host nations:** Gaining access to countries where remains may be located or other vital information might be available is an important step in the investigation and recovery process. Once we open a door to a country, it is important to keep it open so that, as future opportunities develop, we avoid the need to rebuild the relationship. The interagency community in Washington, DC, manages the United States government's international relations, of which personnel accounting represents only one factor, so coordination with other agencies is essential. Requirements for close interagency coordination may be particularly stringent in cases where relations with the other country are sensitive.



Ambassador Ray (left) and Major General Qian Li Hua, Chinese Ministry of National Defense, sign an arrangement in February 2008 to formalize research in Chinese archives on Korean War POW/MIA matters.

The Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs (DASD[POW/MPA]) is responsible for establishing the strategic personnel accounting relationship between relevant OSD offices, the State Department, U.S. embassies and attaches overseas, foreign embassies in the United States, and relevant foreign ministries. The community's participation in this process is essential to ensure operational and technical requirements are part of strategic

negotiations. As the community conducts negotiations and field activities, we will work with the appropriate combatant command and Country Team to ensure full



situational awareness of requirements and plans. The DASD (POW/MPA) provides a strategic perspective while other elements of the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), and others ensure their operational relationships are in line with strategic requirements.

**Investigation:** Investigation requires the collection of information from a variety of sources, such as U.S. and foreign archives, witness interviews, field research, private individuals and groups, and many others. Analysts at JPAC and DPMO evaluate and correlate this information to identify potential loss and burial sites.



Left: DPMO's Joint Commission Support Directorate (JCSD) investigator CPO John Gray pinpoints a loss site in Poland. Right: Army MSG Cory Damm of JCSD reviews WWII Croatian-language military reports at the National Archive in Zagreb.

Investigation requires individuals with expertise in history, regional affairs, archival methods, interview techniques, and foreign languages. Given the scope of incoming data and the diversity of sources, information sharing among analysts within the accounting community is critical to the comprehensive evaluation of data.

**Remains Recovery:** The excavation of loss sites in the search for remains is the most physically challenging part of the accounting process. Each year, JPAC develops a plan for the most effective use of resources in accordance with the accounting community's priorities. It conducts a series of joint field activities using organic assets as well as military augmentation. Safety and force protection are primary considerations when planning excavations. JPAC coordinates its requirements with the host nation and operates within the constraints of agreements negotiated in advance. In the case of unplanned missions when remains are in imminent danger of being lost or destroyed, JPAC will respond if circumstances allow, but in some cases other organizations may be better positioned to recover the remains. Agreements between JPAC and other agencies are useful for outlining responsibilities and support commitments in advance, allowing it to execute time-sensitive missions without delay.



A JPAC recovery team excavates a crash site in Vietnam.

Regardless of who recovers remains, it is important to document the circumstances of their recovery and maintain appropriate control over them, not only to facilitate identification but to ensure the respect they deserve.

**Identification:** The identification of remains, regardless of whether they are from an individual or a group, is never the result of only one type of evidence, but rather the result of a collaborative effort between scientists and analysts from different agencies. The forensic specialists at JPAC's Central Identification Laboratory work closely with the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory and the Air Force's Life Sciences Equipment Laboratory to evaluate available data and to determine identity supported by a preponderance of evidence. This effort often is facilitated by the collection of DNA family reference samples and other evidence from families to narrow the field of possible identifications. Proper excavation and handling of remains in accordance with appropriate scientific and legal principles is critical for removing doubt about the validity of identification. The identification process is lengthy, and efforts to identify a particular set of remains may require additional data or newer technologies.

**Family notification and acceptance:** Service casualty and mortuary affairs officials are primary links to the family, responsible for keeping it up to date on progress and the resolution of its case.

The final step in the accounting process is notifying the family and gaining its acceptance of identification. Once the family accepts the government's findings, the case is considered closed as far as the personnel accounting community is concerned, and mortuary affairs personnel take over to handle the final disposition of remains. In the event of a final identification in which the family refuses to accept remains, or in the case of group remains, the Service secretary concerned will decide ultimate disposition.



The family of U.S. Air Force Senior Master Sgt. James Caniford accepts a folded American flag from U.S. Air Force Major Gen. William Chambers at Caniford's funeral in Arlington National Cemetery. Caniford, who was missing in action from the Vietnam War, was identified in 2007.

## CURRENT SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

In executing the personnel accounting mission, organizations conduct a variety of support functions to assist operators involved in investigation, recovery, identification, and family outreach activities. These functions include:

**Policy development:** DPMO is tasked by law with creating policy on behalf of the Secretary of Defense for all matters relating to missing persons. This may be done through formal DoD issuances such as Directives and Instructions, or through less formal methods such as policy memos, all of which provide the guidelines for the personnel accounting mission. Each agency in the community develops internal policies for its operations that fall within those guidelines and also must comply with the policies of their parent Service or combatant command. This requires open communication among community members, not only to share best practices but to enhance consistency of policies and foster unity of effort.

**Resource acquisition:** DPMO has statutory funding and manpower baselines, but the resources of other agencies are not treated in the same way. As the mission evolves, it is important for every member of the community to identify emerging requirements and take action to secure appropriate resources. In recent years, Congress has demanded greater transparency of the accounting community's budgeting process to ensure proper funding, and DPMO consolidates the community's budget information to meet congressional requirements. Each agency is responsible for procuring resources through its parent organization, while DPMO provides OSD-level advocacy for such resources.

**Responding to external inquiries:** Families of the missing, concerned citizens, veterans organizations, and members of Congress have a great deal of interest in our mission. Since they may send the same question to multiple organizations, it is important for members of the community to coordinate with each other on responses and speak with a common voice to avoid confusion and ensure provision of the most accurate information possible.

**Proactive communication:** The accounting community spreads its message both domestically and internationally. There are two primary goals of our domestic communication effort. The first is to ensure our fallen warriors receive the honor and respect they deserve. The second is to make family members aware of information available and to provide them the opportunity to aid in the effort by contributing DNA samples or evidence that could help us in case resolution. Internationally, we use various communication tools and methods to maximize the strategic benefits of our humanitarian mission. By informing foreign audiences of our activities, we encourage individuals with information about our cases to come forward. All accounting agencies communicate with external audiences, and our efforts will be effective only so long as our operations and external message are first coordinated within the community.



A DNA analyst from the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory uses a cheek swab to collect a DNA sample from a family member at a monthly family meeting.



A service member participates in an exercise at Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape school.

**Planning for Current and Future Conflicts:** Changes in technology and the nature of current conflicts, as well as lessons learned from past conflicts, provide opportunities to further accounting for missing Americans from all wars. We need to support combatant commanders in their responsibility to account for missing personnel during ongoing conflicts. We also need to plan now for the time when current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan end and our attention shifts to traditional personnel accounting. As we do, our plans should guide current personnel recovery efforts and allow for a seamless transition to post-conflict personnel accounting, eliminating the potential gap between the two missions. Planning for post-conflict accounting should not wait until a conflict has ended; accounting agencies should work in advance with combatant commanders to prepare for that transition.

**Capturing lessons learned:** The problems we face when accounting for individuals may suggest new techniques for live recovery and post-conflict accounting in the future. We must look for innovative ideas regarding new technologies or identify new ways to leverage existing technology to improve our mission. The members of the community should have internal methods for identifying and employing lessons learned and disseminating them throughout the community to share “best practices.” We must also be mindful that many of our experienced personnel will leave in the next few years, and we must transfer that institutional knowledge to the next generation of the accounting community.

## **ADDRESSING AREAS OF POTENTIAL CHANGE IN THE MISSION ENVIRONMENT**

As we consider creative ways to maintain or increase the effectiveness of personnel accounting, in the next five to seven years we need to address three essential questions:

**How is our mission environment likely to change?** We need to consider not only the physical aspects of our environment, but also the political and economic realities affecting our mission.

**How much can we control change in the environment?** What can we influence, and what remains outside of our control? How could we influence malleable outcomes?

**How do we adjust to meet future requirements?** Neither the personnel accounting mission nor any region or conflict will go away, though the balance of effort may change. We do not need a drastic overhaul of the mission – the changes will come at the margins.

Though the mission is clear, the challenges and opportunities posed for each organization require vigilance. As the personnel accounting community conducts its mission, community members must consider:

**Challenges for remains recovery:** Remains recovery is becoming more challenging in some regions, particularly in Southeast Asia. The Vietnam War cases that remain are likely to be more time- and labor-intensive than those already completed, and the acidic soil in Southeast Asia, when combined with the passage of time, is making recovery of remains increasingly difficult. We need to focus our efforts where they will yield the best results, which might necessitate working to evolve our agreements with other countries or realigning our efforts to mitigate potential challenges.



A JPAC team excavates a crash site in 2003 on one of its more difficult terrains, Pha Thi Mountain, Laos, in search of missing Americans from the Vietnam War.

Such efforts may include increasing activities in a particular country, region, or conflict, taking into account geopolitical, climate, and terrain constraints. Given our goal to account for as many Americans as possible, we should base our efforts on the potential for success and the risk of losing access to potential remains at particular sites, rather than on a ranking of individual conflicts. As a community, we need to define the likelihood of success for our cases, considering factors such as safety, environmental conditions, accessibility, and other host nation constraints among others.

**Appropriate level of effort and allocation of resources:** A level of effort that allocates resources based on predefined percentages or on prioritization of conflicts is not an effective means of achieving the fullest possible accounting of missing Americans. Such methods provide little flexibility in the face of a changing mission environment and do not account for the challenges unique to particular countries, regions, or conflicts. Rather than using arbitrary measures, the community needs to define a level of effort that is condition-based and focused on maximizing mission success within the constraints that are outside of our control. Operational agencies should allocate resources based on this strategic guidance.

**Access to witnesses:** Witness accounts are a useful tool for identifying loss sites and for narrowing possibilities in identifications. As time passes, the availability of witnesses continues to diminish and memories fade. We are losing eyewitnesses to loss incidents at an increasing rate. The community should make a concentrated effort over the next few years to acquire and collate existing witness accounts and tap into additional sources of information, such as expanded contacts with military veterans of our wartime allies and former adversaries.



A Bulgarian citizen speaks to JCS team members about an aircraft that crashed near his home during WWII.

**Public support for the mission:** Public attention to this mission, while it will remain, is continuing to evolve. Public support for increases in resources for our mission may not be as strong as it was 30 years ago and could diminish, particularly if military spending continues to increase for wars overseas and worldwide operations against terrorists. Improved efficiencies and reductions in some regions may be needed if we attempt to start or increase operations in other parts of the world in what may be a more fiscally-constrained future environment.

**Changing demographics:** The impetus for personnel accounting came from spouses, parents, and siblings of those missing in Southeast Asia, but many of today's family members are children who have fading memories of a parent or other relative. In the case of World War II and Korea, many interested family members are descendants who never met the lost service member. Veterans groups are also seeing changes; as they lose their World War II- and Korean War-era members and continue to have difficulty recruiting veterans of current conflicts, their membership in the near term will consist predominantly of Vietnam War veterans. The pressure on the accounting community from groups and individual family members will likely change as these demographics continue to shift. Though World War II-era families may have accepted the circumstances of their loved ones' disappearance because such was the norm at the time, today's descendants who are used to the idea of instant access to information often demand or seek more information regarding the circumstances of loss. At the same time, information demands from family members and groups might be based less on emotion than in the past, and more on a simple interest in family history. We should watch for trends that will allow us to anticipate changes in demands for information.

**International political relationships:** U.S. relations with other countries affect, and are affected by, the personnel accounting mission. As nations develop economically and politically, and our relationship with them evolves, there likely will be effects on the personnel accounting mission. We will need to find new solutions to challenges when old methods are no longer politically viable.

Meanwhile, our mission still supports the National Security Strategy by providing the opportunity to open, or reopen, doors to other countries such as Burma, Libya, and North Korea when conditions permit. We also have the potential to help strengthen relations with countries such as China, India, and others, as we conduct our humanitarian mission with the cooperation of their governments. The effects of international relationships and political goals achievable through personnel accounting are changing, and we must adapt to such changes.

**Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC):** The BRAC will have a significant impact on personnel accounting in the next five to seven years. Relocation of some of our organizations means we will lose many years of experience as individuals choose not to relocate. The greatest effect will be felt in the Armed Forces DNA Identification Lab, the Air Force Life Sciences Equipment Lab, and the Army's Human Resources Command. The loss of these experienced people in a few short years threatens continuity and requires the community to plan now for the retention of their corporate knowledge. We also must be prepared to maintain continuity of operations during the transition to new locations in order to minimize disruption to investigations and identifications.

**Interoperability between personnel recovery and personnel accounting:** As we account for missing service members from past wars, we should continue to use lessons learned to reduce the number of those who go missing in the future and account for those who, despite our best efforts, do not return from current and future conflicts. Our experiences in personnel accounting have encouraged new ideas that have helped keep the number of unaccounted-for personnel in current conflicts very low. Nonetheless, we likely will have service members and civilians missing in future conflicts.

**Questions for the future:** The personnel accounting community collectively needs to consider questions regarding the future of our mission. In particular, we should be asking:

- How can we expand and optimize our capability at minimal cost to the American people?
- How do we conduct personnel accounting missions during an ongoing conflict?
- What new personnel accounting methods will we need for asymmetric and irregular warfare?
- What is our responsibility to American service members missing as a result of terrorism or criminal activity?
- How might our mission be affected in the event that our forensic capabilities are tasked to provide support to ongoing conflicts or a national emergency?

## CONCLUSION



Personnel accounting is an enduring mission for the Department of Defense. Our successes to date go far beyond the expectations of those who developed the modern personnel accounting mission following the Vietnam War. As our mission environment changes, we must understand emerging requirements, challenges, and opportunities for continued success. With a baseline understanding of our current processes and a thorough analysis of the expected future environment, we have described in this Personnel Accounting Community Strategy the essential goals and objectives we must strive to attain. The agencies that contribute to this mission must synchronize their efforts to maximize the effectiveness of all the resources – human, fiscal, and technological – the personnel accounting community can bring to bear.





# The Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO)

2900 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301-2900  
[www.dtic.mil/dpmo](http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo)

