

MEMORANDUM FOR CORRESPONDENTS

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A U.S. remains recovery team has completed its work for 1997 in China in an effort to recover the remains of a 10-man World War II bomber crew which perished in a 1944 crash in southern China.

The wreckage of the B-24 bomber was found by Chinese farmers in late 1996, and Chinese officials invited experts from the United States to send a recovery team to the site. In January 1997, a team of specialists from the Defense Department's Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office and the U.S. Army's Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii visited the crash site in the rugged mountains of southern China. They returned with some remains recovered earlier by the Chinese, as well as some personal equipment of the aircrew. The Chinese permitted the Americans to return to conduct more comprehensive excavations.

The CILHI team returned to China during the first week in November and spent approximately three weeks there in an effort to recover all the remains of the crew. Severe weather near the 7,000 foot Maoer mountain site made the recovery operation extremely dangerous for the CILHI specialists. During the earlier visit in January, one person suffered serious injuries as a result of a fall from the rough trail. However, in spite of freezing rain, fog and high winds during this operation, the nine-man, two-woman team was able to locate and recover additional remains. Gaining access to the site required extensive safety and logistical preparations, including installation of hundreds of iron footholds along dangerous rock surfaces on the trail.

Debris from the bomber crash is grouped along the mountainside at several levels, thousands of feet apart. The team surveyed and laid out grid markers on those accessible areas, and located some remains using archeological and anthropological techniques. The freezing weather, however, forced the team to conclude its operation before all work could be completed. They prepared the site for a return visit in the fall of 1998. Chinese officials have advised that this is the safest time period for these excavations.

The Department of Defense has established contact with representatives of all 10 families of the crew, and has kept them advised of the progress of the forensic identification process.