



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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AIRMAN MISSING FROM WWII IDENTIFIED

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

Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Hilding R. Johnson, 20, of Sacramento, Calif., will be returned to his family this week to be honored in a private memorial ceremony this summer. On Dec. 25, 1944, Johnson was flying a bombing mission near St. Vith, Belgium, when his P-47D Thunderbolt aircraft crashed after being struck by German anti-aircraft fire. The pilot of an additional U.S. aircraft flying in the mission reported that no parachute was observed when Johnson's aircraft went down. After the war, an investigation conducted by U.S. Army Graves Registration personnel was not able to locate the crash site.

In August 2006, a group of German citizens located the crash site on the edge of a forest near Setz, Belgium. The group notified Johnson's niece, and together they excavated the site and recovered human remains in 2008. The remains were turned over to the Joint Personnel Accounting Command (JPAC) for further analysis and DNA testing. In 2011, a JPAC team completed the excavation of the crash site and recovered additional human remains, aircraft wreckage, and military equipment. The serial number on a .50-caliber machine gun found at the site correlated with a weapon on Johnson's aircraft.

Among forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC used mitochondrial DNA — which matched that of Johnson's niece and grandniece — 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 73,000 remain 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) 699-1420.