



Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office

Tarawa

Fact Sheet

Invasion Casualties

- During the battle (Nov. 20-23, 1943):
 - 1,149 Marines and Navy servicemen were killed
 - 620 have been accounted for (this includes 171 "buried at sea")
 - **520 are not accounted for**
 - 90 recovered remains have not been identified
- Many Marines were killed on the 600+ yard wade into shore, and their bodies never reached land. These unidentified men would neither be buried on the island nor officially buried at sea, but would figure in the number unaccounted for cited above.
- Due to sanitation concerns, hasty battlefield burials were conducted by Marines untrained in graves registration, with little record-keeping. Many graves/trench burials were not properly marked or their locations recorded.
- There were also 3,000+ Japanese killed on the island, whose remains were buried in bomb craters and existing trenches.

U.S. Navy SeaBee Construction

- Immediately after the final day of battle, landing troops were replaced by U.S. Navy Construction Battalions ("SeaBees"), who had little knowledge of burial locations.
- From 1943-1946 at least five SeaBee units cycled through the advanced base, without continuity of personnel.
- These units engaged in construction projects requiring movement or re-arrangement of the known burials or grave markers. No records of the movements have been found, and we suspect none were kept. Unmarked graves were likely obscured by construction.

Remains Recovery Efforts

- In May 1946, a Graves Registration company (604th) arrived and searched for all graves on the island using Marine and SeaBee records. Graves Registration personnel returned briefly in 1948 and 1949 to search particular areas again for additional graves.
- The Graves Registration company discovered several graves and "cemeteries" found to be in memorial only, with no remains buried beneath the markers. The company consolidated all located graves into an organized cemetery called "Lone Palm Cemetery" on island's west end.
- Graves Registration returned to the island in 1947, disinterred all remains from Lone Palm Cemetery, which were shipped to Schofield Barracks Central Identification Laboratory (CIL) for identification and repatriation. The identification processing resulted in 465 individuals being positively identified and buried at the direction of the next of kin.
- In 1949, unknown remains from the Battle for Tarawa were recommended for approval as a single consolidated group burial. This proposal was overturned, and remains were re-segregated into "individuals" and buried as unknowns.

CILHI/JPAC Activity

- In 1978, the Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii (CILHI) received a unilateral turnover from Tarawa, several sets of comingled remains and one U.S. identification tag. After identification analysis, 31 comingled remains were returned to the Japanese government, and one individual was interred in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific ("Punchbowl") as a U.S. unknown.
- CILHI recovered several remains in 1980 that had been collected during a construction project. Of the recovered remains, two were identified as U.S. Marines, one partial set of remains was interred in the Punchbowl as a U.S. unknown, and 17 sets of remains were returned to the Japanese government.
- Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) excavated and recovered two individuals in 2000 that had been unearthed by locals during the construction of a driveway. These remains were identified in November 2001.

CILHI/JPAC Accessions and Identification dates from Tarawa (now Kiribati):

<u>Accession</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Ser No.</u>	<u>Branch</u>	<u>Date of ID</u>
1979-003	UNKNOWN	--	--	--
1980-001	TUCKER, ERNEST E	471058	USMC	29-Apr-82
1980-002	UNKNOWN	--	--	--
1980-003	SCURLOCK, THOMAS L JR	362888	USMC	22-Jan-82
2000-004	BROWN, DARWIN H	460003	USMC	6-Nov-01
2000-004	GILMORE, RAYMOND P	3761971	USN	6-Nov-01
2002-077	STURMER, HERMAN F.	506490	USMC	8 Apr 11

- JPAC is in possession of one partial remains that were turned over to government authorities after discovery by a Peace Corps representative in 2004.
- In 2008, a group of independent researchers (History Flight Inc.) visited Betio Atoll twice and used instruments to mark the location of several prior disturbances in the soil. These disturbances may be the result of Japanese defensive positions, U.S. construction efforts, burial of war dead, prior searches for U.S. burials, or more recent construction activities.
- In 2009, a JPAC team surveyed these locations for potential excavation and recovered partial remains of at least six individuals of unknown national origin.
- JPAC conducted an August 2010 mission to excavate several sites publicized by History Flight Inc. as potential former burials. The JPAC team did not uncover any remains believed to be those of U.S. servicemen at the sites, but did receive two sets of possible U.S. remains from a local citizen.

Tarawa today

- Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll, is now the capitol of the island nation of Kiribati, which was established after the British ceded interest in the islands (self-rule established in 1971, independence in 1979).
- Betio island is 1.2 square kilometers, with an estimated population of over 20,000--a population density equal to that of Hong Kong.