



News Release

Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (Public Affairs)
Washington, DC 20301-2400

Phone: (703) 699-1169

Fax (703) 602-4375

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 8, 2006

MISSING WWII AIRMEN ARE IDENTIFIED

The Defense POW/Missing Personnel (DPMO) announced today that two of four U.S. Army Air Forces airmen missing in action from World War II have been identified, and are being returned to their families for burial with full military honors.

The four are pilot Capt. Douglas R. Wight, Westfield, N.J.; co-pilot 1st Lt. Herbert W. Evans, Rapid City, S.D.; crew chief Cpl. John W. Hanlon, Arnett, Okla.; and radio operator Pfc. Gerald L. Rugers, Jr., Tacoma, Wash. Evans and Rugers were individually identified, while group remains of all four will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington D.C. on Tuesday.

On March 27, 1944, a C-46 crewed by these four airmen departed a base in Kunming, China, on route to Sookerating, India, as part of the massive allied resupply missions over the Himalayan Mountains, referred to as the "Hump." En route one of the crewmen called out for a bearing, suggesting the aircraft was lost. There was no further communication with the crew. The aircraft never reached its destination, and searches during and following World War II failed to locate the crash site.

Officials from the People's Republic of China notified the U.S. in early 2001 that the wreckage of an American WWII aircraft had been found on Meiduobai Mountain in a remote area of Tibet. The following year, a joint U.S.-P.R.C. team, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), excavated the site where they found human remains, aircraft debris and personal items related to the crew.

JPAC scientists and Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory specialists used mitochondrial DNA as one of the forensic tools to help identify the remains. Laboratory analysis of dental remains also confirmed their identifications.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO website at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703)-699-1169.

- end -