

Army Lab Seeks American MIAs Worldwide

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WASHINGTON, April 5, 2000 -- The U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii, has a worldwide mission ranging from the rice paddies of Southeast Asia to the deserts of the Middle East and the glaciers of Tibet.

About 170 military and civilian personnel staff the unit known as CILHI, which is a field operating element of the Casualty and Memorial Affairs Operations Center, U.S. Army Personnel Command. Their primary mission is to search for, recover and identify remains of service members, certain civilian personnel and allied personnel unaccounted for from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and other conflicts and contingencies.

Since the 1840s the United States has made a concerted effort to recover and properly inter its service members killed in war. It was not until the Civil War, however, that the government assumed the dual obligation of identifying and burying its dead in registered graves.

During the Spanish-American War the government disinterred U.S. service members buried in foreign soil and returned their remains for permanent burial at home.

During World War I, a Graves Registration Service was set up to recover and identify American war dead. During World War II, the Army assumed the responsibility of returning service members to their native soil. The government set up a central identification unit in Japan to process war dead during the Korean War.

The Army operated two mortuaries in South Vietnam until the early 1970s, when it set up the Central Identification Laboratory in Thailand to continue the search, recovery and identification of service members killed in Indochina. The laboratory relocated to Hawaii in 1975.

Many of CILHI's recent efforts have focused on the former battlefields of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Since 1992, CILHI has conducted extensive joint recovery operations in Southeast Asia under the operational control of Joint Task Force Full Accounting, mandated by Congress to achieve the fullest possible accounting of service members whose remains were not recovered following the Vietnam war.

Missions to Vietnam and Laos typically take place five times a year, with six teams deploying to Vietnam and three or four teams deploying to Laos. Two teams deploy to Cambodia once a year. About 2,100 Americans remain unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

Breakthroughs in negotiations saw the first-ever combined U.S. and North Korean recovery operation take place in July 1996. Three deployments followed in 1997, then five in 1998 and three in 1999. In 2000, the CILHI will be sending teams to investigate loss sites in South Korea. About 8,100 Americans remain unaccounted for from the Korean War.

World War II recovery missions deploy five times a year to Europe, China, Papua New Guinea and many other remote locations. About 78,000 Americans remain unaccounted for from World War II. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. teams have had unprecedented access to sites involving Cold War losses.

CILHI teams remain in the field for 30 to 35 day periods on each deployment. CILHI personnel commonly spend up to 200 days a year in some of the world's most austere areas.

For more information, visit the unclassified CILHI Web Site at <http://www.cilhi.army.mil>