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## DISSERTATION

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For the Degree of \_\_\_\_\_

“FORGOTTEN WAR, UNFORGOTTEN BODIES: LOCATING, REPATRIATING, AND  
IDENTIFYING THE REMAINS OF AMERICAN SERVICEMEN MISSING IN KOREA,  
1950-2018”

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FORGOTTEN WAR, UNFORGOTTEN BODIES:  
LOCATING, REPATRIATING, AND IDENTIFYING THE REMAINS OF  
AMERICAN SERVICEMEN MISSING IN KOREA, 1950-2018

by

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DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the College of the Marianna Brown Dietrich College of  
Humanities and Social Sciences of Carnegie Mellon University in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

After receiving eight years of education in biology, in the summer of 2014, I arrived in Pittsburgh and became a PhD student in the Department of History at Carnegie Mellon University. While I had taken or audited several undergraduate courses in history, my understanding of this discipline was hardly more than what one would learn from the popular history books sold by Amazon or Barnes & Noble. I had little idea about the skills required for historical research, what types of sources I should collect and rely on, and how to write a dissertation in the humanities. Six years later, I became a newly minted PhD in history with this dissertation. The transition would have been impossible without the generous support from dozens of people. They have enabled me to survive the PhD program in this new discipline, offered me valuable suggestions for sources, critiqued my writing, shared their personal stories with me for my research, and made me feel at home in a foreign country. While it is impossible to list everyone who had assisted me throughout these six years, I would like to highlight a few and demonstrate how much I appreciate their help.

I owe my greatest debt of gratitude to Dr. Jay Aronson, my academic advisor, and Dr. Katherine Lynch, former graduate program director. In the spring of 2014, they recognized my desire and potential to be a historian even though I had taken only a limited number of courses in the subject of history. Since I entered the program, they frequently talked with me in their offices, not only introducing me to the specifics of historical research, but also helping me improve my communication skills. In the research

seminars, these two faculty members guided me through transforming my interest in the Korean War POW/MIA affairs into a manageable research project. Most importantly, however, they have taught me the first lesson to facilitate my transition from a biologist to a historian—the ability to think critically about the social implication of any progress in sciences. Without this lesson, my dissertation may have resembled a simple review of DNA technology. I could never have appreciated the complexity of interaction between scientific knowledge and human beings.

Dr. Aronson's unwavering support, incredible patience, and timely help were indispensable to the completion of my dissertation. He not only made sure that my research and writing were on the right track, but also read, corrected, and polished my draft (as well as my grant applications and conference proposals) that were teeming with language issues and lacked clarity. His suggestions for sources significantly diversified the direction of my research and methods. His passion and generosity have deeply influenced me and taught me how to become an effective instructor in the future. The timely encouragement of Dr. Aronson has allowed me to maintain my momentum to complete this dissertation, helped me overcome the challenges of writing in another language, and encouraged me during the coronavirus pandemic that struck at the last stage of my PhD program.

Dr. Benno Weiner and Dr. John Stoner, my other dissertation committee members, have offered critical assistance to my research since I began to prepare for my qualification exams. They introduced me to the latest historiographies of East Asia and

US foreign policies. It was the first time I systematically read about these fields and began to recognize how to introduce my research project to a broader audience.

Therefore, I began to define myself as a military historian, a diplomatic historian, and a historian of East Asia. These two professors have offered consistent encouragement throughout my research and writing process. Their comments on my draft have challenged me to expand the context of my analysis, clarify my statements, and ensure the accuracy of my claims. I have been so fortunate to work on my first research project with the three outstanding professors over the past six years.

While my colleague, Dr. Christine Grant, is not on my committee, her help has been essential to my dissertation. Before coming to Carnegie Mellon University, I had received limited training in written English, let alone academic writing for the humanities. Despite the patience and frequent assistance from Dr. Lynch, the Global Communication Center, and my dissertation committee, I still faced the challenges of writing in a foreign language. Coordinated by Dr. Aronson and Graduate Program Director Dr. Nico Slate, Christine kindly offered line-editing and copy-editing of all my chapters before submitting my dissertation to my committee.

The generous financial support of the department and the university made it possible for me to stay in the United States for six years and fully commit myself to my favorite research project. The opportunities to teach Global Histories for Dr. Ricky Law, Dr. Nico Slate, and Dr. Andrew Ramey and to contribute to Dr. Edda Fields-Black's research have relieved my financial burden of receiving an education in this country and

have prepared me for teaching positions after graduation. Department Chair Donna Harsch has helped me explore various options to earn extra financial support. Graduate Program Directors Dr. Lynch and Dr. Slate approved my grant applications each year to defray the cost of conference trips and have supported my research in libraries and archives that do not offer research grants. Mr. Timothy Ruff, Ms. Lisa Everett, Ms. Natalie Taylor, and Ms. Army Wells have all assisted me with processing all reimbursement requests and paperwork.

Off-campus, the hospitality and knowledge of librarians and archivists in the United Nations, the United States, China, and Sweden have helped me acquire primary sources. Their suggestions of collections have been critical to my research. I am grateful to all of you. I will never be able to thoroughly show my sincere appreciation for all your help. Here are just a few cherished memories of my trips to over forty libraries and archives. After inquiring about my research, Mr. Luther Hanson of the US Army Quartermaster Museum went through shelves of unorganized documents. He photocopied the ones that he believed to be of interest for free even before I arrived at his office. Ms. Karin Sterky and her colleagues at the National Library of Sweden helped me locate the files of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and copy them at a reasonable rate. They saved me a costly trip to Sweden, not to mention the visa to reenter the United States. Ms. Susan Nash and other archivists at the National Personnel Records Center allowed me to peruse over 400 Individual Deceased Personnel Files of the Korean War era. Sometimes, they expedited my requests for the files of specific servicemen whom I

found valuable to my research so that I could save on the cost of staying in St. Louis.

I would have been unable to analyze the policies and forensic techniques of the US military had the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) not kindly permitted me to attend its family updates and annual briefings. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the help of Mrs. Fern Sumpter Winbush and Mr. Johnie Webb, who not only allowed me to attend these events, which are exclusive to POW/MIA families but also introduced me to some of those families. I also wish to extend my gratitude to DPAA investigators, such as Dr. Jennie Jin and Mr. Daniel Baughman. Many historical and technical details would never have been included in my dissertation had they not answered my long list of questions via email. Finally, I want to thank Major Jessie R. Romero for guiding me through the legal issue of citing the research and presentations of DPAA.

I also owe much gratitude to the POW/MIA activists and family members. As a Chinese citizen whose grandparents served in the Chinese military during the Korean War, I was hesitant to reach out to those whose loved ones had been killed by my grandparents' comrades-in-arms. However, it turned out that my hesitance was unwarranted. My dissertation has received generous support from several prominent figures in the country's POW/MIA affairs, including Ms. Ann Mills-Griffiths, Ms. Janella and Nicollette Rose, Ms. Donna Knox, Mr. Rick Downs, Mr. John Zimmerlee, Ms. Robin Piacine, Mr. Mark Sauter, and former New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson. Not only did they help me with tracing the POW/MIA movements in recent decades, but they also

introduced me to other POW/MIA families whom I subsequently interviewed. My one-hour conversation with Ms. Mills-Griffiths, who had transformed the POW/MIA issue into a national religion, at her office in Falls Church, VA in April 2018 is the most memorable aspect of my entire research. However, what impressed me most were the unexpected phone calls and letters from ordinary POW/MIA families in the summer of 2018. They generously shared their family tragedies with me after receiving my letter introducing my research project. While my conclusions do not necessarily correspond with these families' opinions regarding the POW/MIA campaigns, the US government, or North Korea, I hope that I was able to repay their incredible generosity to a limited extent by sympathizing with their personal loss and sharing my findings.

The community at 360 Baker Hall smoothed my transition from a biologist to a historian and helped me feel less lonely and isolated when I was conducting research alone in a foreign country. During daily conversations, I gradually built up my confidence to speak English. Moreover, it was after informal conversations that I had learned about interesting historical events, conference opportunities, job markets, and sometimes, ideas that prompted me to reconsider the structure and arguments of my dissertation. In my first few months here, Liu Jiacheng offered me valuable advice on how to survive the program. The cohort above me, David Busch, Christine Grant, Susan Grunewald, Mark Hauser, and Clayton Vaughn-Roberson, led me through almost every step in this program. My most enjoyable moments were when I shared news of the department and life in Pittsburgh with the people sitting close to me, Amanda Katz, Levi Pettler, Bennett



Koerber, and Bradley Sommer. Chatting with my cub-neighbor Javier Bonilla late at night about sports and current events became my favorite way to overcome boredom in writing. You are like my brothers and sisters.

Last but not least, I would like to show my appreciation for my family and friends. I owe the most to my mother Liu Fang and my father Zhao Li. Six years earlier, I decided to abandon my career as a biologist against my mother's wishes. While it was a shocking disappointment to her, she has never stopped supporting my new dream. She offered me critical financial help when my stipend and grant could not fund my research trips across the country. While she could no longer provide any advice for me regarding my actual research, she continued to give me general suggestions for how to be successful in graduate school and how to establish social networks with other scholars. My father has been my role model, encouraging me to overcome each challenge that I came across in the program. My grandfather, a historian of modern China and a biographer of Zhou En-Lai, has educated me on the essential characteristics of being a historian—resisting any temptation and pressure, writing the truth, which I will adhere to throughout my entire professional career. I am greatly saddened by his death a few weeks before I finish my dissertation. He did not live to see the start of my career as a historian. A PhD degree can by no means reciprocate their love and support, but it shows that I have not taken their kindness for granted.

*Liu Zhaokun  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA  
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## **KEY ACRONYMS**

CVF: Chinese Volunteer Forces

DMZ: Demilitarized Zone

DPAA: Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency

DPRK: Democratic People's Republic of Korea, also referred to as North Korea

GRS: Graves Registration Services

KPA: (North) Korean People's Army

MAC: (Korean War) Military Armistice Commission

POW/MIA: Prisoner of War/Missing in Action

ROK: Republic of Korea, also referred to as South Korea

UNC: United Nations Command

## **ABSTRACT**

The bodies of people who die during political purges, genocides, and wars carry multivalent political values. This dissertation argues that the remains of US servicemen lost during the Korean War had a second life amid the political strife between the United States and the DPRK after 1953. Domestically, uncertainty over the servicemen's fate due to the loss of their remains caused their relatives to doubt the US government's Cold War policies; internationally, the remains were associated with both the unending saber-rattling between the two countries and their concurrent attempts at cooperation. Besides their traditional roles in familial mourning and war memory, the soldiers' remains became bargaining chips in US-DPRK relations.

Utilizing archival materials, periodicals, and interviews with the relatives of missing soldiers, this dissertation analyzes the repatriation of US soldiers' remains from the Korean Peninsula since 1950. The US military adopted a milestone policy during the Korean War—repatriating all deceased servicemen to their homeland as quickly as possible. Because of this policy and the war's inconclusive result, it was forced to negotiate with its enemy to recover the lost bodies in areas in which it had no access and to develop new forensic methods to minimize the number of unidentifiable remains. Procedures for identification differed significantly from those in previous conflicts.

While the fate of thousands of servicemen remained uncertain, some American pundits and politicians depicted them as hostages of the Communist Bloc and recruited the families of missing soldiers for their domestic and international anti-communist

campaigns. A similar situation after the Vietnam War reminded Americans of the soldiers missing in Korea and established the norm that the military could only account for its missing personnel with their identified remains. The end of the Cold War created favorable conditions for recovering soldiers' bodies from Korea, and the DPRK grasped this chance to seek maximum political and financial concessions from the United States. This study furthers our understanding of the Korean War's legacy for Americans, the security situation in Korea, and the contribution of forensic science to the nation's war memories.

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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation began to take shape in 2005 when I watched the South Korean (ROK) war movie *Taegukgi* (also known as *The Brotherhood of War*) in high school. The film is set during the fiftieth anniversary of the Korean War. It opens with a ROK military investigation of a mass grave containing its soldiers south of the Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ). During the exhumation, a skeleton is unearthed along with a pen bearing the name Lee Jin-Seok. Tentatively identifying the skeleton as that of ROK Army Corporal Lee Jin-Seok, an officer types his name into a war casualty database and is astonished to discover that he survived the war. When Lee Jin-Seok, who has been searching for his missing brother since 1953, is summoned to this site to confirm the body's identity, he tells investigators that it is likely the remains of his elder brother, Lee Jin-Tae, a decorated ROK Army sergeant who had become a senior lieutenant in the North Korean (DPRK) People's Army. He was killed when he turned his machine gun on his comrades to save his younger brother. Lee Jin-Seok is relieved to learn that his brother is no longer alive somewhere in the DPRK.

Several points of Lee Jin-Seok's tearful testimony lingered in my mind. Based on my limited knowledge at the time, I assumed that the only reliable means to identify skeletal remains was to use personal belongings found near by. I was therefore surprised that Lee Jin-Seok's pen almost misled the investigators. While his memory set the record straight, I wondered what would have happened if Lee Jin-Seok had been killed in the war as well or had lost his memory. I was also eager to find out why the ROK

government was so interested in unearthing the bodies, because I knew that there had been no similar project in China. The body enabled Lee Jin-Seok to relive his experience with his brother, and all the bones lying strewn around the mass grave finally endowed South Korea with a sacred site to mourn lost lives in a civil war that had torn the country apart. The film made me realize that soldiers' remains hold political power.

On March 28, 2014, the ROK repatriated 437 bodies of Chinese soldiers to their homeland, another event which drew my attention to bodies of soldiers missing in the Korean War. By returning these remains, ROK President Park Geun-Hye wished to forge closer ties with China.<sup>1</sup> In later years, the ROK delivered more remains in an effort to repair its relationship with China, strained by the US military's deployment of the THAAD missile defense system in the ROK. The body repatriation in 2014 was the first time that the Chinese government had allowed the bodies of ordinary soldiers to be buried in China rather than in North Korea, intimating its frustration with the DPRK's refusal to halt its nuclear tests. This move also suggested that China was attempting to view the Korean War from a nationalist perspective by treating the dead as war heroes who sacrificed their lives for their country in its confrontation with the United States, rather than as internationalist fighters who reinforced their North Korean comrades. As I followed these developments, I became interested in the diplomatic value of soldiers' remains. The bodies of Lee Jin-Tae and the Chinese soldiers planted the seeds of my

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<sup>1</sup> Choe Sang-Hun, "After Six Decades, Chinese Soldiers Killed in South Korea Head Home," *New York Times*, March 28, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/29/world/asia/south-korea-returns-bodies-of-hundreds-of-chinese-soldiers.html>.

study. I seek to answer my lingering questions arising from *Taegukgi* and the homecoming of Chinese soldiers through the stories of over eight thousand US soldiers' bodies lost in Korea.<sup>2</sup>

## Research Questions

The Korean War (1950–1953) was the first major conflict that the US military engaged in after WWII. The tactics of the war, especially in its first year, closely resembled those of WWII. On June 25, 1950, armed and supported by the Soviet Union, North Korean forces (Korean People's Army, KPA) crossed the 38th Parallel to reunify the country, divided since August 1945. Within two weeks, the US military and its allies were deployed to South Korea. UN Security Council Resolution 84 called for the establishment of UN Command (UNC) to take charge of all forces against the DPRK.<sup>3</sup> That summer, North Koreans smashed the weak defense of UNC troops and almost swept them off the peninsula. In September, in the wake of the Inchon Landing near Seoul, UNC forces routed the exhausted DPRK troops and advanced to the Sino-Korean border by early winter. After multiple overt warnings from the Chinese government that it would take action to assist the DPRK after UNC forces crossed the 38th Parallel, China

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<sup>2</sup> The number inscribed on the Korean War Veterans Memorial is 8,177 (listed as missing, but actually all those whose remains are not recovered). This number includes those lost in North Korea, South Korea, and outside the peninsula as well as the unidentified bodies buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. Because they are not identified, there is no way to know whose bodies have been repatriated or not. Therefore, all those bodies are counted together as lost in Korea.

<sup>3</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 84 (1950), July 7, 1950, S/1588, all UN documents, unless otherwise noted, are from the UN Official Document System (UNODS). Considering the dominating role of the US military during the war, it is safe to use "US forces" and "UNC forces" interchangeably in this dissertation.



(Chinese Volunteer Forces, CVF) intervened in the war in October 1950. Three hundred thousand Chinese troops surprised UNC forces and pushed them back all the way south to the 38th Parallel. After months of seesaw battles, the frontline was finally stabilized at the 38th Parallel in the summer of 1951 and remained there until the armistice. Since then, both sides have resorted to peace talks and have abandoned military efforts to reunifying Korea, although battles persisted. On July 27, 1953, the war ended with the Korean War Armistice Agreement. The two sides would safeguard the peace through negotiations at the Korean War Military Armistice Commission (MAC, which consisted of the UNC on one side and the Chinese/North Korean military personnel on the other). For the first time in its history, the US military ended a war without a decisive victory. As a result, recovering its deceased service members who had been lost in the DPRK depended upon further negotiations with the North Koreans, which have been ongoing for decades. Moreover, the military had great difficulty determining the fate of the servicemen missing in action (MIA) in North Korea. This led to suspicion among families of missing soldiers that the CVF/KPA had held prisoners of war (POW) after the armistice. Without their bodies, the POW/MIAs could not be positively accounted for.

The Korean War was the first war in which all recoverable US soldiers' bodies were evacuated from the war zone without delay regardless of the ongoing hostilities or their families' wishes of leaving them overseas. This policy shift was the culmination of a long series of changes in the way that military remains were handled. Before the Civil War, the bodies of American soldiers were generally left where they fell without marked

graves—making the battlefield itself “sacred ground.” It was during the Civil War that the state assumed the duty of collecting the remains of deceased soldiers, burying them with honor in national cemeteries, and accounting for the missing. Beginning with the Spanish-American War, its first conflict overseas, the US military took on the duty of repatriating the recovered bodies pending their identification and families’ wishes to bury them in the United States. Unclaimed bodies were honored by burial in overseas cemeteries. This policy remained in effect for over half a century, through both world wars, until hostilities broke out in Korea.

Casualty management in Korea laid the foundation for entirely new procedures for processing soldiers’ remains in all subsequent wars, from the jungles of Vietnam to the deserts of Iraq. Bodies of deceased US service members were evacuated from the battle zone immediately after death, rather than at the end of the war. American soldiers were no longer allowed to be buried in overseas cemeteries. Examining this shift in policy in a war that had relatively little impact on American society is my first objective. In parallel, I want to know why so many bodies were lost in Korea at a time when repatriating bodies had become such an urgent task. Most bodies were apparently lost after battlefield defeats in a territory that came to be controlled by the DPRK. However, why were there so many barriers to recovering these bodies immediately after the war? Another core question is why there was so little success in retrieving these bodies in the decades after the war ended. Later, what enabled the repatriation of several hundred bodies of US soldiers during the 1990s and early 2000s despite the fact that there was no

change in the DPRK leadership? Was it just because of the end of the Cold War, or was the return of bodies an attempt to generate goodwill on both sides during an era dominated by nuclear crises, sanctions, and military skirmishes? Or could it have been that Americans suddenly remembered the bodies in the 1990s after collectively forgetting about them for over three decades? Finally, when the remains were repatriated, what role did forensic science play in helping the US military avoid awkward situations, such as the misidentification of the body of Lee Jin-Tae in *Taegukgi*, while fulfilling its commitment to servicemen's families?

My core argument is that the bodies of US servicemen lost during the Korean War were given a second life due to the political strife between the United States and North Korea in the officially unending Korean War since 1953. Because the US military failed to defeat its enemy during the war and remained hostile to the DPRK after the armistice, for decades the bodies of missing US servicemen remained inaccessible to Americans. US military officers in the MAC, who were once the only people authorized to negotiate with DPRK military personnel on security-related issues in Korea, had to rely on diplomatic means to recover the bodies. They used the remains to take rhetorical shots at the DPRK. These officers portrayed those who vanished behind enemy lines as prisoners still being held by the CVF/KPA. They denounced their opponents in the MAC as ruthless kidnappers and saboteurs of peace efforts. After the Cold War, the DPRK continued to maintain physical control of the remains of US soldiers in order to extract financial and political gains from the United States. Paradoxically, the recovery of the

remains became one of the few issues on which the two countries could cooperate, although their distrust and animosity never entirely dissipated. The lost soldiers also took on significance on the home front of the Cold War. In the 1950s, their families often stressed the pain of losing their loved ones to advocate for anti-communist, and even right-wing policies. More recently, however, POW/MIA families have spearheaded attempts to repair US-DPRK relations and facilitate the return of remains, during a time in which official US foreign policy barred direct contact between the two governments. Meanwhile, developments in forensic technology have made it easier to identify human remains with very small amounts of biological material, helping to assure families that they have received the correct bodies from North Korea.

### **Leave No Man Behind**

The practice of retrieving soldiers' remains from battlefields and honoring them in designated cemeteries can be traced back to ancient Greece. For example, Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War* records the Athenian troops' search for the bodies of their missing fellows and the elaborate public funerals for slain warriors. The *Illiad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid* also incorporate the paradigm of leaving no dead soldier behind. Greek warriors adopted this code out of loyalty and honor to their deceased fellows, vengeance for their loss, and communal unity. This ancient practice became the

basis for the modern tradition of recovering US soldiers' bodies worldwide.<sup>4</sup>

The practice of retrieving ordinary warriors' remains disappeared in the Roman Era and did not generally reappear until the nineteenth century (in the United States) or the twentieth century (in Europe). At a time when individual names and precise numbers of casualties did not matter, repatriation of the ordinary soldiers carried little value. When discussing the transition, Thomas W. Laqueur's *The Work of the Dead* notes that although the Romans inherited much from the Greeks, they did not "collectively commemorate their war dead by name at all." In the feudal armies of Europe and Japan, only those elites who mattered for history were recorded. While the lack of modern record-keeping and identification methods contributed to the situation, in most cases, the names and numbers of the others just did not deserve kings' or nobles' attention.<sup>5</sup> Laqueur demonstrates that, even in the nineteenth century, the bodies of British soldiers were left namelessly unburied or in mass graves in Waterloo, Crimea, Afghanistan, and South Africa.<sup>6</sup>

The Athenians' practice did not reemerge until the Industrial Age when citizen armies in democratic societies were raised to fight in total wars for their nations. The US Civil War is the first example of such a war. Researchers cite Lincoln's Gettysburg Address to discuss the value of honorably recovering the dead and compare his consecration of the Gettysburg National Cemetery to the funerals of Athenian warriors

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth D. Samet, "Leaving No Warriors Behind: The Ancient Roots of a Modern Sensibility," *Armed Forces & Society* 31, no.4 (Summer 2005), 642.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas W. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 377-379.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas W. Laqueur, "Memory and Naming in the Great War," in *Commemoration: The Politics of National Identity* ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 151-152, 158.

depicted by Thucydides. In events over two thousand years apart, granting the dead a decent funeral played critical roles in boosting national morale and unifying society.<sup>7</sup>

Drew G. Faust further elucidates these roles in her work on death during the Civil War. In this war, thousands of men died far away from home without attention in their final moments, which deviated from the death customs of Victorian domesticity that were crucial to the salvation of their souls and their reunion with their families in eternity. This religious concern and the primitive system of reporting casualties compelled soldiers' families to desperately attempt to locate their loved ones. The cost of finding and repatriating the dead was prohibitive for all but affluent families. The resulting inequality and ubiquitous neglect of the deceased on battlefields drove the Union government in 1862 to assume the duty of burying them with due respect in national cemeteries. With this landmark decision, caring for the dead was no longer the obligation of their families, but of the nation. As a contract between soldiers and their nation when they volunteered to serve, "these men had given their lives that the nation might live; their bodies [...] deserved the nation's recognition and care." The contract did not end at burying the recovered dead but included locating and naming the missing. Accounting for each man became the nation's reciprocal duty as these soldiers had volunteered to fulfill their obligation to the country. The exact numbers and names of the dead allowed the country to fathom the daunting price of freedom and national unity.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Samet, "Leaving No Warrior Behind," 624; and Edward Steere, *The Graves Registration Service in World War II* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1951), 1-3.

<sup>8</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage

Half a century later, Europe witnessed a horrifically destructive war and faced problems similar to those of the United States in 1862. By 1915, the British government could no longer tolerate leaving the dead to rot on battlefields. According to Laqueur, while authorities realized the political value of caring for the dead, citizens' demands for the fates and burial sites of their loved ones was pivotal for introducing policies for concentrating the dead in memorial cemeteries. Assuming responsibility for all dead soldiers was the result of the "public demand for equality of treatment" and "the fact that only the state had the resources to meet the new need for knowing about the names and places of the dead."<sup>9</sup> Contemporary British working-class men typically were not buried individually. However, when they were sent overseas to be slaughtered en masse for their nation in a stagnant war, these citizen soldiers deserved better treatment from the state than what they could have received at home from relatives or friends—private burials in well-maintained cemeteries. If, after suffering a grisly death, their corpses were simply left to rot together in hastily dug pits, they would lose their basic humanity. Marked, uniform graves for those who had sacrificed with honor and tablets inscribed with the names of the missing in cemeteries near battlefields preserved the connection between the deceased and the battles in which they perished. These graves symbolized the multitudes of sacrifices and reflected the democratization of memory that had gradually developed over the previous century.<sup>10</sup>

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Books, 2008), 9-10, 85, 99-101, 229, 260. Victorian values were influential in the nineteenth-century US.

<sup>9</sup> Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, 460-468.

<sup>10</sup> Laqueur, "Memory and Naming in the Great War," 159-161.

During WWI and its aftermath, many families of the dead preferred to have their loved ones buried at home rather than in national cemeteries. However, their requests were not always granted. Britain prohibited the repatriation of any British soldier buried on the continent. Had the British Army allowed some families to move the deceased to home cemeteries, it would have discriminated against the numerous families whose loved ones had no known graves. This would have contradicted the basic value that undergirded the country's task of recovering and honoring the dead—the democratization of death and memory.<sup>11</sup> According to G. Kurt Piehler, by nationalizing the memory of the dead, “the fallen were portrayed as bulwarks of stability who transcended class divisions” to offer complete allegiance to the nation and repulse postwar leftist revolutions across Europe.<sup>12</sup> Despite the populist democratic rhetoric, the dead were both physically and ideologically the property of the state, not their families. Jay Winter shows that during the Great War France had little planning for handling the dead but generally refused families' requests to claim the bodies. After the war, the French government considered concentrating all the deceased in national cemeteries close to the battlefields because leaving the bodies there would consecrate the battlegrounds. However, familial ties, religious concerns, and the difficulties for families in the southern and southwestern provinces in making a pilgrimage to the proposed cemeteries in northern France inspired nationwide campaigns

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<sup>11</sup> Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, 472; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Re-issue Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 27.

<sup>12</sup> G. Kurt Piehler, “The War Dead and the Gold Star: American Commemoration of the First World War,” in *Commemoration*, 168.



to bring the dead home. French authorities relented when many families resorted to illegal gravedigging to disinter the bodies and move them closer to home.<sup>13</sup>

In the United States, because of the distance between the two continents and uncertainty about the optimal way to commemorate the country's first commitment to Europe, the return of soldiers' bodies from France after WWI became a contentious issue. In the Spanish-American War, families of dead servicemen were given the right to choose the final resting places of their loved ones.<sup>14</sup> However, during WWI, where casualties were much more numerous, the US military initially had trouble deciding whether to ship its dead soldiers home from France. Lack of coordination with French authorities and poor transportation in France also complicated the military's decision.<sup>15</sup> What rendered the repatriation of bodies so controversial was a debate over how Americans wished to remember this war. Like their British counterparts, some US leaders proposed burying all war dead overseas to promote a sense of national unity. By establishing national cemeteries in Europe, the dead were drafted into a posthumous legion to represent the country's prestige and sacrifice for Europe and Western civilization. However, many parents and widows often rejected this nationalistic view and perceived their loved ones as private individuals rather than servants to the state. They refused further sacrifice and overwhelmingly demanded the bodies back.<sup>16</sup> Lisa M. Budreau's *Bodies of War*

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<sup>13</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 23-26.

<sup>14</sup> Steere, *The Graves Registration Service in World War II*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Lisa M. Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 37, 40, 46.

<sup>16</sup> Piehler, "The War Dead and the Gold Star," 169, 172-173.

attributes the military's reluctance to repatriate the remains to the state's desire to preserve national unity and signal its increasing involvement in postwar international affairs. American families nevertheless prioritized domesticity over the nation's presence overseas and personalized war commemoration by asking for the bodies.<sup>17</sup> After WWII, despite some initial debates, the military generally adopted WWI practices of allowing individual soldiers' families to decide whether their loved ones would be interred near their hometowns or in domestic or overseas memorial cemeteries.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to the practices in WWI, US military policies regarding deceased WWII and the Korean War soldiers have attracted limited scholarly attention. Most of the available studies are official military narratives of the operations to recover and repatriate dead soldiers.<sup>19</sup> Scholarly studies that make use of primary sources are scarce.<sup>20</sup>

The only study extensively utilizing archival sources to analyze the policies regarding the dead in the Korean War is a 2008 article by Bradley Coleman. Coleman intensively investigates the origin of the landmark policy that all bodies of US service members must be evacuated from Korea immediately after death and repatriated to the

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<sup>17</sup> Budreau, *Bodies of War*, 3, 5, 15, 47-48.

<sup>18</sup> Piehler, "The War Dead and the Gold Star," 181.

<sup>19</sup> The most important official historical studies related to the deceased servicemen are Edward Steere and Thayer M. Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead, 1945-1951* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, Office of the Quartermaster General, 1957) and Victor L. Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War* (unpublished, a copy is from the US Army Center of Military History at Fort McNair, Washington, DC).

<sup>20</sup> Here are some examples: W. Raymond Wood and Lori Ann Stanley, "Recovery and Identification of World War II Dead: American Graves Registration Activities in Europe," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 34, no.6 (November 1989): 1365-1373; Judith Keene, "Bodily Matters Above And Below Ground: The Treatment of American Remains from the Korean War," *The Public Historian* 32, no.1 (Winter 2010): 59-78; Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury & Honor Our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

United States regardless of their families' wishes (I refer to this policy as the "concurrent body return policy," CBRP, throughout the dissertation). While US military's experience in WWII contributed somewhat to the creation of this policy, he argues that the nature of a limited war in Korea—a relatively small number of casualties, a low burden on the military's logistical system, and the lack of a total victory—made it impossible for policymakers to withhold the remains until the war was over as they had done in the two world wars. Concurrently, in order to forestall frustration with the US involvement in the Korean War, which the military then defined as a limited police action rather than a struggle for national survival, the military repatriated the dead as soon as possible to offer solace to their families. Coleman concludes that "the Korean War fundamentally altered expectations surrounding the repatriation of the dead."<sup>21</sup>

## **Necropolitics**

It is essential to place the discussion of the search for dead and missing servicemen into a broader historiography of the political value of human remains. The choice between desecration and decent burial of bodies by states is closely linked to the political agendas of the ruling elites. This can be traced back to Sophocles' *Antigone*. In order to consolidate his rule over Thebes, Creon buried Eteocles to glorify him while leaving Polynices' body at the mercy of beasts as revenge for his treason.

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<sup>21</sup> Bradley Lynn Coleman, "Recovering the Korean War Dead, 1950-1958: Graves Registration, Forensic Anthropology, and Wartime Memorialization," *Journal of Military History* 72, no.1 (January 2008): 194-196, 207-209, 222.

How does a lifeless body attain so much power, and therefore political value?

Human beings share a universal ethical responsibility—“the obligation of the family members toward one another is said to be concentrated in one particular act: the proper handling of the body in death,” or “burial,” as stressed by Hans Ruin.<sup>22</sup> According to Greek mythology, if one’s body is left unburied, the soul will wander along the River Styx without rest. Leaving a body unburied means an insult to both the soul and the body. In his review of the European culture of death over two millennia, Laqueur suggests that bodies “define generations, demarcate the sacred and the profane and more ordinary spaces as well, and are the guarantors of land and power and authority, mirror the living to themselves.” Destroying them erases their humanity and assaults the communities they came from. On the other hand, proper burial of the dead symbolizes maintenance of order in the service of family, church, civil society, nation, class, and even history.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, depriving one of a decent burial stigmatizes the dead and reveals the impotence of his family and community. The bones of US soldiers scattered in unmarked graves in the DPRK symbolize North Koreans’ hate against Americans as well and the limits of the military might of the United States.

The twentieth century has been punctuated by genocide, civil war, and political turmoil, after which the disposal of dead bodies became a politically and ethically contentious issue. Historical and anthropological studies of the political value of remains

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<sup>22</sup> Hans Ruin, *Being with the Dead: Burial, Ancestral Politics, and the Roots of Historical Consciousness* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, 4, 8, 213-214.

have flourished subsequently. Katherine Verdery's pioneering study *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* shows that in post-socialist Eastern Europe, "dead bodies serve as sites of political conflict related to the process of reordering the meaningful universe. The conflicts involve elites of many kinds and the populations they seek to influence, in the altered balance of power that characterizes the period since 1989." Bodies were sites to assess blame, demand accountability, and define new national territories and identities by linking the dead with the survivors and their ethnic boundaries through ancestry. They were also impressed to substantiate the new regimes' de-Communization, rewrite the history of the communist era, and attract Western recognition.<sup>24</sup>

Following Verdery, scholars have analyzed how states have associated human corpses with sovereignty or governmentality by exploiting people's fear of improperly disposed bodies. Achilles Mbembe coined the term "necropolitics" to describe the use of death and dead bodies to make political claims. He argues that "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die." One way to wield such power is "the material destruction of human bodies and populations."<sup>25</sup> States or groups can exert political power through exposing or obliterating evidence of their violence to effectively terrorize people. For instance, analyzing the terrorism of the fascist paramilitary group Ustasa in WWII

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<sup>24</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 36, 38, 49, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no.1 (Winter, 2003): 11-12, 14.

Croatia, Alexander Korb contends that by leaving mangled bodies in plain sight of the surviving Serbian civilians in targeted regions, the Ustasa members “wished to show their opponents that peaceful coexistence [between multiple ethnicities] would never again return” and thus their land would be racially pure.<sup>26</sup> Max Bergholz similarly shows that the Ustasa in Bosnia caused the Serbs in Serb-minority communities to disappear silently in order to sow terror and uncertainty and thus dislodge the remaining Serbs. In towns with Serbian majorities, dismembered and decomposing corpses were displayed to intimidate the survivors, giving them no option but to escape. The Serbs adopted similar tactics in WWII to terrify their ethnic or political enemies after being provoked by these bodies.<sup>27</sup> In addition, according to Michael McConnell, Nazi executioners left the putrefying bodies of their victims in Eastern Europe unburied—a practice that defied basic humanity and European tradition. Such dehumanization further fueled the Nazi occupiers’ disgust for the local people, convincing themselves that they were ruling over subhumans who needed to be governed by violence.<sup>28</sup> Similar acts of necropolitics occurred in the Korean context. The DPRK, for instance, once threatened that the remains of US servicemen exhumed during farming and construction works could be destroyed or

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<sup>26</sup> Alexander Korb, “The Disposal of Corpses in An Ethnicized Civil War: Croatia, 1941-45,” in *Human Remains and Mass Violence: Methodological Approaches*, eds. Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Elisabeth Anstett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 120.

<sup>27</sup> Max Bergholz, “As If Nothing Ever Happened: Massacres, Missing Corpses, and Silence in A Bosnian Community,” in *Destruction and Human Remains: Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence*, eds. Elisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 15, 17-19, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Michael McConnell, “Lands of Unkultur: Mass Violence, Corpses, and the Nazi Imagination of the East,” in *Destruction and Human Remains*, 71.

left untended as long as the United States remained hostile.<sup>29</sup> This threat was likely intended to spark fears among POW/MIA families and thus compel them to petition their government to reconsider its aggressive policies toward the DPRK.

Political boundaries are also defined through bodies disposed of dishonorably. In Peru, in the 1980s, the Communist Shining Path guerrillas left freshly murdered bodies on roads with political slogans and the victims' alleged offenses to claim domination over land, not only militarily but also ideologically.<sup>30</sup> During the military dictatorship in Argentina and Chile, the juntas dumped the bodies of left-wing activists into the sea or in anonymous graves, as Antonius C. G. M. Robben shows, to deny them a ritual "that would reincorporate them into society as deceased members." These clandestine burials known only to the perpetrators marked the juntas' unchallengeable control over their territory by erasing all traces of their enemy. They also terrorized the comrades and relatives of the deceased.<sup>31</sup> In my work, it is unclear whether the DPRK had intentionally desecrated US soldiers' bodies, but by delaying their repatriation and making them hard to identify, it engaged in necropolitics in its political and ideological war against the United States.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For example, see "North Korea Says It is Moving US Soldiers' Bodies: Military Spokesman Says Remains Being Moved for Construction and Land Projects after US Suspended Recovery Program," *the Guardian*, October 13, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/13/north-korea-says-it-is-moving-us-soldiers-bodies>.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Kernaghan, "Time as Weather: Corpse-Work in the Prehistory of Political Boundaries," in *Governing the Dead: Sovereignty and the Politics of Dead Bodies*, ed. Finn Stepputat (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 179, 187-188.

<sup>31</sup> Antonius C. G. M. Robben, "Exhumations, Territoriality, and Necropolitics in Chile and Argentina," in *Necropolitics: Mass Graves and Exhumations in the Age of Human Rights*, eds. Francisco Ferrandiz and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 56-60.

<sup>32</sup> Sarah E. Wagner, "The Quandaries of Partial and Commingled Remains: Srebrenica's Missing and

The necropolitical power of atrocities can be weakened by democracy movements and the intervention of international human rights groups. Forensic investigation of victims' identities ensuing from such movements or interventions can enable the victims' relatives to reclaim their remains and solve the uncertainties surrounding their death. As Sarah E. Wagner suggests, such investigations "returned remains to relatives, providing them at long last with a grave to visit and knowledge of their loved ones' fate."<sup>33</sup> Moreover, identification of the dead can promote justice-seeking for the victims by providing evidence for the prosecution of the perpetrators and dismantling their terror. For instance, when the post-junta administration in Argentina exposed secret graves and, forensic experts identified the victims' bones (and the true identity of the children taken from them and given to military families), the junta was discredited and the survivors empowered to make political and legal claims against human rights abusers.<sup>34</sup> Victoria Sanford has observed how DNA experts have enabled communities in Guatemala to retrieve their loved ones from unmarked graves and turn the mourning ceremonies into political rallies promoting democratization and the prosecution of junta generals.<sup>35</sup>

However, forensic investigation is never a purely humanitarian project exclusively serving the bereaved victims' families, but an arena in which multiple

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Korean War Casualties Compared," in *Necropolitics*, 130.

<sup>33</sup> Sarah E. Wagner, *To Know Where He Lies: DNA Technology and the Search for Srebrenica's Missing* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Robben, "Exhumation," 71; Rita Arditti, *Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 163.

<sup>35</sup> Victoria Sanford, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 20.



stakeholders vie for power. State leaders replacing the perpetrators of atrocities are a major beneficiary of the forensic investigation because they can exploit the investigation to rally support for their own political agendas. Isaias Rojas-Perez has coined the term “necrogovernmentality” to complement necropolitics to describe how states manipulate such investigations. In his study of Peru, Rojas-Perez discovers that the current government employs the discourse of human rights and humanitarianism to exhume the unmarked graves of victims of earlier political violence and return the bodies to their families. In doing so, it has sought “a controlled recovery of the past” and striven to obscure violence and suffering during the previous period of state terror.<sup>36</sup> This effort hampers the survivors’ pursuit of justice and proper mourning while privileging political stability. In another case, while the international community exhumed and identified the Bosniak victims in the Srebrenica genocide of 1995 for justice and social healing, Bosniak political and religious elites seized this chance to assert their authority over Bosnian citizens. This goal was realized not only through ascertaining victims’ identities and offering the survivors monetary support but also by assessing the Serbs’ culpability in the Bosnian War and creating a national narrative that obscured the wartime suffering of the Serbian population. The Serbs have also deployed nationalist counternarratives of their own loss at the hands of the Bosniaks. As a result, a project publicized as being humanitarian and reconciliatory ultimately fed into the respective nationalist campaigns

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<sup>36</sup> Isaias Rojas-Perez, *Mourning Remains: State Atrocity, Exhumations, and Governing the Disappeared in Peru’s Postwar Andes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 18, 260-261.

of Bosniaks and Serbs.<sup>37</sup>

Atrocity survivors, their sympathizers, and investigators also have conflicting political agendas associated with forensic investigations. Adam Rosenblatt contends that forensic evidence is not apolitical, rather—“it enters a landscape of contested narratives and is interpreted differently depending on those narratives; it thus provides uneven and unpredictable political and moral capital depending on how stakeholders deploy it.”<sup>38</sup> Each faction of society perceives each identified body and grave through its unique lens of history. For example, in Spain, the graves of victims murdered by the fascists during its Civil War have been opened since 2000. Layla Renshaw argues that exhuming these bodies has weakened the post-Franco regime’s efforts to mute public debate over the atrocities of Franco’s rule. However, she observes that “the exhumation and reburial in Spain is not a unitary process.” In other words, the supporters of exhumation are “not homogenous or unified.” They are victims’ relatives resisting their marginalization within communities, political activists advocating leftist reforms, and archaeologists motivated by academic achievement and sympathy.<sup>39</sup> Jay Aronson traces the identification and enshrinement of the remains of the 9/11 attack victims to demonstrate how private suffering, mourning, and anger became intertwined with commercial interests, social healing, national politics, and the political ambitions of local leaders. Such divergent

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<sup>37</sup> Wagner, *To Know Where He Lies*, 3, 89-90, 240.

<sup>38</sup> Adam Rosenblatt, *Digging for the Disappeared: Forensic Science after Atrocity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 21, 65-66.

<sup>39</sup> Layla Renshaw, *Exhuming Loss: Memory, Materiality, and Mass Graves of the Spanish Civil War* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press Inc., 2011), 34-38.

interests produced a kaleidoscopic range of opinions about the optimal way to handle these remains and have perpetuated debates between various stakeholders.<sup>40</sup> Such conflicts of interest among the beneficiaries of forensic investigations can also be observed among the families of the soldiers who never returned from Korea or Vietnam.

On some occasions, even when the regimes that once wielded necropolitical power have been toppled, their successors remain reluctant to launch investigations of hidden graves for fear that the identities of the victims may reveal information that they would rather not become public knowledge. In Malaysia, as Frances Tay shows, Malay ruling elites were reluctant to investigate the burials of Chinese victims during WWII as this might remind people of the Malay leaders' wartime collaboration with Japan.<sup>41</sup> In her analysis of a mass grave in Ukraine exhumed in 1943 but never memorialized, Irina Paperno argues that each party of concern "tried to separate and categorize victims and perpetrators in a way that would dispel the mystery of mass murder."<sup>42</sup> However, the multivalent political and racial identities of the victims precluded a uniform narrative of commemoration. According to Joost Fontein, in 2011, the ruling party of Zimbabwe invited reporters to observe a state-sponsored survey of decomposed bodies in an abandoned mine to reinforce its anti-colonist, patriotic rhetoric and marginalize opposing parties. The party presumed that those bodies belonged to victims murdered by the white-

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<sup>40</sup> Jay Aronson, *Who Owns the Dead: The Science and Politics of Death at Ground Zero* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>41</sup> Frances Tay, "Remembering the Japanese Occupation Massacre: Mass Graves in Post-War Malaysia," in *Human Remains and Identification: Mass Violence, Genocide, and the "Forensic Turn"*, eds. Elisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2015), 232.

<sup>42</sup> Irina Paperno, "Exhuming the Bodies of Soviet Terror," *Representations* 75, no.1 (Summer 2001): 91.

dominated Rhodesian regime in the 1970s. Embarrassingly, the investigation revealed that some of the dead were likely the victims of more recent political purges committed by the party itself, which forced the government to seal the mine permanently.<sup>43</sup>

Paradoxically, sometimes the victims' families obstruct identification of bodies as a political tactic. By claiming to be relatives of the missing rather than the recovered dead, they can maintain their political influence indefinitely. Their power diminishes once the dead are buried and justice or compensation is sought. For instance, in Argentina, while forensic experts sought the names and stories of the left-wing young people missing during the junta rule, social activists, especially the mothers and grandmothers of the victims, objected to exhuming the dead. The deceased therefore remained disappeared and could be "pamphlets, headscarves, radio stations, and other tools of their activism" for seeking justice, rather than merely bones for private mourning. In Croatia, some local activists would rather be seekers of the missing than relatives of the dead. By refusing to accept that their loved ones were dead, they "wanted a full explanation as to why the bodies in the graves were believed to belong to their missing men." They doubted the scientific evidence to a nearly irrational degree in others' eyes, in order to demand that the guilt for their loss be assigned to someone.<sup>44</sup> This is the exact logic that some American POW/MIA activists have used to assert that the DPRK kept holding their loved ones despite irrefutable evidence of their demise—even the presence of their remains.

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<sup>43</sup> Joost Fontein, "Remaking the Dead, Uncertainty and the Torque of Human Materials in Northern Zimbabwe," in *Governing the Dead*, 114-116.

<sup>44</sup> Rosenblatt, *Digging for the Disappeared*, 114, 117-118.

In comparison, the role of bodies in diplomacy has received limited attention. A few studies place the return of Africans' remains from Europe in the global reflection on the legacy of colonialism. Viho A. Shigwedha discusses the repatriation from German laboratories in 2011 of the bones of Herero and Nama people massacred by German colonists in Namibia 107 years before. The study addresses the conflict between the Namibian public's advocacy of requesting German recognition of the genocide and demand for reparations versus the Namibian government's concern about sustaining its business and political support from Germany.<sup>45</sup> Another scenario that has attracted some attention is the search for the bodies of French patriots in post-WWII Germany. Devlin M. Scofield traces the reburial and repatriation of French Alsatians' bodies by German civilians and argues that their respectful treatment of the bodies demonstrated their remorse and rejection of Nazism, particularly to the French occupiers.<sup>46</sup> Jean-Marc Dreyfus focuses on a broader project of locating French civilians murdered in Germany. While he notes that the search played limited roles in the reconciliation between the two countries, he finds that French diplomats repeatedly referred to it as "a precondition for further negotiations" in their meetings with German delegates.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, the United States frequently regarded North Korea's or Vietnam's cooperation on accounting for

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<sup>45</sup> Viho Amukwaya Shigwedha, "The Return of Herero and Nama Bones from Germany: The Victims' Struggle for Recognition and Recurring Genocide Memories in Namibia," in *Human Remains in Society: Curation and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Genocide and Mass Violence*, eds. Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Elisabeth Anstett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 197-219.

<sup>46</sup> Devlin M. Scofield, "Corpses of Atonement: The Discovery, Commemoration, and Reinterment of Eleven Alsatian Victims of Nazi Terror, 1947-52," in *Human Remains in Society*, 141.

<sup>47</sup> Jean-Marc Dreyfus, "Rationalizing Bodies? The French Search Mission for the Corpses of Deportees in Germany, 1946-58," in *Human Remains and Mass Violence*, 139.

POW/MIAs as a prerequisite for normalizing US-DPRK or US-Vietnam relations.

### **Studies of the Unending Korean War**

Over the last six decades, there have been a few thousand books and articles talking about the Korean War. However, serious historical studies on the causes, tactics, diplomatic strategies, and social impacts of the war are relatively rare compared to those of WWII and the Vietnam War. My study contributes to research on military operations in the Korean War by investigating the policies and operations of the US Graves Registration Service, tasked with recovering deceased servicemen from Korea. It also complements multiple fields in the political and diplomatic studies of the war, especially the war's legacy in the decades after the armistice.

My study treats the DPRK as a sovereign state that has the power to solve the lingering issues of the Korean War, including returning the bodies of the US soldiers, to serve its own interests. Academics have heatedly debated the agency of the North Koreans in the Korean War. The war had long been portrayed in US official statements and popular literature as a proxy war engineered by the USSR and fueled by China.<sup>48</sup> Since the late 1970s, the release of documents from the US government and Nikita Khrushchev's memoir from the Soviet Union have inspired new analyses of the war that go beyond the context of the US-USSR confrontation. This revisionist interpretation of

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<sup>48</sup> There are also serious studies making such an argument, like Davis Rees, *Korea: The Limited War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964).

the war came to see it as more of a civil conflict than a battle of the global Cold War.

Robert R. Simmons' *The Strained Alliance* pioneered this trend. Bruce Cumings' canonical two-volume *Origins of the Korean War*, which uses a massive collection of Korean sources seized in Pyongyang in 1950, places Koreans at the center of the Korean War.<sup>49</sup> He argues that the nature of the conflict was civil and revolutionary and suggests that the DPRK fought for its complete independence from imperial powers.<sup>50</sup> Since the 1990s, however, a more balanced view that considers both the civil nature of the war and the influence of China and the USSR has been widely accepted due to better access to Soviet documents and the entry of Chinese and Russian scholars into the debate over the war's origin. For instance, Chen Jian contends that while Kim Il-Sung's revolutionary scheme motivated him to launch the Korean War in June 1950, China's entry into the war was assured due to security, ideological, and historical reasons.<sup>51</sup> William Stueck argues that the war must be first comprehended as Koreans' irresistible desire for reunification and only secondarily a conflict in the broader US-USSR conflict. Deep divisions among Koreans played the most critical roles between 1945 and 1950; but as the war unfolded, the great powers gradually determined its course.<sup>52</sup> My research considers that the DPRK

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<sup>49</sup> William Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 2-3, 254n7; Allan R. Millett, "The Korean War: A 50-Year Critical Historiography," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 24, no.1 (2001): 190-191.

<sup>50</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War* Vol. I: *Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), xxi; Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War* Vol. II: *The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 764.

<sup>51</sup> Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), x, 215.

<sup>52</sup> Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 4-6.

always had the ultimate decision with regard to the specific issue of recovering and returning US soldiers' remains, even though the US military tended to confront North Korea, China, and Russia simultaneously to account for its missing personnel.

While recovering US soldiers' remains is currently a bilateral task between the United States and North Korea, until 1994, the latter's principal interlocutor over the struggle for the remains had been the UNC. The UNC, however, is not well covered in the historiography of the Korean War. While some military studies have focused on non-US troops serving under the UNC, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the UNC itself. Perhaps because it was under the control of US military generals rather than the UN, historians have treated it as an ordinary US military command and thus have not paid particular attention to it. This is despite the fact that the UNC was in charge of all forces that fought against China and North Korea in this war. Most of the studies focusing on the UNC were conducted in the 1950s and 1960s as ways to discuss the legitimacy of the US intervention in the Korean War.<sup>53</sup> My study extensively uses UNC records to investigate negotiations at the MAC between the UNC and the DPRK over recovering bodies, before the DPRK withdrew from it in 1994.

The policies concerning the postwar repatriation of the US soldiers' bodies lost in the DPRK are included in subparagraphs 13.f and 58.a(2) of the Korean War Armistice Agreement; thus, the recovery efforts should be seen an integral part of the enforcement

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<sup>53</sup> The observation is based on Keith D. McFarland, *The Korean War: An Annotated Bibliography*, revised 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2010). This book discusses about three thousand publications regarding the Korean War up to 2010.



of the armistice agreement. Although many scholars have studied the peace negotiations over the past six decades, they have focused primarily on the negotiation tactics before reaching the agreement and how the repatriation of POWs delayed the truce. Most studies of the armistice do not investigate how both sides later manipulated the armistice agreement for military or political reasons.<sup>54</sup> I focus on subparagraphs 13.f and 58a.(2) to exemplify how the UNC and the DPRK used the agreement to blame each other for undermining peace in Korea to gain an advantage in their ideological battles at the MAC.

Since one of the reasons for retrieving US soldiers' remains has been to ascertain the fate of POWs suspected to be detained by North Korea after the war, my project complements studies of Korean War POWs. The POW issue was so contentious that it delayed the peace process in Korea for more than a year. One consequence is that Chinese and American POWs have been a popular topic in the literature for decades. However, before the 2000s, excluding some military studies about alleged brainwashing of US POWs in North Korea, our understanding of the POWs has mostly come through memoirs and interviews of these prisoners.<sup>55</sup> In 2000, Richard J. Faillace Jr.'s

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<sup>54</sup> Some critical studies are Barton J. Bernstein, "The Struggle over the Korean Armistice: Prisoners or Repatriation?" in *Child of Conflict: Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953*, ed. Bruce Cumings (Seattle: University of Washington, 1983), 261-307; Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks* (Ithaca, CA: Cornell University Press, 1990); Walter G. Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1966); Alfred D. Wilhelm, *The Chinese at the Negotiating Table: Style and Techniques* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1994). The POW issues not resolved in Korea were later introduced to the negotiations between China and the United States. Thus, they are not studied in the confrontation between the UNC and the DPRK at the MAC, but in the US-PRC relationship. For example, see Sydney D. Bailey, *The Korean Armistice* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992) and Xia Yafeng, *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-1972* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>55</sup> Some analyses of the Korean War POWs were included in the general studies of POWs of all wars. For example, Robert C. Doyle, *Voices from Captivity: Interpreting the American POW Narrative* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994).

dissertation took advantage of documents released after the collapse of the Soviet Union as well as congressional investigation records of POW/MIA affairs to examine the multi-faceted propaganda value of the POWs to each country involved in the Korean War.<sup>56</sup> More recently, new studies have integrated POW interviews and memoirs, newly declassified US military interrogation records of the prisoners, and official wartime documents into comprehensive analyses. These diverse documents have shed light on the unpreparedness of US servicemen for captivity and the pressure they faced in camps as the cause of their collaboration with their captors. Concurrently, they emphasize that the US Cold War propaganda exaggerated the weakness of the soldiers at the hands of their captors, stigmatized the POWs, and prompted the military's prosecution of some repatriated prisoners in order to defend its position in the McCarthy era.<sup>57</sup> Academic studies on the indoctrination of Chinese POWs and the violent confrontations between these prisoners and their guards or fellow POWs have been published in recent years.<sup>58</sup>

Hostility in Korea also impacted US domestic political campaigns, especially after the war entered the stalemate phase in mid-1951. One theme of the literature on how the Korean War reverberated in the United States is the rise of right-wing political agendas in the 1950s. As early as 1957, Selig Alder argued in *The Isolationist Impulse*

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<sup>56</sup> Richard Joseph Faillace Jr., "Prisoners of Cold War: Soviet and US Exploitation of American Korean War Prisoners, 1950-1956," (PhD Diss. Oklahoma State University, 2000), 293-296.

<sup>57</sup> Raymond B. Lech, *Broken Soldiers* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 3-5; William Clark Latham Jr., *Cold Days in Hell: American POWs in Korea* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 4-5; Charles S. Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number: Exploiting Korean War POWs at Home and Abroad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6-8.

<sup>58</sup> The most recent study is David C. Chang, *The Hijacked War: The Story of Chinese POWs in the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).

that the dismissal of MacArthur from the position of Commander-in-Chief, UNC, and the stalemate in the Korean War united isolationists against Truman's policy in Korea. While some hardcore nationalists called for pulling out of Asian affairs, other isolationists merely disapproved of supporting US allies in Europe against communism, and fiercely advocated a decisive blow to crush the Asian communists because a war in Asia was less likely to be restrained by mutual consultation and coordination with European allies.<sup>59</sup>

Steven Casey's *Selling the Korean War*, a comprehensive account of the executive branch's public relations campaigns and propaganda to rationalize the war, reveals that the war led to a split within the Republican Party and the rise of a reactionary wing that fiercely repudiated the internationalist policies of both Truman and Eisenhower.<sup>60</sup>

Besides studies of the isolationists among political elites, Masuda Hajimu focuses on ordinary people around the world during the Cold War. He argues that the fear of a thermonuclear war, the likelihood of which soared during the Korean War, prompted these people to spontaneously defend order and harmony at home and resist subversive impulses. In the United States, the response to the Korean War was not only a grassroots anti-communist campaign but also anti-Civil Rights, anti-New Deal movements.<sup>61</sup> As mentioned above, the suspected collaboration of repatriated POWs with their captors also became involved in domestic Cold War politics, especially those launched by McCarthy

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<sup>59</sup> Selig Alder, *The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth-Century Reaction* (New York: Abelard, 1957; Collier, 1961), 406-409, 427. Citation refers to the Collier edition.

<sup>60</sup> Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 363-364.

<sup>61</sup> Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 8-9, 24.

and his followers.<sup>62</sup> My study analyzes how the allegedly unreturned POWs intervened in domestic right-wing movements.

The memory of the Korean War has rarely been investigated due to its limited influence on Americans. I have found no monograph on Americans' memory of this war in extant historiographical studies. However, there are some cultural or literary studies on this topic. James R. Kerin Jr.'s dissertation in 1994 analyzed the popular literature and movies about the Korean War and concluded that while the war was "memorialized for its very obscurity," the veterans actively resisted this status through writing novels or memoirs and inspiring Korean War movies.<sup>63</sup> A book that partially explores Americans' memory of this war is Suhi Choi's *Embattled Memories*. Like Kerin, she argues that unlike all other American wars, the memory of the Korean War is shaped by "collective amnesia." The official account of saving South Korea from communism has overshadowed alternative interpretations of specific events in the war offered by historians and journalists.<sup>64</sup> My work considers how individual families' memories of the war were rekindled through finally receiving the remains of their loved ones.

The postwar US-DPRK conflict has always been treated as a separate subject rather than as a continuation of a war that has never officially ended. North Korea's provocations against the US or ROK forces, including the recent nuclear crises on the

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<sup>62</sup> Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number*, 109, 114.

<sup>63</sup> James R. Kerin Jr., "The Korean War and American Memory," (PhD Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 370.

<sup>64</sup> Suhi Choi, *Embattled Memories: Contested Meaning in Korean War Memorials* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2014), 13, 53-54. Rather than focusing on the United States, this book intensively studies the war memory in South Korea.

Korean peninsula, are usually contextualized in concurrent ideological or geopolitical struggles. While there have been a few studies about both Koreas' attempts to reunify the peninsula, America's efforts to solve this and other remaining issues of the Korean War has yet to be thoroughly investigated even though it is the US forces that have maintained the status quo in Korea. My focus on the soldiers' remains enables me to contribute to the literature of postwar US-DPRK relations by connecting them to their wartime conflicts.

Many scholars have observed that the two countries' policies toward each other followed consistent principles for several decades. For more than six decades, US hostility toward the DPRK has remained constant. As Michael Hunt argues, one of the ideologies of US diplomacy in the twentieth century was fear of the spread of revolution, especially communist expansion.<sup>65</sup> Thus, avoiding a DPRK annexation of South Korea became the priority of the US forces in Korea. Lee Chae-Jin stresses that a consistent US policy has been the containment and deterrence of the DPRK while it sanctioned inter-Korean negotiations and multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia since the 1970s. The United States made the security of South Korea its top priority on the peninsula.<sup>66</sup> Since the DPRK began to develop its nuclear arsenal in the 1990s, US presidents of both parties and the conservative wing of Congress have resorted to coercion in an effort to disarm North Korea, even though this strategy does not appear to be working.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (1987; repr., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 17. The page number is in the 2009 edition.

<sup>66</sup> Chae-Jin Lee, *A Troubled Peace: U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 275-294.

<sup>67</sup> Leon V. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 5, 9-10. Sigal's book is likely the most frequently cited one when scholars analyze

Before the 1990s, there were few studies of North Korea's tactics to engage the United States or the outside world in general. Due to overwhelming anti-DPRK propaganda, the DPRK has always appeared as an irrational or reckless satellite state of the Communist Bloc. This situation changed only after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, when diplomatic files regarding North Korea were released to the public from Eastern European countries. Scholars were able to conduct serious studies of North Korea in response to the Korean nuclear crises.<sup>68</sup> They generally have concurred that the DPRK leaders were rational decision makers in their engagement with the United States.<sup>69</sup> Their goals have been consistent for decades, although they adjusted their tactics according to the DPRK's domestic and international situation rather than the directions of China or the USSR. Therefore, researchers now do not exclusively resort to Cold War rhetoric or geopolitical analysis to study North Korea but recommend exploring its internal factors, like ideology and culture, to interpret its strategies to engage the United States.<sup>70</sup>

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the North Korean nuclear issue during the Clinton administration. On the situation during the early George W. Bush administration, see Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2004), 396-406. This book is also widely cited in academia, though a large part of this book is based on US diplomats' experience. On the policies of the George H. W. Bush and Obama presidencies, see Walter C. Clements Jr., *North Korea and the World: Human Rights, Arms Control, and Strategies for Negotiation* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 207, 236-239, 290-291.

<sup>68</sup> Charles K. Armstrong, "Trends in the Study of North Korea," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no.2 (May 2011), 357.

<sup>69</sup> This is an idea repeated by almost all serious studies of North Korea. Here are some examples: Bruce Cumings, *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American-East Asian Relations* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2002), 122; Yong-Ho Kim, *North Korean Foreign Policy: Security Dilemma and Succession* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 21; Pacheco Padro Ramon, *North Korea-US Relations under Kim Jong Il: The Quest for Normalization* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 2. Ramon says that despite the different arguments among scholars about US policies to denuclearize the DPRK, all at least agreed that the DPRK "is not an irrational actor."

<sup>70</sup> Brandon Kyle Gauthier, "The Other Korea: Ideological Constructions of North Korea in the American Imagination, 1948-2000," (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2016), 13-14, 363-364; Kim, *North Korean Foreign Policy*, 28.

The official ideology of the DPRK, *Juche*, has been repeatedly cited to elucidate North Koreans' initiatives to interact with the world. *Juche* can be defined as autarky, independence (even from its socialist allies), and self-defense at all costs with regard to policymaking. The preservation of *Juche* and the rule the Kim family are the DPRK's top priorities.<sup>71</sup> Charles K. Armstrong argues that the DPRK never fully aligned with China or the USSR but rather sought a balance between the two to maximize its own interests. North Korea has portrayed itself as a non-aligned state when engaging with either the superpowers or developing countries in order to diversify its trade partners and intervene in multiple postcolonial nation-building projects.<sup>72</sup> In Mitchell Lerner's case study of the Pueblo Incident, in which the DPRK seized a US Navy spy ship on January 23, 1968, in international waters, he demonstrates that defending *Juche* was the main priority of DPRK diplomacy. Rather than in support of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, it was economic difficulties, a border clash with China, and a domestic challenge against Kim Il-Sung that prompted him to provoke the United States. When Kim could not adhere to autarky and felt threatened, his aggression toward the United States, which was motivated by national concerns rather than by a desire to support China or the USSR, at least persuaded his people that he could uphold the self-defense aspect of *Juche*.<sup>73</sup>

In its ongoing conflict with the United States, the DPRK has aimed to bargain on

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<sup>71</sup> Charles K. Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 6, 53; Kim, *North Korean Foreign Policy*, 5, 11, 14.

<sup>72</sup> Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak*, 5, 168.

<sup>73</sup> Mitchell Lerner, "A Failure of Perception: Lyndon Johnson, North Korean Ideology, and the Pueblo Incident," *Diplomatic History* 25, no.4 (Fall 2001), 654-655, 658, 662, 665-669.

an equal footing without any interference from other countries, as *Juche* specifies.<sup>74</sup> The overall goal of the DPRK remains unchanged—evicting US forces from South Korea, signing a peace treaty with the US government to supersede the Korean War Armistice Agreement, and normalizing relations with the United States. North Korea has also included seeking economic benefits and security promises from the United States in its diplomatic missions since the 1990s.<sup>75</sup> As I will elaborate throughout this dissertation, normalizing its relations with the United States, scrapping the Korean War Armistice Agreement, and obtaining economic aid have been the primary demands of the DPRK before releasing US soldiers' remains to the US military.

Because the United States remains hostile to the DPRK and the latter will not budge on the regime's survival, the DPRK's military provocations, particularly its development of nuclear arsenals since the 1990s, have been used as a tactic by its leaders to demonstrate their commitment to *Juche* and to force the US government into serious negotiations. Michishita Narushige concludes that the purpose of the DPRK's sporadic military provocation at the DMZ is to destabilize the peace maintained by the Armistice Agreement. It attempts to persuade the United States to scrap the agreement and

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<sup>74</sup> Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak*, 291-292; Kim, *North Korean Foreign Policy*, 88; Ramon, *North Korea-US Relations under Kim Jong Il*, 4; Andrew C. Nahm, "The United States and North Korea since 1945," in *Korean-American Relations, 1866-1997*, eds. Yor-Bok Lee and Wayne Patterson (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 104.

<sup>75</sup> Nahm, "The United States and North Korea since 1945," 141; Ramon, *North Korea-US Relations under Kim Jong Il*, 134; Narushige Michishita, *North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns, 1966-2008* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 187; Robert A. Manning, "The United States in North Korean Foreign Policy," in *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, ed. Samuel S. Kim (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1998), 140; Larry A. Niksch, "North Korea's Negotiating Behavior," in *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, 69.



renegotiate a new peace treaty with the DPRK.<sup>76</sup> Scholars of North Korea's nuclear ambitions generally agree that the deterrent power of the DPRK's nuclear arsenal has convinced the United States to seek peaceful solutions to the nuclear crises on the Korean Peninsula and to discuss broader security and diplomatic issues with North Korea.<sup>77</sup> Like nuclear weapons and military provocations, the bodies of US soldiers have also been entangled in the DPRK's attempt to establish reciprocal relations with the United States.

Scholars of North Korean diplomacy predominantly focus on the saber-rattling across the DMZ as any small misunderstanding may trigger a thermonuclear war. In contrast, friendly gestures between the United States and the DPRK have been largely ignored. *Famine in North Korea* by Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland is one of the few books to address this limited collaboration. While it mainly interrogates the factors that caused the DPRK's catastrophic famine, its authors argue that "the nuclear crisis and the question of food aid became inextricably linked, but in unexpected ways, as the provision of assistance was used to induce North Korean participation in diplomatic negotiations." They contend that despite the urgency of relieving the famine, the DPRK never stopped demanding that the United States relinquish its intrusive policies in order to defend *Juche*.<sup>78</sup> Regarding the return of POW/MIA bodies, none has comprehensively

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<sup>76</sup> Michishita, *North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns*, 138, 156-157.

<sup>77</sup> There are too many studies on this point to enumerate. Here are just a few examples: Nahm, "The United States and North Korea since 1945," 142; Kim, *North Korean Foreign Policy*, 3, 101, 107; Cummings, *Parallax Visions*, 122-123, 127, 136, 147; Clements, *North Korea and the World*, 90; Ramon, *North Korea-US Relations under Kim Jong Il*, 25-27, 32-34, 41-43, 49-50, 56-59, 68-70

<sup>78</sup> Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Famine in North Korea: Markets, Aid, and Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 5, 136, 238.

explored how this tactic has helped the DPRK to approach the United States.

### **POW/MIA Literature**

The current definition of the acronym POW/MIA denotes all servicemen whose remains have not been repatriated from a war theater, regardless of the conditions of their loss. The development of this term will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV, but for now, it is important to note that I am using the post-Vietnam War definition of this term to describe the servicemen whose remains had never been repatriated from Korea. Extant POW/MIA studies tend to focus on the possibility that POW/MIAs were detained in Vietnam after the Vietnam War and the issue's implication in postwar American politics and culture. My study is the first to primarily investigate the unrecovered remains. While I frequently use phrases like POW/MIA remains or missing soldiers' remains in my work, I do not contest the possibility that some POW/MIAs were secretly detained by their captors for years, or even decades, as many POW/MIA families firmly believe, although some specific claims of living POWs may be called into question.

Despite the large number of missing Korean War soldiers, very few scholars have studied this topic, perhaps due to Americans' "collective amnesia" regarding the war mentioned above.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, historians have been more interested in documenting the stories of repatriated POWs who became entangled in Cold War ideological struggles

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<sup>79</sup> Only Faillace's dissertation has one chapter discussing the effort of the US military to seek the presumably unrepatriated POWs from the Soviet Union in the years after the Korean War.

both in the POW camps and in their home countries. There has been far more work on the political capital of the POW/MIAs from the Vietnam War in American society, and my project will bring scholarly attention to the political struggles surrounding the soldiers missing in Korea. I also aim to expose the interactions between POW/MIA activists of these two wars. Other than their military tactics, connections between the wars have received limited attention from scholars of the Korean War.

Current literature on Vietnam War POW/MIAs falls into three major categories. The first is the work of POW/MIA activists and their sympathizers. The authors of many, if not most, of these accounts tend to write from an anti-US government point of view. They have insisted that Vietnam continued to hold American POWs after 1973 to blackmail the United States. The US government, however, intentionally ignored the existence of these POWs because it wanted to brush aside the bitter memory of the war, conceal its impotence in recovering all POWs from the Communist Bloc, or resume trade with its ex-enemies.<sup>80</sup> This conspiratorial perspective was eventually adopted by the Korean War and WWII POW/MIA activists who had little success in their efforts to locate their loved ones in the decades after they went missing.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> This is a popular topic of the Vietnam War literature; here are just a few examples: Frank Anton and Tommy Denton, *Why Didn't You Get Me Out?: A POW's Nightmare in Vietnam* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Scott Barnes and Melva Libb, *BOHICA: A True Account of One Man's Battle to Expose the Most Heinous Cover-up of the Vietnam Saga!* (Canton, OH: Bohica, 1987); Monika Jensen-Stevenson and William Stevenson, *Kiss the Boys Goodbye: How the United States Betrayed Its Own POWs in Vietnam* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990); Mark Sauter and Jim Sanders, *The Men Left Behind: Henry Kissinger, the Politics of Deceit and the Tragic Fate of POWs after the Vietnam War* (Washington, DC: National Press Books, 1993). Their research methodologies and sources vary significantly, and thus are difficult to evaluate.

<sup>81</sup> Two key examples are Laurence Jolidon, *Last Seen Alive: The Search for Missing POWs from the Korean War* (Austin, TX: Ink-Slinger Press, 1995) and Mark Sauter and John Zimmerlee, *American*

Second, military officers and government employees have written official reports, books, and research articles highlighting the effort of the US military to account for the POW/MIAs, some of which refute the conspiracies alleged by the POW/MIA activists. For instance, spurred by these conspiracy theories, Paul D. Mather, an Air Force officer who spent fifteen years in Southeast Asia accounting for the Vietnam War POW/MIAs as a member of the Joint Casualty Resolution Center, wrote a quasi-official narrative of his agency's operations to locate the missing.<sup>82</sup> Sponsored by the Defense Department, a RAND Corporation researcher named Paul M. Cole published a trilogy of reports in 1994 in which he reviewed the circumstances under which the POW/MIAs of WWII, the Cold War, and the Korean War were lost, analyzed the probability that they were held by the Communist Bloc after these conflicts ended, and evaluated the POW/MIA policies of the US military. Based on his exhaustive research with US government documents and its investigation in Russia, Cole concludes that China did not retain American POWs after the Korean conflict. Moreover, he found no evidence to confirm the claims that some prisoners were not released from the USSR or North Korea after the war.<sup>83</sup> A senior archivist of the National Archives, Timothy K. Nenninger, tracked US POWs in Germany

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*Trophies: How US POWs Were Surrendered to North Korea, China, and Russia by Washington's "Cynical Attitude"* (self-pub., Orcinus, LLC, 2013). By interviewing the authors and reading their research notes, I learn that the authors indeed carried out an extensive study of primary sources; but for some reason, their books are not well annotated like all other books of this kind. On WWII stories, see Robert S. Miller, *America's Abandoned Sons: The Untold Story of Thousands of US Soldiers Secretly Murdered in the USSR* (self-pub. Xlibris, 2012).

<sup>82</sup> Paul D. Mather, *M.I.A.: Accounting for the Missing in Southeast Asia* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1994), xiv.

<sup>83</sup> Paul M. Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1994), xv-xvi, 241-243.

who were alleged to have been kidnapped by the USSR after 1945. After interpreting the same evidence as the people making the allegations, he contends that conspiratorial activists did not use acceptable research methodologies. Their studies, therefore, cannot be trusted and were likely prompted by “unclear motivations.”<sup>84</sup>

Understanding the motivation for the anti-government allegations that US POWs were abandoned in Vietnam is the subject of the third category of POW/MIA studies. The earliest scholars used only official published documents and anecdotes to support their claims. Douglas L. Clark, a military officer at the National War College, wrote the first monograph to analyze how the POW/MIA issue affected US politics of the 1970s. He reveals that the US military intentionally misrepresented servicemen who were unlikely to have survived as POWs being secretly tortured by their captors in order to fan the flames of hatred against Vietnamese communists. Clark argues that the Nixon administration planned to employ such propaganda to counteract the escalating antiwar movements. However, because ending the war seemed to be the most reasonable way of recovering the POWs, this tactic backfired and turned the POW/MIA campaigners against the government. After the war, unable to recover as many prisoners as it had once announced, the government lost its credibility and its flexibility to repair relations with Vietnam.<sup>85</sup>

Clark’s conclusion has been repeatedly cited by later historians, but his study (published

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<sup>84</sup> Timothy K. Nenninger, “United States Prisoners of War and the Red Army, 1944-45: Myths and Realities,” *The Journal of Military History* 66, no.3 (July 2002), 781.

<sup>85</sup> Douglas L. Clarke, *The Missing Man: Politics and the MIA* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1979), 114-116.

in 1979) misses the high point (the 1980s) of the Vietnam War POW/MIA activism.<sup>86</sup>

After observing the high-water mark of the POW/MIA movement in the 1980s, scholars sought to comprehend why the allegation that US POWs were still detained in Vietnam survived over a decade after the war even though there was little credible evidence to back it up. H. Bruce Franklin's polemic *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America* and Susan K. Keating's trade book *Prisoners of Hope* identify specific people who perpetuated this "myth," and exploited the trauma of ordinary POW/MIA families, for their own personal gain. Keating uses multiple microhistories to reveal how in the 1980s, for diverse political or financial reasons, people fabricated evidence of surviving POWs and raised families' false hopes for their return.<sup>87</sup> Franklin traces the critical factors incentivizing the fabrication. He argues that administrations from Nixon to Clinton "attempted to perpetuate the belief that live POWs *might* exist while avoiding the position that they *do* exist" in order to rationalize any of their policies to Vietnam without directly addressing the live POW issue. Reagan notably transformed the "myth" to a national religion. Reinforced by the fabricators, he portrayed the POW/MIAs as victimized by their communist kidnappers and betrayed by the previous administrations,

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<sup>86</sup> This idea is accepted by the three major monographs of the historical study of the Vietnam War POW/MIA movements, see H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America: How and Why Belief in Live POWs Has Possessed a Nation*, Expanded and Updated Edition (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 40; Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 60-62; Patrick Gallagher, *Traumatic Defeat: POWs, MIAs, and National Mythmaking* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 9.

<sup>87</sup> Susan K. Keating, *Prisoners of Hope: Exploiting the POW/MIA Myth in America* (New York: Random House, 1994), 121.

in order to glorify the Vietnam War, justify his escalating confrontation with the USSR, and boost his conservative political campaigns. However, this scheme backfired when he failed to bring back the allegedly live POWs.<sup>88</sup> My project, however, shows that exploiting the POW/MIA issue in anti-communist campaigns did not originate with Reagan. Joseph McCarthy and other right-wing politicians in the 1950s also made such attempts, but neither Truman nor Eisenhower ever endorsed such campaigns. This partially explains why the influence of Korean War POW/MIA campaigns on Americans was nowhere near that of Vietnam War ones.

In recent years, historians have begun to take advantage of newly available archival sources to explore the rise and popularity of the Vietnam War POW/MIA movements. Michael J. Allen's *Until the Last Man Comes Home* is the most comprehensive study of this issue. Focusing on the activists from the prominent National League of POW/MIA Families (NLPF), Allen argues that these activists were desperate to find the guilty parties who cost Americans a victory in Vietnam and prevented the liberation of their loved ones—the “decadent and disloyal domestic elements.” The “elements” were antiwar activists, liberals who promoted reforms in the 1960s that challenged established social orders, and bureaucrats who lacked the volition to defeat Vietnam. He contends that the activists’ personal suffering from the defeat in Vietnam “lent it [the NLPF] disproportionate influence, influence it used to prompt tough-talking

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<sup>88</sup> Franklin, *M.I.A.*, xvi, 124, 133, 136, 162-163.

Republicans and revanchist policies meant to avenge American defeat.” While Reagan initially garnered support from the POW/MIA activists, their alliance dissolved when he endeavored to depict the Vietnam War as a crusade against communism for the sake of restoring prewar national unity, threatening to marginalize the latter’s victimization. Therefore, as Allen argues, despite their partisan discourse, POW/MIA activists “were driven not by party politics but by the politics of loss.” The politics of loss was embodied by their persistent contempt for “a government grown too powerful for the good of its people” in fighting wars, solving the POW/MIA issue, and creating war memories.<sup>89</sup> I observe that some staunch Korean War POW/MIA activists were also desperate for finding the persons who were responsible for the ordeals of their loved ones, and adopted right-wing rhetoric in their political campaigns. However, whether these activists had held similar cynical attitudes about the government is difficult to determine.

Following Franklin and Allen, Patrick Gallagher identifies defeat and victimization as the basis for the birth and longevity of POW/MIA activists’ political campaigns, but he adopts a transnational perspective. By comparing the campaigns after the Vietnam War with those in West Germany after WWII, he contends that when morally questionable wars cannot be honored in traditional ways, sympathy for the missing soldiers presumed to be languishing in enemy camps overshadows the military’s responsibility for the defeat and its wartime atrocities against civilians (returned POWs

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<sup>89</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 7-9.



were sometimes blamed for defeats). Fixing the country's attention to the missing men's ordeal, West Germany and the United States "minimized their own feelings of war guilt and recast themselves as victims of wars they had started."<sup>90</sup> The Korean War could also be defined as a shocking defeat to Americans as the United States could neither vanquish its enemy nor unambiguously justify the war, which facilitated its POW/MIA campaigns.

Scholars have also realized the new political powers of servicemen's bodies after the Vietnam War, which were insignificant in the 1950s. Shortly after the Korean War, the US military stopped demanding the North Koreans return the bodies of soldiers who had undoubtedly perished in the DPRK, and declared these bodies irrecoverable; such a practice ceased to be feasible after the Vietnam War due to the postwar political environment. In his cultural study, Thomas M. Hawley argues that the repatriation of bodies was part of the country's grand project to regenerate the prewar social cohesion and to overcome the unprecedented uncertainties, suspicion, and loss that had occurred during the war and had torn the society apart. The lost or unidentified bodies symbolized the uncertainties and anxieties accumulated during the Vietnam war, and the materiality of the identified bodies restored some desperately needed certainty, unattainable by official propaganda. The identification of bodies also partially redeemed the defeat in Vietnam embodied by the inability to recover the POW/MIAs.<sup>91</sup> The pursuit of bodies to account for POW/MIAs ultimately drove the US military to confront North Korea again

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<sup>90</sup> Gallagher, *Traumatic Defeat*, 2.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas M. Hawley, *The Remains of War: Bodies, Politics, and the Search for American Soldiers Unaccounted for in Southeast Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 30-32, 80, 83-84.

in the 1980s over the issue of the remains of US servicemen. The recovery of US soldiers lost in the DPRK could similarly be perceived as an effort by the US military to redress its setbacks in the Korean War. Holding the bodies and rendering them hard to identify allowed the DPRK to deprive the United States of the chance of redemption.

The best-studied case of identifying a soldier's body after the Vietnam War is the identification of First Lieutenant Michael J. Blassie, who was once buried in the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery. Following the discourse of Benedict Anderson, Michael Allen argues that selecting a body as the Vietnam War unknown was Reagan's endeavor to seek national unity. POW/MIA activists, however, were unhappy with the idea of interring a Vietnam War soldier in the tomb. They argued that this act meant that their leaders had prematurely closed the book of the Vietnam War without rescuing all POWs. Through exhuming the body, activists wished to prove it identifiable, thus exposing what they saw as the government's duplicity.<sup>92</sup> Agreeing with Allen's findings, Sarah Wagner analyzes how technology, particularly DNA testing, and politics cooperated in building war memories. The Tomb of the Unknowns commemorates collective loss and epitomizes national identity, but this mode has been gradually superseded by the return of identified bodies to individual families enabled by modern forensic technology. According to Wagner, the nation increasingly remembers and justifies wars by individualizing sacrifice and honor in local settings.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Michael J. Allen, "Sacrilege of a Strange Contemporary Kind: The Unknown Soldier and the Imagined Community after the Vietnam War," *History & Memory* 23, no.2 (Fall/Winter 2011), 90, 93, 121-122.

<sup>93</sup> Sarah E. Wagner, "The Making and Unmaking of an Unknown Soldier," *Social Studies of Science* 43,

In her recent book *What Remains*, Wagner describes forensic science as a “language of memory.” Science enables the identification of individual missing soldiers and localizes the ritual of honoring each of them. Their homecoming is “not merely fodder for national celebration,” but “allows the living to participate in the rituals of exceptional care otherwise afforded to the states.”<sup>94</sup> This idea coincides with Allen’s concept of the politics of loss—families resisted the government’s encroachment on the memory of the loss in the Vietnam War. The identification of the over eight hundred unknown Korean War dead at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific is also the result of this new way of remembering wars.<sup>95</sup> They will not be collectively remembered as “unknown” by the country, but individually as relatives of over eight hundred families.

While the domestic politics of the POW/MIA issue has been well studied, scholars have not paid comparable attention to its role in diplomacy. Allen, Franklin, and Hawley only tangentially mention that in order to gain a moral upper hand in negotiations with Vietnamese officials, American negotiators required Vietnam to divulge the fate of every missing American. Because this task was impossible to fulfill, the US military felt justified in rejecting any request from the Vietnamese, like offering them reconstruction aid.<sup>96</sup> Both US military officers and their Chinese and DPRK counterparts employed

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no.5, 631, 633, 649.

<sup>94</sup> Sarah E. Wagner, *What Remains: Bringing America’s Missing Home from the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 12-13.

<sup>95</sup> Some Korean War POW/MIA families also advocated the exhumation of the body in the Korean War vault of the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington, but the military has not made a decision.

<sup>96</sup> Franklin, *M.I.A.*, 70, 74, 81; Hawley, *The Remains of War*, 73, 78, 83; Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 87-91.

precisely the same tactic at the MAC in the 1950s, hoping to hold the other side responsible for sabotaging peace in Korea. Lewis M. Stern, an experienced defense department official and expert in the POW/MIA issue, has written the only monograph exclusively on the diplomatic confrontations between the United States and Vietnam over the missing soldiers. He argues that Vietnam held the remains to seek normalization of the US-Vietnam relations and maximal financial interest.<sup>97</sup> North Korea's preconditions before releasing American POW/MIAs' remains were strikingly similar to those of Vietnam. What enabled Vietnam to set such preconditions was its sense of supremacy. Sarah Wagner argues that "the remains of missing US service members allow those [Vietnamese] who control their possession a means to demonstrate the power derived from that possession."<sup>98</sup> North Korea has also excelled at wielding this power.

## Chapter Outlines

Beginning with the nature of the Korean War, Chapter I investigates why and how American soldiers' remains were lost in the DPRK and the origin of the suspicion that missing servicemen were POWs secretly detained by China or North Korea after the war. In this chapter, I describe the military, logistical, cultural, and political factors leading to the birth of the concurrent body return policy (CBRP). The policy ordered all US

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<sup>97</sup> Lewis M. Stern *Imprisoned or Missing in Vietnam: Policies of the Vietnamese Government Concerning Captured and Unaccounted for United States Soldiers, 1969-1994* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Company, 2012), 127-130.

<sup>98</sup> Sarah E. Wagner, "A Curious Trade: The Recovery and Repatriation of US Missing in Action from the Vietnam War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57, no.1 (2015): 186.

soldiers' remains to be evacuated from Korea at the earliest possible moment. The CBRP thus eliminated the possibility that the United States would establish memorial cemeteries in Korea. Most families accepted the CBRP, although some held to the philosophy that heroes should eternally lie where they fell. More importantly, some relatives of servicemen indicated that until they received the remains of their loved ones, they would not accept their family members' death even if the military had declared them dead.

The first step of the CBRP was to recover the bodies. Chapter II starts with the deployment of Graves Registration Service (GRS) units to recover bodies in Korea. It then investigates the origins of the military's proposal to recover the bodies lost in the DPRK after the armistice. While this plan later became subparagraph 13.f in the Korean War Armistice Agreement, its implementation was contingent upon further negotiations between the two sides. This chapter concludes that mutual distrust and the unilateral actions of US forces prevented this article from taking effect and led to the CVF/KPA's alternative plan that CVF/KPA soldiers would deliver the bodies of Americans buried in North Korea across the DMZ by themselves, and vice versa. The exchange, designated "Operation Glory," brought back fewer than three thousand dead Americans, leaving thousands more in the DPRK. Finally, this chapter describes the US military's primary methods of identifying the recovered bodies at various stages of decomposition.

The unrecovered bodies were soon recruited to fight political battles both at the DMZ and on the domestic frontline of the Cold War. Chapter III begins with an analysis of a widely circulated roster—a list of a few hundred Americans whose fate the military

demanding that the CVF/KPA explain and who might have been held hostage after the war. The fate of these men may never be known, or knowable, and this situation has allowed them to be exploited for decades at the DMZ by US military negotiators who used them to prove their opponents' immorality and ruthlessness. Domestically, the missing men's families and right-wing politicians cited this list to denounce what they considered to be the betrayal of these men by communist sympathizers in the US government. They contended that only harsher, unilateralist policies against the Communist Bloc would restore the prestige of the United States that had been tarnished by the defeat in Korea.

Chapter IV endeavors to answer how the Korean War POW/MIA activists reacted to the possible scenario that some American POWs would never be released by their captors after the Vietnam War. They feared that since the US military again failed to defeat a communist regime due to its reluctance to commit all its efforts to the war, some POW/MIAs would similarly be detained by their captors. It analyzes the extent to which these activists cooperated with their Vietnam War counterparts. Conversely, it considers how the Vietnam War POW/MIA activists cited Korean War POW/MIA issues in their own political agendas. These activists had significantly more robust and longer influence than the Korean War POW/MIA campaigners and reinforced the latter's effort to learn about the fate of their loved ones. Particularly, the Vietnam War POW/MIA activists promoted combining several military casualty categories (killed, missing, captured, presumed dead) into the single term POW/MIA that defines anyone whose remains have

not been recovered as a possible prisoner languishing in an undisclosed POW camp. This action expanded the official number of Korean War POW/MIAs from several hundred to over eight thousand. Finally, this chapter indicates that procedures for identifying the dead in Vietnam were generally adopted from the experiences accumulated in Korea. In both wars, there were families who were politically motivated to reject the identification.

Chapter V shifts the focus to cooperation between the United States and the DPRK over the recovery of remains since 1990. North Korea adopted a quid pro quo tactic to approach the Americans with offers of bodies in order to survive in a new global order in which many of its traditional allies had rejected communism and had reconciled with the United States. This chapter analyzes the DPRK's demands for releasing US servicemen's remains. The political and monetary price for the bodies has varied over time according to the urgent needs of the regime in Pyongyang. Delivery of remains from the DPRK has been frequently suspended by political crises in Korea.

While the DPRK has returned several hundred containers of US soldiers' remains since 1990, the US military must confirm their identities before sending them to their families. Simultaneously, it must judge whether the DPRK was faithfully cooperating with the United States by returning the correct remains. Chapter VI explores the scientific and political factors that had prompted the US military to adopt DNA profiling to identify the remains since the early 1990s. This chapter also asks how DNA profiling has influenced POW/MIA families' understanding of reliable identification of the dead. It ends with the families' diverse reflections on burying their recently identified loved ones

decades after their demise.

### **A Note on Sources**

The first four chapters of this dissertation primarily rely on textual sources. The first two chapters cover the years between 1950 and 1954, and the third and fourth chapters mostly include stories prior to the 1980s. Records of events during these periods are readily available at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), presidential libraries, local libraries, and contemporary newspapers. The identification of individual soldiers is investigated through both contemporary military technical manuals and their case files, which were just opened to the public in the mid-2010s. I analyze the negotiations between the UNC and the DPRK at the MAC before the 1980s with minutes in English deposited in the NARA. However, the files that were passed between the two sides during their meetings at the MAC are not accessible.

The records of negotiations between the United States and the DPRK since the early 1980s discussed in Chapter V are still beyond the reach of ordinary researchers. Except in rare cases, details of these meetings remain elusive. The narratives of these talks are therefore based on the personal notes and memoirs of the people who participated. I frequently cite news articles and official releases from the Defense Department to investigate the major debates during these negotiations. Furthermore, because the DPRK traded US servicemen's remains for critical political concessions or financial aid from the United States, its official propaganda sometimes discussed the



return of the bodies, which gives me access to the perspectives of both sides.

The primary sources in Chapter VI are much more diverse. Documents on the initial discussion of adopting DNA profiling in the military were released to the public thanks to POW/MIA activists' FOIA requests and US Senate hearings on POW/MIA affairs in 1991 and 1992. The military also educates the POW/MIA community about DNA technology through public briefings and on the Internet. Moreover, journalists have written abundant news reports on the families' response to DNA technology and how it is used for the identification of their loved ones. I have also interviewed over two dozen POW/MIA families to acquire first-hand experience of their opinions on modern forensic technology and the significance of recovering their loved ones' bodies. The Defense Department regularly releases abstracts of individual POW/MIAs' identification reports. Although the full reports of individual casualties identified in recent years may take decades to declassify, I acquired several servicemen's dossiers while doing research for this dissertation.

## CHAPTER I: BODIES LOST

At the conclusion of battle, the vanquished are usually quick to flee. When the enemy is pressing hard, the routed army may become disorganized. Wounded and dead soldiers are often left to the mercy of the advancing foe. From the Roman military disaster in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest (9 CE) to the Highway of Death in the First Gulf War, the corpses of the losing army have been destroyed by microbes, scavenging animals, and inclement weather, or at best, received a less-than-honorable burial or cremation by enemies or local civilians. Unless the defeated side is able to recover the lost territory, there is little hope of offering a decent burial for the dead or accounting for those left behind. The Confederate Army's two fateful excursions into the Northern territory during the Civil War show that such scenarios are not alien to Americans. When the dead men's remains matter little to political and military elites, the inability to recover the corpses and the missing does not affect their strategic planning. However, in recent times when the care of the war dead has been assumed by the citizens of some western countries to be the responsibility of the state, losing bodies with no attempt to recover them has become intolerable to statesmen, military leaders, and civilians alike. Accordingly, policies have had to be improvised and implemented to minimize the permanent loss of servicemen's remains.

During the Korean War, the US Armed Forces faced a new challenge: retrieving their service members' corpses. In the early stages of the war, the US Army repeatedly suffered military fiascos. Furthermore, hundreds of airmen vanished behind enemy lines

during the UN Command (UNC) forces' attempt to disrupt the enemy's supply route. Even after the war entered its static phase in the summer of 1951, small units were often eliminated during reconnaissance missions. Such defeats were not unfamiliar to Americans in WWII, but the situation in Korea was different because of the war's final outcome. The United States accepted a stalemate in Korea. It lost the chance to reoccupy North Korea, where thousands of US combatants' bodies lay on battlefields or near POW camps. The stalemate prevented the US military from searching for them. It could not dictate to the North Koreans and Chinese, as it had the Germans and Japanese in 1945, that they must reveal the fate of all the missing and captured and surrender the bodies of the deceased. By the time of the Korean War, neither China nor North Korea had ratified Convention (I) of the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949. Its article 17 requires signatories to record the identities of deceased enemy personnel, bury them honorably, and facilitate their repatriation.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, neither country was likely to have the capacity to document all US casualties, even if it had been obligated to do so.

Coincidentally, both the US military and the American public had unprecedented interest in recovering the remains of servicemen during the Korean War. Rather than burying them in temporary cemeteries until the cessation of hostilities, the US military decided to evacuate dead soldiers promptly to safe zones before the war ended. Informed by its experiences gained in WWII, the military responded to pressure from American

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<sup>1</sup> First Convention, Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field of 12 August 1949. China ratified it in 1956, and North Korea in 1957.

families, the need to minimize the permanent loss of remains, and even American culture. Moreover, it decreed that all the remains must be buried in the United States instead of overseas memorial cemeteries. This chapter discusses the circumstances of the loss of US soldiers' remains, the genesis of new repatriation policies, and Americans' understanding of this unprecedented policy for handling dead soldiers.

### **Loss of Remains in the Korean War**

The military defeats in 1950 and early 1951 in Korea account for most losses of the bodies of US soldiers. In the summer of 1950, the first unprepared and under-manned US Army detachment collapsed before North Korean elite soldiers and tanks, resulting in hundreds of casualties strewn over the rice paddies of South Korea and long lines of POWs executed en route to camps in North Korea.<sup>2</sup> Despite General Douglas MacArthur's successful Inchon landing, in the winter of 1950, the overconfident but still ill-prepared US troops met more debacles in their abortive attempts to reach the Yalu River after China entered the war. Battalion-size forces were sometimes annihilated along the frozen dirt roads of North Korea.

According to the statistics of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), most of the unaccounted-for Americans' bodies are still to this day on the battlefields where the US troops had to retreat in disarray.<sup>3</sup> In the first battle of the

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<sup>2</sup> Although the US military has been able to conduct investigations in South Korea freely since late 1950, many of the missing have not been recovered or were later buried as unknown.

<sup>3</sup> DPAA, Map "Loss Concentrations, North Korea", [http://www.dpaa.mil/portals/85/images/korea/map\\_](http://www.dpaa.mil/portals/85/images/korea/map_)

Korean War involving American ground troops, on July 5, 1950, Task Force Smith, a conglomeration of units from the 1st Battalion of the 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division scrambled into position near Osan, ROK with 540 soldiers. The ill-fated detachment was routed after it encountered Soviet-made tanks of the North Korean People's Army (KPA). On the next morning, only 250 men rallied again for duty.<sup>4</sup> Two weeks later, the whole division met a similar defeat. Because these battles occurred in South Korea, the remains of most casualties were recovered in 1951 (but many have never been recovered). In contrast, it was hopeless to recover the more numerous bodies lost after the defeats above the 38th Parallel. On the night of November 1–2, 1950, the 8th Cavalry Regiment faced a crisis near Unsan, DPRK when it was surprised by the Chinese Volunteer Forces (CVF). Two of the regiment's three battalions lost five hundred men, while the third was virtually destroyed, leaving about two hundred survivors out of over its one thousand troopers.<sup>5</sup> On November 30, to avoid being surrounded by Chinese troops, the rear-guarding 2nd Infantry Division had to run through miles of "gauntlet" from Kunu-ri to Sunchon, where the machineguns and mortars of Chinese soldiers lined the retreating route. The division suffered more than four thousand casualties in a single day.<sup>6</sup> In the area of the Chosin Reservoir, the retreating convoy of the 31st Regimental

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remains.jpg.

<sup>4</sup> Roy E. Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu* (1961; repr., Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1992), 65-76.

<sup>5</sup> Allan R. Millett, *The War for Korea, 1950-1951: They Came from the North* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2010), 304.

<sup>6</sup> Roy E. Appleman, *Disaster in Korea: The Chinese Confront MacArthur* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), 75, 285-288.

Combat Team was eliminated by Chinese forces—at least a thousand men were killed or captured in their wrecked vehicles.<sup>7</sup> The 1st Marine Division evacuated the same area with its units mostly intact, but the marines had to abandon their dead comrades-in-arms during their southward flight. Finally, in February 1951, after ROK forces were dispersed by CVF troops near Hoengsong, the supporting US infantry and artillery soldiers were thrown into a one-sided slaughter, with 726 dead. Although Hoengsong was later secured by US forces, over two hundred captured men perished in their march to POW camps.<sup>8</sup>

The lost remains of approximately 4,817 US soldiers were left at the mercy of the triumphant CVF/KPA.<sup>9</sup> Chinese veterans have revealed little about the treatment of American soldiers' bodies in their memoirs. However, the indecent burials of the bodies by the CVF/KPA could be surmised through some recent accounts. A presentation by the DPAA suggested that the manner of burial could depend on who initially buried them—professional US Graves Registration personnel or the enemy. If they had been buried by the enemy, their bones were usually randomly piled against each other.<sup>10</sup> The remains interred by Korean civilians, northern or southern alike, met no better fate. As the top priorities for the civilians were to bury the bodies as soon as possible for cultural and hygienic reasons, they tended to bury them in mass graves, or even cremate them.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Millet, *The War for Korea*, 340.

<sup>8</sup> Millet, *The War for Korea*, 406; the numbers are also from the memorial website of one battalion involved in this battle (the 15th Field Artillery Battalion), <http://www.15thfar.org/hoengsong.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Nese F. DeBruyne and Anne Leland, *American War and Military Operation Casualties: Lists and Statistics*, CRS Report RL32492 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 9. The 4,817 number is those confirmed killed.

<sup>10</sup> DPAA Family Updates, May 20, 2017, Syracuse, NY.

<sup>11</sup> On Korean culture, see Jahyun Kim Haboush, "Dead Bodies in the Postwar Discourse of Identity in

Donna Knox, one of the founders of the Coalition of Families of Korean and Cold War POW/MIAs, described the mass graves to me. During her visit to North Korea in 2001 with US military personnel to recover US soldiers' bodies, she came to a recently excavated pit of soldiers' remains. She realized:

You could tell, they had not been laid to rest by loved ones. They had been thrown in the ground by enemies. They were haplessly scattered all over, and the arms or legs in every way, and they were on top of each other, and everything else.<sup>12</sup>

Leaving servicemen's remains in such horrible disarray contravened American culture and military principles. In recent years, the threat of flooding of some burial sites by DPRK's dam construction has made the loss of these bodies more upsetting.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, the chance of recovering these remains has been greatly diminished by the passing of the people who buried them and knew their whereabouts.<sup>14</sup>

A considerable number of American airmen also went missing in Korea. Because the CVP/KPA had only defensive fighter units, almost all aerial operations happened in North Korea, which meant that the crew members of stricken aircraft were either killed at their crash sites or captured by North Korean patrols or vigilant civilians. At least 4,053 airmen were shot down during the war. Among them, more than 1,200 are still listed as

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Seventeenth-Century Korea: Subversion and Literary Production in the Private Sector," *Journal of Asian Studies* 62, No.2 (May 2003): 415-442. For an example of cremation by local people, see the case file of S/Sgt. Jose C. Campos Jr., Box 77, Entry UD-404E, RG341, NARA II.

<sup>12</sup> Donna Knox, interview by the author, tape-recorded, April 24, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Talmadge, "Remains of U.S. MIAs in North Korea in Political Limbo," *Military Times*, March 24, 2016, <https://www.militarytimes.com/veterans/2016/03/24/remains-of-u-s-mias-in-north-korea-in-political-limbo>.

<sup>14</sup> According to the current data released by the DPAA, several mass graves in Unsan or close to the Chosin Reservoir have been discovered by local North Korean witnesses. I also learned this information from my interview with Donna Knox on April 24, 2018.

“body not recovered,” most of which are still in the area beyond US access.<sup>15</sup>

Jet fighters and bombers loaded with explosives secured US air supremacy in the Korean War, but the remains of pilots involved in crashes were extremely difficult to identify. The force of a high-speed impact into terrain and the explosion of ammunition guaranteed that few, if any, pieces of flesh or bones could ever be salvaged from the wreckage of their aircraft. The condition of the remains hindered identification so severely that only the fact that they were still strapped in their seats at the moment of the crash determined that they were dead. In some cases, an airman’s body might be obliterated without a trace. On February 22, 1952, First Lieutenant John E. Pound’s F-84 jet fighter crashed into a South Korean village building that sheltered thirty-two local civilians. Although some skin and flesh were recovered within 150 yards of the crash site, not a single piece could be associated with the pilot. The only evidence proving his existence was his ID tag found broken into three pieces.<sup>16</sup>

The most problematic category of lost bodies is those of the POWs who perished in or en route to camps. Many of them succumbed to battle wounds, atrocities committed by their guards, meager food and primitive medical care in POW camps, and even attacks by US aircraft. In total, 7,190 American servicemen were captured during the war.<sup>17</sup> At least 2,849 POWs fell during their march to the POW camps or expired once there.<sup>18</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> DPAA, Korean War Air Loss Database, last updated on March 11, 2015, [http://www.dpaa.mil/portals/85/Documents/KoreaAccounting/korwald\\_all.pdf](http://www.dpaa.mil/portals/85/Documents/KoreaAccounting/korwald_all.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Case file of 1st Lt. John E. Pound, Box 82, Entry UD-404E, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, The Korean War (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1994), 22. Cole cited this data from a congressional hearing in 1957.

<sup>18</sup> DeBruyne and Leland, *American War and Military Operation Casualties*, 9.



mortality rate (39.6 percent) exceeded that of the abhorrent Andersonville concentration camp of the Confederacy (32 percent) or the notorious hell ships and slave camps maintained by Japan during the Pacific War (34 percent).<sup>19</sup> To make matters worse, little verifiable information was available to the US military to ascertain captives' death or survival as the CVF/KPA initially refused to offer POW rosters according to the Geneva Convention. While the CVF/KPA reported the names of over three thousand POWs to the United States in 1951 and released almost all of them in 1953, the number was much lower than the total number of servicemen that the US military believed had been captured. Unable to liberate the POW camps or coerce the CVF/KPA to reveal their fate, the US military could never account for these missing POWs unless their bodies were someday found.

The remains of the 2,849 men known to be deceased were usually poorly disposed, just like their unfortunate peers killed on battlefields. When a POW died in a camp, his fellow prisoners usually buried him close by.<sup>20</sup> Emaciated POWs struggling for survival with meager rations had little stamina to offer more than a shallow temporary grave in the frozen ground. Durable markers or burial documents were out of the question. A doctor who suffered long captivity reported to the mother of a deceased POW that "their graves consisted of laying them on the ground and covering them over with

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<sup>19</sup> Raymond B. Lech, *Broken Soldiers* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>20</sup> In this dissertation, when I am talking about individual battle casualties or POW/MIAs, I only use the masculine pronouns (he/him/his). All US military POW/MIAs in previous wars were male (there were female civilians listed as unaccounted for in the Vietnam War). There were female nurses killed in accidents during the Korean War, but they are not officially considered casualties of the Korean War. There was only one female battle casualty in the Vietnam War.

stones, and left for Korea[n] dogs to finished[sic] them up.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, many graves were situated near the bank of the Yalu River and thus were washed away by heavy rains and subsequent flood. Scavenging animals and even local villagers sometimes damaged the graves. Prisoners’ remains were thus commingled or permanently lost to Americans.<sup>22</sup> The corpses of POWs killed on their way to the camps were even more poorly buried and recorded. The most notorious case was the “Tiger Death March” guarded by KPA troops, leaving 330 survivors out of the 750 POWs initially rounded up by a sadistic DPRK officer with the sobriquet “Tiger.”<sup>23</sup> Although most of the atrocities committed against POWs were perpetrated by the KPA in 1950, CVF troops were hardly more lenient; they executed POWs or left them to inclement weather.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the northbound routes toward the Sino-Korean border were dotted with unburied remains.<sup>25</sup>

POWs who attempted to flee were also likely to end up in unmarked graves. Some escapees were shot during escape attempts but not reported by the CVF/KPA. In a letter to the Air Force, the mother of a deceased POW (death reported by his fellow POWs) expressed her wish to give her son a decent burial in the United States rather than leave him in the “god forsaken country” with the guards who shot him but disavowed his

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<sup>21</sup> Frank S. Johnston Sr. to Col. L. F. Carlberg, non-dated, case file of Frank S Johnston, Box 52, Entry UD-404C, RG 341, NARAIL.

<sup>22</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 35. Also see POW Testimony No. KWC1823, Box 8, Entry 1020, RG 330, NARAIL.

<sup>23</sup> William Clark Latham Jr., *Cold Days in Hell: American POWs in Korea* (2012; repr. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2014), 57.

<sup>24</sup> Charles S. Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number: Exploiting Korean War POWs at Home and Abroad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 28; Latham, *Cold Days in Hell*, 117; correspondence with Elva Evans, received on August 15, 2018

<sup>25</sup> Latham, *Cold Days in Hell*, 55; POW Testimony No.1744U, Box 8, Entry 1020, RG 330, NARAIL.

existence.<sup>26</sup> If the prisoners did avoid recapture, their chance of survival was slim, and their remains were probably lost forever. To escape successfully from a society under tight state surveillance, escapees could only select untraveled routes in desolate mountains. In wintertime, trekking over hundreds of miles alone without proper equipment was tantamount to suicide. When they were overwhelmed by weather or terrain, their remains were unlikely to be discovered by DPRK civilians. Their fellow POWs or captors would have no way to report their location of death.

The absence of POW bodies and accurate records of their death would become the basis for some US generals and politicians to create a rumor about American POW/MIAs. They claimed that hundreds, if not thousands, of POWs were secretly murdered or held by the communists after the war. If a POW's corpse was not seen and his name did not find its way to the lists of POWs offered by the CVF/KPA, there was a chance that he had ended up in a camp and was possibly detained after the war for labor or political exploitation. What initially made the POW issue upsetting to Americans was the CVF/KPA's refusal to adhere to Geneva Convention guidelines to report POW names promptly except for some who had been randomly mentioned in propaganda materials. In reality, a detailed record of US POWs was only possible when the captives had been settled in the Chinese POW camp system staffed by English-speaking officers, which was still in its infancy in January 1951.<sup>27</sup> However, most of the American POWs during the

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<sup>26</sup> Nancy Streckler to Major General John H McCormick, September 1, 1954, case file of Capt. Donald S. Sirman, Box 64, Entry UD-404D, RG 341, NARAII.

<sup>27</sup> Guo Weijing, *Shijie Diyi Deng Zhanfuying: Lianheguojun Zhanfu zai Chaoxian* [First Rate POW Camp in

Korean War had been captured by that time. The lack of reliable reports made it difficult for the US Adjutant General office to distinguish those who were killed in action (remains not recovered) from surviving POWs. For soldiers killed on battlefields but not recorded by US forces, the CVF/KPA was unlikely ever to list them as POWs. When the US military asked the CVF/KPA to explain their fates, hardly any useful information was forthcoming. This situation triggered suspicion in the United States that China, the DPRK, or the USSR was intentionally denying the capture of some soldiers and would never release them.<sup>28</sup>

PRC/DPRK propaganda created more confusion by inflating or underreporting POW numbers, providing grist for subsequent rumors of living POWs detained behind in China, North Korea, or the Soviet Union. In December 1951, when the CVF/KPA reported that it held 11,559 POWs from all UN forces, an admiral in the UNC challenged the figure and cited CVF/KPA propaganda that once claimed that there were 65,363 UNC POWs up to March 1951.<sup>29</sup> Besides merely boasting of unproven numbers, the CVF/KPA also used suspicious evidence to unofficially claim US soldiers killed on battlefields as their live trophies, which substantiated some Americans' fear that their relatives were being secretly imprisoned. For example, Sergeant First Class Robert Lauer died at Hoengsong in 1951. His remains were recovered that November and returned home on January 11, 1952. However, on April 16, 1953, his parents insisted that their son

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the World: UN POWs in Korea] (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2010), 45-51.

<sup>28</sup> "Red Charge U.S. Lists Its Dead as Prisoners," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, December 21, 1951, 1.

<sup>29</sup> "Allies, Reds Far Apart in POW Issue," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, December 24, 1951, 2.

must be a prisoner even though his name never appeared on any official POW list delivered by the CVF/KPA. They claimed that they received a letter bearing his handwriting six months after this reported death, describing himself as a POW in a Chinese camp. His parents also cited shortwave radio reports of his captivity from the PRC and a Chinese magazine as evidence.<sup>30</sup> Shrinking the POW number, on the other hand, enabled the CVF/KPA to shrug off their responsibility for executing American prisoners. For example, fellow prisoners reported that Captain Donald S. Sirman was shot by an unprovoked enemy guard on June 14, 1951. However, the CVF did not include him in the POW list delivered that December. They later informed the US Air Force that he had absconded from their control, and thus had ceased to be a POW.<sup>31</sup>

The US military obtained a POW roster for the first time on December 18, 1951, which provoked widespread fear that many POWs would never be released by the CVF/KPA. On that day, the CVF/KPA team in the truce talks at Panmunjom submitted a list of 3,198 US captives living in eleven camps.<sup>32</sup> On the same day, the official number of MIAs from all branches of the US Armed Forces was 11,051 (only 137 confirmed captured), almost 3.5 times as many as the number of POWs on the list.<sup>33</sup> However, on December 29, the CVF/KPA reported just 571 POWs dead in its camps plus another 484

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<sup>30</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Lauer to General Clark, April 16, 1953, and its reply on May 15, Box 49, Entry A1-193, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>31</sup> "Determination Case #153," September 22, 1953, case file of Captain Donald S. Sirman, Box 64, Entry UD-404D, RG 341, NARAII.

<sup>32</sup> A copy of the list is in Folder OF-471B POW (1950-1951), Box 1499, White House Central Files, Official Files (WHCF-OF), Truman Library (Independence, MO).

<sup>33</sup> Department of Defense Office of Public Information, "Report of US Casualties, Summary No.69," December 18, 1951, Box 3, Entry 1020, RG 330, NARAII.

as escapees or pending investigation. These numbers meant that the fate of about seven thousand men was unknown.<sup>34</sup> For the families whose loved ones were on the list, it was a cause for relief or even rejoicing.<sup>35</sup> However, more people were shocked and discomfited by this enormous discrepancy. Shortly after the release of the list, the White House was inundated by an influx of letters concerning POWs. For instance, a day after the POW roster was published in the United States, Mrs. Carrier (first name unknown) from Wichita, KS, complained that her husband was not on the list. She worried that “if we accept this fact we might never see our loved ones again,” and argued that thousands of additional US servicemen’s names should be added for the enemy to account for.<sup>36</sup>

The US military did not take the POW list at face value as the families worried. On the one hand, it did not even believe that all these 3,198 POWs were alive and incarcerated. It only accepted 1,749 out of the 3,198 as confirmed POWs, while the status of others was still MIA.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, during peace talks with their CVF/KPA counterparts, UNC officers claimed that the CVF/KPA was delinquent in providing information on all POWs in their custody. Four days after the release of the list, US officers urged CVF/KPA representatives to account for more than a thousand men once

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<sup>34</sup> “Korea Truce Talks Still Stalemated: Some Americans Named as POWs also on Dead List,” *Pittsburgh Gazette*, December 29, 1951, 2; “Red Claims UN Fire Killed 571 Own Men: 132 American POWs Escaped, 3 Released,” *Austin Statesman*, December 26, 1951, 1.

<sup>35</sup> “List of U.S. Prisoners of War That Was Handed to the UN Command by Communists: There is Happiness as This Family Learns News of Kin,” *New York Times*, December 20, 1951, 10.

<sup>36</sup> “Summary of the Letter from Mrs. Charles L. Carrier to the President dated December 20, 1951,” January 4, 1952, File kp-1-4, Online Collection of the Korean War and Its Origins, Truman Library.

<sup>37</sup> Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett to Senator Francis Case, October 14, 1952, File kp-1-21, Online Collection of the Korean War and Its Origins, Truman Library.

mentioned in its propaganda radio broadcasts but yet to be reported to the UNC. On Christmas Eve of 1951, the UNC delegates at Panmunjom demanded that the CVF/KPA explain why the number of UNC POWs in its propaganda was five times as high as they had recently reported.<sup>38</sup> The gigantic gap between the reported POW number and the propaganda gave rise to allegations that the Chinese and North Koreans were wantonly slaughtering POWs or would never return them, disavowing their existence.<sup>39</sup>

The assertion that the CVF/KPA had slaughtered or held many POWs simmered through the remaining months of the war and became a national headline again after the POW exchange in 1953. This assertion seemed implausible if one solely considers the fate of the reported 3,198 POWs. From April 19 to 26, 1953, sick and wounded POWs were exchanged during Operation “Little Switch” as a friendly gesture for the upcoming armistice. This included 149 Americans. In August, Operation “Big Switch” resulted in the liberation of 3,597 American POWs.<sup>40</sup> This number is slightly more than the men listed in December 1951 and subsequently captured POWs combined. It was also much higher than the US military’s official list of 2,654 confirmed POWs. In late July, the UNC initially did not plan to protest the CVF/KPA’s detention of POWs.<sup>41</sup>

However, the 3,597 tally was lower than the combination of all US servicemen

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<sup>38</sup> “UN Demand Blunt for 1,000 Names Not on POW List,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 22, 1951, 3; “Allies, Reds Far Apart in POW Issue,” *Pittsburgh Gazette*, December 24, 1951, 2.

<sup>39</sup> “50,000 Died as Captives, Reds Hint: Allied Negotiators Continue to Press for Full Accounting,” *Pittsburgh Gazette* December 28, 1951, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 74-77.

<sup>41</sup> Commander in Chief, UN Command to Department of Army, No. CX63929, July 23, 1953, Box 54, Entry PI127-1, RG 554, NARAII.

listed as POWs and MIAs. An estimate prepared on July 23, 1953 listed 4,881 service members captured and missing.<sup>42</sup> A further study by the staff of the US Far East Command on September 25 (updated October 6) estimated the maximum number of POWs held by the CVF/KPA one month after the armistice at 952. Only forty-seven of these were based on reliable evidence. The remainder was a speculative figure, based on US intelligence (POW letters, fellow POWs' testimony, enemy radio messages, Red Cross reports, et cetera), enemy list and propaganda, or unconfirmed evidence.<sup>43</sup> Out of political concerns, US generals and politicians cited the maximum number and alleged that 944 men were known POWs forcibly held by the CVF/KPA. Without their bodies, it was difficult for the CVF/KPA to refute them. Families of missing servicemen remained convinced by this allegation for years after the armistice in Korea.<sup>44</sup>

In 1950, even when the dead soldiers had been recovered by friendly forces and buried in well-marked cemeteries, the safety of their remains was not guaranteed. That summer, American combat troops were hustled from their comfortable barracks in Japan into foxholes in Korea without adequate preparation. The Graves Registration Service (GRS) units of the Army Quartermaster branch were equally unprepared for handling casualties in Korea. The limited and undertrained personnel of the GRS units frequently depended on frontline troops to collect the corpses of soldiers. They then interred the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. This "missing" is unlikely the official number of MIA on that day, which is much larger. It is possible that these missing men were those who might be possibly accounted for by the CVF/KPA.

<sup>43</sup> Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff (J-2), "A Study of Repatriation U.S. Military Personnel, 25 September 1953, Amended 6 October 1953," Box 5, Entry 1020, RG330, NARAII.

<sup>44</sup> The 944 List is a slight modification of the roster of 952 men. The origin and political implications of the 944 List are intensively discussed in Chapter III.



dead in temporary cemeteries of various sizes close to the battlefields, pending further instruction to concentrate them into larger permanent cemeteries after the war.<sup>45</sup> The management of these temporary cemeteries did not follow any specific rules but was contingent on the rapidly deteriorating battlefield situations and the extreme heat. Days after the United States entered the Korean War, the 24th Infantry Division opened its first cemetery in Taejon on July 8, 1950. The graveyard lasted only twelve days and accepted fifty-six men before KPA troops overran it. Its next cemetery survived only two days—only three bodies were interred in the divisional cemetery in Yongdong before it was left behind enemy lines again. Records of many provisional cemeteries were also poorly kept. A small graveyard of eight soldiers near the division headquarters in Taejon did not leave any written records.<sup>46</sup>

Even when the US military was on the offensive, logistical issues that could not keep pace with the rapid advance of US troops restrained evacuation of remains to the rear. In October 1950, the 24th Infantry Division even lacked fuel to transport remains out from the front lines.<sup>47</sup> Bodies were buried in mattress covers, tarpaulin, ponchos, or parachutes, rather than scarce caskets.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, the GRS units set up more temporary cemeteries and isolated graves along its northward marching routes. Confident that the final victory was in sight, the US military felt safe in postponing any decision on

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<sup>45</sup> Victor L. Walker, *History of the Korean War*, Vol. III, *Part 16, Graves Registration Service in the Korean War* (unpublished, Center for Military History, Fort McNair, Washington, DC), 13-14.

<sup>46</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 14-17. Conditions of other divisions' cemeteries were similar.

<sup>47</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 62.

<sup>48</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 41.

whether and when to upgrade the temporary cemeteries to permanent ones or evacuate the remains to South Korea or Japan.<sup>49</sup>

By the time the US military and its allies evacuated North Korea in December 1950, ten cemeteries had been created above the 38th Parallel—four (Pyongyang, Sukchon, Pukchong, Kaesong) in the western part of the peninsula, and the other six (Koto-Ri 1 and 2, Hungnam 1 and 2, Yudam-ni, and Wonsan) in the eastern part. In total, 1,683 UNC personnel were buried in these graves. The largest graveyard among them was the one in Pyongyang, serving as the tentative resting place for 623 military personnel.<sup>50</sup> These cemeteries remained open to accept bodies until shortly before they were overrun. The one in Pyongyang was closed at 4:00 p.m., on December 3, 1950. Three days later, the CVF seized Pyongyang. During the retreat of UNC forces toward South Korea, almost all 1,683 bodies were left in North Korea, likely due to the significant amount of time and human labor required to remove them under pressing battle conditions. The GRS personnel in Pyongyang did not attempt to exhume the over six hundred bodies there, though they would have done so had more time been available.<sup>51</sup> In Hungnam, US soldiers and marines abandoned about 450 bodies after

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<sup>49</sup> Bradley L. Coleman, “Recovering the Korean War Dead, 1950-1958: Graves Registration, Forensic Anthropology, and Wartime Memorialization,” *Journal of Military History* 72, no.1 (January 2008): 191.

<sup>50</sup> List of Locations of United Nations Command Cemeteries Established by the United Nations Command Forces in North Korea, March 1954, Box 67, Entry PI127-1, RG 554, NARAII. The list was submitted to the Chinese and North Koreans on March 19, 1954, during the 106th Meeting of the Secretaries, Military Armistice Commission. The numbers of burials in these cemeteries are all cited from this document, though different numbers exist in other sources.

<sup>51</sup> “Command Report, Section III: Staff Section Reports, Book 21: Quartermaster Headquarters, Eighth US Army, December 1950,” Box 22, RG407 Adjutant General Office’s Records, Truman Library.

they withdrew from the port city, likely because US service personnel, equipment, and Korean refugees had a higher priority than the bodies for evacuation before the arrival of CVF forces.



Figure 1-1: Major areas where US soldiers' remains were lost. Currently, roughly 5,300 bodies are still buried in North Korea. Unsan, Chongchon, and Chosin Reservoir are major battlefields during the Korean War. There were ten UNC cemeteries in North Korea; six of them had been emptied in 1954.  
[https://www.dpaa.mil/portals/85/images/korea/map\\_remains.jpg](https://www.dpaa.mil/portals/85/images/korea/map_remains.jpg)

Warfare did not spare the graves left in North Korea. There is no first-hand evidence to demonstrate that the North Koreans deliberately desecrated these graves. As late as May 1953, the US military had not received any reports of wanton vandalism perpetrated on the ten cemeteries either.<sup>52</sup> However, as demonstrated in a report based on

<sup>52</sup> Captain C. H. West Jr. to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph L. Craig, May 25, 1953, IDPF (Sgt. Joseph L. Craig Jr.),

repatriated POWs' accounts on February 15, 1954, the military suspected that at least three cemeteries had been disturbed by city reconstruction or agricultural reclamation.<sup>53</sup>

We can assume that the North Koreans felt no particular obligation to maintain cemeteries in decent condition.<sup>54</sup> The postwar return of the remains buried in these graves hinted at poor maintenance of these graves. In addition to the cemetery Hungnam 2 from which no remains were ever repatriated, the most problematic one was the cemetery in Pyongyang. After the war, only 439 of the 623 bodies there were returned by North Korea. About half of them were returned with ID tag or interment report once buried with the remains. The bodies that were recovered mostly came from specific rows of the cemetery.<sup>55</sup> This phenomenon suggests that large tracts of this cemetery may have been ravaged by natural or human forces, rather than caused by carelessness or administrative errors during exhumation. Other issues in this cemetery included transposition of remains between rows and plots as indicated in the body inventories provided by the CVF/KPA. In an interview, I learned that one soldier's body was mysteriously lost while everyone else surrounding them was returned.<sup>56</sup> It seems that

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NPRC.

<sup>53</sup> Col. Robert R. Karrer to Commander in Chief, Far East, re Recovery of United Nations Deceased from North Korea, February 15, 1954, Box 221, Entry A1-193, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>54</sup> A similar idea was expressed in Michael Dolski's presentation "A Final Resting Place: The Different Fate of Two U.S. Military Cemeteries," on April 7, 2018, in the eighty-fifth annual meeting of the Society for Military History.

<sup>55</sup> The conclusion is based on my analysis of the roster of Americans buried in Pyongyang and the IDPFs of the soldiers buried in Pyongyang. The IDPFs are from the NPRC. The numbers are from Paul M. Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. III, Appendixes (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1994); and the Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of Graves Registration Committee Held at MAC HQ Area, October 11, 1954, Box 81, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>56</sup> Brenda Lott, interview by the author, on August 11, 2018.

some bodies were reburied for unknown reasons or simply lost during the war.

The damage to these cemeteries was not only committed by North Korea but also likely by US airstrikes targeting DPRK cities and ports. Concerns that US aircraft may have destroyed soldiers' graves were raised by some families whose loved ones were confirmed to be buried in cemeteries in North Korea. A father of a marine sergeant who was buried in Hungnam, for instance, wrote to the Marine Corps and asked "in view of the recent extensive bombing of the Korean east coast, I would like to know if this cemetery is still existent."<sup>57</sup> Although the military told him not to worry, destruction of Americans' graves by American bombs was indeed recorded during the war.<sup>58</sup>

### **Save the Remains—The Policy to Evacuate All Remains from Korea**

The loss of servicemen's bodies in battles or POW camps could not be prevented by any unilateral policy of the US military, but there was a chance to save the ones already buried in graves located within friendly lines. Had the military mobilized more transport units in Korea, the bodies in Pyongyang could have potentially been withdrawn to Kaesong (just above the 38th Parallel) or further south in December 1950, and thus they could have avoided being overrun by the enemy troops. Realizing that the situation in North Korea was untenable, and it was possible that the CVF might overwhelm South Korea, on December 22, the GRS units initiated the evacuation of all bodies in the two

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<sup>57</sup> Joseph L. Craig to Commandant, United States Marine Corps, April 26, 1953, IDPF (Sgt. Joseph L. Craig Jr.), NPRC.

<sup>58</sup> Coleman, "Recovering the Korean War Dead," 189.

UN cemeteries closest to the 38th Parallel, Kaesong and Inchon, to Kokura, Japan. On December 23, the Army approved a project to remove all dead Americans buried in Korea from the peninsula.<sup>59</sup> On December 26, the Far East Command reported to the Army Department that its GRS units had begun to move US soldiers' bodies from Korea to Japan for identification. It also suggested developing a project to further transport the remains from Japan to the United States, leaving the proposed permanent UN cemeteries in Pusan and Taegu, South Korea to other UNC forces.<sup>60</sup> Three months later, on March 1, 1951, the Department of Defense finally released a directive to repatriate all American dead without delay, since the situation in Korea remained precarious.<sup>61</sup> On March 12, the first batch of dead Americans was en route to San Francisco.<sup>62</sup> For the first time in American history, all deceased Americans would be shipped out of the battle zone and returned home regardless of the ongoing war. Overseas war cemeteries like those in France and Belgium were not options in Korea. Since then, the concurrent body return policy (CBRP) had come into effect and would be strictly enforced.

From the chronological sequence of these events, we might surmise that military pressure forced the GRS units of the US Army to withdraw all remains from Korea immediately for fear that they could be permanently lost to the enemy. However, the

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<sup>59</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 50, 62, 68. GRS units may not have evacuated the Kaesong one.

<sup>60</sup> Commander in Chief, Far East to Department of the Army, No. CX52120, December 26, 1950, cited from Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 35.

<sup>61</sup> Memorandum for the Secretaries of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, "Return of United States Dead in Korea," March 1, 1951, Box 604, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92, NARAII; it was announced a few days later, see "U.S. Announces Program on Returning War Dead," *New York Times*, March 9, 1951, 2.

<sup>62</sup> "50 U.S. Dead Start Home from Korea," *New York Times*, March 12, 1951, 3.

process of developing this historic policy was much more complicated. It was derived from WWII experience, battlefield contingency, culture, and domestic pressure. In fact, American military leaders began to consider the policy much earlier than the Chinese onslaught during the winter of 1950.

The birth of the CBRP can be traced back to GRS operations in WWII. During WWII, with few exceptions, the War Department ordered almost all deceased servicemen to be buried in temporary graves until final victory was achieved.<sup>63</sup> After the war, families who wanted to retrieve their relatives' remains had to wait several years to arrange funerals. In the European theater, where US casualties were relatively well recorded, for logistical, diplomatic, and bureaucratic reasons, the bulk of the remains eligible for repatriation only came to the United States between late 1947 and mid-1949. The last group of bodies was shipped back in 1951.<sup>64</sup> While ordinary Americans were not so eager to criticize military policies during WWII as they often were in later decades, the delay in returning remains did result in complaints.<sup>65</sup>

The CBRP also originated from body return policies carried out in peacetime. In the years between WWII and the Korean War, the overseas dead were usually repatriated shortly after their death. In 1950, the Korean War was officially designated as a "police action" rather than a war. As such, it was unclear whether the wartime rules of postwar

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<sup>63</sup> Edward Steere, *The Graves Registration Service in World War II*, QMC Historical Studies No.21 (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1951), 25, 65.

<sup>64</sup> Edward Steere and Thayer M. Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead, 1945-51* (Washington DC: Historical Branch, Office of the Quartermaster General, 1957), 341-366.

<sup>65</sup> Major General H. Feldman to Assistant Chief of Staff (G-4), "Return of U.S. Dead in Korea," October 9, 1950, Box 604, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92.

repatriation or the concurrent return policies in peacetime should be applied to the dead in Korea. Although most of the dead in Korea were buried in temporary graves in the summer of 1950, some were shipped to the United States very early on. By August 10, several dead soldiers had been repatriated, which was less than one month after the start of the US intervention in the Korean War.<sup>66</sup> In August 1950, the Far East Command had already decided to return certain Korean War dead to the United States, and specified that those remains would be treated as peacetime dead. Their disposal should not comply with the policies for WWII casualties.<sup>67</sup> A few soldiers' families demonstrated their awareness that peacetime body return regulations were in effect during the Korean War. For example, referring to the rules regulating peacetime body return in an Army pamphlet, on December 6, 1950, Hattie J. Minter wrote to the Army to get her son's body back to the United States as quickly as possible.<sup>68</sup>

Applying differing policies to servicemen's corpses tended to provoke uproar in a country where equality was highly valued. Unequal implementation of these policies had sometimes purely logistical reasons. However, families did not necessarily perceive the issue in this way. In March 1943, the War Department discussed whether US soldiers killed in non-combatant incidents in Mexico and Canada could be shipped back during the war because of the proximity to their home. Its officers were aware of about thirty

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<sup>66</sup> "Army Returning American Dead," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* (Sarasota, FL), August 10, 1950, 1.

<sup>67</sup> Colonel James B. Clearwater to Colonel Otto W. Humphries, August 16, 1950, Box 605, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92.

<sup>68</sup> Mrs. Hattie J. Minter to Army Quartermaster General, December 6, 1950, IDPF (Cpl. Augusta A. Abbey), NPRC.



servicemen buried in Canada. However, the military predicted that if it were to approve an immediate return of these bodies, it would open the floodgates to requests for the return of bodies from other war theaters. The public was not likely to accept such an exception to the military's original policy of not repatriating any dead body before the end of WWII.<sup>69</sup> When these bodies were returned from Canada is unclear.

The situation in 1950 in Korea was similar. Before the implementation of the CBRP, it was primarily those who were wounded in Korea and died in Japan whose remains were repatriated.<sup>70</sup> However, relatives of deceased soldiers sometimes failed to notice this exception and argued that their brothers, sons, or husbands should be returned home like those who had perished in Japan. On December 29, 1950, Juanita Dean of Tishomingo, MS, asked the military to return the body of her husband who had died of pneumonia a month prior "since there are some of the boys brought back."<sup>71</sup> This suggested that some families knew that some bodies were being returned during the summer, and thus they asked for the same privilege.

In October 1950 when the battlefield situation was still in favor of the UNC, anticipating potential complaints about unequal treatment, army quartermaster officers had already begun to devise a plan to remove all the dead from Korea as quickly as possible. This proves that the CBRP was not a direct response to the battlefield situation.

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<sup>69</sup> Steere, *The Graves Registration Service in World War II*, 64-66.

<sup>70</sup> Major General H. Feldman to Assistant Chief of Staff (G-4), "Return of U.S. Dead in Korea," October 9, 1950, Box 604, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92.

<sup>71</sup> Juanita Dean to Department of the Army, December 29, 1950, IDPF (Sgt. Tulon V. Dean), NPRC.

A directive dated October 9, 1950 from Army Quartermaster General Herman Feldman to the Assistant Chief of Staff (G-4) of the Army recommended that the remains of the US dead in Korea be returned in adherence to the policy applied to the casualties in peacetime. Feldman made it clear that handling the dead in Korea should follow ongoing procedures for returning the bodies of servicemen who were wounded in Korea and passed away in Japan. The directive reasoned that this policy would

obviate a large part of the delay experienced in effecting final disposition of remains during the [WWII] Return Program through elimination of the option of permanent interment in oversea[s] military cemeteries. This will permit return of remains to [the] United States upon completion of identification and casketing,

Feldman also insisted that the quartermaster branch should pursue a uniform procedure for handling dead servicemen, and therefore the task should be under the centralized control of an Army agency assuming all relevant responsibilities. He believed that the uniformity of policies and procedures would preclude “unfavorable public reaction.” Feldman concluded that “considerations which led to permanent oversea[s] military cemeteries being established for World War II dead are not present insofar as the Korean conflict is concerned.”<sup>72</sup> The general did not deliberate on these considerations. A possible interpretation is that as the Army was going to evacuate all the dead from Korea as early as possible, it would be unreasonable to send them back to Korea for burial.

On October 15, a more detailed plan for returning all the remains of servicemen during the war, which contained additional rationale for the CBRP, was drafted by the Far

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<sup>72</sup> Major General H. Feldman to Assistant Chief of Staff (G-4), “Return of U.S. Dead in Korea,” October 9, 1950, Box 604, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92.

East Command and reported to the Army Quartermaster General. Three major advantages of the CBRP were emphasized: 1) it would reduce the anxiety and anguish of the deceased men's families due to delays in returning remains; 2) when fellow servicemen of the dead were still stationed in Korea, they would facilitate identification of their remains, and the intelligence for identifying the remains or searching for the missing would be easy to collect; and 3) using the logistics units and resources already deployed in Korea would be more economical than keeping these units over there much longer after the war to return the bodies. The plan reconfirmed that no permanent overseas cemeteries would be built and offered a guide for quick and accurate identification of the bodies by tentative identification facilities in Korea before sending them home.<sup>73</sup>

Concurrently, families' pressure on the military to return the bodies of their deceased relatives to their hometown was mounting. Based on my research into families' correspondence with the military from July to December 1950, it seems that the number of letters demanding repatriation of remains surged significantly in late October. Among them, the earliest such request was sent somewhere between October 20 and 24 from a soldier's father who was living in Ireland. With the help of the local US Embassy, he demanded the remains be delivered to Louisiana.<sup>74</sup> It is unknown whether they were aware of the CBRP being drafted in the headquarters of the Army Quartermaster Corps in

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<sup>73</sup> Commander in Chief Far East Command to Army Quartermaster General, Return of Remains Now Interred in Korea, October 16, 1950, cited from Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 38, 41-42.

<sup>74</sup> Office of the Quartermaster General to the Assistant Chief of Staff (G2), Repatriation of Korean War Dead-Ireland, Comment No.2, November 8, 1950, Box 43, Entry UD-404B, RG341, NARAII.

October. Some evidence indicates that chaplains who were responsible for communicating with deceased soldiers' families may have divulged this fledgling policy by early December.<sup>75</sup> A more likely interpretation of the timing of the pressure was the situation in Korea. The situation in South Korea was stabilizing in early October, and thus the GRS units could have collected some intelligence to determine who had been confirmed killed and where they were buried. These families deemed that the military might have sufficient resources to return the bodies promptly.

A few examples suggest that the families who made such requests knew of the improving conditions in Korea. On October 31, the parents of Private First Class Charles Hall Jr. asked the Army Quartermaster General for not only their son's body but also another soldier to be taken out of duty to escort the body home.<sup>76</sup> Had the condition in South Korea still been perilous, the parents would have been reluctant to file this request. In another example, on November 6, Mr. and Mrs. Michaelis, parents of slain airman Frederick Michaelis Jr., made their first request for his remains, although they had been notified that their son had been killed on August 14 and buried in the US military cemetery in Pusan.<sup>77</sup> The war situation likely convinced them that it was the proper time to make requests for their son's body. The military policymakers could not completely ignore such pressure. It may have accelerated the finalization of the plan on October 15

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<sup>75</sup> Mrs. Claude R. Taylor to General E. H. Underhill, December 12, 1950, case file of 1Lt. Claude R. Taylor, Box 53, Entry UD-404C, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>76</sup> Charles H. and Ophelia Hall Sr. to Army Quartermaster General, October 30, 1950, IDPF (Pfc. Charles H. Hall Jr.), NPRC.

<sup>77</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Michaelis to Quartermaster General of the Air Force, November 6, 1950, case file of Pfc. Frederick Michaelis Jr., Box 71, Entry UD-404E, RG341.

and helped to solve inter-service rivalry on issues such as whether the Army should monopolize body repatriation, identification, and final delivery to their families.<sup>78</sup> On November 22, the Army Quartermaster General approved the October 15 plan.<sup>79</sup>

However, whether bodies would be returned before the end of conflict according to the October 15 plan was in question. With the final victory in sight, it seemed that most of the remains would be returned after the conflict anyway. The UNC fiascos shortly after November 22 ironically expedited the implementation of this plan and ensured that the remains of most US casualties would be returned before the armistice. The defeats also hastened GRS units to evacuate remains still accessible to them from Korea.<sup>80</sup>

The event that prodded the US military—perhaps decisively—to transport the remains out of Korea immediately was the fury aroused by the prompt return of the body of Lieutenant General Walter Walker, the Commander of the Eighth US Army.<sup>81</sup> After General Walker perished in a traffic accident on December 23, 1950, his body was shipped from Korea to Japan without delay and escorted home by his son, who was also serving in Korea at the time. The body arrived in the United States on New Year's Eve, and a grandiose state funeral was held for him at Arlington Cemetery on January 2, 1951, during which President Truman and a long line of military and government elites paid

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<sup>78</sup> Personnel Service Division Office, Director of Military Personnel to Services Division, Return of Air Force Dead from Korea, Box 43, Entry UD-404B, RG341, NARAII. The file itself was undated but must be after October 20, 1950.

<sup>79</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 43.

<sup>80</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 43; Coleman, "Recovering the Korean War Dead," 191.

<sup>81</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 35; Coleman, "Recovering the Korean War Dead," 191. The historians at the DPAA also share this view.

their respects. The *New York Times* reported on the funeral incessantly between December 23 and January 3. At this time, most of the dead soldiers were lying in temporary graves or scattered on frozen battlefields, ignored by the mainstream media.<sup>82</sup>

The evident privilege extended to the general was a blatant challenge to the principle of equality cherished by Americans. A flow of angry letters to the White House soon commenced. On December 26, when the general's casket had yet to reach the United States, having seen a picture on the *Idaho Daily Statesman* portraying high-ranking officers acting as honor guards for the general in Japan, a minister of the First Baptist Church of Gooding, ID asked Truman, "however, Mr. President, I've been wondering. Have we honored a fallen enlisted man in this same manner?" He wished that the same honor should be conferred to "our heroic dead who sleep on the cold-fog-swept hill-sides of Korea."<sup>83</sup> The Army's response a month later did not explain why the general's body was immediately evacuated from Korea to Japan but stressed that all dead servicemen who ended up in Japan were entitled to be repatriated at this time, and that General MacArthur ordered General Walker's body to be returned quickly.<sup>84</sup> In another letter on January 5, 1951, the widow of an Army sergeant stressed that she wanted to

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<sup>82</sup> "Eighth Army Commander Dies After Car Runs into Truck," *New York Times*, December 23, 1950, 1; "Walker's Body in Japan: The Last Decoration Received by General Walker," *New York Times*, December 25, 1950, 3; "Walker Will be Buried in Arlington Cemetery," *New York Times*, December 25, 1950, 4; "Full Generalship Urged by Truman for Walker," *New York Times*, December 30, 1950, 5; "Gen. Walker's Body Reaches Washington," *New York Times*, December 31, 1950, 2; "Hero Rites for Walker," *New York Times*, January 1, 1951, 2; "Walker is Buried in Arlington Rites," *New York Times*, January 3, 1951, 4; "4 Koreans Reported Shot," *New York Times*, January 26, 1951, 7.

<sup>83</sup> Alexander G. Patterson to Truman, December 26, 1950, Box 605, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>84</sup> Col. Geo W. Hinman Jr., to Alexander G. Patterson, January 26, 1951, Box 605, Entry NM81-1894A, NARAII.

know “if a soldier’s high rank made him better to be brought home right away for a safe burial” than her husband.<sup>85</sup> She did not make the “high rank” clear, but she must have been referring to General Walker.

To avoid further public relations damage, the military guaranteed that equality would be demonstrated in future repatriations. When the first batch of fifty servicemen’s bodies was loaded on the cargo ship SS *G.M. Randall* heading to San Francisco on March 12, 1951, the body of Major General Bryant Moore, commander of IX Army Corps, was placed beside a dead army private. Army public relations staff ensured that this arrangement of bodies was included in military press dispatches. These dispatches highlighted that these bodies represented “soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen of all races, creeds and all ranks from widely scattered battlefields.”<sup>86</sup>

As the dead bodies were continuously shipped back from Korea in adherence to the CBRP, the American public still closely monitored the equal treatment of remains—the delay between a service member’s death and the arrival of his body. Many families were profoundly upset once they saw that people killed later than their husbands, sons, or brothers were repatriated while their relatives were not. On February 13, 1952, an enraged couple from Port Huron, MI, wrote a long letter to the White House to inquire why their only son, a private killed in Pusan on August 10, 1950, was not returned for

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<sup>85</sup> Shirley Young to President Truman, January 5, 1951, Folder OF-471B Soldiers’ Bodies (1950-1951), Box 1499, WHCF-OF, Truman Library

<sup>86</sup> F. L. Parks, “Memorandum for the Secretary of the Army,” March 12, 1951, Box 207, Entry A1-5, RG335, NARAII.

burial, while those who fell in October 1951 already had arrived home. They argued that dead soldiers should be handled in the same way regardless of their creed, race, rank, or family wealth. This couple felt that someone in the quartermaster units had defaulted in his duty to maintain their son's records, possibly due to the difference in rank between their son and other soldiers.<sup>87</sup> In another case, a grieving mother, Anna J. Cady of Pittsburgh, who had lost a son buried in Pyongyang, kept track of each group of soldiers' remains repatriated home and checked the date of their death. Because her son was lost in North Korea, the military told that the return of her son's body could not be expected before the armistice. Nonetheless, she still recruited Representative Vera Buchanan (D-PA) to request that the military explain why her son, killed in November 1950, was not returned while those who died between 1951 and 1953 were lying in domestic cemeteries. She (or congress members on her behalf) wrote at least twelve letters to the military to expedite the return of her son's body after she learned of the CBRP. Her efforts persisted until her deceased son was finally repatriated in 1955.<sup>88</sup>

While the military situation in Korea and the uproar ensuing from General Walker's funeral likely enabled the CBRP to gain momentum, the contemporary logistical situation determined the time that bodies began to arrive in the United States. First, by March 1951, UN forces had pushed the front line back to the 38th Parallel. This victory meant that the US military did not have to abandon large quantities of supplies

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<sup>87</sup> George H. Johnson and Venetia A. Johnson to Truman, February 13, 1952, Folder OF-471B Soldiers' Bodies (Jan to June 1952), Box 1499, WHCF-OF, Truman Library.

<sup>88</sup> IDPF of Pfc. Roy J. Cady, NPRC.



and weapons to avoid their capture by advancing CVF troops. It significantly alleviated the supply burden of US logistics units so that they could spare more holds in cargo ships and more personnel to transport bodies out of Korea. Second, a well-equipped and staffed Central Identification Unit (CIU) was established on January 2, 1951, in Kokura, Japan, and became operational later that month.<sup>89</sup> As the bodies could only be released to their families after a positive identification, a functioning CIU was indispensable. The US Army established the CIU in Japan rather than in Korea due to accessibility of transportation, water supply, and refrigeration facilities, as well as security considerations.<sup>90</sup> The location of the CIU eliminated any chance of setting up permanent cemeteries in Korea as all the recovered remains had to be removed from Korea before their identification and final disposal.

Finally, the relatively low number of US casualties in the Korean War meant that the logistical burden of sustaining the CBRP was manageable. In WWII, a major concern leading to postponing body repatriation to the end of the war was the shipping capacity, inadequate to accommodate tens of thousands of bodies monthly while all battle theaters simultaneously were desperate for an unprecedented number of troops and materiel. On the Korean Peninsula in the summer of 1950, the high death rate combined with unprepared logistics units forced the military to adopt a similar measure.<sup>91</sup> Once the

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<sup>89</sup> Col. John D. Martz Jr., "Homeward Bound," *The Quartermaster Review*, May-June 1954, 14.

<sup>90</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 44-50; Coleman, "Recovering the Korean War Dead," 199.

<sup>91</sup> Steere, *The Graves Registration Service in World War II*, 25; Col. WM. J. McDonald to Honorable Ernest W. McFarland, October 15, 1951, Box 605, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92, NARAII.

United States had mobilized its logistical power and had concentrated it on Korea, evacuating a few hundred bodies out of Korea per month was practical. After April 1952, when front-line support missions no longer required the commitment of all air transportation units, dead servicemen were directly airlifted out of Korea.<sup>92</sup> According to a postwar analysis of the GRS, several quartermaster officers admitted that the CBRP was only feasible in a “peripheral conflict” with limited troops deployed overseas. It would be impossible for a hypothetical World War III with the Soviet Union.<sup>93</sup>

When in late 1951 the CVF/KPA offensives in Korea seemed to be halted, and South Korea was all but certain to survive as a staunch US ally, the CBRP was not challenged. Establishing a permanent overseas cemetery like some other UN countries that fought in Korea was still out of the question. Undoubtedly, transporting the remains identified in Japan back to Korea would have consumed considerable taxpayers’ money and the military’s logistical capacities, but two additional factors doomed any proposal of a memorial cemetery in Korea.

The first was the nature of the Korean War. Initially, some Americans regarded it as the prelude to a global war to repulse communist aggression. It was not only justifiable, but also as honorable as the Great War or WWII. The father of an airman killed in WWII who regarded the Korean War in this way argued that the repatriation of

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<sup>92</sup> “Command Report, Zone Headquarters, American Graves Registration Service Group, 8204th Army Unit, April 1-30, 1952” Box 5821, Entry NM3-429A, RG407, NARAII.; about the logic, see Col. E. E. Toro to Commander in Chief, Far East Command, “Airlift of Remains from Korea to Japan,” September 17, 1951, Box 332, Entry A1-79A, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>93</sup> Coleman, “Recovering the Korean War Dead,” 196.

remains was an obstacle to “expressing our appreciation and respect to those who made the supreme sacrifice for us and our country.” He even deemed the return program a waste of taxpayers’ money.<sup>94</sup> Before their deployment, some servicemen themselves also expressed their wishes to be buried in the battle theater after their sacrifice for their homeland.<sup>95</sup> However, policymakers in Washington defined the war otherwise and kept the conflict in a low profile. The Army was even reluctant to inscribe the phrase “Korean War” on soldiers’ headstones to avoid linking the warfare in Korea with a formal war that had ended only a few years previously.<sup>96</sup> With such an ambivalent definition of the Korean War, the rationale for building overseas permanent cemeteries, as in the two world wars, was doubtful.

Furthermore, in the spring of 1951, both the United States and China recognized the impossibility of a total victory in Korea and began to turn from battlefields to negotiation tables, providing further momentum to terminate the practice of erecting overseas cemeteries and repatriate Americans’ bodies as quickly as possible. While neither side now pursued a total victory, they did not cease fighting immediately. For servicemen’s families who were in constant fear of receiving a telegram informing them

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<sup>94</sup> C. Earl Palmer to Stephen L. Flickinger, carbon copy to the President, September 9, 1951, Folder OF-471B Soldiers’ Bodies (1950-1951), Box 1499, WHCF-OF, Truman Library.

<sup>95</sup> For a few examples, see the case file of 1Lt. Claude R. Taylor, Capt. Philip W. Browning, Capt. Ivan M. Lachnit, 1st Lt. James E. Towle, in Entry UD-404C and UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>96</sup> “Inscription on Government Headstones and Markers--U.S. Dead Returned from Korea,” September 21, 1951, Box 655, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92, NARAII. Before this directive, the phrase “Korean War” was forbidden to be inscribed on headstones in national cemeteries, see Eugene R. Guild and Isabel C. Guild to Senator Eugene D. Millikin, August 3, 1951, Folder Eugene R. Guild 1, Box 250, Papers of William F. Knowland (hereafter WFK Papers), Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (Berkeley, CA); also see G. Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Books, 1995), 157.

of the loss of a loved one, further sacrificing lives to a stalemate rather than a victory crucial to the nation's survival was unbearable. Their support for the war rapidly waned. Repatriating the dead in a timely manner was perhaps the best way to avoid more fury from bereaved families.<sup>97</sup> When the CBRP was proposed in October 1950, military leaders believed that returning the remains could soothe domestic complaints.<sup>98</sup> This idea was supported by a large number of letters between 1951 and 1953, which claimed that families' suffering could not be appeased until remains arrived. One woman clearly stated the importance of returning the remains to keep domestic morale. In her appreciative letter sent in October 1951, Evelyn W. Walter believed that this action made "our country worthy of all the fine lads who have fought and are still fighting in Korea."<sup>99</sup>

Another reason for not establishing a permanent cemetery in Korea was its geographical location. In the 1950s, both the US military and the country was much less diverse than today. American society, predominantly white and Christian, tended to identify Europe as its remote homeland. Leaving soldiers' remains there symbolized their commitment to the defense of their ancestors' home, as perceived by some American generals in the Great War. Although the percentage of repatriated bodies in WWII in the European theater was just slightly lower than in the Pacific theater (59 percent versus 64 percent), in a survey immediately after the war, over 75 percent of the families who had

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<sup>97</sup> Coleman, "Recovering the Korean War Dead," 195-196.

<sup>98</sup> Major General H. Feldman to Assistant Chief of Staff (G-4), "Return of U.S. Dead in Korea," October 9, 1950, Box 604, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>99</sup> Evelyn W. Walter to Major [General] Vaughn, October 19, 1951, Folder OF-471B Soldiers' Bodies (1950-1951), Box 1499, WHCF-OF, Truman Library.

relatives killed in Asia demanded the remains back.<sup>100</sup> According to historian G. Kurt Piehler, though no evidence suggests overt racism produced this discrepancy, it was likely due to contemporary Americans' perception that Asia and Africa had few things in common, either culturally or politically, with the United States.<sup>101</sup> Thus, even if the United States had emerged victorious from the Korean War, not many Americans would have chosen Korea as the final resting place for their loved ones.

Besides a lack of cultural connections, some practical factors also disfavored Korea as the final resting place of American soldiers. In September 1951, when the Far East Command was contemplating the final disposition of the unknown war dead, it decided that all of the bodies must be buried in Hawaii, rather than Japan or Korea. It reasoned that the situation in Korea would be in turmoil for many years. Therefore, establishing and maintaining cemeteries there was deemed too difficult. Another reason was simply the distance between the United States and Korea.<sup>102</sup> A war cemetery in Korea was much less likely to be visited by ordinary Americans than one in Hawaii.

### **Educating the Public on the CBRP**

As one of the goals of the CBRP was to prevent complaints about the delayed return of remains, the decision to evacuate all remains from Korea before the cessation of

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<sup>100</sup> Steere and Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead, 1945-51*, 366, 521, 549.

<sup>101</sup> Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*, 132.

<sup>102</sup> General Ridgway to the Army Adjutant General, "Final Interment of Unknown Dead, Korean Hostilities," September 4, 1951, and K. L. Hastings, "Summary Sheet for Disposition of Unidentified Remains of United States Dead – Military Operation in Korea, February 15, 1954," Box 428, Entry A1-5, RG 335, NARAII; Piehler, *Remember War the American Way*, 155.

hostilities had to be conveyed to the public. When it was announced simultaneously with the return of the first batch of remains from Japan, it was done through mainstream media outlets in urban centers. However, this type of announcement mostly focused on the return of the bodies, rather than the CBRP. Relevant reports usually occupied only a tiny space on a newspaper page and were surrounded by long articles on other topics. Small town newspapers may have skipped it completely.<sup>103</sup> Perhaps, other than the family members of the deceased servicemen, contemporary Americans did not appreciate the significance of these repatriated bodies or the CBRP in the country's war efforts in Korea (if they had ever cared about the war). The military made the additional effort to include the CBRP in its form letters to dead soldiers' families.

Even a few months after March 1951, the military did not include the CBRP in its form letters. When a soldier was killed in 1950 or 1951, if his remains were not lost to the enemy, his family was notified that he had been buried in a temporary UNC military cemetery in Korea. The military made clear that verification of the body's identity would only be possible when military operations permitted, and thus it was not feasible to furnish precise information concerning the final disposition of remains. This disposition was contingent on the situation in Korea, which probably meant the end of the war or a significant de-escalation of this conflict. These form letters continued to be sent probably

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<sup>103</sup> "50 U.S. Dead Start Home from Korea: Aerial Cross of Jet Fighters Formed Above Ship Bearing Heroes of All Ranks," *New York Times*, March 12, 1951, 3. However, in some small places that had few servicemen killed in Korea, such news did not always appear. For example, in this research, one regional newspaper, *Glenwood Post* of Glenwood Springs, CO was intensively studied. It did not have any information about the CBRP or the return of remains on March 12, 1951.

as late as October 1951.<sup>104</sup>

The delay in informing the families of the CBRP was likely due to the military's inability to predict how long it would take to evacuate those men killed after the initiation of the CBRP. Had the military mentioned "concurrent return," families would have expected that the remains be returned within a short time. If a long delay occurred, the military could anticipate an angry reaction. Emphasizing that the return of remains was contingent on the battlefield situation aimed to avoid such unpleasant scenarios. During this delay, the newly killed servicemen were still buried in temporary cemeteries, mostly in the Pusan area far away from the frontline. Two factors may explain the continuation of temporary burials in Korea. First, from March to June 1951, the US military fought fiercely to repulse the last strategic offensive of the CVP. During the battles, its logistical capacity could not sustain immediate evacuation of all the dead from Korea. There was also an immense backlog of bodies buried in South Korea since summer 1950 to be shipped to Japan. It was not until November 1951 that all temporary graves in South Korea were emptied.<sup>105</sup> Second, as US GRS teams evacuated the bodies in several UNC cemeteries in the last days of 1950 and early 1951, there were several thousand sets of remains to be identified in Japan, which was only cleared in October 1951.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> For the latest example that I have collected, see the IDPF of Sgt. Virgil Boyer Jr., NPRC. A letter in early May to his family still did not convey the CBRP. However, my collection of letters was incomplete, and thus I am not sure about the form letters between June and October. In November, the phrases of the form letter changed significantly. The form letters are collected from IDPFs of army soldiers killed in 1950 and 1951, which are kept by the NPRC.

<sup>105</sup> Martz, "Homeward Bound," 146.

<sup>106</sup> Coleman, "Recovering the Korean War Dead," 199.

The form letter used shortly after March 1951 did not clearly state whether overseas burial would still be an option. However, when a dead service member's family made a request, either demanding his body back or wishing to leave it in Korea, the military responded that all dead service personnel were to be returned to the United States for burial. For example, the mother of Private Henry Berendowski had another son of hers write to the military on July 27, 1951, expressing her anxiety to get back her dead son's body, which had been buried in a temporary grave for four months. In response, the military assured the soldier's brother that all the dead would ultimately be repatriated to the United States after the verification of their identities, the timing of which depended on battle exigencies.<sup>107</sup> In another case at the same time, a couple from Perrysville, PA, demanded the Marine Corps leave their son's corpse in Korea. Eight days later, their request was rejected, and they were informed that no permanent UN cemetery would exist in Korea. Their only alternative was the National Memorial Cemetery in Hawaii.<sup>108</sup>

After November 1951, the military's form letters to deceased servicemen's families underwent significant changes. First, the remains were no longer buried in temporary graves. Instead, they were "recovered in Korea and evacuated to the mortuary in Kokura, Japan" for identification. Second, the military assured recipients that "every effort is being made to return the remains of all our gallant dead as expeditiously as

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<sup>107</sup> George Berendowski to Chief of Memorial Division, Department of the Army, July 27, 1951, and Colonel Clearwater to Mr. George Berendowski, August 8, 1951, IDPF of Pvt. Henry Berendowski, NPRC.

<sup>108</sup> Captain C. H. West Jr., to Mr. and Mrs. Frank J. Fischer, August 8, 1951, Service Record of Cpl. Ralph R. Fischer, NPRC.



possible.” Phrases referring to battle situations or military exigencies disappeared. The CBRP was thus clearly conveyed to soldiers’ families. After the armistice, once the CIU identified a body of a soldier, his family simply received notices that his remains had been identified and were en route to the United States.<sup>109</sup>

The terms of the CBRP did not reach everyone during the war. In the last month of the war, a woman from North Carolina was still unsure whether a formal request was mandatory to have her son repatriated. She was soon informed of the CBRP by her local Veterans of Foreign Wars chapter.<sup>110</sup> As will be shown in the next section, even after the war, demands for overseas burial were not uncommon. Some ranking public officials learned about the CBRP relatively late. More than a year after the war, a congressman from Pittsburgh still asked whether overseas military cemeteries had been built for Americans killed in the Korean War.<sup>111</sup>

The influence of the CBRP on the families of service members was reflected in their letters to the military. Among the correspondence dated after March 1951 examined in this study, most revealed that families no longer asked whether their loved ones’ remains could be returned but informed the military of their favored destination for the bodies. The more subtle and diverse impact of the CBRP on individual families is analyzed in the next section.

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<sup>109</sup> Based on a few dozen of the IDPFs of soldiers killed since November 1951 kept by the NPRC.

<sup>110</sup> Carson P. Wayne to unknown recipient, July 3, 1953, Box 51, Entry A1-193, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>111</sup> Col. Ray J. Lack, to Honorable Robert J. Corbett, November 1, 1954, Box 60, Entry NM81-1892E, RG92, NARAII.

## **Accepting the CBRP**

Generally speaking, the CBRP was widely accepted by dead servicemen's families. No evidence acquired in this research demonstrates that anyone expressed a desire to wait for the end of the war to recover remains from battlefields. Almost everyone hoped that the bodies could be laid to rest in a permanent grave with due honors as early as possible. The CBRP thus heightened the expectations of service members' families about the duty of the US Armed Forces. However, their opinions as to where the graves should be located were not uniform, despite the fact that the CBRP required all remains shipped to the United States.

The first heightened expectation was the prompt return of a soldier's body after his death. The CBRP entailed that the body be repatriated at the earliest possible time permitted by the military situation. Therefore, families of dead soldiers who were already aware of the CBRP became less willing to wait months or even years for the return of the bodies of their loved ones.<sup>112</sup> After the summer of 1951, when the frontline had been stabilized, and the war became a stalemate, those families became more impatient to receive their loved one's casket than in previous months.

The duration between each soldier's death and his or her repatriation varies even in more recent wars, let alone during the Korean War, as it is determined by the synergy

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<sup>112</sup> Coleman, "Recovering the Korean War Dead," 209.

of several factors. When a soldier was killed and immediately recovered by his unit in Korea, as long as the body was not mutilated beyond recognition, it usually took two to three months between his family's receipt of a notice of his death and the arrival of his body in the United States.<sup>113</sup> Despite the efforts of the GRS units and the CIU, those bodies that were fragmented, decomposed, or commingled with others demanded more time. For instance, Air Force Captain Leroy E. Aschenbrenner, who perished in a non-survivable air crash in July 1952, had not been repatriated to his wife that December. His widow thus complained of the lack of updates in her husband's case. In contrast, Army Private Ralph E. Amend, who suffered a single wound to his head on April 1, 1952, was buried in his home city of Pittsburgh on June 14.<sup>114</sup> For those soldiers who were killed in the early stages of the war (prior to the summer of 1951), the delay was much longer as it took time to exhume their bodies from temporary graves, and the decomposing bodies necessitated greater efforts to identify.

However, the CBRP's emphasis on returning all bodies as early as possible obscured these difficulties. This resulted in an unexpected side effect—new complaints accusing the military of treating its servicemen unequally. Making complaints to local congressmembers about the purportedly unequal treatment seemingly became a strategy to ensure the faster return of bodies as the military had to deal with families' complaints

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<sup>113</sup> Col. C. B. Root to Commander, Far East Air Force, March 5, 1954, Box 221, Entry A1-193, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>114</sup> Case file of Capt. Leroy E Aschenbrenner, Box 77, Entry UD-404E, RG341, NARAII; IDPF of Ralph E. Amend, NPRC.

seriously in order to salvage any support for an unwelcomed war. An airman who suffered a single shot to the head on July 18, 1951, was tentatively buried in the Tanggok UN Cemetery. The burial postponed his arrival at the CIU to January 1952, and it took another three months to identify his remains. While his family was waiting for his body, the local chapter of the American Legion and a US senator demanded the White House explain why a dead airman immediately recovered from his cockpit and visually identified took so long to return when the CBRP was in effect.<sup>115</sup> Those families who lost a loved one in North Korea had to wait until 1954 or 1955 to learn whether his body had been recovered, but they still cited the CBRP during the war to ask why the body could not be returned earlier, as in the case of Mrs. Cady mentioned above.

Another way for the families of fallen servicemen to expedite the return of remains was to stress their suffering in the absence of the bodies. They argued that unless they received the remains, they were unlikely to recover from the devastation caused by such loss. Even before the introduction of the CBRP, some families had used this argument to appeal for the faster return of their loved ones' remains. For instance, on January 18, 1951, a family doctor wrote to the president arguing that his patient, the mother of a soldier killed and buried in South Korea, was "bordering on complete nervous breakdown and will not be content until body returned."<sup>116</sup> The CBRP gave servicemen's families some hope that their personal suffering and difficulties might be

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<sup>115</sup> Case file of Capt. William Marion Ross, Box 75, Entry UD-404E, RG341, NARAIL.

<sup>116</sup> Dr. R. R. Sharp to the President, January 18, 1951, only a summary of this letter is kept in Folder OF-471B Soldiers' Bodies (1950-1951), Box 1499, WHCF-OF, Truman Library.

truncated if the remains arrived earlier. Immediately after the CBRP was announced to the public, Ramona W. Sluder from Charleston, SC, wrote to her congressman, describing the exact location of her husband's grave in the UNC Cemetery in Inchon and demanding his immediate repatriation. For herself and her aging parents-in-law, she argued that "it would afford them a certain peace of mind to have his remains returned as soon as possible, particularly since other bodies are now being returned."<sup>117</sup> In another case, just one month after her son-in-law perished, the mother-in-law of Second Lieutenant Howard J. Walker was already urging the Air Force to speed up the return of his body by claiming that she and her daughter were "under a terrible strain which we can't hope to lessen until after everything is settled." Judging from contextual information, "settled" meant the final burial of the lieutenant's remains.<sup>118</sup> The demand for a prompt return of remains might have been particularly strong within the families who believed that the best way to bury their loved ones was to send them to a national cemetery. Those families who were yet to receive their loved ones' remains might reserve an empty grave in a local cemetery to serve as a symbolic memorial for the deceased. However, reserving a plot in national cemeteries was not at that time permitted in the absence of remains.<sup>119</sup>

Another new expectation in the wake of the CBRP was that some families demanded an identified body to confirm their loved ones' demise. Because of the CBRP,

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<sup>117</sup> Ramona W. Sluder to The Honorable S. Mendal Rivers, M.C., March 13, 1951, case file of Maj. Amos L. Sluder, Box 71, Entry UD-404E, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>118</sup> Mrs. Chloe Massingill to General John H. McCormick, November 13, 1952, case file of 2Lt. Howard J. Walker, Box 76, Entry UD-404E, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>119</sup> Col. Geo W. Hinman Jr. to Lt. Col. John Lockett and Honorable George A. Smathers, "Memorials for Servicemen," February 26, 1953, Box 24, Entry A1-1890E, RG92, NARAII.

beginning in late 1951, the death of each serviceman was usually followed by burying his coffin in his hometown or in a national cemetery. Therefore, confirmation of death and body repatriation became inseparable in the eyes of some soldiers' families. The families described above who wanted to expedite body repatriation hinted at this idea, as they could not tolerate the limbo of losing a loved one without receiving his remains. When death and body repatriation were decoupled because the military could not recover the body, families sometimes questioned the validity of the death report provided by the military. They suspected that the concerned serviceman was still languishing in a POW camp. For example, on May 18, 1954, Air Force First Lieutenant Clifford G. Selman was declared dead because he had not been seen bailing out of his stricken aircraft a year prior, and no further information regarding him had emerged. Although it was almost certain that he perished in the crash, his parents rejected the Air Force's conclusion on July 30 by arguing that the decision "does not prove to us that he is not alive, unless more positive proof is found." The positive proof probably referred to his remains as they expressed their strong wish to have his remains returned and buried at home.<sup>120</sup> Some families even threatened to inspect the returned remains themselves before accepting the death of their loved ones. Also in May 1954, another airman's widow who was deeply perturbed by a rumor that three thousand live US POWs had been left in Korea, warned the Air Force that she could not be persuaded by a casket bearing her husband's serial

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<sup>120</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Lester E. Selman to L. F. Carlberg, July 30, 1954, case file of 1st Lt. Clifford G. Selman, Box 64, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

number without a chance to see the remains inside. The evidence of her husband's death was relatively solid as he had neither been observed leaving his disintegrating aircraft nor met by other crewmen in POW camps.<sup>121</sup>

Sometimes, even when a soldier's death had been confirmed by his remains, the failure to return his body still caused his family to suspect that he might be a POW. Three years after the war, Sergeant David D. Parke's mother wrote to President Eisenhower asking him to contact the PRC for information about her son's fate. Her son had been confirmed killed on June 13, 1952 in Korea by a fellow soldier. However, his corpse was abandoned on a hillside when American troops had to withdraw under enemy fire. When friendly forces retook this area, his body was not found. His mother thus claimed that "so many mistakes are made in combat and the years have passed and I cannot yet believe that David is not coming home."<sup>122</sup>

Despite the examples presented above, it is hard to estimate how widely families of missing soldiers insisted on coupling their death with the presence of their remains. Unlike the appeal for expedited return of remains, there were relatively few letters unambiguously indicating the link between repatriation of bodies and the confirmation of death. Among the hundreds of letters from POW/MIA families who strived to learn the accurate fate of their loved ones, most solely emphasized that positive evidence was

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<sup>121</sup> Mrs. Ellen E. Henry to General John H. McCormick, May 3, 1954, case file of 1st Lt. Dewey R. Henry, Box 58, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>122</sup> Mrs. Dudley B. Parke to Eisenhower, August 16, 1956, Folder GF-11-H1 Missing Members of the Armed Forces, 1956, Box 227, WHCF-GF, Eisenhower Library.

indispensable in proving the death of a serviceman. It is hard to know whether the positive evidence was limited to an identified body or whether it could be a witness to the death or other indirect evidence. For example, the airman's widow who threatened to check her husband's body herself expressed that she would like to talk with other airmen on the same aircraft to confirm her husband's fate.<sup>123</sup>

In addition to the uncertainties about their loved ones' fate, the inconclusiveness of the war and its questionable purpose also caused many family members to doubt the military's claim about their loved ones. When Anna Huszar protested against the presumptive finding of her son's death and demanded more information from President Eisenhower in March 1954, she claimed: "had I lost him in World War II, I would have given him up proudly but the Korean War was to me and any other American people, a war provoked by stupid, selfish individuals."<sup>124</sup>

Whereas the CBRP ordered that all American soldiers' remains must be returned to the United States, there were still many families who desired to bury their loved ones overseas. It is unclear whether all these families were aware of the CBRP, but considering that many such requests were made in 1953 and even after the war, it was likely that they did not want to accept the elimination of overseas cemeteries. Their choice was influenced by their understanding of the best way to pay homage to their lost kin.

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<sup>123</sup> Ellen M. Henry to General John H. McCormick, May 3, 1954, case file of 1st Lt. Dewey R. Henry, Box 58, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>124</sup> Anna Huszar to President Eisenhower, March 29, 1954, Folder GF-11-H1 Missing Members of the Armed Forces 1954, Box 227, WHCF-GF, Eisenhower Library.



One of the most common reasons for wishing to leave the dead in a cemetery in Korea was to demonstrate the slain warriors' eternal commitment to the land they defended and died for. This principle had been formed in this country's first large-scale involvement in foreign wars. In WWI and WWII, there were strong advocates within the military and other social elites that the war dead should remain overseas as a symbol of the US commitment to the freedom of Europe. The fallen, therefore, continued their honorable service, and the foreign soil that had been soaked in the blood of young Americans was unbreakably tied to their homeland.<sup>125</sup> Although less than half of the dead servicemen were buried overseas after the two world wars, this was still a considerable number.<sup>126</sup> As discussed earlier, when the Korean War broke out, the US public regarded it as a crusade against communist expansion, and many servicemen expressed their wish to be buried overseas if they perceived it to be another "good war."

When these servicemen were killed, their widows or parents sought to honor their last wish. A woman from Kent, OH, who somehow noticed that soldiers killed in Korea were being moved to Japan before the CBRP was announced to the public wrote to her father-in-law (an Army chaplain) hoping the body of her husband would be left in Korea, believing "[Korea] was much more his home than any place here," and stating that it was his wish.<sup>127</sup> Throughout the war, many people did not change their minds. On April 21,

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<sup>125</sup> Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*, 95, 129.

<sup>126</sup> Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*, 96; Steere and Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead*, 366.

<sup>127</sup> Mrs. William H. Shaw to Chaplain, February 13, 1951, Box 322, Entry A1-79A, RG 554, NARAII.

1954, Captain Philip W. Browning was declared dead after being missing for almost three years. Nine days later, his wife notified the Air Force that if his remains were ever found, he should be buried in a national cemetery overseas because it was her wish and “in accordance with the wishes often expressed by my husband during his life time.” Because of the CBRP, her request was rejected.<sup>128</sup> At about the same time, Dorothy B. Goodyear stressed, “under no circumstances” did she want her husband to be returned to the United States, and it was also the wish of his family. Concurrently, she insisted on learning of his fate and sought contact information for the other crewmember on his aircraft.<sup>129</sup>

Another rationale for not repatriating bodies was the belief that leaving the soldiers’ remains undisturbed on the battlefields was the best way to honor them. On March 23, 1951, a couple from Pittsburgh received an instruction from the Marine Corps about the disposition of the body of their son Corporal Ralph R. Fischer, who had been killed earlier that month. Although the Marine Corps informed the couple that all deceased marines would be evacuated from Korea, they wrote back on July 31 requesting that “it is our desire that his body be left where it is now interred.” Undoubtedly, the Marine Corps cited the CBRP and denied their request.<sup>130</sup> On May 14, 1954, the mother of Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Vance E. Black made a similar argument. Probably unaware of the CBRP, she inquired whether overseas cemeteries would still be built in Korea. She suggested that because her son perished in a horrible air crash, there was no

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<sup>128</sup> Case file of Capt. Philip W. Browning, Box 55, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>129</sup> Case file of 1st Lt. James E. Towle, Box 65, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>130</sup> Service Record of Cpl. Ralph Robert Fischer, NPRC.

reason to disturb him and his crewmen, and that the military could maintain a grave near their death site.<sup>131</sup>

After taking a long time to grapple with the trauma caused by the death of a loved one, some families chose to resume their normal lives as quickly as possible. Therefore, they were reluctant to receive their relatives' bodies, which would provoke another trauma for them to overcome. For instance, on March 22, 1954, Esther D. Jacobs responded to the Air Force's presumption of the death of her son three days earlier, stating that it was not necessary to return her son's remains if found because her son would permanently stay in her heart.<sup>132</sup> She did not want to be reminded of her son's death for a second time. The same week, the wife of Captain Ivan M. Lachnit argued that as a lifeless corpse by no means resembled her cherished husband, she felt it meaningless to "go through his death all over again."<sup>133</sup>

Feeling that their loved ones' remains could never be identified, some families wished to avoid burying the wrong body. Geraldine P. Granberg of Wilton, ME, wrote to the Air Force on May 14, 1954 and informed the military that she did not want her husband's body back. She insisted that his parents-in-law would not tolerate another ordeal if they would see his remains. For herself, she felt that after losing his remains on

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<sup>131</sup> Mrs. Q. E. Black to Col. L. F. Carlberg, May 14, 1954, case file of Lt. Col Vance E. Black, Box 55, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>132</sup> Esther D. Jacobs to Col. L. F. Carlberg, March 22, 1954, case file of 1st Lt. Harrison C. Jacobs, Box 59, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>133</sup> Mrs. Lachnit to Director of Supply and Services, Headquarters, USAF, March 26, 1954, case file of Capt. Ivan M. Lachnit, Box 60, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

the battlefield for several years, there was little hope that he could be located.<sup>134</sup> A father from Dayton, OH, expressed similar misgivings. He learned of his son's demise in a POW camp and that his body was left to rot outside the camp. Therefore, he wondered whether any bones of his son could ever be recovered as they had undergone years of depredation by floods and scavenging dogs, and asked to leave his son in Korea.<sup>135</sup> However, some families who initially refused to repatriate their loved ones' remains for this reason changed their minds when they were notified that the bodies had been identified with scientific evidence. On September 21, 1954, when the military asked Perry Abbott of Two Harbors, MN, for her son's medical records to help the CIU identify the remains recently returned by North Korea, she felt that if her son was indeed dead, his remains were unlikely to be identified. Thus, she preferred to leave him in Korea rather than bury a stranger. However, when her son's skeleton was positively identified in November 1955, the family asked the Army to ship the body to a local funeral home.<sup>136</sup>

### **The Bodies Not Returned**

Technically speaking, with the CBRP enforced, Korea should not have been the final resting place for any US military personnel; but this was not always the case. Certainly, all the identified remains were removed from Korea during and shortly after

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<sup>134</sup> Geraldine P. Granberg to Director of Supply and Services, Headquarters, USAF, May 14, 1954, Box 58, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>135</sup> Frank S. Johnston Sr. to Col. L. F. Carlberg, n.d., case file of Capt. Frank S. Johnston, Box 52, Entry UD-404C, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>136</sup> IDPF of Pvt. Charles L. Abbott, NPRC.

the war. Unidentifiable sets of human skeletons, which could potentially be associated with unresolved US casualties, were shipped to Hawaii for burial. However, in South Korea, the military still left behind some human bones it had recovered from battlefields.<sup>137</sup> When all identification work on deceased US servicemen's remains terminated in 1956, 1,588 pouches of bones deemed without identification value by contemporary criteria or determined to be extra parts of the individuals already repatriated were cremated in Yokohama, Japan. The ashes were loaded on a helicopter and spread over the Tanggok UN Military Cemetery in Korea on February 24, 1956.<sup>138</sup> This operation created a symbolic permanent US military cemetery in Korea to commemorate the more than 30,000 lives lost in the country's commitment to the defense of South Korea. In the 1960s and 1970s, some American civilians working for the US military in South Korea were buried in the Tanggok Cemetery after they died of natural causes.<sup>139</sup> Perhaps, the relatively safer situation in Korea at that time, even though the Korean War had not officially ended, allowed loopholes in the CBRP.

Also left behind were over the eight thousand bodies that could not be recovered

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<sup>137</sup> General Ridgway to the Army Adjutant General, "Final Interment of Unknown Dead, Korean Hostilities," September 4, 1951, and K. L. Hastings, "Summary Sheet for Disposition of Unidentified Remains of United States Dead – Military Operation in Korea, February 15, 1954," Box 428, Entry A1-5, RG 335, NARAII;

<sup>138</sup> Col. Q. L. Kendall to the Army Quartermaster General, No. FSML 611554, March 16, 1956, and Memorandum from Commanding Officer of the 8204th Army Unit to Col. Clearwater, "Recommendation for Disposition of CIL Parts," June 7, 1952, Box 80, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>139</sup> A few burial reports in the 1960s and 1970s of Americans can be found in Folder 3, Box 1, Series 690, AG49 (UN Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea, UNCURK, 1950-1973), UN Archives and Records Management Section (ARMS), New York City, NY. According to the website of the UN Memorial Cemetery in Korea, this cemetery now holds thirty-nine Americans, all of which died after the war. It is unclear whether they are all civilians.

even when the CBRP was fully enforced. Some of these bodies were declared non-recoverable during the war, and their relatives were promptly notified. They usually belonged to service members blown to pieces by artillery or killed in air crashes.<sup>140</sup> Usually, a few tiny fleshy parts were all that could be recovered at the scene of their death. They were eternally integrated into the land they defended until their last breath. The other bodies were left behind in North Korea, lost in inaccessible areas, or never documented by any intelligence. After all efforts to search for these servicemen had been exhausted, the military officially declared their bodies non-recoverable at 10:00 a.m., January 16, 1956, due to lack of information regarding their burial, the inability to identify their bodies, or refusal of cooperation from the CVF/KPA (Chapter II will discuss the search for the remains in detail).<sup>141</sup> At this time, it seemed that few families still held hope that these bodies were recoverable. As a result, GRS commanders did not recommend this declaration be delivered to the families of these service members unless they made additional requests.<sup>142</sup>

The bodies that were declared non-recoverable, however, would haunt Americans for decades. For those men buried in marked isolated graves or military cemeteries in North Korea but not returned after the war, their families felt that they owed them a

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<sup>140</sup> One example is in the case file of 1st Lt. John E. Pound, Box 82, Entry UD-404E, RG341, NARAII. The instruction guiding the issuance of such declarations can be found in Department of the Army, *Identification of Deceased Personnel*, TM 10-286 (Washington, DC: Department of Army, 1956). This will be cited as TM 10-286 (1956)

<sup>141</sup> The time is marked on the official declaration of body non-recoverability.

<sup>142</sup> Intra-office Reference Sheet, Chief, Registration Branch to Chief, Memorial Division, Office of the Quartermaster General of the Army, "To Determine Whether Next-of-kin Should be Notified that Remains Are Non-Recoverable," November 21, 1955, Box 81, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII.

decent burial deserving of a hero. For others who went missing during the war, no physical evidence was obtainable to confirm their death. The military declared some of them dead based on witnesses' testimonies or circumstantial evidence.

The criteria for declaring someone dead without a body were complicated and sometimes subjective, but a few general patterns could be observed. During battles, an MIA's demise was often established by someone who, though unable to retrieve the body, could confirm the death. Otherwise, the MIA status continued. For example, on June 28, 1952, the Army listed Sergeants First Class Mojmir P. Ficek and Billie Hance as MIA. Subsequently, although a few of their comrades-in-arms were uncertain about their fate, at least two soldiers testified that they had approached their foxholes and found their corpses heavily damaged. They marked the location of their bodies and took their ID tags, but the bodies were never recovered. Based on the ID tags and the observation of death, on June 22, 1953, the Army Adjutant's General office declared these two soldiers deceased.<sup>143</sup> In contrast, in another case, on November 21, 1950, two soldiers had been seen to fall after being ambushed by the enemy, but no one could approach them to confirm their death. Their MIA status continued almost three years after the date of ambush.<sup>144</sup> To resolve the fate of the POWs who never returned after the armistice, the US military interrogated all ex-POWs by ordering them to fill out dozens of

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<sup>143</sup> "Report of Death of SFCs Mojmir P. Ficek and Billie Hance," June 22, 1953, Box 816, Entry NM3-363E, RG407, NARAII.

<sup>144</sup> "Review and Determination of Status-MIA, Charles L. Somers, and Pvt. Ernest A. Taylor," September 29, 1953, Box 814, Entry NM3-363E, RG407, NARAII.

questionnaires that asked whether they knew about a specific POW, how long they knew about him, whether he died or was close to death, and so forth. Evaluating all their answers simultaneously, the military determined whether POWs had perished in camps or might have been held by China or North Korea.

On many occasions, however, no one was able to recount the circumstance in which a service member went missing; the military, therefore, had to administratively close his case. During the Korean War, the Defense Department followed Public Law 490, Seventy-Seventh Congress (the “Missing Persons Act”) to determine the fate of MIAs. The law demanded that the military review its intelligence regarding its members after they had become MIAs for a year. It then decided whether to regard the MIAs as living or presumed dead. According to US military documents during the war, the CVF/KPA ignored the Geneva Convention and failed to disclose information on US POW/MIAs in a timely fashion. The military had to depend primarily on unverifiable witness reports, enemy propaganda, and POW letters to presume a man’s death.<sup>145</sup> Such unreliable information made the military reluctant to declare soldiers’ deaths based on it. Indeed, no presumptive deaths were declared before September 1951.<sup>146</sup> Gradually, by collecting testimonies from soldiers and returned POWs, the Army Adjutant General’s office and its equivalent in other service branches declared servicemen dead without

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<sup>145</sup> Major General WM. E. Bergin to Honorable Harold C. Ostertag, July 24, 1952, Box 6, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII.

<sup>146</sup> Major General H. Feldman to Brigade General Kester L. Hastings, September 10, 1951, Box 607, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92, NARAII.



bodies. Finally, in late 1953 and early 1954, they presumed all servicemen whose fate remained uncertain dead, since there was no evidence to prove otherwise.<sup>147</sup> These soldiers received a presumptive finding of death (PFOD) status.

The PFOD status could not preclude the possibility that the service member was still detained by the CVF/KPA as the US military never had a chance to conduct an exhaustive search for its missing personnel in the DPRK. Families of missing servicemen were more reluctant to accept the PFOD of their loved ones after certain high-ranking officers or politicians spread rumors that the CVF/KPA were taking hundreds of American prisoners as hostages, which will be discussed in Chapter III.

The PFOD became one reason for POW/MIA families in the following years to accuse the military of writing off servicemen who were possibly still prisoners of the CVF/KPA. In May 1954, a mother from New York City told the military that she firmly believed her son was alive, even though he was officially presumed dead on November 20, 1953. She claimed that if the Air Force sent her a coffin in the future, she would not accept that he was dead until she personally confirmed the remains inside were those of her son. She stated that “no one will interfere [with] my plans.”<sup>148</sup> In another case, in response to a military’s request in October 1954 for medical records to identify unknown soldiers’ bodies that might include her son, Vera L. Painter of St. Louis protested that her

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<sup>147</sup> My research did not find the original military decision to determine all the MIAs dead, but I found it in contemporary newspapers. For example, see “Missing in Korea to Be Cited Dead,” *Pittsburgh Gazette*, November 21, 1953, 1.

<sup>148</sup> Aurea M. McLoughlin to Colonel Carlberg, n.d., case file of A1c Robert J. McLoughlin, Box 60, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

son should not have been presumed dead ten months earlier even though he did not bail out of his aircraft when it crashed. She insisted that “the fact that the Government has declared my Son dead doesn’t convince me of that fact,” and claimed, “That may be a long, long time but this Mother’s heart will hold out.”<sup>149</sup> When the body of a man in the PFOD status was recovered, his PFOD would be rescinded and changed to killed-in-action or died-in-captivity.<sup>150</sup> Bodies were perhaps the most straightforward way to quench the families’ doubt by eliminating the possibility that their loved ones were enslaved in a secret camp in China or North Korea, forgotten by their own government.

## **Conclusion**

Initial US defeats in Korea and the indecisive conclusion of the war resulted in the loss of the bodies of several thousand American servicemen. Once the frontline was stabilized after mid-1951, the GRS would take great pains to locate and identify the remains lost in South Korea. When it came to the bodies of servicemen lost in North Korea, however, for the first time in its history, the US military had to rely on negotiation to recover the corpses of its service personnel. The recovery and identification of bodies from South Korea and the negotiations for the remains left in North Korea will be the major themes of Chapter II.

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<sup>149</sup> Vera L. Painter to Colonel Carlberg, October 16, 1954, case file of 1Lt. Harry R Painter, Box 62, Entry UD-404D RG341, NARAII.

<sup>150</sup> Several examples demonstrate the conversion from PFOD to KIA or died in captivity after remains were recovered. See the IDPFs of Pvt. Charles L. Abbott, Cpl. Bennie B. Bellar, and Sgt. Arthur L. Belt, NPRC.

While the immediate goal of the CBRP was to prevent more bodies of American soldiers from falling into enemy hands and being desecrated as the US forces were in danger of being expelled from Korea, the motivation for and enforcement of the CBRP were more complicated. Earlier experiences in WWII, the wishes of the families of fallen soldiers to receive bodies promptly, the uproar over the privileged treatment of General Walker's body, and the dire prospect of a communist takeover of the whole Korean Peninsula all hastened the introduction of the CBRP in early 1951. Enforcing the CBRP became possible only when the military logistical system had sufficient capacity to support static trench warfare along the 38th Parallel after mid-1951. The extra spaces on aircraft and cargo ships ensured that bodies could be removed from Korea immediately and then shipped to the United States after their identification.

The CBRP revolutionized the practice of handling US military casualties. In contrast to the standard procedures adopted during WWII, the bodies of deceased service personnel were to be evacuated from the theater of war regardless of the ongoing battles in Korea. Upon identification, those bodies would be delivered to the United States regardless of their families' wishes (non-Americans could be buried in their country of origin). The CBRP signaled that only after the repatriation of a soldier's body had the military completely fulfilled its commitment to him. It created the servicemen families' expectation that they must receive the bodies promptly after their loved ones fell on battlefields. For some families, receiving the body became the sole criterion for confirming the death of their relatives, making the practice of PFOD problematic in

future years. Despite some families' objections, the CBRP eliminated the option of burying a loved one in an overseas memorial cemetery. No longer would any deceased US warrior extend his honorable service to his country by being eternally stationed at the place where he fell.

If unidentified, bodies evacuated from Korea would not have any value in revealing the fate of missing soldiers or bringing solace to their grieving families. To satisfy the need to identify the increasing number of bodies evacuated from Korea, forensic experts at the CIU had to apply the most advanced forensic technology then available to the identification of the remains. The CIU and its techniques will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER II: BODIES RECOVERED

The concurrent body return policy (CBRP) discussed in Chapter I required that all recoverable bodies of US servicemen be immediately evacuated from battlefields and repatriated to the United States. The evacuation of bodies fell to the American Graves Registration Service (GRS) Group. Even before the CBRP took effect in March 1951, GRS units deployed in Korea had been busy searching for and recovering bodies from areas that they could enter safely. In order to increase the likelihood of finding soldiers' bodies, GRS teams literally followed the movement of US combat troops that had first repulsed and then pursued North Korean troops in fall 1950. The GRS operation ran at full speed to search for bodies in South Korea from 1951 until a few years after the war. While the active search for bodies had practically ended by the mid-1950s, the GRS teams stationed in the ROK periodically conducted searches and excavations in response to South Korean civilians' discovery of bones belonging to US military personnel.

During and after the war, the more significant challenge was the search for and recovery of remains in territory controlled by the DPRK. No progress was possible outside of negotiations with the Chinese Volunteer Force (CVF) and the North Korean People's Army (KPA). Unlike the repatriation of captured CVF/KPA personnel, recovering deceased servicemen from hostile territory did not cause any significant problems in the truce talks.<sup>1</sup> The Armistice Agreement provided overall guidance as to

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<sup>1</sup> Neither my review of the literature regarding the peace negotiations nor my research in archives reveals that the two sides ever engaged in a heated debate over the remains before the armistice.

how each side could recover the bodies of its soldiers. Each side could dispatch GRS teams to the other's territory to recover the bodies, after confirmation of locations of burial sites. In 1953, the task of recovering bodies in North Korea was designated "Operation Glory" by the US military.

The two sides attempted to adhere to the relevant articles in the agreement, at least initially. However, as this chapter argues, their mutual suspicion that the other side's GRS teams could be spies doomed the original plan.<sup>2</sup> Before both sides had agreed on the details of when and where GRS teams should be deployed to recover bodies, the unilateral relocation of deceased Chinese and North Korean POWs by the US military prompted the CVF/KPA to bar US GRS teams from entering their territory in the summer of 1954. Ultimately, American GRS teams could only wait in South Korea for the CVF/KPA to deliver the bodies.

The Korean War was not only the first conflict in which the US military had to depend on talks with its enemy to recover its deceased members; it was also the first war in which forensic evidence collected from bodies almost completely superseded ID tags and personal effects in identifying soldiers' remains. ID tags found with remains, the primary means of identification in previous wars, could be lost or switched among

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<sup>2</sup> For convenience, the CVF/KPA soldiers tasked with recovering bodies are also referred to as GRS personnel in this chapter. According to a widely circulated online article, it seems that the CVF adopted the designation Graves Registration Service (Fenmu Zhuce) to describe its personnel who handled dead bodies. One source of this online article is "Yu Meijun Jiaojie Zhiyuanjun Yiti [Accepting the Bodies of CVF Soldiers from the US Military]," Zhongguo Xinwen Wang [China News Network], last modified September 6, 2000, accessed on October 7, 2018, <http://www.chinanews.com/2000-09-06/26/44987.html>. This article will be cited as "Accepting the Bodies" hereafter. This article has several factual errors, but this is the only article available in China that I have found talking about Operation Glory.

servicemen. Intact, flesh-covered bodies could be examined for distinguishing characteristics like fingerprints, facial features, tattoos, and body hair, but bodies that had been severely disfigured or had decomposed could not be identified easily. After WWII, the US military had contracted forensic anthropologists and forensic dentists to identify unknown bodies. During the Korean War, forensic experts stationed in the Central Identification Unit (CIU) in Kokura, Japan, processed all bodies, including the flesh-covered, intact ones, before these bodies could be repatriated. CIU experts made an extraordinary effort to identify the remains recovered from battlefields months or even years after the fighting. They also identified most of the remains delivered by the CVF/KPA after the war, which were typically incomplete and sometimes commingled. Out of the 28,793 recovered US soldiers killed in the Korean War, the CIU identified all but 850 bodies, although the accuracy rate of the CIU identification is unknown.<sup>3</sup>

### **Field Search for Remains**

When hostilities broke out in June 1950, the US Army had almost no GRS units dedicated to recovering its dead from battlefields. The Far East Command (FEC) had only one platoon of trained GRS personnel at its disposal, a platoon that was charged with simultaneously handling the bodies of US troops in Japan and investigating those found in WWII-era unmarked graves in the Far East. To make matters worse, this platoon

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<sup>3</sup> *History (January 2, 1951 to February 29, 1956), Headquarters, American Graves Registration Service Group, 8204th Army Unit History*, (unpublished, a copy kept in the Army Quartermaster Museum, Fort Lee, VA), 48.

had almost no experience working under combat conditions. In July 1950, each division deployed to Korea had to improvise a team from its own personnel to recover the dead (directed by the personnel of the GRS platoon). On September 12, 1950, the first GRS company, the 565th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company, was redeployed from the United States to South Korea. When US forces counterattacked after the Inchon landing, the company followed the advancing troops northward to recover the dead in a variety of challenging environments from mountain ridges to rice paddies.<sup>4</sup> To increase the chance of identifying bodies once hastily buried in isolated graves, on October 14, 1950, the Eighth Army delegated to GRS units the sole authorization to handle remains, since the recovery teams improvised by frontline divisions had frequently failed to identify servicemen who were killed in the summer of 1950 and abandoned to the advancing KPA troops.<sup>5</sup>

The US military's lack of preparation for the Korean War and the seesaw battles spanning the whole Korean Peninsula that characterized the first year of this conflict meant that body recovery operations remained understaffed until the spring of 1951. In October 1950, the 565th Company followed the advancing US columns to the Sino-Korean border. When the situation deteriorated in December 1950 after the CVF entered the war and pushed US forces out of North Korea, some GRS personnel were directed to exhume the remains in those cemeteries still under US control and evacuate them to

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<sup>4</sup> *8204th Army Unit History*, 27-29; Coleman, "Recovering the Korean War Dead," 189-190.

<sup>5</sup> "Hasty or Isolated Burials," October 14, 1950, Box 464, Entry A1-132, RG 338, NARAII.



Japan. The 114th GRS Company arrived in Korea just as the CVF routed the UN troops. It was tasked with evacuating cemeteries close to the 38th Parallel.<sup>6</sup> In early 1951, the 148th and the 293rd GRS Companies arrived in Korea. While the 565th GRS Company continued to recover the bodies in South Korea lost in the summer of 1950, the 148th and 293rd GRS Companies were assigned to sectors immediately behind the frontline, where they recovered the dead to ensure battlefield sanitation. Their task also isolated the fallen warriors from reinforcing troops to sustain the latter's morale.<sup>7</sup> With fresh reinforcements and the implementation of the CBRP in March 1951, the GRS companies launched a full-scale, organized search for the four thousand bodies of US soldiers estimated recoverable in South Korea. Recoveries had already become difficult: burial sites and temporary graves had been leveled by weather, battles, or agricultural reclamation. Identification media of the deceased were also lost during this time.<sup>8</sup>

While the field recovery procedure was customized to the situation surrounding each lost US serviceman, there were some general patterns. To search for a dead serviceman, one or more GRS teams would be assembled and assigned a general area where he had last been seen alive. Using a 1:50,000 map of the area subdivided into 3.6 square mile grids, the teams searched for and recovered all remains in the area or reported the serviceman concerned as "non-recoverable." A search could last from a week to a

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<sup>6</sup> 8204th Army Unit History, 28-30.

<sup>7</sup> Coleman, "Recovering the Korean War Dead", 196-197; Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 86.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 89.

month, depending on the size of the area and available personnel. During recovery operations, the teams interrogated all Koreans in the assigned area to obtain information on possible burials. They then searched through all abandoned foxholes, bunkers, and trenches, even if these places had been reclaimed for farmland.<sup>9</sup>

Although most recovery operations happened behind the frontline, the GRS teams still encountered serious challenges. They suffered from a lack of vehicles and personnel. Korea's rudimentary dirt roads and rice paddies were nearly impassable to vehicles.<sup>10</sup> There were even more dangerous threats. In some areas of South Korea, recovery operations were scheduled before minefields had been cleared. Remnants of the KPA units stranded in South Korea also conducted guerilla warfare.<sup>11</sup> As all body recovery operations necessitated questioning local civilians, the reluctance of locals also significantly hindered recovery missions. According to a report by the 148th GRS Company, Korean civilians "have consistently asserted that no American troops fought in the area, and that no American dead reside here," in places where a large number of servicemen were thought to be missing or buried. The report surmised that the local people refused to cooperate because they felt that if Americans' bodies were discovered,

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<sup>9</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 90-98; IDPFs of Pfc. Daniel Hunt, Pfc. James R. Aldridge, Cpl. John F. Cunningham, Capt. Crenshaw A. Holt, Pfc. James Howell, NPRC; Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Technical Manual TM 10-286, Identification of Deceased Personnel* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1956), Appendix V.

<sup>10</sup> *8204th Army Unit History*, 29; "293rd QM Graves Registration Company, Historical Report for August 1951," September 9, 1951, and "Headquarters, 148th QM Graves Registration Company, Historical Report for August 1951," September 4, 1951," Box 5379, Entry NM3-429A, RG407, NARAII.

<sup>11</sup> Headquarters, Eighth United States Army Korea, General Orders No.403, Meritorious Unit Commendation (565th GRS Company), June 5, 1951," Box 5380, Entry NM3-429A, RG407, NARAII.

they might be charged with looting the dead. They also apparently feared being asked to testify about alleged North Koreans' atrocities against US soldiers, which they were unwilling to do.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to solving some of their logistical challenges by bringing in more teams, vehicles, and helicopters, the GRS teams eventually managed to earn the trust of Koreans. While leaflets and radio broadcasts from high-ranking American and Korean officers made little progress, building personal relationships was more successful. GRS team leaders attempted to learn the language, concerns, and philosophies of the locals. Despite military policies that discouraged paying for information, the GRS teams frequently used rice to compensate Korean civilians concerned that the exhumation of bodies might destroy their crops.<sup>13</sup>

Although it has never officially ended, the search for and recovery of the remains in South Korea effectively came to a close in the mid-1950s. Between the outbreak of the war and January 31, 1956, GRS teams recovered 25,849 soldiers' remains from the territory accessible to US forces, including the demilitarized zone (DMZ) separating the two Koreas. This left roughly 2,500 bodies in South Korea, the DMZ, or underwater. They were extremely difficult to recover due to the inaccessibility of their final resting place or the erasure of any trace of gravesites. Field searches tapered off in late 1954, and

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<sup>12</sup> "Headquarters, 148th QM Graves Registration Company, Command Report for May 1953," June 8, 1953, Box 6325, Entry NM3-429A, RG407, NARAII.

<sup>13</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 98-101.

the GRS Headquarters closed the CIU on February 29, 1956.<sup>14</sup> In a letter to the American Legion in early 1957, the Army reported that it had “concluded the active phase of its over-all program to search for, recover, identify, and make disposition of the remains of United States personnel who lost their lives in Korea.”<sup>15</sup> In the 1960s, US forces in Korea still responded when remains were accidentally discovered, though they did not conduct further searches.<sup>16</sup> The active search for bodies in South Korea did not resume until the joint United States-South Korea search operations in the 2000s.

### **Preparation for Recovering Remains from North Korea before the Armistice**

The GRS units succeeded in recovering more than ninety percent of soldiers killed in South Korea despite challenging conditions. It was, however, impossible for them to recover the remains lost in North Korea without an agreement with the CVF/KPA. The military had two strong imperatives to recover remains lost in the DPRK. First, it had a historical obligation to recover and bury fallen servicemen with dignity and honor. Especially after the implementation of the CBRP, no remains of US servicemen were supposed to be left in North Korea. Second, they also had to deal with the rising

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<sup>14</sup> *8204th Army Unit History*, 48. The 2,500 number is calculated by subtracting the number of bodies lost in North Korea from the total number of lost bodies.

<sup>15</sup> George H. Haselton to Robert E. Lynch, March 12, 1957, Box 55, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>16</sup> “UNC Policy Directive No.11-9,” April 27, 1961, Box 3, Entry A1-1257, RG554, NARAII. Some South Koreans proposed resuming searches in later years, but their plan was not endorsed by the US military. See Yoon Yong-Sook, president of the UN Cemetery Service Incorporation to the UN Committee for Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea, March 14, 1969, Box 5, Series 690, AG49, UN ARMS. The UN Military Cemetery in Korea replied to the letter three days later (in the same folder), rejecting all other agendas of this incorporation but not remarking on the body recovery plans.

public perception that anyone not recovered might be a POW secretly detained by CVP/KPA. These imperatives led the US delegates at Panmunjom to include language about recovery of remains into two subparagraphs into the Korean War Armistice

Agreement:

13.f In those cases where places of burial are a matter of record and graves are actually found to exist, permit graves registration personnel of the other side to enter, within a definite time limit after this armistice agreement becomes effective, the territory of Korea under their military control, for the purpose of proceeding to such graves to recover and evacuate the bodies of the deceased military personnel of that side, including deceased prisoners of war. The specific procedures and the time limit for the performance of the above task shall be determined by the Military Armistice Commission. The Commanders of the opposing sides shall furnish to the other side all available information pertaining to the places of burial of the deceased military personnel of the other side.

58.a(2) Insofar as practicable, information regarding name, nationality, rank, and other identification data, date and cause of death, and place of burial, of those prisoners of war who died while in his custody.<sup>17</sup>

Although these two subparagraphs are grouped with the essential issues

(repatriating POWs and maintaining peace in Korea) discussed in the truce talks, they were among the few issues not deemed controversial by either side at that time. The US military first drafted a provision pertaining to the recovery of deceased military personnel from the territory of the other side in late January 1952. On March 2, 1952, terms regarding the recovery of deceased soldiers of the UN Command (UNC) from North Korea appeared in a preliminary agreement draft (possibly very different from the final

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<sup>17</sup> The agreement is also referred to as the Armistice Agreement for the Restoration of the South Korean State, or Agreement between the Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command, on the other hand, and the Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army and the Commander of the Chinese People's Volunteers, on the other hand, concerning a military armistice in Korea. The English text is from <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=85&page=transcript>. Paragraph 13 of the agreement specifies measures to ensure de-escalation of tension after the armistice by setting up the DMZ and limiting import of weapons into Korea. Paragraph 58 demands exchange of POW information.

version of the two subparagraphs).<sup>18</sup> On August 29, 1952, subparagraphs 13.f and 58.a(2) were almost finalized for the armistice agreement and became the basic directions for the US forces to plan recovering bodies in North Korea.<sup>19</sup>

This uneventful process of incorporating a body recovery program into the final armistice agreement is likely attributed to the fact that the program did not contradict the interests of the three signatories of the agreement (China, North Korea, and the UNC).<sup>20</sup> The United States and China were interested in collecting the bodies of their dead: the Americans were bound by the CBRP, while the Chinese wanted their soldiers' bodies to at least be collected and buried in North Korea (this point will be discussed later in this chapter). North Korea's wish to remove Americans' graves from its territory, which was discussed in Chapter I, also likely contributed to the quick solution. There is little evidence to show the viewpoint of the South Korean government, but unlike the issue of POW repatriation, it seemed to have no interest in sabotaging the body exchange operation. When US officers asked ROK Army officers whether they wanted the agreement to include language about ROK soldiers killed in the north, the ROK Army replied that it would take care of its own men, and no deceased ROK soldiers were left in North Korea (judging by the number of bodies of US soldiers left in the DPRK, this was

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<sup>18</sup> "Graves Registration (Narrative), n.d." and Memorandum for Major Garver, Personnel Service Division G-1, Graves Registration, March 14, 1952, Box 2, Entry PI127-14, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>19</sup> "Graves Registration Indoctrination and Orientation," November 20, 1952, Box 2, Entry PI127-14, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>20</sup> Although its armed forces were under UNC control, South Korea is not a signatory of the Armistice Agreement. As mentioned in the introduction, the UNC was a command of the US military.

obviously a lie).<sup>21</sup> Perhaps neither side felt that a deadlock on corpses was worth the prolongation of bloodshed in Korea, a stark contrast to the contentious issue of the voluntary repatriation of CVF/KPA POWs. When these prisoners were released, their choice of destination would reveal whether liberal democracy was more appealing than communism. Dead bodies obviously could not make such a choice.

An important factor that accelerated the agreement exists in the text of subparagraphs 13.f and 58.a(2). As the war ended up in a stalemate, the armistice terms underscored cooperation rather than unilateralism, and the articles for body exchange were no exception. They emphasized that each side must depend on the other's information before initiating its body recovery program. A list of known burials could be submitted to the opposing side, but their existence required confirmation before recovery could proceed. Retrieving the remains of US service members lost in North Korea depended entirely on the cooperation of the CVF/KPA. These subparagraphs did not allow the US GRS teams to search freely for MIAs in North Korea; instead, they required that GRS teams be escorted only to the gravesites that the CVF/KPA wanted to show them. Although the terms significantly limited the US military's ability to recover these lost bodies, they were likely the best resolution given the stalemate that existed on the peninsula and the predictable hostilities after the armistice.

However, there was also a significant loophole in these articles. The two

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<sup>21</sup> Memo for Record, Graves Registration, June 26, 1952, Box 2, Entry PI127-14, RG554, NARAII.

subparagraphs acknowledged that the GRS team of one side should be allowed to go to the gravesites of its individuals before excavation. However, while the terms implied that the exhumation of enemy bodies should be carried out by the opposing GRS teams, they did not specify whether enemy bodies could be moved from where they were originally buried to new graveyards due to sanitary, security, or other reasons before the GRS teams of their side exhumed them. This left leeway for each side to relocate its enemies' graves to places far away from its military bases or other facilities of strategic value. Since neither side wished to permit enemy personnel to approach these key installations, it is possible that both sides intentionally left this loophole, but the US military failed to anticipate the consequences.

Uncertainty about the postwar situation in Korea was the key reason that precluded the UNC from proposing an active search for its MIAs and dead soldiers in North Korea after the armistice. Planning for recovering the bodies commenced in early January 1952, when the UNC assumed that an armistice would come in a few months. The UNC considered a thorough search for MIAs in North Korea, entailing a whole GRS battalion working ten to twelve months. However, mounting hostility during the truce talks at Panmunjom in early 1952 convinced the US military that the war would not end with a settlement, but rather a precarious truce. In fact, the negotiators at Panmunjom had never felt comfortable with allowing opposing GRS teams to search for bodies and missing personnel in their territory. Therefore, in May, the FEC instructed the Eighth Army to scale down the original plan, ordering GRS teams to prioritize the bodies of



UNC soldiers buried in known graves. The UNC plan in January was also unfeasible because reciprocity could hardly be offered to the CVF/KPA, since the Eighth Army reported that many areas in South Korea would not be opened to CVF/KPA GRS teams for security reasons. The FEC believed that the CVF/KPA shared the same concern. Although various US military commands in the Far East later discussed plans to conduct free and thorough searches in the DPRK, none made it to the truce talks.<sup>22</sup>

More detailed planning for recovering bodies from North Korea began in the winter of 1952 as the relevant subparagraphs in the Armistice Agreement were agreed upon in late August. On December 7, 1952, the UNC issued “Operation Plan 9-52,” which became the general guideline for all body recovery proposals before the final armistice in July 1953. Plan 9-52 estimated that the remains of at least 1,600 bodies of US soldiers buried in cemeteries in North Korea would be received in exchange for about 8,500 CVF/KPA bodies in the territory occupied by UNC forces. It directed the US military to comply closely with subparagraphs 13.f and 58.a(2), but it expanded the former to include isolated air crash sites in North Korea.<sup>23</sup> Possibly fearing that the CVF/KPA may deny the entry of US GRS teams on the pretext that they might be spies, the UNC modified Plan 9-52 on February 9, 1953, and instructed that no intelligence agents should accompany the GRS teams to North Korea, nor would the GRS personnel

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<sup>22</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 130-138. The actual planning of the body recovery program may be earlier than January 1952, as many relevant files cited “Commander-in-Chief Far East Operation Plan 8-51.” The commanding structure of US and allied forces changed several times during the war. From 1951, Far East Command and the UNC played the exact same role. The Eighth US Army commanded most US land forces and some allied forces in Korea.

<sup>23</sup> “Operation Plan, CINCUNC No.9-52,” December 7, 1952, Box 2, Entry PI127-14, RG554, NARAII.

carry out espionage. It granted the CVF/KPA GRS personnel safe passage into South Korea but placed their activities under constant surveillance.<sup>24</sup>

Two months before the armistice on July 27, 1953, and after months of refinement of Plan 9-52, the plan for postwar recovery of bodies from North Korea took shape. In adherence to Plan 9-52, the US military tasked a logistical command, the Korean Communication Zone (KComZ), with recovering bodies in December 1952. The KComZ prepared “Operation Plan 5-53” on May 26, 1953, christening the post-armistice body recovery program in North Korea “Operation Glory.”<sup>25</sup> In comparison to Plan 9-52, Plan 5-53 seemed to highlight a recommendation that both sides were to dispatch ships to transport GRS personnel and remove remains.<sup>26</sup> Considering the mountainous terrain of the Korean Peninsula, transport by sea would evacuate remains more efficiently and prevent the ordeal of traveling along the treacherous routes in both Koreas. Moreover, minimizing overland travel perhaps made it easier for both sides to conceal their military installations behind the frontline from the other side’s gravediggers.

Operation Plan 5-53 was the end of the planning stage before the armistice, but the US Navy was reluctant to move GRS units by sea after considering the safety of US personnel and the postwar situation. According to a study of the GRS operations in the Korean War, the ports of Hungnam and Chinampo in North Korea, where GRS personnel

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<sup>24</sup> “Annex I-Intelligence” to CINCUNC Operation Plan 9-52, February 9, 1953, Box 2, Entry PI127-14, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>25</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 139-143.

<sup>26</sup> “Operation Plan Glory (KCZ-OPS 5-53),” May 26, 1953, Box 2, Entry PI127-14, RG554, NARAII.

would disembark, had been heavily mined by the US Navy. The mines posed severe risks to ships loaded with GRS teams or remains. Removing the mines would effectively lift the embargo on the two principal ports in the DPRK, giving the CVF/KPA strategic advantage should hostilities be resumed. Plans involving the transportation of bodies over land were again considered within the US military, but Plan 5-53 remained unchanged up to the armistice.<sup>27</sup> The execution of Operation Glory required an agreement between the delegates of both sides at Panmunjom once active conflict subsided.

### **Initial Conflicts over Bodies—Recovering Bodies from the DMZ**

At 10:00 p.m., July 27, 1953, the three-year-interneccine war in Korea came to a halt. To maintain the fragile peace along the frontline fortified by the two Cold War blocs, the Korean War Armistice Agreement required instant implementation. Per the agreement, the first step was for both sides to withdraw two kilometers away from their current battle line, creating a no-man's land (DMZ). Human remains were not a priority at this time, and thus subparagraphs 13.f and 58.a(2) of the armistice treaty were not urgent priorities.

Some human remains, however, got immediate attention. Since the DMZ had to be vacated promptly (removing weapons, equipment, military personnel), removal of unburied bodies scattered in the DMZ was prioritized, out of respect for the dead and

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<sup>27</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 144.

sanitary concerns. For several months before the armistice, this area had experienced such intense warfare that neither side had had the chance to collect and evacuate the dead. Therefore, although the bodies in the DMZ were not the subject of any article in the agreement, they appeared on the agenda of negotiations immediately after the truce between the UNC and the CVF/KPA. The negotiations were within the scope of the Military Armistice Commission (MAC), mostly via the MAC senior members' meetings (usually referred to as MAC meetings) and MAC secretaries' meetings. While the talks on recovering the bodies in the DMZ lasted less than a month, distrust and security concerns plagued them as the DMZ would be the first battlefield if hostilities resumed. They were a rehearsal for the more contentious negotiations for Operation Glory in 1954.

The initial attempt to draft a protocol to recover bodies from the DMZ had been surprisingly smooth. One week after the armistice, US generals at the seventh MAC meeting proposed a basic outline for evacuating bodies from the DMZ. Contradicting the spirit of Operation Glory, this proposal did not permit GRS units to traverse the two halves of the DMZ. It insisted that military personnel of each side should only be responsible for the dead in their respective DMZ section; if they happened to find enemy remains, these bodies would be delivered along with any retrievable identification media at the demarcation line. The US military predicted that the recovery work would be finished by the time military personnel were no longer permitted in the DMZ, forty-eight days after the armistice. Without haggling, the KPA general in the meeting agreed that “when it [one side] finds the dead bodies of the other side in its Demilitarized Zone, they

[bodies] should be transmitted to the other side of the Military Demarcation Line through the Joint Observer Teams,” but did not comment on the exchange of GRS teams across the demarcation line.<sup>28</sup> However, UNC staff at the MAC reported to other US military headquarters that the CVF/KPA had fully accepted the proposal.<sup>29</sup> The prompt partial agreement was perhaps because the CVF/KPA may have been interested in a plan minimizing the chance that the Americans would penetrate the northern half of the DMZ in the name of finding bodies.

The recovery of bodies from the DMZ was soon caught in the crossfire of charges and countercharges by both sides about sending armed personnel into the DMZ and building fortifications there. On August 13, in the eleventh MAC meeting, the situation took an ominous turn. Although the UNC and the CVF/KPA still agreed to cooperate in the removal of corpses from the DMZ on time, the KPA representatives submitted a counterproposal that adhered more to the spirit of subparagraph 13.f than the US proposal. This plan required each side to report the locations of enemies’ bodies in its half of the DMZ within ten days. Upon confirmation by both sides, the GRS teams of the opposing side would be escorted to the sites identified for recovery. The UNC promised a reply at the next meeting.<sup>30</sup> Likely seeking a propaganda victory, the CVF/KPA made the

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<sup>28</sup> Minutes of the Seventh MAC Meeting, August 4, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>29</sup> SR Member UNCMAC to CG AREIGHT, CG KCOMZ, CINCUNC, CGAFFE, Message MAC 8-51, August 4, 1953, Box 141, Entry A1-1327, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>30</sup> Minutes of the Eleventh MAC Meeting, August 13, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII; Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 156-157. Although I frequently cited the military’s GRS study after the Korean War when primary sources were unavailable, its narrative of the body recovery in the DMZ showed something different from my observation: the proposal on August 4 was offered by the CVF/KPA and protested by the US until the CVF/KPA compromised.

counterproposal to highlight their compliance with the armistice agreement and their care for the fallen men. Meanwhile, the US military had begun to evacuate their own dead and record the locations of enemy bodies in its DMZ sector.<sup>31</sup>

As promised, at the twelfth MAC meeting, the UNC side responded to the proposal and suggested a compromise. It had no reason to delay, let alone refuse, the CVF/KPA offer because the latter's proposal better adhered to the spirit of subparagraph 13.f that was originally introduced by the US military. Unable to defend its original proposal, the UNC side explained that the proposal of August 4 only applied to the unburied bodies in the DMZ, rather than all enemy remains left in this area. Since the CVF/KPA negotiators rejected that proposal, the UNC side agreed to retract it and generally accepted its opponent's proposal of August 13. Only the timeframe for its implementation remained undecided. The UNC suggested that body recovery should be postponed until safe lanes for personnel movement through the DMZ were cleared of undetonated ordnance and booby traps. A judicious delay would increase the safety of GRS teams and demonstrate concern for the living. The suggestion came with a price to the effectiveness of the recovery, though: some bodies far away from the safe lanes would be unrecoverable. The CVF/KPA did not object.<sup>32</sup>

The exchange of burial locations in the DMZ did not progress smoothly. According to the agreement for retrieving bodies from the DMZ, after confirming all

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<sup>31</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 156.

<sup>32</sup> Minutes of the Twelfth MAC Meeting, August 19, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII; Walker, 157-158.

locations of deceased servicemen's remains in the DMZ, GRS personnel would proceed to these sites to recover bodies. The program was scheduled to begin on September 17.<sup>33</sup> However, the CVF/KPA failed to update the Americans regarding burials in the northern half of the DMZ in a timely fashion. To avoid scrapping the agreement and to maintain initiatives, the CVF/KPA representatives devised an alternative plan for recovering bodies from the DMZ. On September 24, they suggested that they would send fewer than a hundred men carrying proper credentials to reclaim bodies from the southern half of the DMZ as soon as burial sites of Chinese and North Korean soldiers were confirmed.<sup>34</sup> Probably overwhelmed by the ongoing POW issues and skirmishes over the DMZ that characterized contemporary MAC meetings, the UNC did not reply until October 17 and began its statement with complaints. While they generally accepted the updated plan, the UNC delegates criticized their CVF/KPA counterparts for failing to confirm the location of bodies of UNC soldiers. The UNC promised that body recovery in the DMZ could begin seven days after it received the locations of the burial sites of its soldiers.<sup>35</sup> Three days later, the CVF/KPA team explained the delay by a countercharge that the UNC had provided inaccurate locations of burials, before it delivered a partial list of dead UNC soldiers in the northern half of the DMZ.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Minutes of the Fifteenth MAC Meeting, August 28, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII; "Procedures for Recovering Bodies from the Demilitarized Zone," August 28, 1953, Box 121, Entry A1-1327, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes of the Fifty-Fourth Meeting of the Secretaries, September 24, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1263, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>35</sup> Minutes of the Seventy-Third Meeting of the Secretaries, October 17, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1263, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>36</sup> Minutes of the Seventy-Fifth Meeting of the Secretaries, October 20, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1263,

Because of all the back and forth, the recovery of bodies from the DMZ commenced only on October 27, 1953. US military records did not indicate any significant conflict in this process. By November 12, when the recovery program ended, 736 bodies of UNC soldiers had been evacuated from both halves of the DMZ; roughly eighty were left behind due to the threat of nearby mines.<sup>37</sup> Before the recovery operation, the estimated number of bodies lost in the DMZ was about 1,100. Therefore, the recovery rate was under 70 percent, significantly lower than the recovery rate of US soldiers' bodies in South Korea.<sup>38</sup> This was unsurprising because of the short timeframe and the hostilities between the two sides. Consequently, the commander of the Eighth Army considered restarting the DMZ recovery in April 1954.<sup>39</sup> The active phase of recovering bodies in the southern half of the DMZ ended in December 1954.<sup>40</sup> However, US GRS teams continued recovering bodies in the DMZ until the 1960s, sometimes with the KPA's help. Even in a moment when it was difficult to make progress on bigger issues, the ability of the two sides to come to a consensus about body recovery indicated that cooperation was possible.

### **Preparation for Operation Glory—Gathering Intelligence**

While recovering remains from the DMZ gave opposing personnel access to an

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RG554, NARAII.

<sup>37</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 158.

<sup>38</sup> The highest number, 1098, was mentioned in the Seventy-Fifth MAC meeting of the secretaries.

<sup>39</sup> CG AREIGHT to SR MBR UNCMAC, No. KGP 4-23, April 7, 1954, Box 33, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>40</sup> *8204th Army Unit History*, 41.



area with minimal military value, implementing subparagraphs 13.f and 58.a(2) would allow hundreds of CVF/KPA personnel to stay in South Korea for months, and the US military remained deeply suspicious of the other side's true intentions. US military officers faced a dilemma: they wanted North Korea to open its territory as soon as possible to recover lost US servicemen, and if possible, scour the country thoroughly for the bodies of all MIAs, but they were reluctant to reciprocate and considered limiting North Korean and Chinese access to a few ports or the DMZ. Although subparagraphs 13.f and 58.a(2) did consider security issues, the negotiators in 1952 did not anticipate that mistrust would poison the relationship so badly that even after the armistice these subparagraphs became unenforceable. In the weeks after the ceasefire, both sides made some attempts to improve relations by strictly observing these two articles. When talks over POWs and Korea reunification were collapsing in 1954, so too was any chance for cooperation on the question of repatriating remains in adherence to these subparagraphs.

Immediately after the armistice, both sides indeed carried out subparagraphs 58.a(2) and the part of 13.f that did not require the opening of territory. Both sides exchanged the names of deceased POWs and located the graves of enemy soldiers in their respective zones as a gesture to improve their relations. Compiling the rosters of dead POWs was urgent for both sides. For North Korea and China, learning who had expired in POW camps allowed them to know whether a POW's absence was due to his defection to South Korea or Taiwan. For the United States, it was critical to counteract the simmering domestic anxiety that some US POWs might never be released. On August 6,

1953, both sides exchanged rosters of dead POWs and their burial sites as ordained by 58.a(2). Two days later, the UNC delivered the dossiers of 11,513 dead CVF/KPA troops found buried in South Korea.<sup>41</sup> KPA officers in the MAC promised that a list of all deceased UNC personnel would be delivered as soon as possible.<sup>42</sup>

Because the MAC meetings did not separate tensions surrounding POW repatriation from the exchange of burial information, the early cooperation stalled in the face of the POW issue. Both sides suspected that the other had intentionally withheld POWs without explanation. The POWs' scars and testimony provided fresh evidence for both sides to characterize their enemies as barbaric, which was especially useful in a contest for the moral high ground in negotiations. The effect of this tension soon became apparent. For instance, on August 19, after an argument about whether UNC soldiers had used violence on KPA POWs before their release, KPA officers ignored a request from the UNC for a more detailed explanation of why some soldiers on the CVF/KPA rosters of dead POWs lacked a burial site, and why the CVF/KPA had failed to submit a list of other UNC troops buried north of the DMZ. Instead, the North Koreans responded with a long anti-US tirade.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps not wanting to break off relations completely a mere month after the armistice, on August 24, CVF/KPA officers at the MAC updated the burial information of

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<sup>41</sup> Minutes of the Twelfth Meeting of the Secretaries, August 8, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1263, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>42</sup> Minutes of the Fourteenth Meeting of the Secretaries, August 10, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1263, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>43</sup> Minutes of the Fifteenth Meeting of the Committee for the Repatriation of POWs, August 19, 1953, Box 67, Entry PI127-1, RG554, NARAII.

UNC soldiers. They explained that if the burial site of a POW was listed as unavailable, he must have been bombed by US aircraft, rendering the body irrecoverable. They also provided the location of some known POW graves and the fates of 569 UNC personnel killed under other circumstances, though these burial sites needed further investigation. The CVF/KPA delegates, however, refused to offer a full list of all deceased UNC personnel buried in their zone, claiming that their previous lists “cover[ed] all the data on the death and the burial places of the deceased Korean and non-Korean military personnel of your side, including the deceased prisoners of war, which is practically impossible for us to furnish your side.”<sup>44</sup> They stressed that they had spared no effort to follow the armistice agreement, but they were lying: they had specified that the lists on August 6 contained only dead POWs. Their refusal to provide a list of the graves of UNC soldiers in military cemeteries in North Korea was likely a tactic to use the information as a bargaining chip in future talks. If the graves had not been destroyed, it was hardly challenging to prepare an inventory of them. Moreover, neither side had reported any burial locations outside established cemeteries on the peninsula, which was required by subparagraph 13.f.

The exchange on August 24 signaled the end of initial cooperation on Operation Glory. It is unclear how the US military reacted to the North Koreans’ excuse for refusing to provide a new roster of deceased personnel; however, this roster never appeared again

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<sup>44</sup> Minutes of the Sixteenth Meeting of the Committee for the Repatriation of POWs, August 24, 1953, Box 67, Entry PI127-1, RG554, NARAII.

in MAC meetings in 1953. At that time, the MAC was overwhelmed by clearing the DMZ and solving the POW issue.<sup>45</sup> In November, inclement weather began to freeze the ground to the point that exhumation was impossible. With the winter approaching and little hope of securing an agreement in 1953, the US military ceased talks over Operation Glory. They would not resume until 1954.<sup>46</sup>

### **Negotiations for Operation Glory—Unilateralism and A Fatal Mistake**

Concurrently with the verbal battles at the MAC, the US military was busy incorporating security concerns into its plans for Operation Glory. On August 28, 1953, the Eighth Army reminded the UNC that Operation Plan 5-53 (allowing CVF/KPA GRS teams to enter South Korea) posed a grave threat to US forces in South Korea. According to the plan, the CVF/KPA teams would use Inchon to enter South Korea and travel past multiple urban centers and military bases located below the 38th Parallel. The Eighth Army suspected that it might be a chance for them to collect intelligence or incite riots.<sup>47</sup> The Navy declared seaborne transport of GRS teams to be impractical due to its reluctance to remove the mines blocking DPRK ports.<sup>48</sup>

Eliminating the use of ports in the body recovery program was a decision supported by all major US military agencies in Korea and reflected in a revised plan on

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<sup>45</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 154.

<sup>46</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 159.

<sup>47</sup> Eighth Army to UNCMAC, Routes of Entry of Communist Graves Registration Personnel, August 28, 1953, Box 848, Entry A1-133, RG338, NARAII.

<sup>48</sup> Eighth Army Adjutant General Section (G-1), "Recovery and Evacuation of Deceased," September 11, 1953, Box 848, Entry A1-133, RG338, NARAII.

November 30, 1953. The November 30 plan addressed the security concerns with several significant updates. The UNC estimated that the number of CVF/KPA corpses in South Korea was 11,726. About sixty percent of the bodies had been concentrated near Pusan, the southernmost port of South Korea; twenty-seven percent had been buried just south of the DMZ. The final significant group was near POW camps which had held CVF/KPA prisoners. The concentration of remains in Pusan meant that CVF/KPA GRS personnel had to travel a long distance overland before recovering them, and so the Army struggled to determine the best route to escort CVF/KPA personnel to Pusan. The November 30 plan did not anticipate that the CVF/KPA might share their concerns about security (POW camps and US soldiers' cemeteries in North Korea were far away from the 38th Parallel). Like their counterparts, though, CVF/KPA commanders had significant security concerns about granting American GRS teams a long sojourn in North Korea.<sup>49</sup> Besides, the plan strictly limited the duration of Operation Glory. The UNC required that the timeframe be sufficient to recover the known UNC dead in North Korea while forestalling "the possibility of Communist graves registration personnel remaining indefinitely in South Korea, merely by their side refusing to agree to a terminal date in the MAC."<sup>50</sup> The US military later predicted that it could take fifteen to sixty days to reach an agreement with

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<sup>49</sup> Enclosure 3 attached to UNCMAC to Commanding General, Eighth US Army, "Graves Registration--Recovery of Bodies from North and South Korea," November 30, 1953, Box 26, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAII. According to the article "Accepting the Bodies," the major concerns of the CVF were: 1) their GRS teams might be attacked by ROK forces; 2) The CVF/KPA could not accept enemy GRS teams who might operate in a large area and provoke conflicts. This article suggests that the CVF/KPA cited the first reason to deny US GRS teams' access to North Korea, but I cannot verify this claim with MAC records.

<sup>50</sup> UNCMAC to Commanding General, Eighth Army, "Graves Registration--Recovery of Bodies from North and South Korea," November 30, 1953, Box 26, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAII.

the CVF/KPA before launching Operation Glory, which was expected to be executed for about 135 days at any time from March to November.<sup>51</sup> On February 24, 1954, the UNC decided to resume negotiations on March 1.<sup>52</sup>

Unbeknownst to all military policymakers in Korea, one short paragraph in the November 30 plan would ultimately cause trouble for Operation Glory. The KComZ considered providing ships to move the bodies of enemy POWs buried near camps on islands off the Korean coast to Pusan, reasoning that the CVF/KPA could conveniently collect a significant percentage of the bodies of its personnel at Pusan (but the plan did not specify how CVF/KPA GRS teams would come to Pusan).<sup>53</sup> At the time, the KComZ claimed that this suggestion was purely benevolent, but security concerns were likely the primary factor for moving the bodies. In fact, on October 19, 1953, the KComZ reported to the UNC that since the POW camps on Cheju Island would be transformed into a ROK barracks, the graves outside the camp needed to be moved to Pusan for fear that CVF/KPA GRS teams might spy on this installation.<sup>54</sup>

The KComZ, directly in charge of recovering bodies, seemed to persuade other

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<sup>51</sup> Commanding General, Eighth US Army to Senior Member, UNCMAC, "Graves Registration--Recovery of Bodies from North and South Korea," January 20, 1954; UNCMAC to UNC, February 7, 1954; Headquarters, UNC to Senior Member, UNCMAC, February 26, 1954; "UNC Position, Post Armistice Graves Recovery Program-Specific Procedures and Time Limit," February 16, 1954, Box 77, Entry PI127-1, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>52</sup> "UNC Notification to the Department of the Army," February 26, 1954, Box 75, Entry PI127-1, RG554, NARAII. The talk resumed on March 19, the first MAC Secretariat Meeting after March 1, 1954.

<sup>53</sup> Enclosure 3 attached to UNCMAC to Commanding General, Eighth US Army, "Graves Registration--Recovery of Bodies from North and South Korea," November 30, 1953, Box 26, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>54</sup> KCOMZ to Senior Member UNCMAC, No. AX 77706, October 19, 1953, Box 52, Entry PI127-1, RG554, NARAII.

military commands to accept its suggestion and proceeded with moving bodies without consulting the CVF/KPA. By March 1954, GRS units had finished transferring bodies from Cheju Island to Pusan; another transfer from Koje Island was ongoing. The UNC anticipated that such transfers might be a source of friction with the CVF/KPA when negotiations on Operation Glory reconvened. Therefore, it instructed the UNC representatives at the MAC to explain to the CVF/KPA the legality of this transfer in the framework of the Armistice Agreement.<sup>55</sup> The unilateral transfer of bodies was later proven to be a fateful blunder that almost torpedoed the entire body recovery program, which the UNC at the time failed to appreciate.

The transfer of POWs' bodies did not seem to worry the UNC, but it was wary of moving remains from isolated battlefield graves to Pusan, fearing that moving an enemy's body from a documented grave to another place without a mutual agreement could be perceived as violating subparagraph 13.f and become a pretext for the CVF/KPA to decline cooperation.<sup>56</sup> Transferring bodies from POW cemeteries was not so different in nature, but the UNC did not deem that to be equally problematic. Furthermore, most of the CVF/KPA dead in South Korea had already been buried in Pusan or close to the DMZ in 1954, while the KPA had fought costly battles far away from Pusan or the DMZ in 1950. The original graves of KPA soldiers buried by their comrades close to the

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<sup>55</sup> "Agreement on Procedure for the Recovery of Bodies of Deceased Military Personnel from the Territories under the Military Control of the Other Side," March 11, 1954, Box 77, Entry PI127-1, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

battlefields must have been disturbed and moved by the UN forces during the war. The UNC seems to have never discussed the legality of transporting these bodies.

Despite the UNC's concern with potential protests about the move of POW bodies before talks over Operation Glory resumed, the UNC delegates chose to behave aggressively. Upon restarting negotiations on March 19, 1954, American officers at the MAC lodged an unusually long protest to the CVF/KPA side for failing to furnish the burial information of deceased UNC personnel. They then notified the CVF/KPA representatives that

it is the policy of the United Nations Command that burial sites of all military personnel under its military control will be concentrated in as few cemeteries as possible. This policy has been extended to include the consolidation of burial sites at which deceased personnel of your side were interred, as well as those burial sites containing the remains of deceased personnel of the United Nations Command.

The officers thus informed their CVF/KPA counterparts that the previous lists of their comrades' graves were no longer valid. The act of moving bodies was in clear defiance of subparagraph 13.f since this subparagraph required both sides to jointly confirm the burial locations of their soldiers. The movement of bodies meant that the CVF/KPA could no longer verify the burial sites of their comrades. Without apology or further explanation, UNC negotiators reported that POW graves on islands off the Korean coast had already been emptied and their contents moved to Pusan. They concluded their statement by delivering a draft agreement specifying how each side should dispatch GRS teams to the other's territory to recover bodies. CVF/KPA officers did not make any comment or response. The two sides soon reverted to the unverifiable mutual charges of



violating the armistice agreement that had already become routine in their negotiations.<sup>57</sup>

Not unexpectedly, the CVF/KPA representatives exploited the unilateral relocation of their comrades' bodies. It gave them a plausible pretext to bar the Americans from entering North Korea since they could cite the US military's action as evidence that the UNC had been the first to violate the Armistice Agreement. On March 23, the CVF/KPA side notified the UNC that they would need extra time to study the relocation of bodies.<sup>58</sup> Possibly contemplating how this issue could be used to their advantage or rejecting the UNC proposal by silence, the CVF/KPA did not make any comments for another two months. On May 25, after the UNC delegates at the MAC realized that their plan to begin body recovery in May had been foiled by this silence, they reintroduced their March 19 proposal. The CVF/KPA continued to refuse to respond to the proposal but suggested that both sides appoint GRS officers to a special commission dedicated to all subsequent talks on the body recovery program. The Americans concurred.<sup>59</sup>

Moving the issue of returning bodies from high-level MAC meetings to a special commission should be interpreted as the CVF/KPA's endeavor to characterize themselves as more faithfully complying with the Armistice Agreement than the UNC, thereby gaining an advantage in the political skirmishes at the MAC. As mentioned above, shortly after the truce, the CVF/KPA side proposed a plan of recovering bodies from the DMZ

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<sup>57</sup> Minutes of 106th Meeting of the Secretaries, March 19, 1954, Box 2, Entry A1-1263, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>58</sup> Minutes of 109th Meeting of the Secretaries, March 23, 1954, Box 2, Entry A1-1263, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>59</sup> Minutes of 111th Meeting of the Secretaries, May 19, 1954, and Minutes of 112th Meeting of the Secretaries, May 25, 1954, Box 2, Entry A1-1263, RG554, NARAII.

that better adhered to subparagraph 13.f of the Armistice Agreement than the UNC version.<sup>60</sup> In May 1954, creating such a commission allowed CVF/KPA officers to further highlight their commitment to the body recovery program. By contrast, the UNC's unilateral relocation of bodies violated this term. Moreover, the CVF/KPA officers may have felt justified in blaming the UNC for sabotaging the body recovery program and retaliating by closing their territory to US GRS teams. Moving the program out of MAC meetings might minimize undesirable attention to its reprisal.

Eventually, in the GRS staff meetings, the UNC realized the grievous consequence of its unilateral move of bodies. The only significant debate in these meetings was whether North Korea would be open to US GRS teams; since the UNC had moved the bodies of captured CVF/KPA personnel, the CVF/KPA believed it reasonable to transport UNC soldiers' bodies closer to the DMZ so that it was not necessary for the US GRS teams to enter North Korea. At the first GRS staff meeting on May 28, 1954, a KPA officer referred to the paragraph cited above about the unilateral move of remains and demanded an explanation. Before the US officers at the meeting could respond, his next question threw the Americans even further off balance. He asked whether the identification media of the remains relocated near Pusan were well preserved—and if so, what difference would there be between going to Pusan to recover their compatriots' bodies and retrieving them from the original burial sites? If the US officers at the MAC

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<sup>60</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 156. This study argues that the CVF/KPA's eagerness to recover bodies at the DMZ was due to their wish to show the world that they faithfully adhered to the armistice agreement.

admitted that the identification media had not been well kept, it meant that the UNC had effectively sabotaged the recovery program by making the remains hard to identify. This provided the CVF/KPA an excellent excuse to terminate negotiations. If these officers insisted that the relocation of bodies had not negatively affected their identification, the CVF/KPA could claim that they were justified in moving US soldiers' bodies close to the DMZ and thus denying Americans' entry into North Korea. In response, a US officer argued that the UNC transported remains to Pusan to extend due dignity and honor to the dead, in compliance with the Geneva Convention and human civilization. He assured his opponents that US GRS teams had preserved the identities of all the bodies transferred to Pusan.<sup>61</sup> However, he avoided answering the question whether there was any difference for the CVF/KPA in recovering the bodies at their original burial sites or in Pusan.

The officer's answer obviously fell short of the CVF/KPA delegates' expectations. When he attempted to persuade his opponents to sign the March 19 proposal, the CVF/KPA side replied that they would only resume discussions if the Americans could give satisfactory answers to both of their questions. The UNC representative then reported that if a body had been identified at its original plot on Koje or Cheju, its identification was preserved in Pusan. His answer implied that it made little difference to the CVF/KPA GRS personnel to retrieve them at either place. By this time, the CVF/KPA delegates must have assumed that, given the US military's actions, it would be reasonable

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<sup>61</sup> Minutes of the First Meeting of Staff Officers Designated to Discuss Body Recovery Program, May 28, 1954, Box 81, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII.

to deny US GRS teams deep access into their territory. Claiming that the UNC answers were still unsatisfactory, they again refused to sign the March 19 proposal.<sup>62</sup>

While the CVF/KPA side did not explicitly renounce the US proposal, the UNC was hardly optimistic. After the meeting, it reported to the commander of US Army Forces Far East that the CVF/KPA was very displeased to learn of the transfer of bodies from POW camps to Pusan. The UNC delegates at the MAC worried that the CVF/KPA could retaliate by shipping all Americans' bones somewhere near the DMZ or cancel future meetings on body recovery entirely.<sup>63</sup>

In the next meeting, the CVF/KPA offered a counterproposal that reminded the UNC of its blunder. Citing what the UNC delegates had reported to them from March to May, the CVF/KPA negotiators concluded that

since bodies of deceased military personnel of our side now in your territory have already been transferred and reinterred in new cemeteries, they are no longer at their original burial sites. Therefore, there is no practical significance for one side to proceed to the territory of the other side to recover and evacuate the bodies [...] It becomes even more suitable for the side that has transferred and reinterred the bodies to consolidate them and deliver them to the other side consolidated.<sup>64</sup>

The new proposal effectively nullified all previous planning for Operation Glory by the US military. The UNC had violated subparagraph 13.f first and was in no position to demand that its opponents adhere to the original agreement, since they could not convincingly justify their move of CVF/KPA bodies. Moreover, as the US military had

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Senior Member UNCMAC to CGAFFE, No. MAC 5-72, May 29, 1954, Box 222, Entry A1-193, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>64</sup> Minutes of the Second Meeting of Staff Officers Designated to Discuss Body Recovery Program, June 4, 1954, Box 81, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII.

never been comfortable with allowing opposition GRS teams to enter South Korea while safeguarding its military security, this counterproposal provided a more feasible solution.

To justify their argument, CVF/KPA representatives described the advantages of their new proposal. They claimed that due to the large number of bodies in the territory occupied by each side, it would be much faster to deliver them in batches than to escort a few GRS teams to hundreds of burial sites throughout the peninsula. They also added that doing so would speed up the process significantly and therefore grant consolation to the families of the dead, which they argued was the real spirit of subparagraph 13.f. UNC negotiators did not have a ready answer and withdrew from the meeting after reminding their adversaries of subparagraph 13.f.<sup>65</sup>

A heated debate arose among US military agencies in Korea about whether they should accept this new proposal. Realizing that the CVF/KPA's reasoning could hardly be challenged, the UNC admitted that its own actions had breached the armistice agreement and rendered untenable its March 19 proposal. The CVF/KPA would not agree to anything if they were not reciprocally permitted to move the remains of American soldiers. The UNC agreed with the advantages of the CVF/KPA counterproposal, especially since it would minimize the risk of exposing military secrets in South Korea. It admitted that although accepting the CVF/KPA plan might result in future difficulties in identification and give up an opportunity for anti-communist propaganda (highlighting

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

that the CVF/KPA had reneged on the Armistice Agreement while the UNC was determined to defend it), refusal to do so would delay the return of bodies for years. Realizing that it was impossible to convince the media and the public that insisting on a flawed proposal outweighed the prompt recovery of remains, the UNC yielded.<sup>66</sup>

Sensing the imminent capitulation, the Eighth Army—where most of the dead personnel came from—adamantly defended the March 19 proposal. It warned that the CVF/KPA plan would endanger the identification work on the bodies delivered from North Korea. Army officers based their conclusion on their observation of the recovery operations in the DMZ; they claimed that the CVF/KPA had shown neither the ability nor the wish to preserve the identities of bodies. Whether this self-serving argument was accurate or biased, the Eighth Army faced an uphill battle in convincing the CVF/KPA negotiators that their own GRS practices were unacceptable, while the American ones were superior in preserving bodies' identities. The US military's unilateralism was also evident in its claim that the Geneva Conventions were adequate to justify its move of enemy POW remains to Pusan, while the CVF/KPA must abide by subparagraph 13.f to leave Americans' bodies alone. Unless the CVF/KPA accepted the original plan, the Eighth Army argued, the UNC should suspend the talks.<sup>67</sup>

Other factors began to impact the pace of the negotiations. While the US military officers could stubbornly refuse to compromise, pressure was mounting on the federal

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<sup>66</sup> SR MBR UNC to CINCUNC, No.2-6-12, June 5, 1954, Box 19, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>67</sup> CG ARMY Eight Korea to CG AFFE, No. KQM 6-13, June 6, 1954, Box 222, Entry A1-193, RG554, NARAII.

government from the POW/MIA families. In the spring of 1954, the tension between POW/MIA families and the federal government reached its apex. As mentioned in Chapter I, due to the CBRP, some families were reluctant to accept the death of their loved ones without receiving their bodies. POW/MIA families were besieging the government with charges of cowardice in its failure to demand that the CVF/KPA release all American POWs.<sup>68</sup> Recovering the bodies as early as possible was at least a partial solution to easing their anger and anxiety. Furthermore, if the US military were to prolong or cease the negotiations, it would be a chance for the CVF/KPA to demonize the United States for its callousness to its citizens by delaying the return of their dead relatives' bodies.

Given the UNC's opinions and the domestic situation, the FEC decided to allow the UNC negotiators to accept the CVF/KPA proposal. On June 7, a meeting among staff officers of various branches in the FEC reached the consensus that concession was inevitable, and the military must prepare to explain the disadvantages of accepting the CVF/KPA proposal to the American public.<sup>69</sup> It was perhaps the military's tactic to direct domestic rage toward China and North Korea while assuring the families that it was endeavoring to account for as many missing personnel as possible. The UNC believed that the Eighth Army's objection should not kill the deal.<sup>70</sup> Later, the Army Forces Far

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<sup>68</sup> This part will be extensively discussed in Chapter III. According to the article "Accepting the Bodies", China realized the domestic situation in the United States, therefore the CVF/KPA forced the US military to accept its counterproposal.

<sup>69</sup> Memorandum for Record, "KPA/CPV Proposal Regarding the Body Recovery Program," June 7, 1954, Box 3, Entry A1-1267B, RG554, NARA II.

<sup>70</sup> Memorandum for J3, "The Body Recovery Program," June 7, 1954, Box 3, Entry A1-1267B, RG554,

East, which had once stood with the Eighth Army, yielded reluctantly. Its commander admitted that suspending talks would be politically unacceptable, and the UNC must ensure that Operation Glory launched by November 1954.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the decision to accept the CVF/KPA proposal, the UNC did attempt to avoid an unconditional surrender and to persuade the CVF/KPA to allow some American GRS personnel to enter North Korea. In a study on June 12 by the FEC, it seemed that there was a new plan being drafted concerning body recovery. Its primary goal was to offset the political gains of the CVF/KPA if the original US proposal were voided. The plan likely included some travel by US GRS personnel into North Korea, but the FEC felt that the CVF/KPA would never agree to any plan that insisted on such an incursion.<sup>72</sup> When the two sides reconvened on July 1, the UNC grudgingly offered a new proposal that generally matched that of the CVF/KPA, but differed in that each side was to be permitted to dispatch a small GRS team as observers to the other's territory to monitor and assist in the exhumation of remains and their shipment to the DMZ.<sup>73</sup>

Meanwhile, the CVF/KPA proceeded with their own proposal without notifying the UNC, likely an act of reprisal. On July 8, a North Korean officer notified his US counterparts that CVF/KPA forces had already moved the bodies of deceased Americans or their allies to Kaesong on the 38th Parallel, claiming that it was no different from the

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<sup>71</sup> "Revaluation of AFFE Recommendation, 8 June 54, on Recovery of United States-United Nations Deceased," June 29, 1954, Box 74, Entry PI127-1, RG554, NARAIL.

<sup>72</sup> "Body Recovery Program," June 12, 1954, Box 3, Entry A1-1267B, RG554, NARAIL.

<sup>73</sup> Minutes of the Third Meeting of Staff Officers Designated to Discuss Body Recovery Program, July 1, 1954, Box 81, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAIL.



earlier actions of US forces. Moreover, he reported that the bodies had been moved with their identification media. Given this fait accompli, no GRS personnel, even observers, would be permitted to cross the DMZ. Unable to suspend negotiations or challenge this reasoning, the UNC side did not lodge a protest. In order to save the observer proposal, it claimed that having observers would ensure that the CVF/KPA would move the dead Americans with due military honor. The KPA officer did not respond directly to his counterparts, stressing that his top priority was to clear the remains as quickly as possible from his country. Therefore, there was no need to send observers who might find fault with and delay the exhumation work.<sup>74</sup> Facing such obstinacy, the UNC gave in.<sup>75</sup>

By now, the most troublesome issue blocking the body recovery program had been solved. The CVF/KPA drafted an “Understanding on the Administrative Details for the Delivery and Reception of Bodies,” which became the blueprint for Operation Glory, and passed it to the UNC on July 8. After another futile request by the UNC to include observers in the Understanding, the UNC and the CVF/KPA signed the Understanding on July 20 and confirmed it in the forty-seventh MAC meeting on August 18.<sup>76</sup> They also agreed to convene a GRS committee to verify the burial location and identification media of each body to be exchanged.<sup>77</sup> Operation Glory was to commence on September 1,

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<sup>74</sup> Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of Staff Officers Designated to Discuss Body Recovery Program, July 8, 1954, Box 81, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>75</sup> Senior Member, UNCMAC to CINCUNC, No. MAC 2-7-15, July 9, 1954, Box 222, Entry A1-193, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>76</sup> Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of Staff Officers Designated to Discuss Body Recovery Program, July 16, 1954, Box 81, Entry A1-2117, RG92; Minutes of the Forty-Seventh MAC Meeting, August 18, 1954, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>77</sup> Minutes of the Sixth Meeting of Staff Officers Designated to Discuss Body Recovery Program, July 20,

1954 and last until all bodies had been transferred.

### **Operation Glory and Afterward**

Operation Glory was not the climax, but rather the coda to the heated debates of the previous months. The process of trading remains proceeded smoothly. At 9:30 a.m. on September 1, under the eyes of senior US and ROK officers, the first batches of bodies were swapped.<sup>78</sup> In exchange for the bodies of five hundred North Koreans and a hundred Chinese, the UNC received 193 American dead and seven unidentified bodies.<sup>79</sup> On each of the following day, GRS teams of the two sides exchanged two hundred UNC bodies for six hundred CVF/KPA bodies. On September 21, after delivering 123 bodies, the CVF/KPA declared that it had finished returning all the bodies of US troops and their allies.<sup>80</sup> The UNC continued its delivery of bodies until October 11; in total, 13,528 containers of remains were handed over to the CVF/KPA.<sup>81</sup>

Both sides, however, had made their declarations too early. On October 11, during a meeting between the two sides' GRS teams, a UNC officer expressed his appreciation for the cooperation, care, and dignity that the North Koreans and Chinese had extended during Operation Glory. He announced that the US military would continue searching for

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1954, Box 81, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAIL.

<sup>78</sup> *8204th Army Unit History*, 43

<sup>79</sup> GLORY REV GR REG to CMD GENERAL AFFE, CMD GENERAL KCOMZ, COMD GEN ARMY EIGHT, No. GLORY 923, September 1, 1954, Box 34, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAIL.

<sup>80</sup> GLORY REV GR REG to AFFE, CG KCOMZ, CG AREIGHT, SECRETARETARIAT UNCMAC, No. GLORY 9-20-21, September 21, 1954, Box 34, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAIL.

<sup>81</sup> GLORY REV GR REG to CG AFFE, CG AREIGHT, KCOMZ, No. GLORY 10-37-11, October 11, 1954, Box 34, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAIL.

its adversaries' remains until October 30. In return, the CVF/KPA side reported that it had recently discovered seventy-eight bodies of UNC forces and scheduled their delivery on the next day.<sup>82</sup>



Figure 2-1: US servicemen are waiting for the exchange of bodies during Operation Glory. (US Army Photos, <https://dpaa.secure.force.com/dpaaFmWbInOperationGlory>. This photo is in the public domain.)

The UNC took advantage of this amicable atmosphere to request that the CVF/KPA search for deceased airmen whose planes had crashed in North Korea. It is not clear why they failed to make this request prior to the beginning of Operation Glory as the UNC had been updating the inventory of isolated graves in North Korea. The official explanation was that the process of confirming the location of these crashes had just been completed, but it is doubtful that checking these locations took much longer than listing isolated burials. The request, which expanded the scope of Operation Glory to crash sites

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<sup>82</sup> Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of Graves Registration Committee, October 11, 1954, Box 81, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII.

that had not been specified in subparagraph 13.f, was possibly the fruit of the cooperative atmosphere in September. Requesting the search for crash sites any earlier might have upset the CVF/KPA and imperiled the dialogues. In the atmosphere of cooperation, the CVF/KPA did not reject the new request.<sup>83</sup> On November 9, it delivered 66 sets of remains to the UNC, bringing the total number of repatriated bodies to 4,167.<sup>84</sup> Three days later, the US military deactivated its office for Operation Glory.<sup>85</sup>

The number of bodies recovered was far below all UNC troops missing in North Korea (likewise the CVF/KPA soldiers lost in South Korea). The likelihood that more bodies might be found in the coming years resulted in a new agreement that would cover future discoveries of remains after Operation Glory. Both sides agreed that paragraph 20 of the Understanding would survive the agreement's expiration on October 30, 1954.

Paragraph 20 states:

In the event that either side discovers in its territory bodies of military personnel belonging to the other side after the termination of this Understanding, the delivery and reception of such bodies shall be arranged through the Secretaries of both sides of the Military Armistice Commission.<sup>86</sup>

It became the general guideline for body recovery in subsequent decades. Thirty years later, the US military still cited it when demanding soldiers' remains from North Korea.

It was also during the October 11 meeting that the only argument during

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> *8204th Army Unit History*, 44. There are multiple versions of the number of bodies recovered during Operation Glory.

<sup>85</sup> CG KCOMZ to AFPE, No. BX 37308 CZQM-GR, November 5, 1954, Box 34, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>86</sup> Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of Graves Registration Committee, October 11, 1954, Box 81, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII. The final version is cited from a copy of the Korean War Armistice Agreement and Its Expansion kept by the United Nations, Box 6, Series 687, AG 49, UNARM.

Operation Glory occurred. While it did not significantly impact the operation itself, it was further evidence that the ostensibly humanitarian project would not be free of animosity. After reviewing the burial records of the ten military cemeteries in North Korea, US GRS troops reported that at least 288 bodies recorded as interred there had not been returned. None of the bodies at the Hungnam No.2 cemetery was recovered. American officers denounced the CVF/KPA for what they perceived as negligence, despite the fact that the CVF/KPA maintained that they had finished all exhumations from these known graveyards.<sup>87</sup> As previously described, these graves had likely been damaged during the war, making it impossible to recover all of the bodies even if US GRS teams had been permitted into North Korea. More significantly, UNC officers informed their CVF/KPA counterparts that 546 bodies of North Koreans the US military had once promised to return had been reclassified as civilians by the UNC and were thus beyond the jurisdiction of subparagraph 13.f. Despite the UNC's initial promise, the ROK government intervened on August 26.<sup>88</sup> The KComZ reported that ROK officials stubbornly refused to release any of the 546 bodies and claimed that either they had been registered by the ROK government as South Korean citizens or had relatives there.<sup>89</sup> Defining these dead as citizens was perhaps the ROK's tactic to claim legitimacy over all Koreans. Not wishing to complicate the ongoing body exchange, the US military

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<sup>87</sup> Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of Graves Registration Committee, October 11, 1954, Box 81, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>88</sup> CINCUNC to CG AFFE, August 28, 1954, Box 74, Entry PI127-1, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>89</sup> KCOMZ to AFFE, No. AX 79281, September 21, 1954, Box 74, Entry PI127-1, RG554, NARAII.

broached this issue only after Operation Glory came to an end.<sup>90</sup> The North Koreans instantly denounced it as unacceptable but did not retaliate.<sup>91</sup>

The exchange of bodies did not terminate with Operation Glory because paragraph 20 of the Understanding remained effective. Exchanging bodies, which had no implication in the security of both Koreas, was the most convenient way to maintain a façade that the two sides still adhered to the Armistice Agreement and its subsequent pacts. The US military and the KPA sporadically swapped bodies discovered inside and out of the DMZ throughout the 1950s. For example, in late November 1954, the bodies of twenty-three UNC soldiers were exhumed from the DMZ and transported to the UNC.<sup>92</sup> On December 15, the US military reported to the CVF/KPA the excavation of a mass grave containing fifteen North Korean soldiers.<sup>93</sup> In November 1956, KPA guards in the northern half of the DMZ came across the bodies of five UNC personnel who had perished during the war. They escorted a US GRS team to the site, just as had been done in the DMZ in the fall of 1953.<sup>94</sup> The KPA and the UNC handled the repatriation as routine DMZ affairs in a friendly manner. However, paragraph 20 obligated neither side to actively search for its enemy's bodies after Operation Glory. A continued search would

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<sup>90</sup> *Annual History, Headquarters, U.S. Army Forces Far East, July-September, 1954*, Box 3, Entry NM3-429B, RG407, NARAII.

<sup>91</sup> Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of Graves Registration Committee, October 11, 1954, Box 81, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>92</sup> SR MBR UNCMAC to CG AFFE/AREIGHT, No. MAC 2-12-6, December 4, 1954, Box 35, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>93</sup> Minutes of the 121st Meeting of the Secretaries, December 15, 1954, Box 2, Entry A1-1263, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>94</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of Joint Observer Team Four on November 2, 1956, Box 10, Entry A1-1265, RG554, NARAII.

require further negotiation, but prospects for that cooperation plummeted with the escalation of the Cold War.

While US forces in Korea had unlimited access throughout South Korea, they did not organize searches for the more than 2,500 bodies of US soldiers presumed lost in South Korea. This was probably because the exhaustive wartime searches had convinced the GRS units that those remains were unrecoverable. Since the mid-1950s, The US military has been recovering bodies that might belong to American soldiers in response to South Korean civilians' reports. The number of bodies recovered from the ROK between 1956 and 1982 is unavailable, but recovery operations in the period are best described as "residual." For instance, in 1975 and 1976, only two bodies were found in each year.<sup>95</sup>

The post-Operation Glory recovery of remains was not only slow, but also low profile until the 1980s, when the country began to deem the repatriation of an identifiable body as the sole means of solving the fate of POW/MIAs. For example, in 1960, the body of Private First Class Joseph A. Balbi, who was presumed by his family and the military to be held by China or North Korea as a POW after the war, was discovered in the DMZ. His half-brother alerted the Army that no notification should be made to Balbi's parents in order to avoid further shock to them. Likely for this reason, his return was not publicly announced. One of his friends even asked President Clinton in 1995 to investigate why

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<sup>95</sup> *Americans Missing in Southeast Asia, Hearings before the Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia*, House of Representatives, Ninety-Fourth Congress, Second Session, Part V: June 17, 25, July 21, and September 21, 1976, 7.

Balbi's fate had not been determined.<sup>96</sup> In 1966, when six soldiers' bodies were brought back from South Korea, the *Los Angeles Times* was likely to be the only mainstream media outlet that reported the story, though the report was very brief.<sup>97</sup> It was not surprising as the country was gradually forgetting the Korean War, and the lost bodies no longer seemed to deserve special attention in the United States.

### **Bodies Recovered during Operation Glory**

Among the 4,219 bodies recovered during Operation Glory, 2,944 were identified to be Americans by the Central Identification Unit (CIU). All but 416 of the 2,944 were identified by 1956.<sup>98</sup> If one considers that there are still about 5,300 servicemen's remains left behind in the DPRK as of 2020, Operation Glory could not be defined as successful. As described in Chapter I, however, most of the bodies still in North Korea were left on battlefields, disposed of en route to POW camps, or pulverized during air crashes. Their burial sites had apparently not been documented by either side, and thus were not covered by subparagraph 13.f.

When only the remains to which subparagraphs 13.f and 58.a(2) apply are considered, Operation Glory was a success. According to an estimation in November

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<sup>96</sup> Louis Valore to the Army, date unknown (in response to a letter on September 29, 1960), and Arthur W. Archer to President William Clinton, October 13, 1995, in IDPF of Pfc. Joseph A. Balbi, NPRC.

<sup>97</sup> "Bodies of GIs Sent Home," *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1966, 5.

<sup>98</sup> The number varies in different sources depending on their definition of the Operation Glory bodies. The previous 4,167 number was by November 8, 1954. I use the data from Coleman, "Recovering the Korean War Dead," 213, as these numbers come from his research published in 2008. The DPAA website explains that the 4,167 containers of remains delivered in 1954 actually hold 4,219 bodies. I do not have data on the CVF/KPA soldiers; therefore, my analysis is limited to the US military.



1953, 3,758 bodies of Americans or their allies were expected to be recovered. The CVF/KPA's achievement exceeded the expectation because the CVF/KPA had located some graves of UNC soldiers that had never been recorded by the US military.<sup>99</sup> There were men on the UNC's body list not recovered, but it is unfair to blame the CVF/KPA for this: graveyards near some POW camps or hospitals that were on the UNC's list were never confirmed by the CVF/KPA.<sup>100</sup> The most evident failure of Operation Glory was the 288 bodies not returned from military cemeteries in the DPRK. It was doubtful that these graves still existed in 1954. Indeed, none have been discovered to date.

Operation Glory was hardly a great success when it came to the identification of the remains of recovered bodies, justifying the Eighth Army's earlier insistence on preventing the CVF/KPA from moving the remains from their original burial sites. Judging from the Operation Glory manifest, the CVF/KPA only determined identity by ID tags, except those who were buried in a few well-documented POW camp graves.<sup>101</sup> The CIU later revealed that over half of the CVF/KPA's identifications were incorrect.<sup>102</sup> Major problems included commingling of bodies and accidental association of one man's ID tags with another buried in the same area.<sup>103</sup> This appeared to validate concerns about

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<sup>99</sup> On the original estimate, see Enclosure 3 attached to UNCMAC to Commanding General, Eighth US Army, "Graves Registration-Recovery of Bodies from North and South Korea," November 30, 1953, Box 26, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAII. For the discrepancy in the numbers and locations of remains, see "Remains Received Under Operation Glory," October 11, 1954, Box 223, Entry A1-193, RG554, and Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of Staff Officers Designated to Discuss Body Recovery Program, July 8, 1954, Box 81, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>100</sup> Paul M. Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1994), 247.

<sup>101</sup> A complete roster is kept in Box 655, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>102</sup> Personal email correspondence with Dan Baughman, a DPAA researcher, October 11, 2017.

<sup>103</sup> A considerable number of records reporting these problems are in Box 80, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII.

poor handling of bodies by CVF/KPA troops.

Identification of the Operation Glory bodies revealed the two sides' different methods of burying dead Americans. In an initial sampling of the bodies obtained on September 19, US GRS personnel deemed all ten bodies from the Hungnam cemetery to be easily identifiable, while only twenty-three out of forty-three bodies from a POW camp were this category.<sup>104</sup> Of all the bodies buried in US military cemeteries in North Korea, only 0.9 percent were unidentified by 1956, all from the most damaged Pyongyang cemetery. The rates were 9 percent in POW camps (interred by other POWs) and 21.8 percent from isolated burials (buried in a hurry or by the enemy).<sup>105</sup>

It is uncertain whether or not CVF/KPA troops purposely botched the exhumations, since Chinese and North Korean sources rarely mention Operation Glory.<sup>106</sup> Only an online article circulated on several Chinese websites describes the Chinese perspective on Operation Glory; it stated that the CVF assigned a hundred military cadres, briefly trained in physical anthropology, to excavate the remains of UNC soldiers. Considering the limited education received by most Chinese soldiers in the 1950s, they were hardly qualified to simultaneously handle hundreds of bodies without frequent errors. Chinese GRS teams admitted that the easiest part of their work was to exhume

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<sup>104</sup> 8204th Army Unit to Department of the Army, No. GR 2117, September 19, 1954, Box 223, Entry A1-193, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>105</sup> Dan Baughman, "POW Camp System in North Korea," August 11, 2017, Korean/Cold War Annual Government Briefing, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

<sup>106</sup> "Figures of Bodies of Military Personnel Exchanged," August 21, 1954, *Radio Peking, New China News Agency*. Its English copy is from Box 65, PI127-1, RG554, NARAII. It seems to be the only time the Chinese government mentioned the operation.

bodies from military graves built by US GRS teams: remains were buried individually with their ID tag/record together, and so even poorly trained Chinese GRS personnel could accurately identify these bodies without difficulty.<sup>107</sup>

Based on the online article and China's contemporary policies on soldiers' bodies, it seems that the CVF troops must have treated seriously the exchange of bodies, as they were interested in recovering their own dead comrades from South Korea. The CVF sealed Chinese soldiers' bodies individually in new coffins and entombed them in memorial catacombs in North Korea.<sup>108</sup> The Chinese military in the early 1950s had detailed policies for repatriating soldiers' remains. Domestically, the Chinese Army was also busy with collecting its members sacrificed in its Civil War (1945-1949) in memorial graveyards for fear that their temporary burials would be disturbed by weather and local people.<sup>109</sup> Within China, local governments offered funds for people to retrieve the bodies of their relatives killed in its Civil War if their graves were accessible.<sup>110</sup> Far from ignoring its soldiers' sacrifice and disrespecting their bodies, the Chinese military claimed that it had to leave its dead in Korea because it lacked the transportation capacity to move the bodies and wished to show China's political commitment to the DPRK.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> "Accepting the Bodies"

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> "Wei Jiancha Chuli Beihuihuai Lieshi Fenmu You [To Survey and Maintain Destroyed Graves of Sacrificed Soldiers], Ministry of Interior," March 16, 1951, Document No. Z008-002-0025-001, Shenyang Municipal Archives (Shenyang, China)

<sup>110</sup> "Chuli Lieshi Lingjiu Qiyun Wenti [Questions about Repatriating the Coffins of Sacrificed Soldiers], Ministry of Interior, No. 10 (Consolation Department, Ministry of Interior)," February 10, 1951, Document Number 401206800-X0065-Y-000205-002, Tianjin Municipal Archives (Tianjin, China).

<sup>111</sup> "Guanyu Quanzu Lieshijiashu Qu Chao Yunling de Tongzhi [Instruction to Discourage Families from Recovering Coffins in Korea]," July 29, 1957, Document Number Z008-002-0206-024, Shenyang Municipal Archives.

## Body Identification in the Korean War

Before the body of a soldier could be delivered to his family in adherence to the CBRP, he had to be positively identified. During the Korean War, all bodies evacuated from Korea were delivered to the CIU in Kokura, Japan, to be examined by forensic experts. The CIU relied on a series of advanced forensic techniques to identify these remains, particularly those returned as incomplete skeletons during Operation Glory.

Initial body identification operations in the Korean War were quite similar to the practices used during WWII. According to WWII casualty files and a manual issued in January 1945 that instructed GRS units on how to handle bodies, ID tags attached to a body were the predominant means of identification. If the tag was missing, either his or her fellow soldiers were to be called in for visual identification, or GRS personnel were to note tooth charts, fingerprints, body abnormalities, and other information pertaining to individual identities (such as ID bracelets, letters, or ID cards) for future comparison against dental, medical, and service records.<sup>112</sup>

Such information could not always be collected, so the military resorted to forensic anthropology. If a body was not recovered promptly, a combination of scavenging animals, bacteria, and acidic rainfall ate away flesh and clothing, leaving only broken bones without personal effects. The destructive power unleashed by modern

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<sup>112</sup> War Department, *Field Manual FM 10-63: Graves Registration* (Washington, DC: War Department, 1945), 22-26.

warfare also frequently destroyed or blew away ID tags, rendering direct identification virtually impossible. As American families in WWII were entitled to get their loved ones' bodies back if they were identifiable, minimizing the number of unknown remains was imperative. After WWII, the US military established Central Identification Points (CIPs) in battle theaters and contracted forensic scientists to process all bodies recovered from isolated graves after August 1946. From this time on, a CIP equipped with modern forensic equipment processed all bodies of deceased servicemen, whether or not ID tags or personal effects could establish identification. Upon receiving a body, CIP staff first collected anthropological and dental data. Then they located any identification media embedded in remains and searched for hidden laundry marks using fluoroscopic or chemical methods. ID tags were still the first piece of evidence the GRS searched for, and sometimes anthropological data were not required to identify skeletal bodies.<sup>113</sup>

In the summer of 1950, there was no such laboratory in the Far East to process large-scale casualties. The undertrained 565th GRS Company assumed the duty of recovering and identifying bodies. To prepare them for the duties, the Eighth Army issued two directives. The first focused on separating US servicemen from other dead and burying the soldiers.<sup>114</sup>

The second dealt with identifying bodies on battlefields by outlining the definition

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<sup>113</sup> W. Raymond Wood and Lori Ann Stanley, "Recovery and Identification of WWII Dead: American Graves Registration Activities in Europe," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 34, No.6 (November 1989), 1368-1371; Steere and Boardman, *Final Disposition of World War II Dead*, 613-619.

<sup>114</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 25

of a positive identification. The directive specified that “an identification tag around the neck of deceased” was the most reliable basis for identification, while a tag elsewhere on the body might be positive proof of identity if it was buried in isolation. Other primary evidence included emergency medical tags, an ID bracelet on the wrist, military IDs found on the body, and statements by people who knew the soldier for some time and recognized features such as tattoos, scars, missing digits, or bodily deformities. When a body was found in a wrecked tank or aircraft, if GRS teams could positively identify all other crew members on its manifest, then the body’s identity was determined by elimination. Secondary evidence had to be accompanied by circumstantial evidence such as a date, place, or cause of death. This type of evidence included ID tags found elsewhere than around the neck, personal belongings with names, vehicle permits, laundry marks, and grave markers not prepared by American GRS personnel.<sup>115</sup>

When primary and secondary evidence could not lead to a positive identification, biometric evidence came into play. GRS units collected fingerprints from both fresh and decomposing bodies. They recorded physical characteristics such as height, weight, general build, complexion, age, tattoos, scars, and wounds on a checklist. If the body was skeletal, fractures and deformities were documented. The directive emphasized the importance of taking dental charts from bodies in a state of advanced decomposition.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> “Standard Operating Procedure for Graves Registration Personnel,” September 13, 1950, Box 464, Entry A1-132, RG338, NARAII. In this document, my term “primary evidence” refers to “individual evidence of positive identity” in the document. My term “secondary evidence” refers to “collective evidence of positive identity.” “Scientific” is the original term in the document.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

To ensure a proper inventory of all relevant data before burial, the Eighth Army notified its subordinate divisions and quartermaster units on October 14, 1950 of the critical importance of filing a Report of Interment form. The form recorded the fingerprints, body characteristics, burial location, and any personal effects of the deceased.<sup>117</sup>

So-called primary and secondary evidence, especially the ID tag, occasionally complicated identification during the Korean War, especially in 1950. When they found an ID tag on a body, inexperienced GRS personnel often identified the remains by the tag without cross-checking other evidence. If GRS teams did not recover the tag, then they labeled the identity of the dead as unknown.<sup>118</sup> However, a postwar study disclosed that KPA troops collected Americans' ID tags as trophies, and US soldiers sometimes traded their tags for unclear reasons.<sup>119</sup> For instance, in May 1954, the Army asked William Griffin, who returned from Korea alive in July 1951, to explain why his tag was found on a body recovered on January 18, 1952.<sup>120</sup> In another case, the GRS headquarters rescinded an identification based on an ID tag held by a decomposed body when the CIU identified the tag's real owner by his physical characteristics and fingerprints.<sup>121</sup> While ID tags remained an important clue, the CIU gradually came to rely on dental and anthropological data to identify bodies, whether or not they were decomposed.

Following the precedent set in WWII, the military established the Central

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<sup>117</sup> "Preparation of Interment Reports," October 14, 1950, Box 464, Entry A1-132, RG338, NARAII.

<sup>118</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 74.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, 114.

<sup>120</sup> William P. Griffin to the Office of the Quartermaster, May 21, 1954, Box 654, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>121</sup> IDPF of Capt. William C. Burkit, NPRC.

Identification Unit for the Korean War to identify the remains evacuated from Korea, and then embalm, casket, and store those bodies.<sup>122</sup> The plan to establish a CIU was conceived in mid-October 1950 but only materialized on January 2, 1951, in Kokura, Japan, after consideration of logistical and security issues.<sup>123</sup> Beginning on January 29, the CIU processed several hundred dead Americans or allies each month. By the time the GRS headquarters deactivated the CIU in March 1956, it had processed 32,183 bodies (28,793 Americans).<sup>124</sup>

With the full operation of the CIU, GRS units gradually transferred to it the duty of collecting scientific evidence from bodies in late 1951. By that time, the CIU had cleared the backlogged remains and was processing bodies immediately upon receipt. GRS units then evacuated bodies from battlefields within days of the casualties. The quicker body evacuation meant that the CIU staff did not need to worry about the loss of dental, physical, or fingerprint evidence due to decomposition, and so the GRS units no longer had to collect evidence for identification under the threat of enemy fire.<sup>125</sup> Instead, after recovering a body, GRS members still made a tentative identification based on ID tags or facial recognition by his comrades-in-arms. The bodies were then sprayed with deodorants, and wounds and amputations were packed with formaldehyde-soaked

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<sup>122</sup> *8204th Army Unit History*, 3.

<sup>123</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 43-45, 50.

<sup>124</sup> *8204th Army Unit History*, 48; *Graves Registration Activities* (February 1953), Box 650, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92; "Final Shipment of War Dead and Termination of Program," December 27, 1955, Box 80, Entry A1-2117, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>125</sup> Zone Headquarters, 8204th Army Unit, "Memorandum No.1, Identification Process," January 2, 1952, Box 5550, Entry UD- 37042, RG 338, NARAII.



compresses to prevent leakage. GRS personnel checked the tentative identification again before they transported the bodies to CIU mortuaries.<sup>126</sup>

The “Standard Operating Procedure” issued by the CIU on July 23, 1952, which delineated the different procedures to be applied to bodies according to their stage of decomposition, reveals some details of the CIU’s daily activities.<sup>127</sup> Upon receiving a body, CIU staff first stripped it of all clothes to examine laundry marks. They employed fluoroscopy of the clothing to search for ID tags, jewelry, or other metallic gadgets to salvage identification information. The CIU sorted all bodies into four major categories: skeletal, semi-skeletal, flesh-covered, or current. Each category demanded a distinctive approach to estimate height, race, and sometimes weight. Photographers would record scars, birthmarks, tattoos, and facial features on flesh-covered corpses or use radiography to document bone deformities or healed fractures on skeletal bodies. Other staff took down dental charts and fingerprints, if obtainable. When commingled bones were recovered from a burnt-out tank or a crashed aircraft, CIU personnel would process all crew members together, separating duplicated parts and rearticulating bones bearing similar characteristics. Additional CIU specialists checked the data obtained from these steps to ensure that no error existed.

The CIU staff that collected data did not participate in the identification process

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<sup>126</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 88.

<sup>127</sup> Central Identification Unit, “Memorandum No.7, Standard Operating Procedure,” July 23, 1952, Box 5550, Entry UD-37042, RG 338, NARAII; *TM 10-286* (1956), 30-39; Coleman, “Recovering the Korean War Dead,” 201-203. The following details of the CIU’s operating procedures are cited from these two sources or the actual identification reports of individual servicemen.

for fear that their knowledge of the remains' data would undermine their objectivity in making the final determination of identity. Instead, the headquarters of GRS received the CIU data and either matched them to a specific serviceman's portfolio or declared the remains unidentifiable. In an ideal case, GRS officers would work with the following data: fingerprints, ID tag or bracelet, medical tags, dental data, physical characteristics (age, height, race, weight, hair, and fractures), personal effects, equipment, and eyewitnesses or historical reports. If the remains were recovered during a field search, relevant details about the search would be furnished.

The evidence used by the CIU could be categorized into three groups. The first category established identity directly—fingerprints or ID tags hanging around the neck. Biological prints and IDs had been widely adopted and deeply embedded in the concept of individuality in western countries for decades.<sup>128</sup> During the Korean War, they played critical roles in the identification of soldiers whose bodies were recovered before decomposition. Fingerprints were not available for skeletal remains, however, and ID tags were subject to loss or mix-up. Even if both were available, they still had to be corroborated by dental and anthropological evidence.

The second category of evidence for individual identification, including dental and anthropological data, was more resistant to loss but could not establish identity

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<sup>128</sup> Simon A. Cole, *Suspect Identities: A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5; Jane Caplan and John Torpey, "Introduction" in *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World* eds. Jane Caplan and John Torpey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 2.

immediately. During the Korean War, the CIU anthropologists estimated age range, approximate height, and race of the deceased from their skeletons. Because these characteristics were neither precise nor unique to individuals, the CIU used them only to eliminate candidates for bodies, not to make identification. Unique dental treatment or decay and healed fractures had much better eliminating power because of the improbability that two men would have exactly the same dental work or trauma.

Fractures were not a common phenomenon among service personnel, and the eliminating power of the dental evidence was also diminished if the latest charts were unavailable.

Decay or tooth loss between the last examination and death, or variation by different dentists in describing decay, also undermined comparison. One of my interviewees described her uncle's unique dental work on his front teeth. The military reported, however, that his front teeth had been lost before his death in a POW camp. As a result, her uncle remained unidentified until 2016.<sup>129</sup> In the CIU, missing teeth were more frequently used to eliminate candidates. If an extracted tooth in a soldier's record was present on a body's jaw, he could be excluded.

The CIU further narrowed down the candidates for a set of remains with the third category of evidence—non-biological information such as vehicle manifests, burial locations, or laundry marks. This data could be of great value if applied alongside the previous categories. After rounds of elimination, if a single name was left, identification

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<sup>129</sup> Sharon Chuvalas, interview by the author, tape-recorded, August 2, 2018.

could be reasonably made; otherwise, the body in question was likely to be designated as unknown.<sup>130</sup>

RECORD OF IDENTIFICATION PROCESSING SKELETAL CHART			
LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL (or unknown number)		BLACK BUT PORTIONS NOT RECOVERED	
Unknown X-328			
GRADE	SERVICE NUMBER		
Unk	Unk		
NAME OF CEMETERY, EVACUATION NUMBER, OR SEARCH AND RECOVERY NUMBER			
U. N. Mil. Cem. Tanggok, Korea			
PLAT	ROW	GRAVE	
11	11	1572	
ESTIMATED AGE (Years)		ESTIMATED HEIGHT	
18-20		Tibia - 5' 7 3/4" Fem & Tib - 5' 6 7/8"	
SKELETAL MEASUREMENTS (Centimeters)			
SKELETAL MEMBER	METHOD	RIGHT	LEFT
SKULL			
HUMERUS			
ULNA			
RADIUS			24.8
FEMUR		45.1	44.2
TIBIA		37.3	37.3
FIBULA		37.6	37.4
REMARKS OR STATEMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGIST (Continue on reverse if more space is required)			
This is the skeletal remains of an average sized man of medium muscularity. The race of these remains is undeterminable at this time due to the absence of the skull and the paucity of the skeletal parts for the racial criteria. Previous racial determination was partially based on the finding of brown body hair which is not present at this time. There is evidence of wound of right ilium and fracture of ribs.			
THE PARTS PRESENT AS INDICATED ON THIS SKELETAL CHART REPRESENTS ONE AND THE SAME INDIVIDUAL			
PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGIST (Name)			
SAMUEL K. LAWSON			
SIGNATURE			
Samuel K. Lawson			
DD FORM 1 FEB 54 892 REPLACES GRC FORM 1044, 18 MAR 47, WHICH IS OBSOLETE.			

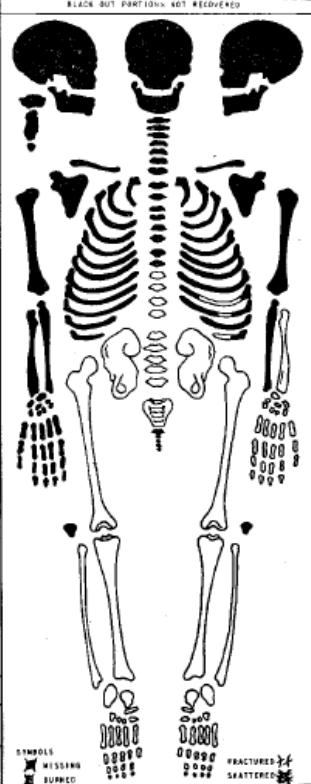


Figure 2-2: One of the forms recording the forensic information pertaining to each set of recovered remains. This one (DD892) contains skeletal data. A full set of identification report may include interment report (DD551), field search report (DD896), personal effects and physical data (DD890), dental data (DD891), anatomical chart (DD893), fingerprint chart (DD894), statement of chemical or radiographic findings, and a conclusion page. This form is used as an example in the Technical Manual TM10-286: *Identification of Deceased Personnel*.

The CIU's approach revealed several features of forensic evidence in the 1950s.

First, although the CIU sometimes collected evidence from a serviceman's relatives, it did not require these relatives' biometric data to facilitate identification. In this sense, the relatives did not participate in the CIU operations. Second, all the epidermal, dental, and physical evidence either categorically supported or precluded the association between a soldier and a body, rather than indicating a quantifiable chance of this association.

Moreover, the determination of height, age, or race from bones required the presence of

<sup>130</sup> Walker, *Graves Registration Service in the Korean War*, 118-119.

almost intact long bones or key parts of specific bones. When the bones were severely fragmented, they could hardly reveal valuable evidence. If a large pile of remains was recovered from mass graves, a destroyed tank, or a multi-crew aircraft wreck, only the presence of specific bones (like skulls, both hipbones, more than eight vertebrae, or eight ribs on the vertebral column) could initiate a CIU investigation. The CIU designated other bones as CIU parts unless it collected additional circumstantial evidence; otherwise, such parts may have been destroyed after the war.<sup>131</sup>

A few examples demonstrate how remains in different states of decomposition were identified. For the servicemen who were processed a few days after death and did not suffer significant trauma, fingerprints and ID tags around the neck were the most critical evidence. On May 6, 1953, the corpse of Sergeant James M. Baker reached the CIU five days after death. Because of this short duration, his fingerprints, ID tags, height, hair color, dental pattern, and personal effects could be recorded easily, and CIU investigators skipped an analysis of his bones. They checked his fingerprints with his FBI records. In his final identification report on May 23, fingerprints confirmation by the FBI appeared on the top of the page, supported immediately by a record of his ID tags. His hair color, race, height, scar, and dental pattern matching his service record substantiated the identification. The circumstances of his death, the location where he was recovered, his fatal wounds, and personal effects ranked lower in his report.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> *TM 10-286* (1956), 32. As noted in Chapter I, the US military cremated a large number of unidentifiable bones after the war.

<sup>132</sup> IDPF of Sgt. James M. Baker, NPRC. For decomposing bodies, fingerprints may still be used for

When the duration between casualty and recovery was longer, anthropological and dental evidence and burial locations became critical factors in narrowing down possible candidates. Unique deformities of bones had perhaps the best value in identification. For example, the skeleton of Corporal Joseph H. Eckhart Jr., who died in a POW camp, was returned during Operation Glory without any personal effects or an ID tag. Although the CVF/KPA record linked his name to this body, the CIU staff still investigated it in July 1955. His presumptive skeleton was almost intact, so the CIU quickly determined the age range, approximate height, and race of the deceased. The teeth pattern was slightly different from Eckhart's last dental entry in 1950 but was still close enough to distinguish him from other deceased POWs. The likely decisive evidence in making his identification was his fused right tibia and fibula revealed by radiography, which verified his compound fracture from 1938.<sup>133</sup> In many cases, however, the skeletons of soldiers did not reveal fractures or other deformities, and so circumstantial evidence became indispensable. In another Operation Glory case, the CVF/KPA unearthed the bones of Private James R. Aldridge Jr. from an unmarked grave and returned them without any clue of his identity. The CIU simultaneously processed all the dead (five individuals) left in the vicinity of his grave. The GRS concluded that the dental pattern and age revealed by the bones matched favorably only with Aldridge's records.<sup>134</sup>

When the deceased suffered tremendous perimortem trauma, the final

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identification if they were obtained prior to burial.

<sup>133</sup> IDPF of Cpl. Joseph H. Eckhart Jr. NPRC.

<sup>134</sup> IDPF of Pvt. James R. Aldridge Jr., NPRC.

identification might not even depend on scientific evidence. On October 1, 1953, the GRS headquarters declared Captain Jack A. Knight and First Lieutenant Walter P. Gilles as a group burial. A GRS team found their bones three months after their plane crashed. Although CIU staff concluded that at least two individuals were present among the osseous objects sifted from the wreckage, these bones did not provide enough evidence for the CIU to analyze. Consequently, the aircraft manifest was the sole means of identifying both men.<sup>135</sup> In another case, when an F-84 fighter crashed into a mountain in Korea, though a GRS team immediately rushed to the crash site, it found only a pulverized body and the pilot's ID card. The CIU staff obtained no physical data from the body except for some blonde hair. Based on the roster of the pilot's squadron and the hair color, he was identified as Second Lieutenant Thomas L. Belyea.<sup>136</sup>

### **Interaction for Identification**

In order to process the twenty-eight thousand bodies of US servicemen, the CIU had to obtain their most updated antemortem information. A considerable number of servicemen in Korea were WWII veterans, but if they had left the service between the two wars, they could have received additional treatments in civilian clinics. On the other side of the spectrum, some draftees had not been in service long enough to have their teeth or body examined in Korea. The data stored in the Far East were far from complete,

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<sup>135</sup> Case file of 1st Lt. Walter P. Gills, Box 85, Entry UD-404F, RG341, NARAIL.

<sup>136</sup> Case file of 2nd Lt. Thomas L. Belyea, Box 85, Entry UD-404F, RG341, NARAIL.

and so GRS officers in Korea maintained daily communication with other military bases and civilian agencies that might have useful information. The files of the Army Quartermaster General office show that such requests were not always successful. In these cases, the CIU had to contact servicemen's relatives.<sup>137</sup>

GRS officers sent much of the correspondence requesting medical information after Operation Glory when thousands of skeletal bodies without ID tags were delivered to the CIU. These bodies, together with those who had already been recovered but remained unidentified, were the most challenging cases for the CIU: the available intelligence could not match them with any known deceased men. This was when the military encouraged the relatives of unresolved casualties to volunteer medical information. It collected bodily and dental X-rays, or at least the addresses of the doctors and dentists who might keep such records. In rare cases, the military asked about personal effects like rings or watches possessed by the deceased.<sup>138</sup> It also contacted the comrades-in-arms of the deceased to learn where they last saw the dead or missing men alive so that they could be associated with the bodies from shallow graves in that area.<sup>139</sup>

Eager to know their loved ones' fates, most families cooperated as much as possible. They offered information indicating extracted teeth or broken bones; they passed on the names of the dentists and doctors who had performed treatment for more

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<sup>137</sup> Most of such correspondence is kept in Entry NM81-1894A, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>138</sup> For example, see the case file of Staff Sergeant Carl J. Dorsey, Box 78, Entry UD-404E, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>139</sup> This category of letters is not always kept with the IDPFs of the concerned service members. The letters analyzed in this research are from Box 653, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92, NARAII.



details. In early 1955, for example, the mother and the private doctor of Corporal Merlin L. Cattell reported to the Army that Cattell had suffered a broken right arm that was reset twice fifteen years earlier. The soldier's final report acknowledged that this intelligence from his mother matched the healed fracture on the skeleton's right radius and ulna.<sup>140</sup> Sometimes, the military retrieved information via multiple channels. In the case of Corporal Eckhart mentioned above, his family reported that he had suffered a broken right leg in childhood that was treated by a local hospital. However, in the final identification report, the military cited a medical form from the 1940s that recorded him as having a compound fracture on his right tibia, without crediting his family.<sup>141</sup>

Generally speaking, the information offered by most families was simple and in plain language. They described the soldiers having "perfect teeth," "no broken bones," "a broken leg," "an extracted tooth," et cetera. Some families described body scars, though they openly doubted that reporting them would be of use.<sup>142</sup> In a few cases, servicemen's families responded with considerable details. In October 1954, the father of First Lieutenant James D. Smith Jr. pulled the medical record of his son from the university hospital at the University of Iowa and extensively reviewed his son's deformities and injuries. Although he was not a doctor, he used medical jargon and provided illustrations

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<sup>140</sup> IDPF of Cpl. Merlin L. Cattell, NPRC.

<sup>141</sup> IDPF of Cpl. Joseph H. Eckhart Jr. NPRC. Identification reports sometimes marked the sources of information.

<sup>142</sup> Mr. and Mrs. L. M. Neighbors to Col. L. F. Carlberg, October 22, 1954, case file of Maj. Robert O. Neighbors, Box 61, and "Mrs. Alvin Crane Sr. to Col. Carlberg, October 17, 1954, case file of 1st Lt. Alvin E. Crane Jr, Box 56, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII;

of the abnormalities on his son's bones in a two-page reply.<sup>143</sup>

Even as some families assisted with the potential identification of their loved ones, politics and grief got entangled with the process. They exploited this opportunity to blame the military for declaring their loved ones' death prematurely. When the military was collecting information, it described the soldier as "an unresolved casualty" whose remains needed to be identified—a phrase that led families to believe that the military had already written off their loved ones and had stopped demanding that China and North Korea reveal whether or not they were being held captive. As a result, families sometimes regarded the request as a de facto declaration of death and protested it. In early October 1954, after receiving an inquiry for physical information, the mother of First Lieutenant Harry R. Painter briefly recalled her son's wrist fracture and club foot in her response. She then changed her tone abruptly and complained about what she regarded as the government's rush to declare her son's death, arguing that she "continue[d] to hope [for her son's survival] until such time you can give me some sort of positive proof or the Communists return all of the hundreds of airmen they are holding." A year later, she was still enraged by this request and claimed that she had not given up her hope.<sup>144</sup>

Following a conclusive identification, although the military sent a series of letters to a soldier's relatives regarding the disposal of his remains, it refused to release all

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<sup>143</sup> James D. F. Smith to Col. L. F. Carlberg, n.d., case file of 1st Lt. James D. Smith Jr., Box 64, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>144</sup> Vera L. Painter to Col. L. F. Carlberg, October 16, 1954, and Vera L. Painter to Col. L. F. Carlberg, October 5, 1955, case file of 1st Lt. Harry R. Painter, Box 62, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

details of the identification process to forestall extra correspondence from families that the military had been busy handling every day. On December 27, 1951, an internal message within the office of the Army Quartermaster General stated that it was the military's policy "not to encourage publicity on identification methods and procedures" because this might stimulate unnecessary curiosity and inquiries from families that might aggravate their suffering.<sup>145</sup> The military also believed that ordinary families did not have the capacity to comprehend the technical details.<sup>146</sup> Explaining the details to thousands of families would divert too much manpower from their assigned duties. There was no clear evidence proving that soldiers' identification reports were ever delivered to their families. Instead, families received form letters, almost all of which stated that, to make the identification, "a very favorable comparison was made of physical characteristics, such as race, height, age, hair color, and dental pattern." Unlike today's news articles boasting the critical role of DNA in identifying POW/MIA remains, journalists in the 1950s did not trace the science of identifying casualties in Korea.<sup>147</sup>

On some occasions, though, families did receive extra details. If a serviceman's ID tag or fingerprints led to the identification, the military listed them in its letter to his family before physical characteristics, suggesting that they were more convincing to

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<sup>145</sup> "Chief Memorial Division to Acting Assistant for Administration, Intra-office Message, December 27, 1951," Box 581, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92, NARAII.

<sup>146</sup> This idea was cited in Roy A. Well to Mrs. Jack W. Ledbetter, May 9, 1955, in IDPF of 1st Lt. Jack W. Ledbetter Jr., NPRC.

<sup>147</sup> "Service Arm of 'Unknown' Mystery, Too," *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), May 19, 1958, in the newspaper clippings book in Box 3, Entry A1-1898D, RG92, NARAII. This article in 1958 is the only one I have seen in my research discussing contemporary forensic technology and asking why it still left so many service members unidentified.

ordinary Americans. In a few cases, the families were notified that healed bone fractures and the circumstances of body recovery also contributed to the identification. The military might offer details only after a family's inquiries or when an unusual incident occurred during identification. In March 1952, a pilot's parents sent telegrams and had someone contact the Air Force regarding their son's identification. The Air Force replied that the body's physical characteristics had been corroborated by his laundry marks, equipment, and aircraft serial number.<sup>148</sup> In another case, the wife of Master Sergeant James M. Cochenour learned that evidence of healed rib fractures had been critical to his identification. Given the CIU's discovery of another man's ID tag on his body and earlier reports about his presence in a POW camp, it is possible that the Army had to provide such details to convince his wife that the CIU had identified the right man.<sup>149</sup>

### **Confirmation of Identities by Families**

Could the military convince families and the public of the accuracy of the CIU's findings with only a few details? Although challenges to the military's identification reports were uncommon, there were indeed some attempts by servicemen's families in the 1950s to open the caskets delivered to them. The rationale for doing this ranged widely, from mourning their loss to criticizing the country's policies.

Before opening the caskets, they first had to fight authorities for the right to open

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<sup>148</sup> Col. James A McKerley to Mr. and Mrs. Orrin W. Fox, March 21, 1952, case file of 1st Lt. Orrin R. Fox, Box 73, Entry UD-404E, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>149</sup> IDPF of MSG. James M Cochenour, NPRC.

the coffin, as the military's endeavor to curtail curiosity about the CIU's methods extended to discouraging families from opening these caskets. The military usually discouraged families from opening coffins because the bodies were in a state of decomposition. For example, on April 10, 1952, a soldier's wife wrote to the Army wishing to examine her husband's body. In reply, the Army instructed that "the casket will not be opened for the purpose of viewing the remains while it is in custody of the Army." She might open the coffin after it was delivered, but it would be subject to state or local public health laws and regulations. The Army stressed that it did not recommend opening the casket due to the time between death and delivery.<sup>150</sup>

While laws about public health varied from jurisdiction to jurisdiction in the 1950s, at least one authority strongly discouraged opening caskets. The Hawaii Department of Health unequivocally suggested that authorities across the country forbid opening the caskets of the Korean War dead. In its instruction on August 14, 1951, it reasoned that the embalming of many bodies had been impossible as they had decomposed before being recovered. Because the remains had been reduced to bones, the Hawaii Department of Health stated that under no circumstance should they be viewed by families, regardless of their desire to do so.<sup>151</sup> It was unclear whether other states, cities, or towns had similar laws. According to contemporary news articles, it seems that the

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<sup>150</sup> Col. James B. Clearwater to Josephine M. Copley, April 29, 1952, in the IPDF of 1st Lt. William E. Copley, NPRC.

<sup>151</sup> Chief, Bureau of Health Statistics and Registrar General, Territory of Hawaii, Department of Health to Health Officers and All Local Authorities, "Opening of Casket of 'US Dead from Korea' Prohibited," August 14, 1951, Box 604, Entry NM81-1894A, RG92, NARAII.

local authorities in the contingent forty-eight states did not approve families' requests to examine the remains unless they had secured a court order.<sup>152</sup>

A common rationale for opening caskets was that many families believed a decent funeral to include an open casket so that relatives could pay final respects directly to the face of the dead. On June 8, 1952, Anna Antes complained about the policy barring her from opening the coffin of her son who had just perished in Korea. She wrote to the military that "if that can't be done which it can, I couldn't go through this life."<sup>153</sup> A mother living in a small town in Ohio described the popularity and honorable service of her son and stressed that his relatives and neighbors were so eager to view this respected young man one last time that the military's policy was cruel and unacceptable.<sup>154</sup>

Occasionally, families were eager to confirm the identification themselves after receiving contradictory reports about the fate of their loved ones. On February 28, 1952, Robert K. Flynn wrote to President Truman describing a story he had recently come across. A woman in California demanded that her husband's casket be opened so that she could determine how he had died, because his commander, chaplain, and fellow soldiers had given conflicting accounts of his last moments. Flynn argued, though, "the whole

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<sup>152</sup> Based on observation from contemporary newspapers, for example: "Soldiers' Widow Identifies Body," *Joplin Globe* (Joplin, MO), April 20, 1952, 29; "Open Casket of Lancaster G. I. on Father's Order," *Lancaster Eagle-Gazette* (Lancaster, OH), December 27, 1952, 2; "Wife Wants to Open Coffin to Assure Herself Husband Was Really Killed in Korea," *Morning Democrat* (Davenport, IA), October 19, 1951, 1; "Open Casket to Identify Victim of Korean War," *The Atchison Daily Globe* (Atchison, KS), January 23, 1952, 2.

<sup>153</sup> Mrs. Antes to Mr. Sheppard, June 8, 1952, in the Service Record of Cpl. Hubert Earl Antes Jr., NPRC.

<sup>154</sup> Goldie Fry to John H. McCormick, August 21, 1953, case file of A2c Dwight G. Fry, Box 79, Entry UD-404E, RG341, NARAII.

idea of the sealed casket has been to spare the family from undue and possible tragic sorrow” due to viewing a mangled body. He warned the president that if her request were granted, more families would follow suit, resulting in “nothing but tragical results” across the country.<sup>155</sup> Later in 1952, another California woman Marne Rivedal asserted that she would open her husband’s coffin to confirm that her husband had deceased: the Air Force had originally determined him to be MIA on July 16, 1950, but a domestic broadcast in July 1950 mentioned him as having safely returned to friendly lines. The Red Cross confirmed his MIA status in January 1951, but weeks later, Rivedal received an unverifiable message and statements from her husband’s unit claiming that no evidence proved his death and that he might have been captured. Perplexed and enraged, she contended that “due to the errors which have been made in the past two years on this particular case I am not going to just bury any remains shipped back and supposedly to be that of my husband.”<sup>156</sup>

New or conflicting information that emerged after a soldier had been buried by his family also caused relatives to question the identification and thereby demand a reexamination of the body. In January 1951, the parents of First Lieutenant Richard W. Haas buried their son in a local grave without opening his coffin after being told that their son’s mutilated body was not recommended for viewing. Trusting the military’s

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<sup>155</sup> Robt K. Flynn to Truman, February 28, 1952, Folder OF-471B Soldiers’ Bodies (Jan to May 1952), Box 1499, WHCF-OF, Truman Library.

<sup>156</sup> Marne E. Rivedal to Director, Supply and Service, Headquarters, USAF, May 20, 1952, and A. B. Oberleiter to John H. McCormick, May 16, 1952, case file of 1st Lt. Arnold D. Rivedal, Box 75, Entry UD-404E, RG341, NARAII.

conclusion, his father withdrew his request to view the body. When they opened a form letter from the military in late 1954 requesting physical information to identify their son's body in the CIU, the flummoxed couple demanded an investigation to figure out if they had buried the wrong body. The military promptly dispatched a representative to the couple's town to explain this administrative error and, with the help of state officials, dissuaded them from a public discussion of this incident in the media.<sup>157</sup>

For some families, requests to reexamine bodies themselves became a political tactic in the context of the accumulated distrust between them and the military. Families of missing soldiers threatened to renounce any conclusion from the military, in order to protest the policy of declaring MIAs dead without what they perceived to be solid evidence. While these families usually did not clarify what defined solid evidence, a positively identified body confirmed by themselves seemed to be the most convincing proof that their loved one was no longer alive. They feared that their loved ones were still alive and that the military might send them a random body in order to conclude the investigation, which has been discussed in Chapter I.<sup>158</sup>

While many families only threatened that they would open the coffins when they had not received the bodies of their loved ones, in at least one case, a family refused to accept the body identified by the CIU and returned it to the military. In 1950, First

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<sup>157</sup> Mrs. William J. Haas to Col. L. F. Carlberg, October 6, 1954, and Eric A. Carlson to Col. L. F. Carlberg, October 14, 1954, case file of 1st Lt. Richard W. Haas, Box 58, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>158</sup> Aurea McLoughlin to Col. Carlberg, n.d., in the case file of A1c Robert J. McLoughlin, Box 60, and Ellen Henry to General John H. McCormick, May 3, 1954, case file of 1st Lt. Dewey R. Henry, Box 58, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.



Lieutenant Jack W. Ledbetter disappeared near Kunu-ri, DPRK. In 1953, the CVF reported him dead in a POW camp in the spring of 1951, an event corroborated by five witnesses and twelve more POWs who had heard about his demise. The CIU received his body during Operation Glory and identified it in April 1955. His family, however, rejected all reports of the returnees and the CIU and hired a dentist to check the body; the dentist discovered an insignificant discrepancy between Ledbetter's dental records and a tooth filling of the repatriated boy. Although the dentist and the military later realized that the error was a misinterpretation of a tooth filling, his family refused to budge regardless of the Army's multiple efforts to explain the CIU workflow and an offer to share the original forensic data. The Army buried Ledbetter's body in a national cemetery in June 1955, but his family stuck to its refusal as late as 1957.<sup>159</sup>

It is hard to judge whether Ledbetter's parents were still concerned about identification in 1957 or whether they just used the original error as a pretext to sustain their hope that their son was still alive for political or emotional reasons. Ledbetter's mother did become a POW/MIA activist, and in a letter circulated in a 1957 congressional hearing regarding unreturned Korean War POWs, she asserted that she had communicated with an underground group in Macao who claimed to have confirmed her son's survival. She passed this information to reporters, the military, and the US Embassy

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<sup>159</sup> Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower, Personnel and Reserve, "Data Pertaining to 1st Lieutenant Jack W. Ledbetter, an Alleged Missing Prisoner of War," June 24, 1957, "Resume of the Case of 1st Lt. Jack W. Ledbetter, O-1341445," Memo for Record, QMGMF 293 Ledbetter, Jack W., 1st Lt., May 27, 1955, and Col. Wall to Mr. and Mrs. Ledbetter, April 21, 1955, Box 835, Entry A1-5, RG335, NARAII.

in London. Her letter omitted the military's explanation of her son's fate and identification; instead, it insisted that she was "hushed up" after a visit to the Pentagon and was subsequently unable to receive anything from the underground group.<sup>160</sup> Such allegations were not rare in the concurrent POW/MIA campaigns against a government that many perceived as behaving in a cowardly fashion during the Cold War (to be discussed in Chapter III). Therefore, had she accepted the body, her qualification for such campaigns would have evaporated. As noted in the Introduction, her mentality was similar to the mothers of victims of the Dirty War in Argentina decades later who objected to the forensic work identifying their remains.<sup>161</sup>

### **Unidentified Bodies**

As described above, the CIU used multiple rounds of elimination to narrow down a body's potential identities. Healed fractures, dental patterns, age, height, hair color, and burial location helped to reveal the identities of most of the skeletal remains recovered from Korea. However, in some scenarios, when a large group of typical American soldiers of the 1950s (strong, healthy, 18-25 year old, white males) were recovered from the same area, it was unlikely that these rounds of elimination could substantially reduce

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<sup>160</sup> *Return of American Prisoners of War Who Have Not Been Accounted for by the Communists, Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Far East and the Pacific of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on H. Con. Res. 140 and Similar Measures to Express the Sense of Congress with Respect to the Return of 450 American Prisoners of War Who Have not Been Accounted for by the Communists*, House of Representatives, Eighty-Fifth Congress, First Session, May 27, 1957, 51-53.

<sup>161</sup> Adam Rosenblatt, *Digging for the Disappeared: Forensic Science after Atrocity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 93-99.

the candidates. This was a common reason for the CIU to declare some bodies unidentifiable. In one extreme case, a body labeled as X-123 Taejon was recovered by a US GRS team (thus his recovery location was known). The CIU determined it to belong to a white male, age 20–23, height 69”–70”. A total of 398 deceased US soldiers fit this description, so X-123 Taejon remains unknown today.<sup>162</sup> On some occasions, the CIU staff succeeded in eliminating all but one candidate for an unknown body, but after rounds of review, the GRS headquarters felt that a decisive piece of evidence was missing and so declared it to be unknown. For example, the CIU identified body X-183 Masan as Private First Class Darden D. Miller, but the GRS headquarters rescinded this conclusion in September 1955. Without the full file on Miller and other unidentified bodies in this category, it is difficult to explain GRS officers’ the exact reasons for retracting the CIU’s earlier conclusions.

Because of the CBRP, unknown remains could not be kept in the CIU forever. Of the bodies recovered during Operation Glory, 416 individuals remained unidentifiable. Another 432 bodies retrieved in South Korea were also left unresolved. Due to later discoveries, the number of unknown remains rose to 868. In May 1956, the US military buried the unknown bodies in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP, also known as the “Punchbowl”).<sup>163</sup>

The burials at the Punchbowl were not publicized and these bodies were largely

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<sup>162</sup> The information about the unknown bodies is obtained from a leading Korean War POW/MIA activist, John Zimmerlee.

<sup>163</sup> Coleman, “Recovering the Korean War Dead,” 219-220.

forgotten. When the military announced its final disposal of the unknown bodies at the NMCP in January 1956, newspapers across the country did not treat it as a significant issue, mostly allocating fewer than a hundred words to this event.<sup>164</sup> This stood in conspicuous contrast to the authorization of selecting an unknown body from Korea for the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington later that year. At the NMCP, the military conferred flat grave markers with only index numbers, half-hidden by grass and unlikely to attract much attention from visitors. I only found a single letter in which an airman's mother asked the Air Force about whether any of the unknown dead to be buried at the NMCP might have come from the area where her son went missing.<sup>165</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite the commitment and efforts of GRS units and the CIU staff, the US military could not recover the bodies of all its slain servicemen. Although the GRS units were poorly prepared in 1950, through improvisation and reinforcement, they succeeded in recovering most deceased US soldiers lost in South Korea, but they had little chance of retrieving remains lost in North Korea. During the war, the UNC and the CVF/KPA had agreed that both sides could dispatch GRS teams after the armistice into the other side's land to recover its fallen men, but their mutual suspicion of potential espionage and a

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<sup>164</sup> The shipment of unknown soldiers to Hawaii was reported in newspapers in January 1956, but very concisely, for example, "850 Unknown War Dead to be Buried in Honolulu," *Honolulu Advertiser*, January 10, 1956, 1.

<sup>165</sup> Mrs. Lester Selman to Director of Military Personnel, Casualty Branch, US Air Force Headquarters, January 12, 1956, case file of 1st Lt. Clifford G. Selman, Box 66, Entry UD-404D, RG341, NARAII.

unilateral decision by the US military provided the CVF/KPA with a hardly refutable pretext to void the deal. Consequently, the US military had to wait for its servicemen's remains south of the DMZ during Operation Glory. The CVF/KPA only returned a portion of Americans killed in North Korea.

The CBRP required that the bodies recovered by GRS units be identified and returned to soldiers' families promptly, which was made possible by the CIU forensic experts. The CIU identified all but approximately 850 recoverable bodies with advanced forensic technology. Soldiers' families often played an essential role in CIU operations by providing medical information that had not been available to the military. While the vast majority of families readily accepted their loved ones' bodies, a few insisted on opening the coffins due to emotional or political reasons, despite the military's discouragement. The bodies of unidentified Korean War soldiers were eventually interred in Hawaii at the NMCP. Until the 2000s, the existence of these graves was not well known even to the POW/MIA families.

As for those men whose bodies were lost in Korea, the Adjutant General's office either determined them to be dead through other servicemen's testimonies or presumed them dead due to a lack of intelligence after the war. The inability to accurately ascertain the fate of these men prompted their families to believe that they might be held by the CVF/KPA after the war. Allegations regarding detained POWs and their implications for Cold War politics are the themes of the next chapter.

### CHAPTER III: THE LIVING DEAD

In 1976, a Vietnam War POW/MIA activist commented: “I feel that some families are so distraught and frustrated and angry that they no longer look for an accounting, but are waiting for a resurrection.”<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon could also be observed in the years immediately after the Korean War. Although they did not enjoy the publicity of their Vietnam War counterparts, some Korean War POW/MIA families were equally unwilling to accept a resolution of their relatives’ fate, despite authorities’ persistent efforts to close their cases. Nothing short of their loved ones’ return could pacify their rage against a government that they presumed no longer protected their interests. However, during the Cold War, it became increasingly impossible for these families to acquire any useful information to convince them that their loved ones were no longer alive. Both the United States and China/North Korea were busy accusing each other of holding a large number of POWs, in order to brand each other as ruthless kidnappers, rather than cooperating in learning the fate of their missing personnel.

When the military could not locate their loved ones’ remains to facilitate a decent burial, some POW/MIA families became entrapped in a cycle of hope that their relatives’ deaths had been misreported and that they were still alive. As discussed in previous chapters, over eight thousand US servicemen were unaccounted for in the Korean War. The military presumed many of them dead only with unverifiable testimony of their

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas L. Clarke, *The Missing Man: Politics and the MIA* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1979), 42. The comment is made during a congressional hearing on the Vietnam War POW/MIA issue in 1976.

fellow soldiers or simply the lapse of time. Without remains to physically prove their demise, families who refused to accept the deaths of their loved ones found reasons for hope. They imagined the POWs as languishing in an undisclosed gulag while the US government defaulted on its duty to confront communism and liberate them.

While only a few hundred Korean War POW/MIA families ever challenged the presumption of death without remains, they were desperate to sustain the possibility of prisoners being held in enemy POW camps as the rest of the country forgot the war. Lacking wide support from either the authorities or the public (other than a few politicians or people with questionable motivation who manipulated them for personal gain), they fought mostly single-handedly to keep their loved ones alive in their minds and in the records of the federal government. Although their ranks shrank with time, a few families were firmly entrenched and remained active for decades. This chapter will focus on their campaigns during the Eisenhower era, before the Vietnam War fomented POW/MIA campaigns on an exceptionally large scale and firmly embedded the POW/MIA issue in American culture and politics.

This chapter also reveals that these families hoped not just for a resurrection of their relatives, by discovering them alive in captivity, but also for a revival of US prestige in the world after WWII. In their minds, the country's image of being able to vanquish any opponent had been tarnished by the Korean War. These families wanted the United States to remain a mighty country undeterred by foreign powers, and not to become one which allowed its citizens to be held hostage by foes, who, at a distance, seemed to be

militarily, ideologically, and racially inferior. Historians of Vietnam War POW/MIA activism concur that the propagation of the rumor that the Vietnamese held US POWs after the war was a tactic to repudiate not just the military defeat in Vietnam, but also the decline of a conservative social order under attack by “the need for social justice at home, the cry for economic egalitarianism, and the influence of radical feminism.”<sup>2</sup> The POW myth was exploited by the rising conservative politicians of the 1980s. It is a stretch to argue that the Korean War POW/MIA families similarly enabled right-wing movements in the 1950s or laid the foundation for the Vietnam War POW/MIA campaigns. However, it was evident that the nostalgia for an imagined American prestige evoked by the POW/MIA families’ personal loss supported right-wing policies, such as ignoring the UN and the country’s European allies in international affairs, escalating confrontation with the Communist Bloc, and stigmatizing the left as a menace to American values. Scholars have investigated the role of repatriated Korean War POWs in the right-wing movements of the 1950s. This chapter instead focuses on the political concerns of the families whose loved ones were presumed captured but who never returned.

I also analyze the abortive negotiations between the United States and China or North Korea over accounting for the POW/MIAs. The wartime abuse of captured enemy personnel by both sides undermined their postwar cooperation over the POW/MIA issue.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert C. Doyle, *Voice from Captivity: Interpreting the American POW Narrative* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 266; H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America: How and Why Belief in Live POWs Has Possessed a Nation*, Expanded and Updated Version (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 167-168; Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 7-8, back cover.



After the war, each made impossible demands on the other side to account for their missing personnel who had never been captured, but simply vanished, during the war. By charging each other with breaching the Armistice Agreement for not releasing all POWs after the war, both sides battled for the higher moral and political ground during the extended hostilities across the 38th Parallel in the Cold War. Resolving the fates of the lost men seemed to be less significant than scoring political points.

### **Faulty POW Lists and the Birth of a Myth**

H. Bruce Franklin's *MIA or Mythmaking in America* uses the word myth to depict the popular belief of the American public that US soldiers and civilians who went missing in the Vietnam War were actually being held prisoner in the jungles of Southeast Asia after the war's conclusion. Many adhered to this belief despite the lack of verifiable evidence and maintained it even when the proof they relied on was shown to be faulty or fabricated. I borrow the term "myth" to describe similar rumors in the 1950s alleging that emaciated Americans were enslaved in the DPRK, the PRC, or the USSR as political bargaining chips. In order to charge the Chinese Volunteer Forces (CVF) and North Korean People's Army (KPA) with detaining American POWs, the US military created a list of its servicemen who might have been captured during the war but failed to return after the armistice. Despite revisions of the list since its first conception, it still contains individuals who almost certainly perished in battles or whose fate would remain elusive forever, even with the cooperation of the CVF/KPA. Some families and politicians, even

military officers, later inadvertently or intentionally misinterpreted the list. Their misinterpretation became the basis of the Korean War POW/MIA myth.

The first list of Americans who were unaccounted for was created in the UN Command (UNC) immediately after the exchange of POWs to prove that China and North Korea were violating the Armistice Agreement. Even before the completion of POW repatriation, each side began to charge the other with withholding prisoners. As soon as repatriation started, on August 7, 1953, General Mark W. Clark, commander of the UNC, announced that his opponents were holding US POWs. Based on returnees' reports that some US officers might be sentenced as war criminals and thus would not be returned, he threatened to keep Chinese officers as retaliation. Although the proposed reprisal was ultimately abandoned, the UNC indeed held some CVF/KPA officers until the last days of repatriation.<sup>3</sup> On August 24, a KPA colonel protested that at least 250 Chinese combatants were detained by the US military. When the CVF/KPA declared that all POWs of the UNC (excluding those who refused repatriation) had been returned on September 6, they produced a list of several hundred POWs and asked the UNC to release them.<sup>4</sup> Likely as a defensive tactic, the US military counterattacked three days later with a list of 944 Americans who it claimed had once been known to be in the custody of the CVF/KPA but had not returned or been reported deceased per the

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<sup>3</sup> Paul M. Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, The Korean War (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1994), 78-80.

<sup>4</sup> Minutes of the Sixteenth Meeting of the Committee for the Repatriation of Prisoners of War, August 24, 1953, and Minutes of the Twenty-First Meeting of the Committee for the Repatriation of Prisoners of War, September 7, 1953, in Box 67, Entry PI-127/1, RG554, NARAII.

Armistice Agreement.<sup>5</sup>

The US military knew that the 944 List was premature and inaccurate. Its representatives at the Korean War Military Armistice Commission (MAC) at Panmunjom claimed that all 944 names were included based on speculation from analyzing Chinese or North Korean propaganda, official POW lists, letters that might have been written by POWs in captivity, or witnesses' reports. However, a study of POWs by the US Far East Command in October 1953 suggested that about 450 men were included based solely on unsubstantiated sources.<sup>6</sup> According to a 1954 official statement made about the 944 List, the information about these people was "scanty and inconclusive."<sup>7</sup> By the end of POW repatriation, the military deemed that fewer than fifty men were likely to have been captured (based on the POW list or propaganda of the CVF/KPA) but not repatriated or reported deceased; only two of them were POWs that China had ever admitted to having.<sup>8</sup> Unless the CVF/KPA had indeed erased all traces of several hundred prisoners, most of the 944 listed people had been killed in action or perished en route to POW

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<sup>5</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 225; Minutes of the Eighteenth Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, September 9, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII. The list will be referred to as the 944 List hereafter (likewise, the 450 List and the 389 List). The UNC simultaneously submitted the names of other UNC POWs and demanded that the CVF/KPA account for them. As my dissertation only focuses on American POW/MIAs, I will focus on the 944 List.

<sup>6</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 225; Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff (J-2), "A Study of Repatriation U.S. Military Personnel, 25 September 1953, Amended 6 October 1953," Box 5, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII.

<sup>7</sup> "Efforts to Secure the Return of American Personnel Who Might Still Be in Communist Custody," May 27, 1954, Folder 12, Box 23, Usher L. Burdick Papers (ULB papers hereafter), Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND.

<sup>8</sup> Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff (J-2), "A Study of Repatriation U.S. Military Personnel, 25 September 1953, Amended 6 October 1953," Box 5, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII. One of them, Sergeant Richard G. Desautels, was acknowledged by China in 2009 as died in Shenyang, China (date unspecified). See "China Admits Taking, Burying U.S. POW," *CBS News*, June 18, 2009, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-admits-taking-burying-us-pow-19-06-2008/>.

camps, and were thus not recorded or covered by the Armistice Agreement.<sup>9</sup> The resolution of their fate was contingent on the recovery of their remains or analysis of their fellow soldiers' testimony, which was still in progress in September 1953.

When the US military was confronting the CVF/KPA to demand the fate of these 944 people, it was also busy gleaning evidence to determine their deaths, and thus the list kept getting shorter. The number was reduced to 526 in August 1954, and 470 in December. In 1955, it reached 450.<sup>10</sup> The number stayed frozen at 450 for several years, and until 1960, the US military frequently cited it in the United States and at the MAC, with only minor adjustments. On July 19, 1960, the number dropped to 389. The military insisted that only the recovery of bodies and the availability of new intelligence had led to the reduction.<sup>11</sup> For example, among sixty-one persons who were dropped from the 450 List, eighteen had their remains identified. Others' removal from the list was based on witnesses' reports of their death in battles or captivity.<sup>12</sup>

The rationale for including each man on the 944 List was unclear.<sup>13</sup> Based on

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<sup>9</sup> The Armistice Agreement only requires each side to repatriate living POWs based on their free will and to inventory the deceased POWs. There is no article obliging belligerents to record the name of each enemy they killed in battle. Death en route to POW camps is a grey area as the dead were not officially registered as POWs. Paul M. Cole created a special category, post-capture death, in his research, indicating their difference from POWs.

<sup>10</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 238; there are some intermediate lists that were not widely circulated. For example, a 736 List was mentioned in Carl E. Greenwood to Eisenhower, January 25, 1954, Box 252, Entry NM3-363E, RG407; a 538 List in a report from the UNC to the Department of Army, June 1954, in Box 78, Entry PI-127/1, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>11</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 232-240; General Graves B. Erskine to J. Graham Parsons, July 19, 1960, State Department Central Decimal Files (SDCDF) 611.95A241/7-1960, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>12</sup> Paul M. Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. III, Appendixes (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1994), 156-162.

<sup>13</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 231. The military even could not locate a single copy of the 944 List when it launched an investigation in the Korean War POW/MIA issue in the 1990s. The 944 List has never been publicized.

casualty files maintained by the Air Force, the criteria for the 944 List were haphazard. In some cases, as long as an aircraft was shot down over North Korea, its crew members, whether or not they bailed out before it crashed, were included. In other cases, however, the Air Force declared airmen lost in similar situations dead.<sup>14</sup> In 1954, the Defense Department admitted to then-Senator John F. Kennedy (D-MA) that many names “should not have been on the list in the first place.”<sup>15</sup> Keeping someone on the list could have had solely psychological reasons. On October 7, 1952, Colonel Glenn C. Nye was shot down in North Korea. His aircraft exploded upon slamming into the ground, and he did not bail out. Although there was no sign of his survival, his name was on the 944 List. According to Senator Everett M. Dirksen (R-IL), Colonel Nye was placed on the list because his friends and fellow airmen in his squadron believed that “he was too able a pilot to have crashed and been killed,” and thus he was possibly a POW held by China.<sup>16</sup>

The 450 List was loaded with similar problems. For example, Marine Private First Class Robert J. Young vanished on sentry duty at his unit’s outpost and could not be located after a search by his squad. The Navy Department thus registered him on the 450 List, but the Air Force argued that he should not be included based on the Air Force standard. The Air Force’s criterion was unclear too. Major Charles E. McDonough was removed from the 450 List because the Air Force presumed that his body had been

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<sup>14</sup> The analysis is based on over a hundred case files in entries UD404-B/C/D/E/F, RG341, NARAII.

<sup>15</sup> “Prisoners of War (SPEC),” June 23, 1954, Folder Prisoners of War, Box 281, Senate Files, John F. Kennedy Pre-presidential Papers, Kennedy Library. This is likely a summary of recent updates on the POW issue written by Kennedy.

<sup>16</sup> Everett McKinley Dirksen to Thurston B. Morton, August 28, 1954, State Department Central Decimal Files (SDCDF) 611.95A241/8-2854, RG59, NARAII.

returned during Operation Glory (it actually had not), though he was once seen alive in a POW camp. However, one pilot who was lost off the coast in freezing temperatures and another one who fell four hundred feet without a parachute in North Korea stayed on the list.<sup>17</sup> In the most egregious case, Private First Class Billy Baker stayed on the 450 List even though his bones were buried in his hometown during the war.<sup>18</sup> Keeping such casualties on the list created a demand that was impossible to fulfill, allowing the United States to wrongly demonize its opponents indefinitely for kidnapping POWs. This action simultaneously discouraged the CVF/KPA from cooperating.

The final 389 List removed many repatriated dead and those who were confirmed deceased by other means, but whether the CVF/KPA could tell the US military anything about those still on it was questionable based on an analysis of the declassified annotation to the list. Among the 188 Army soldiers on the list, although most of them were suspected to be alive in enemy hands, at least ten vanished without any trace; twenty-five were included just because someone wrote their names on a blackboard in an area once occupied by the enemy; and six were considered eligible because they were claimed to be on photos of unknown provenance. Of the 168 listed airmen, twelve simply disappeared in the air rather than were shot down by the CVF/KPA.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Official Memorandum for Mr. McConaughy from Joseph P. Nagoski, "Possible Inconsistencies in Current List of 450 Unaccounted-for Personnel," September 30, 1955, and General E. B. Erskine to Walter S. Robertson, October 1, 1955, Box 1, Entry A1-5315, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>18</sup> This is from a propaganda booklet by a group called Alliance for Abandoned American Fighting Men. Its circulation date is likely after 1957. A copy of the booklet is kept in the collection of Eugene R. Guild, BHS 328-141, Carnegie Library of Boulder, CO. The status of this serviceman was also listed in Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. III.

<sup>19</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. III, 122-155. If these airmen were not shot down but crashed in a remote

It must be acknowledged that a considerable number of families whose loved ones went missing in Korea but never appeared on the 944 List also requested the military to demand their release by the CVF/KPA. In my analysis of over five hundred inquiries about the Korean War POW/MIAs, letters concerning people on the 450 or 389 List barely outnumbered those asking for men never deemed POWs. In the 1950s, each POW/MIA family likely received only the official explanation of its loved one's fate and was told whether he was included in any of the lists by the military. If they somehow learned the rationale for a soldier being included in these lists, then they may have begun to suspect what disqualified their loved ones for the lists. Some of these families tried to collect evidence demonstrating their loved ones' possible survival. Rita van Wees from New York City, arguably the most determined Korean War POW/MIA activist, fought a decades-long battle to get her son onto the lists of possible withheld POWs. Her son Corporal Ronald D. van Wees disappeared on November 3, 1952, after jumping into an enemy trench. While Corporal van Wees did not appear on even the 944 List, Mrs. van Wees insisted that he survived until the armistice but was taken away by his captors for unknown reasons before the POW exchange, likely drawing on her collection of testimonies from other POWs.<sup>20</sup>

Despite reducing the list from 944 to 389, the US military was more often

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area after mechanical failures, they or their bodies were unlikely to have been actively searched for by CVF/KPA troops. The US military even recovered the body of a man on the 389 List from South Korea.

<sup>20</sup> Her long letters appeared in the records of almost all post-1950 presidents, and of the State Department, the Defense Department, and many congressmembers. On her son's story, see Achim Menges, "Prisoners of War, Betrayed," YouTube Video, 50:11, December 3, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgvYjQrPhsk>.

reluctant to remove names from it, especially in front of the CVF/KPA. Even if the military positively determined a soldier's fate, as long as his remains were not returned by the CVF/KPA, they preferred to retain him on the list in order to exaggerate the number of purportedly held POWs to brand the Chinese and North Koreans as kidnappers and violators of the Armistice Agreement. By mid-1954, fewer than fifty missing servicemen had not been proven or presumed dead, but the Defense Department insisted that the diminution of the MIA number would not affect the list.<sup>21</sup> It later stated that men "either captured or killed in action under circumstances in which the UN forces were unable to determine their fate" or lost when "one or another of the elements of the Chinese Communist and/or North Korean forces were in a position at the time of the incidents concerned to determine their fate" should stay on the list. Therefore, the CVF/KPA was still responsible for explaining their fate.<sup>22</sup> For instance, on July 10, 1957, some State Department officials discussed evidence to indict China for defaulting on revealing the fate of a few US servicemen for whom there was "excellent" proof of having been captured. Among the five men to be prioritized, all were seen dead by multiple fellow soldiers (two were buried by them).<sup>23</sup> As these men died in captivity, China was held responsible for reporting their deaths.

However, political concerns sometimes required the military to downsize its

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<sup>21</sup> Colonel Percy H. Lash Jr. to Margaret C. Smith, June 16, 1954, SDCDF 611.95A241/6-1654, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>22</sup> Memorandum for Mr. Walter Robertson (Department of State) by G. B. Erskine, "Geneva Negotiations on Prisoners of War," September 16, 1955, SDCDF 611.95A241/9-1655, and Walter P. McConaughy to Elsie A. Simonson, April 25, 1957, SDCDF 611.95A241/3-857, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>23</sup> Ralph N. Clough to James J. Kelleher Jr., July 10, 1957, SDCDF 611.93251/7-1057, RG59, NARAII.



lists. According to an official explanation of the reduction from 450 to 389 on July 19, 1960, it seems that this reduction served two purposes: 1) demonstrating to both the POW/MIA families and the DPRK/PRC that the US military was still dedicated to solving the fate of each POW/MIA; 2) providing a more reliable list of possible POWs to encourage North Korea and China to cooperate.<sup>24</sup> Even though the Defense Department stressed that the DPRK/PRC were still charged with explaining the fate of the sixty-one men, it is possible that continuing to use an obviously unreliable list would prompt the Chinese delegation to the US-PRC ambassadorial talks in Warsaw to instantly reject the list and further negotiations on the POW/MIAs.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the unclear rationale for including servicemen in the 944/450/389 Lists and the reluctance to remove names, neither the Defense Department nor the State Department officially announced to the US public that all listed men were POWs and still alive after the truce. Instead, these men were listed as those for whom there was “evidence that they had at one time or another been in Communist custody.”<sup>26</sup> In February 1954, the two departments jointly stated that “the United Nations Command had no conclusive evidence regarding the death or survival of these persons” and “it has never been believed, or intended to be implied, that all 944 men were living.”<sup>27</sup> In later

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<sup>24</sup> General Graves B. Erskine to J. Graham Parsons, July 19, 1960, SDCDF 611.95A241/7-1960, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>25</sup> The talks first in Geneva, then in Warsaw addressed the POW/MIA issue. They will be discussed later.

<sup>26</sup> Multiple form letters in this era are found from the binder Correspondence re American personnel rumored to be in Communist Custody, October 27, 1953, Box 707, Entry NM3-363E, RG407, NARAII.

<sup>27</sup> “Joint State-Defense Department Background on Efforts to Secure the Return of American Prisoners of War Who Might Still be Held in Communist Custody,” and its supplementary section, Folder State Department, Box 10, James C. Hagerty Papers, Eisenhower Library.

years, they persistently reiterated that there was no reliable evidence to prove that anyone listed was still alive, but they added the perplexing sentence that they could not “in good conscience completely foreclose the possibility that some of them might still be alive.”<sup>28</sup>

Notwithstanding the two departments’ attempts, POW/MIA families, veterans’ groups, and some congressmembers were adamant that these lists contained the names of confirmed captured Americans who would be detained forever or had been cold-bloodedly slaughtered after the Korean War. On January 18, 1954, a Texan congressman requested the State Department investigate efforts to “secure the release of 944 American boys who are allegedly still prisoners of the Communists.” He enclosed a constituent’s letter arguing that there were “944 of our boys who are still prisoners held by the Reds.”<sup>29</sup> In another letter, Senator Dirksen mysteriously contended that there were near a thousand “American pilots whom the Reds declared they are holding prisoner.”<sup>30</sup> In reality, China and North Korea never admitted to holding a single US POW after the war. In 1962, there were still people claiming that based on “authoritative grounds” three thousand US soldiers were being held by China.<sup>31</sup>

Three major factors contributed to such a widespread and enduring misconception. First, the lack of a victory in Korea deprived the United States of the

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<sup>28</sup> For several examples, Howard A. Cook to Stanley G. Jachera, June 10, 1955 and Wilton B. Persons to Edward S. Guthrie Sr., October 9, 1959, Box 17, Entry A1-1020, RG330; “Draft DOD Statement on Reduction of List,” SDCDF 611.95A241/7-1960, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>29</sup> George Mahon to Thruston B. Morton, January 18, 1954, SDCDF 611.95A241/1-1854, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>30</sup> Everett McKinley Dirksen to Thurston B. Morton, August 28, 1954, SDCDF 611.95A241/8-2854, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>31</sup> Jerome D. Hannan to Daniel J. F. Flood, September 19, 1962, Box 88, Entry UD-1002F, RG407, NARAII.

chance to conduct a thorough search on battlefields and in POW camps in North Korea, making speculation about living POWs possible. Even after WWII, there was at least one mother who suspected that her son was sent to the Soviet Union and never returned.<sup>32</sup> The USSR was also notorious for keeping German and Japanese POWs for several years. Therefore, POW/MIA families could not preclude the possibility that the Soviet Bloc could have detained American POWs after the Korean War.

The second factor leading to the myth of living POWs was the ambiguous phrasing of official statements regarding the 944/450/389 Lists. While these statements claimed that there was no evidence to prove that anyone was alive, or even POWs, they also admitted that the military did not have any proof to confirm that any of them were dead. POW/MIA families could just cling to the hope that the absence of positive evidence proving their loved ones' death meant their survival in POW camps in the Communist Bloc. Some officials' careless comments on the 944/450/389 Lists may have reinforced such beliefs. For example, in 1957, in a congressional hearing, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (manpower, personnel, and reserve) Stephen S. Jackson claimed that the soldiers on the 944 List were all confirmed alive in POW camps but had not returned. Although he realized his misinterpretation later, his comments had already gone public.<sup>33</sup> Congress, on multiple occasions, passed resolutions declaring that 944 or 450 "American prisoners of war in the hands of Communist forces have not been

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<sup>32</sup> The case is analyzed in Timothy K. Nenninger, "United States Prisoners of War and the Red Army, 1944-45: Myths and Realities," *Journal of Military History* 66, No.3 (July 2002), 779.

<sup>33</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 230-231.

repatriated or otherwise accounted for since the cessation of hostilities in Korea.”<sup>34</sup>

The inaccessibility of North Korea and equivocal phrases were not by themselves enough to spread the misunderstanding. Almost all servicemen whose remains were lost in the war had been officially declared or presumed dead by mid-1954. In the 1950s, ordinary Americans often evinced unquestioning trust in and obedience towards the authorities, particularly against the backdrop of the Red Scare.<sup>35</sup> While the military at one time publicized the existence of unreturned POWs to generate support for the Cold War, the embarrassing wartime collaboration of some repatriated US POWs with their captors ultimately persuaded the military to obscure all POW-related issues.<sup>36</sup> Unless the question of living POWs held in China or North Korea was incorporated into concurrent anti-communist political agendas, most of the POW/MIA families were likely reluctant to openly challenge the military’s declaration of their loved ones’ death for fear of being deemed disloyal. Thus, the third factor contributing to the widespread myth of living POWs was its inclusion in the political agendas of a few prominent generals, politicians, and social activists who asserted that the cowardice of the administration during the Korean War had not only cost the United States a victory but also led to the enslavement of several hundred servicemen by their captors.

The Korean War POW/MIA myth likely started when General Clark charged the

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<sup>34</sup> For example, H. Conc. Res. 13, Eighty-Fourth Congress, First Session (1955).

<sup>35</sup> Melinda L. Pash, *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation: The Americans Who Fought the Korean War* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 13-14.

<sup>36</sup> Charles S. Young, *Names, Ranks, and Serial Number: Exploiting Korean War POWs at Home and Abroad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7, 138-139.

CVF/KPA with detaining two to three thousand POWs on August 7, 1953. The general cited the POWs to bemoan the fact that he was the first US commander to sign a truce without victory. In a news conference at the Pentagon, he claimed that he was under significant pressure from his superiors to terminate the war at the earliest possible moment, without a final victory or the release of all POWs.<sup>37</sup> POW/MIA families soon began to cite his number and demand the White House use any possible means, including war, to liberate the prisoners, as telegrams on this issue reached the White House hours after the general's claim.<sup>38</sup> Some POW/MIA families favored the general's number even after the 944 List became known to Americans, likely due to his position in the UNC. For example, on September 30, 1953, H. B. Treester, whose son was missing in Korea, asked Eisenhower and his US senator why the country was focusing on the 944 List only while ignoring the over three thousand people still missing in North Korea.<sup>39</sup>

The flow of POW/MIA inquiries into Washington peaked in December 1953, indicating the moment that the living POW myth became widespread among ordinary Americans. On December 10, 1953, Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) delivered a speech in Richmond, VA. During his long tirade against imagined domestic communist saboteurs, including presumably treacherous officials in the State Department, he

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<sup>37</sup> Such information is extracted from the depositions for *Hearings on Cold War, Korea, WWII POWs, Hearings before the Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs*, Senate, 102nd Congress, Second Session, November 10 and 11, 1992, 21. It will be cited as *1992 Senate POW Hearing* hereafter. General James A. van Fleet gave a much higher number of 8,000.

<sup>38</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 228; Vincent A. Harrold to the president, August 6, 1953, Box 17, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII. Note the time difference between Korea and the United States.

<sup>39</sup> H. B. Treester to Eisenhower, September 30, 1953, and H. B. Treester to Charles E. Potter, September 30, 1953, Box 17, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII.

proclaimed that “on September 10 of this year, the United States Army announced that there were nine hundred American military men [...] the Army knew that had been living and had been prisoners of the Chinese Communists who are unaccounted for as of September 10.” He especially clarified that they were not missing but living POWs. Banging his rostrum with anger, he exclaimed that the POWs were either murdered or still in “blood-stained dungeons,” all due to the country’s loss of national honor and its leader’s failure to remove communists from the US government.<sup>40</sup>

It is unclear how many Americans heard this speech, although a few people admitted that they were influenced by it. However, five days later, right-wing columnist David Lawrence’s article piggybacking on McCarthy’s speech unleashed a flood of POW/MIA inquiries.<sup>41</sup> On December 15, his article was reprinted across the country to warn of the implications of allowing 944 men to be left in Communist Bloc countries. As historian Michael Allen explained, this article publicly linked the POW issue with American weakness and humiliation for the first time. Lawrence placed the living POWs in parallel with other controversial issues, like the dismissal of General MacArthur by President Truman. His article was then expanded and published in his *U.S. News & World Report*, further introducing the myth of the 944 living POWs to Americans.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Joseph McCarthy, “Speech in front of the Current Affair Club (Richmond, VA) on December 10, 1953,” the audio file is kept in Joseph R. McCarthy Papers (1930-1957), Raynor Memorial Libraries, Marquette University (Milwaukee, WI).

<sup>41</sup> Mrs. Fred R. Pfalzgraf to President Eisenhower, December 22, 1953, Box 707, Entry NM3-363E, RG407, NARAII. The author admitted that she listened to McCarthy’s speech. Lawrence’s article convinced her that McCarthy’s claim was credible.

<sup>42</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Men Comes Home*, 133. There are multiple identical copies of David Lawrence’s article (the title varies) across the country, and I am using the ones in Boxes 252 and 707, Entry NM3-

Lawrence emphasized that the 944 Americans were alive to censure an enfeebled government. He described them as those “whom the Chinese Communists have refused to return” and who “were spirited away to hiding places behind the Iron Curtain.” The State Department was reproached for doing nothing while it knew that the 944 men were alive. He was disgusted by the UN and US allies, who were courting and capitulating to the communists while the latter were enslaving US POWs.<sup>43</sup> His article was quoted at length by distressed families who felt that their loved ones were held by China for political bargains while the statesmen in Washington failed to protect them. For example, on December 30, 1953, Senator Alexander Wiley (R-WI) wrote to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, showing that his constituents’ recent questions were well supported by Lawrence’s article. As a solution, Wiley suggested Dulles recruit McCarthy to handle the POW/MIA issue and diplomacy with China.<sup>44</sup> Hundreds of letters with requests ranging from defending national values to withdrawal from the UN inundated Washington in January 1954, but their common demand was to rescue the 944 men.<sup>45</sup> After a few months, though, the flood of inquiries about the 944 men tapered into a trickle.

Similar articles did occasionally appear in newspapers and magazines over the years, refamiliarizing Americans with the living POW myth. In October 1959, for instance, in the pulp magazine *ARGOSY*, Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist Edward J.

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363E, RG407, NARAII.

<sup>43</sup> All direct quotations and information are from Lawrence’s article.

<sup>44</sup> Alexander Wiley to John Foster Dulles, December 30, 1953, SDCDF 611.95A241/12-3053, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>45</sup> Mostly in Boxes 252 and 707, Entry NM3-363E, RG407, and the documents in 1954 filed under SDCDF, RG59, NARAII.

Mowery published an article titled “Presumed Dead” claiming that the military presumed all those on the 450 List dead while it was aware that “they were known by name and serial number to be alive and in Communist prison camps.” It complained that the statesmen in Washington only paid lip service to the POW/MIA relatives.<sup>46</sup> His follow-up article in February 1960 (with the same title) cited dozens of letters to government officials or the magazine editor from POW/MIA families who claimed that his first article had made them believe again that some POWs were still imprisoned in China or North Korea. In addition to provoking veteran POW/MIA activists to protest the government’s inaction in bringing back the POWs, Mowery’s articles encouraged many people to write about the fate of their relatives for the first time, including a high school junior from Indiana.<sup>47</sup> The first article was so influential that the State Department refrained from commenting on it in case the issue became overheated.<sup>48</sup> A military officer felt that this article was deplorable, as it had distressed many families by rekindling hopes of their loved ones’ survival.<sup>49</sup>

### **Hard Evidence for the Living Dead?**

Together with the frequent misinterpretation of the men on the 944/450/389 Lists

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<sup>46</sup> It is hard to find this article, but the second one cited it extensively. A copy of the second one is in Box 1, Entry A1-5315, RG59, NARAII. The quotation is from the first article.

<sup>47</sup> Gerald Gipson to the State Department, February 2, 1960, SDCDF 611.95A241/2-260, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>48</sup> Memorandum from Robert A. Aylward to Mr. Martin, “New ‘Argosy’ Article on Missing and Unaccounted-for,” November 18, 1959, Box 1, Entry A1-5315, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>49</sup> Memorandum for Brigade General A. J. Goodpaster, “Suggested Reply to Edna E. Vinson,” October 27, 1959, Box 17, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII.



as POWs detained by the CVF/KPA after the war, “live sightings” further convinced POW/MIA families that some POWs were still held in China, North Korea, or the Soviet Union. Live sightings refer to claims that US soldiers were seen there by anonymous informants, or to allegations that a specific soldier appearing in photos or TV programs possibly filmed in enemy POW camps.<sup>50</sup> Hoping for their loved ones’ survival, some families claimed to have identified their relatives from these sources. Such sightings even disturbed families who had gone through the loss of their loved ones. The parents of Private Gordon R. Smith silently accepted their son’s demise in late 1950 without his body. However, in May 1953, they saw a news clip filming US soldiers in POW camps. Among a large group of POWs, they picked out their son. After the military refused to consider him a POW, they joined the ranks of the POW/MIA activists.<sup>51</sup>

The veracity of the live sightings varied significantly. An officially endorsed live sighting concerned Major Samuel P. Logan. After he was shot down near Pyongyang in the fall of 1950, he was forced to pose in front of his aircraft’s wreckage for propaganda films by a Soviet news agency. However, his fate was never resolved after the Korean War. The US government and POW/MIA activists frequently cited his video to blame the Communist Bloc for holding POWs.<sup>52</sup> However, some live sightings were of

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<sup>50</sup> The reliability of these live sightings varies significantly, but it is unlikely high. The DPAA data for the Vietnam War ones is that only 2.25% of them might be useful for accounting for POW/MIAs. See “DPAA Family/VSO/MSO Quarterly Call and Update Notes, Wednesday, Nov.6, 2019, 1:00PM,” <http://www.dpaa.mil/portals/85/Nov%206%20%20Family-VSO%20Update%20Meeting%20Notes.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> May Smith to the Secretary of State, February 9, 1955, SDCDF 611.95A241/2-955, and May Smith to the Secretary of State, May 20, 1955, SDCDF 611.95A241/3-2955,” RG59, NARAII.

<sup>52</sup> “Statement Charging KPA/CPV with Failing Account for UNC Personnel Missing and Unaccounted for from the Korean Hostilities,” attached to Walter S. Robertson to General G. B. Erskine, May 24, 1957, Box

significantly lower credibility. Many were simply claims that hundreds or thousands of US POWs (or just “Caucasians”) were seen in labor camps by people who asserted that they were in China around the end of the Korean War. Photos and testimony collected by POW/MIA families were sometimes made by charlatans. In its form letters with families during the war, the military sometimes warned servicemen’s families about this illegal industry profiteering on their sorrow.<sup>53</sup> As shown in Chapter II, First Lieutenant Jack Ledbetter’s family refused to accept his death, even after his body had been identified. According to the State Department, their stubbornness was likely caused by a Chinese person who had been caught fabricating intelligence about US POWs for years. He offered them an allegedly recent photo claiming to show Ledbetter in a POW camp.<sup>54</sup>

However, there were occasions when American or US allies’ servicemen were indeed held after the Korean War and returned home long after the armistice.<sup>55</sup> Their return was perceived by the US military and citizens as hard evidence that China and North Korea had violated the Korean War Armistice Agreement. As these men remained detained after the war, some believed that there was an equal chance that the 944 Americans, or perhaps even more, were secretly held in prison camps.

The most convincing evidence demonstrating that the CVF/KPA held American

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26, Entry P225, RG59, NARAIL.

<sup>53</sup> For example, see C. C. Hall to Mr. and Mrs. George Peiritsch, July 20, 1951, in the case file of Staff Sergeant Frank G. Peiritsch, NPRC.

<sup>54</sup> Thruston B. Morton to Carl Albert, February 18, 1954, SDCDF 611.95A241/2-254, RG59, NARAIL.

<sup>55</sup> By 2003, about thirty-four ROK POWs had sneaked across the 38th Parallel and described themselves as unreturned POWs. The UNC once charged the KPA with holding them after the war and surmised that some American POWs might have been held as well. However, many ROK soldiers were impressed into the KPA; therefore, they were technically not POWs.

prisoners after the armistice was the delayed release of fifteen US airmen who fought in the Korean War but were shot down over China. On January 12, 1953, a B-29 bomber was shot down near the Sino-Korean border. Eleven of its crew members were captured. The other four airmen were shot down when they inadvertently flew across the Yalu River during air combat.<sup>56</sup> Their capture was publicized by the PRC government soon after they landed.<sup>57</sup> Because they did not show up during the POW exchange, the UNC placed them on the 944 List.

Unlike other people's status on the 944 List, these men's captivity and the conditions for their release were promptly disclosed by the Chinese government. Concurrent with the introduction of the 944 List at the MAC, on September 12, 1953, a pro-communist correspondent informed the UNC that China did not register these airmen as POWs but rather as spies, and therefore it would require formal negotiations to release them. In January 1954, the State Department acknowledged this demand by the Chinese government and planned for a different approach from the one applied to the other men on the 944 List.<sup>58</sup> These airmen were tried for espionage and sentenced in November 1954 and May 1955, shortly before being pardoned and deported from China.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 202-203.

<sup>57</sup> "Zhou En-Lai Waizhang Fabiao Shengming Kangyi Meiguo Paiqian Feiji Qinru Woguo Jinxing Zhanlue Zhencha [Foreign Minister Zhou En-Lai Made a Declaration Protesting the U.S. for Dispatching Aircraft to Invade China and Conduct Strategic Scouting]," *Renmin Ribao*, January 22, 1953, 1; and "Wo Jiluo Qinru Dongbeilingkong de Meiji Yijia [We shot down an American Aircraft Invading Northeastern Territory]," *Renmin Ribao*, April 10, 1953, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Mr. Robertson to the Acting Secretary, "United States Personnel Missing in Korea and Communist China," January 28, 1954, SDCDF 911.95A241/1-2854, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>59</sup> "Woguo Zuigao Renminfayuan Junshishenpangting Xuanpan Liangge Zhongda Meiguo Jiandie Anjian [Our Supreme Military Tribunal Announced the Sentence for Two Important Case of U.S. Espionage]," *Renmin Ribao*, November 24, 1954, 1; "Woguo Zuigao Renminfayuan Junshishenpangting Panjue Sige

While China ultimately released these fifteen airmen, their detention in China convinced POW/MIA families that the CVF/KPA were holding more POWs. On November 17, 1953, a woman argued that as the airmen held in China were shot down over Manchuria, it was quite possible that her son, who was shot down over the Yalu River, was secretly held in China too.<sup>60</sup> In another petition, the author distorted facts by stating that the sentencing of these airmen was the first time China had revealed their fate. He thus argued that if China could conceal them for one year, the communists could hold thousands more for much longer.<sup>61</sup> The US government shared this mentality. A 1957 official statement meant to disparage China and North Korea still quoted the story of the B-29 crew to “substantiate the charge that your side still holds against their will many of our personnel who were captured during the Korean conflict.”<sup>62</sup> One of the fifteen men, Steve Kiba, later became a hardcore POW/MIA activist and spread rumors that while he was imprisoned, he saw more Americans detained after the Korean War.

### **Domestic Contest over the Living Dead**

Some of the POW/MIA families, believing that their loved ones were detained by China or North Korea after the Korean War, wished to facilitate their return by petitioning

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Meikongjunrenyuan Jiaji Qinfan Wo Lingkong Anjian [Our Supreme Military Tribunal Announced the Sentence for the Espionage Case of Four USAF Men],” *Renmin Ribao*, May 31, 1955, 1.

<sup>60</sup> Rev. and Mrs. H. E. Jacobson to Lt. Colonel William G. Draper, November 17, 1953, Box 17, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII.

<sup>61</sup> “Petition for the Return of America’s Fighting Men Captured and Unaccounted for by the Enemy in the War in Korea,” Box 17, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII.

<sup>62</sup> “Charge the KPA/CPV with Failure to Account for and Release POW Being Held in Communist China, 1957,” Box 159, Entry A1-3118B, RG59, NARAII.

the US government not to treat them as long dead in battles. The majority of the missing in Korea were enlisted foot soldiers, which meant that most of them came from impoverished rural or working-class families. These families did not feel confident about making public speeches or writing newspaper columns, in contrast to the POW/MIA activists of the Vietnam War.<sup>63</sup> They were also less likely to be able to afford TV or radio advertising to spread their message. Even a trip to an urban center to voice their concern and recruit followers was largely out of the question. Left with few options, they primarily wrote letters to statesmen and military officials in Washington to challenge the presumption of their loved ones' death single-handedly, rather than in groups.

Contemporary social norms also forestalled the birth of organized dissenting groups. As Masuda Hajimu has argued, during the Cold War, each society spontaneously suppressed local disagreement to maintain order at home.<sup>64</sup> Families openly criticizing official policies tended to be frowned on by their fellow citizens and authorities. In 1957, when a reporter, who had extensively interviewed POW families, testified in Congress, he quoted a remark from a soldier's mother, "I lie awake at night composing strong letters to the State Department, then I never send them because I am afraid the State Department will call me a Communist [...] I just don't want to raise that much trouble in Washington."<sup>65</sup> In fact, many letters inquiring about POW/MIAs' fate began with a

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<sup>63</sup> Pash, *In the Shadow of the Greatest Generation*, 22, 47-49; Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 134.

<sup>64</sup> Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 7-8.

<sup>65</sup> *Return of American Prisoners of War Who Have Not Been Accounted for by the Communists, Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Far East and the Pacific of the Committee on Foreign Affairs on H. Con. Res. 140 and Similar Measures to Express the Sense of Congress with Respect to the Return of 450*

statement of loyalty. Rita van Wees, famous for her anti-government stance, deplored that “cowardly parents” ignored her letters to enlist their support for her challenge against the military’s practices of presuming soldiers dead without solid evidence (presumptive finding of death, PFOD) and for her advocacy of America-First policies.<sup>66</sup>

Established veterans’ organizations, such as the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars, were not highly vocal on the POW/MIA issue either. Such groups, whose existence was predicated upon patriotism, were probably reluctant to challenge the military’s declaration of the missing men’s deaths. Only a few local chapters passed internal resolutions asking the White House to adopt more aggressive policies toward the Communist Bloc to facilitate the return of living POWs. The only public declaration I found was a resolution of the Wisconsin headquarters of the American Legion on May 17, 1954, demanding that Eisenhower sever diplomatic relations with all communist countries if China would not release the 944 POWs.<sup>67</sup>

The population who sent letters to authorities to learn of POW/MIAs’ fates was gendered, comprising mostly mothers of the missing and a few wives. Studies of post-atrocity social movements reveal the critical roles of female relatives in confronting authorities to seek justice for victims. In the wake of a death, women were traditionally

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*American Prisoners of War Who Have not Been Accounted for by the Communists*, House of Representatives, Eighty-Fifth Congress, First Session, May 27, 1957, 53. The hearing will be cited as *1957 POW Hearing* hereafter.

<sup>66</sup> Rita van Wees to the Secretary of the Army, January 15, 1954, Box 31, Entry NM3-363E, RG407, NARAII.

<sup>67</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the Department Americanism Commission, the American Legion, Held at Department HQ, Milwaukee, May 17, 1954, Reel 15, American Legion, Wisconsin Records, Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison, WI).

tasked with mourning the loss of life. By voicing their kinship and manifesting their extraordinary pain, they tried to maintain their loved ones' social life even after their death. Female relatives are usually the last in a community or society to remind others of the tragic death of an individual.<sup>68</sup> They thus kept the book open for their loved ones. As illustrated by Mamphela Ramphele in the context of apartheid-era South Africa, by entering public funeral rituals, widows who embodied loss and pain spread their private trauma to the public and became symbols of social suffering.<sup>69</sup> After the Korean War, the mothers and widows of the missing men stressed their suffering as hostages' relatives to show how Americans were victimized by the communists. Fathers, who were usually veterans, were possibly more willing to accept the death of a soldier without his body or an accurate report of his fate as they had in their own wars.

Most of the letters and resolutions were Washington-bound. The White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon were popular destinations for correspondence regarding the POW/MIA issue. Outside Washington, the UN was both a receiver and a target of the POW/MIA families' letters, because it granted the US military the use of its banner to justify its intervention but had Communist Bloc countries in its membership. Red Cross offices in Washington, London, Geneva, Beijing, Pyongyang, and Moscow were also these families' last resort.

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<sup>68</sup> Isaias Rojas-Perez, *Mourning Remains: State Atrocity, Exhumations, and Governing the Disappeared in Peru's Postwar Andes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 19.

<sup>69</sup> Mamphela Ramphele, "Political Widowhood in South Africa: The Embodiment of Ambiguity," *Daedalus* 125, No.1 Social Suffering (Winter, 1996), 99.

When analyzing senders' names signed on the correspondence from families to domestic or foreign authorities collected in this research, it was not difficult to see that their diversity plunged after 1954 except for brief moments, such as when the *ARGOSY* articles were published. This is understandable, because an increasing number of families accepted the inevitable fact that even without their loved ones' remains, the chance of these soldiers' survival waned with time. When I interviewed the siblings or offspring of POW/MIAs, many stated that their parents or grandparents were indeed in frequent communication with the military before and shortly after these POW/MIAs were presumed dead. However, after months to years without any updates, they just ceased writing and tried to accept their loved ones' death, although they may still have been gripped by the hope of their relatives' survival.<sup>70</sup>

The most common response to these families was merely a form letter issued by the State Department or the Defense Department. In most cases, these form letters did not contain any individualized information, but just a brief review of the POW/MIA issue and recent updates of negotiations between the United States and the Communist Bloc. Such form letters were sent out in bulk, with the only difference between them being their recipient's name and address. For instance, at least thirty congressmen and more families who wanted to verify the accuracy of Lawrence's article received identical letters regarding the 944 men's fates in January 1954. The Eisenhower library also preserved a

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<sup>70</sup> The hope of survival was expressed by placing a photo or candle on a dining table during festivals. I learned of it from my interviewees: Greg Beckwith (August 4, 2018), Paul DeFrain (August 13, 2018), and Sharon Chuvalas, (August 2, 2018).



large quantity of form letters. On February 23, 1954, the White House sent out nine copies of letters with a State Department statement to handle inquiries pertaining to POW/MIAs from January 26 to February 12.<sup>71</sup>

Predictably, the POW/MIA families were disheartened by the form letters. On December 26, 1955, John Zingarella complained to the secretary of state that every letter he received just wrote that “everything is being done to obtain information concerning the whereabouts of prisoners or soldiers missing in action in the Korean conflict,” without any specific updates on his son.<sup>72</sup> In 1957, a missing soldier’s mother explicitly asked the State Department to “not send me any more form letters as I am already fed up with them.”<sup>73</sup> The form letters probably discouraged many families from further inquiring about their loved ones’ fate.

However, exceptions to this trend must be acknowledged, as a few POW/MIA families who never accepted the death of their loved ones were so determined that they kept writing for years, if not decades. The number of dedicated families is extremely small, probably no more than ten, but they dominated Korean War POW/MIA activism and kept it alive all the way through the Vietnam War. The reasons for them becoming hardliner POW/MIA activists vary.

Some people became determined activists because there was convincing evidence

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<sup>71</sup> These letters or at least the indexes of these letters were kept in the Eisenhower Library. In this research, I only used the copy of the files from the Eisenhower Library that were deposited in Box 17 to 21, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAIL.

<sup>72</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Zingarella to John Foster Dulles, December 26, 1955, SDCDF 611.95A241/12-2655, RG59, NARAIL.

<sup>73</sup> Mrs. John E. Schwab to Robert Murphy, May 6, 1957, SDCDF 611.93241/5-657, RG59, NARAIL.

to show that their relatives had been captured by the CVF/KPA. When the United States was confronting China in Geneva (to be discussed later in this chapter) to press for an accounting of its missing servicemen, US diplomats prioritized three cases. One was that of Major Logan, because he appeared in a Soviet propaganda film. Another pertained to Captain Harry D. Moreland, who was known to have been captured in October 1952. His fellow POWs testified that by November, both of his legs were amputated, but China reported that he escaped from the camp—an improbable conclusion.<sup>74</sup> While Logan's family primarily wrote letter after letter to Washington, Moreland's father employed more diverse approaches, likely due to his economic and social influence as an attorney and bank counselor in Tulsa, OK. According to an interview with Moreland's parents in 1954, conducted by a few congressmen, they had used private funds to incentivize their son's fellow US or Canadian POWs to collect evidence to prove that he had been abducted by the Chinese. They also threatened to bring a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the Army's practice of issuing PFODs for soldiers without consulting their relatives.<sup>75</sup> Moreland's father even ran for Congress to introduce POW/MIA legislation.<sup>76</sup> His campaign failed, but he became the sole POW/MIA relative to testify in a congressional hearing on the Korean War POW/MIA issue in 1957—it was not until 1992 that Congress

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<sup>74</sup> "Charge the KPA/CPV with Failure to Account for and Release POW Being Held in Communist China, 1957," Box 159, Entry A1-3118B, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>75</sup> "Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Harry D. Moreland Whose Son was Shot Down over Korea and Who Remains Unaccounted for by the Communists, March 26, 1954," SDCDF 611.95A241/3-2654, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>76</sup> Harry D. Moreland to Mike Monroney, December 3, 1956, SDCDF 611.95A241/12-556, RG59, NARAII.

launched another hearing solely on this topic.

The motive of other hardliners was perhaps just that they did not obtain physical proof of their relatives' death and considered them alive out of instinct. Some people who kept writing in the 1960s include the kin of lieutenants Edward S. Guthrie Jr., John P. Shaddick III, and Bruce A. Sweney. The three men remained on the 389 List, but contrary to Logan's and Moreland's cases, there was no proof that they were ever captured. The official reason for them staying on the list was that they might have had a chance to safely parachute out of their stricken aircraft.<sup>77</sup>

Ironically, the most influential POW/MIA activists after the Korean War were the parents of two servicemen who were never on any list, meaning that the military considered there to be sufficient evidence to prove their deaths. One was Rita van Wees. The other one, whom I will discuss later, was Eugene R. Guild. Guild's son was killed in Korea, but his body was returned home in 1951. There is no evidence that Guild doubted the body's identity.

US government officials could do nothing but express sympathy for these hardliners' ordeal; however, privately, they regarded these people as troublemakers and chose to ignore some of their letters. For example, Sweney's mother wrote so many letters to the military that the Air Force complained that it had run out of methods to convince her of the death of her son, and thus no more correspondence should be

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<sup>77</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. III, 122-155.

delivered to this “hopeless” woman.<sup>78</sup> Van Wees was more irksome to the statesmen in Washington. In 1957, incensed by her citation and distribution of McCarthyist propaganda, the State Department defined van Wees as “notorious” and discouraged replies to her with signatures of high-ranking department officials. Later, the State Department granted van Wees an interview to present relevant evidence and discuss the living POW rumor, but concluded that there was no hope that she would budge in her conviction.<sup>79</sup>

The Korean War POW/MIA families were reluctant to form or join organizations aimed at protesting official policies, but there were efforts to bring the families together. During the war, a few prisoners’ families established a Save-Our-Son Committee to accelerate the liberation of American POWs. However, this group was later indicted for being pro-communist and targeted by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Major Logan’s family also made abortive and ephemeral attempts.<sup>80</sup> The only long-lasting, influential Korean War POW/MIA group was Fighting Homefolks of the Fighting Men (FHFMM) run by Eugene Guild from Glenwood Springs, CO. Unlike the organizations formed after the Vietnam War, it obtained little public traction.

FHFMM was not launched as a POW/MIA group, but as a group against the Truman

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<sup>78</sup> A note by the Air Force on October 27, 1956, Box 17, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII.

<sup>79</sup> Office Memorandum, “Letter to Mrs. van Wees, from R. A. Aylward to Mr. Clough,” June 12, 1957, and Memorandum of Conversation, “Discussion of American Servicemen Missing during the Korean War and Related Subjects,” October 21, 1957, Box 26, Entry P225, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>80</sup> *Investigation of Communist Propaganda Among Prisoners of War in Korea (Save Our Sons Committee)*, *Hearings before the Committee on Un-American Activities*, House of Representatives, Eighty-Fourth Congress, Second Session, June 18 and 19, 1956; Ethel C. Logan to John Foster Dulles, January 6, 1956, SDCDF 611.95A241/1-656, RG59, NARAII.

administration. The death of Guild's son in September 1950 and the defeat of US forces in early December motivated him to form FHHM. On December 7, 1950, Guild proposed to form a group to protest President Truman's policy that seemed to be sending American boys to fight in Korea with their hands tied, purportedly costing him his son. He established FHHM on December 28 as an anti-government group with three major aims: 1) removing any restraints on the war in Korea; 2) using nuclear weapons; 3) deposing Truman and his fellow Democrats if they would not consent to the first two aims. The removal of MacArthur and Guild's dissatisfaction with battle honors conferred on his son deepened his animosity toward Truman.<sup>81</sup> During Guild's wartime campaigns, his followers were not POW relatives. Most of them were soldiers' relatives who held similar views on the war. One of his staunch supporters was John Halsey McGovern, who lost two sons in Korea and was known for his anti-communist perspective. In early 1953, to expand his influence, Guild avowed his unwavering support for Joseph McCarthy and the latter's effort to eradicate communism from American life.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> "Lt. Guild, First Korean Casualty from Glenwood," *Glenwood Post* (Glenwood Springs, CO), October 12, 1950, 1; "Letter to Editor, Use A-Bomb Now, Hero's Dad Urges," *Glenwood Post*, December 7, 1950, 1; "Captain Guild's Wake Up Fight Gathering Speed," *Glenwood Post*, December 28, 1950, 1; "MacArthur Should Have Been Given Opportunity to Resign Command—Guild," *Glenwood Post*, April 14, 1951, 2; "Father of Glenwood Korean Casualty Gives Address at Funeral Here," *Glenwood Post*, May 10, 1951, 2; "Omission of Korean War on Headstone of Glenwood Casualty is Protested," *Glenwood Post*, August 9, 1951, 2; "Dad Asks If Truman Balked Son's Honor Medal," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, CO), November 11, 1951, 6.

<sup>82</sup> On the biography of John Halsey McGovern, see the description of his papers in the Library of Congress, [https://www.loc.gov/folklife/civilrights/survey/view\\_collection.php?coll\\_id=3115](https://www.loc.gov/folklife/civilrights/survey/view_collection.php?coll_id=3115); on his relations and cooperation with Guild, see Halsey McGovern to Mrs. E. G. Garfield, July 28, 1953, Folder 1, Box 2; on their cooperation, see Halsey McGovern to Eugene R Guild, March 4, 1952, and "Eugene R Guild to Halsey McGovern, February 16, 1952, Folder 6, Box 1; on the extension of his influence, see Gold-Star Parents Form 'Fighting Homefolks' Group, a news clip on January 14, 1952, on an unknown newspaper circulating in Shawano, WI, Folder 6, Box 1, John Halsey McGovern Papers (JHM Papers hereafter), Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.); "Public Forum," *Glenwood Post*, January 15, 1953, 3.

Guild's alignment with McCarthy may have prompted him to politicize POW/MIA affairs. He once remarked that McCarthy was the only one who could overcome both Democrats and Republicans to publicize the myth that American POWs were being secretly held by China or North Korea.<sup>83</sup> McCarthy became interested in the 944 List in early September 1953. Then, on September 19, Guild approached the Defense Department to request the home addresses of the 944 people as well as of over ten thousand others then listed as MIAs, some of whom he believed to be alive.<sup>84</sup> The considerable number of people who might attribute their personal loss to the administration's policies in the Korean War were the best candidates for his FHFMM.

Guild's request was impossible for the military to fulfill, but POW/MIA families began signing up for FHFMM. From September 1953 onward, FHFMM attracted people by holding Truman, Eisenhower, and the UN responsible for the death and abduction of POWs at the hands of CVF/KPA. In 1955, Guild claimed that FHFMM had the kin of 350 servicemen.<sup>85</sup> Van Wees was his loyal follower. Other members included people who frequently contacted the White House or the State Department to protest their inertia on the POW/MIA issue, including the mothers of Shaddick, Logan, and Guthrie.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Guild's Flyer December 7, 1953, with a title "McCarthy Broke the Conspiracy", File 502B, Box F14, Hall-Hoag Collection of Dissenting and Extremist Printed Propaganda (hereafter Hall-Hoag Collection), Brown University Library (Providence, RI).

<sup>84</sup> Eugene R. Guild to Public Information Officer, Department of Defense, September 19, 1953, Box 814, Entry NM3-363E, RG407, NARAII.

<sup>85</sup> Eugene R. Guild to Dorothy Hall, February 2, 1955, File F648, Box F14, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library. His members were not necessarily from the families of the men on the 944 List.

<sup>86</sup> The roster of the FHFMM was never disclosed. However, Guild led a group of parents to sue the federal government in 1956 in Denver. The list of co-plaintiffs is available and included those names I mentioned. A copy of this lawsuit was in Box 250, WFK Papers, Bancroft Library.

The tactics of FHFM were unique among POW/MIA activists. As Guild did not have a son missing in Korea and was hostile to the US government, he seldom wrote letters to statesmen. He primarily distributed printed tirades against the president, the military, the State Department, and the UN, as well as flyers that circulated claims of abandoned POWs among POW/MIA families. For example, when the country was focusing on the 944 List, Guild insisted in his flyers that there were an additional 3,141 men whose deaths could not be confirmed, and who might therefore be detained in China or the DPRK. Van Wees then copied this number in her letters to Washington.<sup>87</sup> Guild also attempted to reach a broader population beyond the POW/MIA families' community by selling postcards or bumper stickers to advertise FHFM. According to him, he kept "syndicating it [his political agenda] in 100 metropolitan dailies throughout the country," and reserved a column in the *Denver Post*.<sup>88</sup> Guild also traveled across the country to intensively use local TV and radio stations for his propaganda.<sup>89</sup> FHFM was primarily funded by Guild himself, as he charged only nominal dues to its members, but its costly campaigns drained his funds and later hemorrhaged FHFM's ranks.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> "GI KIN Appeal to UN for Redress of Wrongs Done Their Soldier Sons and Husbands," September 27, 1955, Folder HH154-2, Box 46-4, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library; Rita van Wees to James C. Hagerty, March 28, 1957, SDCDF 611.95A241/4-157, RG59, NARAII. The 3,141 number is rarely seen in official documents.

<sup>88</sup> Guild's undated open letter on FHFM stationery, in Collection BHS 328-141 Carnegie Library of Boulder, CO.

<sup>89</sup> An example of his itinerary and programs, see "Radio Schedule of Fighting Homefolks Broadcast on 'State of the Union', November 4, 1955," in Folder HH154-2, Box 46-4, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library. In the schedule, he planned five broadcasts in one week in Denver, New York City, and Washington, DC.

<sup>90</sup> The open letter mentioned above says that he charges fifty cents per issue for mailing out his propaganda materials. Membership Bulletin 55-259, February 19, 1955, Folder HH154-3, Box 46-4; Bulletin to Members 54-239, December 15, 1954, File 96A-98, Box F14, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library.

What gave Guild some historical significance in Korean War POW/MIA activism was that he mobilized about seventy mothers and widows to march to Washington, DC, and New York City to picket the White House and the UN Headquarters respectively. The original recruitment message from FHFM was not found, but David Lawrence helped Guild publicize the upcoming march in January 1954. Lawrence defined the goal of the march as a protest against the president's ignorance of the so-called living POWs in China or North Korea.<sup>91</sup> Accepting Lawrence's and Guild's argument, people across the country signed up.<sup>92</sup> Guild planned his march for late April 1954. It seemed that he set this time to lend his support to McCarthy at the historic Army-McCarthy hearings in Congress. He also wished to harvest publicity by meeting right-wing politicians who defended McCarthy such as Senator William F. Knowland (R-CA), who openly backed Guild's political agenda and the march.<sup>93</sup>

While Guild's march earned him some publicity, with newspaper pictures of weeping women lining up on sidewalks near the White House and the UN Headquarters, he admitted that it achieved very little. On April 19, he led seventy mothers or wives of missing servicemen to New York City but failed to discuss their concerns with either the US Ambassador to the UN Henry Cabot Lodge or UN Secretary-General Dag

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<sup>91</sup> David Lawrence, "U.S. Mothers Demand Action," *Manchester Union Leader* (Manchester, NH), January 22, 1954, 17. It seemed that Lawrence initially published this message on the *New York Herald-Tribune*. A clip of Lawrence's article is in Box 250, WFK Papers, Bancroft Library.

<sup>92</sup> For example, "3 From Chicago to Plead for GI Prisoners: Join Crusade to UN to Urge Release," *Chicago Tribune*, April 14, 1954, 8.

<sup>93</sup> Bob Considine, "America's Forgotten Men," it is a news clip without provenance, as File No. 51B-11, Box F-14, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library.



Hammar skjöld.<sup>94</sup> Guild was a little more successful in Washington on April 21 and 22.

Before arriving in the capital, he had already mobilized his members, whether or not they joined his crusade, to fill the White House mailbox with petitions to meet the president.<sup>95</sup>

Based on White House documents, it seemed that White House staff did not welcome Guild's crusade, because they felt that he was doing nothing but exploiting human

suffering for his own advantage. The White House delivered form sympathy letters to FHFM members but refused a meeting. Instead, it directed the Defense Department to

handle Guild and his followers first when they were in Washington.<sup>96</sup> According to

Guild, the mothers and wives stood on Pennsylvania Avenue with protest slogans and blue sashes reading "Mother of Forgotten Men." These women were snubbed until they ran out of money and returned home.<sup>97</sup>

On April 22, the Defense Department granted FHFM a meeting, but there was no progress for Guild. He, van Wees, and another woman met the Assistant Secretary of Defense (manpower and personnel) and representatives from each service branch during a little-known hearing before the Senate Committee on Armed Service. Guild first advocated the release of the 944 List. He protested the military's actions of declaring some of the 944 men dead and merging the remainder with the over eight thousand men

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<sup>94</sup> "DAG and IKE Have Patience," Bulletin No. 54-244, January 13, 1955, File No. 156B-43, Box F-14, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library.

<sup>95</sup> The letters, dated March and April 1954, are kept in Box 1285, WHCF-GF, Eisenhower Library.

<sup>96</sup> The information is based on two handwritten notes in Box 1285, WHCF-GF, Eisenhower Library. One is dated on March 29, 1954, while the other is undated. The signature of the notes is "art."

<sup>97</sup> "DAG and IKE Have Patience," Bulletin No. 54-244, January 13, 1955, File No. 156B-43, Box F-14, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library

who were listed as MIA but without evidence of being captured. He wondered whether this administrative action of obscuring the 944 List was a diplomatic tactic to avoid offending China in the ongoing talks with the PRC in Geneva (China was confronted with the later 450 List in 1955). Guild concluded that the 944 possible POWs were the price of a halfhearted war in Korea and warned that the escalating conflict in Vietnam could be another such war. Without addressing Guild's charges, the Assistant Secretary generally repeated what was written in the military's form letters to POW/MIA families. He testified that he had twice sought Guild's suggestions for any practical policies to be adopted to account for the missing, but Guild seemed to have nothing to offer.<sup>98</sup>

Guild also used more extreme strategies to exploit the POW/MIA issue to publicize his campaigns. After his futile march, Guild conceived a lawsuit asking the federal government for \$1 million to indemnify each living POW to deal a hard blow to Eisenhower and to remind him of these POWs.<sup>99</sup> Guild and van Wees filed two lawsuits in 1956 and 1957, respectively.<sup>100</sup> Despite some media attention, they achieved nothing.

Guild's hostile attitudes to the authorities not only alienated him from his compatriots but also convinced officials that he should be handled differently. Ordinary

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<sup>98</sup> *Status of Persons Missing in Action in the Korean Conflict, Hearing before the Committee on Armed Service*, Senate, Eighty-Third Congress, Second Session, Part II of III, April 22, 1954. The other two parts of the hearing are not found in this research. Therefore, it is difficult to analyze Guild's full statement on that day. Guild's number of over eight thousand men missing in action should not be confused with the modern 8,177 number of POW/MIAs.

<sup>99</sup> "To the Kin of the Missing, Later Presumed or Determined Dead," Bulletin No. 54-228, October 28, 1954, Folder HH154-1-1, Box 46-4, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library.

<sup>100</sup> *The Suits Against Truman and Eisenhower*, September 11, 1956, Bulletin No. 336, Box 250, WFK Papers, Bancroft Library; *Rita van Wees, et al., v. Dwight D. Eisenhower*, Civil Action no.4267-56, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, January 15, 1957, one copy is filed in SDCDF 611.95A241/4-157, RG59, NARAII.

Americans of the 1950s, including many POW/MIA families, were unlikely to accept his extreme activities. For instance, a mother from Pennsylvania who had heard about her son's capture in Chinese propaganda unequivocally rejected Guild's invitation to lead the PA chapter of FHFM in the march to Washington. Although she was unhappy with Eisenhower's policies, she felt that Guild's anti-government campaign would not bring any positive results in terms of her son's return.<sup>101</sup> Guild's county post office refused to deliver his anti-government propaganda leaflets, and the residents of his hometown found him a public nuisance. They feared that Guild would give the city a bad name through his "rabble-rousing" and wanted to banish him.<sup>102</sup> According to Guild, the federal government sabotaged FHFM. He complained that some ex-FHFM members were so overwhelmed by pressure from Eisenhower and the military that they left FHFM.<sup>103</sup> On other occasions, he asserted that the FBI was monitoring him for subversive activities.<sup>104</sup> FHFM was later on a White House watch list of extreme right-wing groups.<sup>105</sup>

Unsurprisingly, FHFM's major support came from a few right-wing politicians, but it must be noted that they were not the only ones to show sympathy for ordinary

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<sup>101</sup> "Mrs. Baumer Says Ike 'Too Busy' to See Her," not sure about its date or origin. The newspaper clipping is kept in Box 17, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII.

<sup>102</sup> FHFM Bulletin No.8, July 27, 1952, Folder 6, Box 1, JHM Papers, Library of Congress; "Captain is Dedicated to Prisoners' Return," *Mirror-News* (Los Angeles, CA) on December 18, 1959. Retrieved from, <https://latimesblogs.latimes.com/thedailymirror/2009/12/paul-v-coates-confidential-file-dec-18-1959.html>

<sup>103</sup> Bulletin No.261, n.d., Folder HH154 SIFR, Box 46-4, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library. Judging from the phrases he used in this form letter, it likely happened several months after his march to Washington, DC and New York City.

<sup>104</sup> Eugene R. Guild to the FBI Director, Bulletin No. 54-236, December 2, 1954, Folder HH154-1-1, Box 46-4, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library.

<sup>105</sup> *Financial Scope of the American Right-Wing, August 1963*, Digital Identifier: JFKPOF-106-013, President's Office Files, Subject: Right Wing-Movement, Kennedy Library.

POW/MIA families. Such sympathy was ensconced in the nation's values and was the politically correct position to take. It also dovetailed with anti-communist political agendas across party lines. Lyndon B. Johnson introduced as many POW/MIA families to the administration to learn about their loved ones' fate as his Republican colleagues did. It was a liberal statesman, Representative Clement J. Zablocki (D-WI), who summoned a congressional hearing exclusively on the Korean War POW/MIA issue. The hearing's major achievement was to publish the 450 List and make the Korean War POW/MIA issue a national project.<sup>106</sup> It also facilitated bipartisan support for Zablocki's House Resolution 292 (based on two Republicans' draft) to prioritize rescuing possible POWs from China and North Korea in the country's diplomacy. However, Zablocki later acknowledged that this had no conspicuous result.<sup>107</sup>

### **Nostalgia for A Different America**

As described above, right-wing politicians and their supporters facilitated the circulation of the myth that POWs were detained in the Communist Bloc after the armistice. They patronized the POW/MIA families by asserting that their loved ones were alive and could be recovered if the administration were more determined to crush

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<sup>106</sup> *1957 POW Hearing*, 7, 26, 34; Statement of Hon. Clement J. Zablocki, Chairman, Subcommittee on the Far East and the Pacific, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, June 5, 1957, Box 764, Eighty-Fifth Congress, RG233, NARAI.

<sup>107</sup> "American Soldiers Held Prisoners of War by the Reds," Remarks of Hon. Clement J. Zablocki of Wisconsin in the House of Representative, July 9, 1957, and Clement J. Zablocki, "Should We Relax Our Barrier on Trade with China," Folder 21, Box 2, Series PP2; Clement J. Zablocki to Other Representatives, March 5, 1958, Folder 3, Box 1, Series CS3, Clement J. Zablocki Papers (CJZ Papers hereafter), Raynor Memorial Libraries, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI.

communism. Unsurprisingly, many families linked their personal suffering with right-wing politics. To rescue their abducted relatives, they stressed the urgency of preventing their motherland from becoming a hotbed for infiltrating communists, as exaggerated by McCarthy and his protégés. They also appealed for more bellicose policies toward the Communist Bloc and a reduced commitment to the UN and uncooperative allies, which were presumed to have cost the United States both victory in Korea and the POWs. Moreover, as Masuda Hajimu argues, the Korean War home front was defined not only by a top-down, McCarthyite campaign but also by “waves of grassroots conservative back-lash under the name of anti-Communism.”<sup>108</sup> As most POW/MIA families were wary of being regarded as subversive when challenging the official declaration of their loved ones’ death, merging their private ordeals with anti-communism and patriotism was a safe option.<sup>109</sup>

The root of the POW/MIA issue resonated with many Americans’ reflections on the result of the Korean War. The US military was repulsed from North Korea and later prevented by the administration from thoroughly vanquishing the DPRK. POW/MIA families attributed the inability to determine the fate of missing servicemen and search for their remains to the failure to conquer North Korea. After the Vietnam War, many people believed that the Vietnam War POW/MIAs could be liberated if some people

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<sup>108</sup> Masuda, *Cold War Crucibles*, 204, 206, 215.

<sup>109</sup> The families who kept writing to authorities were among the hardcore POW/MIA activists, and thus their voice may not accurately reflect the concerns of the silent majority of POW/MIA families.

“hadn’t tied our boys’ hands and stabbed them in the back.”<sup>110</sup> Similar rhetoric circulated in the 1950s. On Christmas Day of 1953, to protest the upcoming PFOD of all men missing in Korea, Guild censured the US government for disregarding the lives of the missing, just as it had during the war by not equipping soldiers with the best weapons or placing them under the command of competent generals.<sup>111</sup> One of FHF’s logos was a soldier whose right hand was tied to a pole, while he raised his left arm to fight a hopeless battle against Stalin, with Truman standing aside with his arms folded. In 1957, van Wees wrote that Americans’ hands were tied, during and after the war, so they could not ensure the safe return of the prisoners who she believed were enslaved in Russia.<sup>112</sup>

Sometimes, POW/MIA families simplified the “tied hands” rhetoric to Truman’s decision to fire MacArthur in 1951. The general who defeated the Japanese Empire in WWII was still a godlike figure for many Americans in the 1950s. One week after Truman dismissed him, a deluge of over eighty thousand telegrams protesting this decision hit the White House.<sup>113</sup> One reason for dismissing the general was his pursuit of an all-out war with China. Accordingly, those POW/MIA activists who were mourning the loss in Korea felt that MacArthur could have been the savior of their loved ones. Even in 1952, a POW mother argued that had MacArthur not left Korea, the war would have

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<sup>110</sup> Franklin, *M.I.A.*, 155.

<sup>111</sup> Eugene R. Guild’s Open Letter to the Kith and Kin of the Missing in Korea, December 25, 1953, Box 17, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII.

<sup>112</sup> Rita van Wees to Walter S. Robertson, November 23, 1957, Box 26, Entry P225, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>113</sup> Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinions in the United States, 1950-1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 234-235.

been over long ago, and her son would have been liberated.<sup>114</sup> The author of a booklet circulated by a lesser-known anti-liberal POW/MIA activist group, the Alliance for Abandoned American Fighting Men, blamed Truman's restraint of MacArthur, especially his plan to bomb China, for the loss of the 944 POWs "still in Chinese hands."<sup>115</sup>

POW/MIA activists also bemoaned the country's policies, which they saw as impotent to rescue POWs. They felt that the federal government was so dishonorable that it was intimidated by the Communist Bloc and thus abandoned its citizens. When Zablocki introduced his resolution on rescuing POWs to his colleagues, he was not at all convinced that the executive branch had the requisite vigor, determination, and strength to get the men back. He charged that the administration was so spineless that it would not even release the 450 List for fear of offending the Communist Bloc.<sup>116</sup> A POW/MIA mother who marched with Guild in 1954 warned Eisenhower that if he continued to be so craven, she would confront Mao Zedong herself and tell him that there were American women who had more courage than their leader to liberate their sons or to retaliate if they were murdered in prison.<sup>117</sup> Through this rhetoric, she satirized a government perceived as lacking masculinity.

Although there was no evidence that the US government ever officially

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<sup>114</sup> Mrs. John Lessman to William F. Knowland, January 31, 1952, Folder Prisoners China 1, Box 282, WFK Papers, Bancroft Library.

<sup>115</sup> This booklet is kept in Collection BHS 328-141, Carnegie Library of Boulder, CO.

<sup>116</sup> "American Soldiers Held Prisoners of War by the Reds," Remarks of Hon. Clement J. Zablocki of Wisconsin in the House of Representative, July 9, 1957, Folder 21, Box 2, Series PP2, CJZ Papers, Raynor Memorial Libraries.

<sup>117</sup> Mrs. H. L. Stiter to President Eisenhower, January 27, 1955, SDCDF 611.95A241/1-2755, RG59, NARAII.

proclaimed that it would make any political concessions to ask China to account for its missing personnel, many POW/MIA families felt that they were obligated to forestall this possibility. They could not imagine that their mighty motherland would yield to its enemy. On January 10, 1954, an MIA's mother asked, "is the United States of America too fearful to demand the accounting for and return of our men?" and "are we afraid to enforce the return of our own [POWs]?" when she learned of a rumor that the 944 men were still alive and China was going to use them in an attempt to extort its admission to the UN from the United States.<sup>118</sup> Influenced by a similar rumor, a Navy reservist urged Eisenhower not to take any bargain over POWs proposed by China; instead, the president should be brave enough to use force to solve the POW/MIA issue. He also feared that if China gained anything through accounting for missing US servicemen, they would be motivated to abduct more Americans during future conflicts.<sup>119</sup>

To reinforce their frustration with their leaders' inaction on the POW/MIA issue, many POW/MIA families warned Eisenhower that abandoning these prisoners would be devastating to the nation's values and morale. When they wrote to the authorities in hope of recovering their loved ones, they insisted that they were defending the country's traditions. During the Cold War, undermining US traditions was perceived as critical to a triumph for the USSR.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Catherine H. Haag to John Foster Dulles, January 10, 1954, SDCDF 611.95A241/1-1054, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>119</sup> Robert T. B. Iverson to Eisenhower, August 20, 1954, SDCDF 611.95A241/8-2054, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>120</sup> The idea was expressed in George Kennan's famous "Long Telegram," the excerpt of which is from George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 604.



A common topic of the POW/MIA activists was the country's prestige. The failure to recover all POWs or servicemen's remains shattered their familiar image of an omnipotent America.<sup>121</sup> In a laconic letter to the president, a Massachusetts physician wrote only two sentences in addition to the salutation: 1) "What are you going to do about the 944 American Prisoners or more now held by the Chinese Communists?" 2) "The prestige of this country demands their release."<sup>122</sup> On November 7, 1954, a woman who had received no updates on her son's fate months after she received his PFOD deplored that "this country of ours has gone down and [is] still going down [...] I never would have believe[d] it could get in such a mess as it is today."<sup>123</sup> When US Ambassador to Czechoslovakia U. Alexis Johnson was meeting with Chinese diplomats in Geneva, van Wees reminded him that he had to try and rescue all American prisoners from China; if they were abandoned alive in secret POW camps, America could never have its honor and dignity restored.<sup>124</sup>

Another major concern of the POW/MIA activists was the country's obligation to defend its citizens' freedom by refusing to abandon them to a hostile power. The US military had assumed the duty to search for the missing and dead since the Civil War, a duty perceived as part of the contract between the military and the citizens who sacrificed themselves for their country.<sup>125</sup> Since Eisenhower was also a five-star general and the

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<sup>121</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 133.

<sup>122</sup> Ralph G. Bussler to Eisenhower, December 26, 1953, Box 707, Entry NM3-363E, RG407, NARAII.

<sup>123</sup> Elise U. Lenox to Eisenhower, November 7, 1954, Box 17, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII.

<sup>124</sup> Rita van Wees to U. Alexis Johnson, October 6, 1955, Box 1, Entry A1-5315, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>125</sup> Drew G. Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 229.

commander-in-chief of the military, POW/MIA activists sought to remind him of his duty as both a military and a national leader. On October 27, 1953, William J. Flittle, who learned of General Clark's comment on the possible detention of thousands of POWs by the CVF/KPA, reminded Eisenhower that he had "absolute obligation to the individual" rather than just counting a total, "unless we have become completely crass and material." He contended that the country owed a reciprocal moral obligation to the unwavering support of its volunteers and draftees.<sup>126</sup> When Guild sought support for his lawsuit against Eisenhower, he argued that as soldiers were still US citizens, deserting them was a denial of their constitutional rights. He thus charged Eisenhower and the military with depriving its soldiers of due "traditional protection."<sup>127</sup>

As the POW/MIA activists thought that the mutual obligation between the government and its servicemen was being compromised, they worried that Americans would be less willing to serve in future wars against the Soviet Union. After reading David Lawrence's article, a man asserted that because Eisenhower had forgotten the 944 men, it was no surprise that the cadets of West Point and Annapolis were selecting civilian track jobs immediately after finishing their service requirement.<sup>128</sup> On March 26,

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<sup>126</sup> William J. Flittle to President Eisenhower, October 27, 1953, Box 707, Entry NM3-363E, RG407, NARAIL.

<sup>127</sup> "Suit for Damages against the Government in the Court of Claims by the Kin of GIs Whose Contract Was Deliberately Broken in Bad Faith by the Government and Who Were Deliberately Denied Their Constitutional Rights," FHFM Bulletin No. 54-222, October 11, 1954, Folder HH154-1-1, Box 46-4, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library; FHFM Bulletin No. 54-235, December 1, 1954, Box 250, WFK Papers, Bancroft Library.

<sup>128</sup> T. Raymond Rathbone to the Secretary of War, December 26, 1953, Box 707, Entry NM3-363E, RG407, NARAIL.

1954, Senator Homer Ferguson (R-MI) forwarded a Navy reservist's letter to the State Department. Shocked by General Clark's claim that thousands of prisoners were being detained in North Korea or China, the aged sailor contrasted Eisenhower's silence on the POW issue with Theodore Roosevelt's prompt decision to send warships and marines in response to the *Perdicaris Incident* in 1904 (a US Navy operation to rescue US citizens kidnapped by bandits in Morocco). He questioned how Eisenhower would convince him and his two sons, as well as millions of others, to sacrifice themselves in the next war.<sup>129</sup>

POW/MIA families also conveyed other traditional values. During the grassroots conservative movements of the 1950s, many Americans tried to defend purported Christian values. In some letters, people employed religious language to portray rescuing POWs as a divine duty. In 1958, a Chicagoan complained of the president's indifference to the men on the 450 List and urged him to "immediately act as a Christian in the matter and show America that you will do something with God given courage."<sup>130</sup>

Another pertinent value was equality, as the families whose loved ones were not on the 944/450/389 Lists assumed that rank or social status might have affected their chance of being considered a living POW instead of being declared dead without a body. They protested the lack of uniform eligibility for being included in those lists. For example, the mother of Air Force First Lieutenant James G. Clayberg called on Eisenhower to explain why another pilot called James—Captain James A. van Fleet Jr.,

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<sup>129</sup> Homer Ferguson to Ben H. Brown, March 26, 1954, SDCDF 611.95A241/3-2654, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>130</sup> Robert Seelos to Eisenhower, June 28, 1958, Box 17, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII.

son of General James van Fleet—was on the 944 List while her son was omitted, as both men's aircraft vanished over North Korea and were never heard of again.<sup>131</sup>

### **No Concession to Communists**

The decisive role of China in the Korean War meant that many POW/MIA families and statesmen concentrated their fire on China (and sometimes the USSR) rather than on North Korea. Although Chinese Communist forces toppled the US-backed Kuomintang regime and caused over a hundred thousand US casualties in Korea, the debate on whether the United States should remain hostile to China or adopt a more moderate policy toward it to crack the Sino-Soviet alliance remained fierce. The Eisenhower administration followed a containment path by embargoing China to undermine its economy and internal stability. Some domestic statesmen and business elites, however, advocated lifting the blockade on China shortly after the Korean War.<sup>132</sup> Their proposals to relax the blockade incensed right-wing politicians and upset POW/MIA families who assumed that their loved ones were still languishing in China. These families were further enraged by the possibility of inviting China to the UN and some Western countries' business relations with the PRC. US allies in Europe and the UN also became their targets. Therefore, isolationist policies sometimes gained favor among POW/MIA activists.

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<sup>131</sup> Mrs. Faith Clayberg to Eisenhower, January 20, 1954, Box 17, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII.

<sup>132</sup> Simei Qing, *From Allies to Enemies: Visions of Modernity, Identity, and U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1945-1960* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 169, 180, 183, 200-201.

The US government's official stance on trade with China aligned well with the POW/MIA activists, but these activists were not confident that it would last. In form letters to be delivered to POW/MIA families in early 1954, the State Department emphasized that the US government prohibited the export of all items to China and sought cooperation from the Western Bloc. It also assured them that recognition of China would be out of the question.<sup>133</sup> Activists nevertheless wanted to ensure that the embargo on China would be executed faithfully. When Zablocki advertised his House Resolution 292, he emphasized that any trade and peaceful coexistence with China must be contingent on its release of all Americans.<sup>134</sup> Guild persistently persuaded his followers to support the blockade of China to coerce it into cooperation, because he thought this would be the most effective way to free the POWs without shedding blood.<sup>135</sup> Van Wees regarded those advocating trade with China as responsible for the endless incarceration of her son and other POWs. She deemed the United States not bold enough to liberate the POWs because of "pressure from England and our many business men [*sic*], who care nothing about our country, or our suffering sons, only the dollar matters."<sup>136</sup> She argued that each dollar China earned through its trade with the US would just encourage it to

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<sup>133</sup> For examples of form letters, see Thruston B. Morton to Wayne Morse, February 19, 1954, and Thruston B. Morton to Earle C. Clements, February 19, 1954, SDCDF 611.95A241/2-1154, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>134</sup> "Should We Relax Our Barrier on Trade with China?" Folder 21, Box 2, Series PP2, CJZ Papers, Raynor Memorial Libraries.

<sup>135</sup> For example, see "At Long Last the President Remembers America's Forgotten Men," FHFMB Bulletin No. 54-232, November 25, 1954, Folder HH154-1-1, Box 46-4, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library.

<sup>136</sup> Rita van Wees to Howard Kyle, August 21, 1958, Box 17, Entry A1-1020, RG330, NARAII.

prolong the POWs' ordeal.<sup>137</sup>

The POW/MIA impasse was also cited to advocate denying China a UN seat or US recognition, as noted by David Lawrence in his article mentioned earlier. UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld's trip to Beijing in 1955 and pressure from some Western allies caused more Americans to worry that the UN would soon welcome China.<sup>138</sup> As a result, some POW/MIA families and statesmen referred to the alleged detention in China of US POWs, who had technically fought under the UN Command, and insisted that China must be barred from the UN. In 1958, in response to growing call to admit China to the UN, an unofficial association of a few congressmen, "The Committee of One Million against the Admission of Communist China to the United Nations," reviewed numerous claims that US POWs had been murdered and kidnapped by the Chinese. It argued that "there is a mountain of evidence to convince us that the communists know much about these unaccounted-for personnel." The committee went further, urging Americans to recognize "this further indication of communist perfidy and dishonesty" and to deny China diplomatic recognition, trade, and a UN seat.<sup>139</sup> There were, however, also a few people arguing that offering China a UN seat would be a quid

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<sup>137</sup> Rita van Wees to Paul A. Fine, January 12, 1960, SDCDF 611.95A241/1-1960, RG59, NARAII. In this letter, she complained about the showing of a movie she (falsely) presumed to have been produced in China in New York City.

<sup>138</sup> For example, though Guild was anti-UN for a long time, he seemed to introduce the rhetoric of barring China from the UN in early 1955, when Hammarskjöld just returned from Beijing.

<sup>139</sup> A petition of The Committee of One Million Against the Admission of Communist China to the United Nations Bulletin on March 3, 1958, and the committee's bulletin on March 4, a copy of them is kept in Folder 15, Box 14, ULB Papers, Chester Fritz Library. It seems that the evidence used by these congressmen was offered by Rita van Wees.

pro quo measure to elicit cooperation on the POW/MIA issue.<sup>140</sup>

While most of the POW/MIA families blamed China for their loss, a few of them believed that the Communist Bloc should be punished collectively. This may have been due to rumors that American POWs had been transferred to Siberia. Leading POW/MIA activists, therefore, targeted the USSR. Seeing Eisenhower and Soviet Marshal Zhukov exchanging gifts and military respects, Guild issued a bulletin asking whether the president remembered his march to Washington and the missing soldiers who might have been tortured and murdered by the Soviets.<sup>141</sup> Van Wees even protested against the State Department for permitting fifteen youths to go to Moscow for a cultural exchange program.<sup>142</sup> A few activists advocated drastic actions. On January 19, 1954, David Lawrence published an article in the *New York Herald Tribune* alleging that Americans could be enslaved in Siberia. He suggested that certain commodities the Communist Bloc could not produce could serve as leverage—an embargo would facilitate the release of the POWs. Convinced by Lawrence, a New Yorker reminded the president that “to enter into trade relations with Russia while she arbitrarily holds hundreds of our men, would be a lasting disgrace,” and preferred “extreme diplomatic ends.”<sup>143</sup> Such extreme ends could mean breaking all relations with the Communist Bloc, as argued by a missing pilot’s father that July and a columnist in the *Los Angeles Examiner* in early 1956.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> H. T. Goodier to Sherman Adams, November 28, 1954, SDCDF 611.95A241/11-2854, RG59, NARAIL.

<sup>141</sup> “Damon Loves Pythias,” FHFMB Bulletin No. 283, September 9, 1955, Box 250, WFK Papers, Bancroft Library.

<sup>142</sup> Rita van Wees to James C. Hagerty, May 5, 1959, SDCDF 611.95A241/5-559, RG59, NARAIL.

<sup>143</sup> R. G. G. Bousfield to the President, January 23, 1954, Box 252, Entry NM3-363E, RG407, NARAIL.

<sup>144</sup> Memorandum for Colonel Burroughs by William W. Thomas, July 27, 1954, Box 17, Entry A1-1020,

Some activists targeted US allies because they were not serving what they thought of as Americans' interest—isolating China to force it to return the captives. The animosity toward allies was also introduced to the American public by Lawrence's article in December 1953, which bemoaned the lack of support of US allies to liberate the POWs while the United States was committed to financing and defending them. Van Wees immediately followed Lawrence's discourse by arguing that Europe only cared about what it could get out of the United States, without respecting Americans' lives and particularly those who were missing, like her son.<sup>145</sup> Two weeks later, another parent of a missing soldier asked Eisenhower if he was going to “discipline on appeasing allies.”<sup>146</sup> Some people regarded US allies and the USSR equally as obstacles that America faced in retrieving its lost warriors.<sup>147</sup>

This mentality evoked activists' call for America-First policies, which was enunciated particularly by van Wees. She was locked in a way of thinking that held that as long as her son was not returned, the United States should spare no effort in liberating him before deploying resources elsewhere. For example, when she ruminated over the loss of her son on January 6, 1956, she felt that unless he and other missing POWs could return home, the country should not commit to any foreign conflicts on behalf of its

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RG330, NARAII. A copy of the column article is in Folder POW, Box 283, WFK Papers, Bancroft Library.

<sup>145</sup> Rita van Wees to John Foster Dulles, December 29, 1953, SDCDF 611.95A241/12-1953, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>146</sup> A. P. DeRosier to President Eisenhower, January 16, 1954, Box 252, Entry NM3-363E, RG407, NARAII.

<sup>147</sup> Petitioners to William F. Knowland, June 18, 1956, Folder POW, Box 283, WFK Papers, Bancroft Library.



uncooperative allies, like sending arms and forces to defend Europe from the USSR. She insisted that it would be unfair if only Americans suffered a tragedy like hers.<sup>148</sup>

Among the US allies, Great Britain was most reproached by POW/MIA activists. The British government ran a consulate office in Beijing and was eager to trade with China, and thus these activists felt that the UK was disloyal to the United States. Guild exclaimed that the British were so afraid of offending China that they frowned on Americans' resolution to save their compatriots detained in China. In his FHFMM flyers issued in early 1955, he derided British leaders for their fraternization with the murderers of their fellow citizens (British forces fought in Korea under the UNC) and claimed that patriotic American POW/MIA relatives would never tolerate communists' presence in the United States, unless they were there to be hanged as war criminals.<sup>149</sup> Shortly after, a Guild follower wrote to a newspaper editor and two congressmen and urged the media and Congress to petition the president to end all aid to Britain immediately for its trade with China and the USSR.<sup>150</sup>

Since the POW/MIA activists' targets included the PRC, the Soviet Bloc, and disloyal allies, these activists hated the UN, which not only included communist regimes and those allies but was also considering admitting the PRC. They echoed contemporary

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<sup>148</sup> Rita van Wees to William F. Knowland, January 6, 1956, Folder POW, Box 283, WFK Papers, Bancroft Library.

<sup>149</sup> "GI Dad Says: It's A Prelude to More Appeasement," FHFMM Bulletin No. 55-249, January 28, 1955, and Guild's Open Letter to the President, FHFMM Bulletin No. 55-253, February 1, 1955, Folder HH154-2, Box 46-4, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library.

<sup>150</sup> H. L. Stiter to J. Richard Early, February 25, 1955, Folder POW 1, Box 282, WFK Papers, Bancroft Library.

isolationists' policies proposing to withdraw the United States from the UN.<sup>151</sup> Guild argued that whereas Americans had sacrificed under the UN banner in Korea, the UN was betraying the missing men and seeking rapprochement with the PRC. He argued that a Soviet-infiltrated UN had prevented the United States from defeating the CVF/KPA and had given them the opportunity to detain US POWs with impunity. In his eyes, the UN was like "the Public Safety Commission of Chicago" chaired by "Al Capone and his hoodlums" that kidnapped children and slaughtered policemen.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, van Wees saw the UN as a communist-infested, illegitimate agency responsible for her personal ordeal.<sup>153</sup> The activists thus wanted to remove the restraint the UN had placed on Americans. On December 27, 1955, for instance, Leota Shadden, a mother who never accepted her son's death, told the secretary of state that if the UN would not help recover her son and other POW/MIAs, the United States should leave it and fight a unilateral war to save these men.<sup>154</sup>

### **The Living Dead on Bargaining Tables**

The repatriation of prisoners and the recovery of fallen combatants' remains are

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<sup>151</sup> Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 657.

<sup>152</sup> "Complaint to the Federal Communication Commission on the Failure of Radio Station KOA to Afford Both Sides Equal Time on the Air in a Political Controversy over the United Nations," FHFM Bulletin No. 266A, April 15, 1955, and "Testimony before the Congressional Committee Hearing on the UN, Denver, Colorado, April 11, 1955," Box 250, WFK Papers, Bancroft Library.

<sup>153</sup> Rita van Wees to Francis O Wilcox, January 24, 1956, SDCDF 611.95A241/1-2456, and Rita van Wees to James C Hagerty, March 28, 1957, SDCDF 611.95A241/4-157, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>154</sup> Leota Shadden to John Foster Dulles, December 27, 1955, SDCDF 611.95A241/12-2755, RG59, NARAII.

included in the Korean War Armistice Agreement. Accordingly, the MAC, consisting of the UNC on one side and the CVF/KPA on the other, had been the official venue for the US military to seek information about its missing personnel and to recover POWs not returned after the truce, if there were any. However, this approach was ineffective.

The MAC venue lacked the necessary atmosphere for cooperation. During the Eisenhower administration, UNC officers in the MAC made four formal requests to their opponents to account for American POW/MIAs. More than twenty meetings between two sides' MAC senior members or lower-ranking secretariats covered the POW/MIA issues, but they solved the fates of very few service members from either side. One major reason for this situation was related to what North Korea and China wanted to obtain from these meetings. The MAC became the frontline of the Cold War when the officially continuing Korean War transitioned from its active battle phase to a less bloody political phase. The CVF/KPA representatives, therefore, broached various issues in the MAC meetings to hold the United States responsible for the fragile situation in Korea, especially by pointing to its reinforcement of the ROK troops with modern weapons and trumping up allegations of border skirmishes provoked by ROK forces.<sup>155</sup> Busy with fending off such charges, the UNC could hardly introduce its agenda to the MAC, including the issue of POWs. In 1960, a US general returning from the UNC stated that "MAC meetings have been characterized by inconclusiveness of discussions and lack of concrete

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<sup>155</sup> This was also noted by contemporary American officials. See CINCUNC to Department of the Army, No. FE805503, June 22, 1957, Box 25, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAII.

accomplishments.”<sup>156</sup> The low credibility of the 944, 450, or 389 Lists further exacerbated the situation and made the Chinese and North Koreans suspect that Americans’ real intention was just to find another excuse to discredit them.

Even if the CVF/KPA actually withheld some information about captured US personnel, the handling of North Korean and Chinese POWs by the United States and South Korea rendered cooperation on the POW/MIA issue unlikely. Both popular literature in China and recent academic studies have revealed rampant abuse of CVF/KPA POWs in US custody. CVF POWs were induced or impressed into spy rings by Taiwanese intelligence officers directed by the US military, which meant that they were not eligible for postwar repatriation.<sup>157</sup> Conspiring to sabotage the imminent truce, South Korean president Syngman Rhee allowed all anti-communist DPRK POWs (who were supposed to be delivered to neutral forces first) to flee from their cells on June 18, 1953, without consulting the UNC. About twenty-five thousand POWs soon merged with local civilians, making it impossible to recapture them.<sup>158</sup> Although the US military denied playing any role in this release and was thus not responsible for these escapees, the Chinese and North Koreans thought otherwise.<sup>159</sup> Together with Chinese POWs

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<sup>156</sup> Major General Sam Maddux Jr., “Recommendation by General Biddle at Washington Debriefing,” n.d., Box 35, Entry UD-2846, RG84, NARAII. It is filed among documents created in early 1960.

<sup>157</sup> For example, Catherine Churchman, “Victory with Minimum Effort: How Nationalist China ‘Won’ the Korean War,” and “The Life and Death of Line-Crossers: The Secret Chinese Agents of UNPIK,” in *The Korean War in Asia: A Hidden History*, ed. Tessa Morris-Suzuki (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2018), 77-108, 155-172.

<sup>158</sup> Korea Institute of Military History, *The Korean War*, Volume 3 (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 548-557.

<sup>159</sup> “Ambassador Dean’s Response to the Joint Statement of Ki Soek-Pu and Huang Hua on December 14 (1953),” Box 2, Entry A1-745, RG43; and Minutes of the Twentieth Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, September 21, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII.

impressed into service for Taiwan, these escapees became evidence that the United States was holding CVF/KPA POWs and discouraged the CVF/KPA from seriously considering Americans' demands to know the fate of their personnel. Finally, over two-thirds of known CVF/KPA POWs went to the anti-Communist Bloc after the war. China and North Korea were so humiliated by this propaganda defeat that they were reluctant to be reminded of the POW issue.<sup>160</sup>

Although the US military never admitted its own fault in foiling the POW/MIA issue, some POW/MIA families reached this conclusion. On January 31, 1958, Lieutenant Guthrie's mother wrote to Representative Usher L. Burdick (R-ND) and hoped that he would appeal to the US military to accounting for missing CVF/KPA personnel, as well as ordering Syngman Rhee to release the North Korean POWs he had "detained," in order to encourage North Korea to release her son.<sup>161</sup> A determined POW/MIA activist, Robert Dumas, who insists that his MIA brother is still alive in North Korea, told me during my interview with him that he did not hold only North Korea or China responsible for his brother's loss, but the United States as well.<sup>162</sup>

It was the CVF/KPA that initiated the issue of detained prisoners during MAC meetings. On August 30, 1953, during the seventeenth MAC meeting, CVF officers

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<sup>160</sup> U. Alexis Johnson and Jef Olivarius McAllister, *The Right Hand of Power* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1984), 170, 231. The Chinese government believed that most of those going to Taiwan were forced to do so.

<sup>161</sup> "Mrs. Edward S. Guthrie to Alice Anderson, January 31, 1958," Folder 15, Box 14, ULB Papers, Chester Fritz Library. Guthrie wanted her letter to Anderson to be forwarded to Representative Burdick.

<sup>162</sup> Robert Dumas, interview by the author, tape-recorded, January 2, 2018. His younger brother, Roger Dumas, was on the 389 List because someone claimed to have seen him in July 1953. He is extremely influential in the POW/MIA community.

demanded that the Americans explain three incidents: 1) the secretary of the army's statement on August 15 that the US military would retain 250 POWs (he listed several names); 2) General Clark once hinted that he would release seventy-six thousand CVF/KPA personnel in May, but the number dropped to seventy-four thousand in August; 3) the whereabouts of the North Koreans set free by Syngman Rhee. The UNC side did not answer any of the questions, but claimed that the POWs released by Rhee would choose South Korea over the North anyway.<sup>163</sup>



Figure 3-1: Military Armistice Meeting at Panmunjom, on July 28, 1953. This is the first MAC meeting. Since then, hundreds of MAC meetings have been held to discuss security and political issues in Korea, including the unreturned POW/MIAs and their remains. Catalog No. SC 426684, courtesy of the NARA. Copied from the website of Naval History and Heritage Command, <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/sc-series/SC-400000/SC-426684.html>

While the CVF/KPA's first inquiries were based on known facts and could at least conceivably have been solved through cooperation, attempts to ascertain the US POW/MIAs' fate soon degenerated into political charges and countercharges. As described earlier, the US military responded with the 944 List in the next MAC session

<sup>163</sup> Minutes of the Seventeenth Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, August 30, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII.

when the CVF/KPA had just declared that all POWs had been exchanged.<sup>164</sup> The UNC threw its adversaries into a dilemma. If a listed soldier were returned, he would constitute irrefutable proof that the CVF/KPA was holding POWs, thus violating the Armistice Agreement. Otherwise, in the eyes of US officers, his absence proved that the CVF/KPA slaughtered POWs. Whatever the Chinese or North Koreans did, they would be incriminated. As a countermeasure, the CVF/KPA introduced a gigantic binder of 98,742 names of its personnel, including those released by Rhee or refusing repatriation. Like the Americans, they insisted that they had solid evidence to substantiate their survival, including letters sent from POW camps or reports from the International Red Cross. Considering a Chinese officer's memoir arguing that most letters from camps in South Korea used fabricated names or addresses, the CVF/KPA's claim was likely false.<sup>165</sup>

While the lists of both sides were faulty, they still attempted to adhere to the Armistice Agreement in the first several months after the armistice, at least in front of journalists across the world. On October 3, KPA officers declared that out of the 944 Americans listed, ten were recorded as repatriated and 112 as dead, released, or having escaped.<sup>166</sup> Over the next several months, however, the US military only asserted that the

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<sup>164</sup> Minutes of the Eighteenth Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, September 9, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII. The CVF/KPA repeated its charges of the seventeenth meeting, without introducing new issues.

<sup>165</sup> Minutes of the Twentieth Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, September 21, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII. On the letters from South Korea, see Guo Weijing, *Shijie Diyideng Zhanfuying: Lianheguojun Zhanfu zai Chaoxian* [First-Rate POW Camp in the World: UNC POWs in Korea] (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2010), 146-147.

<sup>166</sup> Minutes of the Twenty-Second Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, October 3, 1953, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554; US Embassy in Manila to the State Department, December 29, 1953, Box 2, Entry A1-745, RG43, NARAII. Journalists from both blocs reported MAC meetings.

October 3 explanation was unsatisfactory and demanded more information, while the CVF/KPA side kept reminding the UNC of their 98,742 people.

The UNC remained indecisive about how to account for CVF/KPA personnel. The US military finished a review of the 98,742 people by the end of 1953, including twenty-seven thousand escapees in June 1953, twenty-two thousand refusing repatriation, and thirty-seven thousand civilians whom the DPRK claimed as POWs to swell their POW ranks.<sup>167</sup> However, the military was reluctant to provide a name-by-name account. On January 31, 1954, the UNC sent the Army a long message, analyzing the possible use of these POWs' names and the prospects for learning of the fate of its own POW/MIAs. First, the UNC found that it had no accurate information about at least 6,655 people, which was a number much larger than its own list. Second, it predicted that it would never receive an account of its own lost men unless it could account for the 98,742 CVF/KPA personnel. Moreover, this would not preclude that the North Koreans might ask for more "POWs" (in fact civilians) as an additional pretext for refusing to account for the missing Americans and to keep the UNC permanently on the defensive. Third, it realized that there was little chance of the CVF/KPA releasing more information about missing Americans, as they had already announced the repatriation of all captives in September 1953. The UNC deemed that concealing the 98,742 names was the only way to extract any more information about the UNC POW/MIAs from the CVF/KPA. Finally,

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<sup>167</sup> US Embassy in Manila to the State Department, December 29, 1953," Box 2, Entry A1-745, RG43, NARAII. This telegram evidently cites information from US officials in Seoul.



releasing these names, including the defectors' names, may have had grave political or humanitarian consequences, as their families would be subject to severe persecution.<sup>168</sup>

The UNC's position on January 31 guided negotiations on the POW/MIA issue in subsequent MAC meetings. In April, the UNC decided that it should divide the roster of 98,742 men into several categories (defectors, escapees, et cetera.) and inform of the CVF/KPA only of the number of people in each category. Their names would be withheld in order to extract information about UNC POW/MIAs.<sup>169</sup> On May 22, when the CVF/KPA summoned the forty-third MAC meeting to discuss the POW/MIA issue, the UNC followed the April guideline, only to encounter the CVF/KPA's refusal to further account for any POW/MIAs of the UNC. They also claimed that any more accounting was unnecessary, because there was "no tenable data" on the 944 List.<sup>170</sup> In August, after another offer of all 98,742 names in exchange for the fate of the missing UNC personnel was declined, the US Army decided that no further attempts should be made through the MAC pending further orders.<sup>171</sup>

Despite the Army's decision in late 1954 and the fact that the US offered nothing regarding the CVF/KPA's roster of 98,742, a new demand was still made in late 1955

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<sup>168</sup> CINCUNC to DEPTAR, No. CX66632, January 31, 1954, Box 18, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAIL. If the non-US POW/MIAs are included, the UNC list also contains several thousand names, but far fewer than 6,655.

<sup>169</sup> CINCUNC to DEPTAR, No. CX67803, April 22, 1954, Box 18, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAIL.

<sup>170</sup> Minutes of the Forty-Third Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, May 22, 1954, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAIL.

<sup>171</sup> Minutes of the Forty-Seventh Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, August 17, 1954, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554; CINCUNC to DA, No.C69436, August 28, 1954, and DA to CINCUNC, No. DA967346, September 8, 1954, Box 75, Entry PI-127/1, RG554, NARAIL.

(using the 450 List) as a political tactic to coordinate the Sino-US talks in Geneva, rather than as a serious request for information about the POW/MIAs' fate. When the list was delivered during the sixty-seventh MAC meeting, the UNC misrepresented it again as living POWs to blame the other side for violating the Armistice Agreement.<sup>172</sup> The UNC received a partial account of the 450 men in the sixty-ninth MAC meeting (1956), but it immediately called the account unsatisfactory because it felt that the CVF/KPA knew much more about the persons they had classified as having "no data." Ironically, the hard evidence that disproved the findings of the CVF/KPA was that many US soldiers whose remains were now lying in their homeland were listed as escapees.<sup>173</sup> After this meeting, the UNC concluded that further progress on the POW/MIA issue was unlikely as it was not politically feasible to account for the enemy personnel whom the CVF/KPA were most interested in recovering: those released by Rhee or had defected to Taiwan.<sup>174</sup>

The sixty-ninth MAC meeting was the last time that any information on the US POW/MIAs was revealed.<sup>175</sup> Afterward, the UNC regularly delivered the 450 (later 389) List to the KPA for an accounting. All lists were either ignored or rejected, with the latter demanding that its alleged POWs had to be released first. Not only had both sides

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<sup>172</sup> SR MBR UNCMAC to CINCUNC, No. MAC-5-11-40, November 26, 1955, Box 98, Entry PI-127/1, and Minutes of the Sixty-Seventh Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, November 26, 1955, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>173</sup> Minutes of the Sixty-Ninth Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, February 25, 1956, Box 1, Entry A1-1262, and DA to CINCUNC, No. DA900776, April 12, 1956, Box 23, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>174</sup> SR MBR UNCMAC to CINCUNC, No. MAC 6-8-16, August 12, 1956, Box 24, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>175</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. III, 59-62. My reading of the MAC minutes confirms Cole's conclusion.

imposed impossible demands on the other side to return nonexistent POWs, but the foundation for a serious exchange of POW/MIA information likely collapsed after this MAC meeting. The CVF/KPA had provided information on UNC POW/MIAs twice without gaining any intelligence about their own people.

Consequently, the POW/MIA issue ceased to be a quid pro quo process but became a weapon in the two sides' arsenal in subsequent MAC meetings, used to reprimand the other side for endangering peace in Korea. For instance, in the 229th MAC meeting on October 11, 1966, the US delegates warned the North Koreans twice that if they wanted to honor the Armistice Agreement after frequent provocations along the DMZ, they must unconditionally provide intelligence on each person on the 389 List. The North Koreans, as they had done innumerable times, replied that they had discharged their duty as required by the truce treaty in 1954.<sup>176</sup>

Both sides also exploited the POW/MIA issue to denounce the other side as defying basic humanitarian principles and prolonging the ordeals of Koreans. For example, during the 101st MAC meeting (1959), the UNC cited its POW/MIAs, along with ROK fishermen detained in the DPRK and a passenger aircraft hijacked by North Korean agents, to portray communists as habitual kidnappers.<sup>177</sup> In 1976, ROK troops ambushed a few DPRK infiltrators below the 38th Parallel and transferred their remains

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<sup>176</sup> Minutes of the 229th Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, October 11, 1966, Box 7, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>177</sup> Minutes of the 101st Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, April 27, 1959, Box 2, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII..

to the UNC. In the 377th MAC meeting (1976), in which US officers denounced such aggression, KPA representatives called the denouncement a sham charge and rejected these corpses. The UNC side found this a propaganda opportunity and claimed that “26 years since your side launched the war, the UNC has not forgotten those who fought your aggression,” but that the KPA “in less than ten days, have not only failed to acknowledge your personnel, but have even refused to accept their remains and bury them.”<sup>178</sup>

The POW/MIAs were sometimes put in the same category as captives resulting from accidents or conflicts in the DMZ, in order to delay or facilitate the release of the latter. In the 175th MAC meeting (1963), when KPA officers again asked for their over ninety-eight thousand men, the US officers on duty reminded them that two US pilots, who had recently been shot down north of the DMZ, were still in DPRK custody. They stated that unless the pilots were released, there would be no discussion of the KPA’s allegation.<sup>179</sup> In the 210th MAC meeting (1965), when KPA officers insisted on the return of two fishermen washed onto the South Korean coast, the UNC not only made a counterdemand for South Korean fishermen apprehended in North Korea but also asked a satirical question: if the North Koreans really cared about the two fishermen, how could they ignore the over two thousand missing personnel from the UNC during the war?<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Minutes of the 377th Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, June 28, 1976, Box 17, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>179</sup> Minutes of the 175th Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, July 26, 1963, Box 5, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>180</sup> Minutes of the 210th Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, June 10, 1965, Box 6, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII. The US military then used a list of 2,840 UNC missing personnel, 389 of which were Americans (the 389 List).

When the MAC debated the casualties of skirmishes in the DMZ, the DPRK's tactics in handling interned US or ROK soldiers (or their remains) further cast doubt on the rumor that American POWs in the Korean War had been detained after the truce. When an incident resulted in US or ROK troops killed or captured north of the DMZ, the KPA announced the death or capture of its enemies immediately and demanded a fairly modest political ransom. When its goal was fulfilled, the KPA released the prisoners or their remains. For instance, on May 18, 1965, an ROK Army reconnaissance aircraft was shot down over North Korea, and the pilot was killed instantly. The KPA announced this incident one day later and contacted the UNC promptly with an offer of the body. Although they had never agreed on whether this incident was espionage or a navigational error, the KPA returned the body on the second day after a US officer willingly signed an acknowledgment that the aircraft had violated North Korean airspace.<sup>181</sup> After a similar incident in 1977, resulting in a US pilot captured and three more killed, a meeting two days later ended with their return after the UNC admitted an intrusion into North Korea.<sup>182</sup> Considering the DPRK's promptness in announcing the existence of the captives (or their remains) and the price for their release, it is hard to fathom that it would have detained hundreds of POWs after the war without demanding a ransom from the United States.<sup>183</sup> Unsurprisingly, before the 1980s when the UNC shifted its focus from

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<sup>181</sup> Minutes of the 208th Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, May 21, 1965, Box 6, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>182</sup> Minutes of the 385th Meeting of the Military Armistice Commission, July 16, 1977, Box 18, Entry A1-1262, RG554, NARAII.

<sup>183</sup> Paul M. Cole found that bodies of at least thirteen US servicemen who were shot down over the DMZ or North Korea after the Armistice were never recovered, although their deaths were almost certain. See

the allegedly detained POW/MIAs to their remains lying in North Korea, the MAC achieved nothing in accounting for the missing soldiers.

### **Alternative Approaches**

Although the US government stubbornly refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of Mao's rule in China and prevented the UN from doing the same, it did not sever all communication with China, if only for the sake of US civilians known to have been detained in the PRC. Neither did China reject approaching the United States to retrieve its students living over there and to solve the crisis in the Taiwan Strait. One channel consisted of the ambassadorial talks in Geneva (later in Warsaw) between 1955 and 1970.<sup>184</sup> Their first stage (up to 1958) was between US Ambassador to Czechoslovakia U. Alexis Johnson and Chinese Ambassador to Poland Wang Ping-Nan, during which Johnson periodically introduced the POW/MIA issue. Another milestone event in accounting for the POW/MIAs was UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld's visit to China to recover the fifteen US airmen detained as political prisoners. Due to limited sources, this section provides only a cursory narrative of these two events.

In April 1954, when major global powers convened in Geneva to discuss the potential reunification of Korea and the escalating conflicts in Vietnam, both China and

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Paul M. Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 243. However, he did not provide the source of his data. My research shows that the DPRK reported each US aircraft it shot down and the casualties to the MAC.

<sup>184</sup> Office of the Historian, "US-China Ambassadorial Talks, 1955-1970," Department of State, accessed on February 1, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/china-talks>.

the United States regarded the detainees they held (including the purportedly unreturned POWs of the Korean War) as an important leverage to further their relations. For Zhou En-Lai, the premier and foreign minister of China, one of the major goals in Geneva was to persuade the Americans to treat the nascent socialist regime as a great power to be reckoned with. The US civilians and airmen in his hands were his obvious bargaining chips. Simultaneously, the exit ban imposed on Chinese students in America prompted him to exchange hostages. Through the British chargé d'affaires to China, the United States was informed of Chinese willingness to discuss the issue of detainees, but only with a high-level American statesman. In May, the State Department authorized direct dialogues with China and selected Johnson to confront Zhou's delegate Wang. Before the talks, Johnson made it clear that any progress in bilateral relations was contingent on releasing all US military and civilian prisoners.<sup>185</sup> He introduced the issue of detainees in June 1954, although formal Sino-US ambassadorial talks began on August 1, 1955. By November 1955, while the military still hoped that China would gradually leak something pertaining to the 450 List to maintain the bilateral negotiations, Johnson felt that negotiations over recovering more Americans from China were completely deadlocked in Geneva.<sup>186</sup>

The official form letters from the military and the State Department to the

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<sup>185</sup> Johnson and McAllister, *The High Hand of Power*, 234, 242; Yafeng Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-1972* (Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 2006), 78, 90; Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 217.

<sup>186</sup> DA to CINC FE and SR MBR UNCMAC, No. DA992673, November 26, 1955, Box 20, Entry A1-1267A, RG554, NARAII; Johnson and McAllister, *The High Hand of Power*, 258.

POW/MIA families depicted the talks in Geneva as a crucial channel for the United States to liberate any possible POWs detained in China and North Korea; however, this was an exaggeration. It was only in September 1955 that Johnson first introduced the 450 List to the talks in Geneva as “other practical matters” than the primary goal of repatriating known American detainees and Chinese students. When he brought out the 450 List, Wang unequivocally refused to discuss it and claimed that this was an issue for the MAC only. To keep the Americans at the bargaining table, in the sixty-seventh MAC meeting, Chinese and North Korean representatives agreed to take the 450 List for an accounting, as mentioned earlier. Referring to the list in his memoir, Johnson claimed that he had “raised it in Geneva only for the record” and admitted that he never expected any progress on it, and it was no more than a negotiation ploy.<sup>187</sup>

Despite being pessimistic about making any progress toward learning the fate of the 450 people, Johnson followed the State Department’s instructions to insert this issue occasionally into his dialogues with his PRC counterparts because the department had decided to capitalize on the 450 List in Geneva. By the commencement of the talks, the State Department felt it would be beneficial to open a second front on the POW/MIA issue to vent the pressure from domestic POW/MIA activists who were blaming the country’s leaders for abandoning Americans abroad. However, it was necessary to keep the issue a secondary topic because the State Department did not want China to exploit

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<sup>187</sup> Johnson and McAllister, *The High Hand of Power*, 252-253.



the 450 List and the activists' pressure to make excessive demand on the United States in Geneva. It insisted that negotiations over the 450 List would only be publicized when China refused to accept the list, in order to channel domestic furor to the PRC.<sup>188</sup>

Without the minutes of all Johnson-Wang talks, it is impossible to analyze how the US POW/MIAs of the Korean War had come into the talks in Geneva. However, the State Department preferred the Geneva channel over the MAC despite the slim chance of discernible progress. According to a State Department memorandum for the secretaries of all service branches in October 1956, the POW/MIA issue had only been discussed twice in fifty-eight meetings between the two countries' delegates. While it had been barely mentioned since October 1955, the State Department proposed reviving this issue for four major reasons. In addition to the legal implication of introducing this issue at the MAC versus in Geneva, a key factor was that the State Department perceived the release of the fifteen airmen imprisoned by China for espionage in the summer of 1955 as an achievement of the ambassadorial talks in Geneva. More interestingly, it was convinced that the DPRK was cooperative in returning US soldiers' remains (North Korea returned some bodies found at the DMZ after Operation Glory). Therefore, the State Department believed that the United States should focus its fire on China, even if the main goals of continuing to introduce the POW/MIA issue in Geneva remained propaganda and a pretext to frustrate any Chinese diplomatic campaigns.<sup>189</sup> Johnson continued to confront

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<sup>188</sup> "Return of UNC Personnel Who Are Still in Communist Custody," April 26, 1954 (microfilmed), Roll 18, Cabinet 44, Entry A1-1225, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>189</sup> An untitled attachment to the Memorandum for the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy,

the PRC delegates with the 450 List, but not a single MIA's fate was revealed by the time the Sino-US talks moved to Warsaw.

Hammarsskjöld's visit to China in January 1955 was the only occasion that was followed by the release of any US servicemen. While China had never denied detaining the fifteen airmen, his visit gave some POW/MIA families short-lived hope of finding their loved ones. His trip itself, however, may not have been critical to the release, as China was actively attempting to engage in negotiations with the United States through releasing detained US nationals, including the airmen.<sup>190</sup>

UN intervention in the US POW/MIA issue was justified by the legal status of the Korean War. As US forces fought under the UN banner, any American serviceman deployed in Korea was a UN combatant. On August 18, 1954, the US Ambassador to the UN, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., declared that because fifteen US fliers were known to be held in the PRC, hundreds more were likely suffering from the same fate. As a result, as long as the PRC held any UN personnel hostage, it would never be admitted to the UN.<sup>191</sup> As the United States is one of the permanent members of the Security Council, its objection was sufficient to block the PRC from the UN. On December 10, promoted by the United States and its allies, the 509th plenary meeting of the General Assembly

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the Secretary of the Air Force by Colonel Monroe, "Actions to Obtain the Release of Prisoners of War," October 8, 1956, Box 159, Entry A1-3118B, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>190</sup> Meredith Oyen, *The Diplomacy of Migration: Transnational Lives and the Making of U.S.-Chinese Relations in the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 197. These fifteen men were on the 944 List, but not on the 450 or 389 List.

<sup>191</sup> "United States Mission to the United Nations," Press Release, August 18, 1954, Box L179:79, Dag Hammarskjöld Collection (hereafter DH collection), Nation Library of Sweden (Stockholm, Sweden).

passed a resolution condemning the PRC for sentencing eleven of the fifteen airmen as spies and demanding that the secretary-general facilitate their and all other UNC POWs' release.<sup>192</sup> Hammarskjöld honored the resolution on the same day and requested a visit to Beijing immediately. A week later, Zhou condemned UN interference in its internal affairs. He clarified that the resolution was engineered by the United States but welcomed Hammarskjöld "in the interest of peace and relaxation of international tension."<sup>193</sup>

When the POW/MIA families became aware that a high-ranking statesman was going to travel to China in an attempt to rescue eleven US airmen, these families felt that his trip would bring hopes of learning their loved ones' fates, if not of their immediate release. When Hammarskjöld finalized his itinerary, he learned about the 450 List as well as MIAs of other nationalities.<sup>194</sup> POW/MIA families' letters gradually flowed into his office, asking him to include their relatives' names in his notebook for his future talks with Zhou. For example, on December 22, Anna Grocock highlighted her Swedish descent and wrote to Hammarskjöld to ask him if he could ask Zhou about the fate of Lieutenant Kenneth Tackus, who was not on the 450 List. In response, Hammarskjöld

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<sup>192</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 906 (IX), "Complaint of Detention and Imprisonment of United Nations Military Personnel in Violation of the Korean Armistice Agreement," passed in the 509th Plenary Meeting, December 10, 1954. The eleven men were then prosecuted in a Chinese court, and thus the resolution only covered these eleven men.

<sup>193</sup> "Statement in the General Assembly Following Adoption of the Resolution on the Fliers," New York, December 10, 1954; Exchange of Cablegrams with Chou En-Lai, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Public of China: Cable from the Secretary-General, New York, December 10, 1954; Cable from Chou-En Lai, Peking, December 17, 1954, from *Public Papers of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations*, Vol. II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 421-423; Cablegram dated 17 December 1954 addressed to the Secretary-General by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China," Peking, December 17, 1954, Box L179:79, DH Collection, National Library of Sweden.

<sup>194</sup> Memorandum from G. A. Stavropoulos to the Secretary-General, "Definition of the Secretary-General's Mandate," December 21, 1954, Box L179:79, DH Collection, National Library of Sweden.

clarified that his priority was the airmen. He was to mention the 450 List and encourage China to review it, but not to cover individual cases, let alone those not on the list.<sup>195</sup>

When Hammarskjöld arrived in Beijing, though he was welcomed by Chinese ruling elites with fanfare and banquets, he soon found it extremely hard to achieve his foremost goal—rescuing the eleven airmen, let alone discussing the 450 List. During his first meeting with Zhou on January 6, 1955, Hammarskjöld cited multiple international laws to challenge the Chinese government’s definition of the eleven men as spies. Zhou lectured him on the second day to prove their guilt and unambiguously claimed that China would not give in to any external threat infringing its sovereignty, especially a resolution masterminded by the United States. The Secretary-General was then relegated to a listener to Zhou, who expressed China’s wish to mitigate the Sino-US/UN conflicts. While Zhou categorically stressed that he would never tolerate any US pressure to release the POWs, he implied that these airmen’s sentences could be significantly commuted if there were to be favorable development in Sino-US relations, and he permitted visits by these airmen’s relatives. Zhou refused to include the eleven airmen in his final joint communiqué with Hammarskjöld.<sup>196</sup> As Hammarskjöld did not bring any POWs back, Eisenhower stated that “the immediate reaction of all Americans to the Secretary

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<sup>195</sup> Anna Andersen Grocock to Dag Hammarskjöld, n.d., and Dag Hammarskjöld to Mrs. Grocock, December 22, 1954, Box L179:79, DH Collection, National Library of Sweden.

<sup>196</sup> “Joint Communiqué by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Premier and Foreign Minister of the People’s Republic of China,” Beijing, January 10, 1955, from *Public Papers*, Vol. II, 436-440. Other information in this paragraph is based on the minutes of his conversation with Zhou in Beijing, which are preserved in Box 179:80, DH Collection, National Library of Sweden.

General's announcement is disappointment."<sup>197</sup> Dulles simply declared the trip a thorough failure.<sup>198</sup>

The situation gradually changed later in 1955 due to the PRC's new diplomatic tactics. Hammarskjöld continued to contact Zhou via the Swedish Embassy in Beijing to seek the release of the airmen. In March, Zhou hinted that he might release four airmen soon. Hammarskjöld believed that the Bandung Conference scheduled in late April would encourage China to free them because it would use this chance to improve its global reputation, as the airmen's families had made their appeals to Zhou known to the world.<sup>199</sup> As predicted, on May 31, 1955, the four fighter pilots shot down while flying over China were delivered to Hong Kong, but the eleven men from the B-29 were still incarcerated. In July, the State and Defense Departments realized that China remained steadfast in its defiance of the UN resolution and that it was using the Chinese students allegedly stranded in the United States as an excuse to fend off any requests for these airmen.<sup>200</sup> China indeed linked the release of the students with that of the US airmen. To secure these intellectuals, who were essential to its modernization, and to facilitate the upcoming ambassadorial talks in Geneva, China released the eleven men on August 1.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> "Statement by the President," January 14, 1955, Folder Wang-Johnson Talks POW 1955 (5), Box 11, John Foster Dulles Papers, Eisenhower Library.

<sup>198</sup> "Department of State Press Conference for Hammarskjöld Mission," January 18, 1955, Box L179:80, DH Collection, National Library of Sweden.

<sup>199</sup> Dag Hammarskjöld to Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., March 28, 1955, Cabinet 42, Roll 8, Entry A1-1231, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>200</sup> "Possible Course of Action in Flier Case," July 20, 1955, Memorandum of Meeting participated by Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. *et al.*, "Prisoner-of-War Problem," July 21, 1955, and "Comments Regarding Suggested Courses of Action in Cases of Imprisoned Americans," July 22, 1955" Box 1, Entry A1-5315, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>201</sup> This idea is from semi-official Chinese propaganda. For example, see Sui Guo-Feng, "Zhongmei

Americans quickly became aware of Hammarskjöld's success. Besides appreciation letters from the fifteen liberated airmen and their families, requests for his help to investigate whether their loved ones were still alive constantly reached his office, especially when he was scheduling new trips to the Far East. The writers of these letters even included van Wees and other FHFMM members.<sup>202</sup> Unfortunately, they overestimated his influence and the UN's boundaries of power. For instance, on January 10, 1956, the mother of Edward Guthrie sought Hammarskjöld's help after receiving nothing from Washington for years. Two weeks later, she was notified that the UN had no information on any servicemen, and that the only thing it was authorized to do was to extend sympathy.<sup>203</sup> By the time of the tragic air crash that killed Hammarskjöld in a Zambian desert in 1961, no more POW/MIAs' fates had been revealed through the UN.

## Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the propagation and influence of the myth that hundreds, if not thousands of US POWs were detained after the Korean War. Although there was little solid evidence to support the myth, the inability to search for these men, the ambiguous

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Liangguo Jiaohuan Qian Xue Sen de Guanjian Chouma [Critical Bargaining Chips for China to Exchange Qian Xue-Sen from the US],” on the website of the Museum for Anti-America Assisting-Korea War [Kangmenyuanchao Zhanzheng Jinianguan], accessed on January 1, 2019, <http://www.kmycjng.com/pictittxt.aspx?c=738EC25E57FFA38D&id=B779ED8B307193C7&a=s>. On the influence from talks in Geneva, see Oyen, *The Diplomacy of Migration*, 197. She did not think the Chinese intellectuals played a major role.

<sup>202</sup> Most of them are in Box 4Ae74, Lawrence Jolidon Collection, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History (hereafter Briscoe Center), University of Texas (Austin, TX); and Boxes L179:81 and L179:82, DH Collections, National Library of Sweden.

<sup>203</sup> Andrew W. Cordier to Mrs. Edward S. Guthrie Sr., January 26, 1956, Box 4Ae74, Laurence Jolidon Collection, Briscoe Center.

statements on their fates in official announcements, and the invocation of detained POWs in anti-communist propaganda indoctrinated POW/MIA families into believing that their loved ones were languishing somewhere in the Communist Bloc. Portraying themselves as hostages' relatives, these families voiced an urgency to change the country's foreign policies, wishing to restore the United States to the mighty country it was after WWII, able to defeat its enemies, defend its national values, and remain unrestrained by any external power. The issue of allegedly detained US POWs also entered into negotiations between the United States and China/North Korea. Due to the untenable myth and the fact that many CVF/KPA POWs never returned home after the armistice, the talks yielded hardly any results. Both sides were more interested in maximizing the political value of their missing personnel through denouncing their opponents as kidnappers and saboteurs of peace in Korea than in cooperating to resolve their fate and recover their bodies.

Twenty years after the Korean War, the United States encountered an even grimmer situation in Vietnam. The US military was evicted from Vietnam more dishonorably, and thousands of its servicemen were lost in the Communist Bloc again. At this time, POW/MIA campaigns swept across the country and survive to today, permanently transforming the cultural and political landscape of the United States. The next chapter will discuss how the two wars' POW/MIA movements influenced each other, which ultimately revived the Korean War POW/MIA campaigns in the 1980s and effected a policy shift of the US military, from merely asking for living POWs to seeking all lost bodies of US servicemen from North Korea.

## CHAPTER IV: DÉJÀ VU

By the 1960s, the Korean War had been largely forgotten in the United States. Its inconclusive end prevented Americans from remembering it as a triumphant crusade against communism.<sup>1</sup> The loss suffered by the United States was overshadowed first by the triumph of WWII and then by the escalation of the Vietnam War. While a few families of soldiers missing in Korea managed to cling to the hope that their loved ones still survived in secret camps in the Communist Bloc, neither government officials nor the public paid much attention to their suffering. Few continued to utilize the political value of the men on the 944/450/389 Lists as it was difficult to place them in the country's memory of the Korean War or its Cold War politics. Indeed, building a national memorial for this war or commemorating its anniversary was not proposed until the mid-1980s.<sup>2</sup>

Had the United States emerged victorious in the Vietnam War, POW/MIAs of the Korean War might have forever remained a footnote in American history; however, the war in Southeast Asia ended in a similar manner as the one fought in Northeast Asia. No sizeable US unit had been cut off and destroyed behind enemy lines, but hundreds of airmen had vanished over Southeast Asian jungles untouched by human civilization after their planes crashed. More ended up in the stockades of Vietnamese, Laotian, and

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<sup>1</sup> G. Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 1995), 157.

<sup>2</sup> Even the Korean War Veterans Memorial dedicated in 1995 does not show the accurate number of casualties; nor does it contain the names of the dead. Both China and South Korea have erected memorial walls with the names of all their soldiers who died in the Korean War. In the United States, although local name walls have been established since the 1980s, it was in October 2016 that President Obama authorized the establishment a national name wall at the National Mall for the US service members and the Korean nationals serving in US Army units who were killed during the Korean War .



Cambodian guerillas or in North Vietnamese POW camps, and their captors did not promptly report their fates. In January 1973, for the second time, the US military had failed to retake the land where its service members were missing or had been captured. Again, it had no choice but to rely on an unenforceable peace treaty and wait passively for the North Vietnamese government to release US POWs and divulge the fates of the missing. However, when some of the missing were not returned, and Vietnamese officials refused to cooperate with the US military to ascertain their fates, the American public began to suspect that some POW/MIAs were being detained by their captors in secret camps and had been abandoned by the US government, which it deemed too frail and treacherous to confront the Vietnamese communists.

The suspicions that arose at the end of the Vietnam War might have dissipated in a few years after 1973 just like those that had briefly haunted the United States two decades earlier. However, a few critical factors elevated the rumor of POWs being abandoned in Vietnam almost to the point of a national religion. Unlike Korean War soldiers, Vietnam War POW/MIAs were more likely from urban, well-educated, middle-class families, who were more capable of organizing and petitioning for the return of their loved ones and attracting the support of the general population. Moreover, President Nixon and the military intentionally exaggerated the number of US POWs thought to be incarcerated in Vietnam, openly supported their families, and propagated the POW issue to the American public, while neither Truman nor Eisenhower seems to have manipulated POW numbers or endorsed POW/MIA organizations.

Since 1973, Vietnam War POW/MIA families and the country as a whole have been struggling to find the most appropriate way to memorialize the war, assign responsibility for the defeat, and honor the fallen and the missing despite the military loss. Determined POW/MIA crusaders, filmmakers, writers, refugees from Southeast Asia, and a host of people with questionable motivations, utilized TV advertisements, movies, and popular literature to spread the rumor of US POWs left behind in Vietnam. More often than not, these efforts were self-serving rather than truth-seeking. More strikingly, when POW/MIA families attributed their suffering to the left-wing social and cultural movements of the 1960s as well as the Vietnamese, Ronald Reagan and his conservative followers became their staunchest allies. By contrast, the Korean War POW/MIA families were more often just a nuisance to the administration in the 1950s.<sup>3</sup>

As these factors have been intensely analyzed in the Vietnam War historiography, it is not my intention to reevaluate them in this chapter. Instead, I am arguing that the impressive power and duration of the Vietnam War POW/MIA movements were critical to rekindling the country's drive to acquire US servicemen's remains that had been lost in Korea and to revive Korean War POW/MIA movements. Worried that the North Vietnamese government would never release all American POWs, the Korean War

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<sup>3</sup> Many researchers have extensively investigated those factors contributing to the longevity of the Vietnam War POW/MIA movements. Here are some examples, Patrick Gallagher, *Traumatic Defeat: POWs, MIAs, and National Mythmaking* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 9-10, 155-156; Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 3, 5-9, 60-61, 77, 248; H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America: How and Why Belief in Live POWs Has Possessed a Nation*, Expanded and Updated Edition (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), xvi, 48-49, 155.

POW/MIA activists struggled to remind the country of the Korean War POWs in the hope of preventing a similar tragedy. During the Vietnam War POW/MIA campaigns, the missing servicemen of the Korean War were sporadically mentioned by both activists and government officials for very different reasons, which inadvertently educated the country on the Korean War POW/MIA issue.

More importantly, a new development in the Vietnam War POW/MIA activists' struggle for political power reinvigorated the Korean War POW/MIA campaigns, when these activists redefined the term POW/MIA to alert the public to the seriousness of the issue of US soldiers surviving in POW camps long after the Vietnam War had ended. The term no longer referred only to service members who had been captured or were missing but to anyone, dead or alive, who had not returned from the wars. Instantly, the number of Vietnam War POW/MIAs had doubled because any serviceman whose body had not been recovered became a possible prisoner held by the enemy.<sup>4</sup> More specifically, this redefinition suddenly inflated the number of Americans possibly held by North Korea from 389 to 8,177, a number that no citizen or statesman could ignore.<sup>5</sup> As recovering soldiers' remains from Vietnam became virtually the only way to account for the men missing in Southeast Asia, retrieving the bodies lost in North Korea likewise became the

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<sup>4</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 210. By the time of redefinition, the official POW/MIA number of the Vietnam War was about 1,300. After the redefinition, about 1,200 Americans who had been confirmed dead but whose bodies were not recovered were added to the POW/MIA number, making it 2,500.

<sup>5</sup> The number 389 comes from the final version of the 389 List discussed in Chapter III. The number of 8,177 as MIA is inscribed at the Korean War Veterans Memorial at the National Mall.

sole option for the US military to confirm the fates of the 8,177 men.<sup>6</sup>

While POW/MIA families and politicians had transformed POW/MIA activism after the Vietnam War into a critical component of American culture, the actual methods of resolving the POW/MIA issue—negotiating with communist countries and identifying recovered bodies—had not changed much in the years between the wars. Due to a lack of sources, such negotiations cannot be investigated right now.<sup>7</sup> While the procedures for body identification during the Vietnam War was overall the same as those employed during the Korean War, it was much easier for the military to identify its dead personnel in the 1960s and 1970s, likely due to the short time between a soldier's death and the evacuation of his body (although the accuracy is unknown).<sup>8</sup> The techniques and the prompt recovery of remains left only four unidentified bodies to select from when the country was going to bury a Vietnam War casualty in the Tomb of the Unknowns.<sup>9</sup>

### **Korean War POW/MIA Activism during the Vietnam War**

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<sup>6</sup> On the rationale behind the pursuit of bodies, see Thomas Hawley, *The Remains of War: Bodies, Politics, and the Search for American Soldiers Unaccounted for in Southeast Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), Ch.3.

<sup>7</sup> A narrative of the US-Vietnam talks on the POW/MIA issue, which were teeming with hostility and quid pro quo, is published as Lewis M. Stern, *Imprisoned or Missing in Vietnam: Policies of the Vietnamese Government Concerning Captured and Unaccounted for United States Soldiers, 1969-1994* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc. 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Unlike the early stage of the Korean War, the killed servicemen, if recoverable, would be immediately evacuated from battlefields with helicopters. As the land battles were only fought in southern Vietnam, US forces had full control of the battlefields on most occasions. By the 1980s, there were only a few bodies returned from prisons in Vietnam, which were usually well preserved. Those bodies that were lost behind enemy lines were not recovered until the mid-1980s. On the discussion of such characteristics of casualties, see Michael J. Allen, "Sacrilege of a Strange, Contemporary Kind: The Unknown Soldier and the Imagined Community after the Vietnam War," *History & Memory* 23, no.2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 105. Incorrect identifications have been reported since the war, but the overall accuracy of identification is unknown.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah E. Wagner, "The Making and Unmaking of an Unknown Soldier," *Social Studies of Science* 43, no.5 (2013): 635.

By the 1960s, only a small fraction of the Korean War POW/MIA families (likely no more than fifty) continued to bombard government officials with requests to locate their loved ones, sending appeals generally unsubstantiated by evidence. When it became clear that the Vietnam War would not end in victory for the United States and that many Americans had been taken prisoners, these families were eager to warn their compatriots, especially the relatives of Vietnam War POW/MIAs, of the possibility that some POWs would be left to the mercy of their captors after US forces withdrew from Vietnam.

As in the 1950s, inquiries by POW/MIA relatives spiked when they came across publicized rumors that US POWs had been seen alive in the Communist Bloc. Such rumors were disturbing for family members who had already accepted the demise of their loved ones. For example, in a letter dated September 11, 1962, Richard T. Gardiner, who was not a staunch POW/MIA activist, told a relative of President Kennedy that after his son was shot down over the Taiwan Strait during the Korean War, he had “consigned him to the hands of God.” However, a news article in his home city newspaper *Kansas City Star* convinced him that his son “could be one of the unnumbered American prisoners in the hands of the Chinese Reds.”<sup>10</sup> In May 1964, Eugene Guild, the leader of Fighting Homefolks of Fighting Men (FHFMM) wrote an article entitled “389 GIs ARE ROTTING IN RED PRISONS TODAY” in capital letters that was published in the men’s adventure magazine, *SAGA*. It instantly captured the attention of many readers, including a few

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<sup>10</sup> Richard T. Gardiner to Joseph P. Kennedy, September 11, 1962, Folder ND 9-2 Casualties Gen. A to K, Box 604, White House Central Files-National Defense (WHCF-ND), Kennedy Library. The content of the article is unknown.

POW/MIA mothers. The article merely regurgitated information from his FHFMM flyers of the 1950s and was supplemented by stories provided by his staunchest FHFMM followers, like Rita van Wees, and well-known POW/MIA cases such as those of Major Samuel Logan, First Lieutenant Edward Guthrie, and Captain Harry Moreland. A propaganda photo of US POWs paraded about by their captors triggered several families to claim that they recognized their relatives in the photo despite its low resolution. The State Department responded to such inquiries from families, members of Congress, or American Legion chapters with form letters containing no updates on the fates of the servicemen missing in Korea.<sup>11</sup>

Some POW/MIA relatives were inspired by diplomatic progress across the Iron Curtain. As discussed in Chapter III, not all families singled out China or North Korea as their loved ones' captors. Some instead held the entire Communist Bloc responsible. When a communist country released captives (unrelated to the Korean War) in an effort to establish better relations with the United States, these relatives suspected that if the US government would only take the initiative to engage the Communist Bloc further, their loved ones might be freed by other communist countries as well, like China, North Korea, or the Soviet Union. On January 10, 1963, upon learning that two weeks earlier, Fidel Castro had released the Cuban exiles captured during the Bay of Pigs Invasion, Mrs. Cummings (first name unknown), who frequently contacted the White House in

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<sup>11</sup> A collection of the response is in Box 2399, Category POL 27-7 N KOR-US, Subject-Numeric Files, 1964-1966, RG59, NARAII.

attempts to persuade the military to place her son on the 944/450/389 Lists, wrote the following request to President Kennedy: “the success of the negotiations to return the Cuban prisoners encourages me to ask you to urge the United Nations and the Department of Defense” to renew their task of freeing the American POWs possibly detained in China.<sup>12</sup> Even two years later, a friend of an airman on the 389 List cited the prisoners freed from Cuba when urging President Johnson to confront China about the Korean War POW/MIAs by Christmas of 1964.<sup>13</sup> When China returned the last known CIA agent detained in Beijing (who had been captured during the Korean War but not considered as POWs) after President Nixon’s historic visit in 1972, the parents of Captain Ara Mooradian, who were not among the most determined POW/MIA activists, suddenly was inspired to write to the president to inform him that they believed their son was still alive in China and to request immediate action.<sup>14</sup>

The political inclination of Korean War POW/MIA relatives in the 1960s and 1970s is difficult to determine because their correspondence with officials (preserved in presidential libraries) was almost completely monopolized by Rita van Wees. During this period, she adopted a more right-wing agenda than she had in the 1950s. She was inspired to write even more letters in the 1960s when the liberals dominated the presidency and Congress. Her basic logic was that if the communists did not release her

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<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Bernard Cummings Sr. to the President, January 10, 1963, Folder ND 9-2 Casualties Gen. A to K, Box 604, WHCF-ND, Kennedy Library.

<sup>13</sup> Duncan Hallock to the President, October 27, 1964, Folder ND19/CO-50-2, Box 420, WHCF-ND, Lyndon B Johnson Presidential Library (hereafter Johnson Library), Austin, TX.

<sup>14</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Nish T. Mooradian to the President, March 15, 1973, Box 2421, Category POL 27-7 KOR N, Subject-Numeric Files, 1970-1973, RG59, NARAII.

son, the US government should not only remain hostile to China but also refuse to fund the Great Society or pursue racial equality. Neither should it trade with communist states under any circumstances, an act which she believed would betray her son's sacrifice. For instance, on March 25, 1961, she complained that the United States was being taken advantage of by Japan because there were too many "Made-in-Japan" goods on the shelves of US stores. She worried that if this trend of importing foreign merchandise was not checked, products made in China would flood US markets and enrich her son's kidnappers.<sup>15</sup> On September 13, 1965, she disparaged Martin Luther King Jr. for hijacking the leaders in Washington, DC, and deemed his friendly gesture towards Mao Zedong to be despicable. She regarded King as a "traitor," a "trouble-maker," and the "worst enemy in our history."<sup>16</sup>

She never lost hope that her son remained alive in the Communist Bloc. As late as 1983, she congratulated President Reagan for his efforts to coerce Vietnam to account for POW/MIAs and to approach North Korea. Since she was convinced that her son appeared in a recent photo taken in Siberia, she implored Reagan to terminate all trade with communist regimes and deport their personnel.<sup>17</sup> The Vietnam War POW/MIA issue was never the primary topic of her diatribes against communism or officials in DC, though she worried incessantly that the United States had not learned its lesson in Korea and had

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<sup>15</sup> Rita van Wees to Dean Rusk, March 25, 1961, SDCDF 611.95A241/3-2561, RG59, NARAII.

<sup>16</sup> Rita van Wees to Lyndon B. Johnson, September 13, 1965, Rita van Wees, WHCF-Name Files, Johnson Library.

<sup>17</sup> Rita van Wees to Richard Childress, August 18, 1983, Folder POW/MIA Correspondence RTC (1), Box 15, Richard Childress Files (hereafter RTC Files), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library (hereafter Reagan Library), Simi Valley, CA.



“abandon[ed]” POW/MIAs again in Vietnam.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, Eugene Guild, whose anti-administration agenda had gained momentum from the Korean War, was heavily involved in the early phase of Vietnam War POW/MIA activism.

In the 1950s, Guild argued that thousands of American servicemen had been kidnapped after the armistice because of the lack of a decisive victory against the communists in Korea. Accordingly, in the 1960s, he campaigned for a complete victory in Vietnam to avoid repeating this tragedy. Guild was particularly upset by Lyndon Johnson and his fellow liberals’ reluctance to escalate the Vietnam War into a full-scale confrontation against the Soviet Union, and insisted that the president “fights not to win, but for political negotiations [...] he denies to his soldiers loyalty, and ties their hand in the name of ‘peace,’” like Truman and Eisenhower.<sup>19</sup> In the summer of 1966, Guild and two of his supporters took action after learning of the North Vietnamese plan to prosecute captured US pilots as war criminals and Viet Cong guerillas’ earlier announcement of having executed a US POW. Guild and his followers warned the president that the situation in Vietnam and the concurrent US policy of relying on the International Red Cross to resolve the POW issue were ominous signs that the Vietnamese communists would not be deterred from holding and abusing US prisoners, just as their Korean and Chinese comrades had over a decade earlier. They suggested that the United States must

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<sup>18</sup> Rita van Wees to Lyndon B. Johnson, September 2, 1966, Folder ND9 V, Box 42, WHCF-ND, Johnson Library.

<sup>19</sup> “Cattle?” October 5, 1965, Flyer No. 479, BHS 328-141, Carnegie Library of Boulder, CO. Guild deemed that all statesmen who were against escalating the war were liberals.

resort to force, rather than negotiations, to secure the release of its POWs.<sup>20</sup>

In reaction to President Nixon's Vietnamization policy, Guild contemplated how to prevent the North Vietnamese from forcing the withdrawal of US troops without giving something in return—namely, releasing all US POWs. He proposed that the troop withdrawal should be proportional to the release of POWs. For example, by December 1969, when sixty thousand US troops left Vietnam, Guild asked the Pentagon to confirm the release of at least 12 percent of known US POWs. He insisted that another 10 percent must be released before the United States could withdraw fifty thousand troops by April 1970.<sup>21</sup> He believed that this was the only way to prevent Vietnam from secretly detaining US captives after the war.<sup>22</sup>

To expand his impact while the country was focused on Vietnam, Guild attempted to cooperate with influential Vietnam War POW/MIA activists. However, his plan did not go well. One activist he tried to approach was the Texas billionaire Ross Perot, who had been a patron of Vietnam War POW/MIA campaigns and later featured them in his 1992 presidential campaign. During the war, Perot advocated for peaceful means to promote the release of POWs, such as writing to the North Vietnamese in Paris and Hanoi, while

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<sup>20</sup> E. F. Kriszat to Lyndon B. Johnson, July 9, 1966, Folder ND19-3 CO312 (November 22, 1963 to July 31, 1966), Box 421, WHCF-ND, Johnson Library. Kriszat was the chairman of a lesser-known group, Alliance for Abandoned American Fighting Men. Guild served as its executive advisor, and van Wees led a woman auxiliary of this alliance.

<sup>21</sup> Elzene E. Estes to Richard M. Nixon, n.d., Folder Gen. ND18-3 CO165 February 1-28, 1970, Box 3, Series ND18-3, White House Central Files-Subject Files (hereafter WHCF-SF), Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library (hereafter Nixon Library), Yorba Linda, CA.

<sup>22</sup> Dean Manion, "Troop Withdrawal Must Include American POWs: Congress, The President, Peaceniks and Public Ignore Plight of Red Captives, Interview of Eugene Guild by Dean Manion," *Manion Forum* (South Bend, IN), Weekly Broadcast No.785 (October 19, 1969), the file is kept in Folder 35, Reel 93, Cartoon 25, Social Protest Collection, Bancroft Library.

Guild favored the use of military threats to achieve the same objective. When Guild sought POW/MIA activists' support for FHF, he offered them two choices: success or the vain letter-writing campaign of "the starry-eyed Ross Perot." He derided Perot's "riskless campaign," which he thought would be a useless attempt to prevent the North Vietnamese from committing atrocities.<sup>23</sup> During the Vietnam War, he was jealous of the power wielded by the National League of POW/MIA Families (NLPF), arguably the most influential group of its kind in US history, and the prestige of its original founder, Sybil Stockdale.<sup>24</sup> Although he tried to persuade Stockdale to support his campaigns and sought Vietnam War POW/MIAs' addresses from her to expand FHF, the NLPF paid hardly any attention to Guild's initiatives.<sup>25</sup>

Like van Wees, Guild utilized right-wing rhetoric. He constantly held the liberals in the federal government responsible for the death and capture of US servicemen. For example, in a propaganda flyer dated March 16, 1965, he sarcastically asked President Johnson, "Aren[*sic*] not our soldiers, whose vote is negligible, entitled to rights as well as negroes, whose vote is important?" He further stated, "you are on the side of the negroes in the fight for their rights, should you not be even more on the side of American soldiers

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<sup>23</sup> Eugene R. Guild to H. L. Hunt, May 23, 1972, Folder 35, Reel 93, Cartoon 25, Social Protest Collection, Bancroft Library.

<sup>24</sup> My claim is based on the following facts. The NLPF was officially recognized by the federal government, and its annual meetings were once sponsored by the Nixon administration. Currently, the Defense Department's annual briefing on the Vietnam War POW/MIA issue is also the annual NLPF meeting. The black POW/MIA flag in front of almost all government buildings is created by the NLPF. On Stockdale and the birth of the NLPF, see Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 24-26.

<sup>25</sup> "Just A Minute, Please," this flyer is neither dated nor numbered, File 274A, Box F14, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library.

in their fight for the continued freedom of America?”<sup>26</sup> Several months later, he concluded that “the liberal President must regard American soldiers as Cattle as did liberal Truman and liberal Eisenhower.”<sup>27</sup>

Despite his interest in the Vietnam War, Guild remained focused on Korea. When he was protesting the US government’s reluctance to escalate the Vietnam War, he tended to mention the loss of the Korean War POW/MIAs in order to substantiate his arguments. He made a brief visit to the southern section of the Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ) in 1960 and met with a few US military officers, as well as UN and Red Cross officials. Based on their conversations, he wrote the previously mentioned provocative article that was published in *SAGA*. However, according to the State Department, his visit did not yield any “constructive information with regard to the unaccounted-for personnel.” The military also refuted many allegations in the article.<sup>28</sup>

Over the years, FHFM had retained some influence among Korean War POW/MIA activists. Among them, Representative Clement Zablocki was a key figure in relaying the FHFM agenda to the political elites of Washington. For example, in 1971, when the entire country was eager to learn whether Nixon would be able to end the Vietnam War while attaining the release of all US captives, Zablocki brought Guild to a congressional hearing to make a speech to the legislators on the history of FHFM and to

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<sup>26</sup> Eugene R. Guild to Lyndon B. Johnson, March 16, 1965,” an undated flyer, BHS 328-141, Carnegie Library of Boulder, CO.

<sup>27</sup> “Cattle?” October 5, 1965, Flyer No. 479, BHS 328-141, Carnegie Library of Boulder, CO.

<sup>28</sup> Brook Hayes to Clement J. Zablocki, August 18, 1961, SDCDF 611.95A241/7-1861, RG59, NARAII; Eugene R. Guild to Brig. Gen. William W. Berg, August 4, 1964, BHS 328-141, Carnegie Library of Boulder, CO.

sell his claims that escalating the conflict, rather than continuing talks, would guarantee the return of all POWs.<sup>29</sup>

### **New Korean War POW/MIA Campaigns after the Vietnam War**

Since the 1970s, several new advocates for the repatriation of Korean War POW/MIAs became prominent in POW/MIA activism. They also held the belief that Americans were languishing in slave camps in Communist Bloc countries. Possibly inspired by the Vietnam War activists' private negotiations with Vietnamese officials regarding missing Americans, the new Korean War POW/MIA activists exploited the détente between the two Cold War blocs and approached the North Koreans. In the 1980s, observing the commemoration of the Vietnam War and the country's attention to its POW/MIAs, Korean War veterans launched their own organizations to preserve the memory of their triumph and sacrifice in Korea. Simultaneously, they incorporated the Korean War POW/MIA issue into their agendas.

In the mid-1970s, Steve Kiba's experience in Beijing after the Korean War was a popular topic among Vietnam War POW/MIA activists who used it to strengthen their cause. As described in Chapter III, he was among the fifteen airmen imprisoned in China who were not listed as Korean War POWs by Chinese authorities. After his release, he

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<sup>29</sup> *American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia, 1971, Hearings before the Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Ninety-Second Congress, First Session, March 23-25, 30-31, April 1, 6, 20, 1971, 190-197.*

insisted that the white men he saw in Beijing were not known CIA employees who had been imprisoned for espionage but unidentified Korean War POWs. His story became well known after it was picked up by a local chapter of the NLPF in his home state of Ohio in 1974.<sup>30</sup> His story offered the NLPF an impressive text to convince its followers that communists habitually detained US POWs and tortured them, and that the US government denied their existence. He used the story to boost the credibility of the Vietnam War POW/MIA activists' claims that American POWs had been left behind in Vietnam. The story remained popular among POW/MIA activists even in the 1990s.<sup>31</sup>

Kiba desperately warned people of the grave consequences if Americans did nothing to protest their leaders' lackluster efforts to rescue Vietnam War POW/MIAs. His commander knew of his captivity almost immediately after he was shot down, but Kiba insisted that he was secretly held for two years until either a careless diplomat or a drunken Chinese officer divulged his whereabouts. While he said little about his ordeal in Beijing, he vividly imagined the horrible lives of American POWs in Vietnam: they "are now chained, caged, and taunted as if they were savage beasts" and "wallow in their own excrement and urine." He attempted to portray these descriptions, possibly based on his

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<sup>30</sup> Frank A. Sieverts to Carole Bates, December 17, 1975, case file Steve Kiba, Box 79, Entry A1-5307, RG59, NARAII. The recruitment material of the Ohio chapter of NLPF is in this folder.

<sup>31</sup> For one example of his defense of live sighting, see Steve Kiba to Congressman G. V. Montgomery, January 5, 1977, Folder MIA Correspondence, Box 104-50, Gillespie V. Montgomery Papers (hereafter GVM Papers), Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library (hereafter Grant Library), Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS. Even in 1990, Kiba's story was still cited by authorities to refute live sightings, showing its significance in the living POW myth. See a form letter by the Department of the Army on February 23, 1990, in Box 11, Section E, Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARA I. He testified in front of this committee in 1992.

personal experience, as a crisis of Western civilization, which would occur if Americans were eternally abandoned in Southeast Asia.<sup>32</sup> His anti-administration rhetoric, frequent references to Christian and American values, and intense hatred of communist regimes, closely resembled those of the activists of the 1950s.

While Kiba's tactics were reminiscent of the campaigns of the 1950s, the Korean War POW/MIA campaigners in the 1980s adopted different approaches. Likely influenced by their Vietnam War counterparts, they conducted private research into intelligence regarding the men who were missing in Korea, although their methodology may have been problematic.<sup>33</sup> Domestically, they openly distrusted government officials and held them responsible for their personal losses. Internationally, they preferred private or quasi-official negotiations with Communist Bloc officials rather than vocal denunciation of communism. Both strategies resembled those employed by Vietnam War POW/MIA activists.

Robert Dumas spearheaded new Korean War POW/MIA movements in the 1980s. He and all of his brothers served in the Korean War; but his youngest brother Roger A.

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<sup>32</sup> Marianne Lester, "An MIA Wife: Twisting Slowly, Slowly in the Breeze," this article is probably printed in the June 19, 1974 issue of the *Magazine of Army/Navy/Air Force Times* as noted on a copy of this article. This copy is kept in Folder MIA Public Mail (2), Box 17, Theodor C. Marrs Files, Gerald Ford Presidential Library (hereafter Ford Library), Ann Arbor, MI; other information is from the letter from Frank A. Sieverts to Carol Bates, December 17, 1975, the NLPF chapter's recruiting materials authored by Kiba, and Kiba's letters to the First Lady and Henry Kissinger, December 22, 1974, all of which are in the case file of Steve Kiba, Box 79, Entry A1-5307, RG59, NARAIL. Also see Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 157-158.

<sup>33</sup> While I have not read about the Vietnam War POW/MIA activists' private research, it seems that they accessed the service records of their loved ones to learn the intelligence leading to the decision of their fates. The popular literature on POWs abandoned in Vietnam (or other conflicts) in the 1980s, though poorly footnoted, at least claim that their conclusions are based on live sightings, reports of refugees, or so-called secret intelligence. On the poor credibility of their research from an academic perspective, see Timothy K. Nenninger, "United States Prisoners of War and the Red Army, 1944-45: Myths and Realities," *Journal of Military History* 66, no.3 (July 2002): 761-781. The author is a senior NARA archivist.

Dumas never returned home. According to Robert Dumas' nephew, Roger Dumas was last seen by fellow POWs being taken away by his captors from a camp shortly before the prisoner exchanges in 1953. Without further evidence available to the Army, his name remained on all the lists of unaccounted-for Korean War POWs, including the final 389 List. After making a life-long promise to their parents, Dumas's siblings spent decades investigating the fate of their youngest brother.<sup>34</sup> A letter from his family in 1975 suggested that they had worked closely with the NLPF and had assimilated some of its discourse.<sup>35</sup> According to NLPF director Ann Mills-Griffiths, Robert Dumas was among the first of several Korean War POW/MIA relatives to seek her cooperation and was well known for his campaigns during the Reagan era. Mills-Griffiths said that she helped Dumas write bylaws for his proposed POW/MIA group (name unknown), although there is no evidence that Dumas ever joined the NLPF.<sup>36</sup>

For Robert Dumas, as well as a few prominent activists today, proving that American POWs were left behind after the war and learning their fates remain their research priority.<sup>37</sup> There is little evidence that the earliest activists such as Guild

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<sup>34</sup> On his background information, see the documentary of his nephew Bill Dumas, "Missing, Presumed Dead: The Search for America's POWs," YouTube video, 1:04:47, posted by "Bill Dumas Productions," July 16, 2014 (hereafter "Missing, Presumed Dead") <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuqR11jLS5U>. Although I could not find earlier correspondence from Dumas' family in presidential libraries or NARA, it seems that they did confront the government in the 1950s for some time, as mentioned in a letter Robert L. Jones to Joseph L. Liberman, February 23, 2000, Folder Correspondence to and from Dumas, Box 4Ae80, Laurence Jolidon Collection, Briscoe Center.

<sup>35</sup> Clarence G. Dumas to President Ford, January 27, 1975, POW/MIA Database and Documents, the Library of Congress, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/pwmia/PDS36/124686.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Ann Mills-Griffiths, the director of NLPF, interview by the author at her headquarter in Falls Church, VA, on April 17, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Besides Robert Dumas, several Korean War POW/MIA relatives from the National Alliance of Families, a group separated from the NLPF due to their strong belief in living POWs, were also active in POW/MIA affairs in the 1990s. The directors of the Coalition of Families of Korean War and Cold War POW/MIAs



attempted to gather intelligence in the 1950s to substantiate the existence of Korean War POWs detained in China or North Korea.<sup>38</sup> Conversely, Dumas and many current activists have acquired considerable archival evidence, collected testimonies from ex-POWs, and interviewed nationals of the Communist Bloc countries to prove that some US POWs were never repatriated after the war. These activists benefited from the gradual declassification of POW/MIA files in recent decades and the loosening of travel restrictions for officials from states previously hostile to the United States. These activists were also concerned with repatriating the remains of servicemen, either because of the low chance that their loved ones were still surreptitiously detained in China, North Korea, or Russia, or because retrieving bodies became the norm after the Vietnam War to account for POW/MIA (whereas, van Wees and Guild scarcely talked about bodies).

What distinguished Dumas from other Korean War POW/MIA relatives was that he managed to accumulate adequate documentation and to recruit witnesses to temporarily “revive” his younger brother in the service records (changing from “presumed dead” to POW). In the summer of 1982, he filed a case at the US District Court, District of Connecticut against eight defendants, including the president and several high-ranking military and civilian leaders, which later became *Robert R. Dumas v.*

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are relatively more concerned about the POW/MIA remains, but they have invested considerable time to collect materials about possible living POWs. Some journalists also dedicated significant effort to the living POW investigation, like Laurence Jolidon and Mark Sauter.

<sup>38</sup> As Guild is not a POW/MIA relative, he is unlikely to obtain much POW intelligence. Most of his charges against the government are unofficial statements by military officers or claims. In my interview with Robert Dumas, he told me that he was well aware of Eugene Guild and his FHFM, but he thought that his own research into his brother’s fate is more evidence-based than Guild’s campaigns.

*Secretary of the Army John O. Marsh Jr.*, in which Dumas asked the previously mentioned change in his brother's status, \$200 million, and that the United States demand China and North Korea return the remains of US servicemen.<sup>39</sup> While the Army was concerned that rampant rumors in the 1980s of US POWs having been abandoned in Vietnam would bring undue credibility to and sympathy for Dumas's claim in the trial, Army officers were impressed by his copious research. In a memorandum to the Assistant Secretary of the Army after Robert Dumas initiated his case, the author concluded that "he [Dumas] has accumulated a voluminous amount of material which he asserts supports this thesis [Roger Dumas was a POW]." While he doubted the credibility of Dumas's evidence, he admitted that conflicting reports surrounding Roger Dumas's fate warranted an investigation.<sup>40</sup> According to Dumas's family, on September 12, 1983, Roger Dumas's status was revised to POW; however, Robert Dumas found that Roger's status returned to "presumed dead" shortly afterwards.<sup>41</sup>

Robert Dumas was perhaps also the first POW/MIA relative to speak with the North Koreans about the fates of American POWs who had never returned after the Korean War. During the Vietnam War, the North Vietnamese government adroitly utilized American POWs as a way to approach anti-war protesters from the United States, hoping the latter would further turn ordinary Americans against the war and their government.

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<sup>39</sup> Alan H. Nevas and John B. Hughes to John O. Marsh Jr, December 7, 1982, Box FRC1, Entry UD-04W1, RG335, NARAII.

<sup>40</sup> Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) by R. L. Armitage, "Pfc Roger A. Dumas USA/MIA," October 6, 1982, Box FRC1, Entry UD-04W1, RG335, NARAII.

<sup>41</sup> "Missing, Presumed Dead."

This tactic resulted in the early liberation of some servicemen.<sup>42</sup> A small number of prominent Vietnam War POW/MIA relatives confronted Vietnamese officials, either as private citizens (funded by domestic sympathizers) or unofficial members of US delegations in Paris or Hanoi, to bring a humanitarian face to the highly politicized US-Vietnam talks on the POW/MIA issue.<sup>43</sup> The success of this tactic is difficult to judge, but their campaigns provided a new model for Korean War POW/MIA relatives seeking cooperation from the North Koreans.

The détente in the 1970s and the North Korean attainment of UN observer status in 1973 opened the United States to delegates from Pyongyang, allowing Dumas to meet with functionaries from that reclusive regime. While he was fighting with the Army in court over his brother's status, DPRK UN observer Pak Gil-Yon contacted him. Since then, they have maintained a personal relationship. Pak frequently complained that the United States was responsible for the POW/MIA deadlocks because it had prevented Chinese and North Korean POWs from returning to their homeland after the war and had refused to talk directly with North Korea on the POW issue. Dumas emphasized this very point during my interview with him. Pak encouraged Dumas to visit Pyongyang, and if possible, to urge the US government to rescind its hostile policies against North Korea. In 1987, Dumas persuaded a Democratic presidential candidate Jesse L. Jackson to travel

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<sup>42</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 22, 28, 31.

<sup>43</sup> This is highly advertised by the NLPF. <https://www.pow-miafamilies.org/about-the-league.html>; also see Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 34. During the war, their travels to Paris were funded by so-called concerned citizens who had some political power or connection with the military. After the war, Ann Mills-Griffith was a quasi-official participant in the negotiations between the United States and Vietnam.

with him to Pyongyang and to attend POW negotiations with the North Koreans, although the trip was denied by the State Department due to travel restrictions.<sup>44</sup> This development, however, opened up the possibility of creating an unofficial channel to engage with North Korean officials.

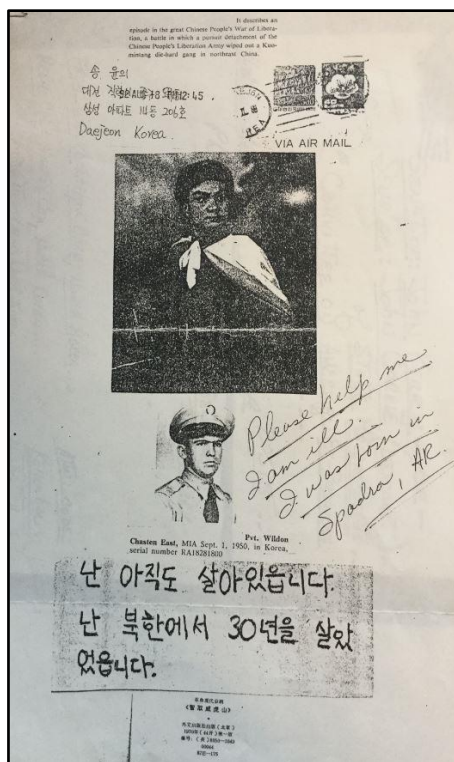


Figure 4-1: An example of the claims that US soldiers were still detained in the DPRK in the 1980s. The message in Korean reads "I am still alive. I have been living in North Korea for 30 years." It is allegedly written on the back of a postcard featuring a Chinese opera. The return address is a South Korean one. This file is copied from the investigation files of the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs. Preserved in Folder East, Box 5, Section Q (LeGro), Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARA.

New organizations concerned with Korean War POW/MIAs also emerged in the early 1980s. For decades after the decline of Guild's FHFMM in the early 1960s, there were few notable groups advocating for these POW/MIAs because the country's attention was focused on Vietnam. Beginning in the 1980s, interest in Korean War POW/MIAs and their remains became a side project of Korean War veterans' groups. The popularity of

<sup>44</sup> Robert Dumas, interview by the author, January 2, 2018. Robert Dumas was very critical of the US government and claimed no hatred toward the North Koreans. Jesse Jackson to Pak Gil Yon, December 9, 1987, and J. Alan Liotta to Jesse Jackson, January 8, 1988, Folder Copied Correspondence Copies (1), Box 4La135, Laurence Jolidon Collection, Briscoe Center.

the POW/MIA issue after the Vietnam War likely encouraged veterans to take up the Korean War POW/MIA cause in order to attract public attention. Another possible reason was the commemoration of the Korean War. The Vietnam War was remembered for the loss of individual lives, as evidenced by the panels of names carved on the Vietnam War Veterans' Memorial and the plight of the POW/MIAs. As the Korean War also ended in a partial defeat, its memory was inexorably associated with its human loss, especially those who were left to the mercy of the advancing enemy. Therefore, the POW/MIA issue was indispensable to the memory of this war. Veterans' attention to the bodies also reflected concurrent trends for the American public and the military in determining the fate of POW/MIAs, which required the recovery and identification of their bodies.

In contrast to FHFV, which focused exclusively on surviving POWs, the veterans demonstrated considerable interest in recovering POW/MIAs' remains from the DPRK. A group of veterans who had survived the Battle of Chosin launched the Chosin Few in early 1983, with the goal of holding a reunion in 1985 on the thirty-fifth anniversary of the battle. One objective of the proposed reunion was to revisit North Korea.<sup>45</sup> Although available evidence does not reveal how the veterans approached the North Koreans between 1983 and 1985, the turning point for the recovery of US servicemen's remains from the DPRK occurred on October 20, 1985, when Frank Kerr of the Chosin Few met with DPRK vice premier Kim Yong-Nam in New York City during the fortieth

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<sup>45</sup> "Chosin Reservoir Vets Organizing," *Marine Corps Gazette* 67, January 1983, 1.

anniversary celebration of the UN. For the first time since 1954, DPRK officials announced that they would “cooperate in returning military remains if the US Government formally request[ed] a search for and recovery of US War dead.” A North Korean officer unofficially reiterated this promise at the Korean War Military Armistice Commission (MAC).<sup>46</sup> In later years, Chosin Few members visited the DPRK UN observer’s office in New York City and proffered considerable intelligence regarding isolated burials of US service personnel in the DPRK.<sup>47</sup> Similar approaches were taken by the Korean War Veterans Association (KWVA), which was founded on the thirty-fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the war. It included the repatriation of dead or missing US soldiers as one of its five major principles.<sup>48</sup> Both groups wished to visit the DPRK in the 1980s to recover remains, but neither succeeded due to a variety of practical and political reasons.<sup>49</sup>

Compared to veterans’ organizations, the Korean War POW/MIA activist groups after the 1980s were more inspired by the Vietnam War POW/MIA campaigns. One example is the group launched by Robert Dumas with the help of Mills-Griffiths. Donna Knox, a leader of the highly influential Coalition of Families of Korean and Cold War

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<sup>46</sup> Gregory Witcher, “Veterans Seek Data on MIAs in Korean War,” *Boston Globe*, November 28, 1985, 54; Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. III, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1994), 63.

<sup>47</sup> *Report on Congressional Delegation Trip to Korea to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs House of Representatives*, 101st Congress, Second Session, May 28, 1990, 9. Hereafter cited as *1990 Delegation Report*.

<sup>48</sup> *The Graybeards* 1, 1986, front cover and page 1.

<sup>49</sup> James V. Healion, “Chosin Ambush Recalled: A Miracle on the Ice,” United Press International, August 21, 1983, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1983/08/21/Chosin-ambush-recalled-A-miracle-on-the-ice/3418430286400/>; on the Korean War Veterans Association’s attempt, see Blaine P. Friedlander to the DPRK’s Observer Mission to the US[UN], June 19, 1989, Folder Copied Correspondence Relating to POW MIA Issues, Box 4La123, Laurence Jolidon Collection, Briscoe Center.

POW/MIAs, also commented that her group and the current Korean War POW/MIA campaigns were motivated by the NLPF.<sup>50</sup> Generally speaking, the members follow the NLPF's modus operandi, which primarily conduct research on the POW/MIAs possibly detained after conflicts but welcome the return of bodies.

### **Forming an Alliance**

Until the 1990s, when most people in the United States spoke of POW/MIAs, it almost exclusively referred to American soldiers left behind in Vietnam. Popular literature, movies, and rumors pertaining to POW/MIAs also predominantly concentrated on Vietnam. However, it was the Vietnam War POW/MIA activists that educated the public about the Korean War POW/MIAs and hoped to avoid repeating the tragedy after the Korean War. Military officials also sporadically fused the POW/MIAs of the two wars together, but likely for a different goal—diluting the influence of the most determined Vietnam War POW/MIA campaigners.

Some groups with considerable nationwide influence actively circulated the allegation that hundreds of American POWs had never been released by North Korea, in order to advocate that American people should prevent the soldiers missing in Vietnam from becoming new victims of government negligence. For example, although the NLPF only recruited relatives of the Vietnam War POW/MIAs, it mentioned Korean War POWs

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<sup>50</sup> Donna Knox, interview by the author, April 24, 2018.

when it began to coordinate operations with the White House to ensure the release of all US prisoners from Vietnam.<sup>51</sup> As mentioned earlier, an Ohio chapter of the NLPF published Kiba's story in its flyers.

A few months after the United States signed the peace treaty with Vietnam, the organization Voices in Vital America (VIVA), which was the first to broach the topic of American POWs forgotten in Vietnam and introduced the popular POW bracelets (each bore a POW's name in order to remember his capture), distributed an article featuring American soldiers suspected to still be detained in Korea. Citing the story of Private First Class Robert E. Meyers, who was on the 389 List and had allegedly appeared in a POW photo, an editor of the VIVA journal commented that Meyers's parents had only received a hollow promise that talks regarding the fate of their son were ongoing. The editor stressed that "now the families of 1,300 additional men have received the promise from the Defense Department".<sup>52</sup>

Under the influence of these groups, many ordinary Americans became aware of the Korean War POW/MIAs. For example, when the US military was about to pull out of Vietnam, letters reminding Nixon of the unrepatriated Korean War POWs reached the White House almost every week. A class of high school students from California, who

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<sup>51</sup> Memorandum for Dr. Kissinger from John Holdridge, "Talking Paper for Your Meeting with the POW/MIA Families," August 24, 1971, Folder Vietnam July to December 1971, Vol.3 POW (2), Box 121, National Security Council, Vietnam Subject Files, Nixon Library.

<sup>52</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 57, 94. The journal is kept in Folder MIA Public Mail 1, Box 17, Theodor C. Marrs Files, Ford Library. According to Allen, several million bracelets were sold in total. 1,300 is the original official number of POW/MIAs.



had not even been alive during the Korean War, wrote a binder of such letters.<sup>53</sup>

Lesser known, newly established POW/MIA organizations have utilized the issue of Korean War POW/MIAs as a strategy to gain more public attention and to distinguish themselves from the NLPF. One such group that has achieved enduring and nationwide influence is the National Alliance of Families for the Return of America's Missing Servicemen (NAF), which was formed by a faction of hardline POW/MIA activists within the NLPF who had rebelled against Ann Mills-Griffiths due to their differing opinions toward living POWs and military policies. In June 1990, these dissenters launched the NAF, which described itself as "the only family organization to represent POW/MIA families from all wars."<sup>54</sup> According to Mills-Griffiths, this claim followed the secession of the NAF from the NLPF.<sup>55</sup> The NAF not only recruited Korean War POW/MIA activists but also seemed to consider the families of American POWs in WWII and more recent conflicts, like the relatives of Americans abducted by terrorists in the Global War on Terror, as potential members in order to achieve prominence in the POW/MIA community.<sup>56</sup>

The most influential political figure to promote the alliance of the POW/MIA

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<sup>53</sup> The collection of letters is kept in 18 archival boxes filed under the series ND18-3, WHCF-SF, Nixon Library. The letters from the high school are kept in Folder Gen. ND18-3 CO165-1, June 1 to 30, 1972, Box 10, ND18-3, WHCF-SF.

<sup>54</sup> Susan K. Keating, *Prisoners of Hope: Exploiting the POW/MIA Myth in America* (New York: Random House, 1994), 52. The quotation is from the website of the NAF, <https://www.nationalalliance.org/who-we-are>. Generally speaking, the NAF is more hostile to the administration and firmly believes that POWs had been abandoned in Vietnam.

<sup>55</sup> Ann Mills-Griffiths, interview by the author, April 17, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> In the NAF periodicals, there are articles or columns talking about possible American POWs in the recent wars and doubting whether the government would ever bother to retrieve them from the terrorists or anti-US guerillas.

activists in these two wars was President Reagan, who prevented the declining Vietnam War POW/MIA movements in the late 1970s from sliding into obscurity in the 1980s as the Korean War ones had done decades earlier. To distinguish himself from his predecessors, Reagan presented himself as a leader who sympathized with the POW/MIA community and publicly bemoaned previous administrations' lip service to people still haunted by the possibility that their loved ones were alive but abandoned to their captors.<sup>57</sup> In his political campaigns, he frequently touted the Korean War POW/MIA issue to prove his long-time commitment to POW/MIA families. In an address to the NLPF, he recounted his correspondence with van Wees in the 1960s, in which he promised to reform the bureaucracy and resolve her son's case once he took power in Washington. He then assured his audience that "the torch of responsibility has been passed and I'm more determined than ever to end your suffering and uncertainty."<sup>58</sup> His speech for National POW/MIA Recognition Day in 1984 lamented that Korean War POW/MIA families had suffered "the daunting specter [their loved ones being held prisoner] of thirty-one years since the end of the Korean War," but he was making progress in engaging the DPRK to account for the missing men.<sup>59</sup> His claim was sincere, as it was during his administration that the US military resumed attempts to recover

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<sup>57</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 215-219.

<sup>58</sup> "Proposed Presidential Speech to the NLF," as an attachment to Memorandum for Aram Bakshian from Dick Childress, "President's Speech to the National League of Families," January 24, 1983, Folder POW MIA NLF January 1983 Meeting, RAC Box 15, RTC Files, Reagan Library. In this draft, the name of van Wees was later crossed out, and she was only referred to as an MIA mother of the Korean conflict.

<sup>59</sup> Remarks at a White House Ceremony Marking the Observance of National POW/MIA Recognition Day, July 20, 1984, Reagan Library, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/72084b>.

soldiers' bodies from North Korea. Another strategy he utilized to inspire audiences also pertained to Korea. According to historian Michael Allen, with his experience of portraying a POW in Korea in the propaganda film *Prisoner of War* (1954), Reagan "visualized the plight of POWs and MIAs in the most personal way possible."<sup>60</sup>

Congressional investigations also kept the Korean War POW/MIA issue alive when they analyzed the POW/MIA issue of the Vietnam War, but they tended to undermine rather than corroborate the claims of POWs abandoned in Southeast Asia. Before November 1992, when the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs launched a hearing on WWII, Korean War, and Cold War POW/MIAs (although the primary objective of the committee was the Vietnam War), all prior hearings had exclusively focused on the Vietnam War POW/MIA issue. These hearings discussed Korean War POW/MIAs only because congress members and POW/MIA activists wanted to know how the experience of handling the Korean War POW/MIA issue could be applied to determine the fate of the Vietnam War POW/MIAs. The transcript of each hearing regarding POW/MIAs was usually hundreds of pages long; however, mention of the Korean War POW/MIAs appeared on fewer than five pages.<sup>61</sup>

In the congressional hearings that aligned the Korean and Vietnam Wars, Representative G. V. "Sonny" Montgomery (D-MS) deserves special mention for his role in the Korean War POW/MIA issue. He rose to prominence when he chaired the House

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<sup>60</sup> Allan, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 217.

<sup>61</sup> This statistic is based on all published congressional hearings on the Vietnam War POW/MIAs in the 1970s and 1980s.

Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia that conducted a fifteen-month investigation into the Vietnam War POW/MIA issue in 1975 and 1976. It consisted of in-depth case file research and meetings with Vietnamese officials. Although his investigation was dedicated to the Vietnam War, in order to defend his conclusion that it was unlikely that any US servicemen were left behind in Vietnam after 1973, he also reviewed the rumors that POWs had been forgotten in Korea and cited two cases (one being Kiba's story) in his final report to Congress. His military service in Korea, his investigation of the Korean War cases for the select committee, and his later work on facilitating the repatriation of Master Sergeant John R. McInnis Jr.'s body from South Korea to his congressional district in 1982 partially qualified him as the first statesman to persuade the DPRK to surrender US soldiers' remains after 1954.<sup>62</sup>

What made Montgomery famous (or infamous) among POW/MIA activists was his opinion that there were no POWs abandoned in Vietnam and his proposed solution to the POW/MIA issue. Ironically, he launched his career as an activist with the firm belief that US prisoners had been left behind in Southeast Asia, until mounting evidence convinced him that such rumors were ultimately unsubstantiated.<sup>63</sup> When he was analyzing the Korean War cases during his select committee investigations, he found that Kiba was unable to offer names or descriptions of any white people whom Kiba alleged

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<sup>62</sup> The reasons for him being the first statesman to engage the DPRK to recover the remains in 1990 were complicated and will be discussed in Chapter V. The return of Sgt. McInnis' body is listed as the first accounted-for POW/MIAs by the Defense Department, though some servicemen's bodies were recovered between 1954 and the 1980s from both Koreas.

<sup>63</sup> Franklin, *M.I.A.*, 15, 87.

to be secretly jailed in Beijing and concluded that there was “no evidence to support the contention that other Americans were held as POWs.” After studying another Korean War case, Montgomery reported that the person who claimed to have seen detained POWs could not actually identify anyone and “would not have the opportunity to know whether all Americans had been returned.” The witness himself had been wrongfully reported as a detained POW by his fellow prisoners.<sup>64</sup> During the years when rumors of living POWs in Vietnam were widely circulated by a wide range of people, Montgomery’s claim that no Americans were “still being held alive as prisoners in Indochina, or elsewhere, as a result of the war in Indochina” seemed to be a betrayal of the POW/MIA activists who had wished him to find solid evidence proving that American captives had been left behind after the war.<sup>65</sup> Three of his colleagues in the committee even refused to endorse his conclusion and attached separate views to the committee’s final report. The POW/MIA activist community soon called him by many derogatory nicknames such as “V. C. Mont-GOMER-y” and “Jane Fonda.”<sup>66</sup> Regardless of this criticism, he did not change his views and continued to believe that insisted that no living POW remained in Vietnam or Korea.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *American Missing in Southeast Asia, Final Report Together with Additional and Separate Views of the Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia*, US House of Representatives, Ninety-Fourth Congress, Second Session, Report 94-1764, 70-72, 75-76. This document will be cited as *Select Committee Report* hereafter.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>66</sup> Franklin, *M.I.A.*, 131. According to Franklin, V. C. stands for Viet Cong, and GOMER is racist slang for the Vietnamese.

<sup>67</sup> For example, in 1981, he made a public announcement on the ABC News that no POW was left behind in Vietnam and Korea. As in 1976, his office was flooded with numerous angry letters protesting his statement. In a letter to a fellow congressman, he emphasized that “as I have stated publicly in recent weeks, I do not believe the Vietnamese nor the Koreans are holding any American Servicemen against their

Montgomery favored friendly diplomatic talks that focused only on POW/MIA bodies with officials of the Communist Bloc to account for POW/MIAs, which set him apart from many statesmen involved in POW/MIA affairs in the 1950s. In his final report for the select committee, he warned the military that demanding excessive information about POW/MIAs that Vietnam would never be able to produce would erode “the credibility of the United States data base,” “embarrass them,” or “prevent meaningful talks.”<sup>68</sup> He stressed that “human remains provide the only positive basis for *prima facie* identification of the missing.”<sup>69</sup> Accordingly, seeking the bodies of the missing servicemen would be the primary way to resolve the POW/MIA issue. To advance this goal, he discouraged hostile, non-recognition policy towards Vietnam; instead, he contended that “further information or receipt of remains” would depend “on the status of normalization of relations between the United States and the countries involved.”<sup>70</sup> In 1990, he urged the US government to offer similar incentives and focused on the recovery of bodies when he met with DPRK officials on the POW/MIA issue.

In congressional hearings, military representatives, who probably wished to disempower Vietnam War POW/MIA activists, were also interested in aligning POW/MIAs of both wars. During the Montgomery Committee investigation, military officials were consistently confronted by activists who endeavored to block the Defense

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will.” See Gillespie V Montgomery to Donald J. Mitchell, August 21, 1981, Folder POW-MIA General Correspondence, Box 104-51, GVM Papers, Grant Library.

<sup>68</sup> *Select Committee Report*, 199.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

Department from declaring their loved ones dead based merely on the passage of time, as it had done in previous conflicts. To defend its practice, the military had to prove that although its earlier policy of presuming servicemen dead after a year without further information had been carried out much more frequently in the Korean War, this had never resulted in any false declaration. In one of the hearings before Montgomery's select committee, Major General Walter D. Druen Jr., Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff (personnel) presented casualty statistics from the Air Force in the Korean War. He explained that over half of the 888 men officially listed as missing had been presumed dead due to lack of evidence that they had survived, and none of them had been found alive. He further recounted two WWII cases to illustrate that even when the US troops had unrestrained access to battlefields, there were always servicemen whose deaths could never be confirmed beyond doubt, and thus their cases must be closed administratively.<sup>71</sup>

The sheer number of WWII and Korean War soldiers whose bodies had never been repatriated was a convenient tool the military used to dilute the influence of Vietnam War POW/MIA activists. It could argue that the number of POW/MIAs in Vietnam was quite small compared to those in WWII and the Korean War. The families of WWII and Korean War POW/MIAs had never besieged the military as fiercely as their Vietnam War counterparts were doing, therefore, these activists' animosity towards the Pentagon was unwarranted. In the same hearing, an official of the Defense Department in

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<sup>71</sup> *Americans Missing in Southeast Asia, Hearings before the Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia*, House of Representatives, Ninety-Fourth Congress, Second Session, Part IV: April 7, May 12, 26, and June 2, 1976, 26-27.

charge of international security affairs informed his audience that “8,184” men, 22 percent of all Korean War casualties, had never been recovered, and most had been declared dead in 1954. In comparison, only four percent of Vietnam War casualties belonged to this category. He concluded that “we are much farther ahead in Vietnam in relative terms than we were in Korea or World War II.”<sup>72</sup> This comparison could be perceived as a strategy to silence the Vietnam War POW/MIA activists—the Defense Department had given their cases disproportionate attention, and their Korean War counterparts were the silent majority who deserved more attention. My interview with NLPF director Mills-Griffiths supported my hypothesis. She was critical of the military’s decision in recent decades to add a huge number of WWII and Korean War POW/MIAs to the list of unaccounted-for servicemen, especially the thousands of WWII sailors and airmen entombed in wrecks at the bottom of the ocean. Such hopeless cases overburdened the military and drained its resources. She argued that this practice compromised the military’s ability to solve open POW/MIA cases.<sup>73</sup> Presumably, the open cases meant the Vietnam War ones that the NLPF has been pursuing.

### **Expansion of the POW/MIA Ranks**

Before the end of the Vietnam War, when a service member did not return from war, whether dead or alive, depending on the circumstances of his loss, his name might

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>73</sup> Ann Mills-Griffiths, interview by the author, April 17, 2018. She has never said that there is no value in resolving the WWII or Korean War cases, but just wanted a better approach.



be listed in one of several casualty categories. Those who were known to have been killed in action or in accidents but whose bodies were not recovered were labeled as KIA/BNR (killed in action/body not recovered) or NBD (non-battle death)/BNR; those who were known to be captured were referred to as POW; those missing in action were listed as MIA. However, the Vietnam War POW/MIA activists convinced the US military to eliminate the demarcations among these categories of casualties, implying that it must retrieve even the bodies of men who had been confirmed dead in Vietnam to reduce POW/MIA numbers and to satisfy campaigners. The cultural factors linking the identified bodies of soldiers and the confirmation of POW/MIAs' fates are extensively analyzed in Thomas Hawley's *The Remains of War*. This section instead traces how this association has affected the Korean War POW/MIA issue. After the merger of these casualty types into a single term, POW/MIA, the US military and the activists realized that in order to account for Korean War POW/MIAs, they should demand as many US soldiers' remains from the North Koreans as possible rather than continue to fruitlessly press the latter for the 389 allegedly surviving POWs, as they had done for decades.

Although this merger, initiated by the Vietnam War POW/MIA activists, only doubled the number of Vietnam War POW/MIAs, its effect on the tally of Korean War POW/MIAs was astonishing.<sup>74</sup> For a long time, the American public thought that there were only 389 US servicemen who might have been held by their enemies after the

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<sup>74</sup> On the figures after the Vietnam War, see Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 209-210.

Korean War. However, the Korean War Veterans Memorial, designed in the mid-1980s, lists 8,177 as the number of MIAs (including those known to have been killed but whose bodies were not repatriated). Since then, Korean War POW/MIA activists have gradually interpreted this much larger number as possible POWs detained by the Communist Bloc. The sudden, twenty-fold expansion of the ranks of Korean War POW/MIAs alerted the country to the unfinished task regarding the Korean War.

Before explaining the redefinition of POW/MIAs, several terms must first be clarified. The acronyms POW and MIA refer to prisoner of war and missing in action respectively. A “Prisoner of War” is defined as “one who, while engaged in combat under orders of his or her government, is captured by the armed forces of the enemy.”<sup>75</sup> It does not distinguish between those who are released alive and those who are known to have died in camps or who are possibly detained after a conflict. “Missing in Action” is defined as one “who is not present at his or her duty location due to apparent involuntary reasons and whose location is unknown.” It includes people who are presumed dead or believed (but not confirmed) to have been captured, those whose fates could not be undoubtedly established, and those who fail to report to duty on time. If a service member is known to have been killed in action, he or she is not considered to be MIA. If his or her body is not recovered, he or she obtains a KIA/BNR status. If no other information about an MIA becomes available, then low odds of survival usually result in

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<sup>75</sup> All definitions of the military terms in this section are from *Joint Publication 1-02 Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (April 21, 2001, as Amended through October 31, 2009). The term Missing in Action should not be confused with missing, which is much broader.

a presumptive finding of death (PFOD). Service members determined to be KIA/BNR or PFOD are no longer MIAs.

During the Korean War, the military generally used these definitions to categorize its casualties. A dead serviceman could be placed in the following classifications: 1) KIA, 2) died of wounds (DOW), or 3) NBD. Those killed and buried in North Korea were not reclassified as MIA when the military declared their bodies unrecoverable.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, loss of his body did not affect a soldier's KIA status. Soldiers who were at first classified as MIA were moved to the KIA status once their bodies were found or when the military had obtained adequate proof of their deaths. MIAs whose fates were never revealed were given PFOD status after the armistice. The criterion for POW was strict in the Korean War and was treated as a sub-category of MIA. Soldiers were listed as POW usually after their captivity had been confirmed by both sides; therefore, the official number of POWs only rose significantly after the two sides exchanged POW rosters in late 1951. The POW number dropped to zero in April 1954 after all the unreturned POWs were declared dead.<sup>77</sup> Whether their bodies had been recovered or not, dead POWs were taken out of this category and reclassified as "died in captivity."

The combined term POW/MIA was a product of the Vietnam War.<sup>78</sup> It is not a combination of POW and MIA, but serves as a synonym of "unaccounted-for," which is

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<sup>76</sup> While the recovery of a body did not affect the categorization of casualties, the deceased soldiers' identification reports declared that whether or not their bodies were recoverable.

<sup>77</sup> The analysis of the terms used in the Korean War and all other observations in this paragraph are based on the weekly casualty reports kept in Box 3, Entry 1020, RG330, NARAII, as well as the IDPFs at the NPRC

<sup>78</sup> Franklin, *M.I.A.*, 13.

“commonly used when referring to personnel who are killed in action and whose bodies are not recovered.” However, I use this term to include all servicemen who were captured, missing, or killed in Korea whose remains had never been recovered, just as their families currently do. The Defense Department now also uses this term to encompass all such servicemen as is illustrated by the name of the agency in charge of recovering them, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

During the Vietnam War, KIA/BNR, POW, and MIA initially existed as distinct categories of casualties. Based on the statistics cited by H. Bruce Franklin, among the 2,255 unaccounted-for men in the Vietnam War (POW/MIAs according to today’s terminology), at least 1,095 were KIA/BNRs, which was acknowledged by the NLPF before the end of the war.<sup>79</sup> The definition of POW was initially similar to that used in the Korean War, which required confirmation of captivity. However, while the military internally kept POWs and MIAs separate, the Pentagon’s public announcements blurred the demarcation, thus creating the term POW/MIA. During Nixon’s campaigns to justify prolonging the war as a noble task to save POWs, the military announced that over 1,600 Americans were being tortured by their communist captors. However, it officially listed only 591 as POWs and the rest as MIAs. Even this POW number included “anyone reported as a possible prisoner anywhere in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, or China at any time from 1963 to 1973, whether or not there was credible evidence of capture and even

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<sup>79</sup> Franklin, *M.I.A.*, 13; Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 93.

if there was evidence of subsequent death.”<sup>80</sup> Lumping the two categories together exaggerated the number of men who were possibly held by their enemies to such a ridiculous degree that the Vietnamese officials could never account for all of them, which allowed the Pentagon to indict them for concealing POWs who had actually been killed in a place that was completely inaccessible—a tactic already used in the MAC in the 1950s. This was one of the few strategies that the United States could use to put its enemy on the defensive in a losing war.<sup>81</sup>

This tactic backfired for the military when it could not recover as many POWs after the Vietnam War as it had once claimed. As MIAs were mixed in with POWs, relatives of MIAs who had an almost negligible chance of survival could not resist the temptation of believing that their loved ones were secretly locked up by their captors. The return of so few who were originally listed as MIAs after the Vietnam War, while not a surprise to the military, was very distressing for their relatives. When the military could not gather more evidence to learn of the fate of MIAs, they were presumed dead, which terminated their pay and benefits. Their relatives, however, perceived this action as abandoning them to their captors.<sup>82</sup> A group of POW/MIA activists attempted to block the official presumption that MIAs were dead, which evolved into the case known as *McDonald v. McLucas* filed by the NLPF members on July 20, 1973, in the US District Court for the Southern District of New York. This lawsuit ultimately resulted in a four-

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<sup>80</sup> Franklin, *M.I.A.*, 13; Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 91.

<sup>81</sup> Franklin, *M.I.A.*, 92-93.

<sup>82</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 91, 97.

year moratorium on declaring MIAs dead without hearing their families' opinions.<sup>83</sup>

A lasting legacy of *McDonald v. McLucas* was the assimilation of the KIA/BNRs into the ranks of the POW/MIAs. After the Vietnam War, when an MIA was presumed dead, he was removed from the contemporary POW/MIA category and reclassified as KIA/BNR. According to Mills-Griffiths, in 1973, her father and other NLPF members realized that if the military took unlimited liberties to presume the MIAs dead, then all POW/MIAs, regardless of their chance of survival, would ultimately become KIA/BNRs. The NLPF argued that this presumption was premature because it did not believe that the Pentagon was taking adequate action to gather intelligence on MIAs. On the one hand, the NLPF was preparing for legal action; on the other hand, even though it never changed its name, the NLPF included all KIA/BNR cases in its mission as it believed many KIA/BNRs should remain POW/MIAs.

Although the NLPF failed to end the military's practice of reclassifying missing service members as KIA/BNRs without considering the opinions of their families, Mills-Griffiths believed that the league had accomplished one essential achievement. The military was still able to presume that the POW/MIAs were dead and redefine them as KIA/BNRs due to lack of evidence of survival; however, because the NLPF refused to stop demanding investigations into these men's fates by the Pentagon, the military could no longer simply close their cases. Therefore, there was essentially no difference between

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<sup>83</sup> Clarke, *The Missing Man*, 43-46.

POW/MIA and KIA/BNR. Investigating every case on the KIA/BNR list (including those originally defined as POW/MIAs), which included all servicemen who had never returned from the Vietnam War, dead or alive, became a new task for the military.<sup>84</sup> Without their remains, these men's cases could not be closed. In *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, Michael Allen frequently cites his interview with Mills-Griffiths, and further interprets this redefinition of the term POW/MIA as a tactic the NLPF and its sympathizers in the federal government used to raise the American public's awareness of the POW/MIA issue and increase pressure on national leaders and the Vietnamese.<sup>85</sup>

The redefinition created an important perceptual shift. The term POW/MIA evoked some hope of survival. While the military could declare POW/MIAs dead due to the absence of contradictory evidence, POW/MIA activists could now pose an equally strong claim that these men might still be alive.<sup>86</sup> By merging KIA/BNRs into POW/MIAs, pilots who failed to parachute out of their stricken aircraft over Vietnam became possibly surviving POWs. Soldiers buried in cemeteries or unmarked graves in North Korea, and even those who lay at the bottom of the sea, were also redefined as hostages of the DPRK. Rescuing all of them turned out to be an impossible and never-ending mission, and the POW/MIA campaigners could perpetuate their mission despite the military's effort to account for the POW/MIAs.

Yet it would be wrong to declare the military as the loser and the activists as the

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<sup>84</sup> Ann Mills-Griffiths, interview by the author, April 17, 2018

<sup>85</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 209.

<sup>86</sup> An example of this mentality is given in Gallagher, *Traumatic Defeat*, 118.

winners in this situation. As the new definition of POW/MIA incorporated KIA/BNR, the military did not necessarily need to bring back living POWs, if any remained, in order to actively resolve the POW/MIA issue. Simply by retrieving the bodies of KIA/BNRs, the military could announce an achievement. While some activists would not be satisfied without living POWs, they could not discredit the military's efforts either.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, if the repatriated remains happened to belong to the relatives of activists, these activists might lose the motivation to continue their campaigns. As most official reports and academic studies reveal, there were few pieces of solid evidence to prove that any US POWs were detained after the Korean and Vietnam Wars (and even if this evidence did exist, the North Koreans and Vietnamese were unlikely to acknowledge it). As a consequence, any search for surviving POWs generally led to a dead end. Focusing on the remains instead allowed the military not only to placate some activists but also to fulfill its overdue obligation to offer the KIA/BNRs decent burials.

It is difficult to determine the exact date when the KIA/BNR and POW/MIA categories became officially merged. Allen argues that this occurred when Lieutenant General Eugene F. Tighe of the Defense Intelligence Agency testified before a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on June 27, 1980, that approximately 2,500 Americans were unaccounted for after the Vietnam War, and that the differences among POWs, MIAs, and KIA/BNRs should only be administrative.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> A widely circulated political cartoon in 1986 cited on page 245 of Allen's book and my conversation with Robert Dumas reveal this purported government's preference for bones over living POWs.

<sup>88</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 209-210.



Actually, in the 1976 Montgomery committee's report, the representative wrote that "2,546 did not return to the United States." Although Montgomery admitted that these men were "killed or missing," he did not bother to break down the numbers.<sup>89</sup>

The moment when the Korean War POWs, MIAs, and KIA/BNRs became a single group of POW/MIAs is even less certain. Days after the armistice, the US Army announced that approximately eight thousand men were missing, and that some of them were possibly alive. This was the total number of MIAs on the armistice day minus the 3,597 American POWs who had been released by Chinese and North Korean troops. This figure soon became obsolete as the military began processing intelligence about the missing and debriefing returned POWs.<sup>90</sup> Guild once argued that the official 944/450/389 Lists only represented a tiny fraction of the servicemen missing in Korea, but he never cited the 8,177 number.<sup>91</sup> In 1967, a news article featuring van Wees claimed that over eight thousand men were left behind in the DPRK, although the author did not disclose his source.<sup>92</sup> The 8,177 number of Korean War POW/MIAs has become ubiquitous since the mid-1980s. For instance, on August 5, 1985, a Vietnam War POW/MIA activist implored Reagan, "take the Korea War POWs, we've lost 8,000 men

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<sup>89</sup> *Select Committee Report*, 21.

<sup>90</sup> *Hearings on Cold War, Korea, WWII POWs, Hearings before the Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs*, Senate, 102nd Congress, Second Session, November 10 and 11, 1992, 22

<sup>91</sup> For example, "GI Kin Appeal to UN for Redress of Wrongs Done Their Soldier Sons and Husbands," September 27, 1955, unnumbered flyer of the FHF, Folder HH154 (2), Box 46-4, Hall-Hoag Collection, Brown University Library. He once used a figure of 4,691, which included the MIAs presumed dead and soldiers whose remains had been recovered but not identified.

<sup>92</sup> The article is dated April 15, 1967, as an attachment to Rita van Wees to Mario Braggi, June 2, 1969, Box 2263, Category POL 27-7 KOR N-US, Subject-Numeric Files 67-69, RG59, NARAII.

some of which I feel are still alive which will never return home again.”<sup>93</sup> In a congressional hearing on alleged sightings of American POWs in Vietnam on February 27, 1986, the Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs) stated, “there are 8,200, or so, Americans missing in action, as a result of the Korean conflict.”<sup>94</sup> Representative Montgomery also agreed that over eight thousand men were missing in Korea when he wrote about his reflections on the design of the Korean War Veterans Memorial.<sup>95</sup> The 389 number is rarely mentioned in official documents today, although some POW/MIA activists still hold to it.

### **The Initial Pursuit of Bodies Lost in Korea**

Thanks to the redefinition of POW/MIA, soldiers who had long been confirmed dead in Korea were resurrected in the minds of POW/MIA activists as aged men languishing behind iron bars in North Korea who must be rescued. Following the procedures for accounting for Vietnam War POW/MIAs, the US military began in 1982 to approach the North Koreans at the MAC to seek permission to recover the bodies of its fallen members. Korean War veterans and POW/MIA activists also promoted the recovery of soldiers’ remains lost in Korea.

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<sup>93</sup> Cheryl D. Cooper to Reagan, August 5, 1985, Folder POW/MIA Correspondence August to December 1985 (5), RAC Box 14, RTC Files, Reagan Library.

<sup>94</sup> “*Live Sighting*” *Reports of Americans Listed as Missing in Action in Southeast Asia, Hearings before the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs*, Senate, Ninety-Ninth Congress, Second Session, January 28 and 30, February 27, 1986, Volume 1, 181.

<sup>95</sup> House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs to Donald P. Hodel, March 25, 1987, Folder Korean War Veterans Board 2, Box OA18830, Office of Presidential Personnel Records, Reagan Library.

The reintroduction of the topic of US soldiers' remains lost in North Korea at MAC meetings was likely inspired by the progress made in Vietnam. In the early 1980s, not only did the US military focus on recovering bodies to account for the POW/MIAs lost in Vietnam, but the Vietnamese government was also willing to use the remains to improve its relationship with the United States. Vietnam was desperate to extricate itself from the embargo imposed by the United States while it engaged in a war of attrition with China.<sup>96</sup> Reintroducing the topic of POW/MIAs' remains at the MAC following the US-Vietnam model, rather than adhering to the alleged survival of POWs, was inevitable. To elicit the DPRK's cooperation, the UN Command (UNC) returned the bones of two Chinese soldiers found in South Korea and the corpses of North Korean civilians that had been washed ashore south of the DMZ in 1981 and 1982.<sup>97</sup>

The first three years of talks over remains were as futile as those related to POWs due to the manner in which the US military introduced this topic. On December 21, 1982, the UNC brought up the issue of remains at the 415th MAC meeting, specifically the bodies buried outside POW Camp Five at Pyoktong, where the mortality of US POWs was high. It seemed that the US officers of the UNC in this meeting depicted the bodies as those of POWs who had been murdered during the war or who had expired there after the armistice. The North Koreans, who had been subject to such accusations for decades,

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<sup>96</sup> Sarah E. Wagner, "A Curious Trade: The Recovery and Repatriation of US Missing in Action from the Vietnam War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57 no.1 (2015): 167, 175-176.

<sup>97</sup> "Fact Sheet on Americans Unaccounted for in the Korean War," June 9, 1986, Folder POW/MIA Korea (3), RAC Box 15, RTC files, Reagan Library.

ignored this request. In the following three years, whenever the US officers brought up the issue of remains, they also confronted their DPRK counterparts with the twenty-year-old 389 List. Furthermore, when the UNC side requested the remains, it provided limited information about the location of remains and did not promise any reimbursement or technical support.<sup>98</sup> The North Korean People's Army (KPA) officers at the MAC likely thought that their US opponents were again using non-existent POWs to portray their people as ruthless kidnappers. The North Koreans regarded the UNC demands as a continuation of hostility rather than as a sincere proposal for cooperation.

The turning point came in October 1985. On two separate occasions, North Korean officials informally hinted that they might launch a search for American soldiers' remains if the US government could meet two political conditions. First, a formal request must be made by the United States, and second, the request must be made by the US government, rather than the UNC.<sup>99</sup> The first condition would create the illusion that the DPRK was on par with the United States, who was forced to beg the DPRK before obtaining the remains.

The second condition reflected North Korea's goal of being recognized by the United States as a legitimate regime and seeking to engage with it as an equal partner. As mentioned in the Introduction, this goal dates back to the USS Pueblo incident (1968). In the years immediately following the incident, the DPRK tended to rely on military

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<sup>98</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. III, 62-63.

<sup>99</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. III, 63.

provocations to directly engage the United States; by 1985, North Korea was likely considering a different strategy as its major allies, China and the USSR, were overhauling their political systems and approaching the West. A key step to direct engagement was to delegitimize the UNC and circumvent the MAC. Since the 1960s, North Korea had continually challenged the legitimacy of the UNC. Meanwhile, the UNC lost its UN façade and had become little more than a joint command of US and ROK forces, as other countries fighting under the UNC in the Korean War had withdrawn their troops. While the intra-Korea negotiations were ongoing in the 1970s, US diplomats even considered its dissolution.<sup>100</sup> Since ROK officers usually presented at the MAC talks, bypassing the MAC would allow the North Koreans to ignore the Seoul regime, which they deemed illegitimate. Moreover, confronting the UNC meant that North Korea still regarded the UN as an enemy, which would be detrimental to its pursuit of UN membership.<sup>101</sup> However, because recognizing the Pyongyang regime was out of the question in the 1980s, some US statesmen preferred to communicate with the DPRK via the MAC even if it meant that this would delay the repatriation of remains.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> US Embassy, Seoul to the Secretary of State, Incoming Telegram No.484, January 11, 1963, Folder Korea Cables (January 1963), Box 129, National Security Files, Kennedy Library; The Secretary of State to the UN Mission of the US, Draft Letter on Korea to UN Security Council President, June 24, 1975, Folder People's Republic of China-Korea (5), Box 9, and "Legal Aspects of the UN Presence in Korea," Folder Korea-UN Command (Working Files) 2, Box 52, NSC Staff for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Working Files, Ford Library.

<sup>101</sup> The Letter to the Congress of the United States of America by the Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, March 25, 1974, Folder North Korea, Box 61, Ford Vice Presidential Papers, Ford Library. In the MAC secretariat meetings in the 1970s, North Koreans persistently ignored the credentials of South Korean officers for such meetings, and thus treated the talks as bilateral US-North Korea talks.

<sup>102</sup> US Consul, Seoul, to the Secretary of Defense, "Security Consul Joint Communique," June 9, 1988, Folder Korea (June 1-20, 1988), Box 4, James A. Kelly Files, Reagan Library.

Consequently, the new deadlock regarding Korean War POW/MIAs was over determining whether the return of bodies should be governed by the Korean War Armistice Agreement (a reminder of the US-DPRK hostility) and handled via the MAC. In an attempt to preserve this commission's authority regarding debates over the remains, US military officers contended that the return of remains via the MAC was in accordance with subparagraph 13.f of the Armistice Agreement and with a supplementary treaty, which specified the procedures for returning bodies. They insisted that the UNC was the only lawful recipient of the bodies. Furthermore, by emphasizing that the POW/MIAs lost in North Korea included not only Americans, but also citizens of South Korea, Britain, Turkey, and other nations, they argued that only the UNC could represent the interest of all soldiers who had fought in the Korean War. While their insistence on using the MAC to return the remains had politicized this issue by substantiating the US non-recognition policy toward the DPRK, the US military insisted that the search for and recovery of bodies was purely a humanitarian and moral act no matter where it occurred.<sup>103</sup> For these US officers at the MAC, humanitarianism meant maintaining the status quo in Korea.

In order to exclude the MAC from this controversial issue, KPA officials found a critical flaw in the Americans' reasoning.<sup>104</sup> Subparagraph 13.f only included the bodies

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<sup>103</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. III, 63-71.

<sup>104</sup> UN Command, "482nd MAC Secretaries Meeting Held," news release, May 26, 1987, Folder News Clippings, Box 4La123, Laurence Jolidon Collection, Briscoe Center. Also see Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. III, 63-71.

at known burial locations that were jointly confirmed. Even the supplementary treaty signed at the 47th MAC meeting only obligated both sides to return any hostile combatants' bodies that they happened to find through the MAC. Thus, the United States was in no position to use the armistice agreement to demand that the DPRK comb its territory for dead Americans. The North Koreans were well aware of this point. For example, on September 11, 1986, after reviewing all terms pertaining to remains, a KPA spokesman made the following statement:

Accordingly, the MAC can arrange the delivery and reception of remains, when *discovered*, to suit it's[sic] function but the question of *disinterring* remains for their delivery cannot be solved in the MAC as the Armistice Agreement has no provision for it [...] nevertheless, the UNC side of the MAC brought up at the Secretaries meeting the question whose solution is beyond the capability of the MAC...in the past we, proceeding from the humanitarian position, expressed on many occasions our intention to conduct negotiations with the *US side* to settle the problem of remains.<sup>105</sup>[emphasis mine]

The “discovered” remains referred to bodies that had been accidentally unearthed during farming or construction work. These bodies were therefore under the jurisdiction of the armistice agreement. In contrast, “disinterring” meant exhumation after extensive investigation, which was not bound by the agreement, according to the North Koreans.

The DPRK's apparent adherence to the armistice agreement was an illusion. It had breached the agreement almost monthly at the DMZ over the past decades and hoped to replace it with a bilateral treaty with the United States. The DPRK must have recognized the potential value of the remains in achieving this objective and thus refused

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<sup>105</sup> “Spokesman of the DPR of Korea side of the MAC Gave A Talk on September 11, 1986,” Folder News Clippings, Box 4Ae60, Laurence Jolidon Collection, Briscoe Center.

to surrender the bodies without a cost. The agreement offered an excuse to reject the Americans' requests for its cooperation if only the UNC was involved in recovering bodies. This was also a possible reason why North Korea did not permit the veterans of the Chosin Few or the KWVA to retrieve the remains of their comrades-in-arms, because the US government were unlikely to not endorse their trip.<sup>106</sup>

As the Americans could not enter the DPRK to search for deceased US servicemen, they focused on bodies in the ROK. As discussed in Chapter II, about 2,500 men were officially listed POW/MIAs were lost in South Korea. Active searches for their bodies did not resume until the 2000s; however, in the 1980s, there was a significant shift in the Defense Department's reporting of recovering US soldiers' bodies in South Korea. For a long time after Operation Glory, the military or the media did not well publicize the return of the remains of American soldiers from South Korea or consider it as progress in resolving the Korean War POW/MIA issue. However, since the casualty categories of KIA/BNR and POW/MIA merged after the Vietnam War, bodies exhumed in South Korea were spotlighted by Korean War POW/MIA organizations and by the Pentagon in the ongoing mission to account for POW/MIAs.

The first achievement in accounting for Korean War POW/MIAs, according to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, was the discovery of Master Sergeant John R.

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<sup>106</sup> The North Koreans' violations of the armistice agreement are recorded in the minutes of MAC meetings. As I have discussed in my introduction, the DPRK had been determined to void the armistice agreement. In the 1980s, the United States did not allow its citizens, let alone government officials, to visit North Korea, except in very rare cases.



McInnis in 1981. On October 31, 1981, an ROK policeman taking a break next to a highway discovered the skullcap, the mandible, eight teeth, the ID tag, and various pieces of rusty equipment belonging to McInnis, thirty-one years after he went missing near the city of Chonui. Montgomery's communication with ROK officials and McInnis's relatives made the congressman and this discovery a popular topic for journalists on both sides of the Pacific for about four months.<sup>107</sup> A second body was recovered six years later in Chinju. Anthropological and material evidence led to its identification as Corporal Jack L. Walkers. In addition to some media attention, the KWVA dedicated its fourth reunion and its celebration of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Korean War armistice to this soldier.<sup>108</sup> The repatriation of McInnis and Walker, which were the result of sheer luck when South Korean civilians came across them, were the only cases of Korean War POW/MIAs to be resolved in the 1980s. However, due to the fact that the return of bodies had at that time become the only way to account for POW/MIAs, the military regarded the two soldiers' repatriation as a milestone achievement.

The active search for bodies in South Korea was pioneered by the POW/MIA activists of a lesser-known group, Project Freedom for All American POW/MIAs. According to its advertising materials, a group of Korean War veterans and POW/MIA activists, including van Wees and Dumas, launched Project Freedom. The White House

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<sup>107</sup> Most relevant materials are collected in Folder Sgt. John R. McInnis, Box 98, Series 16, GVM Papers, Grant Library; also see Paul M. Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I (Santa Monica: CA, Rand, 1994), 285-286.

<sup>108</sup> *The Graybeards* 3, January to April 1988, front cover story. However, the body of a soldier who was recovered in October 1986 in South Korea did not get the same attention as McInnis and Walker. He was even ignored by Paul Cole when Cole finished his POW/MIA study for the Defense Department in 1994, probably because he was not identified until the 2000s.

described this group as one “among the smaller of a multitude of POW/MIA groups,” not deserving of an individual meeting with the president when the group proposed that a sculpture depicting the suffering of POW/MIAs be displayed in the White House.<sup>109</sup> Its primary goal was likely to circulate reports about US POWs still alive but detained after the Korean and Vietnam Wars.<sup>110</sup>

The search promoted by Project Freedom must be viewed in the context of the ubiquitous post-Vietnam War charges that the Pentagon was failing to collect information about missing POWs, which these advocates hoped to prove through their archival research and the retrieval of the bodies that the military had once declared to be unrecoverable. It drafted a proposal to search for remains in South Korea, particularly at two sites, Ha Dong and Umi, where the US 24th Infantry Division was overrun by the KPA in 1950. The activists assumed these two sites to be the resting place of the remains of at least a few dozen soldiers. They found this information when perusing the transcripts of repatriated POWs’ testimonies and were shocked to discover that the military had failed to heed the burial information when it interrogated these POWs. To confirm their hunch that soldiers were still buried there, in September 1983, three members of Project Freedom, all veterans of the Korean War, flew to South Korea. After speaking with ROK Army veterans and local villagers, they identified several possible

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<sup>109</sup> Memorandum for Gregory J. Newell from William P. Clark, “Sculpture Presentation (Project Freedom),” January 15, 1982, Folder POW/MIA Private Lobby—Project Freedom, RAC Box 16, RTC Files, Reagan Library.

<sup>110</sup> For example, see “Account for Missing Americans,” *Spotlight*, September 7, 1981, 25, a photocopy is in Folder Open POW Cases, Box 4La134, Laurence Jolidon Collection, Briscoe Center.

gravesites to be excavated. While they were pleased with and confident in their findings, according to their statements, they became dejected when the Defense Department and the US Embassy in Seoul did not offer them any technical or diplomatic support for the excavation. Consequently, they delivered a thick binder of supporting documents dating back to the 1950s on October 6, 1983, to Senator Paula Hawkins (R-FL), hoping to have their request conveyed to the president.<sup>111</sup>

The binder of documents was given extraordinarily special attention by the Pentagon. In December 1983, Defense Department officials met with the president of Project Freedom to analyze the excavation proposal. After conducting its own research on these two sites, the military concluded that Ha Dong had already been investigated in 1967, and that all remains of US soldiers had been removed, while in Umi American and Korean soldiers had been hastily buried together in mass graves. In spite of this information, the Defense Department secured permission for excavation from the ROK government after months of bureaucratic process.<sup>112</sup> Finally, in the summer and fall of 1984, US forces in Korea dispatched engineers, explosive handling specialists, medical personnel, and helicopters to the two sites. Members of Project Freedom observed the exhumation of human remains, hoping to find the bodies of their fellow soldiers. To their disappointment, army forensic experts soon realized that the recovered bones belonged to

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<sup>111</sup> Clyde A. Fore to Paula Hawkins, October 6, 1983, and its enclosure no.1 Memorandum for Record, September 20, 1983, Folder POW/MIA 1, Box 45, Morton Blackwell Series IV Files, Reagan Library.

<sup>112</sup> Robert M. Kimmitt to Lewis Millett, April 13, 1984, Folder POW/MIA Private Lobby—Project Freedom, RAC Box 16, RTC Files, Reagan Library.

Koreans, as the military had predicted.<sup>113</sup> While Project Freedom had gained some media attention during the excavation, there is little indication of later efforts by this group. It may have become inactive by the age of the internet.

### **Identifying the Dead in the Vietnam War Era**

In general, procedures for identifying dead soldiers during the Vietnam War were similar to those that had been established during the latter half of the Korean War. Fallen soldiers were immediately evacuated from battle zones, shipped to a central laboratory in the theater of war, and identified via dental records and various forensic anthropological methods. These procedures were so effective that there were only four unidentified bodies left as candidates for the Tomb of the Unknowns.<sup>114</sup> However, during and after the Vietnam War, political concerns sometimes prompted POW/MIA activists to reject the identification of their loved ones.

Since the deactivation of the Central Identification Unit (CIU) for the Korean War in 1956, there had been few additions to the military's forensic arsenal. By 1976, the US Army had published three versions of its standard procedures for identifying deceased military personnel. The 1956 version was compiled based on the CIU's operations during the Korean War. A new edition published eight years later differed very little. Blood

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<sup>113</sup> T. I. Kwon and Bill Fullerton, "Quiet Returns to Umi-Ri," *VFW Magazine*, June 1985, 30-32

<sup>114</sup> By the time an unknown body was selected for the Vietnam War vault of the Tomb of the Unknowns, not many dead bodies had been repatriated by the Vietnamese or Laotian governments. The bodies repatriated in the 1980s were much more difficult to identify than those recovered during the war.

typing appeared as a new method for identifying fresh bodies (though it had been proposed in the 1956 version). Blood type was to be determined from blood, tissue, or bone marrow, which could be used to either segregate commingled remains into specific individuals or substantiate individual identification when other methods failed to yield convincing results.<sup>115</sup> Another new segregating tool was shortwave ultraviolet rays, which work based on the correlation between the composition of bones and the color or pattern of the light reflected from them upon exposure to such rays.<sup>116</sup>

Two new features of the 1964 version reflected the lessons from the Korean War. In the later stage of the war, frontline troops and graves registration personnel were no longer tasked with identifying bodies on battlefields, except inventorying the materials useful for identification (like ID tags). The new version, therefore, left out all guidelines pertaining to the temporary burial of bodies and their identification on battlefields. Identification procedures only began when bodies were delivered to a Central Identification Laboratory (CIL) located in the war theater. As discussed earlier, after 1952, remains recovered from Korea were immediately airlifted to Japan for identification. Before decomposition set in, bodies recovered from battlefields could be positively identified within days via fingerprints, dental patterns, stature, tattoos, and personal items. This advantage likely convinced the Army to eliminate burial and

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<sup>115</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Technical Manual TM 10-286, Identification of Deceased Personnel* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1964), 9-10.

<sup>116</sup> *TM 10-286* (1964), Appendix IV. This technology was tried during the Korean War, but not widely used then. See Ellis R. Kerley to T. Dale Stewart, May 16, 1955, Folder Letters to Kerley, Box 8, Thomas D. Stewart Collection (hereafter TDS Collection), National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter NAA), Suitland, MD.

identification on battlefields in future conflicts, as long as logistics permitted.

The second feature was the result of forensic research on identifying bodies during the Korean War. The 1964 manual contained pages of charts, algorithms, tables, and illustrations to elucidate the association between age and hipbone (innominate) morphology and the estimation of a person's stature based on the length of long bones (humerus, radius, ulna, femur, tibia, fibula, or some combinations thereof).<sup>117</sup> These data and correlations were obtained from studying the thousands of bodies collected from battlefields in Korea. For example, the hipbone-age correlation was derived from Smithsonian Institution anthropologist Thomas D. Stewart's research on over 450 soldiers' bodies in various stages of decomposition that had been recovered from Operation Glory.<sup>118</sup> Before the war, anthropologists had to work on abandoned bodies collected from urban slums; consequently, they were only occasionally able to check the accuracy of the estimation of individuals' age based on bone morphology. According to Stewart, their old algorithms were subject to errors, which could be corrected through data obtained from Korea.<sup>119</sup> Research on stature also benefited from the war. In the 1940s, anthropologists only had access to a nineteenth-century formula to estimate body stature from the length of certain long bones. An anthropologist who identified bodies for

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<sup>117</sup> *TM 10-286* (January 1964), Appendix II and III.

<sup>118</sup> *Technical Report EP-45 Skeletal Age Changes in Young American Males* (Natick, MA: Quartermaster Research and Development Center, 1957), 8; and "C. G. Calloway to the Quartermaster General, May 31, 1957," attached to this book, kept in Box 1, Thomas D. Stewart Operation Glory Collection (hereafter TDSOG Collection), NAA.

<sup>119</sup> Coleman, "Recovering the Korean War Dead," 215; T. D. Stewart, "Abstract, Degree of Accuracy in Estimates of Chronological Age of Human Skeletons," Folder 6, Box 14, TDSOG Collection, NAA.

the military after WWII, Mildred Trotter, developed new stature formulas by studying over 1,200 bodies in the early 1950s and refined her theories with new data obtained from Korean War casualties.<sup>120</sup>

Based on experience gained in the Vietnam War, the US Army published another technical manual in 1976 that closely resembled the 1964 version. This edition updated some examples of identification, but the general identification procedures remained unchanged. Fingerprints, dental records, and body stature inferred from the length of long bones were still the primary methods for identifying remains. During the Vietnam War, because US forces usually secured the battlefields after skirmishes and deployed helicopters to evacuate the dead, the bodies were not decomposed upon arrival at forensic laboratories.<sup>121</sup> Thus, forensic technicians were able to utilize a combination of fingerprints and dental records for identification. By 1968, over 75 percent of recovered bodies were identified by fingerprints.<sup>122</sup> The only major method introduced in the 1976 version was facial superimposition, in which the image of a person's skull is compared to a photograph taken when he or she was alive. However, the manual specified that this method should only be used "on rare occasions," when medical records had been lost or other evidence was unavailable.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Coleman, "Recovering the Korean War Dead," 214, 216.

<sup>121</sup> Wagner, "A Curious Trade," 169.

<sup>122</sup> Wesley A. Nepp, "Procedures Used by the US Army to Ensure Proper Identification of the Vietnam War Dead and Their Acceptance by the Next of Kin," in T. D. Stewart (ed.) *Personal Identification in Mass Disasters* (Washington DC: National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, 1970), 5-9.

<sup>123</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Field Manual FM 10-286, Identification of Deceased Personnel* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1976), Appendix N.

The 1976 manual also included two long chapters extensively illustrating all human bones and teeth in great detail. This probably reflected the growing importance of dental records and bone morphology in identifying decomposed bodies during the two conflicts. In 1976, based on data from the US military, Representative Montgomery reported that ten percent of a skeleton was enough for identification “if the dental portion is recovered or if a uniquely characteristic bone exists.” Otherwise, at least 65 percent of a body was required.<sup>124</sup> However, as the forensic reports from the Vietnam War era are still classified, it is impossible to evaluate the accuracy of his statement.

Based on contemporary correspondence between military agencies and servicemen’s families that revealed piecemeal information regarding the identification process, it seems that actual practices during the Vietnam War sometimes deviated from the manuals. For example, in one case in which a soldier’s race, age, height, teeth, and personal items all matched the description of his recovered body, the Defense Department informed the NLPF that the primary method for identifying him was facial superimposition.<sup>125</sup> The military sent this message to the NLPF at a time when the latter was charging it with prematurely declaring service members dead. Emphasizing the use of a sophisticated method was likely to convince the NLPF that the military was employing the latest techniques and sparing no effort to verify the fate of each

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<sup>124</sup> *Select Committee Report*, 210. Since 1976, CIL had been relocated to Hawaii and in charge of all overseas casualties.

<sup>125</sup> Roger E. Shields to Dermot G. Forley, April 25, 1974, Folder MIA/POW Mar 11 to July 5, 1974, Box 61, Ford Vice Presidential Papers, Ford Library.



POW/MIA. In another case, after reviewing the search for the body of a US civilian, senior anthropologist Charles P. Warren of the CIL in Thailand proclaimed it imperative that the “division of labor between the activities of Search and Recovery personnel and the activities of the Central Identification Laboratory personnel” be enforced.<sup>126</sup> This statement indicated that the CIL was unable to monopolize the identification process during the Vietnam War.

During the Vietnam War, some servicemen’s families insisted on inspecting the bodies of their loved ones due to their distrust of the military, as some families had during the Korean War. Their suspicions similarly arose out of concerns that the military had sent back random bones in sealed coffins to convince them that their relatives had perished, even though these service members might have a chance of survival. Evident inconsistencies in these servicemen’s casualty reports reinforced this skepticism. Citing these discrepancies, these families intended to expose the Defense Department’s duplicity on the POW/MIA issue.

In early 1963, likely influenced by the rumor that American POWs were abandoned in Korea, Mrs. Shaughnessy (first name unknown) announced her doubts regarding the identification of her husband, who had been reported killed in Vietnam. When Captain John F. Shaughnessy Jr. was shot down, his initial casualty report revealed that no human remains were found in his aircraft wreckage, information that his wife

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<sup>126</sup> Case file of Steven A. Haukness, Box 78, Entry A1-5307, RG59, NARAII.

initially accepted as true. Three days later, she was shocked to learn that her husband's burnt torso was en route to Houston, but that his casket should not be opened. The identification report of the pilot was also confusing. While the airman's head was said to have been lost during the crash, the military once stated that dental comparison had contributed to his identification, which was in fact based on his fingerprints. After reading the conflicting reports, his wife succeeded in getting permission to open the casket and had a priest check the cadaver, which failed to convince her of her husband's death. She suspected that the government wanted to soothe her grief by returning a body allegedly belonging to her husband but ignored the possibility of his capture (and thus put no effort into rescuing him). She continued to hold on to the hope that her husband had survived and began to participate in POW/MIA campaigns. Her congressman Robert R. Casey (D-TX) thought that he had succeeded "in discouraging her from getting mixed up in the political aspects of this [her husband's case]" in 1963. He found, however, that a year later, Mrs. Shaughnessy "might very well be more inclined now to be used by someone" to politicize her husband's death.<sup>127</sup>

Because POW/MIA organizations became much more politically active after the war, doubts about the accuracy of the military's identification increased as well, as accepting a serviceman's body would disqualify his relatives from POW/MIA activism. On August 29, 1973, Phyllis Melinn, mother of Staff Sergeant Rick E. Medaris and a

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<sup>127</sup> Bob Casey to Walter Jenkins, May 13, 1964, and the attached narrative on April 4, 1963, Folder ND 9-2 S, Box 49, WHCF-ND, Johnson Library.

plaintiff in *McDonald v. McLucas*, faced a dilemma. While she was notified that her son's body had been identified, she and her co-plaintiffs were gaining momentum in this case. Although Melinn demanded that the military bury the body, she decided to reject his identification and an official report of her son's death, nor did she allow the military to have other anthropologists examine the body. By leaving the body unidentified, she could contend that her son was still alive and continue her campaigns. The military concluded that if she accepted the identification, this would "prejudice her position as a plaintiff in the McDonald case," and make her ineligible for her son's income, which would accrue indefinitely if his death was not declared.<sup>128</sup> It is difficult to determine the extent to which this financial issue had motivated the activists to insist on their relatives' survival.

The selection of an unidentified body for the Vietnam vault of the Tomb of the Unknowns best demonstrated the fact that political concerns regarding Vietnam War POW/MIAs demanded that identifiable bodies remain unknown. When the time for selection came, however, the activists hoped to identify the body, while the country's leaders prevented its identification. There were then only four unidentified bodies held at the CIL in Hawaii (CILHI) that might fit the strict criteria to be selected for this national shrine (US servicemen honorably killed in Southeast Asia).<sup>129</sup> CILHI eliminated three of

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<sup>128</sup> Roger E. Shields to Dermot G. Foley, April 25, 1974, and Verne L. Bowers to Gerald R. Ford, n.d., Folder MIA/POW Mar 11 to July 5, 1974, Box 61, Ford Vice Presidential Papers, Ford Library.

<sup>129</sup> There may be extra criteria for selecting the remains, for example, must be almost complete, not cremated, not commingled, no clue of identification, et cetera. See "Criteria for Selection of An Unknown," likely printed in 1977, in Folder PA-1 Executive January 20, 1977, to December 31, 1978, White House Central Files, Subject Files PA-1, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, GA. This meant that many fragmented, commingled remains were automatically disqualified for the tomb though they were also unidentifiable. However, the recoverable body of Blassie was only a small portion of a man's skeleton.

them because it was not sure whether they were deserters, civilians, or non-Americans.

The last one, which was ultimately selected for the shrine, was later identified in 1998 as First Lieutenant Michael J. Blassie.

Politics outweighed forensic evidence in the controversial burial of Blassie as an unknown serviceman. Equipment and personal items recovered from his crash site indicated that four ribs, a pelvis, and a humerus lying in his aircraft wreckage belonged to Blassie. However, blood-typing of a trace hair on his flight suit and measurement of the recovered bones (which were later found to be erroneous) cast doubt on the original identification. Despite the high possibility of identifying him through further analysis, this body became the safest option for the tomb. The NLPF and other POW/MIA activists protested the selection out of fear that it would signal the end of the search for living POWs in Southeast Asia, likely since the WWI and Korean War unknowns were selected shortly after the military had disposed of all casualties. However, President Reagan, the main supporter of POW/MIA activists, expedited the burial of Lieutenant Blassie as unknown. Siding with the more established, patriotic veteran groups such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Gold Star Mothers Inc., he proceeded to bury the Vietnam War unknown soldier as an essential element in creating the “noble cause” narrative of the war and healing the war-torn society.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 237-239; Wagner, “The Making and Unmaking of an Unknown Soldier,” 634-641.

## Conclusion

Two decades after the Korean War, reemergence of the rumors that US POWs had been abandoned to their captors contributed to considerable interaction between activists of the two wars and ensured that Korean War POW/MIAs would not remain a footnote in this country's history. The veterans of Korean War POW/MIA campaigns warned the American public that some POWs would never be released after the US forces had to withdraw from Vietnam. It was, however, the extraordinarily influential Vietnam War POW/MIA activists who reinvigorated the country's concerns for the men lost in North Korea. These activists took up the issue of Korean War POW/MIAs to reinforce their own cause. The military was also interested in aligning POW/MIA issues of the two wars together in an effort to dilute the influence of hardcore Vietnam War POW/MIA activists.

The most significant contribution of the Vietnam War POW/MIA activists to their Korean War counterparts was their success in redefining the concept POW/MIA. Determined to prevent the military from prematurely declaring missing soldiers of the Vietnam War dead, the activists blurred the line between soldiers who vanished on battlefields and those who were known to have been killed but whose bodies were unrecovered. Therefore, according to these activists, any deceased service member whose body was not returned became a possible POW still being held by his captors. To resolve the POW/MIA issue, the US military not only had to retrieve the bodies of missing soldiers to confirm their fate but also recover the bodies of those whose deaths had been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt. This redefinition created the misconception that as

many as 8,177 US POWs were never released by their captors after 1953, which would be shocking to any unsuspecting reader of POW/MIA stories.

Due to this change, the bodies of American soldiers stuck in North Korea attracted the attention of both the US military and the POW/MIA activists. This situation prompted the UNC to again ask the DPRK for access to the lost bodies. The DPRK's prerequisite for cooperation was a bilateral US-DPRK mission, which meant a de facto recognition of the Pyongyang regime by the United States. Negotiations for bodies lost in the DPRK became stalled, as such recognition contradicted US foreign policy. To overcome the impasse, alternative approaches in addition to recognition needed to be improvised, which is the major theme of Chapter V.

As previously stated, the forensic techniques utilized to identify servicemen killed in the Vietnam War were mostly those developed during the Korean War. Political concerns, rather than uncertainties about the effectiveness of the technology, motivated some families to reject their loved ones' remains. However, while the technology was overall capable of identifying bodies recovered during the war, those repatriated after years of exposure to the tropical weather of Vietnam and those to be returned by North Korea in the 1990s, which were extraordinarily fragmented or commingled, posed an unprecedented challenge to the CILHI staff and the forensic methods available at the time. How CILHI endeavored to overcome this challenge is the topic of Chapter VI.

## CHAPTER V: CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

On the morning of May 28, 1990, Panmunjom, site of the Korean War Military Armistice Commission (MAC), observed a solemn ceremony for which thousands of American families had waited thirty-six years. Li Song-Ho, deputy to the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK, handed five caskets and five tiny boxes to a US congressional delegation led by Representative Gillespie V. Montgomery. This was the first time since Operation Glory (1954) that the DPRK had returned the remains of US soldiers in a formal, diplomatic manner rather than just having military troops transport them across the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Among the Americans attending the ceremony was Lieutenant Colonel Don Byers, the only Korean War veteran still on active duty and stationed in Korea, who commented, "I feel happiness, sadness, bitterness[...] I want to know where the rest are. Why five, why not 500?"<sup>1</sup>

The DPRK returned only five bodies in 1990, rather than hundreds of them, partly due to its diplomatic ambitions that emerged in the mid-1980s. Admittedly, in the early 1990s, North Korea was unlikely to have several hundred sets of US soldiers' remains preserved in a mortuary. It, however, must have had considerable information about the burial location of American servicemen, and perhaps had unearthed a few more bodies, which the DPRK was unwilling to offer before observing any mitigation in the US animosity toward North Korea.<sup>2</sup> Since 1954, the MAC had achieved little success in

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<sup>1</sup> Associated Press, "Bodies of 5 Korea War Victims Returned to U.S.," *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 1990, 28.

<sup>2</sup> On the curation of bodies, see Paul M. Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1994),

retrieving the remains of US servicemen missing in North Korea. Only in 1985 did the DPRK declare that they would cooperate with the Americans in locating and returning these remains, assuming that the MAC would not intervene in such action. While the United States was reluctant to engage directly with a regime it deemed illegitimate, its political and military leaders had to weigh the country's diplomatic decisions against mounting domestic pressure from those who believed that it was beyond time to resume a repatriation suspended for nearly four decades, as discussed in Chapter IV.

Meanwhile, in Pyongyang, DPRK leaders were beginning to contemplate their place in a post-Cold War world. Instead of capitulating to the Western Bloc like many of its European and Asian ex-allies, the DPRK sought to use its access to US soldiers' remains to win concessions from the Americans in the form of currency, fuel, and food. More importantly, rather than talking with the US military at the MAC, the DPRK pursued bilateral negotiations with the US government, whose participation would imply that the United States acknowledged the legitimacy of the Pyongyang regime. The DPRK also attempted to achieve this goal by brandishing nuclear arms; nuclear crisis in Korea has thus complicated the repatriation of US servicemen's remains.

The changing ways in which the DPRK has strategically used US servicemen's remains mirror the critical inflection points in the relationship between the two countries. This chapter argues that the return of bodies between 1990 and 2018 can be divided into

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256, 261. Cole believed that the DPRK was unlikely to have stored a large number of bodies for decades. The curated bodies, however, were supposed to be promptly returned to the UNC according to the Armistice Agreement.



four major stages, based on the political or financial concessions offered by the United States, which were reflected in part by the channel through which the bodies were delivered. In the first stage, from 1990 to 1991, the DPRK offered bodies to reward prominent US statesmen who engaged with their North Korean counterparts outside the MAC. Such unofficial bilateral talks likely convinced the North Koreans that the US government would ultimately recognize the DPRK, and so the soldiers' remains may have helped maintain the movement toward a bilateral relationship. In the second stage, between 1992 and 1994, the United States and the DPRK managed to reach a short-lived agreement emphasizing bilateral cooperation on repatriation, and the DPRK temporarily resorted to the MAC channel to return remains. The third stage lasted a decade (1996—2005), in which US military personnel entered the DPRK and worked with their North Korean counterparts to recover remains. The two countries' major disputes during this time focused on reimbursement for the North Koreans' work in exhumation. During the Clinton era, the DPRK adopted the ethically questionable but pragmatic policy of trading the remains for food and financial aid from the United States, but George W. Bush's "axis of evil" policy toward the DPRK and the renewal of North Korean nuclear projects doomed the joint mission of recovering bodies. Since 2005, although both countries have attempted to resume the joint mission, the DPRK has reverted to its first-stage practice of offering bodies to visiting American statesmen, as evidenced by the repatriation of fifty-five boxes of remains in 2018 after the Donald Trump-Kim Jong-Un Singapore Summit. Although there have been multiple joint declarations regarding critical security issues

since 1990, the repatriation of servicemen's remains seems to have been the single solid achievement of US engagement with the DPRK.

It is critical to analyze the only successful cooperation between the two countries in the context of their consistent saber-rattling across the DMZ and the nuclear crisis in Korea. As a historian, however, there are considerable challenges. Most files pertaining to North Korea are still classified and so I depended upon congressional documents, news articles, US government press releases, memoirs, and secondary sources. Sources from North Korea are limited to its state propaganda. Unofficial visits by private US citizens or statesmen to North Korea or its UN office in New York City are poorly documented. The only exception is Montgomery's visit in 1990, as relevant records were donated to his alma mater after his death. Through news articles and interviews with American participants, I was able to develop a limited picture of the US-DPRK negotiations during this period, but a full recounting is not yet possible.

### **Prying Open the Reclusive Regime**

An accurate interpretation of DPRK policies regarding the return of US soldiers' remains requires some context—specifically, that of North Korea's ambition to win the Korean War that never formally ends. The DPRK's victory in this war means unifying the Korean Peninsula and creating a single, legitimate regime equal to other countries in the world, which could be symbolized by a single UN membership and direct US-DPRK

talks.<sup>3</sup> During the war, North Korea's opponent was the UN Command (UNC). As the DPRK endeavored to secure a UN seat in the 1980s, confronting the UNC at the MAC ran counter to this diplomatic objective.<sup>4</sup> When American officers confronted their DPRK peers in the MAC after 1985, the North Koreans adamantly denied the MAC's authority to handle the recovery of US soldiers' remains. In 1987, DPRK officials even turned down an offer of deceased DPRK soldiers delivered through the MAC, even though it had accepted bodies this way for decades.<sup>5</sup> The US-ROK alliance was also an obstacle should the DPRK ever need to resort to war to reunify the peninsula, and so the DPRK sought to undermine this alliance on every possible occasion. As some American statesmen believed, talks over US soldiers' remains without involving the MAC, and thus the UNC (by then merely a US-ROK joint military command) resulted in South Koreans feeling betrayed.<sup>6</sup>

The DPRK's attitude toward the MAC and the US government's refusal to recognize the Pyongyang regime resulted in a deadlock that necessitated a new channel of communication between the two countries. One solution was to have private US citizens serve as surrogates for official diplomats to engage with DPRK officials outside

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<sup>3</sup> Charles K. Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 292. On its attitude to UN membership, see Letter Dated July 1, 1987 from the DPRK Permanent Observer to the UN Addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/18958.

<sup>4</sup> According to the document S/18958, the DPRK made three attempts in 1948, 1952, and 1957 to join the UN. Then, it apparently proposed to join the UN as a unified Korea in 1970 and 1980.

<sup>5</sup> "Americans Unaccounted for in the Korean War," October 1987, Folder POW/MIA Korea 4, RAC Box 15, RTC Files, Reagan Library.

<sup>6</sup> *Report of the POW/MIA Task Force Fact-Finding Mission to Bangkok, Hanoi, and Seoul, Report of a Congressional Study Mission to Bangkok, Hanoi, and Seoul, February 11-18, 1996 to the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, House of Representatives, Ninety-Ninth Congress, Second Session, 11. Chapter IV has discussed the status of the UNC in the 1980s.

the MAC, a scenario that did not require the State Department to overhaul foreign policy yet satisfied the DPRK's wish to cut the MAC out of body repatriation. Such private citizens would have to possess considerable political power to convince DPRK officials that their meeting could influence US diplomacy; members of Congress, who have legislative power, fit this bill.

Representative Stephen J. Solarz (D-NY) was the first US official to visit North Korea after the end of the war, but it is unknown whether his 1980 meetings with Kim Il-Sung touched on the POW/MIA issue. There is no evidence in the minutes of his meetings that he mentioned the servicemen missing in the Korean War. When Korean War POW/MIA activist Robert Dumas testified before Congress in 1998, however, he contended that DPRK leaders, especially Kim Il-Sung's son Kim Jong-Il, had approached Solarz because of Solarz's interest in the POW/MIA affairs of the Vietnam War and even offered to discuss whether American soldiers were still alive in North Korea. Dumas claimed that Solarz shunned this offer multiple times.<sup>7</sup> The credibility of this story is doubtful, as Dumas did not raise the allegations in his prepared statement for Congress, but if the story is true, then as early as 1980, the DPRK may have sought out quasi-bilateral talks with the United States through cooperating on the POW/MIA issue.

In the 1980s, Dumas, the Chosin Few, and the Korean War Veterans' Association

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<sup>7</sup> *POW/MIA Oversight, Hearing before the Military Personnel Subcommittee of the Committee on National Security*, House of Representatives, 105th Congress, Second Session, October 2, 1998, 23. Hereafter cited as *POW/MIA Oversight*. Solarz was likely aware of Dumas as he collected a news clip "U.S. House Panel Paper Refutes N. Korea POWs," *New York Times*, June 29, 1980, featuring Dumas in Box 1363, Stephen J. Solarz Papers, Brandeis University Library (Waltham, MA).

(KWVA) frequently visited the DPRK's UN observer's office in New York City to meet North Korean officials and discuss the issue of remains; at the time, the North Koreans welcomed the visitors but insisted that actual repatriation of POW/MIAs' bodies (or search for living POWs) required the presence of US statesmen in their meetings. After the observer's office informed the Chosin Few that the DPRK could help the United States to locate and exhume deceased US soldiers, the Chosin Few petitioned the State Department, arguing that this issue should not be confined to the MAC and urging immediate government-level negotiations.<sup>8</sup> According to a news article reporting on one of Dumas's meetings with DPRK UN Observer Pak Gil-Yon in 1987, the DPRK agreed that Dumas could lead a delegation to Pyongyang to discuss the fate of his missing brother and other POWs, but he "must persuade a US representative, senator, or diplomat to join the delegation."<sup>9</sup> Dumas brought a Democratic presidential candidate, Jesse L. Jackson, to a New York hotel room for a brief conference in which, according to Dumas, Pak informed Jackson that there might be American POWs still living in North Korea.<sup>10</sup> Even in 1992, after the KWVA asked Ho Jong, the DPRK ambassador to the UN, to investigate a postcard allegedly sent by an American POW perhaps still alive in Korea, the veterans presumed that Ho was unlikely to respond unless Congress or the president personally intervened.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Frank Kerr to William L. Bell III, January 6, 1986, Folder POW/MIA Korea 2, RAC Box 15, RTC Files, Reagan Library.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Catlin, "Brother Pursues US Aid to Find Korean War POWs," *Hartford Courant* (Hartford, CT), August 11, 1987, B3.

<sup>10</sup> *POW/MIA Oversight*, 27-28. Dumas said that Jackson denied that Pak made this statement in later years.

<sup>11</sup> "A Petition for Redress on Behalf of Wildon Chester East, MIA, Spadra, AR," Folder Korea, Box 14,

In late 1987, the DPRK made the first formal offer of remains, which it claimed to have recently found, amid a series of peace proposals. That year, it had announced the demobilization of over a hundred thousand troops and suggested a massive reduction of forces on both sides of the DMZ (including US forces). It promised talks with the United States and the ROK simultaneously, so long as they were peace talks, not MAC meetings.<sup>12</sup> For its part, the United States considered lifting some restrictions on travel and trade, but demanded that the DPRK cooperate in repatriating MIA bodies, stop sponsoring terrorism, and restrain its anti-US propaganda.<sup>13</sup> When the DPRK disclosed its possession of two US soldiers' bodies, Jesse Jackson (representing only his civil rights group the National Rainbow Coalition but not the Democratic Party) and the POW/MIA populist and petroleum tycoon Ross Perot each announced he intended to retrieve these bodies.<sup>14</sup> Neither man's political credentials met the DPRK's expectations.

In January 1988, the DPRK found some US officials with adequate political power to whom it would release the remains, but this trade was truncated by North Korean terrorism. In the first week of 1988, Congressman Frank McCloskey (D-IN), en

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Section J; the postcard and other background information is in Folder East, Box 5, Section Q (LeGro), Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARAI.

<sup>12</sup> Letter dated January 23, 1987 from the DPRK Permanent Observer to the UN Addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/18629, and Letter dated December 15, 1987 from the DPRK Permanent Observer to the UN Addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/19345, "Proposal of the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for a Phased Reduction of Forces by North and South and the Withdrawal of US Forces," July 23, 1987, from Appendix B, *Dialogue with North Korea: Report of A Seminar on "Tension Reduction in Korea"* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> *Dialogue with North Korea*, 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> *Dialogue with North Korea*, 35; Jesse Jackson to Ambassador Pak Gil Yon, December 9, 1987, Folder Copied Correspondence Copies (1), Box 4La135, Jolidon Collection.

route to Hanoi for a POW/MIA conference, detoured to Panmunjom to privately speak with North Korean officials about the bodies. His proposal to talk privately immediately enraged the US Embassy in Seoul because he “should not attempt to make such a contact because it would be perceived as bilateral US-*n*K negotiations, and against US, ROK, and UNC policy.”<sup>15</sup> To avoid the perception that they were breaking the deal, the UNC informed the DPRK on January 9 that, one week later, McCloskey and two other congressmen would be present in the 490th MAC Secretariat Meeting to finish the paperwork necessary to receive remains. This was not a bilateral negotiation, but it at least involved US government officials. North Korea acknowledged that meeting these unofficial American diplomats in the MAC was acceptable, but the meeting was scheduled for January 27. On January 20, however, the United States designated the DPRK to be a state sponsor of terrorism due to the sabotage of a South Korean passenger jet by two North Korean agents in November 1987. In retaliation, the DPRK canceled the scheduled meeting and reverted to its policy that anything pertaining to the return of remains must be handled outside the MAC.<sup>16</sup>

In 1988 and 1989, while North Korea repeatedly refused to deliver the bodies in its possession through the MAC, neither DPRK officials, nor Korean War veterans, nor POW/MIA activists lost hope of resuming talks. In a letter to the DPRK’s UN observer

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<sup>15</sup> “Point Paper: Remains Issue,” February 15, 1990, Folder POW Issue WWII/Korea, Box 14, Section E, Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARA. Also see “CODEL McCloskey: Korean Remains, January 6, 1988,” POW/MIA Databases and Documents, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/powmia/pw149276/> The lowercase “n” denotes that the State Department did not recognize the Pyongyang regime.

<sup>16</sup> Paul M. Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 67-71.

dated June 19, 1989, a KWVA member applied for a trip to recover remains. He underlined the fact that during the meetings between KWVA members and the observer on January 30, 1989, the KWVA felt that the DPRK “was anxious to return the remains of five American servicemen.”<sup>17</sup> Even if this was true, the observer was patient enough to wait for various American factions (veterans, POW/MIA activists, retired officials, and incumbent officials of various ranks) to offer the highest political price for the remains. Observing that the DPRK was pitting different groups of Americans against each other to extract the maximum possible political concessions, a KWVA open letter in June 1989 advocated that Americans should “show a United Front to North Korea.”<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the State Department relented in its objection to US-DPRK talks outside the MAC. Although the State Department still forbade American citizens to travel to Pyongyang, the two countries held their first ambassadorial conference on December 6, 1988, in Beijing and three more meetings in early 1989.<sup>19</sup> This breakthrough made it difficult for the administration to discourage US officials from meeting their DPRK counterparts.

### **Stage I: Presence of Ranking US Officials for Remains (1990–1991)**

The first stage in the United States’ recovery of bodies from North Korea spanned 1990 and 1991. When the DPRK delivered recovered bodies to Panmunjom, the

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<sup>17</sup> Blaine P. Friedlander to the DPRK Observer Mission to the United States[sic], June 19, 1989, Folder Korean War Vets OA/ID 02865-023, Public Liaison Files, White House Office of Public Liaison Records, George W. Bush Presidential Library (College Station, TX).

<sup>18</sup> Blaine P. Friedlander’s Open Letter, June 16, 1989, Folder Korean War Vets OA/ID 02865-023, Public Liaison Files, White House Office of Public Liaison Records, Bush Library.

<sup>19</sup> *Dialogue with North Korea*, 1.



recipients were members of the US Congress, not military officers of the UNC. It was not a formal diplomatic process, but the DPRK had fulfilled one of its diplomatic goals: involving the US government in the repatriation of remains. In 1990 Representative Montgomery received five boxes of remains, and in 1991, Senator Bob Smith (R-NH) received eleven. While both sides officially claimed that the return of bodies was strictly a humanitarian task, for the DPRK, being humanitarian meant returning the bodies directly to the Americans without involving the MAC; for the United States, it meant defending the authority of the MAC.

From the very beginning, the State Department had insisted that the MAC handle all remains. Its instruction on May 18, 1989 warned Montgomery that the MAC was the only channel complying with the Korean War Armistice Agreement and argued that “to accept an official, bilateral solution [to the repatriation of remains] we believe would constitute a betrayal of the allies who fought alongside us during the Korean Conflict.”<sup>20</sup> The State Department may have worried that the DPRK would use remains to lure Montgomery into admitting that the Korean War had been fought only between the DPRK and the United States. This idea would compromise the legitimacy of the UNC and, consequently, the MAC itself. Montgomery recognized these warnings. The State Department also informed him of the benefits that he could offer to the DPRK in exchange for remains; these included loosening restrictions on unofficial visits of North

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<sup>20</sup> “State Department’s Briefing by Mark Fitzpatrick,” May 18, 1989, with written notes of Representative Montgomery, Folder Briefing Materials, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

Koreans to the United States and the reciprocal travel of private US citizens. Commercial exports of basic human needs and “substantive diplomatic contacts” were also possible. This instruction allowed Montgomery to convince the North Koreans that the return of bodies would “signal an interest in better relations” between the two countries.<sup>21</sup>

Permitting private travel and exports was not a new offer to the DPRK. The permission had been proposed in the early 1980s, though the US government had never formally offered it. In October 1989, a former US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs traveled to Pyongyang after his retirement. After his trip, he told reporters in Japan that he had promised the United States would loosen its ban on exports to the DPRK. However, he observed that the DPRK cared more about the withdrawal of US troops from the ROK and normalized relations with the United States than trade.<sup>22</sup>

The State Department even discouraged Montgomery from meeting with the North Koreans in New York City. On November 7, 1989, two staff members of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs (chaired by Montgomery), Jim Holley and Thomas Gregory, met Mark Fitzpatrick, a State Department official who served as the liaison officer between his department and Montgomery, to discuss the possibility of the congressman talking with the North Koreans about the repatriation of remains. Fitzpatrick insisted that the department “will not sanction a meeting with the North

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew C. Nahm, “The United States and North Korea since 1945,” in *Korean-American Relations, 1866-1997* eds. Yor-Bok Lee and Wayne Patterson (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 123-124.

Koreans” and officially recommended against it, as the DPRK was a terrorist state. As a compromise, Holley and Gregory followed Montgomery’s instruction to contact the DPRK UN observer on the congressman’s behalf, to demonstrate that a meeting between the two countries’ officials outside the MAC had the support of multiple congressmen. Holley and Gregory suggested the participation of congressmen was essential to the DPRK’s return of bodies, which would give the DPRK positive publicity and de facto recognition in Congress.<sup>23</sup> Given the fact that the DPRK had narrowly failed to deliver the bodies to a US representative in 1988, it was unlikely that the DPRK would trade bodies with anyone outranked by McCloskey in 1989. Ten days later, Holley and Fitzpatrick still could not reach consensus on an acceptable proposal; a compromise was therefore necessary. Holley asked Montgomery to make four points clear to the DPRK: 1) their meeting was unofficial and not endorsed by the US government; 2) the repatriation of remains was purely humanitarian; 3) the number of meetings would be limited to one; and 4) the repatriation must be through the MAC.<sup>24</sup>

Besides seeking approval from the State Department, Montgomery’s team had to coordinate with the North Koreans. On December 2, Holley and Gregory visited Ho Jong in New York City. Possibly aware of the Americans’ insistence on receiving remains

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<sup>23</sup> “Memorandum from Jim Holley to Chairman re Return of Remains from North Korea, November 7, 1989,” Folder Report to Committee on Veterans Affairs, Memos/Correspondence (hereafter Memos/Correspondence), Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library. Gregory was a consultant of the committee and oversaw the POW/MIA committee of the Chosin Few.

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum from Jim Holley to Chairman, “Meeting with State Department on Return of Remains from North Korea,” November 17, 1989, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

through the MAC and not wanting his talks with Montgomery to deadlock, Ho did not personally reject delivering the remains to the MAC. However, he was eager to know what political benefits the DPRK would reap from the repatriation. Montgomery's staff insisted that the repatriation was strictly a humanitarian mission but promised to open more bilateral dialogues in the future. Ho, however, demanded that as soon as Montgomery received the bodies, the United States immediately remove the DPRK from its list of terrorism sponsors, a decision over which the congressman had no authority.<sup>25</sup> Holley later scheduled a formal but unofficial meeting for January 17, 1990 between Ho and Montgomery to discuss these outstanding issues.<sup>26</sup>

The January 17 meeting went surprisingly smoothly. A friendly atmosphere pervaded the conference. Montgomery proposed that his visit to Korea to claim remains would take place during the House recess in April; Ho did not reject his plan. They took photos of their handshake and promised to finalize the date soon.<sup>27</sup> The congressman's career was a factor leading to the tentative success of his talk with Ho. Since his 1976 investigation into the Vietnam War POW/MIA issue, Montgomery had maintained that it was unlikely that American POWs were being held in socialist states. During his meeting with Ho, he only asked once whether there were any US POWs still in the DPRK; when

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<sup>25</sup> Memorandum from Jim Holley to Chairman, "Meeting with North Koreans," December 4, 1989, Folder Briefing Materials (blue), Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>26</sup> Memorandum from Jim Holley to Chairman/Louisere, "Meeting with North Koreans," December 15, 1989, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>27</sup> "Meeting with North Koreans in New York City on Return of 5 Sets of Remains," January 17, 1990, Folder Briefing Materials (blue), Box 104-59; Ho Jong to G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery, January 25, 1990, Folder Trip to Korea, May 25-31, 1990, Box 104-44, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

Ho replied, “I’m not sure, myself,” Montgomery did not force an answer.<sup>28</sup> Avoiding unrealistic demands regarding living POWs had been his favored approach to crafting effective solutions to POW/MIA issues, as analyzed in Chapter IV.

A few critical decisions that took the DPRK’s goals into consideration ensured the success of this meeting. The presence of a sitting congressman convinced Ho that the US government was taking the DPRK seriously. Montgomery clarified that while he was required to maintain that the return of the remains was a humanitarian issue, the executive branch would recognize the repatriation as a positive step toward the normalization of the two countries’ relations. He also brought two surprises for Ho. Aware that the DPRK wished to have negotiations outside of the MAC, Montgomery promised to visit North Korea to discuss all of the DPRK’s political concerns; he also implied that he was not against receiving remains there. Ho responded that if the DPRK should recover more US soldiers’ remains in the future, it would notify the MAC and return them through it. Montgomery cautioned, however, that while he would hear out and relay the DPRK’s demand, he could not make any agreement on behalf of his government in Pyongyang.<sup>29</sup>

Although the State Department had approved Montgomery’s message regarding

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<sup>28</sup> “Meeting with North Koreans in New York City on Return of Five Sets of Remains,” January 17, 1990, and “Briefing for meeting with North Koreans on Return of Five Sets of Remains,” January 17, 1990, Folder Briefing Materials (blue); one later news article also suggested that Montgomery discounted the possibility of living POWs in Korea, see “Montgomery, with ‘sad satisfaction,’ Accepts 5 Servicemen’s Caskets,” *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, MS), May 29, 1990, Folder Korea Trip Press Clippings, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

the executive branch's recognition, his plan came as a surprise: a US congressman was to conduct diplomatic bargaining (over the bodies) in Pyongyang. The State Department reiterated that Montgomery's proposed talks would weaken the UNC's authority and adversely affect the US-ROK alliance; nevertheless, issues other than repatriating remains could be discussed during the visit, but the bodies must be delivered at the MAC. Montgomery immediately updated Ho with this compromise, and Ho deemed it acceptable if the visit occurred before remains were returned. The State Department only grudgingly agreed to this scenario, in which the DPRK might tell its people that the United States had begged for bodies in Pyongyang before they were returned. The State Department asked Montgomery to secure a joint public announcement with the DPRK when the repatriation was scheduled, likely to prevent the latter from reneging on the deal, but his message was not immediately passed on to Ho for unknown reasons.<sup>30</sup>

Although the meeting on January 17 ended with a temporary agreement, it was far from secure and was subject to the political situation in Korea. While the State Department reluctantly approved Montgomery's visit to Pyongyang, the UNC was not informed. Under pressure from the State Department, Montgomery broke his promise to receive remains in Pyongyang, and neither did he address the DPRK's wish to be removed from the list of terrorist states after delivering remains. After a letter thanking Montgomery for the January 17 meeting, there was a long silence from Ho regarding the

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<sup>30</sup> Memo to File, n.d. (must also be on January 22, 1990) and Jim Holley to Ho Jong, Process for Return of Remains, January 22, 1990, Folder Briefing Materials (blue), Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

date of the body repatriation.<sup>31</sup>

In February 1990, two crises emerged that threatened the possibility of receiving remains later that year. The first came from the UNC, whose commander, General Louis C. Menetrey, wrote to Montgomery, “two problems arise here [regarding Montgomery’s trip to Pyongyang], neither of which are trivial.” The trip would be exploited by the North Koreans to undermine the US-ROK alliance, Menetrey contended; moreover, traveling to the DPRK through Panmunjom would require approval from both Korean governments, which the ROK was unlikely to provide. Even if this trip did occur, the commander did not want any observer or press from reporting on the repatriation ceremony.<sup>32</sup> Such publicity would be detrimental to the MAC’s legitimacy as the sole agency for handling US-DPRK relations. Facing this challenge from the UNC, Montgomery refused to abandon his plan and informed Menetrey that he was deeply disappointed in its sudden sabotage of his diplomatic efforts. He claimed that the State Department supported his plan, and that it had been forwarded to the president and the secretary of state.<sup>33</sup> Learning of the approval of the executive branch, the UNC sent an apology for its tone and misunderstanding.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ho Jong to G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery, January 25, 1990, Folder Trip to Korea, May 25-31, 1990, Box 104-44; G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery to Ho Jong, February 9, 1990, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>32</sup> Louis C. Menetrey to G. V. “Sonny” Montgomery, February 20, 1990, Folder Trip to Korea, May 25-31, 1990, Box 104-44, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>33</sup> G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery to Louis C. Menetrey, March 5, 1990, Folder Trip to Korea, May 25-31, 1990, Box 104-44, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>34</sup> Louis C. Menetrey to G. V. “Sonny” Montgomery, March 17, 1990,” and G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery to Louis C. Menetrey, March 28, 1990, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

The second crisis, caused by both the DPRK and the United States, was much harder to solve. On February 22, Holley confronted Ho and emphasized that Montgomery's visit had been approved by the president and was waiting for the DPRK's approval. While Ho understood Montgomery's impatience, he stated that the contemporary political and military environment was "delicate," "provocative," and "not acceptable" due to the 1990 joint US-ROK military exercise, Team Spirit. The DPRK decided to suspend all contact with the United States until the end of the exercise, and Ho added a new prerequisite for the return of bodies: Montgomery must visit Pyongyang to finalize all details of the repatriation.<sup>35</sup> Asking Montgomery to discuss the repatriation in Pyongyang (as shown above, the State Department forbade him from doing so) was likely a face-saving action after the DPRK had agreed to return remains via the MAC. With all details decided in Pyongyang, the MAC would just be a stop for homebound bodies. During the meeting on February 22, Holley reported that the United States was salvaging its relationship with the DPRK, strained by Team Spirit, through a plan to withdraw five thousand troops from the ROK. In a fax to Ho, Montgomery suggested that he would like to finalize any repatriation procedures through means other than a visit to Pyongyang, asserting that his reluctance was logistical, not political.<sup>36</sup> Despite the efforts of Holley and Montgomery to encourage cooperation in arranging repatriation, Ho remained silent

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<sup>35</sup> Report to File, February 23, 1990, Folder Briefing Materials (blue), Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>36</sup> Report to File, February 23, 1990, and Fax Message to Ho Jong from G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery, February 23, 1990, Folder Briefing Materials (blue), Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.



for several more weeks.

When Montgomery was on the verge of canceling the trip, he learned the official reason for Ho's silence.<sup>37</sup> On March 12, Ho relayed that his superiors had approved the January 17 proposal weeks earlier, but the modified plan to visit Pyongyang had needed additional review. He also intimated that the Team Spirit exercise was primarily responsible for his silence, and wrote to Montgomery: "I am pleased to inform you the position of our side to keep discussing and resolve the issue of return of American remains after the month of April when the 'Team Spirit 90' is fully over and favourable [*sic*] atmosphere restored."<sup>38</sup>

Montgomery resorted to asking the USSR and China to persuade the North Koreans to cooperate. China had played a critical role in the US-DPRK relationship. Since 1988, it had mediated councilor-level conferences for the two countries' officials. In October 1989, the DPRK ambassador to China indicated that the DPRK would invite US statesmen to Pyongyang. The issue of remains was included in US-DPRK talks in Beijing in 1990. Meanwhile, Moscow handled correspondence between Washington and Pyongyang.<sup>39</sup> Although China and the USSR in 1990 were no longer the DPRK's staunch allies, Montgomery still believed that its foreign policy was subject to the two countries' influence. On March 1, he expressed to Ho his disappointment that the DPRK

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<sup>37</sup> G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery to J. Roy Rowland, March 8, 1990, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>38</sup> Ho Jong to G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery, March 12, 1990, Folder, Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>39</sup> Nahm, "The United States and North Korea since 1945," 124.

lacked the desire to “achieve this mutually beneficial humanitarian objective,” the return of remains, and warned that the Soviet Embassy in Washington supported this objective.<sup>40</sup> Two of his colleagues later wrote to the DPRK Foreign Ministry with similar information.<sup>41</sup> On March 20, the PRC ambassador to the United States expressed his appreciation for Montgomery’s proposed visit to Pyongyang and promised to relay his support for the trip to the DPRK.<sup>42</sup> On April 26, DPRK officials in Beijing informed US diplomats that they would return the bodies as soon as possible.<sup>43</sup> The North Koreans later admitted that pressure from Beijing had been critical.<sup>44</sup>

Besides influence from China, the DPRK was prompted to deliver bodies to Montgomery for a practical reason. Ho even gave his personal phone number to Montgomery to ensure quick communication between them in order to deliver the bodies at the earliest possible time.<sup>45</sup> The DPRK wanted visas for its diplomats to attend an academic conference in DC in May; the State Department claimed that these visas were dependent on “positive moves regarding the remains issue” and refused to consider the applications before receiving the bodies.<sup>46</sup> Despite the State Department’s stance, the

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<sup>40</sup> “G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery to Ho Jong, March 1, 1990,” Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>41</sup> James H. Bilbray and Frank McCloskey to Kim Yong-Nam, March 6, 1990, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>42</sup> Zhu Qizhen to Hon. G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery, March 20, 1990, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection., Grant Library.

<sup>43</sup> Memo to File, April 26, 1990, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>44</sup> Report to File, May 4, 1990, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>45</sup> Jim Holley to Chairman Montgomery, April 30, 1990, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>46</sup> Memorandum to File, April 26, 1990, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

visas were issued on time, possibly after Montgomery interceded for the North Koreans.

On May 4, Montgomery and Ho agreed that, pending logistics and DPRK confirmation, the MAC would accept the bodies on May 28.<sup>47</sup>

Details such as where to transfer the remains and when Montgomery should visit Pyongyang were also finalized on May 4. The bodies would be delivered via the MAC, but the North Koreans required the repatriation ceremony to be held in the northern half of the DMZ, an alternative that ensured that the Americans must go to the northern part of Korea before receiving the remains—a face-saving victory for North Korea.

Montgomery accepted this and reiterated his willingness to visit Pyongyang, but only after the transfer of bodies. Mysteriously, Ho denied this visit despite repeated requests.<sup>48</sup>

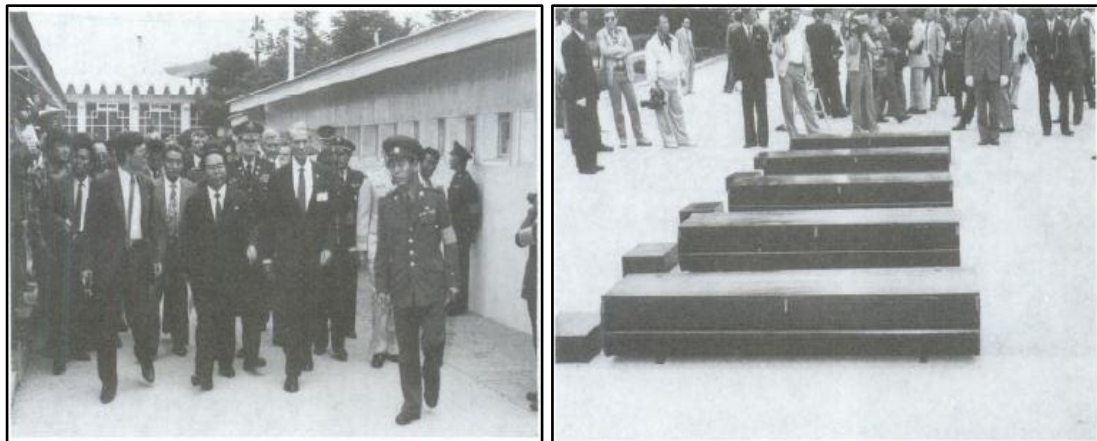


Figure 5-1: (Left) A DPRK officer was leading Representative Montgomery to cross the military demarcation line. (Right) Montgomery's delegation was going to examine the five bodies delivered by North Korea on May 27, 1990. (Copied from *Report on Congressional Delegation Trip to Korea to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs*, House of Representatives, 101st Congress, Second Session)

<sup>47</sup> Report to File, May 4, 1990, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>48</sup> Report to File, May 4, 1990, and G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery to J. Roy Rowland, May 4, 1990, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library; *1990 Delegation Report*, 16.

The morning of May 28 witnessed the historic moment described at the beginning of this chapter. At 10:30 a.m., the Montgomery delegation was escorted to the MAC conference room to meet DPRK officers. After reviewing the files accompanying the remains, Montgomery's team stepped northward across the demarcation line to inspect them. Deputy Li Song-Ho and Montgomery, rather than military officers, signed their names above their official government titles on a bilingual receipt. North Korean pallbearers delivered the bodies to UNC honor guards across the demarcation line; the coffins were draped with UN flags prior to their flight to Hawaii for identification.<sup>49</sup>

In separate press conferences held afterward, each side reaffirmed its political objectives of the previous months. Li announced that the DPRK could have returned the remains years ago, but "the US side had intentionally created difficulties in the solution of even this humanitarian question." He stated that he was ready to work with the United States to return more bodies in exchange for less intervention in Korean reunification.<sup>50</sup> His reference to humanitarianism seemed to be delivering bodies directly to the United States, because direct delivery had been consistently rejected by the US government. A possible justification for Li's stance was that the bodies would bring solace to American families, and so their return should not be bound by the MAC or political treaties like the Korean War Armistice Agreement. Avoiding the MAC was, however, perceived by the

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<sup>49</sup> *1990 Delegation Report*, 15-17; Kelly Smith Tunney, "North Korea Turns Over Remains of Five Soldiers," Associated Press, May 28, 1990, Folder Korea Trip Press Clippings, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>50</sup> "News Briefings Held on Return of U.S. Remains," *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, May 28, 1990, Folder Press Clippings and Release, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

US government as politicizing bodies. In his briefing, Montgomery repeated the humanitarian nature of the repatriation and announced that he hoped to recover more than two hundred bodies in the future, but he was not optimistic.<sup>51</sup> His version of humanitarianism, keeping the status quo in Korea, was incompatible with the DPRK's.

The remains escalated the political battles between Pyongyang and Washington before they even arrived in Hawaii. Since Montgomery had not visited Pyongyang before claiming the bodies, the DPRK could not portray the May 28 return as a victory to its people.<sup>52</sup> It fell back on a secondary goal: to be removed from the list of terrorism-sponsoring states. However, it was furious to learn of a State Department announcement on May 29 that the United States would not consider improving relations with the DPRK until the latter stopped engaging in terrorist acts.<sup>53</sup> On June 2, the DPRK Foreign Ministry stated that it would hold the United States responsible for any delay in settling the remains issue since it continued to label the DPRK as a terrorist state.<sup>54</sup>

The poor condition of the returned remains aggravated the situation. In the five boxes of remains, there were two ID tags of US soldiers. Lieutenant Colonel Johnnie Webb of the Central Identification Laboratory (CILHI) expected that the bodies with ID

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<sup>51</sup> Media Conference, May 28, 1990, Panmunjom, Folder Press Clippings and Release, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>52</sup> I read through the DPRK Workers' Party newspaper *Rodong Sinmun* (Workers' News, Pyongyang) from May 23 to June 2, but could not find any article reporting this event. In contrast, in later years, the DPRK reported the delivery of bodies when it accompanied some breakthroughs in the US-DPRK relationship.

<sup>53</sup> Memo to File, n.d., Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>54</sup> "DPRK Foreign Ministry Spokesman Denounces Improper Remarks of U.S. Side on Repatriation of U.S. Soldiers' Remains," June 4, 1990, sources unknown, Folder Press Clippings and Release, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

tags would be positively identified within thirty days; the others would take six months or longer. It turned out that, based on the dental and physical features of the remains, the bodies of the ID tags' owners could not be in the five boxes, which contained at least seven men.<sup>55</sup> Less than thirty days after receiving the bones, the Defense Department announced that it was unsure whether the remains were Americans despite assurances from North Korea. Media outlets also claimed that the remains were not American. Ho was irritated and complained when he met Montgomery again. Montgomery convinced Ho that he personally resented such baseless claims and had spoken to the military to prevent their recurrence.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the unpleasant events in the wake of the first repatriation, neither Montgomery nor Ho abandoned the newly opened channel. On July 9, although their meeting was dominated by the provocative remarks on the bodies' identities, Montgomery persuaded Ho that Congress held a very positive opinion of the DPRK, and he was willing to recover more remains and improve bilateral relations. Reciprocally, Ho consented to deliver US soldiers' remains in the future via the MAC, but Montgomery's proposal to send US military personnel to North Korea to recover remains was rejected.<sup>57</sup> Instead, in October, the DPRK declared its possession of the remains of eleven more

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<sup>55</sup> *1990 Delegation Report*, 13.

<sup>56</sup> "Montgomery Disputes News Reports that Korean Conflict Remains Are Not American," *House Veterans Affairs Committee News*, June 18, 1990, Folder 94, Box 16-10; Memo to File, n.d., Report to Committee on Veterans Affairs, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>57</sup> Memo to File, n.d., Report to Committee on Veterans Affairs, Folder Memos/Correspondence, Box 104-59, GVM Collection, Grant Library

soldiers and contacted Montgomery and two other representatives to discuss body repatriation.<sup>58</sup> For unknown reasons, the DPRK chose a more senior US official.

Senator Bob Smith's trip to retrieve remains, which occurred on June 24, 1991, was contingent upon both the DPRK's pursuit of a bilateral relationship with the United States and some progress in deescalating the nuclear crisis in North Korea. Ever since, the victims of the Korean War have been intermingled with the issue of the very nuclear weapons that could provoke a second one. The events in Korea in 1991 suggested that the DPRK offered remains in response to its warming relations with the United States. In May, the ROK's entrance to the UN was all but certain with the consent of China and the USSR. Reluctantly, the DPRK agreed to join the UN alongside the ROK, as long as the United States did not veto its entry.<sup>59</sup> In a press briefing on June 19 focusing on the upcoming repatriation of bodies, a State Department spokesperson mentioned that there was ongoing progress in the US-DPRK negotiations in Beijing regarding the DPRK's admission of foreign inspectors to its nuclear facilities.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the US military announced the withdrawal of tactical nuclear weapons from the ROK in September, but this intention might have been disclosed to the DPRK earlier.<sup>61</sup> The most decisive factor

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<sup>58</sup> "North Korea Holding 11 Sets of American Remains," *House Veterans Affairs Committee News*, October 10, 1990, Folder 152, Box 16-10, GVM Collection, Grant Library.

<sup>59</sup> David E. Sanger, "North Korea Reluctantly Seeks U.N. Seat," *New York Times*, May 29, 1991, A3.

<sup>60</sup> "EAC Press Guide: Korea: Return of MIA Remains from North Korea," June 20, 1991, Folder South Korea: POW/MIA OA/ID CF01519-025, Torkel Patterson File (Subject Files), Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Bush Library.

<sup>61</sup> Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), Appendix A, Chronology. (The dates of all other major events on the Korean Peninsula mentioned hereafter will be based on this chronology).

for the DPRK's offer of bodies must be what it alleged that Smith had promised: the possibility of establishing a joint US-DPRK committee on the remains issue outside of the MAC, a promise neither Smith nor the US government confirmed.<sup>62</sup>

The circumstances of Senator Smith's promise are unclear, but regardless, North Korean officials were infuriated when the senator could not honor it. On June 23, Li Song-Ho greeted Smith at the MAC and stated that his visit would "promote reconciliation and trust between the two countries and help create an atmosphere of peace and the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula."<sup>63</sup> He then asked Smith to confirm the establishment of the joint US-DPRK committee on recovering the bodies outside of the MAC. Li alleged that this had been agreed to during Smith's visit to the DPRK's UN office, and contended that shortly before Smith's visit, Li had received a list of US officials who would be on the committee.<sup>64</sup> The allegation was unequivocally countered by Smith's statement that he was not empowered to "negotiate on behalf of the US government" and that US policy required the remains be collected through the MAC.<sup>65</sup> In anger, Li cross-referenced this statement with Smith's announcement in a news conference three days earlier that the US government had approved the

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<sup>62</sup> "Joint Meeting with US on Remains Transfer," June 23, 1991, Folder 2, Box 11, Section E, Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARAI; Letter dated June 13, 1991 from the Chargé d'Affaires A.I. of the US Mission to the UN Addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/22705.

<sup>63</sup> "Joint Meeting with US on Remains Transfer," June 23, 1991, Folder 2, Box 11, Section E, Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARAI.

<sup>64</sup> "Migunyugolmunjegyeoleul wihan jomigongdonghoeui: Panmunjeomeseo jinhaeng [Joint US-Korea Meeting to Solve the Issue of US Military Remains: At Panmunjom, In Progress]," *Rodong Sinmun*, June 24, 1991, 5.

<sup>65</sup> *Hearings on Cold War; Korea, WWII POWs, Hearings before the Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs*, Senate, 102nd Congress, Second Session, November 10 and 11, 1992, 263.



establishment of the joint committee; Li charged Smith with being untrustworthy and, terminating the meeting, sarcastically asked Smith to talk with someone back home with the power to represent the US government before begging for bodies again.<sup>66</sup>

By the next day, June 24, the two sides somehow reached an agreement on receiving newly discovered remains through the MAC in the future, and Smith received the eleven bodies.<sup>67</sup> In the DPRK's official statement, Li emphasized that while the DPRK was offended that Smith had reneged on his promise of a joint committee, his country's humanitarian concerns for American families waiting for their dead had prompted him to release the bodies anyway. He went on to contend that the release of bodies had taken place after Smith agreed that new negotiations for establishing the joint committee would commence as soon as possible. Smith was required to publicize this agreement shortly after receiving the remains, which he did on June 25. Judging from the wording of this statement, the DPRK regarded Senator Smith as a plenipotentiary delegate of the United States, even though Smith had denied that he represented the US government. The agreement allowed North Korea to declare victory.<sup>68</sup>

The details of how Smith promoted the establishment of the joint committee are not fully clear, but the MAC was not to be left out of the committee that handled the bodies. On September 18, Smith met DPRK Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Sok-

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<sup>66</sup> "Joint Meeting with US on Remains Transfer," June 23, 1991, Folder 2, Box 11, Section E, Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARAI.

<sup>67</sup> "US-North Korea Pact Reported on Return of American Remains," *New York Times*, June 25, 1991, A6.

<sup>68</sup> "Jomigongdonghoeui je-2-ilhoeui jinhaeng uricheuktae tanjang kijadeulkwa hoekyeon: Migunyugol 11gureul migukcheuke indo [Joint US-Korea Meeting, the Second Day in Progress: Sending back 11 Sets of Americans' Remains, Our Delegation Leader Met Journalists]," *Rodong Sinmun*, June 25, 1991, 5-6.

Chu at the UN. The State Department again instructed him to define repatriation of remains as a purely humanitarian issue—not a bilateral operation. During their meeting, Smith introduced a proposal for the establishment of the committee, in which US government officials would work directly with their North Korean counterparts, as representatives of all countries that contributed forces to the UNC during the Korean War (the proposal did not specify the exclusion of the MAC). Kang did not object to the proposal and promised that his government would accept it.<sup>69</sup> After the DPRK approved inspections of its nuclear facilities and materials by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in January 1992 (the State Department advised Smith to delay further contact with the North Koreans prior to the approval), Smith visited Pyongyang on December 19, 1992. DPRK officials reassured him that the MAC could participate in the US-DPRK joint committee to handle remains as they had agreed in June 1991. Smith was guided to a war museum usually inaccessible to foreigners for information relevant to US POWs. Satisfied, he suggested that the State Department, the Defense Department, and an envoy of President-elect Clinton collaborate with the North Koreans on remains.<sup>70</sup>

## **Stage II: Unilateral Delivery of Remains through the MAC (1992–1994)**

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<sup>69</sup> “Senator Smith Meets Kang Sok Chu,” September 20, 1991, Folder South Korea: POW/MIA OA/ID CF01519-025, Torkel Patterson Files (Subject Files), Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Bush Library.

<sup>70</sup> “Senator Smith Discusses Historic Visit to Asia Concerning American POWs from the Korean and Vietnam Conflicts,” for immediate release on December 22, 1992, Folder Korea, Box 14, Section J, Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARAI; *POW/MIA’s Report of the Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs*, Senate Report 103-1, 445-447. The report will be cited as *1993 Senate Select Committee Report* hereafter.

Between 1992 and 1994, the DPRK returned over two hundred containers of US soldiers' remains through the MAC. In this period, the North Koreans temporarily acknowledged the legitimacy of the MAC, either because of their agreement with Senator Smith or in an attempt to repair their relationship with the United States after joining the UN. While the North Korean nuclear crisis and its withdrawal from the MAC in 1994 ultimately doomed this channel, it was the US military's dissatisfaction with the condition of repatriated remains that prompted it to circumvent the MAC and to seek entry into the DPRK to exhume bodies itself.

As on the previous two occasions of repatriation, the DPRK expected some diplomatic concessions from the United States before releasing bodies in 1992, though it no longer specified the exclusion of the MAC. In December 1991, a DPRK officer at the MAC divulged that the bodies of thirty US soldiers were ready to be delivered.<sup>71</sup> North Korea likely chose this time to approach the Americans to see whether the United States would revamp its foreign policies toward the DPRK in the wake of the USSR's demise. It perhaps also wished to confirm how the United States would implement what Senator Smith had promised in June and September: the formation of a joint committee made up of US officials and their DPRK counterparts. In response to the offer of bodies, a US official came to the DPRK's UN office; this time, the visitor, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Arnold Kanter, came from the executive branch. According to the

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<sup>71</sup> Letter dated June 15, 1993 from the Permanent Representative of the US to the UN Addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/25031.

DPRK's official statements, US officials asked for these bodies at least twice at the UN office and again at the MAC in 1992, after which the DPRK returned the bodies at the MAC out of humanitarianism on May 13 and 28, 1992, with a promise that the DPRK would provisionally continue to contact the UNC with remains as long as the State Department did not object to handling the issue in a bilateral manner in the future.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, a formal agreement in which the DPRK delivered remains through the MAC was still lacking.

Despite this lacuna, both countries generally agreed that the repatriation of remains could be regularized to improve their relations; accordingly, they moved forward with a formal treaty on recovering remains that would supersede previous private deals between US legislators and DPRK officials. From August 1992 to August 1993, the two sides prepared an agreement at the MAC, though the DPRK constantly sabotaged this agency. During this period, the DPRK returned one batch of remains in July 1993, possibly as a reward for progress in the negotiations for Korean denuclearization and President Clinton's trip to the DMZ.<sup>73</sup> The DPRK, however, insisted that it was merely a positive response to the repatriation negotiations. More importantly, it could have been a reward for recent US-DPRK government-level talks that resulted in a joint statement on June 11 promising more dialogue, respect for the DPRK's sovereignty, non-interference

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<sup>72</sup> *Hearings on Cold War, Korea, WWII POWs*, 96-97; "Panmunjeomeseo Migunyugol Miguncheuke Indo: Joseoninmingun Jungjangi Gijadeulgwa hoegyeon [At Panmunjom, US Soldiers' Remains Are Repatriated to the US Side: Korean People's Army Lieutenant General Met Journalists]," *Rodong Sinmun*, May 14, 1992, 5.

<sup>73</sup> "N. Korea Returns Remains of 17 Soldiers," *Waterloo Courier* (Waterloo, IA), July 12, 1993, A3.

in its internal affairs, and the peaceful reunification of Korea.<sup>74</sup>

The trickle of remains from the DPRK burst into a flood when the two countries finalized an agreement on bilateral cooperation regarding the recovery of remains in August 1993. Some US officials admitted that the DPRK had won a milestone victory by signing a treaty with the United States, but this was an exaggeration.<sup>75</sup> The treaty was merely a memorandum of understanding that still required the DPRK to work with the UNC. North Korea would be completely in charge of searching for and exhuming remains, while the UNC would furnish necessary intelligence and technical support, an operational mode which the United States had desired in the 1980s. The DPRK could still, however, declare victory.<sup>76</sup> In the 1980s, the UNC had referred to the terms of the Korean War Armistice Agreement and its supplementary pacts to urge the North Koreans to search for and return remains; the new agreement superseded the articles of the Armistice Agreement, which the DPRK had sought to replace with a peace treaty since its institution. Enjoying the victory, from November 13 to December 21, 1993, the DPRK returned 131 containers of remains in four batches.<sup>77</sup> The quick repatriation suggested that the DPRK had found these remains much earlier and had been holding them until a

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<sup>74</sup> “Panmunjeomeso Miguncheuge Migunyugoleul Neomgyeojuge Doenda [At Panmunjom, Deliver US Soldiers’ Bodies to the US Side],” *Rodong Sinmun*, July 10, 1993; US-North Korean Joint Statement, June 11, 1993, Geneva, see Wit, Poneman, and Gallucci, *Going Critical*, 419-420.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Burns, “N. Koreans Tell US They Will Help Account for Troops Lost in the War,” *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison, WI), August 26, 1993, 7A.

<sup>76</sup> Judging from how DPRK reported it, this event was considered as a considerable breakthrough. See “Jomisaie Yugolmunjewa Goanlyeonhan Hapuseo Chaetaek [Text of Mutual Agreement about US-DPRK Relations and Remains Issue Decided],” *Rodong Sinmun*, August 26, 1993, 5.

<sup>77</sup> On the text of the agreement, and the facts of returning remains, see Letter dated June 15, 1994 from the Permanent Representative of the US to the UN Addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/1994/713.

diplomatic breakthrough, a hard-won agreement that ultimately proved short-lived. The cooperation between the DPRK and the UNC specified by the agreement was never fully materialized, nor had the committee proposed by Smith in 1991 ever been formally established. The DPRK returned only fourteen more bodies to the UNC on September 13, 1994, when the US military was about to scrap the deal and propose a joint search for bodies in the DPRK with the North Korean People's Army.<sup>78</sup> In this joint search, the US military personnel deployed in North Korea would no longer represent the UNC.

Financial, technical, and political factors together doomed the 1993 agreement. Per the agreement, the United States was obligated to provide all necessary support for the return of remains; therefore, North Korea deemed that it should be remunerated. The agreement did not specify the rate for each body or provide an itemized bill for each step in seeking, exhuming, and delivering remains, leaving considerable room for the DPRK to inflate their cost. Money to finance its nuclear projects and weather its economic crisis after the collapse of the USSR was perhaps more critical to the regime's survival in 1994 than political concessions from the United States. Seeing that remains were being shipped through the MAC in November 1993, the US and ROK governments concurred that they should consider replacing military threats with economic incentives, ostensibly to

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<sup>78</sup> This does not count the return of a British soldier's body through the MAC on October 30, 1995. In fact, it was ultimately found to be an American soldier in 2018. "N. Korea Returns Remains of 14 GIs," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 13, 1994, A4, and Letter dated May 13, 1996 from the Permanent Representative of the US to the UN Addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/1996/351. On the formation of the committee, see Bob Smith to William J. Clinton, September 6, 1994, Folder Korea, July-December 1994 (1) OA/ID 405, Box 1, Part 2 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), William J. Clinton Presidential Library (Little Rock, AR).

encourage the DPRK's progress in denuclearization. However, a Reuters reporter deemed that this shift in policy must also be due to the progress in repatriating remains.<sup>79</sup> After the agreement in August 1993, the US Army provided \$897,000 to reimburse the DPRK for the cost of recovering and returning bodies from 1990 to 1992 (about \$19,500 per body).<sup>80</sup> By March 1994, the DPRK had issued its bill for bodies delivered in 1993: about \$30,400 per box of remains, totaling \$4.5 million worth of labor and material, and the North Koreans believed that the United States should pay at least \$3.6 million.<sup>81</sup> The price increase likely reflected the dire economic situation already besetting the DPRK.<sup>82</sup>

This exorbitant cost was unacceptable to the United States. Officers of the UNC and the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) deemed the North Koreans' bill to be based on "unrealistic expectations;" they argued that 1) these bodies were extremely difficult to identify due to the poor training of North Korean personnel in anthropology and archaeology, if not to outright sabotage of the exhumations, and 2) the payment must not be in the form of fixed amount per set of remains, but in an itemized bill for remains storage, labor, mileage traveled to access the remains, and so forth, to avoid the perception that the US government was purchasing bones.<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, the

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<sup>79</sup> "North Korea to Return the Remains of G.I.'s," *New York Times*, November 26, 1993, A3.

<sup>80</sup> James H. Bilbray to Bill Clinton, September 23, 1994, Folder Korea, July-December 1994 (4) OA/ID 405, Box 2, Part 2 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

<sup>81</sup> Fax from Lt. Col. Cole to Lt. Col. Marty Wisda, March 17, 1994, Folder Korea-Missing in Action OA/ID 1044, Box 3, Part 2 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

<sup>82</sup> The DPRK denied that this transaction was for profit, but many people thought otherwise. See Peter J. Spielmann, "Buying Remains for Cash: North Korea Continues to Return Bones, and US Continues to Pay—Now It's A Question of How Much," *The Beacon Journal* (Akron, OH), September 14, 1994, A2.

<sup>83</sup> Secretary of the UNCMAC to the Joint Staff, "Request for Reappraisal of KPA Compensation Claims," March 18, 1994, with annotation by someone in Washington, Folder Korea-Missing in Action OA/ID 1044, Box 3, Part 2 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

Clinton administration rejected the North Koreans' bill and offered no more than \$2,000 per body.<sup>84</sup> The offer of one-fifteenth of the price tag was likely perceived as unreasonable and insulting by the DPRK, considering its desperate need for cash.

The poor condition of the repatriated remains was the official reason why the US military asked the DPRK to stop its unilateral return of remains through the MAC. A CILHI anthropologist later commented that the 208 boxes of bones returned in those years were "a large commingled skeletal assemblage that contains the remains of hundreds of US military personnel, along with ROK and possibly other UNC soldiers." CILHI estimated that the boxes contained about six hundred individuals. Most of the remains came without accurate information regarding their recovery location.<sup>85</sup> The bones were randomly assembled and showed signs of curation; some skulls, especially the facial portions, demonstrated clear signs of extensive damage by shovel during their exhumation.<sup>86</sup> The condition of the bones perhaps reflected the North Koreans' carelessness or even hatred toward the United States, but no proof supports the hypothesis that bones were deliberately commingled or damaged. These remains were almost impossible to identify at that time and were useless for solving the POW/MIA issue. On October 7, 1994, the United States urged the DPRK to halt all excavations.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> President Clinton to James H. Bilbray, October 29, 1994, Folder Korea, July-December 1994 (4) OA/ID 405, Box 2, Part 2 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

<sup>85</sup> Jennie Jin, *et al.*, "The Korea 208: A Large-Scale Commingling Case of American Remains from the Korean War," in *Commingled Human Remains: Methods in Recovery, Analysis, and Identification*, eds. Bradley J. Adams and John E. Byrd (Oxford: Elsevier Inc., 2014), 409, 420.

<sup>86</sup> *Hearings on Cold War, Korea, WWII POWs*, 262-264.

<sup>87</sup> Letter dated May 13, 1996 from the Permanent Representative of the US to the UN Addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/1996/351. By May 1996, only five bodies had been identified.



The collapse of the MAC channel was by no means purely technical. The default in payment for the remains already repatriated provided the DPRK with a pretext to block this pathway.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, in 1994, as a new step to pressure the United States into signing a bilateral treaty with North Korea to officially end the Korean War, the DPRK finally delegitimized the MAC. On April 28, the DPRK Army announced that they had withdrawn from the MAC (leaving liaison officers there) and threatened to void the Armistice Agreement. China emboldened the North Koreans' decision by leaving the MAC in September, rendering it virtually defunct.<sup>89</sup> As I will discuss in the next section, finally, in June 1994, Kim Il-Sung agreed to allow US military personnel to enter North Korea to exhume remains, which the US military had been after since 1953. The 1993 treaty and the MAC were thus redundant.

### **Stage III: Joint US-DPRK Operations (1996–2005)**

In the first half of 1994, the Korean Peninsula was on the verge of a thermonuclear war. The DPRK withdrew from the MAC, which had maintained the status quo after the Korean War; it also reinitiated its nuclear projects. Unable to tolerate a hostile nuclear power neighboring close allies, the United States conceived of multiple ways to forestall Kim Il-Sung's acquisition of nuclear bombs, including a preemptive

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<sup>88</sup> Letter dated June 5, 1995 from the Permanent Representative of the DPRK to the UN to the President of the Security Council, S/1995/461.

<sup>89</sup> "Background Paper on Korean Armistice Institutions," Folder North Korea, January 1995 (9) OA/ID 711, Box 22, Part 2 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

strike. To avoid another Korean War, US officials actively engaged the North Koreans in search of a peaceful solution to the nuclear crisis, during which time the POW/MIA issue was introduced. The crisis ironically brought forth the most promising response from the DPRK to account for POW/MIAs and to recover their remains.

From 1996 to 2005, the US military worked with the DPRK Army to conduct thirty-three field operations, collecting up to 229 caskets of human bones believed to belong to US servicemen.<sup>90</sup> While frequent political snags in Korea hampered these operations, the major obstacle in the operations during the Clinton administration was how much the Americans would pay for their deceased warriors. George W. Bush administration's hostility toward the DPRK gradually undermined the joint operations, which were ultimately terminated in another nuclear crisis in 2005.

When tensions in Korea mounted in early 1994, an unconventional method based on personal friendship proved to be an alternative to a preemptive strike. In June 1994, ex-President Carter interceded. Although Carter had abhorred Kim Il-Sung during his service in the US Navy in the 1950s, Carter had proposed a US troop reduction in Korea during his own presidency.<sup>91</sup> He deliberated visiting Pyongyang in the early 1990s to facilitate the denuclearization and reunification of Korea. While some promising signs in

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<sup>90</sup> "Progress on Korean War Personnel Accounting," Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, last updated October 28, 2019, <https://www.dpaa.mil/Resources/Fact-Sheets/Article-View/Article/569610/progress-on-korean-war-personnel-accounting/>.

<sup>91</sup> Marion Creekmere Jr., *A Moment of Crisis: Jimmy Carter, the Power of a Peacemaker, and North Korea's Nuclear Ambition* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006), 22-23. Ex-President Carter wrote the introduction for this book. Moreover, the Carter Center sent me a letter signed by Carter recommending I use Creekmere's book for my research.

denuclearization talks and the US-DPRK relationship in November 1993 convinced him that his trip was unnecessary, he recommended that Clinton treat the DPRK with respect and cancel the Team Spirit military exercise in 1994.<sup>92</sup> Clinton did not heed that advice, and the DPRK prepared to accelerate its nuclear project. In response to the DPRK's repeated invitation, Carter offered to visit Pyongyang in June 1994 to lower tensions and to provide a friendly gesture to Kim that he had failed to undertake during his term.<sup>93</sup>

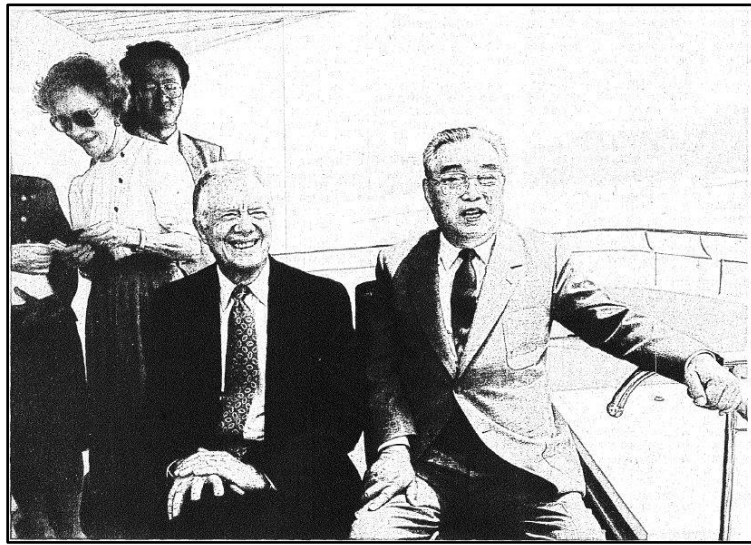


Figure 5-2: Jimmy Carter and Kim Il-Sung were having a cruise trip on the Tae-Dong River in Pyongyang. It was on this ship that Kim agreed to allow US military personnel to enter North Korea and to recover US soldiers' remains. (Copied from *Rodong Sinmun*, June 18, 1994; pursuant to Article 32 of the DPRK copyrights law)

Although a discussion of POW/MIA remains was not originally Carter's priority, he was at least familiar with the issue.<sup>94</sup> Prior to his 1994 trip to Pyongyang, he had not discussed the POW/MIA issue frequently in public releases or speeches. Without a clear

<sup>92</sup> Jimmy Carter to President Clinton, November 17, 1993, Folder Korea (Folder 2) [1] OA/ID 64, Box 4, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

<sup>93</sup> Jimmy Carter to President Clinton, June 6, 1994, cited from Creekmore, *A Moment of Crisis*, 69-71.

<sup>94</sup> Creekmore, *A Moment of Crisis*, 23. During his presidency, Carter once facilitated the return of the bodies of three US aviators after their helicopter was shot down in North Korea.

perspective on how his talks with Kim Il-Sung would proceed, it would have been premature to make such a low-priority demand of Kim. However, Carter received letters from POW/MIA families appealing to him to address this issue, and as a US officer at the MAC escorted him through the DMZ, he was told that it was imperative to dispatch US military personnel to unearth servicemen's remains because they knew the bodies' locations and would exhume them in a professional manner. The officer asked Carter to speak with Kim about the possibility of carrying out joint US-DPRK excavations.<sup>95</sup>

The visit-for-remains method of trade in 1990–1992 continued in the summer of 1994 when Carter was in North Korea and resulted in Kim Il-Sung's oral permission for US military teams to unearth remains in the DPRK. In the early 1990s, North Korea tended to require the visit of increasingly higher-ranked US statesmen before each delivery of remains. On June 16, 1994, the former president, though as a private citizen, traveled to Pyongyang accompanied by a CNN crew. The visit, plus some preliminary consensus between Carter and Kim on Carter's first day in Pyongyang, impressed and satisfied Kim Il-Sung. On the second day, by Kim's private invitation, the two cruised the Tae-Dong River together, filmed by CNN. Camaraderie between Carter and Kim developed during the three hours spent on the cruise ship. In a relaxed atmosphere, they reached a few oral agreements on nuclear projects and sanctions in front of CNN cameras, although these were later furiously disavowed by the Clinton administration. At

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 125.

the peak of their rapport on the ship, Carter proposed the dispatch of US military personnel to recover remains.<sup>96</sup>

Even though Kim Il-Sung enjoyed the friendship and publicity of Carter's visit, the ex-president's request was difficult for Kim to accept. Carter emphasized the Americans' knowledge of the remains' locations and avoided talking about the poor quality of the bodies, but Kim argued that the channel via the MAC was operational (without mentioning the DPRK's withdrawal from the MAC). Contrary to the official policy that capped the price for each body, Carter urged, "in the spirit of cooperation and friendship, let our people join the search. We would pay all of the expenses." Kim budged a little but linked the formation of a joint survey team to vaguely defined improvements in the relations between the countries that could hardly be achieved in the foreseeable future. At this moment, Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Kim intervened on Carter's behalf and forced Kim's verbal consent that "We will go together and unearth them together."<sup>97</sup> In an Associated Press report, Kim's comment after his reluctant consent was "I'm done."<sup>98</sup> No written treaty was drafted, guaranteeing that the agreement would be voided with Kim Il-Sung's sudden death in July 1994 and Clinton's refusal to honor Carter's other deals with Kim. Even in the report of his visit, Carter worried that this deal over jointly recovering remains might "become bogged down in debates."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 188-189. North Korea evidently did not treat Carter as a private citizen.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 192-193.

<sup>98</sup> Associated Press, "Nod from N. Korean Leader's Wife Brings Agreement on U.S. Servicemen's Remains," *Times and Democrats* (Orangeburg, SC), June 20, 1994, 3A.

<sup>99</sup> "Report on Our Trip to Korea by Jimmy Carter," June 1994, cited from Creekmore, *A Moment of Crisis*, 319-325.

Kim Il-Sung's demise nullified Carter's efforts. When Kim Jong-Il assumed power, he resumed talks on denuclearization with the United States and promised to honor his father's promises "to resolve the nuclear and other pending issues between the DPRK and the United States of America in close cooperation with the US Administration."<sup>100</sup> In practice, however, except for a few agreements on paper regarding the nuclear issue, Kim Jong-Il was unwilling to cooperate with the United States, including on the joint recovery of remains, without extracting more political or economic benefits.<sup>101</sup> The return of American soldiers' remains in September 1994 via the MAC initially seemed to be a sign of the new leader's intention to honor his father's written treaty of the year before; he could not scrap such a publicized agreement if he wanted to secure international prestige and consolidate his domestic power by being perceived as a faithful successor. The reluctant oral deal was something utterly different, and the fragile domestic situation in the DPRK gave him a solid excuse to delay opening his country to US military personnel tasked with recovering bodies.

Kim Jong-Il did, though, enter serious negotiations with the United States to solve the nuclear crisis, creating favorable circumstances for recovering remains from North Korea via a bilateral channel. Two months after Carter's tour of Pyongyang, the United States concurred with the DPRK that they would set up liaison offices in their respective

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<sup>100</sup> Pak Gil Yon to Newt Gingrich, August 25, 1994, Folder North Korea-Framework (11) OA/ID 711, Box 24, Part 2 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library. Kim Jong-Il resumed talks with the Americans on the nuclear issue in August 1994.

<sup>101</sup> Creekmore, *A Moment of Crisis*, 367 n.4.

capitals in order to offer technical support to the project of denuclearizing North Korea.

The two countries' diplomats expected that these offices would move the United States and the DPRK "toward full normalization of political and economic relations."<sup>102</sup>

Building liaison offices appeared in the two countries' Agreed Framework signed on October 21, 1994, in which the DPRK promised to halt its nuclear program in exchange for energy aid from the United States.<sup>103</sup>

The White House seemed to hope that the proposed offices would be tasked with solving the POW/MIA issue, but multiple issues prevented their establishment, which in turn delayed the initiation of joint US-DPRK operations for recovering US soldiers' remains to 1996.<sup>104</sup> While many details regarding the liaison offices had been agreed upon by August 1995, a critical deadlock remained: North Korea refused to permit US officials for the liaison office in Pyongyang to deliver diplomatic pouches through Panmunjom. North Korea preferred to scrap the proposal of liaison offices rather than compromise.<sup>105</sup> According to Lynn Turk, a State Department official who had negotiated with the North Koreans over the liaison offices, the DPRK was extremely reluctant to allow US officials to travel long distances in North Korea, like from Pyongyang to

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<sup>102</sup> "Agreed Statement between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," August 12, 1994, Geneva, cited from Wit, Poneman, and Gallucci, *Going Critical*, 420-421.

<sup>103</sup> "Agreed Framework between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," October 21, 1994, Geneva, cited from Wit, Poneman, and Gallucci, *Going Critical*, 421-423.

<sup>104</sup> Anthony Lake to Nicolas J. Pappas, December 23, 1995, Folder North Korea, 1995 (1) OA/ID 1040, Box 6, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library. This letter was widely distributed to multiple veterans or POW/MIA activists.

<sup>105</sup> Pak Sok Gyun to Lynn Turk, August 14, 1995, and Jeffrey Goldstein to Pak Sok Gyun, August 23, 1995, Folder North Korea (1), Box 9, Part 2 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

Panmunjom (and then to South Korea). Ultimately, North Korea lost all interest in setting up these offices.<sup>106</sup> As the two countries were technically at war, the North Koreans' reluctance was understandable. In 1954, such reluctance had likely prevented the US military from searching for its deceased soldiers in North Korea. After more than four decades, the same concern still delayed the return of US soldiers' bodies.

It is possible that Clinton also had reasons to be lukewarm about setting up the liaison office. When he lifted the US trade embargo on Vietnam in 1994 and announced the normalization of the US-Vietnam relationship in 1995, some members of Congress and Vietnam War POW/MIA activists vehemently disparaged him.<sup>107</sup> He had to be cautious about upgrading the US-DPRK relationship while there was little progress in accounting for Korean War POW/MIAs.

Although the United States was no longer objecting to direct talks with the DPRK in 1995, payment still hampered progress in recovering remains.<sup>108</sup> That year, the DPRK endured a catastrophic famine after being weaned off food and monetary aid from the ex-socialist bloc.<sup>109</sup> It was possibly also waiting to see if the United States and its allies

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<sup>106</sup> Eric Talmadge, "Swedes Keep Room Ready for US Diplomats in Pyongyang," Associated Press News, March 25, 2019, <https://apnews.com/5c12a9c9f5054c7fa15344d345ed68a5>; and Lynn Turk, "North Korea: Liaison Offices—The First Time," 38 North, June 29, 2018, <https://www.38north.org/2018/06/lturk062918/>. Turk also believed that the DPRK military strongly disfavored the liaison office and prevented its establishment.

<sup>107</sup> In the series of 2015-0530S (Vietnam) of the Clinton Presidential Library, there are boxes of letters from these people.

<sup>108</sup> Testimony by J. Alan Liotta before the House Committee on International Relations Asia Subcommittee, June 20, 1996, a copy from Folder Korea-Miscellaneous, 1996 (1) OA/ID 1048, Box 6, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

<sup>109</sup> "North Korea Food Outlook," January 31, 1996, Folder Korea-Miscellaneous 1996 (3) OA/ID 1048, Box 6, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.



would deliver the fuel and food promised in the Agreed Framework. Therefore, the DPRK was eager to acquire some financial support from the United States in order to judge whether the relationship between the two countries would improve. It expected at least some payment, on which the United States had so far defaulted, for remains returned in previous years. In one of its letters to the UN in 1995, it expressed resentment toward the US government for failing to fully defray the cost of the bodies. Under these circumstances, the DPRK suspended the search for remains.<sup>110</sup>

Seeing no progress in 1995, some Korean War veterans and POW/MIA activists were tired of the liaison office approach and considered alternative strategies. Some denounced the US government for its unwillingness to normalize relations with the DPRK, even though it was the North Koreans who were slow to set up an office. In November, the leaders of the KWVA, the Chosin Few, the VFW, and the American Legion bombarded the White House with similar messages and recommended two assistant deputy secretaries from the State Department and the Defense Department “meet directly with representatives of North Korea.”<sup>111</sup> An influential POW/MIA campaigner, Pat Dunton of the Korean/Cold War Family Association of the Missing, requested that Clinton “begin bilateral negotiations with North Korea regarding the missing from the Korean War” and address it “separately from any other United States or

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<sup>110</sup> Letter dated 5 June 1995 from the Permanent Representative of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to the United Nations Addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/1995/461.

<sup>111</sup> For example, Nicholas J. Pappas to Anthony Lake, November 16, 1995, Folder North Korea, 1995 (1) OA/ID 1040, Box 6, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library. In this folder, there are at least four such letters.

United Nations/North Korea negotiations.” She even suggested that the military be removed from talks and argued that the DPRK be recognized in exchange for POW/MIA intelligence.<sup>112</sup> By December 1995, the military had invited the North Koreans to CILHI to offer them technical advice for locating and exhuming US soldiers’ remains.<sup>113</sup>

Establishing a liaison office between the two countries has not seemed to reappear in POW/MIA remains negotiation since 1996. In the following decade, instead of seeking a treaty that was intended to be valid for years but lacked details for implementation, before any joint operation in the DPRK, the two countries bargained over practical procedures and payment. Launching an operation was subject to two major factors: 1) the price the United States would pay for the cost of the excavations and 2) the politicization of the POW/MIA issue by the two countries. The DPRK’s nuclear project did not initially interfere with the recovery of remains, perhaps because both countries then attempted to comply with the Agreed Framework in 1994 and ostensibly committed to the peaceful denuclearization of North Korea.

The first joint recovery operation, scheduled to occur in the summer of 1996, demonstrated how desperate the North Koreans were to trade remains for foreign currency. On January 10, 1996, the negotiation for joint excavation of bodies in North Korea began at CILHI. Instead of limiting the talks to technical issues, the State and

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<sup>112</sup> Pat Wilson Dunton to Anthony Lake, November 13, 1995, Folder North Korea, 1995 (1) OA/ID 1040, Box 6, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

<sup>113</sup> Anthony Lake to Nicolas J. Pappas, December 23, 1995, Folder North Korea, 1995 (1) OA/ID 1040, Box 6, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

Defense Departments dispatched senior officials to meet DPRK generals and diplomats to determine the details of the operation. By the fourth day, the two sides had nearly finalized a joint mission, but then two high-ranking members of the DPRK team demanded that the United States pay \$4 million for the remains delivered in 1993 and 1994, for which the US team said it would offer \$1 million at most.<sup>114</sup> Five days later, an unofficial report from Pat Dunton said that the offer had been doubled to \$2 million, but the North Koreans were still unsatisfied.<sup>115</sup> They left the next day on the grounds of inadequate payment. According to the *New York Times*, the North Koreans' action served as a warning to the United States that if upcoming talks among the United States, the ROK, and Japan did not result in a satisfactory amount of food aid to relieve the famine and flood in North Korea, the United States should not expect any more remains.<sup>116</sup> The Defense Department officially admitted that money was "a major stumbling block to joint US-North Korean recovery operations," but it assured the public that the North Koreans had "expressed interest in future meetings."<sup>117</sup>

In addition to payment, there was another factor complicating the negotiations. The DPRK military remained skeptical about the joint missions, possibly due to the same concern that had frustrated the plan for liaison offices in 1995, but the suspicion only cast

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<sup>114</sup> Tim Weiner, "US at Least Breaks the Ice with North Korea on MIAs," *New York Times*, January 15, 1996, A9.

<sup>115</sup> Robert Burns, "US Ready to Pay N. Korea Millions for War Remains," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 19, 1996, A10. The initial US offer in 1994 was \$400,000.

<sup>116</sup> "North Korea to End Effort to Recover War Remains," *New York Times*, January 21, 1996, 9.

<sup>117</sup> Jim Garamone, "Accounting for Korean War Missing," *DoD News*, February 29, 1996, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=40574>.

doubt on when the joint mission should start, rather than whether it would be executed.<sup>118</sup>

The North Koreans probably desired more time to ensure that the potential excavation sites would not pose a threat to national security, or even to move remains away from their key military facilities.<sup>119</sup> In January 1996, while rejecting the Americans' proposal to launch the joint operation in spring or early summer, they announced that North Korean civilians who might have knowledge of wartime burials had been mobilized to support the search for remains.<sup>120</sup>

When the meeting reconvened in May, it further proved that the financially depleted DPRK was eager to exchange remains for monetary aid from the United States. Before the meeting, the Defense Department had agreed to pay \$2 million and concluded that the difference between this number and the North Koreans' figure was the only remaining issue.<sup>121</sup> In May, the North Koreans consented to this amount.<sup>122</sup> The US military announced that after the North Koreans had walked away from the January meeting, they had ordered their UN representatives to negotiate an acceptable amount with the United States; therefore, walking away had been a strategy to extract maximum

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<sup>118</sup> Tim Weiner, "US at Least Breaks the Ice with North Korea on MIAs," *New York Times*, January 15, 1996, A9.

<sup>119</sup> The North Koreans did stage some burial sites by dumping random bones of American soldiers into a pre-dug pit, especially in Unsan. This idea was conveyed by Jennie Jin's presentation "Progress on the Korean War Project: K208, JRO, and Punchbowl Unknowns," during the annual DPAA briefing for the Korean War/Cold War on August 11, 2017. However, the interpretation of North Koreans' intention is mine. Jin did not interpret the staged burial in her presentation.

<sup>120</sup> Robert Burns, "US Ready to Pay N. Korea Millions for War Remains," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 19, 1996, A10.

<sup>121</sup> Philip Shenon, "US and North Korea Agree on Joint Search for Missing," *New York Times*, May 10, 1996, A12.

<sup>122</sup> Department of Defense News Release, "New York Agreement on USA-DPRK Remains Talks, Release No.269-96," May 10, 1996, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=877>.

food aid from the United States and its allies. By May, it was probable that the DPRK had realized that earning \$2 million to mitigate famine and flood was more reasonable than waiting for \$4 million that might never arrive, but the concession had conditions. The fund was to be transferred through Panmunjom in ten days.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, the amount could “not serve as a precedent for any future compensation.”<sup>124</sup> It left leeway for the North Koreans to demand more later on for their labor and intelligence or for the Americans’ entrance to the country. In June, the Defense Department considered offering even more food supply to encourage DPRK civilians’ support for recovering remains.<sup>125</sup>

The DPRK’s official statement on May 11, 1996, also revealed the critical role of money. The original goal of this statement had been to announce that by the admission of the United States, the meeting’s aim was to improve the US-DPRK bilateral relationship. It emphasized, however, that the North Koreans had insisted in that meeting that as a way for the United States to express gratitude for their cooperation in the 1993 and 1994 returns of remains, the DPRK must be fully reimbursed for their materials and time, the disturbance to North Koreans’ properties, and the use of equipment for exhumation.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> “North Korea is Paid for Help on War Dead,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1996, A8.

<sup>124</sup> The official interpretation was that the US would better assess the cost of the actual recovery mission, which may indicate that the United States might pay less in future. See “US/DPRK Agreement on Accounting for Americans MIAs from Korea, Presenters: Alan Liotta, Deputy Director, Defense POW/MIA Affairs, May 10, 1996, 11:00AM EDT,” Department of Defense News Transcript, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=518>.

<sup>125</sup> Memorandum for Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs from Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (POW/MIA Affairs), “Request for Exception to Policy-Provision of Subsistence Rations to North Korean Workers Supporting Recovery Operations in North Korea,” June 25, 1996, Folder Korea-Miscellaneous, 1996 (1) OA/ID 1048, Box 6, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

<sup>126</sup> “Migunyugolmunjee Daehan Jomihodam Nyuyokeseo Jinhaeng [About the Issue of US Soldiers’ Remains, US-DPRK Meeting in Progress in New York City],” *Rodong Sinmun*, May 11, 1996, 4.

Once payment was agreed upon, though the North Koreans were cautious about the scope of the first joint operation, it proceeded smoothly. The operation was limited to a single crash site in Unsan County, to which Defense Department officials had been escorted prior to the excavation. The date of the operation was set for July 10 and was not to last more than twenty days.<sup>127</sup> The first body was recovered on July 29 and identified a few months later.<sup>128</sup>

Due to a combination of financial and political issues, the second mission, scheduled for September 1996, never materialized. This was not a surprise, at least to the White House, which had warned veterans in June about the second mission's unpredictability.<sup>129</sup> As the DPMO was about to finalize the mission's details, the DPRK Army commander at Panmunjom wrote to the DPMO on August 18 and stressed the inadequacy of the United States' prior payment for his country's sincere help in returning remains between 1990 and 1994. He also complained that the DPRK had not received an installment for the first operation in 1996 and that allowing its ex-enemies to search for bodies in its territory was a great concession from the DPRK. He concluded that "it is completely illogical to mention about the beginning of the second operation without proper consideration" of compensation and demanded more money and humanitarian

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<sup>127</sup> Testimony by J. Alan Liotta before the House Committee on International Relations Asia Subcommittee, June 20, 1996, Folder Korea-Miscellaneous, 1996 (1) OA/ID 1048, Box 6, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

<sup>128</sup> "Remains of Korean War Soldier Identified," *Defense POW/MP Weekly Update*, October 15, 1996, Folder Korea Miscellaneous, 1996 (1) OA/ID 1048, Box 6, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

<sup>129</sup> Anthony Lake to Frank Metersky, June 19, 1996, Folder North Korea, 1996 (3), OA/ID 1048, Box 7, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

relief before the second mission.<sup>130</sup> The DPMO contended that the first mission had, in fact, been fully defrayed but promised to consider additional payment so long as the second operation started on time.<sup>131</sup>

Before the payment was settled, on September 18, a DPRK submarine accidentally ran aground off the ROK coast. Its crew and the commandos on board infiltrated South Korea, resulting in a costly manhunt and condemnation from the United States and South Korea. Among other reprisals, Clinton dissuaded then-Representative Bill Richardson (D-NM), who had a decent private relationship with the North Koreans, from visiting Pyongyang to intercede on the issue of remains repatriation and the DPRK food crisis.<sup>132</sup> In late November 1996, however, Richardson visited North Korea to retrieve an American missionary accused of espionage, which partially salvaged the US-DPRK relationship.<sup>133</sup> Ultimately, to reengage with the US government, the DPRK announced its “deep regret” for the submarine incident.<sup>134</sup>

Discussion of joint recovery operations restarted in early 1997, and the acceptable rate for each operation (or body) remained the focus. The DPRK’s expression of regret for the submarine incident had removed a political obstacle to reconciliation. Moreover, the DPRK welcomed Clinton’s proposal for joint talks with the United States, the PRC,

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<sup>130</sup> Pak Rim Su to Alan Liotta, August 18, 1996, Folder Korea-Miscellaneous, 1996 (1) OA/ID 1048, Box 6, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

<sup>131</sup> Joe B. Harvey to Pak Rim Su, August 21, 1996, Folder Korea-Miscellaneous, 1996 (1) OA/ID 1048, Box 6, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F (Korea), Clinton Library.

<sup>132</sup> Terry Atlas, “Sub Incident Tangles US Goals for Koreans,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 25, 1996, 10.

<sup>133</sup> Nicolas D. Kristof, “North Korea Frees American, Prompting Optimism on Other Issues,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1996, A7.

<sup>134</sup> Nicholas D. Kristof, “‘Deep Regret’ Sent by North Koreans,” *New York Times*, December 30, 1996, A1.

and the ROK to formally conclude the Korean War. Despite some resistance in Congress, the State Department favored financial assistance to the DPRK to facilitate its cooperation in searching for POW/MIAs. In April, it promised \$15 million worth of food to the DPRK.<sup>135</sup> After negotiations in May 1997 that resulted in the two countries agreeing on a rate of \$105,500 for each operation, three such operations took place. Between August and October 1997, the US military retrieved the bodies of six soldiers from these operations.<sup>136</sup> The cost was nearly \$50,000 per body, much higher than in all previous repatriations. The payment elicited further breakthroughs in the recovery of remains. In the last operation in 1997, the North Koreans invited and escorted US veterans of the Korean War to excavation sites, libraries, and war museums.<sup>137</sup> By the end of 1997, five operations had been scheduled for 1998.<sup>138</sup>

In the following years, while the US-DPRK relationship continued to improve thanks to the Clinton administration's overall friendly policies to North Korea, the DPRK still prioritized the extraction of money and aid from the United States in exchange for bodies. Although remains had been transported through the MAC since the first joint

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<sup>135</sup> Steven L. Myers, "US Giving North Korea More Food, Reply Due Today on Holding Talks," *New York Times*, April 16, 1997, A9; and *A World Wide Review of the Clinton Administration's POW/MIA Policies and Programs, Hearing before the Committee on International Relations*, House of Representatives, 105th Congress, Second Session, June 17, 1998, 22-23, 26-27.

<sup>136</sup> Department of Defense, "United States and North Korea Reach Agreement on POW/MIAs, Release No. 242-97," news release, May 15, 1997, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=1258>; Rudi Williams, "US, North Korea Agree to Search for MIAs," *DoD News*, May 19, 1997, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=41001>; Letter dated September 9, 1998 from the Permanent Representative of the US to the UN Addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/1998/844.

<sup>137</sup> J. Robert Lunney's narrative about his trip to the DPRK as a representative of the POW/MIA Committee, the Chosin Few, dated on November 13, 1997, a copy from Folder North Korea/PPD-56, Political-Military Collapse Plan (1), OA/ID 3058, Box 9, Part 1 of Series 2009-0528F, Clinton Library.

<sup>138</sup> "Defense POW/MIA Weekly Update," December 10, 1997, a copy from Folder Korea-Instability Planning (loose 1), OA/ID 1828, Box 12, Part 2 of Series 2009-0528F, Clinton Library.



operation in 1996, in October 1999, the Defense Department dispatched officials to accept bodies in Pyongyang, finally removing the MAC from its effort to account for Korean War POW/MIAs.<sup>139</sup> That month, Kim Jong-Il invited Clinton to Pyongyang for a talk on the issue of DPRK missile projects (Clinton did not go, but his secretary of state did in 2000).<sup>140</sup> In December 1999, however, when the two countries met in Berlin to hammer out the details of operations to take place in 2000, the DPRK delegates terminated the meeting without an agreement after the United States refused to pay the amount of humanitarian aid they requested.<sup>141</sup>

Since the North Koreans had suspended negotiations due to money, the Americans could only get them back by offering more. On June 7, 2000, when they met in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the United States extended a much more generous offer. In 1999, the rate per mission had been \$200,000, twice that of 1997. In 2000, the rate was doubled again to \$400,000. The new rate was somewhat justifiable. First, the US military selected Unsan and a few POW campsites for excavation. The DPMO expected that at least 1,500 servicemen had perished in these areas, and so these operations would yield an unprecedented number of bodies.<sup>142</sup> Second, the time was unique: the first operation was

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<sup>139</sup> Department of Defense, "North Korea Agrees to Repatriate Remains, Release No. 484-99," news release, October 15, 1999, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=2225>. According to the DPMO, it was due to DPRK's pressure.

<sup>140</sup> Statement by the President, December 28, 2000, Folder North Korea, OA/ID 4019, Box 17, Part 2 of Series 2009-0528F, Clinton Library.

<sup>141</sup> Department of Defense, "North Korean Talks End without Agreement, Release No. 547-99," news release, December 17, 1999, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=2273>; Anne Gearan, "MIA Searches Go on, Clinton Assures Families," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 30, 2000, A1.

<sup>142</sup> Robert Burns, "US and North Korea Forge Agreement on Search for Remains of GIs," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 10, 2000, A5; Robert Burns, "Search for US Remains to Resume on Anniversary Date," *Carlsbad Current-Argus* (Carlsbad, NM), June 11, 2000, 8A.

to begin on the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the Korean War, while the last one was to end on Veterans' Day.<sup>143</sup> The mutually beneficial nature of the recovery missions was highlighted in their October 12 joint communiqué, "Calls for Permanent Peace Arrangements," in which the DPRK juxtaposed the food and medical assistance proffered by the United States and its allies with the repatriation of remains.<sup>144</sup> By December 2000, the US military had recovered sixty-five bodies.<sup>145</sup>



Figure 5-3: (Left) American and North Korean military personnel were working together to investigate possible burial sites of US servicemen. (Right) Remains recovered from the Chosin Reservoir area were being packed before repatriation. (Copied from Jennie Jin's presentation "Progress on the Korean War Project," on August 11, 2017, Korean/Cold War Annual Government Briefings)

When George W. Bush took over the White House, Clinton's friendly efforts to

<sup>143</sup> Department of Defense, "US, North Korean Negotiators Agree to Remains Recovery Operations, Release No. 322-00," news release, June 9, 2000, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=2489>.

<sup>144</sup> The text is cited from Wit, Poneman, and Gallucci, 425-428.

<sup>145</sup> Associated Press, "Talks to Start about War Remains," *South Bend Tribune* (South Bend, IN), December 7, 2000, A12. Considering that only 229 bodies were recovered between 1996 and 2005, the missions in 2000 were very successful.

tame the DPRK's nuclear ambitions were gradually nullified; and the joint operations to recover remains soon became a victim of Bush's more aggressive policies. Bush's first-term cabinet was filled with unilateralists who favored military threats over accommodation. The Agreed Framework, which required that North Korea abandon its nuclear project in exchange for light water reactors and supply of heavy oil from the United States, had been defaulted on by both sides since its implementation. It had long been disdained by Republicans, who thought that the United States had been blackmailed.<sup>146</sup> Proof that the DPRK had resumed the development of nuclear weapons and its presence since 1988 on the list of states sponsoring terrorism prompted Bush to reverse policies toward the DPRK, especially after the 9/11 attack.<sup>147</sup> In his State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002, Bush declared the DPRK, Iran, and Iraq to be the "Axis of Evil" and deemed it justifiable to carry out a preemptive attack on hostile states that presumably owned weapons of mass destruction.<sup>148</sup> The first US-DPRK negotiation on remains recovery in 2002 fell apart due to this animosity.<sup>149</sup>

In June 2002, while the DPRK offered three joint operations to acquire more money from the Americans, the United States took the offer but seemed to lose interest in following through. The Defense Department blamed the DPRK's lack of cooperation and

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<sup>146</sup> Walter C. Clements Jr., *North Korea and the World: Human Rights, Arms Control, and Strategies for Negotiation* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 207-208, 213; Creekmore, *A Moment of Crisis*, xxii. The Agreed Framework finally collapsed in late 2002.

<sup>147</sup> Peter Howard, "Why Not Invade North Korea? Threats, Language Games, and U.S. Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no.4 (December 2004): 806.

<sup>148</sup> Wit, Poneman, and Gallucci, *Going Critical*, 378.

<sup>149</sup> Department of Defense, "US-North Korea POW/MIA Talks End, Release No. 050-02," news release, February 2, 2002, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=3223>.

its failure to promise that US personnel working there would be safe, an issue that had never been broached in previous years.<sup>150</sup> If the safety issue was not provoked by the deteriorating relations between North Korean soldiers and American investigators at excavation sites as a result of Bush's hostile policies, then it was likely an excuse for Bush to terminate the DPRK's lucrative business while shifting blame in order to avert fury from domestic POW/MIA activists. The safety issue also complicated the negotiations on recovering remains in 2003 and 2004.<sup>151</sup>

In 2003 and 2004, although there were still joint operations, the Bush administration moved toward blocking the most productive US-DPRK bilateral cooperation by linking it to DPRK denuclearization. Bush disdained Clinton's policy of giving the DPRK *de facto* recognition; instead, he insisted on multilateral talks, which later became the Six-Party Talks. The United States demanded "complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement" of nuclear facilities in the DPRK before any other topics could be addressed, which the DPRK deemed offensive to its national sovereignty.<sup>152</sup> In October 2002, when the DPRK publicly admitted to clandestine nuclear projects that had supposedly been halted by the Agreed Framework, the White House decided that it must

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<sup>150</sup> Department of Defense, "Agreement Reached on Korean War MIA Remains Recoveries, Release No. 296-02," news release, June 10, 2002, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=3375>; and "US-North Korea Conclude POW/MIA Talks, Release No. 508-02," news release, October 7, 2002, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=3499>.

<sup>151</sup> Department of Defense, "US-North Korea Conclude POW/MIA Talks, Release No. 858-03," news release, November 17, 2003, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=5792>; and "US-North Korea Reach Agreement on Recovery of US MIA, Release No. 1189-04" news release, November 19, 2004, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=7974>.

<sup>152</sup> Creekmore, *A Moment of Crisis*, 278.

suspend the joint recovery operation, though the militaries of both countries had just pledged otherwise in their talks over technical support and POW/MIA intelligence.

Hawks in the Bush administration found it absurd to pay millions of dollars to a hostile regime and perceived related negotiations to be a sign of weakness. According to an Associated Press journalist, there was fierce disagreement within the military and the administration about whether operations to recover remains should hinge on the nuclear issue; since the late 1980s, the United States had been insisting that the search for POW/MIA remains was a purely humanitarian issue. Possibly under pressure from veterans and some military officers, the Defense Department announced in June 2003 that contacting the DPRK for the purposes of recovering bodies did not contradict current US foreign policy.<sup>153</sup> While the military offered a more generous payment (\$2.1 million for two operations in 2004), it revoked the North Koreans' privilege of bypassing the MAC to deliver remains.<sup>154</sup>

Despite mounting hostilities, the DPRK still arranged operations at Unsan and the Chosin Reservoir in 2005, but the United States never followed through with them.<sup>155</sup>

After just one operation, the Pentagon directed its personnel to evacuate the DPRK on May 25 and canceled all future operations due to "the uncertain environment created by

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<sup>153</sup> David E. Sanger, "North Korea Says It Has A Program on Nuclear Arms," *New York Times*, October 17, 2002, A1; Robert Burns, "Nuclear Threat Stymied Recovery of War Remains," *Marysville Journal-Tribune* (Marysville, OH), September 24, 2003, 10.

<sup>154</sup> Department of Defense, "US-North Korea Strike New Arrangements on MIA Operations, Release No. 101-04," news release, February 12, 2004, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=7073>.

<sup>155</sup> Department of Defense, "US-North Korea Reach Agreement on Recovery of US MIA, Release No. 1189-04," news release, November 19, 2004, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=7974>.

North Korea's unwillingness to participate in the Six-Party Talks," its re-initiation of its nuclear project, its withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and safety issues.<sup>156</sup> In May 2005, although the DPRK sometimes revealed its wish to return to the Six-Party Talks, its official propaganda outlet *Rodong Sinmun* published long tirades holding the United States responsible for the ongoing nuclear crisis. In such a precarious situation, the US military had few options other than evacuating its personnel. In June, a Defense Department official testified in Congress that it had to cease all operations because the DPRK could not guarantee communication with US personnel deployed there or their prompt evacuation in case of accidental injury.<sup>157</sup>

POW/MIA activists who traveled to the DPRK in later years offered firsthand reports that proved that Bush's politicization of the remains prevented the repatriation of US soldiers' bodies after 2005. One activist, Frank Metersky, testified before Congress in 2009 that "North Korea's ready to reengage on the POW/MIA issue." He reported that Kim Jong-Il told visiting Americans, "we didn't shut it down [...] You shut it down in 2005, your country."<sup>158</sup> According to senior staff of the Richardson Center for Global Engagement who traveled to Pyongyang in 2016, the DPRK still looked favorably on

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<sup>156</sup> "US Halts Search for Its War Dead in North Korea," *New York Times*, May 26, 2005, A11; Emma Chanlett-Avery and Ian E. Rinehart, *North Korea: US Relations, Nuclear Diplomacy, and Internal Situation*, CRS Report R-41529 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 22-23. The DPRK acceded to the treaty in 1985 and withdrew from it in 2003. In December 1993, the DPRK threatened to quit it, leading to the crisis in 1994, but it soon retracted the threat.

<sup>157</sup> *North Korea: An Update on Six-Party Talks and Matters Related to the Resolution of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis, Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, Senate, 109th Congress, First Session, June 14, 2005, 25.

<sup>158</sup> *Improving Recovery and Full Accounting of POW/MIA Personnel from All Past Conflicts, Hearing before the Military Personnel Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services*, House of Representatives, 111th Congress, First Session, April 2, 2009, 19.

trade during the Clinton era: using remains to gain currency and other material aid.<sup>159</sup> It deeply resented Bush (and later Obama) for associating bodies with the nuclear issue. North Korea insisted that if the US government had approached it just for remains, this issue would have been solved long ago. In 2016, the DPRK claimed to have about 220 bodies ready for return, pending a negotiation that did not involve other issues.<sup>160</sup>

#### **Stage IV: Back to Stage I, Reengaging with the DPRK (2007–Present)**

When the repatriation of remains from North Korea was suspended in 2005, no one could predict when the DPRK would again become accessible to Americans. The United States adopted two strategies to regain access to remains: private visits by officials to the DPRK (as in Stage I) and negotiations between the Defense and State Departments and their DPRK counterparts (as in Stage III). Only the Stage I strategy has brought back US servicemen's remains from North Korea since 2005. Bilateral cooperation at the government level never recovered from Bush's perceived hostility, and President Obama failed to resume it.

The only official attempt that neared success was in late 2011 after the United States offered political and financial concessions. To keep the DPRK in the Six-Party Talks, from which the DPRK did not formally withdraw in 2005, Bush had removed the

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<sup>159</sup> Presentation of Mickey Bergman, during the annual DPAA briefing for the Korean War/Cold War on August 10, 2017; and Interview with ex-Governor of New Mexico Bill Richardson on November 10, 2017.

<sup>160</sup> Rick Downes, the current president of the Coalition of the Families of the Korean War/Cold War POW/MIAs, interview by the author, tape-recorded, on November 7, 2017. He traveled with Mickey Bergman to the DPRK in 2016.

DPRK from the list of terrorism-sponsoring states shortly before he left the Oval Office.<sup>161</sup> In April 2009, however, the DPRK quit the Six-Party Talks after being condemned by the UN Security Council for a missile test, and so in late October 2011, the United States reluctantly faced the DPRK in Geneva to persuade it to return.<sup>162</sup> A few months before this meeting, a senior DPRK diplomat had visited New York City to bargain over the terms for rejoining the Six-Party Talks, during which he was offered \$900,000 worth of flood relief supplies. Reciprocally, in August, the DPRK agreed to discuss a search for POW/MIA remains with the United States in response to an earlier request for talks from the Pentagon. The deal can be traced back to a 2010 offer from Pyongyang of a large quantity of newly discovered remains, allegedly turned down by the State Department due to its policy that “any bilateral negotiation between the US and North Korea would not be possible out of the context of the six-party talks.”<sup>163</sup>

On October 20, 2011, the two countries struck a short-lived deal for recovering POW/MIA remains. They agreed to jointly investigate suspected burial sites of POW/MIA remains at Unsan and the Chosin Reservoir in the spring. To prevent the excuses of 2005—safety for US personnel and politics—from torpedoing the operation,

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<sup>161</sup> Michael D. Shear and David E. Sanger, “Trump Revives Terrorist Label for Pyongyang,” *New York Times*, November 21, 2017, A1.

<sup>162</sup> “Chronology of US-North Korea Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy: Fact Sheets & Briefs,” Arms Control Association, last updated March 2020, accessed March 30, 2020, <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>.

<sup>163</sup> Choe Sang-Hun, “North Korea Agrees to Talk on Searching for Remains of Missing US Soldiers,” *New York Times*, August 20, 2011, A9; Choe Sang-Hun, “US and North Korea May Discuss Recovering Remains of Americans,” *New York Times*, August 10, 2011, A6; “KPA Holds US Side Responsible for Leaving Remains of GIs,” *Korean Central News Agency*, April 5, 2010, the English version is provided by the website of National Committee on North Korea.



the DPRK pledged to guarantee Americans' safety, and the United States reiterated the operation's humanitarian nature.<sup>164</sup> However, on March 21, 2012, the Pentagon stated that "the United States has suspended efforts to find remains of US service members lost during the Korean War due to North Korean threats to launch a ballistic missile" and "North Korea has not acted appropriately in recent days and weeks." The United States was particularly enraged because the DPRK had just signed a treaty on February 29 that placed a moratorium on missile launches in exchange for food. Interestingly, the United States unambiguously denied that it was politicizing the issue of the remains and charged the DPRK with linking this issue to a US-ROK military exercise. The DPRK reportedly felt the exercise did not honor the spirit of the agreement from the previous October.<sup>165</sup> Under these circumstances, the offer of several million dollars for remains would have likely encouraged even more reckless actions from the DPRK. The unexpected death of Kim Jong-Il in December 2011 also gave his successor, Kim Jong-Un, a pretext to suspend cooperation, just as had been the case in 1994.

Since 2005, unofficial deals have been slightly more successful. Most notably, New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson brought back six bodies in 2007. The governor had a long history of serving as a special diplomat to the North Koreans outside the State

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<sup>164</sup> Department of Defense, "US-North Korea Conclude POW/MIA Talks, Release No. 895-11," news release, October 20, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=14874>; Donna Miles, "Recovery Mission to Begin This Spring in North Korea," *DoD News*, January 27, 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=66958>.

<sup>165</sup> Jim Garamone, "US Suspends MIA Search in Korea," Defense.gov News Article, March 21, 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=67639>; Matthew Pennington, "Recovery of Korean War Remains Halted: US Move to A Response to North's Plan to Launch Rocket," *News Journal* (Wilmington, DE), March 22, 2012, A5.

Department. In 1994, he facilitated the return of a captured American pilot and the body of another shot down in the DPRK; later, he dedicated himself to Korean family reunions across the DMZ and advocated friendly policies toward the country, believing trust between the countries could be built through the recovery of remains and family reunions.<sup>166</sup> The DPRK thought that his visit in 2007 to claim remains would significantly reduce US-DPRK hostilities.<sup>167</sup>

When he embarked for North Korea in April 2007, Richardson attempted to reopen a direct communication channel between the two countries that had earlier been closed down by Bush, despite its critical importance to the return of remains. He led bipartisan congressional delegates and Bush's senior advisor on North Korea, Victor Cha, whose presence expressed the administration's endorsement for his trip. His official task was to bring back the remains of six US soldiers, a reward from the DPRK for his effort to ease the soured US-DPRK relationship and for positive progress in the Six-Party Talks. His team was also tasked with ensuring the fulfillment of a February agreement that the United States would unfreeze North Korean bank accounts in Macau if Kim Jong-Il shut down his Yongbyon nuclear reactor. However, the restart of the joint recovery missions was not seriously addressed. According to Richardson's adviser on Asian affairs, the

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<sup>166</sup> Ex-Governor Bill Richardson, interview by the author, tape-recorded, on November 10, 2017. On his first trip to the DPRK in 1994, also see Wit, Poneman, and Gallucci, *Going Critical*, 350-352.

<sup>167</sup> Kim Ji-Yeong, "Jeonjaengjonggyeol Joseonui Ganghan Uji Pyomyeong [End the War! Koreans Express Their Strong Determination]," *Choson Sinbo* (Korean Newspaper/The People's Korea, Tokyo, Japan), April 12, 2007, retrieved from the database KPM Joseoneonlonjeongbogiji (North Korean Newspaper and Journal Databases).

North Koreans signaled that the missions would not restart soon.<sup>168</sup> *Rodong Sinmun* did not mention the joint missions at all, although the governor and a Japan-based pro-DPRK newspaper, *Choson Sinbo*, were more optimistic about their resumption.<sup>169</sup>



Figure 5-4: A “Chosin Few” veteran thanks Governor Richardson for assisting in returning the remains of US servicemen from the DPRK. (US Army Photo by Sgt. Adelita Chavarria Mead, <http://www.defenseimagery.mil/imageRetrieve.action?guid=8c94f51e4ca2a0fb7c4bb46bf7e85a7275d48562&t=2> This photo is in the public domain).

Other private visits during this period failed to provide the DPRK with a chance to negotiate with senior US government officials and so were fruitless. During such

<sup>168</sup> “N. Korea Releases Remains of US War Dead,” CBS News, April 11, 2007, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/n-korea-releases-remains-of-us-war-dead/>; Foster Klug, “Richardson Seeks Servicemen’s Remains in Visit to North Korea: Bush Administration Endorses Trip,” *Republican & Herald* (Pottsville, PA), April 9, 2007, 5; Choe Sang-Hun, “North Korea Set to Carry Out Nuclear Deal, US Envoy Says,” *New York Times*, April 12, 2007, A8; Kim Ji-Yeong, “Nyumeksikojujisa Ilhaeng Joseonbangmun: Joseoncheuk Panmunjeom Tonghae Migunyugol Indo [New Mexico Governor and His Delegation Visit Korea: Korean Side Delivered US Soldiers’ Remains through Panmunjom],” *Choson Sinbo*, April 12, 2007.

<sup>169</sup> Ex-Governor Bill Richardson, interview by the author, on November 10, 2017; Kim, “End the War! Koreans Express Their Strong Determination,” *Choson Sinbo*, April 12, 2007; “Migun Nyumeksikoju Jisailhaengi Tteonadatda [US New Mexico State Governor and His Delegation Left],” *Rodong Sinmun*, April 12, 2017, 6.

visits, the North Koreans excelled in pitting American visitors against their leaders in Washington by warmly welcoming them but telling them that the administration's refusal to engage directly with the DPRK was the only roadblock to the repatriation of remains. In 2013, a Korean War veteran visited Pyongyang to find the body of the first African American US Navy pilot. When he worked with officers of the North Korean Army to propose a search for the pilot's body, they stated that it was impractical for him to visit the site due to flooding, but a search for the body was possible if a US military representative in charge of POW/MIA affairs were to accompany him next time.<sup>170</sup> In 2016, Richardson Center staff member Mickey Bergman and a POW/MIA campaign leader, Rick Downs, were invited to confer face to face with the DPRK vice foreign minister to discuss the prerequisites for acquiring remains. The vice foreign minister told his visitors that the only solution was to persuade the Obama administration to decouple the "humanitarian campaigns" of recovering remains from denuclearization. Furthermore, they required that the money for recovering remains come from the US Treasury, not the Richardson Center, to ensure the US government's endorsement of the transaction.<sup>171</sup>

### **Post-Cold War Efforts to Recover POW/MIAs from Other Countries**

When the Defense Department updates POW/MIA families on progress

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<sup>170</sup> Jane Perlez, "Six Decades Later, a Second Rescue Attempt: Ex-Navy Pilot Visits North Korea to Seek Colleague's Remains," *New York Times*, July 30, 2013, A4.

<sup>171</sup> Rick Downes, interview by the author, on November 7, 2017, and ex-Governor Bill Richardson, interview by the author on November 10, 2017; also see Rick Gladstone, "In Rare Encounter, A Private US Delegation Visits North Korea," *New York Times*, October 8, 2016, A5.

regarding missing servicemen of the Korean War, it typically presents the results in North Korea, China, Russia, and South Korea together. The operation in South Korea was hardly affected by the end of the Cold War, but since the implosion of the Communist Bloc, the US military and Korean War POW/MIA families expected that missing servicemen would be retrieved not just from North Korea, but also China and Russia. China and the USSR committed the majority of manpower and materiel to the Korean War, and the official US propaganda in the 1950s believed that these two countries had masterminded the war.<sup>172</sup> While most of the POW/MIAs were killed and buried in Korea, the military and families suspect that China and Russia may know the burial locations in Korea and have even held living POWs after the war.

Interactions with Russia have not led to tangible results. Shortly after the collapse of the USSR, Americans had an ephemeral hope of gaining unrestricted access to top-secret Soviet files regarding the fate of POW/MIAs.<sup>173</sup> Access to Russian archives has been unreliable. Russian President Boris Yeltsin, eager to seek legitimacy from the West, was misreported to have admitted that Stalin intentionally jailed US POWs after WWII and the Korean War; in fact, he only admitted that some WWII US servicemen were detained in the USSR for a year or longer.<sup>174</sup> The US military has been cooperating with

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<sup>172</sup> As shown in Chapter III, many families of missing soldiers claimed the Communist Bloc, especially China and the Soviet Union, collectively for their loss. The role of China and the Soviet Union in the Korean War is one of the most contentious topics in the war's historiography.

<sup>173</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I, 95-97.

<sup>174</sup> Barbara Crossette, "Yeltsin Says US Servicemen Were Held by Stalin," *New York Times*, June 13, 1992, 6; Statement of Boris Yeltsin to Senators, translated from Russian, June 12, 1992, Folder South Korea: POW/MIA OA/ID CF01519-025, Torkel Patterson Files (Subject Files), Bush Presidential Records, National Security Council, Bush Library.

Russia since 1992 to solve the fate of POW/MIAs in past conflicts, but not a single missing serviceman has ever been recovered from Russia.

China began to assist the United States in accounting for US POW/MIAs years before the end of the Cold War, although it was initially only interested in solving the WWII and Vietnam War cases due to its own involvement in Korea.<sup>175</sup> As of 2020, the fates of two Korean War casualties have been disclosed by China. In 2003, China disclosed the whereabouts of Sergeant Richard G. Desautels, one of two POWs that China admitted to capturing but failed to release in 1953. Chinese files recorded Desautels' death in China before the armistice, and his body was later lost.<sup>176</sup> The other case was Captain Troy D. Cope, who had been shot down near Dandong, China, in 1952. Over four decades later, when an American businessman found Cope's ID tag displayed in a war museum, his crash site was excavated with the help of Chinese and Russian records. In 2004, Cope's body was repatriated.<sup>177</sup> The United States and China now observe a 2008 treaty to conduct research on US POW/MIAs in PRC military archives.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Bob Smith to Liu Daoyu, July 12, 1994, Folder Bob Smith, Box 2.325M22, Laurence Jolidon Collection, Briscoe Center; Bill Clinton to Rick Lazio, June 15, 1998, Folder 9803573 OA/ID 2037, Box 3, Series 2015-0530S (Vietnam), Clinton Library.

<sup>176</sup> Associated Press, "China Admits Taking, Burying US POWs," CBS News, June 19, 2008, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-admits-taking-burying-us-pow-19-06-2008/>. It is not known why his story was only reported in 2008 by major news portals. As Desautels's body has not been recovered, his fate is still officially unaccounted for.

<sup>177</sup> Service Records of Captain Troy D. Cope, NPRC. Barbara Starr and Larry Shaughnessy, "Long-lost Korean War Pilot to Get Military Burial: Remains Missing for Decades, Chance Brought them to Light," CNN, March 7, 2005, <http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/03/03/missing.pilot/index.html>.

<sup>178</sup> Department of Defense, "US and China Sign POW and MIA Arrangement, Release No. 170-08," news release, February 29, 2008, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=11729>; Their agreement is in the form of a memorandum between the two countries' military and addresses issues of archive research only.

## Conclusion

The fourth stage of recovering POW/MIA remains from North Korea is still in progress, as evidenced by the latest return of fifty-five caskets of American soldiers' remains on August 1, 2018, in the wake of the Trump-Kim Summit in Singapore two months earlier. In the previous three decades, high-ranking US officials such as ex-President Carter and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had visited Pyongyang, and the two countries had issued several joint declarations after bilateral negotiations. However, no sitting US president had ever met a DPRK supreme leader. A direct meeting between the top leaders would unambiguously (though not officially) legitimize the Pyongyang regime, which the United States had been reluctant to offer and which North Korea had persistently pursued. The DPRK waited for the visit of a sitting US president to release the US soldiers' remains it still possessed.

In 2018, President Donald Trump ignored US policy norms toward North Korea and convinced the DPRK to release bodies. An article from *The Atlantic* interprets Trump's policy toward North Korea as "soft on the people" and "hard on the problem." In other words, he befriended Kim Jong-Un but remained determined to denuclearize the DPRK. Trump also followed the philosophy that "the cheapest concession you can make in a negotiation is to give the other fellow a little respect" and became the first US president to shake hands with the DPRK supreme leader.<sup>179</sup> Treated as an equal national

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<sup>179</sup> Uri Friedman, "The Disturbing Logic of Trump's Lovefest with Kim Jong Un," *The Atlantic*, June 1, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/06/why-doe-donald-trump-keep-praising-kim-jong-un/590830/>.

leader with the US president in front of cameras and journalists, Kim achieved the political victory that his grandfather and father had dreamed of since the 1960s.

Reciprocally, the bilateral commitment to the recovery of POW/MIA remains was incorporated as item four of the two leaders' joint statement, and the DPRK released fifty-five boxes of remains in late July. Even before the remains reached US soil, though, reports surfaced that the DPRK would request more financial and political favors from the United States before delivering other bodies it had already exhumed.<sup>180</sup> Unless the joint US-DPRK repatriation missions resume, Kim may demand that Trump himself visit Pyongyang or lessen pressure on the DPRK to denuclearize before releasing more bodies.



Figure 5-5: DPAA forensic anthropologists were examining the fifty-five boxes of remains to be delivered in August 2018. (US Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class David J. Marshall, copied from *DPAA FY18 Year in Review*)

Including those fifty-five boxes of remains, the United States has received 498

<sup>180</sup> Joyce Lee, "Recovery of US Troops' Remains in North Korea Complicated by Cash, Politics," Reuters, July 24, 2018, [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-remains-explainer/recovery-of-u-s-troops-remains-in-north-korea-hindered-by-cash-politics-idUSKBN1KE12R\\_](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-remains-explainer/recovery-of-u-s-troops-remains-in-north-korea-hindered-by-cash-politics-idUSKBN1KE12R_).



containers of remains from the DPRK since 1990. Broken down, that figure includes 208 between 1990 and 1994; 229 between 1996 and 2005; six in 2007; and fifty-five in 2018. As of October 28, 2019, 306 coffins of unidentified Korean War dead from the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl), one body from China, one from Japan, and twenty-six from South Korea had also been delivered to CILHI for identification.<sup>181</sup>

Since the 1990s, the DPRK has returned remains to the United States for two major reasons: to build a bilateral relationship and to seek cash to reinvigorate its dilapidated country. The repatriation of bodies was complicated by political crises on the Korean Peninsula. The return of remains from the DPRK can be divided into four major stages based on the channel through which the bodies were delivered: 1) to visiting US officials (1990–1991); 2) via the MAC (1992–1994); 3) via joint US-DPRK missions in North Korea (1996–2005); and 4) again to visiting US officials (2007 and 2018).

The approach in the third stage is the most effective and mutually beneficial one. During this stage, US military personnel exhumed the remains themselves (though sometimes from staged burials), which enabled them to better preserve forensic evidence that was critical to identification. The joint operations also allowed US investigators to communicate with North Korean civilians to acquire more information about unmarked

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<sup>181</sup> “Progress on Korean War Personnel Accounting,” last updated October 28, 2019, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, <https://www.dpaa.mil/Resources/Fact-Sheets/Article-View/Article/569610/progress-on-korean-war-personnel-accounting/> According to DPAA’s update in April 2020, the fifty-five boxes delivered in 2018 may include 250 individuals, eighty of which are not Americans. In the 208 boxes returned by North Korea between 1990 and 1994, there are about a hundred non-American individuals. See “DPAA Family/VSO/MSO Quarterly Call and Update Notes, Thursday, April 16, 2020, 2:00 p.m.,” [https://www.dpaa.mil/Portals/85/Apr%2016%202020%20Family-VSO%20Update%20Meeting%20Notes\\_1.pdf](https://www.dpaa.mil/Portals/85/Apr%2016%202020%20Family-VSO%20Update%20Meeting%20Notes_1.pdf).

graves of US servicemen. However, before resuming such operations in the future, US policymakers must understand the rationale behind the North Koreans' cooperation.

Between 1996 and 2005, fallen US soldiers of the Korean War became a unique type of POW awaiting rescue. The DPRK treated their remains as if they were hostages to be ransomed for payment, adopting a pragmatic policy that ensured the income generated by the bodies would help the survival of a regime that had been battered by flood and famine. Whenever the United States was unwilling to pay the ransom or complicated the trade with political issues, cooperation on recovering remains collapsed.

The North Koreans' extraction of money obviously had a pragmatic element, but the country's enduring hatred of the United States must also be taken into consideration. The DPRK may have considered payment for bodies to be war reparations. The hate they had held since the war made it unimaginable for them to search for and exhume the bodies of men who had murdered their kin and destroyed their homes without being compensated.<sup>182</sup> This mentality is not unique to the DPRK, as Vietnam once linked the POW/MIA issue with reconstruction aid from the United States.<sup>183</sup> As the United States refused to pay war reparations and, during negotiations, associated the bodies with policies that further undermined DPRK sovereignty, the North Koreans regarded such actions as new insults and suspended joint missions in protest. In the 2010s, the DPRK

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<sup>182</sup> This mentality had been expressed on multiple occasions by North Koreans. For a recent example, see "Migugeun, Migunyugolbalgulsaeopeul Patansikin Chaekimeseo Gyeolko Beoteonalsu Eopda [US is to Blame for Disrupting Excavation of Remains of GIs]," Joseon Jungyang Tongsin (Korean Central News Agency, Pyongyang, DPRK), July 6, 2016.

<sup>183</sup> Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 89.

repeatedly demanded the revocation of hostile US policies before reopening talks on efforts to recover remains, stating that it did not care about Americans' bodies being endangered by flooding and the construction of infrastructure.<sup>184</sup>

The vast majority of remains from North Korea have been incomplete, damaged, and heavily commingled. The forensic technology that had identified nearly all bodies evacuated from battlefields in Vietnam could not identify them. Fortuitously, these remains were recovered just as advances were being made in forensic DNA analysis, a technique that would quickly become the only hope of determining whose remains were among the bones returned by the DPRK, and thus verifying whether the DPRK had faithfully cooperated with the United States in accounting for POW/MIAs. The evolution of methods of identifying remains from North Korea is the focus of Chapter VI.

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<sup>184</sup> For example, “Joseoninmingun Panmunjeomdaepyobu Daebyeonin Obamamihaengjeongbuneun Migunyuhaebalguljakeopeul Jungdansikin Chaekimeseo Jeoldaero Beoteonalsu Eoptago Gangjo [Korean People’s Army Delegates at Panmunjom: Obama Administration Assailed for Preventing Work to Unearth Remains of GIs],” Joseon Jungyang Tongsin, October 13, 2014.

## CHAPTER VI: DECIPHERING THE BONES

Between 1990 and 1994, the DPRK sent the United States 208 boxes of human remains allegedly belonging to US soldiers killed in the Korean War. Identifying individual soldiers from this jumble of bones without any evidence regarding the circumstances of their recovery was a daunting task. Given how frustrated the Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii (CILHI) was by the poor condition of the remains, the US military could have adhered to the post-Korean War practice of burying them as unknown soldiers at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP, also known as the Punchbowl).

However, in the wake of the Vietnam War, this practice was no longer acceptable to the American public. In the context of the uncertainties and suspicion following this war, according to Thomas Hawley, “the materiality of identified remains provides the desired certainty in the form of a body that can be interred in a casket and buried in American soil.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, the recovery of remains from Vietnam came to symbolize an alternative to redeeming the defeat on battlefields, and the only yardstick of its success was identified bodies. As discussed in Chapter IV, since the mid-1970s, in the eyes of POW/MIA activists and military officials, the return of an identified body to a missing serviceman’s family has become the only acceptable indication of his fate. Declaring soldiers’ remains unidentifiable and drawing conclusions about the fate of the missing by

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas M. Hawley, *The Remains of War: Bodies, Politics, and the Search for American Soldiers Unaccounted for in Southeast Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 24.

relying on circumstantial evidence of death ceased to be acceptable options, despite the fact that the US military had relied on them since its inception.<sup>2</sup> Retroactively, the over eight thousand American soldiers whose remains had been lost during the Korean War suddenly became possible POWs languishing in North Korea and awaiting rescue. Piggybacking on this cultural shift, the advancement of modern forensic technology represented by DNA profiling ended practices such as leaving bones in the vault of the Tomb of the Unknowns or entombing sailors collectively in the hull of the *USS Arizona*.<sup>3</sup> Against this background, it had become unthinkable for the remains repatriated from North Korea simply to be left nameless.

Nevertheless, identifying individuals from the remains recovered from Korea and Vietnam was enormously challenging for CILHI. The bodies from Vietnam were severely damaged by modern warfare and admixed with other objects, while those from Korea were heavily commingled or were recovered from burials staged far away from where the soldiers fell. Traditional methods, such as estimating race, age, height, and antemortem wounds from the bones and correlating them with service records and circumstantial evidence of death, could therefore not be used to identify them. Yet, each failure by the US military to identify a body was fuel to the fire of determined POW/MIA activists' campaigns, convincing the activists that American soldiers were languishing in enemy

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas M. Hawley, "Bodies and Border Practices: The Search for American MIAs in Vietnam," *Bodies and Society* 8, no.3 (2002): 50-51.

<sup>3</sup> Jay D. Aronson, *Who Owns the Dead?: The Science and Politics of Death at Ground Zero* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 4-5.

POW camps. Facing a backlog of remains, the military was desperate for a new method to identify them. By the 1990s, DNA technology was emerging as a popular tool in law enforcement and the investigation of human rights abuses. Military officials became increasingly convinced that DNA profiling could help rebuild the public's trust in its commitment to account for every missing service member.

Although DNA results are not the only type of evidence used in such identification, DNA profiling has played a pivotal role in identifying the remains recovered from the DPRK. Before employing this technique, it was nearly impossible for CILHI to identify them. The picture was complicated by the fact that the unknown bodies recovered from Korea and buried at the Punchbowl since 1956 had been embalmed, and this initially hampered the extraction of their DNA; and by some POW/MIA families and activists' criticism of DNA-profiling on a variety of grounds. Nevertheless, the use of this approach has convinced most POW/MIA families that the military has positively identified their loved ones over the past two decades.

Families, public officials, and the media have often used the term "closure" in relation to the positive identification of POW/MIA remains. However, according to Brandon Hamber and Richard Wilson, post-conflict closure at the national level differs from that at the individual level. Survivors' conception of closure also varies.<sup>4</sup> The US military and government define closure in terms of administratively closing cases of

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<sup>4</sup> Brandon Hamber and Richard Wilson, "Symbolic Closure through Memory, Reparation, and Revenge in Post-Conflict Societies," *Journal of Human Rights* 1, no.1 (March 2002): 35.

POW/MIAs and delivering their bodies to their families. Families' closure, on the other hand, means the confirmed death of their loved ones, communities' acknowledgment of their loss, a decent burial, and a sense of justice, broadly conceived. Some families never obtain emotional closure because of the irrecoverable and tragic loss of their relatives, or the feeling that justice has not been done. In their minds, the resolution of a POW/MIA case does not stop at the decent burial of an identified body. They must know when, how, and where their loved ones lost their lives, as well as whether or not the people responsible for their death have acknowledged the guilt.

While my dissertation focuses on the Korean War, this chapter frequently discusses the casualties of the Vietnam War for several reasons. First, the US military introduced DNA profiling in response to the heavily damaged remains repatriated from Southeast Asia. Second, most of the well-publicized controversies surrounding CILHI or DNA profiling pertained to the Vietnam War. Moreover, while the casualties of each conflict pose distinctive challenges to CILHI, its overall procedures for identifying fragmented, commingled human remains apply to all the bodies it has processed.

### **Deadlock in Identification**

Several years before the DPRK began to return US soldiers' remains, CILHI had begun to recognize that available forensic methods were inadequate to the task of processing human remains recovered from Southeast Asia. The most challenging cases were of airmen shot down in enemy territory. When aircraft laden with fuel and

ammunition slammed into the ground, often at supersonic speed, the ensuing explosions and fires could consume their bodies entirely. Moreover, such crash sites had remained inaccessible to Americans for years, and scavenging animals, acidic soils, tropical weather, and farmers recycling scrap metal further destroyed the residual remains of the airmen. Worse still, rumors that the US government would pay for its people's bones, whether with money or immigration visas, lured impoverished local people into an illegal industry that collected random human or animal bones for purposes of deception.<sup>5</sup>

While CILHI strove to refine its methods of identifying these bones, arguably enhancing them to the limits of their investigative potential, the results did not always satisfy POW/MIA activists and families. The Pentagon faced a dilemma. On the one hand, these methods were less and less reliable for identifying the remains; on the other hand, the bones were the only hope for convincing POW/MIA activists that it had made every effort to ascertain its members' fate. For decades, the military had confronted sporadic challenges to its identification results but had either persuaded those complaining to accept the bodies or silenced them via burial without familial consent. But once POW/MIA activists secured the assistance of forensic experts who questioned the methods used by CILHI, the military could no longer ignore their concerns.

In 1985, for the first time in its history, CILHI rescinded some of its identification

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<sup>5</sup> Paul D. Mather, *M.I.A.: Accounting for the Missing in Southeast Asia* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1994), 109-111; Lewis M. Stern, *Imprisoned or Missing in Vietnam: Policies of the Vietnamese Government Concerning Captured and Unaccounted for United States Soldiers, 1969-1994* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 1995), 106-107.



reports. This incident resulted from POW/MIA activists' political campaigns rather than an academic debate, and the technological problems it highlighted were therefore obscured by politics. Specifically, the POW/MIA activists involved deemed the identification carried out by the military to be "junk science" and part of an orchestrated government plot to write off their loved ones prematurely in the name of closing cases and claiming progress in accounting for POW/MIAs. In other words, as Michael Allen argues, "junk science was merely the means by which MIA activists challenged military officials for control over the war dead." These activists categorically protested the military's reliance on bodies to account for missing men, rather than on sending missions to rescue the POWs rumored to be left behind in Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> By recruiting forensic experts to cast doubt on CILHI's methods, the activists acquired scientific opinions, rather than just hearsay that POWs had been abandoned in Vietnam, to back up their contention that the US military was insincere in its efforts to ascertain the fates of POW/MIAs. Nevertheless, the genuine scientific problems the activists and their chosen experts detected eventually led to the application of DNA profiling to CILHI operations.

Ironically, the return of the remains involved in this controversy was initially regarded as a milestone in accounting for POW/MIAs. On December 21, 1972, an Air Force AC-130 gunship had been shot down near Pakse, Laos, and the ensuing explosion was so intense that a pro-US guerilla force found only a severed arm in the wreckage,

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<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 243-244.

leaving thirteen airmen unaccounted for. In February 1985, in the wake of President Reagan's offer of cash, medicine, and food to Vietnam and Laos, Pakse became the first destination that the US military was permitted to reenter for the purpose of recovering Americans' bodies lost in the Vietnam War. The search retrieved more than fifty thousand bone fragments, most of which were about the size of a dime. The National League of POW/MIA Families (NLPF) and Reagan were both delighted by the progress this represented.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, neither anticipated the challenge of identifying these bones or the social cost of misidentification.<sup>8</sup>

When CILHI announced the identification of the thirteen missing crew members in that July, the wife of one man who had been on that aircraft was not so optimistic. Ann Hart, wife of Colonel Thomas Hart III, began to suspect that the identification might have been erroneous due to obvious discrepancies between CILHI's report and her own knowledge of the circumstances of her husband's loss. She obtained a court injunction to block the delivery of bodies to other crewmen's families, over the objections of the military and families of some crew members. She then hired Michael Charney, a forensic anthropologist from Colorado State University, to re-examine the body (only six bone

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<sup>7</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 240; Hawley, *The Remains of War*, 108; *Activities of the Central Identification Laboratory, Hearing before the Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services*, House of Representatives, Ninety-Ninth Congress, Second Session, September 10, 1986, 26. Cited as *1986 CILHI Hearing hereafter*. The NLPF and its primary patron Reagan then monopolized the POW/MIA issue.

<sup>8</sup> There were misidentifications or suspicions of misidentification during the Vietnam War, but their influence was limited. At least one soldier's body identified by an ID tag was found to have been wrongly identified: see Patrick Gallagher, *Traumatic Defeat: POWs, MIAs, and National Mythmaking* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 98. Prior to Pakse, the remains returned from Vietnam were usually from prisons or mortuaries of the Vietnamese government, which were more likely to be complete.

fragments) that CILHI had identified as her husband.<sup>9</sup> Confirming her concerns, Charney remarked that, “there was no way” a few one to six-inch fragments of bone “could be identified as Lt. Col. Hart,” and stated that the identification report of Hart revealed “incompetence of the worst sort.” Dedicated POW/MIA activists related to two other crewmen, Chief Master Sergeant James R. Fuller and Captain George D. MacDonald, supported Hart and rejected the identification of these two airmen.<sup>10</sup>

Similar concerns spread among POW/MIA families that had already buried their loved ones, including Kathryn Fanning, wife of Major Hugh M. Fanning, who was shot down in 1967. In 1984, bones marked as his were delivered from Vietnam, and the Marine Corps initially told Kathryn Fanning that her husband had been identified via his dental chart. However, when Fanning examined her husband’s casualty files in Washington, DC a year later, she found clues that she felt hinted at his survival, along with an inventory of around thirty recovered bone parts from arm, leg, toe, and hip, but no tooth or skull fragments.<sup>11</sup> When the military admitted that there had been miscommunication, she contacted Charney and another well-known anthropologist, Clyde C. Snow, and asked them to re-examine the bones that had been returned to her. Both declared that positive identification was impossible. A third expert, after examining

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<sup>9</sup> Hawley, *The Remains of War*, 109.

<sup>10</sup> Josh Getlin, “Hearts & Bones: Thirteen Years After Lt. Col. Thomas Hart Disappeared in Laos, the Army Said It Had Found His Remains. His Wife, Anne, Couldn’t Be Sure. Finally, the Army Admitted It Wasn’t Either,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1986, [http://articles.latimes.com/1986-10-12/magazine/tm-2683\\_1\\_bone-fragments/](http://articles.latimes.com/1986-10-12/magazine/tm-2683_1_bone-fragments/).

<sup>11</sup> David Finkel, “Marine’s Widow Returns Bones: She Doubts They Are Those of Pilot-Husband,” *St. Petersburg Times* (St. Petersburg, FL), July 17, 1987, 1A.

Fuller's and Fanning's bones, denounced CILHI for "extreme carelessness, incompetence, fabrication of data, or some combination of these things."<sup>12</sup>

At the center of the controversy over CILHI were anthropologist Tadao Furue and his "morphological approximation" method, which he had developed specifically to identify severely fragmented bones from Vietnam. Furue had decades of experience identifying deceased US servicemen, beginning in 1951, and by the 1970s was the most senior CILHI anthropologist. However, some POW/MIA activists deemed his long tenure without a doctoral degree as proof of the military's less-than-serious attitude to establishing POW/MIAs' fates.<sup>13</sup> The full details of morphological approximation remained elusive as he did not publish his empirical method before his death in 1988. However, he was not the only one using this technique, nor was it groundless. When he defended it in a 1986 House Armed Services Committee hearing on CILHI's activities, he testified that it was "hard to explain, as people explain similar techniques can be used but under different names." According to a fellow CILHI anthropologist, and a later interview with Furue conducted by the US Army Military History Institute, his method allowed anthropologists to use a small section of a long bone, about one-third of it, including some key measuring points, to estimate the parameters of the complete bone. Comparing the fragment of the long bone with a collection of intact bones from men of various ages, races, heights, musculatures, handedness, et cetera, he could determine

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<sup>12</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 241.

<sup>13</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 243.

certain physical characteristics of the deceased. However, he stressed that the method was primarily used for segregating commingled bones, and not employed as the sole evidence for identification.<sup>14</sup>

In the same congressional hearing, Furue was confronted by anthropologists who had sided with the POW/MIA activists. Charney argued that Furue's extrapolation of full bones' lengths from shards recovered at Pakse could not be repeated with his own bone collection. He went on to accuse Furue of fabricating age data from broken bones, using a formula not supported by the scientific literature, and failing to include margins of error in his height estimations.<sup>15</sup> Two other anthropologists, Samuel Dunlap and George Gill, concurred with Charney and cast doubt on the credibility and work ethic of Furue and CILHI, hinting that CILHI might have faked data in previous cases, potentially leading to misidentification.<sup>16</sup>

As a result of these allegations, the military invited prominent members of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences to scrutinize CILHI and the cases in question. These experts reached no definitive conclusions about the validity of the charges against Furue or CILHI. Three forensic experts, including Ellis R. Kerley, who had worked with Furue in Korea, duly toured CILHI in December 1985. While they detected problems with CILHI's equipment and standard operating procedures, their examination of the

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<sup>14</sup> *1986 CILHI Hearing*, 4, 81-85; Senior Office Oral History Program (Project 87-25, Mr. Tadao Furue), interview by Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence J. Johnston, Tadao Furue Papers, the US Army Heritage and Education Center (Carlisle, PA).

<sup>15</sup> *1986 CILHI Hearing*, 51-58.

<sup>16</sup> *1986 CILHI Hearing*, 32-51.

cases in question did not detect any obvious misidentifications or errors. But on the other hand, they reported that they could not make the same identifications Furue claimed to be able to make using the standard forensic methods generally accepted in academia. Out of the thirteen decedents at Pakse, they confirmed only two with confidence.<sup>17</sup> While Kerley did not comment on Furue in 1985, he noted years later that he was very critical of Furue's unscientific identification practices, and by the 1980s, Furue was no longer as cautious as he had been in Korea.<sup>18</sup> Shortly after Kerley's inspection, the House Armed Services Committee conducted another. Although it too cleared CILHI of the suspicion that it had acted negligently in response to external pressure to make identifications based on inadequate evidence, the committee recommended that a moratorium be placed on morphological approximation pending formal peer review.<sup>19</sup> By 1987, Hart's and MacDonald's identifications had been rescinded. While Fanning's was not, his bones were returned to CILHI for further investigation.<sup>20</sup> While the military never admitted to any misconduct by CILHI or Furue, this represented tacit recognition of problems with its earlier identifications.

Although CILHI had not been entirely discredited, the mood there was far from

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<sup>17</sup> "CILHI Identification Inspection Report of An on Site Inspection of the Facilities and Procedures of the US Army Central Identification Laboratory in the Hawaiian Islands, December 9-12, 1985," unlabeled folder, Box 5, Section Q (Erickson), Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARAI.

<sup>18</sup> Memorandum from Tom Long, Dr. Ellis R. Kerley, October 23, 1991, Folder Identification of MIA Remains, CILHI, Box 5, Section Q (Erickson), Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARAI.

<sup>19</sup> *1986 CILHI Hearing*, 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> *US Army Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii (CILHI), Hearing before the Investigation Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services*, House of Representatives, One-Hundredth Congress, First Session, September 15, 1987, 25

optimistic. Furue's approach had been suspended, yet there was nothing available to replace it with. Kerley joined CILHI in 1987 and remained there until 1991, but during his tenure, the situation did not change much from what he had observed in his investigation in 1985, and arguably, it deteriorated further. The backlog of unidentified bones from Vietnam loomed large in the minds of its staff members, who were under constant pressure from the POW/MIA community.<sup>21</sup> Fanning's case went nowhere, and the image of CILHI in the eyes of servicemen's families never fully recovered. In late 1991, the national convention of the American Legion passed a resolution censuring CILHI for its lost credibility.<sup>22</sup>

At the beginning of the 1990s, anticipation that a large number of bodies would soon be repatriated from North Korea further aggravated the situation. These bodies suffered from more problems than those from Vietnam did. The DPRK sometimes intentionally misinformed the US military about where bodies had been found, or reburied them at new locations shortly before the arrival of US military personnel. For example, two men's bodies returned in 1990 were recorded as having been found in Namjonggu, thirty-four miles from where they were presumed to have been killed.<sup>23</sup> Extreme commingling was also a major issue. In the 208 boxes of human remains

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<sup>21</sup> Memorandum from Tom Long, Dr. Ellis R. Kerley, October 23, 1991, and Ellis R. Kerley to John Kerry, August 20, 1991, Folder Identification of MIA Remains, CILHI, Box 5, Section Q (Erickson), Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARAI.

<sup>22</sup> Johnie E. Webb Jr. to John Sommers, September 27, 1991, Folder Identification of MIA Remains, CILHI, Box 5, Section Q (Erickson), Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARAI.

<sup>23</sup> Cole, *POW/MIA Issues*, Vol. I (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1994), 260. The DPRK may give inaccurate locations.

returned between 1990 and 1994, not only were the bones of multiple men often placed in one coffin, but the bones of one man might be found at sites as much as sixty miles apart, or in multiple surveys conducted over a decade. As of that time, there had been almost no systematic research on the segregation of commingled remains on a large scale.<sup>24</sup> The situation was further complicated by the fact that the conflagration in the National Personnel Records Center in 1973 had done extensive damage to Army and Air Force servicemen's medical records.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, CILHI was in a desperate need of a technique capable of segregating the bones of multiple men despite an almost total lack of visible morphological distinctions. Ideally, such a technique would also be able to rearticulate bones of an individual unearthed on multiple occasions. Finally, it was imperative that this method not rely exclusively on service members' antemortem data. In October 1991, when Kerley reflected on his tenure at CILHI, he made two critical recommendations for the laboratory, one of which was that it introduce DNA-based techniques.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> As mentioned in Chapter V, the 208 boxes of remains may contain more than six hundred individuals. Among the over five hundred Korean War POW/MIAs identified since 1980, at least the partial remains of at least eleven men were found both in the North Koreans' unilateral repatriation and the latter joint operations. Also see Jin *et al.*, "The Korea 208," 417. This issue also is discussed in Sarah E. Wagner, "The Quandaries of Partial and Commingled Remains: Srebrenica's Missing and Korean War Casualties Compared," in *Necropolitics: Mass Graves and Exhumation in the Age of Human Rights*, eds. Francisco Ferrandiz and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 119-139.

<sup>25</sup> "The 1973 Fire, National Personnel Records Center," National Archives, accessed June 3, 2019, <https://www.archives.gov/personnel-records-center/fire-1973>. While some veterans, POW/MIA activists, and even government officials mention the impact of this fire, it must be noted that there are other copies of such data unaffected by the fire, which are archived in the NPRC or the NARA.

<sup>26</sup> Memorandum from Tom Long, Dr. Ellis R. Kerley, October 23, 1991, Folder Identification of MIA Remains, CILHI, Box 5, Section Q (Erickson), Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARA. Kerley likely referred to the identification of Fanning in late 1991 with the help of DNA by AFDIL.



## Introduction of DNA Profiling at CILHI

The military's decision to adopt DNA profiling was driven by both the availability of the relevant technology and by pressure from POW/MIA families. Soon after its development in the 1980s, DNA profiling was applied in court cases and human rights investigations around the world. Encouraged by its success, CILHI considered that it might be a critical tool for identifying the backlogged POW/MIAs' remains and regaining their families' confidence.

It is helpful to review the basic principles of DNA and its forensic application.<sup>27</sup> DNA carries the genetic information in our bodies. In higher organisms, most DNA is located in the cell nucleus. In the nucleus, a DNA molecule is packed with proteins to form a chromosome. A human cell has forty-six chromosomes in twenty-three pairs, including twenty-two pairs of autosomes, and a pair of sex chromosomes (two X for females, and an X and a Y for males). About 99.9 percent of the DNA sequence is identical across all human beings, but the remaining 0.1 percent is unique to each individual, due to mutations over millions of years in regions of the genetic code that lack clear functions. This 0.1 percent allows an individual to be identified by his or her DNA profile, even if the body is highly fragmented, because almost all the trillions of cells in a human body have the exact same set of forty-six chromosomes. Theoretically, as long as a tiny bone fragment of a person is recovered, his or her DNA profile can be obtained.

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<sup>27</sup> All the information about DNA and DNA Profiling is from textbooks Lizabeth A. Allison, *Fundamental Molecular Biology*, First Ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007) and David L. Nelson and Michael M. Cox, *Lehninger Principles of Biochemistry*, Third Ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 2000).

The inauguration of DNA profiling in the military and the establishment of the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) in 1991 can be traced back to a discovery seven years earlier. In 1984, British geneticist Alec Jeffreys unexpectedly noticed that at some sites in the human genome, the numbers of DNA minisatellites—a tract of repetitive short DNA sequences—were likely unique to individuals. He predicted that the odds of any two individuals sharing the same DNA “fingerprints” would be one in thirty billion and suggested that DNA could be applied to human identification, including parenthood analysis.<sup>28</sup>

Shortly after Jeffreys published his data, DNA made its debut in the justice system. At that time, the primary method of DNA profiling was restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP). DNA molecules can be cut at specific nucleotide sequences by restriction enzymes derived from bacteria, which use the enzymes to destroy exogenous DNA. Selected restriction enzymes target the sequences bracketing the minisatellites in various genomic regions. Thus, the length of excised DNA fragments varies from one person to another. In December 1984, when Mary-Claire King and her colleagues used human leukocyte antigen typing to reunite people with their grandchildren who had been kidnapped during the Argentine Dirty War (1976–1983), King’s team considered the potential of RFLP to help with identification. Argentina began to establish a national databank to store the grandparents’ white cells for DNA

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<sup>28</sup> Alec J. Jeffreys, Victoria Wilson, and Swee L. Thein, “Individual-Specific ‘Fingerprints’ of Human DNA,” *Nature* 316, no.6023 (1985): 76; Jay Aronson, *Genetic Witness: Science, Law, and Controversy in the Making of DNA Profiling* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 13.

extraction in 1985.<sup>29</sup> In the same year, DNA profiling results were first introduced in an immigration case in Britain, though it was not until January 1988 that DNA evidence was first used to successfully convict a criminal. DNA profiling arrived in the United States in late 1987 and was soon used in the courts and commercialized. By the end of 1988, DNA evidence had been admitted in more than eighty trials, and the FBI had equipped its first DNA analysis unit.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike in court cases where the suspects' DNA is compared directly against genetic evidence left at crime scenes, however, the military could not compare the DNA sequences of remains recovered from Korea or Vietnam to the genetic profiles of missing soldiers, as the military did not start collecting its members' DNA until 1992.<sup>31</sup> DNA is passed down the generations through reproductive cells, which, unlike body cells, only have a half set of chromosomes. Thus, in a fertilized egg, half of the genome is contributed by the mother and the other half by the father. Because the genetic variations used for identification are included in what is passed down through the generations, and shared among family members (with closer blood relationships resulting in more shared markers), it is possible to determine a person's identity with reasonable accuracy using DNA profiles of his or her family members, coupled with statistical methods developed for this purpose.

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<sup>29</sup> Ana Maria Di Lonardo *et al.*, "Human Genetics and Human Rights: Identifying the Families of Kidnapped Children," *The American Journal of Forensic Medicine and Pathology* 5, no.4 (December 1984): 339-341; Mary-Claire King, "An Application of DNA Sequencing to A Human Rights Problem," *Molecular Genetic Medicine* 1, 1991:118.

<sup>30</sup> Aronson, *Genetic Witnesses*, 13-17, 56, 113.

<sup>31</sup> "US to Keep Genetic Data on Military," *Chicago Tribune*, January 12, 1992, Section 1, 3.

The US military ultimately selected mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) sequencing to identify the remains returned from North Korea, because of two potential drawbacks with RFLP for this purpose. First, RFLP in the early years required a considerable amount of DNA, whereas only trace amounts of chromosomal DNA, far below the required threshold, could be obtained from the small bone fragments recovered in Korea and Vietnam. Mitochondria exist outside the cell nucleus and are tasked with producing energy for cells. Unlike chromosomal DNA, of which each cell has only one copy, mtDNA has multiple copies and is also more stable. Therefore, the chance of obtaining an adequate quantity of mtDNA from soldiers' bones is much higher. The DNA in mitochondria includes highly variable regions that differ among family lineages. To use mtDNA for identification, investigators must sequence these regions. In 1986, the newly discovered polymerase chain reaction (PCR) simplified the amplification of selected DNA fragments and their sequencing. PCR made it possible to accumulate ample DNA for sequencing, even from the trace amounts recovered from bones. To amplify DNA, laboratory staff must know the sequences bracketing the target region, and geneticists had sequenced the full length of human mtDNA in 1981.<sup>32</sup>

Second, most Korean War soldiers were born in the 1920s or early 1930s, and thus few of their parents or siblings were alive in the 1990s. More distant relatives' chromosomal DNA, meanwhile, has diminishing value for identification. The

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<sup>32</sup> S. Anderson et al., "Sequence and Organization of the Human Mitochondrial Genome," *Nature* 290, no.5806 (April 1981): 457-465. Since the late 1980s, PCR has been introduced to RFLP assays for genetic analyses.

characteristics of mtDNA can partially resolve this issue. Being maternally inherited, a soldier's mtDNA shares the same sequence with all his siblings, all his sisters' children, and all his maternal aunts' children. The pool of mtDNA donors for matching is therefore significantly larger than that of chromosomal DNA donors. However, precisely because mtDNA profiles are shared by these broader populations, they must be used in conjunction with other evidence in order to make definitive identifications.

In recent years, with the development of better DNA extraction techniques and PCR, the military has introduced autosomal DNA and Y-DNA short tandem repeat (STR) to complement mtDNA tests for identification. In many regions of chromosomal DNA that lack known function, there are short repeats of two to six base pairs (bp) in tandem, with a total length of between fifty and five hundred bp. The number of such repeats varies between individuals, creating unique DNA profiles. As the STR region is short, it is likely to remain intact even when the chromosomal DNA in bones is extensively degraded over decades. Although there are many STR regions in the genome to characterize, the FBI settled on thirteen loci of autosomal DNA to characterize in November 1997, and expanded the set to twenty in January 2017.<sup>33</sup> The number of STR regions available for investigation makes it highly unlikely that people who share many of the same makers are unrelated. As a result, familial matching has become both easier

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<sup>33</sup> John M. Butler, "Genetics and Genomics of Core Short Tandem Repeat Loci Used in Human Identity Testing," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 51, no.2 (March 2006): 253; "FBI CODIS Core STR Loci," National Institute of Standards and Technology, accessed December 29, 2019, <https://strbase.nist.gov/fbicore.htm>. The military may use slightly different sets of loci.

and more reliable over time. Y-DNA profiling ensures a large pool of DNA donors, as Y-DNA is only paternally inherited. A soldier's Y-DNA profile shares those of his male cousins, nephews, and male offspring. However, it has similar issues to mtDNA, and thus cannot be used as the sole evidence for positive identification of an individual.

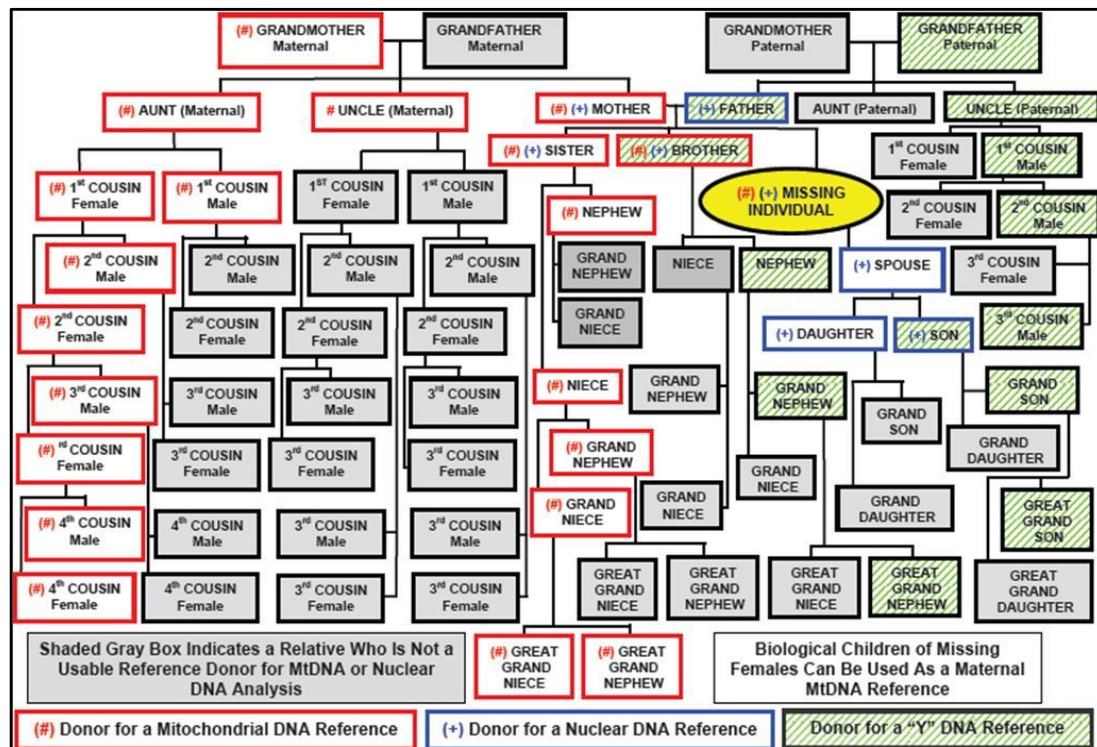


Figure 6-1: Family pedigree of eligible DNA donors, created by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. <https://www.dpaa.mil/portals/85/Images/DNAasm.jpg>

Prior to AFDIL's adoption of mtDNA sequencing, this method had been successfully used on multiple occasions. King's team used mtDNA profiling to determine whether a boy abducted during the Dirty War and later returned to a group called the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo belonged to a specific family. In 1991, Mark Stoneking used mtDNA to identify a skull found in the Mojave Desert as belonging to a missing girl. In the same year, mtDNA sequencing helped to confirm a body as belonging

to Nazi war criminal Joseph Mengele. Shortly after the First Gulf War, the newly established AFDIL launched its first mtDNA investigation, which proved that a package of human remains delivered by Iraq was not the body of Captain Michael Scott Speicher, the only casualty unaccounted for after that conflict.<sup>34</sup>

Pressure from the POW/MIA activists' community also prompted the Defense Department to adopt DNA profiling. Even before the foundation of AFDIL, CILHI sought commercial providers of DNA profiling to convince the activists of its commitment to servicemen's families. After his battle with CILHI in 1985, Charney lent technical support to another POW/MIA family in its confrontation with the authorities. Hospital Corpsman Third Class Mark V. Dennis had been killed when his helicopter was shot down in 1966. All other passengers on board were soon identified, leaving just one body that was burnt beyond recognition. Checking the manifest, the military associated it with Dennis. In 1971, however, Dennis's relatives said they had seen him in a photo purportedly taken in a Vietnamese prison. A reexamination of his body did not overturn the military's earlier conclusion, but the CILHI controversy in 1985 encouraged Dennis's family to join Hart and Fanning's battle against the Pentagon. In 1988, likely as part of its defense of its credibility, CILHI submitted eight samples from Dennis's body to the LifeCodes Corporation. None of them yielded adequate DNA for its RFLP-based DNA-

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<sup>34</sup> King, "An Application of DNA," 126-128; Terry Melton and Victor W. Weedn, "Forensic DNA Sequencing," in Brian K. Nunnally (ed.) *Analytical Techniques in DNA Sequencing* (Boca Raton, FL: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 218-219; Christine Spolar, "US Hunts POW of '91 War," *Chicago Tribune*, April 24, 2003, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2003-04-24-0304240299-story.html>. According to Spolar, the navy concealed this fact and claimed that the DNA test had identified Speicher.

PRINT™ analysis. LifeCodes then investigated the polymorphisms of the human leukocyte antigen genes (which required PCR). This analysis concluded that Dennis's mother was "genetically consistent with being the mother" of the individual examined by LifeCodes, but that this did "not constitute an absolute biological identification."<sup>35</sup> Subsequent DNA tests still could not identify Dennis beyond doubt, but his family abandoned their fight and cremated his body in 2017.<sup>36</sup>

The Dennis case was not a success, but the solution in 1991 of another troublesome case persuaded the military that mtDNA profiling could be a practical solution to clearing the backlog of remains from Vietnam. While the identification of Hugh Fanning was not revoked in 1986, his putative body was returned to CILHI, which later conceded that there was inadequate evidence to substantiate the original identification. Little is known about the events in the interim, but CILHI somehow reaffirmed the original identification in 1989. After consulting with anthropologists hired by Fanning's widow, the Marine Corps and Fanning's parents proposed burying him in Arlington on July 17, 1991. However, his widow was determined to sabotage what she

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<sup>35</sup> "Lifecodes Case #: FI10400, August 10, 1988," and "Robert C. Shaler to Dr. Kerley, November 9, 1988," both files and other background information of Mark Dennis are from "Objection to Identification of Mark V. Dennis, Complete Study Made by Brother Jerry Dennis," deposited as an appendix in *POW/MIA Policy and Process, Hearings before the Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, on the US Government's Efforts to Learn the Fate of America's Missing Men*, Part II of II, Senate, 102nd Congress, First Session, November 5, 6, 7, and 15, 1991, 1107-1417.

<sup>36</sup> Howard Altman, "Family Finally Accepts Death of Navy Corpsman Shot Down in Vietnam," *Tampa Bay Times* (St. Petersburg, FL), March 31, 2017, <http://www.tampabay.com/news/military/war/family-finally-accepts-death-of-navy-corpsman-shot-down-in-vietnam/2318696>; Chris Stewart, "Miamisburg Man's Death in Vietnam, Questioned for Decades, Now Has Closure," *Dayton Daily News* (Dayton, OH), April 5, 2017, <http://www.mydaytondailynews.com/news/miamisburg-man-death-vietnam-questioned-for-decades-now-has-closure/vuXZm5ZWR11qfGdsfn7EUO/>; "Vietnam War: The Battle over Remains," KUSA (Denver, CO), <https://www.9news.com/article/amp/news/local/vietnam-war-the-battle-over-remains/1323908112/>.



perceived as a premature declaration of her husband's death. Senator Bob Smith, who was organizing the most comprehensive investigation to that time of POW/MIA affairs in the US Senate, appeared to endorse her position.<sup>37</sup> The military decided to use DNA technology, hoping that it would generate a more certain result than previous methods did to solve this impasse.

That decision was also influenced by an ongoing POW/MIA campaign. In the run-up to the First Gulf War, many POW/MIA campaigners expressed worry that the United States might be entering another Vietnam-type conflict, in which servicemen who went missing would be unaccounted for afterward. While the war turned out to be a sweeping victory over Saddam Hussein, Iraq was not completely open to US forces, and as noted above, Captain Speicher's fate remained elusive. Thus, POW/MIA campaigners suspected that he might still be detained in Iraq.<sup>38</sup> The attempt to use mtDNA to identify the body returned by the Iraqis as Speicher was possibly part of a two-pronged Pentagon public-relations effort aimed at appeasing these activists, the other being the proposal to examine Fanning's bone DNA.

The military collected DNA samples from seven bones believed to be Fanning's, and from his parents and sisters. In August 1991, they reported that DNA degradation prevented the use of genomic DNA, but that the extraction of mtDNA from four of the

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<sup>37</sup> Michael Kennedy, "Wife, Marines Clash Over Whose Bones Are in Coffin," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1991, A1, A13; "MAJ Fanning Case," MIA Facts Site, accessed October 8, 2015, <http://www.miafacts.org/fanning.htm>

<sup>38</sup> Hawley, *The Remains of War*, 244-252.

seven bones had been successful. AFDIL sequenced a region of about a hundred bp and found that the sequence from each of those four bones was identical. It then established that an eighty bp region matched the sample from Fanning's mother, but not two control samples taken from persons unrelated to the Fanning family.<sup>39</sup> According to a later official report and a research article based on this identification, the mtDNA samples were sequenced again. This time, an over two hundred bp DNA from the same four bones matched samples from his sisters and mother, but not his father. Its sequence was then compared to those in a database of 650 individuals. No match was found, indicating that this particular sequence was relatively rare in the general population. AFDIL chief Major Victor W. Weedn concluded that this result constituted "clear and convincing confirmation of previous identification efforts, particularly in light of other circumstantial evidence."<sup>40</sup> By today's standards, both the length of the amplified mtDNA and the database were unacceptably small, but the military sought to appease Fanning's widow using what were apparently the best techniques available at the time.

Nevertheless, DNA failed to convince Fanning's widow. When the preliminary report was released (Weedn declared the identification as 95 percent certain), she instantly rejected its conclusion without giving any explanation, declaring that "if I can

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<sup>39</sup> "Preliminary Report Identification of Remains, Major Hugh M. Fanning, US Marine Corps, CILHI Case #0013-84," August 16, 1991, provided by MIA Facts Site, accessed October 8, 2015, <http://www.miafacts.org/fnprlp2.htm> 2/

<sup>40</sup> "Final Report, Identification of Remains, Major Hugh M. Fanning, US Marine Corps, CILHI Case #0013-84," September 6, 1991, provided by MIA Facts Site, accessed on October 8, 2015, <http://www.miafacts.org/afmepg1.htm> 1/; Mitchell M. Holland et al., "Mitochondrial DNA Sequence Analysis of Human Skeletal Remains: Identification of Remains from the Vietnam War," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 38, no.3 (May 1993): 542-553.

determine these bones are my husband's, Hugh Michael Fanning, I will consider that knowledge a victory after six years struggle to determine the truth." She also warned the Pentagon that she was going to hire a geneticist from the University of California, Riverside, Michael Clegg, to analyze the bones.<sup>41</sup> Little is known about subsequent events. Considering her phrase, "I can determine," she likely meant that it was her discretion, rather than scientific evidence, that would close the case. However, it is noteworthy that in 1991, she received much less publicity and academic support than she had in the past. When AFDIL released its final report in September, few journalists reported her side of the story. In 1985, Charney had been able to challenge morphological approximation since it had never been accepted by academia. The later publication of the full details of Fanning's identification in a peer-reviewed academic journal made it much harder to question the results. Even the National Alliance of Families (NAF), which remained critical of AFDIL's mtDNA-based identification procedures, scarcely mentioned this case.<sup>42</sup>

While the DNA test did not dispel Mrs. Fanning's belief that her husband was languishing in Vietnam, it served as a reminder to forensic experts that mtDNA was a potential solution to clearing the backlog of unidentified bodies from the Vietnam War. In

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<sup>41</sup> Associated Press, "Genetic Testing Identifies MIA Flier," *Press Democrat* (Santa Rosa, CA), August 24, 1991, B3. The sequence in the preliminary report was only compared with a tiny database of sixty-three individuals, and a match was found among thirty-six unrelated Caucasian entries. It is not certain whether this was the reason that Kathryn Fanning refused to accept the result. In an email dated June 7, 2019, Dr. Clegg told me that because his laboratory did not really specialize in mtDNA research, he referred her to another laboratory (he could not remember which).

<sup>42</sup> After 1995 (when its earliest leaflet was available), while NAF questioned mtDNA-based cases, it did not mention Fanning.

Kerley's retrospective assessment of his CILHI career in October 1991, he recommended large-scale adoption of DNA profiling to identify remains rather than continuing to rely on older approaches, and cited the identification of Fanning as one of its successes.<sup>43</sup> Leading CILHI anthropologists "believed that DNA techniques would revolutionize the identification of remains," although more experimentation would be needed before it could be applied on a large scale.<sup>44</sup>

In response to a congressional request in December 1991 for information about its progress in identifying soldiers' remains, CILHI admitted that it was experiencing three major obstacles. They were: 1) insufficient quantity of recovered biological materials, which moreover could not be identified using ordinary methods; 2) inadequate data about the locations where repatriated bodies had been found; and 3) a lack of servicemen's medical files, especially for those killed in the Korean War. CILHI noted that the first of these obstacles could probably be overcome, given AFDIL's help with DNA identification, provided that the Army could collect DNA samples from POW/MIAs' relatives.<sup>45</sup> And with regard to the third issue, when physical and dental records of Korean War casualties were unavailable, DNA profiling seemed to be a viable alternative

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<sup>43</sup> Memorandum from Tom Long, Dr. Ellis R. Kerley, October 23, 1991, Folder Identification of MIA Remains, CILHI, Box 5, Section Q (Erickson), Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARAI.

<sup>44</sup> "Evaluation of the Human Remains Identification Process at the US Army's Central Identification Laboratory (CILHI), Status Briefing," February 20, 1992, Folder Evaluation of CILHI, Box 1, Section J, Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARAI.

<sup>45</sup> "Point Paper, Evaluation of Human Remains Identification Process at the US Army's Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii (CILHI)," March 24, 1992, unlabeled folder, Box 5, Section Q (Erickson), Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARAI.

for identifying them, because of its independence from their antemortem data.

In June 1992, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) drafted a detailed report on CILHI's capacity to address the demands of POW/MIA activists. In this document, CILHI reported to GAO that it was holding about 1,100 sets of remains, of which eight hundred were "of such poor quality that even with existing scientifically accepted techniques, the likelihood of a positive identification is extremely remote." CILHI recognized that it would be risky to use DNA as the sole approach to identifying them but promised to increase the use of DNA-based techniques, especially to corroborate those identification reports already recommended for release to families. Seeing the potential of DNA technology, the Army informed GAO that it would discontinue the practice of destroying bones that would have no identification value using contemporary techniques.<sup>46</sup> The final GAO report, released in October 1992, confirmed that CILHI would more frequently use mtDNA to identify POW/MIAs' bodies. By that point, CILHI had already contracted AFDIL to conduct DNA analysis on seventy-five cases per year, as CILHI did not have the ability to sequence DNA on its own.<sup>47</sup>

### **MtDNA Tests Become Routinized**

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<sup>46</sup> GAO Draft Report to the Chairman, Select Committee on POW/MIA, US Senate, *Issues Related to the Identification of Human Remains from the Vietnam Conflict*, June, 1992, Folder GAO CILHI, Box 13, Section J, Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARA. Destroying body parts deemed without the possibility of identification has been a practice for decades.

<sup>47</sup> GAO Report to the Chairman and Vice-chairman, Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, US Senate, *Issues Related to the Identification of Human Remains from the Vietnam Conflict*, (Washington, DC: US General Accounting Office, 1992), 22-23.

In 1995, the military proposed to apply mtDNA sequencing on a large scale to identify the backlogged remains in CILHI from Vietnam and Korea. Particularly, it regarded the commingled bones repatriated from Korea as the top-priority task for mtDNA sequencing. However, it would be nearly a decade before this technology emerged as essentially the default method for identifying bodies returned by North Korea.

As we have seen, CILHI's initial stance was that DNA-based techniques should only be used to supplement more established methods for identifying remains; but in reality, the condition of some remains made it impossible to use other methods. CILHI thus tended to rely exclusively on DNA and circumstantial evidence to solve POW/MIA cases. In February 1993, CILHI's deputy commander commented that the identification of Lieutenant Ralph E. Foulks Jr. was "the first in which DNA testing was used as the sole means of identification, except for circumstantial evidence."<sup>48</sup> Among the CILHI case summaries in the 1990s and early 2000s that were signed by anthropologist Ted A. Rathbun, the condition of many bodies precluded the use of anthropological or dental methods, and mtDNA sequencing together with circumstantial evidence were the only feasible techniques for identification.

Despite its critical role in many cases since the early 1990s, until 1995, CILHI regarded DNA testing as a last resort to be used "when other identification techniques are impracticable," and not something with which to "routinely confirm identification made

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<sup>48</sup> John Fritz, "DNA Technique Identifies Pilots Killed in Vietnam," *Lansing State Journal* (Lansing, MI), February 7, 1993, 6A.

by fingerprint and/or dental comparison or by other positive means.” The attitude was in part driven by the fact that an mtDNA test consumed a considerable proportion of the bones to which it was applied, meaning that in cases where only a tiny amount of biological materials from a missing man was recovered, testing was tantamount to the remains’ destruction.<sup>49</sup> In the early 1990s, moreover, mtDNA test procedures were far from standardized, making the effective identification of mass casualties far from straightforward. Rathbun reported to the military that “careful dental and skeletal analysis should remain the prime mode of identification. A number of ‘bugs’ appear to remain for the timely and accurate enhancement and analysis of DNA.”<sup>50</sup> He also expressed concern that the enormous time and financial cost of mtDNA testing would be a “bottleneck” when it came to identifying casualties in large numbers.<sup>51</sup>

In 1993, CILHI’s reluctance to use mtDNA tests to identify Captain Harley H. Hall led to protests from his family. Three teeth and small fragments of bones believed to belong to Captain Hall had been recovered from Vietnam. While CILHI proved that the teeth were Hall’s, thus identifying him, his family and the NLPF were enraged, as the teeth alone, without accurate information regarding the circumstances of their recovery, could not affirm Hall’s death. According to Hall’s family, absent an association with skull or jawbones, the teeth proved nothing apart from the fact that Hall had lost three teeth.

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<sup>49</sup> “Policy Statement, Identification of Remains Using Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) Comparison,” December 21, 1993, Folder May 1994, Box 14, TAR Collection, NAA.

<sup>50</sup> Ted A. Rathbun to M. T. Spinello, May 20, 1993, Folder CILHI Laboratory Visit May 1993, Box 14, TAR Collection, NAA.

<sup>51</sup> Ted A. Rathbun to M. T. Spinello, December 20, 1994, Folder CILHI Laboratory Visit December 1994, Box 14, TAR Collection, NAA.

However, CILHI refused to perform DNA tests on the bone samples recovered along with the teeth on two grounds: 1) that such samples might not yield any DNA, and 2) that the dental match had rendered an mtDNA test “redundant and unnecessary.”<sup>52</sup>

The policy of reserving DNA testing for only a handful of challenging cases from the Vietnam War did little to pacify POW/MIA activists such as Hall’s family, who consistently charged the military with lacking dedication to the task of finding its missing men. In the early 1990s, the relationship between government officials and these activists rapidly deteriorated. In July 1992, President George H. W. Bush exploded, “would you please shut up and sit down,” in response to agitated hardcore activists’ aggressive shouting during an NLPF annual conference.<sup>53</sup> In November, during a Senate hearing on the POW/MIA issue, Senator John McCain III (R-AZ) left the chamber in protest amid defiant shouting from the audience of activists.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps, under such circumstances, applying DNA tests to all remains that could not be identified beyond doubt by any other established methods might persuade some POW/MIA families to leave the aggressive activists’ campaigns after receiving their loved ones’ bodies.

The military received more pressure to apply mtDNA tests on a large scale when it received remains exhumed from secondary graves in the DPRK. Pursuant to the US-DPRK agreement on the repatriation of remains signed in August 1993, CILHI received

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<sup>52</sup> Narrative of Mrs. Hall, undated; Ann Mills-Griffiths to E. R. Ghent, April 6, 1995, and E. R. Ghent to Mary Louise Hall, June 7, 1993, Folder 30, Box 8, Garnett Bell Collection, the Virtual Vietnam Archives (VVA, the Texas Tech University).

<sup>53</sup> Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 279-280. The NLPF leaders failed to restore order after the shouting.

<sup>54</sup> The hearing was videotaped by C-Span.



131 boxes of remains in late 1993 and anticipated receiving more. As of June 1994, however, only one body from those boxes had been identified.<sup>55</sup> An approach that could re-associate bones discovered miles apart into a single person without relying on antemortem data was the only possible solution. In June 1994, having recognized the success of mtDNA technology inside and outside the military, the Defense Department launched a Defense Science Board (DSB) task force to “determine the feasibility of utilizing DNA techniques to identify unassociated ancient remains from past conflicts” and to evaluate factors that might possibly affect the routinized use of mtDNA tests to identify bodies from Vietnam and Korea.<sup>56</sup>

The task force’s conclusion revealed that it was the poor condition and sheer quantity of bodies from Korea that ultimately motivated the Defense Department to employ mtDNA for identification. It noted that a program of DNA testing for identification was possible, and “mtDNA sequencing currently offers the best means of identifying those skeletal remains that cannot be identified through traditional means.” While it recommended that the military use mtDNA tests on Vietnam War casualties first, due to the higher chances of locating their relatives, the Korean War cases remained a major concern. The first main conclusion of the DSB report was that “current DNA

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<sup>55</sup> Letter dated June 15, 1994 from the Permanent Representative of the US to the UN Addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/1994/713.

<sup>56</sup> Memorandum for Chairman, Defense Science Board, Terms of Reference, “Defense Science Board Task Force on the Use of DNA Technology for Identification of Ancient Remains,” June 21, 1994, cited from *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on the Use of DNA Technology for Identification of Ancient Remains, July 20, 1995* (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition & Technology, 1995). It is hereafter cited as *DSB Report*.

identification efforts are supported by sufficient scientific evidence to proceed, in particular with application of mtDNA sequencing to identify ancient remains from the Korean conflict.” Accordingly, the DSB proposed a twelve-year project to identify these remains using a combination of mtDNA and non-DNA evidence.<sup>57</sup>

Another incident involving POW/MIA campaigns accelerated the standardization of mtDNA tests for identification. In 1958, an Air Force C-130 was shot down by Soviet forces in Armenia, killing all seventeen men on board, including Airman Second Class Archie T. Bourg Jr. The Soviet authorities returned six bodies but did not disclose the fates of the other eleven men. Among the six, a body burnt beyond recognition was designated as X-6. After the demise of the USSR, the US military reinvestigated the loss of Bourg’s plane. Out of fear that the military was about to close the case prematurely, Bourg’s family requested mtDNA testing on X-6 in January 1993. That July, AFDIL stated that it had positively identified X-6 as Bourg, but his sister was not persuaded.<sup>58</sup> Aware of the frequent confrontations between POW/MIA activists and government officials, she suspected that the remaining eleven airmen had parachuted safely from the plane and subsequently been held as secret captives of the USSR.<sup>59</sup>

Like Fanning, Bourg’s sister targeted body identification, and her suspicion prompted the military to review its DNA testing procedures. In October 1993, Bourg’s

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<sup>57</sup> *DSB Report*, summary pages, 55-57. The DSB Report estimated 3,000-5,000 recoverable bodies from the DPRK.

<sup>58</sup> *DSB Report*, Appendix D; Lee Hockstadter, “The Long Cold War of a Lost Airman’s Sister,” *Washington Post*, October 26, 1993, F1

<sup>59</sup> “Sister of Airman Downed in 1958 Says US Covered Up Story of Survivors,” *Baltimore Sun*, March 5, 1993, [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1993-03-05/news/1993064220\\_1\\_bourg-soviet-union-airman](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1993-03-05/news/1993064220_1_bourg-soviet-union-airman).

sister contacted Mary-Claire King for an independent test to confirm the identity of X-6, which revealed that two positions of X-6's mtDNA sequence did not match hers. Less than a week after King reported her findings, to avoid another public relations disaster, the military placed a moratorium on the use of mtDNA as a "primary means of identification."<sup>60</sup> AFDIL re-examined X-6's DNA sample and sent it to a British laboratory for an additional test, which confirmed AFDIL's original finding. AFDIL, however, reviewed its past identification, modified its operating procedures, and resumed mtDNA testing in October 1994. The DSB cited the X-6 case to stress the importance of quality assurance and warned of a high likelihood of sample contamination during tests. Bourg's family accepted the mtDNA result and planned to bury him in late 1995.<sup>61</sup>

The DSB task force's plan to identify Korean War POW/MIAs via mtDNA sequencing was scheduled to commence with a small-scale investigation in 1998, but the military did not regularize mtDNA tests on those remains until 2005.<sup>62</sup> The first factor responsible for the delay was the need to establish mtDNA databases of both POW/MIA families and the general population. In DNA profiling, the result must be accompanied by an estimate of the probability that the same profile could coincidentally match that of someone within a specific population who is unrelated to the subject individual. This necessitated the collection of sufficient DNA profiles from various races. When AFDIL

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<sup>60</sup> *DSB Report*, Annex D.

<sup>61</sup> *DSB Report*, 29 and Annex E; Bruce Schultz, "She Wouldn't Quit\*\*\*: Lorna Bourg Was Determined to Find Out What Happened to Her Big Brother," *Advocate* (Baton Rouge, LA), September 2, 1995, 1B.

<sup>62</sup> The first one likely took place in 2000.

identified Fanning in 1991, it did not own a database but used third-party ones. In 1995, unsurprisingly, the DSB deemed the AFDIL database then in use inadequate to ensure the discriminatory power of mtDNA tests to identify Korean War dead. The DSB recommended that at least five hundred profiles from each race had to be included in the database to precisely predict the odds of a random match between a recovered body's mtDNA sequence and that of an unrelated person. While it was relatively easy to acquire samples of Whites and African Americans, the military had only a few samples from Vietnamese, Koreans, and other minorities on file, and acquiring more would be vital to determining whether particular bodies belonged to US allies from Asia, Asian-American soldiers, or Koreans and Japanese drafted into the US military.<sup>63</sup>

Collecting family reference samples (FRS) to identify the bodies of missing personnel was challenging and time-consuming. A year before the DSB proposed a family outreach project aimed at FRS collection, the Defense Nuclear Agency had contacted Korean War veterans for a research study of its own, but due to “client unawareness, poor records availability, aging population, etc.,” that project faced significant impediments. This observation served as a warning to the DSB of the challenges posed by collecting FRS. The military had to locate POW/MIA relatives who might be unfamiliar with the Korean War or who had decided to metaphorically close the book on it, perhaps decades earlier. The Defense Nuclear Agency estimated that a DNA

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<sup>63</sup> *DSB Report*, 26, 36-37, 56. In 1991, AFDIL used databases maintained by civilian geneticists. Besides Asian immigrants from the west coast and Hawaii, during the Korean War, Koreans and Japanese were drafted into the US military to deal with personnel shortage in US Army units.

outreach program might cover 70 percent of the POW/MIA families, but that 40 percent was more likely.<sup>64</sup> In the long run, this proved pessimistic: as of June 2018, relatives of 91 percent of Korean War POW/MIAs have had their samples deposited in the database.<sup>65</sup> However, the initial collection of FRS was painfully slow, restrained by the limited opportunities to contact Korean War POW/MIA families; and as of 1999, only 15 percent of FRS were on file.<sup>66</sup>

Due to a personnel shortage, the DSB recommended that the Defense Department outsource FRS collection and POW/MIA database management to civilian contractors.<sup>67</sup> One such contractor was the Korean War Project (KWP), managed by Ted Barker and his brother. In August 1995, the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) asked the KWP to seek out the families of Korean War casualties. The KWP distributed DPMO announcements to POW/MIA families via its website, which acquired interactive capability in 1999 and from then on supported an effective family outreach program. The next year, the military provided the KWP with the names of POW/MIAs whose families had not yet donated DNA samples by 2000. Its website added a dedicated column, “Urgent, DNA Needed,” in 2004.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *DSB Report*, Annex G.

<sup>65</sup> Timothy P. McMahon, “AFMES-AFDIL’s Capabilities, Assets & Resources,” presentation during the annual DPAA briefing for the Korean War/Cold War on August 10, 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Jin, *et al.*, “The Korea 208,” 409.

<sup>67</sup> *DSB Report*, Annex G.

<sup>68</sup> Ted Barker, interview by the author, tape-recorded, August 24, 2018. The Barker brothers informed the families that even the personal items of the POW/MIAs may contain trace of their hair or saliva, thus useful to collect DNA when their maternal relatives are not accessible. While they had asked families to send the samples directly to the military, they sometimes received various personal items. They delivered these items then to the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory in Rockville, MD. However, the KWP never has an official cooperation with the Defense Department.

As this suggests, FRS collection was rather poorly publicized before 2000. When the KWP website was launched in 1995, internet service was available to only a small percentage of Americans. The rural areas and small towns that had been home to a large portion of the POW/MIAs often lacked access. Barker told me that although the number of visitors to his website snowballed after the dedication of the Korean War Veterans' Memorial in July 1995, it was only in 1999 that the KWP and its request for DNA began to attract media coverage.<sup>69</sup> It may not have been a coincidence that this happened just one year after Michael Joseph Blassie was identified by DNA profiling as the Vietnam War serviceman interred in the Tomb of the Unknowns. The Korean War Veterans' Association also first mentioned FRS collection in its journal only after the military proposed, in the wake of the Blassie identification, to exhume the bodies at the Punchbowl.<sup>70</sup> The military began to update POW/MIA families regularly on its progress in accounting for POW/MIAs in 1997, but eight years would pass before AFDIL began collecting FRS during such briefings, according to a Defense Department official.<sup>71</sup>

Another obstacle to establishing an adequate DNA database was some families' refusal to donate FRS, perhaps out of distrust of the military. In February 1992, when CILHI was evaluating DNA techniques, it admitted that "civil liberty and privacy advocates [had] expressed concerns that the DNA data base could be used inappropriately

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<sup>69</sup> Ted Barker, interview by the author, August 24, 2018.

<sup>70</sup> "Unidentified Remains Disinterment Policy Established," *The Graybeards* 13, no.4 (July/August 1999), 20. This short advertisement mentioned the identification of Michael Blassie.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Maves to Ted Barker, May 3, 2005, courtesy of Ted Barker.

for genetic discrimination;” and in 1995 the DSB demanded sensitivity to genetic privacy during the establishment of mtDNA databases.<sup>72</sup> Such concerns were justified. A niece of missing Corporal Freeman H. Lindsey acknowledged that her surviving uncles were initially reluctant to give blood to the military because they thought it might be a scam. Barker also noted that “people were leery” of giving biological samples to anyone, but especially to the government.<sup>73</sup>

The families’ reluctance to donate FRS also reflected their hesitancy about reopening old wounds. Lindsey’s siblings, for instance, said they did not want to relive the painful memory of losing their brother. Barker told me that, despite the KWP’s efforts to educate people about the importance of FRS, many families still turned down requests for it. The parents and siblings of POW/MIAs were not always cooperative. After they had passed away, their offspring who had no direct experience of the war tended to be more comfortable giving samples, especially after interacting with the Defense Department.<sup>74</sup> This assessment by Barker was echoed by a military officer, who further observed that some family members refused to donate FRS out of apathy toward POW/MIA investigations. This officer expressed an idea that these individuals might be encouraged to change their minds on FRS donation if it were de-coupled from updates on

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<sup>72</sup> “Evaluation of the Human Remains Identification Process at the US Army’s Central Identification Laboratory (CILHI), Status Briefing,” February 20, 1992, Folder Evaluation of CILHI, Box 1, Section J, Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs Files, RG46, NARAI; *DSB Report*, 34-35.

<sup>73</sup> Amy Matzke-Fawcett, “60 Years Later, Korean War POW’s Fate Told to Pulaski Family,” *Roanoke Times* (Roanoke, VA), September 2, 2011, [https://www.roanoke.com/news/years-later-korean-war-pow-s-fate-told-to-pulaski/article\\_6846dd40-1feb-52f9-a156-eecc72455b48.html](https://www.roanoke.com/news/years-later-korean-war-pow-s-fate-told-to-pulaski/article_6846dd40-1feb-52f9-a156-eecc72455b48.html).

<sup>74</sup> Ted Barker, interview by the author, August 24, 2018.

the fates of their loved ones.<sup>75</sup>

Another factor that delayed mtDNA identification of remains from North Korea until the mid-2000s was allocation of resources. The limited budget for the Korean War dead necessitated careful shepherding of funding, and it was not until the early 2000s that DNA testing became financially as well as scientifically practical as a tool for identifying the bodies received from North Korea.<sup>76</sup> Since these bodies were heavily commingled, CILHI needed to examine a high proportion of all bones to determine how many individuals' remains were included in each container. By the same token, it was usually only after investigating numerous containers that CILHI staff could segregate and rearticulate an adequate number of bones sharing the same mtDNA profile into an individual's body for anthropological investigation. In 2013, for instance, CILHI employed mtDNA evidence to consolidate the bones of Sergeant Cameron M. Flack from three boxes that had been delivered by the DPRK in 1993, plus three burial sites that had been exhumed in 2000, into an incomplete skeleton, before it proceeded with anthropological analysis.<sup>77</sup> Laying out hundreds of skeletons required a spacious laboratory and a team of experienced anthropologists dedicated to the Korean War casualties, but these resources only became available in 2008 and 2011 respectively.<sup>78</sup>

Gradual equalization of the treatment of missing servicemen from all wars

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<sup>75</sup> R. H. Armbruster to Ted Barker, June 9, 2006, courtesy of Ted Barker.

<sup>76</sup> Jin, *et al.*, "The Korea 208," 409.

<sup>77</sup> Identification Report of CIL 1993-214-I-03 (Sgt. Cameron M. Flack), courtesy of Ms. Shirley Brooks Parker.

<sup>78</sup> Jin, *et al.*, "The Korea 208," 409.



determined the availability of resources. For decades, when Americans talked about POW/MIAs, they had generally been referring to those who went missing in Vietnam. While President Reagan cited Korean War POW/MIAs in his political campaigns, his priority was those lost in Vietnam. Lynn Dougherty, a POW/MIA activist, protested in 1987 to Reagan that, based on the definition of POW/MIA then, those missing in WWII and the Korea War were much more numerous than their Vietnam War counterparts, and yet the latter monopolized the country's attention. That is, ignoring the former violated the principle of equality.<sup>79</sup> However, the situation changed little over the ensuing twenty years. In a congressional hearing in 2009 on CILHI's working efficiency, POW/MIA advocate Ron Broward testified that only twenty to twenty-five percent of the Defense Department funding for CILHI's identification projects was allocated to the missing men of the Korean War and WWII; and that from 2000 to 2008, only 15 percent of identified bodies were Korean War casualties. Rear Admiral Donna L. Crisp, who supervised POW/MIA affairs at the time, admitted that only 12.8 percent of research and recovery efforts had thus far pertained to the Korean War. The military responded to strong lobbying from the activists. For example, in this hearing, Frank Metersky of the Korea-Cold War Families of the Missing suggested that a forensic team be assigned to the bodies from the DPRK.<sup>80</sup> In 2011, exactly such a team was deployed. In 2013, the US

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<sup>79</sup> Lynn D. Dougherty to Ronald Reagan, December 9, 1987, Folder POW/MIA Correspondence January to May 1988, 3, RAC Box 14, RTC Files, Reagan Library.

<sup>80</sup> *Improving Recovery and Full Accounting of POW/MIA Personnel from All Past Conflicts*, Hearing before the Military Personnel Committee of the Committee on Armed Forces, House of Representatives, 111th Congress, First Session, April 2, 2009, 11, 30, 38, 166.

military declared that it “has endeavored to provide equitable treatment and application of our resources across all conflicts.”<sup>81</sup>

Before the use of mtDNA profiling in identifying bodies recovered from Korea, few POW/MIAs had ever been accounted for. Prior to 2000, on average, CILHI identified one body from the DPRK annually. Between 2000 and 2004, this increased to around four per year. However, the bodies identified in this period tended to be in good condition, which was uncommon among bodies repatriated from the DPRK. For example, in 2002, the US military recovered the almost intact skeleton of Sergeant Carl E. Sheraden, together with at least seventy-four personal items. CILHI estimated his age and height with ease, observed antemortem fractures on the left radial head and a rib that perfectly matched his medical records, and found no contradiction between his thirteen recovered teeth and his dental charts. Sheraden was soon positively identified based on these factors alone.<sup>82</sup> Since 2005, however, mtDNA sequencing has been utilized to identify almost all Korean War casualties (excluding those buried at the NMCP). In that year, eleven bodies were identified, and the annual rate accelerated rapidly over the following decade, with sixty-four bodies identified in 2016. Between 1981 and June 25, 2019, 504 Korean War missing were accounted for, 357 of them after 2010.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Mismanagement of POW/MIA Accounting, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Financial and Contracting Oversight of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Senate, 113th Congress, First Session, August 1, 2013, 32.*

<sup>82</sup> Identification Report of CIL 2002-150-I-02 (Sgt. Carl Edward Sheraden), Box 17, TAR Collection, NAA.

<sup>83</sup> The statistics are based on my own database of Korean War POW/MIAs built by collecting the military’s official report of the identification of each individual. I intentionally selected the end date, the sixty-ninth anniversary of the Korean War armistice.

While mtDNA testing did not eliminate the need for dental, anthropological, and material evidence, it transformed the identification of deceased military personnel. First, as discussed above, antemortem data were no longer essential. Unlike height and dental patterns, the transfer of DNA down the generations was governed by predictable rules.

DNA profiling also minimized the number of bones required to identify a person and confirm his death. In the Civil War, even a full skeleton could not guarantee the identification of a soldier. During the Korean War, a decomposed body tended to require most of its teeth and a large portion of its skeleton for identification. When dealing with bodies from Vietnam, CILHI's efforts to decrease the required quantity of bone matter provoked the 1985 confrontation. In that era, besides Tadao Furue's morphological approximation using a fractional long bone, CILHI sometimes used nothing more than a tooth to identify a body, because other bones recovered with it, which were essential to a person's survival, were useless for identification.

This was unacceptable to some families, who argued that just a tooth was not proof of death. For example, in the 1980s, a sister of Airman First Class Robert E. Simmons consistently rejected CILHI's conclusion that Simmons had been shot down and killed in Laos based on a single identifiable tooth. She asserted that "if they had seven teeth from my brother, I could accept it [...]. Seven teeth don't just fall out [...]. One little tooth just doesn't seem like enough to take someone's life away."<sup>84</sup> Samuel

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<sup>84</sup> Tim Larimer, "Clinging to Hope for An MIA," *San Jose Mercury News* (San Jose, CA), August 12, 1987, 1A.

Dunlap, who had confronted Furue and cast doubt on CILHI's identification work since 1985, noted of the Simmons case that "where there is not a closed chain of evidence an ID based upon a single tooth would not be accepted under a court of law."<sup>85</sup> Harley Hall's family expressed a similar concern when they realized that his identification was based on just three teeth without other evidence of Captain Hall's demise—such as bones essential to a person's survival (for example, those retrieved with his teeth) or other positive evidence of his death.<sup>86</sup>

The availability of mtDNA techniques fundamentally altered the possibilities for identification (although it takes additional forensic evidence to fully realize this promise). Small bone fragments, which had once been of no real value in identification but are essential to one's survival, suddenly had the potential to account for many POW/MIAs. So long as a sufficient quantity of mtDNA could be extracted from a bone, it could be used at the very least to show that the bone had come from a particular individual. In late 2014, only a single clavicle bone of Sergeant First Class Harold P. Haugland was recovered from a staged burial in the DPRK. It was much too small to allow for extrapolation of the physical characteristics of the deceased, but a single mtDNA test led to his identification (CILHI stressed that Haugland's mtDNA profile was extremely rare in the White population).<sup>87</sup> Indeed, by 2017, the military reported that it could use a two-

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<sup>85</sup> Samuel Dunlap to Harry and Stan (family names unknown), January 1, 1988, courtesy of Dr. Dunlap.

<sup>86</sup> Narrative of Mrs. Hall, undated, Folder 12, Box 22, Garnett Bell Collection, VVA.

<sup>87</sup> Identification Report of CIL 2004-124-I-32 (SFC. Harold Peter Haugland), courtesy of Clayton Haugland. While one of Haugland's clavicle bones was found, CILHI never mentioned chest radiography for his identification.

inch leg bone for DNA identification.<sup>88</sup> This meant that CILHI could retire the vastly less reliable morphological approximation used by Tadao Furue, although it still identifies service personnel from a single tooth (likely with reliable circumstantial evidence).<sup>89</sup>

### Trust in DNA Evidence

In media outlets, DNA profiling seemingly created an impression that this technique would leave no serviceman's body unknown. Most of the families I contacted said that, among the various types of evidence supporting the identification of their loved ones, DNA matching was the most critical. However, their opinions differed regarding the additional factors that rendered the military's finding trustworthy. Vigilant POW/MIA activists were aware of the limitations of mtDNA testing, and some used this as a basis of a contention that the US military was still insincere about solving POW/MIA cases.

Since its debut, DNA profiling has been well-publicized in the media. Milestones in coverage included the identification of Blassie and Speicher. The identification of 9/11 victims from small amounts of charred flesh and the investigation of those slaughtered in Rwanda further reinforced laypeople's appreciation of the power of DNA. Convictions of

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<sup>88</sup> Katy Reckdahl, "Relatives of Louisiana Soldier Missing from Korean War Still Hope for Identification of His Remains," *New Orleans Advocate* (New Orleans, LA), March 26, 2017, [https://www.theadvocate.com/new\\_orleans/news/article/8fd7bdd6-1263-11e7-be2d-3bc688a63f2a.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/new_orleans/news/article/8fd7bdd6-1263-11e7-be2d-3bc688a63f2a.html). Not all families, however, will accept that a leg bone is a proof of death.

<sup>89</sup> In 2013, Lance Corporal Merlin R. Allen was identified just with a single tooth. The DPAA did not mention DNA in his identification, see DPAA, "Marine Missing from Vietnam War Identified (Allen) no. 13-053," news release, June 24, 2013, <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/579553/marine-missing-from-vietnam-war-identified-allen/>; The information is confirmed in Sarah E. Wagner, *What Remains: Bringing America's Missing Home from the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 22.

notorious criminals using decisive DNA evidence has also been dramatized in popular TV series like the fifteen-season (2000-2015) *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*.

The effect of television was so formidable that scholars coined the term “CSI effect” for juries, mesmerized by dramatized forensic technology, that are reluctant to convict without the type of evidence depicted as fail-proof on TV.<sup>90</sup> According to Michael Lynch et al., the CSI effect indicates “awe and anxiety about the perceived power of scientific evidence, particularly DNA evidence,” and that DNA has “attained a level of ‘mathematical certainty’ that transcends” subjective evidence. Even people fully cognizant of the fictional nature of *CSI*, including some legal scholars and science reporters, have hailed DNA analysis as an unassailable “truth machine.”<sup>91</sup> *CSI* generally delivers a scenario in which trace DNA left at a crime scene perfectly matches the DNA profile of a suspect, and the case is solved beyond doubt.<sup>92</sup> Translating this into POW/MIA terms, a DNA sample is extracted from a bone, matches one FRS, and leads to a missing person’s identification.

My interaction with POW/MIA families suggested that they had been deeply influenced by the dramatized power of DNA. In August 2018, during the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency’s (DPAA) annual briefing, the military speakers were besieged by families who, having seen the power of DNA on television, felt the military

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<sup>90</sup> Aronson, *Genetic Witness*, 3.

<sup>91</sup> Michael Lynch et al., *Truth Machine: The Contentious History of DNA Fingerprinting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), x-xi.

<sup>92</sup> Corinna Kruse, “Producing Absolute Truth: *CSI* Science as Wishful Thinking,” *American Anthropologist* New Series 112, no.1 (March 2010):85.

should be readily able to identify the unknown Korean War casualties at the NMCP, as well as the one entombed at Arlington. In an interview, a brother of Sergeant Gerald J. Mueller told me that DNA evidence convinced him of Mueller's identification, as he had seen so many examples of its critical role in solving murders and convicting criminals.<sup>93</sup>

The military and the media also played a part in reinforcing the image of DNA profiling as a truth machine. In the DPAA annual briefings, posters of DNA technology and pedigree charts of eligible FRS donors were placed in conspicuous positions, and color-printed handouts about DNA profiling were distributed with the briefing agenda. News articles sometimes even reported inaccurate stories regarding the identification of individual soldiers. For instance, Sergeant John McLaughlin, once buried at the Punchbowl, was identified via his dental records and chest X-ray photos; but according to the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, "over the years, DNA identification technology improved, and in February the military made a positive identification."<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Corporal Lindsey C. Lockett was identified by his chest radiograph, but a local weekly reported that he had been identified via collarbone DNA.<sup>95</sup>

However, both the military and the media have educated the public that DNA

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<sup>93</sup> Greg Beckwith, interview by the author, on August 4, 2018.

<sup>94</sup> Tracie Mauriello, "Obituary: Sgt. John McLaughlin: After 65 Years, Marine Comes Home," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 5, 2015, <http://www.post-gazette.com/news/obituaries/2015/06/05/Obituary-Sgt-John-McLaughlin-After-65-years-Marine-comes-home/stories/201506050222>; Chris Togneri, "Korean War Veterans' Remains Coming Home to Pittsburgh Family," Triblive, May 23, 2015, <https://archive.triblive.com/news/korean-war-veterans-remains-coming-home-to-pittsburgh-family/>.

<sup>95</sup> Joey Matthews, "A War Hero Comes Home: After 64 Years, Cpl. Lindsey C. Lockett Laid to Rest with Full Military Honors," *Richmond Free Press* (Richmond, VA), April 16, 2015, <http://richmondfreepress.com/news/2015/apr/16/war-hero-comes-home/>. The reporter directly quoted Lockett's family's statement, but DPAA did not specify DNA test in its public release.

does not work as shown on TV dramas. JPAC's (Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, a predecessor of DPAA) website once warned its readers: "we can't quickly identify an individual from a DNA sample like forensic scientists do on TV," and emphasized that, unlike criminal investigators, it did not already have the DNA of the people to be identified; families therefore would have to donate their FRS if its DNA-based investigations were to have any hope of success.<sup>96</sup> A Defense Department spokesman quoted in a *Washington Post* article stressed that real-world identification "bears scant resemblance to the fictitious versions of the forensic programs we see on television," and credited a decade-long effort to identify Corporal Robert K. Imire to a combination of historical, circumstantial, and biological evidence, patience, and cooperation with the DPRK.<sup>97</sup> Another article on CILHI's operations and its senior anthropologist, Jennie Jin, cautioned against overdependence on mtDNA evidence, and recommended its readers "forget what you might have seen about DNA on TV."<sup>98</sup>

My conversations with POW/MIA families and news reports about them both suggest that they preferred DNA test results to other evidence when they came to accept that they had received the correct remains. When I asked about the techniques used to identify their relatives, they tended to mention how DNA "accurately" identified their bodies and to go on to talk about their experiences of donating FRS. Some just blurted

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<sup>96</sup> "Family Reference Samples (FRS)," JPAC, accessed May 21, 2015, Internet Archives, <http://web.archive.org/web/20101203020552/http://www.jpac.pacom.mil/index.php?page=frs&exempt=2&ind=4/>

<sup>97</sup> Steve Vogel, "VA. Nieces Help ID Soldier's Remains," *Washington Post*, July 23, 2007, B1.

<sup>98</sup> Jay Price, "Bone by Bone, A Forensic Puzzle Leads to Korean War Homecoming," WUNC, March 30, 2016, <https://www.wunc.org/post/bone-bone-forensic-puzzle-leads-korean-war-homecomings>.



out “DNA.” An interviewee merely responded that the military had matched his DNA and his father’s to that of his uncle, who died in the war.<sup>99</sup> Likewise, Private First Class Lamar E. Newman’s nephew filled “DNA. Cross Referenced from Family Members” in my questionnaire that asked him what had convinced him that he had received his uncle’s remains.<sup>100</sup> Many families believed that without DNA-based methods, identification would have been unlikely. When I talked with the daughter of Corporal Leonard V. Purkapile about the remains to be delivered from the DPRK in July 2018, she stressed the indispensable role that DNA had played in identifying her father, and that without DNA technology, few bodies would ever have been identified.<sup>101</sup> Corporal Robert Higgins’s niece told reporters that “we’re fortunate his remains were not put into ‘the punch bowl’ in Hawaii,” where she thought the military “can’t get a true DNA match.” Thus, “if he had been put in the punch bowl, he would never have been matched.”<sup>102</sup>

The exceptions were families whose loved ones were buried at the NMCP, from which the military had failed to extract DNA in the past. When I called a sister of Private First Class Walter C. Hackenberg, once buried in Hawaii, she initially described her experience of donating FRS and inadvertently stated that DNA had helped in his identification. However, when we talked about the Punchbowl bodies, she told me, “I

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<sup>99</sup> Questionnaire filled out by Thomas Mainhart, regarding Corporal James T. Mainhart.

<sup>100</sup> Questionnaire filled out by Donald Dotson, regarding Private First Class Lamar Eugene Newman.

<sup>101</sup> Delores Hall, interview by the author, June 13, 2018.

<sup>102</sup> Petra Chesner Schaltter, “COMING HOME: Remains of Missing in Action Korean War Veteran to Be Buried Saturday at Washington Crossing National Cemetery,” *Bucks Local News* (Lansdale, PA), April 10, 2015, [http://www.buckslocalnews.com/news/coming-home-remains-of-missing-in-action-korean-war-veteran/article\\_cde53643-2d7d-51e7-a84f-41c837fcf3ad.html](http://www.buckslocalnews.com/news/coming-home-remains-of-missing-in-action-korean-war-veteran/article_cde53643-2d7d-51e7-a84f-41c837fcf3ad.html).

don't think our DNA may give it help, you know, to identify him; but through his bones, and his teeth, I guess, they made the identification from that."<sup>103</sup> Similarly, when Sandra Gormley talked about her uncle's case, she informed me that DNA extraction was not always successful for the Punchbowl remains, and that he was therefore identified by dental and anthropological methods.<sup>104</sup>

While many families emphasized the critical role of DNA profiling in the identification of their loved ones, not all of them believed DNA testing to be a magical method, or that DNA evidence by itself would simply speak the truth. Rather, their interaction with the people who had performed the DNA tests and/or reported their results was essential to their acceptance of the military's findings. Some relatives of missing servicemen have developed long-term trust in the military and seemed to believe the information that is in the official military reports. When describing the evidence leading to the identification of his half-brother Gerald Muller, Greg Beckwith wrote to me: "the DNA results were positive that Gerald was our brother. As a retired member of the military I put full confidence in what we read, along with the briefing we also received [...] I do not think the Dept of Defense would tell us anything but the truth."<sup>105</sup> Ann Ford, a relative of Sergeant Joseph A. Bowen, said that DNA helped with Bowen's identification, but underscored that trust was what made her believe that the identification

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<sup>103</sup> Stella Hackenberg Knepp, interview by the author, tape-recorded, December 5, 2017.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas and Sandra Gormley, interview by the author, August 6, 2018.

<sup>105</sup> Questionnaire filed by Greg Beckwith, regarding Sergeant Gerald Muller, August 3, 2018. My conversation with him confirmed his opinion in the questionnaire.

was correct.<sup>106</sup>

A few families attributed their confidence in DNA evidence to the military's full disclosure of its forensic data and its patience in interpreting them. According to a study by Sheila Jasanoff, "judgements concerning the credibility of science appear to be governed by standards of virtue, of ethical and reasonable behavior," and the use of "mundane normative language" markedly facilitates the accessibility of experts' judgements.<sup>107</sup> In a CILHI report on the identification of particular remains, the DNA evidence is usually the major chapter. The military aligns long DNA sequences of the deceased and his family members to demonstrate that they match. This data is displayed straightforwardly, with a detailed explanation by military representatives, and it is probably this—rather than DNA testing per se—that convinces families that they have received the correct body. Mary Lynch, a sister of Corporal Clarence R. Skates, remembered that when her brother was identified, the military dispatched representatives to her house with a thick, comprehensive booklet, and went through everything in it with her. Although it contained charts and photos of his skeleton, the officers went into great detail when explaining how each piece of DNA evidence confirmed the relationship between Skates and Lynch, as well as her daughter.<sup>108</sup> Ralph Delaney, a friend of Private First Class Walter F. Piper, who represented Piper's family, similarly recounted that the

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<sup>106</sup> Ann Ford, interview by the author, August 16, 2018.

<sup>107</sup> Sheila Jasanoff, "The Eye of Everyman: Witnessing DNA in the Simpson Trial," *Social Studies of Sciences* 28, no.5-6 (October-December 1998): 729.

<sup>108</sup> Mary Lynch and her daughter, interview by the author, August 21, 2018.

military assigned officers to present him with a 150-page book of identification data, detailing how Piper's bones were segregated from the commingled bones returned by the DPRK, and why his DNA perfectly matched his family's FRS.<sup>109</sup>

Additional evidence was essential to some families' trust in DNA-based identifications. These families may have suspected that their loved ones were still languishing in North Korea, and thus been critical of the military's information. As DNA testing is never error-free and DNA samples could be obtained from almost any part of a body, some of my interviewees needed additional facts to confirm the death of their loved ones and the identity of their remains, while still acknowledging the critical role that DNA evidence had played. Paul DeFrain, a nephew of Corporal Roy C. Fink, described DNA as the most convincing evidence and could not remember any other evidence. However, he noted that if the returned bone was a femur, it only proved that his uncle had lost a leg; but if it was a part of a skull, it was proof of death as well as positive identification.<sup>110</sup> Patricia Goff, a sister of Sergeant Charles L. Scott, initially wrote to me that the mtDNA obtained from one of Scott's teeth was key to his identification. However, she later told me that it was the combination of his dental records, skeletal characteristics, mtDNA, and chest X-ray photos that left her in "no doubt" that the remains sent home were his.<sup>111</sup>

This preference for multiple forms of evidence was especially prevalent among

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<sup>109</sup> Ralph Delaney, interview by the author, tape-recorded, August 2, 2018.

<sup>110</sup> Paul DeFrain, interview by the author, tape-recorded August 13, 2018.

<sup>111</sup> Personal correspondence with Patricia Goff, August 14, 2018, and September 6, 2018.

leading POW/MIA activists. Two leaders of the Coalition of Families of Korean and Cold War POW/MIAs, Donna Knox and Rick Downes, regarded the combination of chest X-ray photo comparisons and mtDNA analysis, reinforced by circumstantial evidence, as adequate for positive identification.<sup>112</sup> The Coalition's former director, Robin Piacine, stressed that people should never trust a single method, but rather look for a combination of several lines of evidence. She underscored that DNA alone could not identify a specific body, but only eliminate alternative candidates.<sup>113</sup>

Among all the Korean War POW/MIA families who had buried their loved ones' remains, the great majority accepted the identification within a short time and buried the bodies promptly. However, there were some instances of long delays between identification and burial, and I suspect that the families in question postponed the funerals of their loved ones due to their doubt about the identification. Among the 410 Korean War POW/MIAs with known burial dates, twelve were delayed for more than a year. However, such delays may have been unrelated to the presence or absence of DNA testing, as eight of these twelve men were identified using DNA evidence. Among the forty-six men who were buried seven to twelve months after JPAC or DPAA announced their identifications, twelve had not been identified by DNA profiling.

I came across only one rationale for a long delay. It indicated that a family's distrust of the military, rather than doubt about the technology itself, was what led them

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<sup>112</sup> Rick Downes, interview by the author, November 7, 2017, and Donna Knox, interview by the author, April 24, 2018.

<sup>113</sup> Robin Piacine, interview by the author, tape-recorded, April 20, 2018.

to postpone the burial for several years. On December 29, 2010, the Defense Department announced that it had identified Corporal Nehemiah E. Butler through mtDNA analysis and chest X-ray comparison. When an Army representative explained the forensic evidence to Butler's daughter, she observed a bullet hole in his skull and crushed sections of his face, chest, and legs, which she perceived as proof of the atrocious execution of a helpless POW. The Army officer insisted that Butler was never captured, but his daughter and great-niece nevertheless demanded a moratorium on the disposal of Butler's body and an investigation into war crimes. The great-niece noted that "with questions remaining, we didn't want to close the case," thinking that his burial would forestall a serious investigation. They insisted on extra details of Butler's fate until satisfied that the matter had been settled, and finally buried the body in 2015.<sup>114</sup>

Arguably the best-organized critics of the military's use of mtDNA profiling in identifying missing personnel came from the NAF, which had remained suspicious of the military and the US government and firmly believed that American POWs had been abandoned to their captors. Much as in 1985, the NAF argued that the military was using scientifically questionable methods to resolve pending POW/MIA cases prematurely. During its eighth annual conference in 1997, the NAF invited AFDIL official James Canik to give a presentation on mtDNA testing. According to NAF journals, this

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<sup>114</sup> Mitchell Northam, "Six Decades Later, Pocomoke Soldier Buried at Arlington," *DelmarvaNow*, November 27, 2015, <https://www.delmarvanow.com/story/news/local/maryland/2015/11/27/pocomoke-soldier-arlington/76320442/>; DPAA, "Soldiers Missing from Korean War Accounted For (Butler), no. 15-059," news release, August 6, 2015, <http://www.dpaa.mil/NewsStories/NewsReleases/tabid/10159/Article/612456/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-butler.aspx>.

presentation confirmed three suspicions NAF members had previously held about AFDIL's mtDNA test. These were 1) that AFDIL was declaring some identification based solely on mtDNA matches, rather than only using mtDNA to prove a "no match" or to offer the probability of a random match; 2) that AFDIL's mtDNA database did not have an adequate number of entries; and 3) that the database did not contain Native Americans or Asians. The NAF concluded that "the government is using a faulty technology to bury men that may still be alive" and claimed that other AFDIL staff present were in a furor when Canik admitted these issues in public.<sup>115</sup> The NAF also frequently warned of the danger of overreliance on mtDNA tests, via a story that the military never explained why the bones of Captain Victor J. Apodaca (a NAF director's brother), originally judged to be animal bones, were later deemed to be of human origin and identified by mtDNA evidence. It alleged that Apodaca's mtDNA tests gave the military "a new method to creatively account for our missing servicemen."<sup>116</sup>

As well as the limitations of mtDNA profiling, the NAF protested AFDIL's work ethic. Its most widely circulated story was about Marine Private First Class Mark W. Judge, whose body was returned from a Vietnamese POW camp in 1986. As CILHI could not positively identify him then, an mtDNA test on his body was conducted by AFDIL in

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<sup>115</sup> *Bits 'N' Pieces* (the newsletter of the National Alliance of Families), June 27, 1997. It must be noted that all such information was from the NAF, and no other source could corroborate the stories in *Bits 'N' Pieces*. The NAF still focuses on the latest genetic studies on mtDNA to warn its members of the danger in relying on mtDNA profiling solely in identification.

<sup>116</sup> *Bits 'N' Pieces*, January 24, 1998. The cases of Apodaca and Berry/Judge/Plumadore were still placed together in the 2000s.

1994.<sup>117</sup> According to the NAF, AFDIL concluded that the sequences of the mtDNA extracted from Judge's skull and arm matched his mother's sample, and did not detect them in its mtDNA database of the general population (which, as the NAF reported, was extremely small in 1994, with only 271 entries). AFDIL's 1997 reexamination of the case in response to a request by Judge's family revealed that one nucleotide in the sequenced region of the skull mtDNA sample could not be affirmed. Once this position was taken out, the sequence matched sixty-four others from the AFDIL's database (expanded to 742 entries then), rendering the result useless. The remains' arm sample also matched one entry in this database, leading NAF to predict that the larger the database became, the more matches between the sample and that of an unrelated person would be found. It thus recommended that its members not trust mtDNA results until the database had grown sufficiently large.<sup>118</sup> In 1999, upon learning about the military's refusal to run another mtDNA test on Judge's body, NAF described the original mtDNA identification as one of the outright lies produced by CILHI, AFDIL, and the Marine Corps and contended that an unknown US service member had "died as a Prisoner of War, unacknowledged by the United States government."<sup>119</sup>

### **The Limitations of mtDNA Testing and the Bodies at the NMCP**

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<sup>117</sup> Memorandum for Commander, US Total Army Personnel Command, "CILHI Remains (0048-86)—Possible Misidentification of Associated Remains," June 24, 1994, Folder 15, Box 3, Garnett Bell Collection, VVA

<sup>118</sup> *Bits 'N' Pieces*, January 24, 1998, and February 28, 1998

<sup>119</sup> *Bits 'N' Pieces*, November 20, 1999.



Other factors besides the initial challenges of collecting FRS also restricted the application of mtDNA testing to Korean War casualties. The maternal inheritance of mtDNA meant that a POW/MIA might share the same profile with multiple unrelated individuals, not only in a broad population but also among POW/MIAs, if his profile happened to be extremely common within a racial group. In such cases, an mtDNA result could only reduce the potential candidates for a body. Additionally, the US military was initially unable to extract usable DNA from the bodies buried at the NMCP. It had to seek alternative techniques to identify those remains, against the backdrop of accusations by POW/MIA families that it lacked commitment to accounting for the maximum number of missing soldiers.

Among the Korean War POW/MIA population, individual soldiers' mtDNA profiles were not always unique, vastly diminishing the value of mtDNA testing. In a coffin returned from the DPRK in 1992, when partial skeletons of two men were segregated from the jumble of bones following an initial mtDNA screening, CILHI found that they not only shared the same mtDNA sequence, but also that this sequence matched 404 entries in the FRS database of Korean War POW/MIAs. Among the 404 individuals in question, twenty-seven were lost in Suan, where the North Koreans alleged the box had come from.<sup>120</sup> Finding five or six Korean War casualties with similar physical characteristics and the same mtDNA sequence was not uncommon.<sup>121</sup> CILHI thus had

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<sup>120</sup> Jennie Jin, "Progress on the Korean War Project: K208, JRO, and Punchbowl Unknowns," presentation during the annual DPAA briefing for the Korean War/Cold War on August 11, 2017.

<sup>121</sup> Jin *et al.*, "The Korea 208," 417-420. In one case that Jin cited, thirty-five servicemen shared the same

two options: to sequence individuals' entire mtDNA so that nucleotide polymorphism could be detected at more positions, or to combine mtDNA testing with Y-STR and autosomal-STR testing to boost discriminatory power.

Due to lack of access to relevant documents, it is only possible for me to outline the introduction of STR tests by AFDIL. The low amount of nuclear DNA from bones required AFDIL to boost the efficiency of extracting DNA using a demineralization buffer, which first became available in 2006. An earlier protocol for DNA extraction from bones resulted in large quantities of undissolved bone powder, which still contained a considerable amount of DNA, being discarded. With the new buffer, bones were thoroughly dissolved to ensure the maximum release of DNA. On average, the buffer increased the DNA yield by 4.6 times, and the DNA collected using this method yielded better results in STR assays.<sup>122</sup> With this enhanced ability to obtain nuclear DNA, AFDIL began performing STR tests on remains from Korea. Its first successful identification of a Korean War casualty via the combination of mtDNA, Y-STR DNA, and autosomal-STR DNA tests was of Corporal Robert J. Tait in September 2013. The precise details of Tait's identification have not been released. In general, Y-DNA is more frequently used than autosomal DNA, likely due to the larger pool of Y-DNA donors. Another factor might have been AFDIL's dissatisfaction with the FBI's 13-loci system, as the degradation of DNA in the remains meant that the survival of the majority of the

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sequence.

<sup>122</sup> Odile M. Loreille et al., "High Efficiency DNA Extraction from Bone by Total Demineralization," *Forensic Science International: Genetics* 1 (2007): 191-195.

thirteen loci could not be guaranteed. AFDIL expanded its target list and produced a 23-loci STR test kit in 2015.<sup>123</sup>

The more than eight hundred bodies at the NMCP served as a reminder to the public and the military alike that DNA could not resolve the identities of all recovered remains. They were the least remembered Korean War POW/MIAs (based on the post-Vietnam War standard). Of the thirty-four Korean War POW/MIA family members I interviewed, before the 1990s, only three (including one living in Hawaii) seemed to be aware of the unidentified bodies buried at the NMCP. John Zimmerlee, a POW/MIA relative and dedicated researcher of the Punchbowl bodies, did not know of the existence of the bodies at the NMCP until 1995.<sup>124</sup> Ironically, compared with the bodies lost in North Korea, retrieving the remains at the NMCP did not require any diplomacy, only a Defense Department policy to exhume them.

Exhuming these bodies also reflected the above-mentioned pursuit of equal treatment for POW/MIAs from different wars. The exhumation of the remains of Michael Blassie from the Tomb of the Unknowns for DNA tests in May 1998 prompted the public to believe that DNA profiling could identify bodies that, decades previously, had been declared unidentifiable. It was at this point that researchers and activists of Korean War POW/MIA affairs turned their attention to the NMCP. On June 7, 1998, Paul Cole, a RAND researcher whom the military contracted to conduct the first exhaustive study of

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<sup>123</sup> Timothy P. McMahon, “AFMES-AFDIL’s Capabilities, Assets & Resources,” presentation during the annual DPAA briefing for the Korean War/Cold War on August 10, 2018.

<sup>124</sup> Email from John Zimmerlee to the author, October 12, 2017.

the Korean War POW/MIA issue, commented that “the 14th Amendment, which guarantees equal protections, suggests that the missing from the Korean War should be given treatment equal to that extended to the missing from Vietnam.”<sup>125</sup> Ten days later, leading Korean War POW/MIA activist Pat Dunton made the same point to Congress.<sup>126</sup>

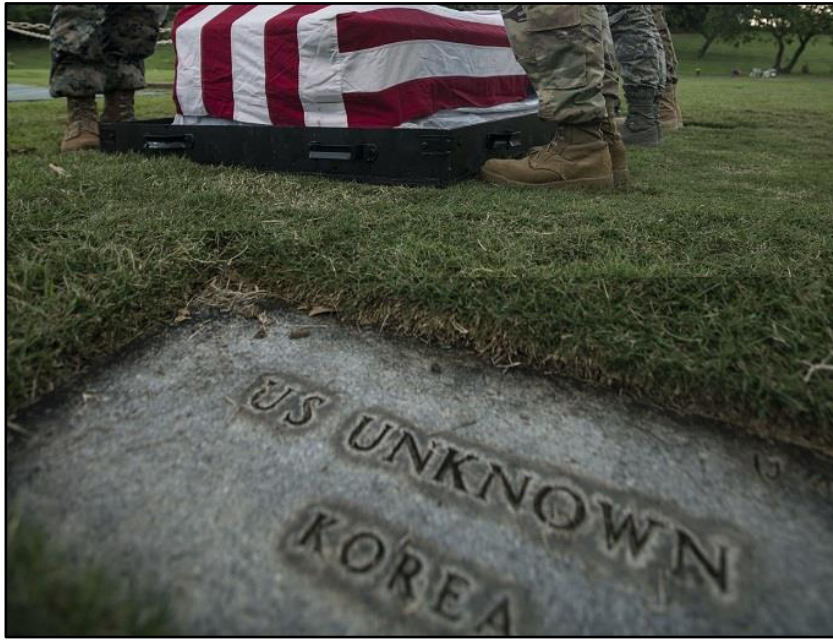


Figure 6-2: Each unknown dead of the Korean War is buried under such a tombstone. Soldiers in the background were going to transfer a newly exhumed unknown body with military honors. (US Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Seth Coulter, <https://dpaa.secure.force.com/dpaaFamWebKoreanWarDisinternments>. The photo is in the public domain.)

The military responded to such pressure in May 1999. A high-ranking Defense Department official remarked that after the identification of Blassie, “it became clear we could apply the same science to other unknowns, in particular, those buried in the

<sup>125</sup> Paul M. Cole, “Searching for Korean War Unknowns,” *Washington Post*, June 7, 1998, C6.

<sup>126</sup> *A Worldwide Review of the Clinton Administration’s POW/MIA Policies and Programs, Hearing before the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, 105th Congress, Second Session, June 17, 1998, 37.*

Punchbowl cemetery in Hawaii” and announced a policy of disinterring bodies at the NMCP; the first two were exhumed in that September.<sup>127</sup> The military declared that “we believe, with the help of DNA, we can identify” some bodies at the NMCP and picked a few with the best records.<sup>128</sup> However, CILHI soon found that this claim was overly optimistic. In the 1950s, the Army mortuary preserved soldiers’ bodies with formaldehyde, which crosslinks DNA with proteins.<sup>129</sup> The DNA extracted from this DNA-protein complex was usually so fragmented as to be nearly useless for sequencing, at least using the technology that existed in the early 2000s.

On the positive side, the bodies at the NMCP were not usually commingled, so CILHI was able to revert to methodologies that depended on dental patterns and clavicle morphology. As compared to 1950s methods of forensic odontology, the Computer-Assisted Postmortem Identification (CAPMI) system developed by the US Army in the 1980s allowed for much quicker checking of a body’s dental pattern against a vast database of soldiers’ dental records. In 2000 and 2001, Korean War casualties’ dental charts were input into CAPMI. During the Korean War, most soldiers only had dental charts or notes rather than X-rays, and the interpretation of such charts was likely to vary

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<sup>127</sup> Department of Defense, “Unidentified Remains Disinterment Policy Established, Release No. 250-99,” news release, May 21, 1999, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=2099>; Associated Press, “Korean War Bones to Be Disinterred for DNA Testing: US Servicemen Buried in Hawaii Are Unidentified,” *Baltimore Sun*, September 14, 1999, 8A.

<sup>128</sup> Rudi Williams, “DNA Tests Spark Efforts to ID Korean War Remains,” *DoD News*, July 7, 1999, <http://www.defense.gov/utility/printitem.aspx?print=http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=42803>.

<sup>129</sup> Timothy P. McMahon, “AFMES-AFDIL’s Capabilities, Assets & Resources,” presentation during the annual DPAA briefing for the Korean War/Cold War on August 10, 2018.

among dentists. Therefore, whether the dental pattern of an unidentified body matched the dental chart of a missing soldier was somewhat subjective. For this reason, in the 2000s, CILHI designed an Odontosearch system that encodes all types of dental extraction and restorative patterns into a simple set of letters. Much like mtDNA tests, Odontosearch results serve as an objective means of predicting the frequency of a specific body's dental pattern among both Korean War POW/MIAs and the US general population, as a means of limiting the number of potential candidates for a given body.<sup>130</sup>

When dental patterns alone failed to positively identify a serviceman at the NMCP, or when all his teeth were missing, comparison between antemortem and postmortem chest radiographs would be the next method used to identify him. As early as 1972, forensic scientists had established the individuality of clavicle patterns and used a single clavicle to identify an individual.<sup>131</sup> In subsequent years, the application of clavicle morphology to identifying deceased personnel has been intensively investigated. CILHI adopted this method, with the antemortem comparison data consisting of chest X-ray images from POW/MIAs' service files, taken upon induction to test for tuberculosis.<sup>132</sup> On May 21, 2003, Private First Class Ronald D. Lilledahl became the

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<sup>130</sup> "OdontoSearch," JPAC, accessed May 21, 2015, Internet Archives, <http://web.archive.org/web/20101203013509/http://www.jpacom.mil/index.php?page=odontosearch&size=100&ind=3>; "General Instructions for Use of Odontosearch," JPAC, accessed May 21, 2015, Internet Archives, <http://www.archive.org/web/20060809231919/http://www.jpac.pacom.mil/CIL/OdontoInfo.htm#codes>.

<sup>131</sup> Issac Sanders, et al., "A New Application of Forensic Radiology: Identification of Deceased from A Single Clavicle," *American Journal of Roentgenology, Radium Therapy, and Nuclear Medicine* 115, no.3 (July 1972): 619-622.

<sup>132</sup> Memorandum from Charles A. Henning to Senator Richard Lugar, Korean War Missing-In-Action (MIA), September 27, 2011, a copy is from [https://www.ncnk.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/publications/CRS Letter Punchbowl\\_Sept 2011.pdf](https://www.ncnk.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/publications/CRS%20Letter%20Punchbowl_Sept%202011.pdf). Dental comparison was then given priority over chest X-ray comparison.

first soldier at the NMCP to be identified from his chest X-ray records.<sup>133</sup>

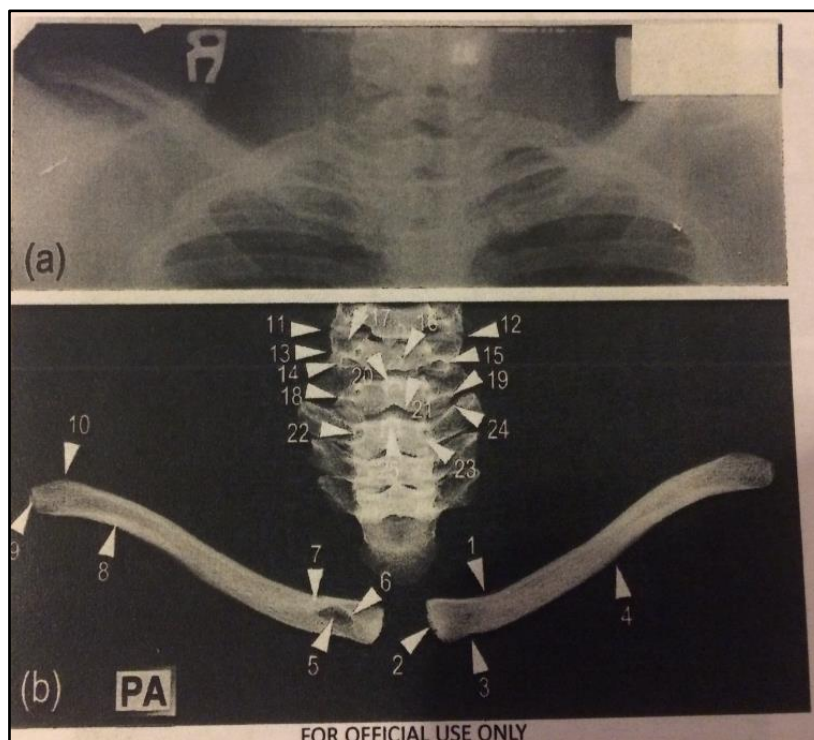


Figure 6-3: Chest radiograph comparison between a soldier's antemortem (a) and postmortem (b) images of his collarbones (clavicles) and breastbones (sternum). The arrows indicate the points to be compared for identification. (Copied from John Byrd's presentation "Chest Radiograph Comparisons," on August 11, 2017, Korean/Cold War Annual Government Briefings)

The military officially acknowledged the feasibility of using clavicle-based identification in 2005, but several more years would pass before CILHI acquired the necessary equipment and software to analyze X-ray photos as a regular practice.<sup>134</sup> In 2011, it finished evaluating the reliability of juxtaposing antemortem and postmortem X-ray photos as a means of identifying US soldiers, "in particular to the 855 individuals

<sup>133</sup> Department of Defense, "First Korean War Unknown Identified, Release No. 349-03," news release, May 21, 2003, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=3838>.

<sup>134</sup> John Byrd, "Chest Radiograph Comparison," presentation during the annual DPAA briefing for the Korean War/Cold War on August 11, 2017.

recovered from the Korean War who are buried as unknowns in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii.”<sup>135</sup> Since then, CILHI has been able to carry out identification with radiographic comparison on a large scale.

Chest radiography allowed bodies lacking distinguishable dental and physical characteristics to be identified with a high degree of certainty. Most US soldiers of the Korean War era were young, healthy, White males, including “an overabundance of individuals with ‘perfect teeth’” (no decay, extractions, or dental work).<sup>136</sup> For instance, NMCP body X-739 (Corporal Donald E. Matney) was recovered in March 1951. Personal items found with the body bore some partially legible laundry marks (a serial number) that could not be linked to Matney beyond a doubt. The Graves Registration Service headquarters also concluded that without additional dental data, it would be impossible to explain the discrepancy between the dental pattern of X-739 and Matney’s last dental record; thus, he was declared unidentifiable in 1954. Six decades later, CILHI reexamined the physical data of X-739 and selected twelve men as potential candidates for that body, but the dental data only eliminated two of them. Ultimately, CILHI took X-ray photos of X-739 and compared them to the chest radiographs belonging to the remaining ten candidates, and this enabled nine of them to be eliminated. Based on sixteen points of concordance on X-739’s left and right clavicles as well as its vertebrae,

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<sup>135</sup> Carl N. Stephan, et al., “Skeletal Identification by Radiographic Comparison: Blind Tests of a Morphoscopic Method Using Antemortem Chest Radiographs,” *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 56, no.2 (March 2011): 321.

<sup>136</sup> Bradley J. Adams, “Personal Identification Based on Patterns of Missing, Filled, and Unrestored Teeth,” (PhD diss. University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2002), ix.



CILHI concluded that it probably belonged to Matney. Meanwhile, AFDIL was unable to extract a usable mtDNA sample from the body.<sup>137</sup>

While the military acknowledged the challenges of obtaining usable DNA from remains at the NMCP, it continued its efforts to identify them via DNA profiling, which is still the preferred method for identifying bodies whose chest bones are broken or missing.<sup>138</sup> AFDIL spent nearly sixteen years seeking an effective way to extract DNA from the Punchbowl bodies and analyze them with Next-Generation DNA Sequencing (NGS). NGS is an umbrella term for several high-throughput, automated, low-cost sequencing approaches (simultaneously sequencing massive numbers of DNA segments). One feature of NGS is its capacity to sequence DNA fragments that are too short to be handled by conventional sequencing methods. It enables AFDIL to sequence the numerous tiny, overlapping mtDNA fragments extracted from the remains at the Punchbowl, which ultimately cover considerable portions of the entire mtDNA.<sup>139</sup> NGS nearly doubled the annual number of identified Punchbowl bodies. The first identification credited to NGS, likely in October 2016, was of Punchbowl body X-14411 as Major Jack D. Griffiths. Among the nineteen Punchbowl bodies identified by CILHI in 2017, ten were identified via their mtDNA profiles revealed by NGS techniques. In 2018, the proportion was twelve out of twenty-one Punchbowl bodies.

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<sup>137</sup> Identification Report of CIL 2016-068-I-01 (Cpl. Donald Eugene Matney), courtesy of Thomas and Sandra Gormley; and Interview with Thomas and Sandra Gormley, August 6, 2018.

<sup>138</sup> Jennie Jin, "Progress on the Korean War Project: K208, JRO, and Punchbowl Unknowns," presentation during the annual DPAA briefing for the Korean War/Cold War on August 11, 2017.

<sup>139</sup> Samantha Thrope, "Next Generation DNA Sequencing," *The Quest* (DPAA Newsletter), Spring 2016. DPAA seems to depend on NGS more frequently in recent years.

Availability of new technology itself did not suffice to justify a rapid, large-scale investigation of the Punchbowl cases, in contrast to the bodies from North Korea.

Identifying the bodies from the DPRK allowed the US government to judge whether the North Koreans were sincere about helping the United States—whether the bodies they had sent were genuinely those of US servicemen. Moreover, their identification allowed the military to project an image of active engagement with its former enemies to recover lost warriors. In contrast, the identification of bodies that had been laid to rest on US soil many decades earlier had no comparable urgency. Thus, while the bodies returned by the DPRK were examined more or less automatically, exhuming the bodies at the NMCP required petitions from POW/MIA activists, research conducted by soldiers' families, and politics to align in a particular way.

CILHI faced constant petitions from activists to launch investigations into the identities of specific bodies at the NMCP. Beginning in March 1999, The NAF mobilized families to request that the military exhume body X-656 for mtDNA tests as it believed that this body almost certainly belonged to Private First Class Louis P. Mutta. The NAF alleged that the Pentagon had rejected its request due to CILHI's assumption that body X-656 was so heavily burnt that it would not yield mtDNA. NAF leaders argued that the Defense Department had little reason to block this request, given the identification of Blassie, whose body was almost consumed by fire after his aircraft crashed.<sup>140</sup> The

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<sup>140</sup> *Bits 'N' Pieces*, March 6, 1999. Body X-656 was recovered from a burnt down building. Mutta has not been identified yet, and when and whether X-656 was investigated is unknown.

rejection also bolstered the NAF's broader cause that the government was insincere about accounting for POW/MIAs. Leading POW/MIA activist Broward also persisted in asking CILHI to exhume a body that he believed belonged to a close friend of his.<sup>141</sup>

Before 2019, despite intense pressure from POW/MIA families, the policy guiding the exhumation of the NMCP bodies significantly limited the number that could be surveyed. The military occasionally exhumed a few bodies to evaluate technical challenges to identification. However, if families wanted a certain body to be investigated, they usually had to submit a request first. The military had to be convinced, prior to exhumation, that the body would have a high chance of being identified.<sup>142</sup> The policy, as updated on May 5, 2016, specified that this chance must be 50 percent for a single body or 60 percent for commingled remains, within two years after its exhumation, and using intelligence that was already in hand.<sup>143</sup> By necessitating intensive pre-exhumation research, this policy effectively allowed the military to concentrate its resources on cases with the highest odds of success.

Due to these evidentiary requirements, filing a request was a complicated task for an ordinary family as they needed to furnish considerable evidence suggesting which body might be associated with their loved one. When Sandra Gormley applied for the exhumation of X-739, she told the military that the description of that body seemed to

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<sup>141</sup> Michael R. Dolski, "When X Doesn't Mark the Spot: Historical Investigation and Identifying Remains from the Korean War," in *Missing Persons: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Disappeared*, ed. Derek Congram (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2016), 153-154.

<sup>142</sup> Dolski, "When X Doesn't Mark the Spot," 154-157.

<sup>143</sup> Deborah S. Skillman, "The Disinterment Process for Graves Marked 'Unknown'," presentation during the annual DPAA briefing for the Korean War/Cold War on August 10, 2017.

match her uncle, Corporal Matney, in terms of his age, height, and clothing. The file on X-739 was provided to her by John Zimmerlee, who had accidentally obtained it along with those pertaining to the other unknown bodies at the NMCP.<sup>144</sup> In 2018, I contacted a sister of Private First Class Robert E. Mitchell, who was among the first few Punchbowl dead to be investigated. When she filed her request, she was informed that the military “would need enough evidence to be pretty sure that it [the body she had selected for investigation] was my brother” before exhuming the body.<sup>145</sup> According to the NAF, the threshold of minimal evidence for unearthing a body was high and unpredictable, and as of 2014, 96 percent of requests had been rejected.<sup>146</sup> The official rate as of July 2017 was about 70 percent.<sup>147</sup>

The exhumation policy’s probability-of-success requirements provoked strong resentment from POW/MIA activists, who asked how any reasonable estimate of such probability could be made while the remains were still buried. While petitioning for the exhumation of X-656, the NAF contended that the military could not deny the possibility that its mtDNA could be extracted unless it sent a bone to AFDIL.<sup>148</sup> Knox, whose POW/MIA coalition had a unique interest in the NMCP bodies, complained that the while the military demanded a 75 percent chance of identification prior to exhumation, families

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<sup>144</sup> Email from Sandra Gormley to the Army (recipient unknown), April 25, 2014, cc’d to John Zimmerlee, courtesy of Thomas and Sandra Gormley.

<sup>145</sup> Personal correspondence with Beth Moore, September 7, 2018.

<sup>146</sup> *Bits ‘N’ Pieces*, April 5, 2014.

<sup>147</sup> Deborah S. Skillman, “The Disinterment Process for Graves Marked ‘Unknown’,” presentation during the annual DPAA briefing for the Korean War/Cold War on August 10, 2017. The number includes both the Korean War and WWII cases.

<sup>148</sup> This petition appears in multiple issues of *Bits ‘N’ Pieces* between 1999 and 2003.

(and perhaps also the military itself) were in no position to know such odds if the bodies were not exhumed.<sup>149</sup>

Another factor that contributed to the military's increasing efforts to identify Punchbowl remains after 2011 was the political situation in Korea. In 2012, the United States suspended negotiations with the DPRK on the POW/MIA issue, diminishing the prospect of retrieving more bodies. A military researcher wrote, "disinterring and identifying the Korean War unknowns presents an obvious way to address the social demand to send these casualties home to their families."<sup>150</sup> Investigating the bodies at the Punchbowl would demonstrate the military's commitment to accounting for its Korean War missing after the DPRK stopped sending bodies.

### **A Reflection on Identified Bodies: "Closure" (Resolution)**

When Sarah Wagner investigated the identification of the victims of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia, she discovered that acceptance of such identifications generally required both genetic evidence and family recollections. "Science and memory combine forces, connecting the narratives of the missing with the stories unfolded by sets of genetic codes."<sup>151</sup> In the Korean War cases, the role of familial memory in identifying remains is limited. However, what enabled POW/MIA families to obtain "closure," a

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<sup>149</sup> Donna Knox, interview by the author, April 24, 2018. She used seventy-five as an example, rather than the actual rate.

<sup>150</sup> Dolski, "When X Doesn't Mark the Spot," 160.

<sup>151</sup> Sarah Wagner, *To Know Where He Lies: DNA Technology and the Search for Srebrenica's Missing* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 13.

word that POW/MIA families and statesmen alike had overused when bodies were repatriated, were not just the identified bones. This word in public discourse has various meanings and remains a heavily loaded term that resists simple summarization. I quote it here only because of its widespread use by POW/MIA families.

Physical closure, as represented by the final burial of a deceased serviceman, did not happen automatically simply because the military had transferred his identified remains to his family. In addition to resistance to burial by families who disputed identification, another issue might be at play: the return of a serviceman's bones from the DPRK in multiple batches over a period of years. This raised the contentious issue of how to dispose of additional bones of an identified man who had already been buried by his family.<sup>152</sup> Does the family prefer to avoid a second trauma by not taking their loved ones' additional bones, or retrieve these remains in order to make the buried body as complete as possible? Reluctance to leave the bones of its citizens in a country alien and hostile to the United States was exactly the original rationale for the US military ceasing to build permanent overseas cemeteries during the Korean War. However, disturbing a beloved family member's grave is also undesirable.

DPAA's current policy is to comply with each family's wish for handling extra body parts, in line with the one adopted by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner during its identification of the remains of 9/11 victims.<sup>153</sup> For example, in the report on

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<sup>152</sup> Wagner, "The Quandaries of Partial and Commingled Remains," 132-133.

<sup>153</sup> Aronson, *Who Owns the Dead*, 96.

Harold Haugland, whose clavicle was the only body part recovered, DPAA wrote that if additional remains were found, “disposition of those remains will be in accordance with the wishes of the next-of-kin.”<sup>154</sup> Haugland’s nephew said that he hoped that more remains would be discovered, but has not disclosed his final decision regarding them.<sup>155</sup>

I found opinion on this issue to be divided. Lori Evans, a niece of Corporal Harold A. Evans, noted that although her uncle’s legs, hip, clavicle, and some parts of his arms and skull were returned, much of him was still buried in Korea. She said she wished that these missing parts could come back to America someday, and that she would accept them if they did.<sup>156</sup> When Greg Beckwith was contacted by the military regarding extra remains of his half-brother Gerald Mueller, he was offered two options: to open his grave and place them in his casket, or to cremate them and place the ash at Arlington National Cemetery. Not wanting his brother to be exhumed another time, Beckwith chose the second option.<sup>157</sup>

Regardless of their choices regarding the completeness of bodies, having their loved ones buried on home soil is a type of closure for families. During the US Civil War, leaving dead soldiers unattended far away from home went against the prevailing Victorian conception (in America) of a “good death,” which emphasized domesticity.<sup>158</sup> This situation prompted people to locate their kinsmen’s bodies on battlefields

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<sup>154</sup> Identification Report of CIL 2004-124-I-32 (SFC. Harold Peter Haugland).

<sup>155</sup> Clayton Haugland, interview by the author, on August 21, 2018.

<sup>156</sup> Lori Evans, interview by the author, August 6, 2018.

<sup>157</sup> Greg Beckwith, interview by the author, August 4, 2018.

<sup>158</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 10, 85.

themselves. In subsequent US wars, families overwhelmingly demanded that their dead relatives be shipped home. Linking family burial to closure was a regular trope in news articles about Korean War POW/MIAs. When the body of Corporal Terrell J. Fuller was identified in 2018, his great-niece said: “It’s a closure to the family. It’s just a wonderful homecoming to have him come home and be buried on American soil.”<sup>159</sup>

Some families, on the other hand, unequivocally defined closure as learning that the bones were no longer buried in North Korea, a place that was not merely foreign to them but a place of great sorrow, with a regime they feared would destroy such remains out of hatred for Americans. Upon receiving Sergeant Wilson Meckley Jr.’s body, his brother said that he felt a sense of closure, as he had been experiencing “a sense of emptiness when he thought of his brother lying dead somewhere in North Korea.”<sup>160</sup>

Corporal Clarence H. Huff Jr. was buried in a cemetery in North Korea in late 1950.

When the military reported that his body, after being returned to Hawaii in 1956, had been newly identified, one of his brothers commented, “It was quite a relief to know he’s not over (in North Korea) anymore.” Once Huff had a tomb close to home that she could lay a wreath upon, his sister said, “Now, there is closure for the family at least.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Jennifer Brett, “North Georgia Town Readies for Return of Korean War Veteran’s Remains,” WRAL.com, August 8, 2018, <https://www.wral.com/north-georgia-town-readies-for-return-of-korean-war-veteran-s-remains/17755485/>.

<sup>160</sup> Ron Devlin, “Robeson Township Man Whose Brother Was Killed in Korean War Getting Closure,” *Reading Eagle* (Reading, PA), March 27, 2016, <https://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/roberson-township-man-whose-brother-was-killed-in-korean-war-getting-closure>.

<sup>161</sup> Lisa Roberson, “Family Grateful Remains of Korean War Vet, Long Missing, Have Returned,” *Chronicle-Telegram* (Elyria, OH), November 11, 2012, <http://www.chroniclet.com/news/2012/11/11/Family-grateful-remains-of-Korean-War-vet-long-missing-have-returned.html>.



Some POW/MIA offspring regarded local burial of their relatives as a family obligation; thus, their closure consisted of the fulfillment of a promise passed down the generations. Most POW/MIAs' parents and siblings passed away before they could recover their lost sons or brothers. Many expressed a hope that their loved ones would ultimately be cared for with respect by their descendants. For instance, Kaggie Baker, a niece of Sergeant Donald Baker, finally arranged for her uncle's burial in 2018.

According to a news article, "though they [her grandparents] and his brother have since died, she is happy her generation of the family now has closure."<sup>162</sup> Corporal Albert Quintero's mother had prayed until her death for either news of her son's survival, or his funeral with Catholic rites. When she passed away, she bestowed upon her daughter and granddaughter this familial wish. When the corporal's body was finally identified, his niece Alice Arviso said, "It was just relief" that he was buried beside his mother.<sup>163</sup>

My interviewees also expressed such feelings. Nancy Strickland, a niece of Sergeant First Class Raymond K. McMillian, told me that while her grandmother accepted his tragic death, she never lost hope that his remains would be recovered. This hope had been passed down through each generation until his body was found. Strickland clearly defined this moment of her eventual fulfillment of her family's wish as closure.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Alison Gowans, "Sgt. Donald Baker, Missing in Action in Korean War, Laid to Rest in Cedar Rapids," *Gazette* (Cedar Rapids, IA), June 19, 2018, <https://www.thegazette.com/subject/news/community/donald-baker-korean-war-cedar-rapids-iowa-memorial-veteran-us-army-20180619>.

<sup>163</sup> Chris Haire, "Family Lays Soldier to Rest in Long Beach 68 Years after He Died in Korean War, Thanks to POW/MIA Office," *Long Beach Press-Telegram* (Long Beach, CA), May 21, 2018, updated May 22, 2018, <https://www.presstelegram.com/2018/05/21/68-years-after-dying-a-korean-war-soldier-returns-home/>

<sup>164</sup> Nancy Strickland, interview by the author, September 29, 2018.

Similarly, Lori Evans defined the return of her uncle's body as "closure" for her family, who had waited more than fifty years to learn his fate, and regarded herself as having carried the family's burden.<sup>165</sup> William Sowles, in part because his father's fate is still undetermined, informed me that his final task for his father will be to bury his body side-by-side with those of his ancestors and brother. Sowles said that he had inherited this duty from his mother and uncles, and pledged: "If I'm still here, I will see to it that he will have a military burial in Salt Lake. If I am gone, my son will do same."<sup>166</sup>

In the post-Vietnam War era, with tales of Americans left behind in enemy territory a popular theme of literature, TV shows, and movies, a notion unsurprisingly prevailing in media outlets is that an identified soldier's body brings closure because his relatives can finally confirm he actually died.<sup>167</sup> When the body of Corporal Marvin E. Omans was buried, his nephew's wife commented, "we were told before that there is always the chance that some of them were taken captive and ended up in China or Russia and will never be accounted for. So we are very grateful to have this closure."<sup>168</sup> In early 2018, Victor Baker learned that his brother, Private First Class David Baker, had been identified among the bones delivered by the DPRK in 1993. He admitted once thinking his brother "was somewhere hiding" and "still alive somewhere." Baker's niece told

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<sup>165</sup> Lori Evans, interview by the author, August 6, 2018.

<sup>166</sup> Personal email from William Sowles, February 12, 2018.

<sup>167</sup> For an analysis of this popular culture and their examples, see Franklin, *M.I.A.*, 133-163.

<sup>168</sup> "AT LONG LAST, HOME Former Korean War MIA Finally Laid to Rest," *Pine Bluff Commercial* (Pine Bluff, AR), June 24, 2013, <https://www.pbcommercial.com/sections/news/region/long-last-home-former-korean-war-mia-finally-laid-rest.html>.

reporters, “it was a closure, finally, after 67 years.”<sup>169</sup> In March 2019, a nephew of Master Sergeant Charlie Mares learned of the identification of his uncle and claimed that his grandmother had never abandoned the hope that his uncle would return. While the nephew insisted that true closure would only happen after the funeral of his uncle in his hometown, the identification convinced him that Mares was no longer alive “in Japan [*sic*] or anywhere else.”<sup>170</sup>

A few of the POW/MIA families I interviewed shared similar views. When asked about the importance of receiving Corporal Matney’s body, his niece explained that this allowed his surviving siblings to confirm that he had been killed in action, rather than detained in a POW camp for decades, and it was this moment that she defined as closure.<sup>171</sup> A sister of Sergeant Joseph Bowen emphasized “closure” in response to a similar question, noting that her family, especially her father, had always harbored doubts that Bowen was dead.<sup>172</sup>

POW/MIA activists who have not yet received their relatives’ remains highlighted the importance of reliable information of their relatives’ deaths to the achievement of closure. Where the situations of their loss greatly diminish the chances of bodies being

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<sup>169</sup> Dong Ross, “Korean War GI from Gary, Who Had Been Missing since 1950, to Be Buried on Saturday,” *Times of Northwest Indiana* (Munster, IN), June 19, 2018, [https://www.nwitimes.com/news/history/korean-war-gi-from-gary-who-had-been-missing-since/article\\_82b79659-4f87-5da2-a636-fc4e498d3516.html](https://www.nwitimes.com/news/history/korean-war-gi-from-gary-who-had-been-missing-since/article_82b79659-4f87-5da2-a636-fc4e498d3516.html).

<sup>170</sup> Jon Wilcox, “After Seven Decades, MIA Korean War Veteran’s Remains to Be Buried at Home,” *Victoria Advocate* (Victoria, TX), March 27, 2019, [https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/news/after-seven-decades-mia-korean-war-veteran-s-remainsto/article\\_4565cf88-50b7-11e9-b2cb-2b581021cfef.html](https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/news/after-seven-decades-mia-korean-war-veteran-s-remainsto/article_4565cf88-50b7-11e9-b2cb-2b581021cfef.html).

<sup>171</sup> Thomas and Sandra Gormley, interview by the author, August 6, 2018.

<sup>172</sup> Ann Ford, interview by the author, August 16, 2018.

recovered, a feasible substitute is solid evidence of death in battle. For instance, Robert Moore, whose brother went missing in Korea, remarked that while he thought his brother was dead now and that his body was likely lost, he insisted that his brother had been a POW of the Soviet Union for a long time. For him, closure meant that “you have found what happened to your loved one and are now willing to just have memories, even if there are no remains to bury.”<sup>173</sup>

Although identified bodies allayed some people’s fears that their loved ones were enslaved in Communist Bloc countries after the Korean War, an equal number did not need bodies to be convinced that their relatives had died during the conflict. For the latter group, closure was equated to the body filling a gap in their family history. Many servicemen on the Korean War POW/MIA list were recorded as buried or left at body collection points, which were subsequently overrun by the enemy. For these men’s families, there was no ambiguity about their deaths. However, they were eager to learn whether their relatives’ remains had been disturbed or otherwise disrespected over the ensuing decades. They also tended to make conjectures about their loved ones’ final moments based on the bones. Such details were sometimes filled in with the forensic data in the military’s identification reports.<sup>174</sup>

My interviewees sometimes expressed a definition of closure as involving a

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<sup>173</sup> Email from Robert Moore in response to my questionnaire, October 10, 2017.

<sup>174</sup> Moreover, as revealed by my interviewees, the IDPFs detailing the situation of individual casualties during the war were not always delivered to their families or might be lost over the years. Their identification reports in recent years include the file created in the 1950s. Therefore, it was likely the first time that their families would learn any details about their deaths and the search for their remains.

family's need to know all of its members' fates. During my interview with Stella Knepp, sister of Private Hackenberg, she claimed that finally knowing exactly where he lost his life brought "a big closure" to her family. She also said she had figured out from the bones that her brother had perished in a POW camp, rather than during a battle. When asked about this by a journalist, Knepp said that "we assumed all this time he was no longer living, but just to think of where he could be—it was a missing part of our family."<sup>175</sup> Brenda Lott, despite having previously expressed a wish that her brother Corporal Daniel Dulin had survived the war, informed me that she was aware her brother was killed in action, as he was recorded as buried in a Pyongyang cemetery. Nevertheless, she insisted that the story of her family would not be complete if she failed to confirm whether his body was still buried at the Punchbowl or in North Korea, and that this question could only be answered through the identification of his remains.<sup>176</sup>

News articles also reported that while an identified body is not absolutely necessary to families' determination of their loved ones' deaths, it proves useful in illuminating their last moments. A sister of First Lieutenant Alvin E. Crane Jr. remarked, "I think we had resigned ourselves to the fact he was dead, but there was not a resolution, you don't really know." For her, this resolution consisted of recovering Crane's body, and with it, a theory that he parachuted out of his stricken plane but succumbed to the

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<sup>175</sup> Stella Hackenberg Knepp, interview by the author, December 5, 2017; Barbara Miller, "Central Pa. Prisoner of War in Korea Will be Laid to Rest at Home," *Pennlive.com*, October 24, 2017, [http://www.pennlive.com/news/2017/10/central\\_pa\\_prisoner\\_of\\_war\\_in.html](http://www.pennlive.com/news/2017/10/central_pa_prisoner_of_war_in.html)

<sup>176</sup> Brenda Lott, interview by the author, August 11, 2018.

inclement weather in Korea.<sup>177</sup> Closure for the family of Corporal Frank H. Smith was unlikely to be based on the mere knowledge that he had died, as this had already been confirmed, and his obituary posted in 1951. Instead, they described it as a relief to have a body to bury, and more importantly, to learn that he was killed instantly by a grenade, as indicated by damage to his skeleton.<sup>178</sup>

A few POW/MIA families stressed that closure meant acknowledgment of the servicemen's sacrifice by their families, communities, or country. For a long time, the Korean War had been considered as a "forgotten war," but the personal losses it entailed were not so easily forgotten. The lack of a body deprived families of a physical basis for memory or for teaching others about their sacrifice for the country. Crucially, these families did not want their loved ones' deaths to be ignored by their offspring and friends. For instance, when I asked him what was most important about getting his uncle's body back home, a nephew of Private First Class Charles C. Follese responded "Closure! For So many relatives and visibility for the future generations."<sup>179</sup> Similarly, Corporal Clarence Skates's niece underscored that her uncle deserved a marked grave at home with a decent funeral. She regarded the grave and the funeral as the recognition of a citizen's fighting and dying for his country, without which closure would be impossible.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Bob Norberg, "Identification of 22-year-old Pilot's Remains Solves 55-year Mystery for Family," *Press Democrat* (Santa Rosa, CA), March 30, 2006, <https://www.pressdemocrat.com/news/2111548-181/identification-of-22-year-old-pilots-remains>.

<sup>178</sup> Rick Moriarty, "Remains of Salina Soldier Killed in Korean War Finally Come Home," *Syracuse.com*, August 30, 2010, [http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2010/08/remains\\_of\\_salina\\_soldier\\_kill.html](http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2010/08/remains_of_salina_soldier_kill.html).

<sup>179</sup> Questionnaire filled out by Michael Follese, regarding Private First Class Charles C. Follese.

<sup>180</sup> Mary Lynch and her daughter, interview by the author, tape-recorded August 21, 2018.

The participation of local population in a serviceman's funeral is an important indicator of the acknowledgment. The motorcade escorting his body, local residents lining the route to his grave, and the exchange of anecdotes among his acquaintances, often serve to reassure his family that his community appreciates his sacrifice. Elva Evans, despite knowing little about her brother-in-law Corporal Dudley L. Evans, underscored the fact that burying him next to his parents and grandparents "has given the family great comfort." The funeral reunited about twenty family members and the population of his town. What impressed her more, however, was a group of Patriot Guard Riders who accompanied the family.<sup>181</sup> Similarly, having seen such a group escorting the body of Sergeant First Class Alfred G. Bensinger Jr., his son expressed gratitude that his father's ultimate sacrifice had not been forgotten. The staff of the mortuary preparing for Bensinger's funeral believed that the honor extended by veterans, riders, and concerned citizens provided a unique experience that helped bring closure to his family.<sup>182</sup>

Despite these multiple paths to closure that are mediated by identified bodies, some families never achieved it, even after burying the deceased with military honors. Bradon Hamber and Richard Wilson define "closure" as "a situation where the trauma is no longer seen as unfinished business [...]. Grief and loss no longer plague the individual consciously or unconsciously."<sup>183</sup> Many families, although they accepted the bodies,

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<sup>181</sup> Personal Correspondence from Elva R. Evans, July 10, 2018.

<sup>182</sup> Steve Gust, "Korean War Vet Receives Military Honors," *Edmond Life & Leisure* (Edmond, OK), February 22, 2018, <http://wedmondlifeandleisure.com/korean-war-vet-receives-military-honors-p16166-87.htm>.

<sup>183</sup> Hamber and Wilson, "Symbolic Closure," 38.

experienced permanent trauma caused by the tragic death of their relatives. The widow of Sergeant First Class Dean D. Chaney could not recover from losing her husband and found it impossible to forget Chaney's tragic loss in a POW camp. After receiving his remains, while admitting that she felt better, she said, "they [the military] say it will bring you closure. But it never will."<sup>184</sup> Jim Ardent was traumatized when he realized the fate of his brother Corporal Stanley P. Ardent, a POW executed by the North Koreans. Worse still, he was unable to track the only survivor of this atrocity. After arranging his brother's funeral, he told reporters, "it's not really closure."<sup>185</sup>

Lack of information also deprived some POW/MIA families of closure. As discussed earlier, a few such families defined closure as determining the exact fate of their loved ones, not just having confirmation that they had died. During the Korean War, many soldiers vanished in battles or POW camps, and their fates remained mysterious. As we have seen, soldiers' bones were sometimes exhumed many miles away from the sites where they were lost. The paucity of recoverable remains also obscures the trauma the missing men suffered. In such cases, even when their families receive bones that have been identified beyond doubt, they still cannot determine how these men spent their last moments. When Emma Lunsford received the body of her brother, Captain Turnace H. Brown, she was impressed by the generous support she received from veterans, her local

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<sup>184</sup> John Boyle, "Boyle Column: Korean War Soldier Comes Home, After 65 Years," *Citizen-Times* (Ashville, NC), November 28, 2015, <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2015/11/28/boyle-column-korean-war-soldier-comes-home-after-65-years/76369940/>.

<sup>185</sup> Renee Trappe, "Korean War Vet from Palatine Is Finally Home," *Daily Herald* (Naperville, IL), March 25, 2010, <https://www.dailyherald.com/article/20100325/news/303259913/>.



community, and the Army. However, what she found in the casket was “these few bones that are here, not a complete person;” and therefore, she said, she would “never have full closure.” She likely felt that his exact fate would not be ascertained unless more of his body was returned.<sup>186</sup>

The return of Private First Class Frank Worley’s body was not closure for his family either. Worley remained on the list of 389 Americans who were once incorrectly depicted as POWs held after the Korean War. The military had never explained the fate of these men by the time it ceased asking the DPRK to account for them. When his brother received his remains, he was not informed whether Worley had been shot dead in a battle or had languished in a POW camp before dying. Thus, he “still didn’t think the family would find any sort of closure,” and added that in his mind, the war never ended.<sup>187</sup>

### **Conclusion: A DPAA Press Conference**

On August 8, 2018, DPAA held a press conference focusing on the identification of a body returned by the DPRK a week earlier. Before an audience of family members and reporters, AFDIL collected DNA samples from two sons of Master Sergeant Charles H. McDaniel, who went missing on November 2, 1950. The collection of samples reminded the public of the essential role that DNA evidence has played in the

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<sup>186</sup> Christopher Curry, “Gainesville Soldier Killed in Korea Is Laid to Rest,” *Gainesville Sun* (Gainesville, FL), October 5, 2012, <https://www.gainesville.com/article/LK/20121005/News/604155874/GS/>.

<sup>187</sup> Lydia Coutre, “Remains of Korean War Soldier from Wilmington Identified,” *Wilmington Star-News* (Wilmington, NC), October 30, 2015, <http://www.starnewsonline.com/news/20151030/remains-of-korean-war-soldier-from-wilmington-identified/>.

identification of remains repatriated from North Korea since 1990 and encouraged other POW/MIA families to donate FRS. However, AFDIL's rationale for selecting the McDaniel case was that his ID tag was found among the personal items returned by Kim Jong-Un. An ID tag—a basic approach to the identification of dead warriors dating back to Ancient Greece—initiated an identification process that was ultimately successful because of the use of every major forensic method adopted by the US military over the course of the twentieth century: anthropological and dental analysis, mtDNA profiling, and chest radiographs. Nevertheless, it was only through DNA evidence that CILHI was able to determine that McDaniel's remains were among the fifty-five boxes of bones from the DPRK, which in the pre-DNA era would have been classified as unknown.<sup>188</sup>

The stories that circulated after the identification of McDaniel again demonstrated the significance of an identified body to the country, as well as to his sons. Upon learning about his identification, President Trump tweeted that “hopefully, their families can have closure.”<sup>189</sup> He also expressed his satisfaction about the deal that had been reached with Kim Jong-Un, which included the repatriation of US soldiers' remains. McDaniel's sons, in contrast, did not comment until the end of their father's funeral, but appreciated the

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<sup>188</sup> I was present at this press conference, so the information was based on my notes. Also see DPAA, “Funeral Announcement for Soldier Killed During Korean War (McDaniel C.), Release No: 18-175,” news release, October 23, 2018, <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1669321/funeral-announcement-for-soldier-killed-during-korean-war-mcdaniel-c/>; Claudia Grisales, “In A Sea of Remains, A US Military Dog Tag Is Found,” *Stars and Stripes*, <https://www.stripes.com/news/in-a-sea-of-remains-a-us-military-dog-tag-is-found-1.541695>.

<sup>189</sup> Associated Press, “Trump Identifies Remains of Two American Soldiers,” NBC News, September 20, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/trump-identifies-remains-two-american-soldiers-killed-korean-war-n911666>.

presence of people who escorted their father's body and honored him in a way that "he has certainly deserved for seven decades." The body, they believed, also filled a seventy-year-gap in military records and their family history, during which McDaniel "ceased to exist" after being declared dead in 1953.<sup>190</sup>

Veterans and POW/MIA activists today still shape how the Defense Department handles its missing personnel. The press conference on August 8, 2018, revealed that the Veterans of Foreign Wars had played a critical role in convincing Trump to request that Kim resume the joint US-DPRK search for bodies that had been suspended by President George W. Bush in 2005. While the main subject of this press conference was technology, it inevitably went some way toward addressing the concerns of the Korean War POW/MIA activists, who had been influenced by their Vietnam War counterparts: did the North Koreans fake ID tags as the Vietnamese did? Did they use animal bones to fool the United States? Are there still POWs living in North Korea? Such rumors are unlikely to dissipate and will likely continue to besiege the military as long as there are still thousands of Americans' bodies lost in North Korea.

While I was drafting this dissertation in late 2018, the POW/MIA families scored another victory. Yielding to the families' constant pressure, DPAA announced that it would disinter all the bodies at the NMCP, regardless of whether families could provide adequate evidence that there was a high probability of identifying them within a limited

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<sup>190</sup> Holly V. Hays, "This Hoosier Army Medic Went Missing during the Korean War. 70 Years Later, He's Coming Home," *Indianapolis Star*, <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2018/10/25/remains-hoosier-soldier-charles-h-mcdaniel-sr-lost-korean-war-returned-1st-calvary-division/1761505002/>.

period.<sup>191</sup> The analysis of several hundred previously unidentified bodies at the Punchbowl will ensure that some progress continues to be made in accounting for Korean War POW/MIAs even while the delivery of bodies from the DPRK remains unpredictable. Certainly, it will end the embarrassing situation that as the United States has been grappling with the DPRK for about five hundred containers of bones since 1990, a larger number of deceased soldiers lay on American soil, their identification hampered chiefly by bureaucracy.

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<sup>191</sup> “Major Project to Identify Long Nameless Korean War Dead Begins,” *NPR*, December 13, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/13/675672396/major-project-to-identify-long-nameless-korean-war-dead-begins>; “Disinterring Korean War Unknowns,” DPAA, <https://dpaa.secure.force.com/dpaaFamWebKoreanWarDisinternments>.

## CONCLUSION

When I proposed this project in 2017, the repatriation of the remains of US soldiers lost in the Korean War appeared to be on long-term hold: the DPRK had not delivered a single American soldier's body for over a decade. Since then, despite Donald Trump calling Kim Jong-Un "Rocket Man" and boasting that he had a bigger nuclear button than Kim—and despite the United States' continued refusal to recognize the DPRK—the return of remains from North Korea surprisingly resumed, at least for a while.<sup>1</sup> In April 2018, CIA Director Mike Pompeo secretly traveled to Pyongyang to schedule a direct meeting between Trump and Kim at Kim's invitation.<sup>2</sup> In May, after another visit (this time as secretary of state), Pompeo secured the release of three Korean-Americans who were accused of espionage in 2016 by the DPRK government.<sup>3</sup> The release of the living hostages aroused some hope that posthumous hostages—US soldiers' remains—might be released after the Trump-Kim meeting.

As discussed in Chapter V, Trump became the first incumbent US president to meet a DPRK supreme leader. For several decades, North Korean supreme leaders had coveted such a direct encounter, thinking that being put on equal footing with the United

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Trump, Twitter posts, September 17, 2017, 06:53 AM <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/909384837018112000> and January 2, 2018, 07:49PM, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/94835557022420992>.

<sup>2</sup> Jeff Zeleny, Elise Labott, and Ben Westcott, "CIA Director Mike Pompeo Secretly Met with North Korea's Kim Jong Un," CNN, April 18, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/17/politics/mike-pompeo-kim-jong-un-visit/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Leigh Ann Caldwell, "Mike Pompeo Makes Surprise Visit to North Korea: President Trump Said Preparations Continue for the Historic Summit," NBC News, May 8, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/mike-pompeo-makes-surprise-visit-north-korea-n872451>.

States would give their regime legitimacy in the world community. In exchange for a chance to build bilateral relations with the United States, Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il had offered several hundred sets of US soldiers' remains in the 1990s and 2000s, but only ex-US presidents (Carter and Clinton) had visited Pyongyang. Kim Jong-Un achieved something that his father and grandfather had failed to do, and he decided to reward the United States with the remains of US servicemen after his handshake with Trump at their June 12, 2018 summit in Singapore. In their joint statement after the summit, they committed to four actions. The first three are abstract political clichés, promising to 1) establish new US-DPRK relations, though not necessarily to normalize them; 2) maintain peace on the Korean Peninsula; and 3) commit to DPRK denuclearization. Item four, however, declared that “the United States and the DPRK commit to recovering POW/MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those already identified.”<sup>4</sup> To date, this item has been the only one to come to fruition.

However, even before North Korea released fifty-five boxes of US soldiers' remains on July 27, 2018, the sixty-fifth anniversary of the armistice of the Korean War, lingering hostilities between the two countries began to overshadow the achievement of the Singapore Summit. On July 12, DPRK officers failed to show up to a meeting in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) to schedule the delivery of remains. It also behaved

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<sup>4</sup> “Joint Statement of President Donald J. Trump of the United States of America and Chairman Kim Jong Un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the Singapore Summit, June 12, 2018,” the White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-president-donald-j-trump-united-states-america-chairman-kim-jong-un-democratic-peoples-republic-korea-singapore-summit/>.

uncooperatively during another of Pompeo's visits, this one about denuclearization.<sup>5</sup>



Figure C-1: Vice President Mike Pence was welcoming the remains repatriated from the DPRK. (Air Force photo by Senior Airman Apryl Hall, [https://www.defense.gov/ Explore/News/Article/Article/ 1602465/dpaa-provides-update-on-identifying-service-members-missing-from-korean-war/](https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1602465/dpaa-provides-update-on-identifying-service-members-missing-from-korean-war/). The photo is in the public domain)

When the DPRK announced that it would only deliver fifty-five boxes of remains instead of the 220 or so that had been shown to US visitors in 2016, media outlets began to wonder what North Korea would ask from the United States before releasing the other bodies.<sup>6</sup> In September, the DPRK hinted that, because they had returned some US soldiers' remains according to item four of the joint statement, the statement would be void if the United States did not reciprocate by seeking reconciliation (possibly referring to item one).<sup>7</sup> Kim Jong-Un openly viewed the return of remains as a political bargaining

<sup>5</sup> Choe Sang-Hun, "North Korea Misses Talks with U.S. on Remains," *New York Times*, July 13, 2018, A8.

<sup>6</sup> Joyce Lee, "Recovery of US Troops' Remains in North Korea Complicated by Cash, Politics," Reuters, July 24, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-remains-explainer/recovery-of-u-s-troops-remains-in-north-korea-hindered-by-cash-politics-idUSKBN1KE12R>.

<sup>7</sup> Li Hak-Nam, "Daehwaga Jincheokdoeji Mothagoitneungeoteun nuguttaemununga? [Who Is Responsible

chip rather than the humanitarian task that his father and grandfather had insisted it was. Since then, the DPRK has not returned any more bodies, suggesting that it is waiting for new offers from Trump. Lifting some economic sanctions on North Korea and signing a declaration to officially end the Korean War, according to some political analysts, are likely what Kim Jong-Un wants before any further cooperation with the United States.<sup>8</sup>

The second Trump-Kim summit further dampened any prospect of recovering more bodies from the DPRK. Since Kim had already met with Trump, the February 2019 summit in Hanoi did not bring additional political prestige, and so there was little impetus for him to release more remains unless Trump again defied the diplomatic norms of the United States and attempted to further befriend him. The second Trump-Kim summit was truncated when, according to Trump, Kim insisted on the removal of all sanctions against the DPRK without disarming his nuclear arsenal on Trump's terms.<sup>9</sup> Given that the probability of recovering remains from North Korea in previous decades had been predicated largely on agreement on financial and nuclear issues, Trump's walk-away from the Hanoi Summit discouraged any cooperation on returning bodies. On May 8, 2019, the Defense Department suspended its preparations for restarting joint US-DPRK operations to recover bodies, reversing the only concrete achievement from Singapore.<sup>10</sup>

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for No Progress in Negotiation?]" *Rodong Sinmun*, September 18, 2018, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Conner Finnegan, "Mike Pompeo Heads to North Korea with Low Expectations, But High Pressure," October 6, 2018, ABC News, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/mike-pompeo-heads-north-korea-low-expectations-high/story?id=58310367>.

<sup>9</sup> Kevin Liptak and Jeremy Diamond, "'Sometimes, You Have to Walk': Trump Leaves Hanoi with No Deal," CNN, February 28, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/27/politics/donald-trump-kim-jong-un-vietnam-summit/index.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Dan Lamothe, "Pentagon Suspends Effort to Recover War Remains amid Silence from North Korea,"





Figure C-2: Handshake between President Donald Trump and Supreme Leader of North Korea Kim Jong-Un across the military demarcation line on June 30, 2019. (Official White House Photo by Shealah Craighead, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/whitehouse/48162701617>. The photo is in the public domain.)

On June 30, 2019, Trump became the first sitting US president to cross the 38th Parallel northward to meet a DPRK supreme leader, but Kim Jong-Un did not offer more remains. The moment was historic, but because their subsequent conversation happened at the DMZ rather than in Pyongyang or Washington, DC, its political implications may have been insufficient to persuade Kim to return more remains. Trump had been boasting about his relationship with Kim when he claimed that “for some reason, we have a certain chemistry” and declared himself to be the only one capable of solving the DPRK’s nuclear issue.<sup>11</sup> However, Kim Jong-Un had surely been seeking a reconciliation with the

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*Washington Post*, May 8, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2019/05/08/pentagon-says-n-korea-isnt-responding-requests-discuss-recovery-war-remains/>.

<sup>11</sup> Eli Stokols and Victoria Kim, “Trump Meets Kim Jong Un at DMZ and Becomes First Sitting US President to Enter North Korea,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-trump-korea-dmz-kim-moon-20190630-story.html>.

United States rather than a personal relationship with Trump. In late 2019, in a routine anti-US tirade, Ri Thae-Song, the vice foreign minister of the DPRK, stated that “it is entirely up to the US what Christmas gift it will select to get.”<sup>12</sup> Media outlets tended to interpret the gift to be a missile test. However, we may speculate that gifts in the future could be additional remains if the two countries reached agreement on either denuclearization or the lifting of sanctions. Offering US Treasury money to the DPRK on an ad hoc basis may be an alternative path to retrieving remains without political considerations, as during the joint US-DPRK search for remains between 1996 and 2005.

The military must expeditiously identify the remains returned in 2018 in order to demonstrate the country’s commitment to missing servicemen, since identified bodies have become virtually the sole criterion to account for POW/MIAs since the Vietnam War. Military forensic experts seemed to prioritize the identification of the remains delivered in 2018, though it is unclear whether or not they may have been under pressure from an administration eager to exploit the political value of those remains by promptly returning them to POW/MIA families. According to *Stars and Stripes*, a newspaper owned by the Defense Media Agency, forty-one servicemen had been identified from these boxes by October 25, 2019. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) ascribed the success to increased analysts and resources for this task, established procedures for separating commingled remains, a near-hundred percent probability of

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<sup>12</sup> Joshua Berlinger, “North Korea Warns US to Prepare for ‘Christmas Gift’, But No One’s Sure What to Expect,” CNN, December 5, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/12/04/asia/north-korea-christmas-gift-kim-jong-un-intl-hnk/index.html>.

extracting usable mtDNA samples from the remains, and the DPAA's extensive collection of family reference DNA samples.<sup>13</sup> All of these factors have resulted from military's response to the horrible conditions of remains repatriated in previous decades, as well as cooperation by POW/MIA families. Despite the critical role of DNA in identifying all of the forty-one men, the most rudimentary identification media, ID tags and personal items, also significantly contributed to identifying a large portion of them.

While the quick identification of the remains would be beneficial to the administration, there is no guarantee that these remains will be identified in a short time. *A New York Magazine* article argues that it may be advantageous for the president to allow their identification to drag on for years, since sporadic identification would remind his supporters that he cares about Korean War POW/MIA families, despite North Korea not having delivered any remains since August 2018.<sup>14</sup> Even if there were no political reason to slow the identification, the DPAA may not be able to identify all the bones in the fifty-five boxes with current technology. Just as the military began to use DNA profiling in response to the commingled remains repatriated from the DPRK in the early 1990s, unidentifiable bones in the fifty-five boxes (or the containers earlier returned) will prompt the military to find new forensic techniques. When most of the bones in these boxes are identified, the Defense Department may shift its priority back to the

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<sup>13</sup> Kim Gamel, "So Far, 41 US Troops Have Been ID'd from Remains Returned by North Korea, DPAA Says," *Stars and Stripes*, October 25, 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/so-far-41-us-troops-have-been-id-d-from-remains-returned-by-north-korea-dpaa-says-1.604519>.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Chait, "Trump's Boast About Getting Fallen Heroes from Korea is Collapsing," *New York Magazine*, August 1, 2018, <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/08/trumps-boast-about-getting-remains-from-korea-is-collapsing.html>.

unidentified bodies at the National Military Cemetery of the Pacific. In late 2018, the military decided to investigate all of these casualties, demonstrating the country's continuous progress in accounting for Korean War POW/MIAs despite a dearth of bodies from the DPRK.

In spite of the small chance of recovering more US servicemen's remains from North Korea, Trump has actively advertised his only concrete achievement at the Singapore Summit as a validation of his diplomatic strategy, perhaps deluding himself that he had outdone his predecessor.<sup>15</sup> Trump emphasized the repatriation to garner support for the Republicans in the 2018 midterm election and even in his presidential reelection campaign. On June 20, 2018, at a rally in Duluth, MN, he lied that "in fact, today already two hundred [sets of remains] have been sent back" after the Singapore Summit. In fact, the DPRK had not delivered a single body at that point.<sup>16</sup> On multiple occasions in 2019, in an effort to defend his policy toward the DPRK, Trump inaccurately claimed that North Korea was still returning bodies.<sup>17</sup>

Using the POW/MIA issue to reinforce a right-wing political agenda is hardly Trump's invention. POW/MIAs from the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam represented the

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<sup>15</sup> According to a fact-checker article in *Washington Post*, in his conversation with ROK President Moon Jae-In on June 30, 2019, Trump alleged that Obama once begged to meet Kim Jong-Un, but the latter refused. This statement was deemed to be inaccurate. See Salvador Rizzo, "No, Obama Didn't Beg Kim Jong Un for A Meeting," *Washington Post*, July 2, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/07/02/no-obama-didnt-beg-kim-jong-un-meeting/>.

<sup>16</sup> "President Trump Rally in Duluth, Minnesota," C-SPAN video and transcript, June 20, 2018, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?447274-1/president-trump-holds-rally-duluth-minnesota>.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Dale, "Fact Check: Trump Is Wrong that Soldiers' Remains Are Still 'Coming Back' from North Korea," CNN, June 25, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/25/politics/trump-north-korea-remains/index.html>.

heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice to defend their country against communism, in contrast to the typically left-wing domestic anti-war activists during the Cold War. As discussed in Chapters III and IV, in the 1950s, rumors that American prisoners of war were being held by their captors after the armistice fueled anti-communist campaigns in the United States. Right-wing politicians and some POW/MIA families thought that there must be communist sympathizers in a government that denied the country a victory in Korea and compromised its ability to recover all POW/MIAs. Other right-wing tenets like isolationism, and even racism, gradually emerged when some POW/MIA activists held the left wing collectively responsible for undermining the war effort and America's international prestige. The POW/MIA campaigns of the Vietnam War thrived in the same vein, but on such a large scale that they were integrated into US culture. Both Nixon and Reagan believed that these campaigns dovetailed with their political agendas and heavily exploited them. The Vietnam War POW/MIA campaigns also served as a venue for people who had lost confidence in the federal government or who had failed to adapt to the social revolutions of the 1960s. These factors ensured the longevity and influence of Vietnam War POW/MIA campaigns.

Given the limited impact of the Korean War on most Americans, its POW/MIA campaigns might have been no more than a footnote in 1950s US history, but the Vietnam War POW/MIA campaigns resuscitated them. Particularly, they reminded Americans that over eight thousand bodies of US servicemen still awaited repatriation from the Korean Peninsula, prompting the United States to re-engage with the DPRK and allowing North

Korea to earn political advantages unobtainable by other means. Korean War POW/MIA family groups are still overshadowed by their Vietnam War counterparts, especially the quasi-official National League of POW/MIA Families (NLPF), which had “changed the way Americans think about missing troops and the government’s responsibility for them.”<sup>18</sup> Despite the NLPF’s past success, it is uncertain what the future holds for POW/MIA families from both wars. Currently, the DPAA reports the identification of WWII and Korean War POW/MIAs much more frequently than that of the Vietnam War ones (it is understandable given the former’s large number). Perhaps, the NLPF will gradually lose its dominant position in the country’s POW/MIA campaigns.<sup>19</sup>

In the final analysis, while this study suggests that negotiations over remains is an effective way for the United States to peacefully engage with North Korea against the background of its constant saber-rattling, it also reminds people that, even though shooting across the 38th Parallel is not a regular occurrence, the Korean War has not yet ended. Given the slim chance that the DPRK will soon collapse, a tripartite battle over the remains will persist among the DPRK, the US military, and Korean War POW/MIA families. The latter two parties both aim to persuade the DPRK to release remains, but

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<sup>18</sup> Jay Price, “Having Changed America, The League of POW/MIA Families Fades,” National Public Radio, October 19, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/19/558137698/having-changed-america-the-league-of-pow-mia-families-fades>.

<sup>19</sup> In August 2018, the brother of the NLPF’s director Ann Mills-Griffiths, who went missing in the Vietnam War, was accounted for. Therefore, she was no longer a POW/MIA relative. Given the fact that Mills-Griffiths has firmly controlled the NLPF and has single-handedly coordinated its operation with the federal government for decades, the repatriation of her brother’s body was likely to bring significant changes to the NLPF. Moreover, in the same month, Senator John McCain III, who had a sour relationship with POW/MIA activists (including Korean War ones), passed away. The impact of his death on the activists remains to be seen.

they are not always close allies, either before or after bodies are repatriated.

Negotiations over these bodies are likely to continue well into the future. The US military is bound by the concurrent body return policy established during the Korean War and its current insistence on identifying bodies to account for POW/MIAs. As long as the DPRK regime survives, it will be reluctant to relinquish its hostility to Americans and allow them to search freely for the remains of men who once ravaged the country. The aging relatives of POW/MIAs, who still remember their fathers, brothers, or husbands, will eventually pass away, but their offspring and family members have inherited their commitment to recovering their loved ones' bodies and offering them funerals with respect and honor.

It is difficult to predict how these diplomatic battles will play out, but the gradual erosion of bones and the death of elderly North Koreans, the only people who know where American casualties are buried, mean that the search for POW/MIAs will get even more difficult over time. Experience has shown that the DPRK is unwilling to release bodies directly to POW/MIA families, and so it is up to the US government to take the initiative to recover these remains. Considering the division of Korea since 1945 and the balance of power across the 38th Parallel, the US government might ultimately recognize North Korea and leave Koreans alone to determine the future of the peninsula. The DPRK's primary diplomatic goal would thus be satisfied, and its leaders more willing to cooperate with the United States in recovering remains. However, geopolitical concerns are likely to prevent the US government from ever thinking about this option. The US

military may consider reverting to its 1996–2005 practice of offering lucrative rewards for the DPRK’s cooperation. The success of such a practice relies on satisfactory payment and the two countries’ joint efforts to remove politics, especially denuclearization, from the issue of remains. Resorting to extreme military pressure, economic sanctions, or even a thermonuclear war may facilitate a change of regime in Pyongyang and a subsequent unhindered search for remains, but this option would prove to be too costly for both countries. Whatever option the US government chooses, it must act quickly before the memory of burial locations disappears and natural forces obliterate the bodies of US servicemen, called to “defend a country they never knew and a people they never met,”<sup>20</sup> killed in a conflict that arguably brought the world to the brink of an apocalyptic world war, and largely forgotten by their fellow citizens.

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<sup>20</sup> The quoted phrase is from the Korean War Veterans Memorial at the National Mall.



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