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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WORLD WAR II MIA REMAINS IDENTIFIED

The remains of three American servicemen missing in action from World War II have been identified and are being returned to their families for burial in the United States.

They are identified as Maj. Frank H. Blakey, Millbrook, Ala.; 2nd Lt. John S. McConnon, Pittsburgh, Pa., and Tech. Sgt. Wayne O. Shaffner, Martinsville, Ill.

Blakey was commanding officer of the 305th Airdrome Squadron near Aitape, New Guinea, when he was last seen driving a jeep on June 10, 1944, near the unit's POW stockade. When he failed to return to his quarters the following day, the squadron reported him missing and launched a massive search effort. The area surrounding Aitape was reported to be under Japanese control. Four days after his disappearance, an Australian soldier found Blakey's jeep south of Aitape. Following the discovery of the Jeep the area was again searched, but the missing officer was not found. Blakey was presumed dead Jan. 22, 1946.

In April 1989 the U.S. Embassy in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, was notified that a district officer in Aitape Sanaun province was in possession of remains believed to be those of an American Serviceman.

In July 1989 a recovery team from the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii (CILHI) traveled to New Guinea and questioned the individual in possession of the remains. In addition to the remains, the team recovered personal effects including two identification tags and a bracelet engraved "Frank H. Blakey." The team visited the location where the remains were found, but recovered no additional personal effects or remains.

McConnon and Shaffner were crew members aboard a B-24J Liberator aircraft on Aug. 10, 1944, returning from a bombing raid on enemy oil fields in Ploesti, Romania. An anti-aircraft explosion struck the tail of the aircraft, severing the tail gun turret and rudder. The aircraft entered a steep dive and crashed in Albania. It was subsequently learned that at least four of the crew had safely parachuted, but were taken prisoner by German soldiers. The six remaining crewmen, including McConnon and Shaffner, were listed as missing in action.

After the end of the war the survivors indicated that their captors had shown them identification tags for McConnon and Shaffner. On June 6, 1945 both men were placed in killed in action status.

In 1995, James C. McConnon, 2nd Lt. McConnon's brother, contacted an Albanian journalist in an effort to uncover information relating to his brother's disappearance. Information discovered by McConnon and the journalist, L Lazar Vero, was given to the U. S. Army.

Later that year, a representative from the U.S. Army's Memorial Affairs Activity in Europe traveled to Goraj, Albania and interviewed several local residents with information correlating to the loss of 2nd Lt. McConnon's B-24. The residents stated that two of the crewmen were buried in unmarked graves near the village.

In April and June 1998, CILHI recovery teams excavated two unmarked burial sites near Goraj from which two sets of remains were recovered.

Anthropological analysis of the remains and other evidence assembled by the CILHI confirmed the identification of Blakey, McConnon and Shaffner. More than 78,000 Americans still remain unaccounted-for from World War II.