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(703)697-5131(media)  
(703)697-5737(public/industry)

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## **UNIDENTIFIED REMAINS DISINTERMENT POLICY ESTABLISHED**

The Department of Defense today announced a policy to facilitate the use of DNA technology to identify Korean War and World War II remains previously classified as "unknown" and interred in national cemeteries. In 1995, the Department certified the use of mitochondrial DNA technology as a reliable forensic tool, and has improved and refined the use of mtDNA technology since then.

"This is a natural fulfillment of our commitment to the fullest possible accounting of America's missing in action servicemen," said Robert L. Jones, deputy assistant secretary of Defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs. "After our work in identifying the former Vietnam Unknown from the Tomb of the Unknowns, it became clear we could apply the same science to other unknowns, in particular, those buried in the Punchbowl cemetery in Hawaii," he added.

In 1998, the Department identified the Vietnam Unknown as U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Michael Blassie, using mtDNA from the remains and matched sequences with those from his family. He was killed in Vietnam in 1972, classified as an unknown, and interred in the Tomb in 1984.

The cemetery with the greatest number of gravesites containing unknown remains is the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, commonly called the Punchbowl. This cemetery contains 864 remains of unidentified soldiers from the Korean War. Most of these remains were received by the United States at the ceasefire in 1953. Another 204 were turned over by the North Koreans between 1991 and 1994 and are currently in the possession of the Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii.

The records associated with each of the unknown remains in the Punchbowl cemetery will undergo rigorous evaluation before a decision is made to disinter. CILHI will first determine if there is strong circumstantial evidence associating a serviceman's name with a set of remains. Since mitochondrial DNA is expected to be used to identify most of these remains, a comparison blood sample must be obtained from a family member from the serviceman's maternal bloodline. Scientists believe approximately 70 cases may be candidates for disinterment.

The CILHI will direct the disinterment and will seek to identify each of the remains through forensic identification processes, including DNA. This laboratory identified the remains of Blassie in 1998. For the past five years CILHI has applied the science of mtDNA to approximately 45 per cent of its cases.