



Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office

Korean War Research at the National Archives

Background: DPMO Korean War research analysts use official military records found in the National Archives to fill in gaps in our knowledge regarding individual loss incidents and to gather all relevant personal information about unaccounted-for servicemen. Military unit operations records, for example, can help refine a loss location and give a detailed description of how a combat element moved within the battlefield. Unit intelligence files can contain debriefings of former POWs describing their movements in captivity and may contain details of POW deaths. Generally, these type of records are found in the National Archives and Record Administration II (NARA II) facility in College Park, Md.

Personnel files, on the other hand, can provide detailed information about an unaccounted-for individual. These files are stored in the National Personal Records Center (NPRC), in St. Louis, Mo. Information from both archive sites is shared by DPMO with researchers and scientists at the Joint POW/MIA Personnel Accounting Command (JPAC), Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, the Service Casualty Offices, and family members.

National Archives II, College Park, Md. DPMO analysts visit NARA II two to three days per week, workload permitting, responding to requests for information from the JPAC Central Identification Laboratory (CIL) in Hawaii; JPAC J-2 analysts; family members, congress, internal DPMO researchers, and other government offices. The National Archives use a measured system of record availability, which can slow research while old records are filed and new ones are retrieved, often several hours later or even the next day. If there is a backlog of information requests, the priority of research goes to support pending CIL identifications, informing deploying field operation teams, fulfilling family member requests, answering congressional inquiries, and finally, satisfying queries from other DPMO analysts.

NARA documents are filed in record groups (RG) reflecting how government agencies created and maintained these records. Among the primary record groups used by DPMO for research are: RG 24 – The Bureau of Naval Personnel, which contains casualty and POW files; RG 38 The Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, which includes operational and POW files; RG 127 – USMC files which contain daily journals and operational reports; RG 153 – The Office of the Staff Judge Advocate General, which contains war crimes files; RG 338 – The Army Commands, which includes Far East Headquarters and numbered unit files; RG 341 – The Air Staff, which includes operational and POW files; and RG 407 – The Adjutant General’s Office, which received copies of unit operational and staff files. Most Korean War era documents are declassified. In the case of the few documents that are not declassified, all DPMO Korea analysts possess sufficient clearances to access those files and the ability to extract any key information from them to better inform families and the Defense Accounting Community.

National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO. DPMO visits the NPRC three to four times a year in response to requests for information from the same client groups mentioned above. During these visits, key information is captured from individual personnel files, U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force daily Morning Reports, and Army semi-annual unit personnel rosters. Because of stringent NPRC limitations including the requirement that all material for review be pre-ordered and pre-paid weeks before DPMO can begin screening the data, requests for information from St. Louis may take several visits to complete. Some 75 percent of individual files for Korea were destroyed or damaged in a fire in 1973. DPMO accesses the NARA in-house personnel record database prior to going to NPRC to ascertain what, if any, records still exist for a given individual. In the unfortunate case where all records were destroyed, DPMO will inform the requestor of that fact.