



News Release

Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (Public Affairs)
Washington, DC 20301-2900

Phone: (703) 699-1169

Fax (703) 602-4375

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 2, 2007

FIVE MISSING WWII AIRMEN ARE IDENTIFIED

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

They are 1st Lt. Cecil W. Biggs, of Teague, Texas; 1st Lt. William L. Pearce, of San Antonio, Texas; 2nd Lt. Thomas R. Yenner, of Kingston, Pa.; Tech. Sgt. Russell W. Abendschoen of York, Pa.; and Staff Sgt. George G. Herbst of Brooklyn, N.Y.; all U.S. Army Air Forces. Pearce was buried April 27 in Louisville, Ky.; Herbst will be buried June 8 at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C.; Biggs will be buried June 9 in Teague, Tex.; Abendschoen's funeral is June 13 at Arlington; and Yenner will be buried July 30 at Arlington.

Representatives from the Army met with the next-of-kin of these men in their hometowns to explain the recovery and identification process and to coordinate interment with military honors on behalf of the Secretary of the Army.

On Sept. 21, 1944, a C-47A Skytrain crewed by these airmen was delivering Polish paratroopers to a drop zone south of Arnhem, Holland, in support of *Operation Market Garden*. Soon after departing the drop zone, the plane crashed and there were no survivors. The Germans opened the dikes in the region where the plane crashed and flooded the area before any remains could be recovered.

When Dutch citizens returned to their homes in Arnhem the next year, they recovered remains from the Skytrain's wreckage and buried them in a nearby cemetery. A U.S. Army graves registration team later disinterred the remains which were reburied as group remains in 1950 at the Zachary Taylor National Cemetery in Kentucky.

In 1994, a Dutch citizen located more human remains and other crew-related materials at a site associated with this C-47 crash. They were eventually turned over to U.S. officials.

Among dental records, other forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory also used mitochondrial DNA in the identification of the remains of these five men. The remains that could not be attributed to a specific individual have been buried with the first set of group remains at the Zachary Taylor National Cemetery.

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.

-end-