



News Release

Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (Public Affairs)
Washington, DC 20301-2900

Phone: (703) 699-1169

Fax (703) 602-4375

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 13, 2008

U.S. - JAPAN SEARCH FOR WWII JAPANESE MIAs IN ALASKA

The Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that a small team of Japanese and U.S. specialists is visiting Attu Island, Alaska, in search of burial locations of the Japanese soldiers who are still missing from a 1943 World War II battle there.

The Department of Defense, the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are supporting a team of three Japanese and 11 Americans. The team departed from Kodiak today via a C-130 on a flight to the U.S. Coast Guard Station on Attu Island. Some engineering equipment will be flown to Eareckson AFS on a U.S. Air Force C-17 and from there, the Coast Guard will move the equipment via C-130 to Attu Island.

The team's work on Attu Island will be supported by Army engineers from Ft. Richardson, Alaska, who will also employ ground-penetrating radar to help locate remains and guard against unexploded ordnance.

While visiting the island, the team is being housed at the long range navigation station and will be supported by the U.S. Coast Guard garrison. Attu Island is under the management and protection of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service which administers the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. At the end of Alaska's Aleutian island chain, Attu is the westernmost point of land of the United States.

In June 1942, a unit of the Japanese Army occupied Attu, capturing and imprisoning many of its inhabitants. U.S. forces began action to recapture the small island in May 1943, where fierce hand-to-hand battles led to about 540 American and 2,300 Japanese deaths. It was the site of the only land battle in WWII in North America.

In 1953, 235 sets of Japanese remains were recovered on Attu and reburied at Ft. Richardson, near Anchorage, Alaska. The Japanese later disinterred those remains, cremated them as part of a religious ceremony and reburied them at the same location.

The Japanese government assisted U.S. investigators in June 2007 in a visit to Iwo Jima in search of information related to American WWII MIAs. This 14-day deployment to Attu Island follows a similar four-day investigation there in July 2007.

- end -