



News Release

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AIRMAN MISSING FROM WWII IDENTIFIED

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office announced today that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing in action from World War II, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

Capt. Jennings H. Mease, 36, of Greenville, S.C., will be buried Sept. 30 in Salt Lake City. On April 24, 1943, Mease and four other U.S. servicemen were flying over the Himalayan mountains, from Yangkai, China, to their home base in Chabua, India, in their C-87 Liberator Express aircraft. After losing radio communications following take-off, the crew was never heard from again. Eleven aerial search missions were unable to locate the aircraft or crew due to intense snows on the mountains, at high altitudes, and dense jungle growth, at lower altitudes.

Almost 60 years later, in 2003, an American citizen discovered the wreckage of the C-87 aircraft while trekking in the mountains near Chabua. He recovered the aircraft's identification plate, military equipment and human remains. The artifacts and remains were turned over to U.S. officials for analysis. Attempts to excavate the site are being negotiated with the Indian government.

Among other forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used mitochondrial DNA – which matched that of Mease's cousins – in the identification of the remains.

As part of the war effort against the Japanese, U.S. Army Air Forces cargo planes based in India continually airlifted critical supplies over the high mountain ranges that comprise the Himalayas – known as “The Hump” – in support of American airbases in China. The amount of materiel flown over the Himalayas was a logistical achievement unparalleled at the time.

Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, more than 400,000 died. Today, more than 73,000 are unaccounted-for from the conflict.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, call (703) 699-1169 or visit the DPMO Web site at www.dtic.mil/dpmo.

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