

MEMORANDUM FOR CORRESPONDENTS

No. 132-M
August 11, 1999

The remains of an American Army Air Forces officer and an American Red Cross employee have been identified and were interred in Arlington National Cemetery Friday, Aug. 6, 1999.

They are identified as 1st Lt. Harold F. Wurtz Jr. of Dearborn, Mich. and Harriet E. Gowen of Stillwater, Minn.

On May 12, 1945, Wurtz and Gowen took off from an airstrip in Nadzab New Guinea aboard a two-seat P-47D Thunderbolt. The aircraft disappeared after take-off and aerial search missions on May 12th and 13th proved unsuccessful.

In 1996 a local resident of Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea found wreckage of a P-47 near his home. He enlisted the help of neighbors to recover the wreckage from the crash site. Amid the wreckage they found human remains and personal effects including a frame from a women's pair of eyeglasses and an identification tag for "Wurtz, Harold F." The tail number found on the wreckage matched that of Wurtz's P-47. The remains and effects were turned over to the National Museum and Art Gallery in Papua New Guinea. The museum in turn released them to an U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii representative in March of 1998. Two months later, a CILHI team excavated the crash site and recovered additional human remains.

In September of 1998 another CILHI recovery team received remains from the U.S. Embassy which had been gathered by local villagers prior to the May 1998 recovery.

Anthropological analysis of the remains and other evidence by CILHI confirmed the identification of Wurtz and Gowen. More than 78,000 Americans remain unaccounted-for from World War II.