

"Until They Are H·O·M·E"

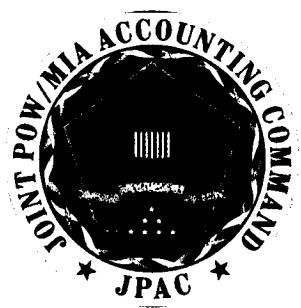
JPAC Strives to Account for Missing Americans

Story by Mary D. Karcher · Photos courtesy of JPAC



"JPAC has a unique and critical mission of accounting for the men and women of our Armed Forces that preserved our freedom and protected the security of others. ... Those, whose fate has never been resolved, have been in the minds and hearts of their families, fellow Americans and the members of JPAC."

—RADM Donna Crisp, USN
Commander of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command



On Dec. 7, 1950, 19-year-old Private First Class Donald M. Walker lost his life near Koto-ri, Korea, during the Marines' heroic fighting withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir in bitter sub-zero temperatures. Fifty-seven years to the day later, the leatherneck from Service Company, 1st Service Battalion, First Marine Division was laid to rest during a funeral with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery near the nation's capital.

PFC Walker's remains were recovered from a grave marked "Unknown" in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii (often called the "Punchbowl"), examined by forensic anthropologists, matched against known circumstances of his death and correlated with family ancestry to be positively identified.

During the service Lieutenant Ronald C. Nordan, a Navy chaplain, said, "While 57 years have passed and many have forgotten, this country has not. Today we honor him for his service to his country and the example that he has given to us by paying the ultimate sacrifice for freedom's cause."

Indeed, our country has not forgotten. Accounting for the more than 88,000 Americans missing as a result of the nation's conflicts is the mission of the Joint Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Accounting Command (JPAC). JPAC was activated in October 2003, merging two organizations—the 30-year old U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory and the 11-year-old Joint Task Force-Full Accounting. About 420 military and civilian personnel, approximately 30 of whom are Marines, carry out the JPAC motto "Until they are home" as they research, investigate, recover and identify missing Americans.

Opposite page: PFC Donald M. Walker (inset) was buried in a grave marked "Unknown" in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii until April 2007 when JPAC researchers disinterred his remains for the identification process.

Right: Forensic anthropologist and Marine veteran Denny Danielson (left) and his JPAC team search for remains at a burial site near the Chosin Reservoir in 2004. Human remains were found during this effort, but still await identification.

While JPAC is located at Hickam Air Force Base on the island of Oahu in Hawaii, the command also has three permanent overseas detachments to assist with in-country support during investigation and recovery operations: Detachment One, located in Bangkok, Thailand; Detachment Two in Hanoi, Vietnam; and Detachment Three in Vientiane, Laos. Detachment Four at Camp Smith, Hawaii, is responsible for recovery team personnel when they are not deployed.

JPAC works in close coordination with other U.S. agencies, including the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office, Department of State, the Joint Staff, United States Pacific Command, Defense Intelligence Agency, the Armed Forces Medical Examiner and the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.

While the command supports Pacific Command, or PACOM, JPAC's area of responsibility is actually the entire world. Marine Colonel John R. Hahn, JPAC's deputy commander, emphasized that JPAC investigations around the globe depend upon country-to-country negotiations and the time and accessibility limitations put in place by the host country. While JPAC searches for remains from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cold War and the Gulf War, most of the recovery missions focus on the most recent

conflicts, Hahn said, competing against time to minimize deteriorating environmental aspects, as well as the loss of eyewitnesses, which render the search more difficult.

The sense of immediacy necessitated a previously unscheduled mission on Jan. 13 when two JPAC forensic anthropologists began a two-day site survey after officials on Wake Island notified JPAC of possible human remains. The location was in an area under development, so JPAC commanders acted to "quickly dispatch the two scientists to ensure potential remains and material evidence were not destroyed," according to a JPAC press release.

Throughout that same month, scheduled deployments included missions to Laos and Cambodia in Southeast Asia and Palau, southeast of the Philippines (where Peleliu is located). During this fiscal year (October 2007 to October 2008), JPAC will conduct more than 70 investigations and recovery missions around the globe.

Steps to Recovery

Not all of the missing Americans are deemed recoverable, at least not with current technology, as some were lost at sea or entombed in sunken vessels. For the others, a meticulous process must be conducted before a recovery team is recommended. While JPAC averages about six



MIA identifications each month, the process to recover and identify remains may take years. This process requires thorough and perceptive detective work by historians and scientists alike.

Initiating the process requires extensive research, utilizing correspondence, maps, unit histories, medical and personnel records, interviews with family members and, if possible, fellow veterans who were eyewitnesses. This information is contained in a "loss incident case file" for each missing veteran.

If the research pinpoints a specific site, an "X" on the ground, so to speak, an investigative team visits the location to collect correlating evidence that would merit a recovery mission. To do this, the team talks to potential witnesses, conducts on-site reconnaissance and evaluates safety and logistical concerns for a recovery mission. JPAC's six field investigative teams deploy in locations around the world for 35 days at a time.

mous flag raising on Mount Suribachi during WW II.

Eyewitness accounts had placed Genaust in a cave when he was killed nine days after filming the historic event. The investigation team leader, Army Major Sean Stinchon, stated in a JPAC press release that based on research, the team needed to investigate sites on the southwest side of Hill 362A. They used a map a Navy engineer survey team drew after the battle that showed the tunnels and caves known to exist on the hill and they also explored unmapped sites. The command will evaluate the team's reports to determine if a recovery team will be sent to excavate an area or if further investigation is necessary.

Once an area has been deemed valuable for locating remains, JPAC sends in a recovery team of 10 to 14 people led by a team leader and a forensic anthropologist. Many of the sites pose a real challenge to reach and work in during the 35 to 60 days a mission typically requires.



of local workers, and sifted by JPAC's team members using quarter-inch wire screens, searching for even the smallest bits of remains, artifacts (pieces of issued items such as weapons, packs, mess kits or uniforms) or personal effects (like a comb, ring or watch). What they collect is then taken to JPAC's Central Identification Laboratory for scientific analysis.

Piecing Together the Clues

The Central Identification Laboratory is the largest forensic anthropology laboratory in the world. Forensic anthropologists apply knowledge of skeletal anatomy and biology to determine identity and circumstances surrounding the time of death. Depending on the amount and condition of the recovered remains, examining and measuring the bones aids in the determination of age, ancestry, gender and stature. The anthropologist also might analyze trauma at the time of death or previous conditions of the bones (arthritis or previously healed breaks) that might help identify the individual.

To allow an unbiased approach to the identification process, the anthropologist who accompanied the recovery mission



Denise To and Greg Berg sift dirt at a dig site on Wake Island on Jan. 13, 2008, to search for artifacts and remains. The forensic anthropologists conducted the site survey to preserve potential remains and artifacts after Wake Island officials notified JPAC of possible human remains in an area under development on the island.

Col Hahn referred to one such investigative team that was sent to Iwo Jima last June—the first team on the island since 1948 to look for missing remains—to illustrate that JPAC often relies on research done alongside foreign governments in addition to their own research. In this case, the team worked with the Japanese government and the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force as they looked for information to narrow the search for Marine Sergeant William H. Genaust, the combat cameraman who filmed the fa-

The JPAC Web site describes team members as walking through jungles, traversing difficult terrain in 4x4 vehicles, rappelling cliff-sides, climbing mountains and riding on horseback, boats or trains to reach sites, all with 10,000 pounds of survival and excavation equipment.

The recovery site, which can range from a few meters for individual burials or larger than a football field for aircraft crashes, is divided into grids with stakes and string, much like an archaeological dig. The dirt is removed by section, often with the help



Left: At the Central Identification Laboratory, or CIL, the largest forensic anthropology laboratory in the world, forensic anthropologists analyze bones to aid in identifying remains. Each table may contain remains from one individual or the combined remains found at one site, such as a WW II bomber crash.

Below: Owen O'Leary scrutinizes the sole of a boot associated with a WW I combat loss. Material evidence combined with skeletal clues can help to identify an individual.



is not the anthropologist who examines the recovered remains and artifacts. Instead, the anthropologist in the laboratory works "blind," that is to say, without prior knowledge of suspected identity or details of the loss incident. In the end, several reviewers must come to the same conclusion before remains are considered identified.

A forensic odontologist examines the teeth—a critical tool in identification since teeth last a long time and can be compared to an individual's existing dental record, if available. Teeth also contain mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), a specific kind of DNA that either positively identifies or excludes the remains in suspected family relatedness.

Anthropologists use mtDNA, which is inherited through only the mother. Family reference samples of mtDNA, obtained by a simple cheek swab (see sidebar), can confirm if the donor and the deceased shared a common maternal relative. The samples are sent to the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) in Rockville, Md.

This process has helped significantly in the identification of the missing since JPAC uses mtDNA in about three-quar-

You May Be Able to Help

1. Are you or someone you know eligible to donate mitochondrial DNA? JPAC Central Identification Laboratory maintains a database on the JPAC Web site that lists MIAs for which an mtDNA family reference sample is still needed (www.jpac.pacom.mil/pages/FRS_public/FRS_public.aspx). Donors are asked to contact the casualty office of the appropriate branch of service.

For the Marine Corps, contact Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, (800) 847-1597. The mailing address is: Manpower and Reserve Affairs (MRA), Personal and Family Readiness Division, 3280 Russell Rd., Quantico, VA 22134-5103.

To understand more about who qualifies to donate mtDNA, visit www.jpac.pacom.mil/index.php?page=frs&size=100&ind=2.

2. Can you provide any information that would assist in the search for missing Americans? JPAC now has an international toll-free telephone number to collect such information: (866) 913-1286.

3. To learn more about the JPAC mission and how you might help, visit www.jpac.pacom.mil.

ters of its cases. Unfortunately, according to Dr. Debra A. Prince, a JPAC forensic anthropologist who worked on identifying PFC Walker and other unknowns from the Korean War, many of the remains from the Punchbowl have degraded DNA sequences due to the way the remains were processed in the 1950s. Therefore, mtDNA cannot be used in these cases; however, researchers at AFDIL are working diligently to resolve this problem.

Obtaining a sample can add more than a year to the identification process. JPAC maintains an online database that lists MIAs for whom an mtDNA family reference sample still is needed. Dr. Prince in-

dicated that JPAC has collected 50 percent of the family reference samples needed for the Korean War and 65 percent of the samples needed for identifying the missing from the Vietnam War.

All evidence—skeletal and dental remains, as well as relevant material evidence found at the recovery site—must be examined at the laboratory and correlated with the historical research about the individual. Once the remains have been identified, the process undergoes a peer review and an external review before the completed case is sent to the appropriate service branch mortuary affairs office for notification of the next of kin.

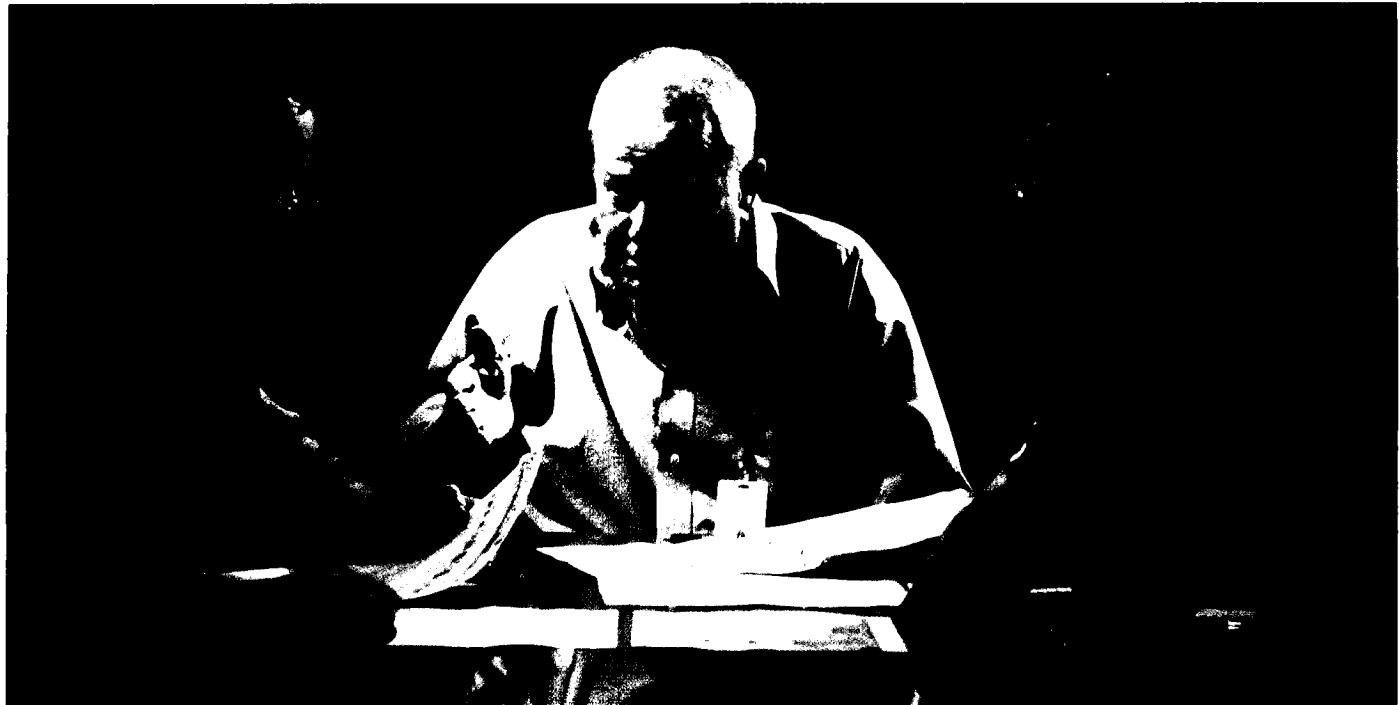
Bringing PFC Walker Home

The Marines of PFC Walker's unit originally buried him in a temporary United Nations military cemetery in Hungnam. At the time of burial, Walker's fingerprint was included with his dog tags, USMC identification card and an interment report. Shortly after his burial, the North Koreans overtook the cemetery.

In 1954, the U.S. and North Korean governments participated in Operation Glory, during which the North Koreans returned several thousand remains, including remains associated with Walker's burial. However, since the Army mortuary in Kokura, Japan, assessed an age, race and height that were inconsistent with PFC Walker's biological profile, they could not conclusively identify his remains and he was buried in a grave marked "Unknown" at the Punchbowl.

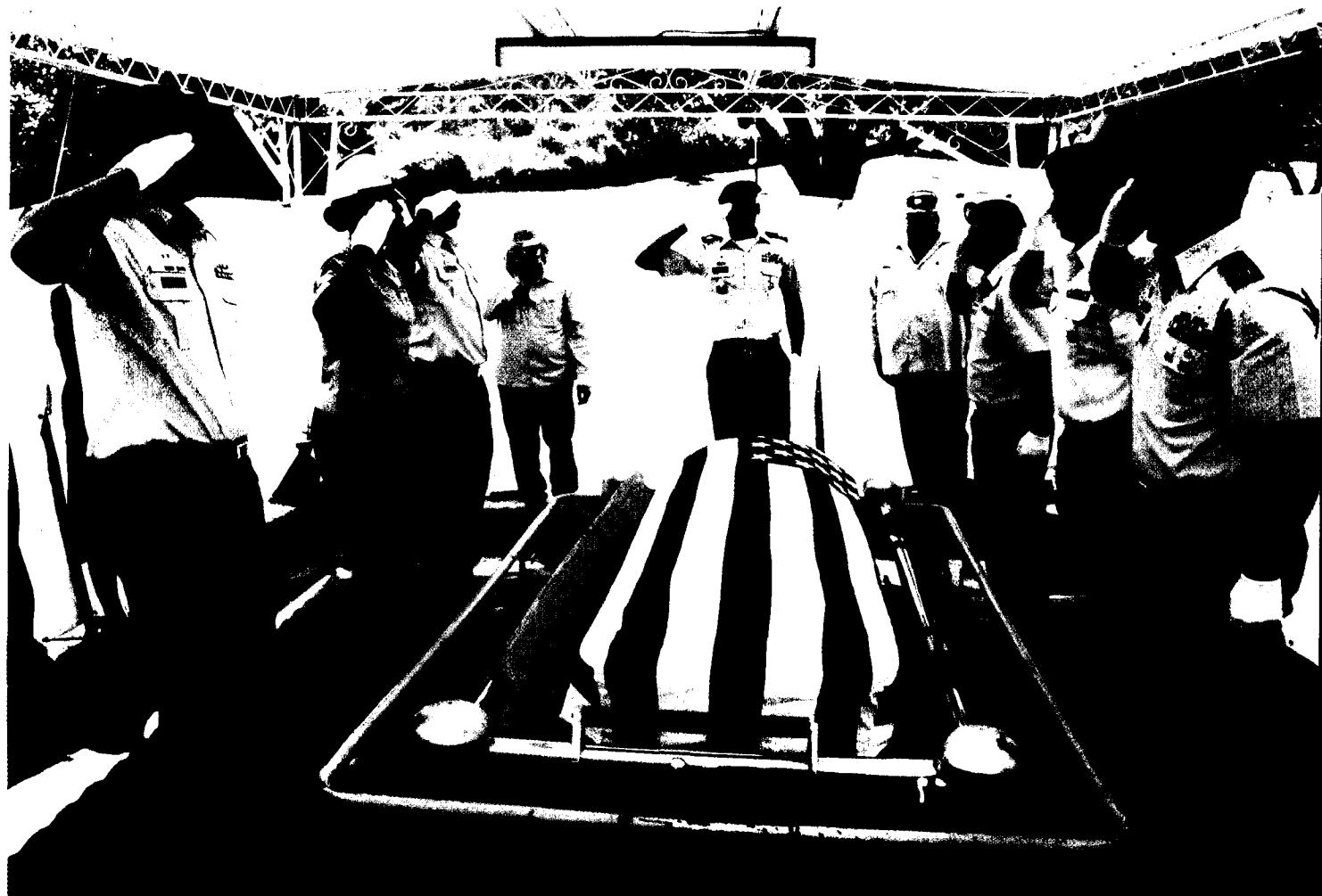
In April 2007, research done at JPAC led to the belief that Walker's remains could be identified, and his remains were disinterred for analysis. Critical to the process was family genealogy. Was there any mixed ancestry in his family tree?

Hattie Johnson, the Marine Corps head of repatriation in the Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps Casualty Office, is the person who acts on behalf of the Commandant to interact with all of the families who have relatives still missing. Johnson consulted a genealogist to locate Walker's niece, Carolyn Stewart in Kentucky, and a nephew named after Walker, Donald L.



SSGT CHRIS FLAHERTY, USAF

Ron Broward (middle) meets with Dr. Andy Tyrrell and Dr. Alec Christensen to review records of unknown military personnel lost during the Korean War. Broward was concluding an extended visit as a JPAC research intern in December, the latest in a series of such visits to help the command hone in on the possible identities of unidentified Korean War casualties buried at the Punchbowl. Broward's research assistance aided JPAC in the identification of PFC Donald M. Walker in September 2007.



A disinterment detail salutes the coffin of an unknown hero, later identified as PFC Donald M. Walker, as it is lifted out of the ground at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific on April 18, 2007. The disinterment ceremony is a respectful tribute to the deceased as the remains are unearthed and transported to the CIL for analysis. (Photo by Sgt Kelly Burkhart, USA)

Hawkins in Virginia. Stewart was able to recall that her family history contained both Caucasian and American Indian blood, and Hawkins was able to provide the family reference sample for the mtDNA.

The anthropologists analyzed Walker's skeletal measurements and found them consistent with a 19-year-old black male who was 5 feet 5 inches tall, which corresponded with his biologic profile. The forensic odontologist studied Walker's dental record against his remains and determined that while locations for dental work matched exactly, an error could have been made in his dental record that indicated he had received needed restorations, which did not exist in his dental remains. Through their assessment, JPAC concluded that the remains did indeed belong to PFC Donald Walker.

Johnson quickly went to work. She visited Hawkins in Virginia Beach and began preparation for a funeral with full military honors at Arlington. She arranged for all reservations and tickets to transport and house PFC Walker's family and friends. Hawkins, who retired from the

Navy after 25 years of service, said Johnson "spearheaded the whole thing" and became a part of their family as she shared a few tears and guided them through the process that would finally bring their uncle home.

There are nearly 4,000 missing Marines, according to Johnson.

Marine veteran Ron Broward is one man trying to identify as many as he can. Since 1998, Broward has been volunteering his time to conduct research at JPAC, focusing primarily on the 8,100 military personnel missing from the Korean War. To him, they are the young faces, barely 20 years old, he sees in pictures. He volunteers for 30 days every 90 days at JPAC and, in fact, was involved in the research for PFC Walker. He urges family members to submit a family reference sample and suggests that fellow military personnel can help by sharing details of battles they were in since so much of the research relies on circumstantial evidence.

Broward does have an added personal stake in his committed efforts. He has relentlessly searched for a fellow Marine,

PFC Warren "Jackson" Rarick, from his hometown of Downey, Calif., with whom he fought on Horseshoe Ridge in Korea. When Broward turned 18 in Korea, Rarick gave him a surprise that he had carried all the way from home, a jar filled with Downey dirt. In a photograph taken in April 1951 and now posted on the JPAC Web site, the two friends are frozen in time at an outpost in South Korea.

This month Ron Broward plans to once again return to Korea to look for his old buddy. While he'll be bolstered by modern technology, he'll be driven by the Marine Corps creed that leaves no man behind.

Author's note: Thanks to Donald L. Hawkins and Carolyn Stewart, for permitting Leatherneck to share PFC Walker's story; JPAC Public Affairs Deputy Director Troy Kitch for his unending support; Hattie Johnson for representing the Marine Corps to the families who wait; and especially to Ron Broward, who inspired us to print this story. May your mission be accomplished.

