

Chinese Agree to Help U.S. Account for MIAs

By Rudi Williams
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WASHINGTON -- Robert Jones returned home from China Sept. 25 with hopes of future Chinese assistance in accounting for thousands of American servicemen missing in Asia since World War II.

"I believe we've developed a working relationship that can only produce better results in the future," said Jones, deputy assistant secretary of defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs. "I'm optimistic that we will continue to make gradual progress with the Chinese on the MIA issue." He said he hopes to return to Beijing soon to continue talks.

Jones and three assistants went to China to convince leaders there of the significance of their cooperation and active participation in helping account for 8,200 missing U.S. servicemen from the Korean War. They also discussed missing servicemen from World War II, Vietnam and the Cold War.

The delegation gave the Chinese documents on 44 individual cases and asked for records of military units that ran Korean War POW camps. The documents included information about battles, particularly in the Chosin Reservoir and Demilitarized Zone, aircraft crash sites, shoot-down records and the names of certain individuals that were published in Chinese propaganda periodicals during the war.

After the Beijing meetings, the delegation traveled to an area to the south where U.S. and Chinese teams have been working for years at the crash site of a World War II B-24 bomber. In a Sept. 24 repatriation ceremony, Chinese officials presented Jones with the suspected remains of a 10th crewman from the B-24. U.S. officials received remains in January 1997 that are thought to belong to the other nine crewmen. All remains go to the Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii for forensic study.

"We have DNA samples that will help identify eight of the crew members and some circumstantial evidence from the crash site that we hope will lead to the identification of a ninth crew member," Jones said.

The B-24 crew crashed in August 1944 while on a mission to bomb Japanese shipping around Taiwan. Diverted on their way home because the Japanese had overrun their base airfield, the crew ran into bad weather and flew into a rugged mountainside. A farmer stumbled on the wreckage site about three years ago.

Jones said the Chinese have dedicated an entire floor of a museum to the crash site. The museum includes photographs of the wreckage, pictures of the excavation, pieces of the aircraft and other items.

"The Chinese have made this a symbol of Chinese-American friendship," Jones said. Almost every area resident he met was aware of the operation, he said.

"They were interested in how the recovery was going and what was happening in terms of the identification process," Jones said. "This has become a major symbol for them in terms of U.S.-China friendship, specifically as it relates to World War II."