



MEMORANDUM

September 27, 2011

To: Senator Richard Lugar
Attention: Keith Luse

From: Charles A. Henning, Specialist in Military Manpower Policy, x7-8866

Subject: Korean War Missing-In-Action (MIA)

This responds to your questions concerning the remains of Korean War servicemembers interred in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, colloquially known as the Punchbowl. Your questions are highlighted in bold below, followed by a response. A final question has been added to include some clarifying remarks.

1. How many remains from the Korean War have been identified since their original arrival in Hawaii?

A total of 867¹ Korean War unknowns have been interred in the Punchbowl, with most of these burials taking place on Memorial Day, 1956. Since then, 22 have been disinterred: one was transferred to the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery, 13 have been accounted for², and 8 are currently being processed for identification by the Joint Prisoner of War/Missing in Action (POW/MIA) Accounting Command (JPAC) in Honolulu, Hawaii. JPAC officials believe that as many as 400 remains may eventually be identified using current and emerging technologies.

2. Please describe the condition of remains from Korea upon their arrival in Hawaii.

The 867 remains came from two sources: 416 were turned over by the North Koreans following the armistice and 451 were from Graves Registration recovery efforts in South Korea during and immediately following the war. All of these remains were sent to the 8th Army Graves Registration unit in Kokura, Japan for processing and identification. The remains interred in the Punchbowl are in numbered caskets with only one set of remains in each casket.

The remains that have been disinterred and examined have generally been reasonably complete and well preserved. This suggests that they were recovered and secured shortly after the death of the individuals and that there were sufficient remains to support laboratory testing. The laboratory testing, however,

¹ Data contained in this memorandum were confirmed by the Defense POW/MIA Office (DPMO) as of September 7, 2011. Numbers will continue to change as additional remains are disinterred, recovered, identified, and accounted for.

² The terminology "Accounted For" refers to a completed identification with acceptance by remaining family members of the findings and possible reburial at a location selected by the family.

found that there was no identifiable DNA³ in these remains. Apparently, the remains were preserved by the Graves Registration unit in Japan by using formaldehyde and this damaged the DNA sequence. Since DNA testing methods weren't begun until the mid-1990s, those responsible for preserving the remains in the 1950s were probably unaware of the potential damage by formaldehyde. It is believed that there may be no usable DNA in any of the remaining 845 Punchbowl unknowns.

Assuming there is no usable DNA in the remains of the Punchbowl unknowns, the primary form of identification will revert to forensic odontological (dental) analysis, previously the most commonly used method of identification. JPAC has also developed a new identification procedure involving the comparison of the clavicle (collar bone) and cervical vertebrae with chest X-rays taken as part of the military induction process.⁴ The clavicle/vertebrae process is referred to as "chest radiographic comparison" and has been found to be scientifically sound. A computer program that compares the X-ray with the actual bone has been developed to facilitate more rapid identification.⁵

3. What is the estimated number of American remains from the Korean War in comparison to the remains of persons from other countries contained in the Punchbowl?

The National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl) is one of only two American military cemeteries in the Pacific region; the other is the American Military Cemetery in Manila, Philippines. The first burials in the Punchbowl occurred on January 4, 1949 and the cemetery was opened to the public on July 19, 1949. There are approximately 34,000 American military veterans from WWII, Korea, and Vietnam, in addition to approximately 10,200 authorized family members, who are interred in the Punchbowl.

Three WWII allied personnel are also interred in the Punchbowl--a British soldier, a Philippine Scout, and a U.S. citizen who served with the Royal New Zealand Air Force. No allied personnel from the Korean or Vietnam Wars have been interred. The cemetery is currently full and was closed to new casket interments in 1991 but space remains available for cremated remains and second interments (the subsequent interment of an eligible family member in the same gravesite).

4. Under what circumstances were the remains related to the Korean War transferred to the United States government?

The Korean War armistice did not address the repatriation of human remains but did require an exchange of information by stating, "Insofar as practicable, information regarding name, nationality, rank, and other identification data, date and cause of death, and place of burial, of those prisoners of war who died in his custody".⁶

In the 1953-1955 timeframe, 416 of the Punchbowl unknowns were returned to U.S. control by the North Koreans, processed by the Graves Registration unit in Japan and buried in the Punchbowl.

³ DNA is the abbreviation for Deoxyribonucleic Acid. There are several types of DNA but the one most frequently used in the identification of remains is mitochondrial DNA (mt DNA) which is passed from the mother. The use of DNA testing does not guarantee a positive identification; according to JPAC officials, 7% of all Caucasians have the same mtDNA.

⁴ During the Korean War era, all personnel entering the military were required to have a chest X-ray as a check for tuberculosis.

⁵ The effort to automate this process is being accomplished by the Department of Energy's Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL).

⁶ Section III, paragraph 58(a) and (a)(2), *Korean War Armistice Agreement*, July 27, 1953.

5. What was the location origin of the remains?

Remains from North Korea came from Prisoner of War (POW) camps in the northern and southern portions of the country, battle areas, POW march routes, United Nations cemeteries in north, northwest and northeast North Korea, battle sites near the Demilitarized Zone ((DMZ) and aircraft crash sites throughout the country. While some of the remains from North Korea included information on where the remains were found, this information has been inconsistent and unreliable.

Remains recovered from within South Korea came primarily from the southeastern portion of the country and included battle sites, POW transport routes, and aircraft crash sites near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

6. What is the process by which it is determined which Korean-war related remains will be the focus of research?

Identification efforts for the 867 unknowns interred in the Punchbowl began in 1999. JPAC anthropologists initiate the process by reviewing the files of the “unknowns” and prioritizing candidate remains that can now be identified using technologies that were not available in the 1950s.

Realizing the DNA identification may not be possible for the unknowns, personnel and other records and known biological information have been compiled into a database. These records may include dental X-rays or recreated dental charts, chest X-rays and information that accompanied the remains from the Graves Registration unit in Japan.

Historians then match the individual information with geographical information on the location of the remains and develop prioritized lists for scientific evaluation. If there is a reasonable probability that a set of remains may be identified, disinterment is recommended to the Secretary of the Army who is the approval authority for the disinterment of all U.S. remains from military cemeteries.⁷

7. Please advise how many Korea War-related remains are presently being reviewed by U.S. authorities and what is the timetable for such?

Eight disinterred remains are currently pending identification in the JPAC laboratory. The average time for identification of Punchbowl disinterments in 2011 was less than two months. This improved turnaround time is expected to continue as use of the new chest radiographic (clavicle/vertebrae) comparison test continues to expand.

8. Are the records which accompanied the transfer of the remains to the Punch Bowl public? If not, what is the basis for not releasing the records?

There is a case file (referred to an “Individual Deceased Personnel File”) on each of the 7,980 Korean War MIAs. These original files are on loan to JPAC from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Any MIA next-of-kin can obtain a copy of their case file from their respective service casualty office.

Persons outside the family must submit a request under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

⁷ P.I. 368-80, August 5, 1947. This authority has been further delegated to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

Files of personnel who are accounted for are returned to NARA.

9. Are there other Korean War MIAs who are in Hawaii but have not been interred in the Punchbowl?

In addition to the 845 still unidentified remains in the Punchbowl, there are two other groups of Korean War unidentified remains that have never been interred in the Punchbowl but are located in Hawaii.

The first group is 208 boxes of remains that were unilaterally turned over by the North Koreans between 1990 and 1994 and have been stored in JPAC facilities on Oahu (these remains are colloquially known as “K-208”). Each box is believed to contain several comingled remains; some of the boxes examined have contained up to seven sets of remains and some personal effects. As a result, the exact number of remains has not yet been determined but may be as many as 400 to 450.

In addition to the original 208 boxes, an additional 6 boxes of remains were repatriated during a humanitarian visit to North Korea by a bipartisan U.S. delegation headed by New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson and former Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi that took place from April 8 to April 11, 2010. These boxes are also stored in JPAC facilities on Oahu.

Remains in the K-208 (which include the 6 boxes returned in 2010) were not treated with chemical preservatives and all have been sampled for DNA.

Unlike the Punchbowl unknowns with a single set of remains in each casket, the K-208 remains are managed in “batches” based upon the geographical area the remains reportedly came from. After being prioritized in “batches”, they are further prioritized by the individuals most likely to be readily identified. Factors that affect resolution within this grouping include skeletal completeness, presence of teeth and dental records, the presence of bones of the neck and shoulder and chest X-rays, successful DNA sequencing and the presence of a DNA family reference sample.

Service Casualty Offices are responsible for obtaining DNA samples from surviving family members (referred to as Family Reference Samples). Of the 7,980 Korean War MIAs, approximately 75-80% of these samples have been voluntarily provided and have been added to the database at the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory.

Since processing of the K-208 group began, over 70 identifications have been made .

The second group is approximately 220 remains (based on field examination) that were recovered by 33 on-site excavation missions in North Korea in the 1996-2005 timeframe and have also been stored in JPAC facilities on Oahu. An additional aspect of the identification of these remains is the reality that some may be additional portions of individuals whose remains were partially turned over in the initial transfer of 416 or the later transfer of the K-208 remains.

As with K-208, these remains have not been preserved chemically and may be identifiable through DNA sequencing. Eighty-eight identifications have been completed from these 220 remains.
