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Recovery Teams Leave For Around The World To Bring Home Fallen Servicemen

HICKAM AFB, Hawaii -- Recovery operations kick off next week for American service members unaccounted for from the Vietnam War and World War II. There are about 100 personnel deploying from here the week of Jan. 7 on the 68th Joint Field Activity to Vietnam to recover service members from four crash sites and two isolated burials. The 68th JFA will consist of six recovery teams and one investigative team. Team members are from mostly Hawaii-based U.S. military units such as Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (JTF-FA), the U.S. Army's Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii (CILHI) and the Joint Field Operating Base, Hawaii (Stony Beach).

Team members will begin work on recovery operations in six Vietnamese provinces. The investigation team is scheduled to investigate up to 29 cases involving unaccounted for servicemen. In addition to the JFA deployment, the second week of January there will be CILHI teams leaving for Kwajalein, Panama and Papua New Guinea recovering unaccounted for service members.

A 10-man team from CILHI will deploy to Kwajalein Island located in the Marshall Islands to recover the remains of Americans executed on the island during WWII. The mission is to recover the remains of the nine missing Marine raiders who were executed by the Imperial Japanese Navy in October of 1942. These Marines were captured on Makin Island after the 2nd Marine Raider Battalion's raid of August 1942. CILHI recovered and identified the other 19 Makin Raiders from 1999 to 2001. In the summer of 2001, six were sent home for burial and 13 were buried in Arlington National Cemetery. The team will also try to recover as many as three B-24 bomber crews buried on Kwajalein. The crews were last seen in late 1943 and early 1944 and may have been held at Kwajalein as prisoners. There are two recovery teams heading to Papua New Guinea from the CILHI. One 10-man team will deploy to the Lae region, where it will attempt to recover the remains of three service members who were lost in March of 1944 when their aircraft went down. The other 10-man team will head to the Wewak region, where the team will try to recover the remains of a pilot who went down in his P-38 in December 1943.

In Panama, a 10-man CILHI team will excavate a site where an O-47 disappeared during June 1941 in the jungles. The service members took off in their aircraft from France Field, Canal Zone heading for their home station in Rio Hato, Republic of Panama, when their aircraft disappeared enroute. The site is in a remote area, with the nearest town being El Cacao, 10 kilometers away. The wreckage is located on a slope in mountainous, thick jungle. There are more than 78,000 service members still unaccounted for from World War II and 1,950 service members unaccounted for from the Vietnam War. While the recovery and identification process may take years, the CILHI and JTF-FA remains committed to the fullest possible accounting of all service members killed in defense of their country. For more information please contact the CILHI Public Affairs Officer Ginger Couden at (808) 448-8903 ext. 109. For JTF-FA mission information contact Public Affairs Officer Capt. Gina Jackson, (808) 477-5301.