



News Release

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AIRMEN MISSING IN ACTION FROM WWII IDENTIFIED

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the remains 12 U.S. servicemen, missing in action from World War II, have been identified and are being returned to their families for burial with full military honors.

Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Jack E. Volz, 21, of Indianapolis; 2nd Lt. Regis E. Dietz, 28, of Pittsburgh; 2nd Lt. Edward J. Lake, 25, of Brooklyn, N.Y.; 2nd Lt. Martin P. Murray, 21, of Lowell, Mass.; 2nd Lt. William J. Shryock, 23, of Gary, Ind.; Tech. Sgt. Robert S. Wren, 25, of Seattle; Tech. Sgt. Hollis R. Smith, 22, of Cove, Ark.; Staff Sgt. Berthold A. Chastain, 27, Dalton, Ga.; Staff Sgt. Clyde L. Green, 24, Erie, Penn.; Staff Sgt. Frederick E. Harris, 23, Medford, Mass.; Staff Sgt. Claude A. Ray, 24, Coffeyville, Kan.; and Staff Sgt. Claude G. Tyler, 24, Landover, Md. The remains representing the entire crew will be buried as a group, in a single casket, August 4 in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C. Eight of the airmen were identified and buried as individuals during previous ceremonies. Shryock, Green and Harris were also individually identified and will be interred individually at Arlington on the same day as the group interment.

These 12 airmen were ordered to carry out a reconnaissance mission in their B-24D Liberator, taking off from an airfield near Port Moresby, New Guinea, on Oct. 27, 1943. Allied plans were being formulated to mount an attack on the Japanese redoubt at Rabaul, New Britain. American strategists considered it critical to take Rabaul in order to support the eventual invasion of the Philippines. The crew's assigned area of reconnaissance was the nearby shipping lanes in the Bismarck Sea. But during their mission, they were radioed to land at a friendly air strip nearby due to poor weather conditions. The last radio transmission from the crew did not indicate their location, and in the following weeks, multiple searches over land and sea areas did not locate the aircraft.

Following World War II, the Army Graves Registration Service conducted investigations and searches for 43 missing airmen, including these airmen, in the area but concluded in June 1949 that they were unrecoverable.

In August 2003 a team from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) received information on a crash site from a citizen in Papua New Guinea while they were investigating another case. He also turned over an identification card from one of the crew members and reported that there were possible human remains at the site of the crash. Twice in 2004 other JPAC teams attempted to visit the site but were unable to do so due to poor weather and hazardous conditions at the helicopter landing site. Another team was able to successfully excavate the site from January to March 2007 where they found several identification tags from the B-24D crew as well as human remains.

Among other forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used mitochondrial DNA—which matched that of some of the crewmembers’ families—in the identification of their 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 are 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) 699-1169.