



News Release

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SEARCH UNDERWAY FOR WWII JAPANESE MIAs IN ALASKA

The Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that a small team of Japanese and U.S. specialists is visiting Attu Island, Alaska, in search of information which may lead them to remains of missing Japanese soldiers.

With support from the Department of Defense, the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the team of five Japanese and three Americans arrived Thursday for a four day mission. The team is investigating potential loss or burial sites where the remains of Japanese soldiers may be found. The team's findings will be evaluated by the U.S. and Japanese governments to determine if follow-on excavations are called for.

Primary airlift for the team was provided by the U.S. Coast Guard on a regularly-scheduled C-130 airlift mission from Kodiak to Attu Island. While visiting the island, the team is being housed at the long range navigation station where some Coast Guardsmen have volunteered to assist in the investigations. Attu Island is under the management and protection of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service which administers the Aleutian Islands National Wildlife Refuge. At the end of Alaska's Aleutian island chain, Attu is the westernmost point of land of the United States.

In June 1942, a unit of the Japanese Army occupied Attu, capturing and imprisoning many of its inhabitants. U.S. forces began action to recapture the small island in May 1943, where fierce hand-to-hand battles led to about 540 American and 2,300 Japanese deaths. It was the site of the only land battle in WWII in North America.

Shortly after the war, 235 sets of Japanese remains were recovered on Attu by U.S. forces and reburied at Ft. Richardson, near Anchorage, Alaska. The Japanese later disinterred those remains, cremated them as part of a religious ceremony and reburied them at the same location.

The Japanese government assisted U.S. investigators last month in a visit to Iwo Jima in search of information related to American WWII MIAs.

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