



## POW/MIA Update

By Phil O'Brien

These are interesting times. We do not have, just yet, an invitation from North Korea to do recovery work during 2008. It might come a little later, or not. I can't speak to any specifics, but I haven't given up on the possibility of "going North" later this year. Meanwhile, preparations continue for work in South Korea.

Our friends at the Joint POW Accounting Command (JPAC) hope to visit several areas, including the POW march routes leading north into the present Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Work there looks really promising. In just a first "road recon" last year, our JPAC team was able to recover two sets of likely remains, and this year, they'll be able to get into some of the planting areas before new crops go in. That gives us a lot more room to work, and it gives local villagers a lot more time to talk. This is one of the things we'd hoped for, and it is proving true.

Very often, we are dealing with members of the same Korean families and they still remember events from during the war. At least some of the second and third generations are not far from the original villages. True, most of these areas evacuated as enemy forces moved forward. But there were people who could not get out, and their stories are pretty well known, family by family. So we'll have a lot to listen to and look for.

Picking up, now on a previous story, we're also looking much more closely at some of the Unknown burials at National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP) in Hawaii, "the Punchbowl." There were a total of 867 burials from the Korean War. One went on to Arlington. Ten others have already been exhumed, and six of them have now been identified. The bad news is that we still cannot use DNA on bone cuts from the early Punchbowl burials to do identifications. The bone material was effectively scrubbed by the preservatives used prior to burial. But we are getting limited results with new methods, so we haven't given up there, either.

The good news is that we've gotten to

know these Unknowns a lot better than ever before. Some examples . . .

- Two of the burials are from the United Nations Military Cemetery (UNMC) at Inchon. We know the exact dates of original burial for both men, and we have locations and approximate dates of death. One man was likely a POW en route north, early war, from the group that followed Tiger Group in September 1950. We are trying to sort out names. The other man's remains were pretty badly destroyed in combat, but even that gives us a "window of possibility" to work with.

- Twenty-one others are from the UNMC at Masan, deep within South Korea. It was set up by the 25th Infantry Division, opened in July 1950, and had its last Unknown burials early in 1951. Now consider the numbers: early war, far south, and many of the missing men from nearby were either known or suspected POWs who worked northward before they died or disappeared.

Many names can be excluded very quickly. We're not ready to exhume anyone returned from UNMC Inchon or UNMC Masan just yet, but we are trying to "fine down" the names that are still possible. Can't promise, but I am expecting good progress from both sites. Once again, we have a real advantage in working with Unknowns from South Korea, originally recovered by our own people, for we know exactly where and when they were found.

Now consider the other side of the coin. For those returned from North Korea during Operation Glory, it's a lot less exact. The Chinese and North Koreans did provide location information for the human remains they passed back. We know from experience, meaning previous identifications, that sometimes they were quite truthful and accurate. And sometimes they were not. Remains coming from Camp 1, Camp 5, and the Chosin Reservoir battle zone, including the temporary cemeteries that we left behind, were typically "pretty close."

The Chinese and North Koreans often got individual names wrong, but they weren't too concerned with that. At least they got the locations right. But there's another case where the Chinese and North

Koreans just about "got it all wrong."

We opened a large, temporary cemetery at Pyongyang, North Korea. Then we had to leave the burials behind in December 1950 as allied forces fell back. UNMC Pyongyang contained around 650 U.S. and allied burials. When the Chinese and North Koreans returned human remains during Operation Glory in September and November 1954, they claimed that 439 of the caskets held remains from Pyongyang. Our people at Kokura, Japan, worked on these remains, and identified many of them. So far, so good.

But they were also able to positively identify dozens of others, reported from field burials around western North Korea, who were actually from the Pyongyang cemetery. We know, because we had buried them by name, and these remains "matched up." So, at a given point, it was very obvious that someone among the Chinese and North Koreans was playing an ugly little game.

Our best belief right now is that UNMC Pyongyang was exhumed completely, except perhaps for one isolated plot containing six graves. It had been part of the main cemetery, but was separated from the other rows by an open area reserved for those still falling in daily combat. Most of the open area was not used, and, quite plausibly, the Chinese and North Koreans never discovered the final six men. We can say this reasonably because there were identifications from every other plot and row within the cemetery.

Our task now is to reconstruct which Americans, originally buried at Pyongyang but later wrongly cited from elsewhere, are among the Unknowns at NMCP in Hawaii. We believe that 52 of 58 by-name burials from Pyongyang are now in the Punchbowl. The other six are from that isolated row, and were likely missed, but we're checking for them, as well. This is "needle in a haystack" work, because we have to go over the burial records for every one of the North Korean returns. But it's worth doing, and the process is very rewarding.

Here again, we're not yet ready to start exhuming, but as lists of possible names get

shorter and shorter, we will be.

I'll try to have more, "recent" news, next time.

A note from the author: Here's the story on the item above. I sometimes write a column for the newsletter of the Korean War Ex-POW Assn. This column was written originally on 11 Feb 2008. The only differences now: [1] we are a bit later into the possible work season, so the chance of going back into North Korea in 2008 is less, and [2] work has now begun within South Korea.

## Soldiers Missing From The Korean War Are Identified

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office announced that the remains of four U.S. servicemen, missing from the Korean War, have been identified and returned to their families for burial with full military honors.

They are Cpl. Robert L. Mason of Parkersburg, W.Va., Pfc. Joseph K. Meyer, Jr., of Wahpeton, N.D., Sgt. 1st Class George W. Koon of Leesville, S.C., and Sgt. 1st Class Jack O. Tye of Loyall, Ky., all U.S. Army. Mason was buried in Belpre, Ohio, Meyer was buried in Wahpeton, Koon was buried in Leesville, and Tye was buried in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C.

Representatives from the Army met with the soldiers' next-of-kin to explain the recovery and identification process, and to coordinate interment with military honors on behalf of the Secretary of the Army.

Mason was assigned to B Company, 32nd Infantry Regiment, and Meyer was assigned to K Company, 31st Infantry Regiment. Both were attached to the 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT), 7th Infantry Division. The team was engaged against the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea from late November to early December, 1950. Both men died as result of intense enemy fire, and their bodies were not recovered at the time.

In late November 1950, Koon was assigned to the Medical Company, 9th Infantry Regiment, and Tye was assigned to Company L, 38th Infantry Regiment. Both were members of the 2nd Infantry Division advancing north of Kunu-ri, North Korea. On Nov. 25, the Chinese Army counterattacked the Americans in what would become known as the Battle of the Chong Chon (River).

This combat was some of the fiercest of the war, and the 2nd Division initiated a fighting withdrawal to the south. Koon and Tye were captured by Chinese forces during the intense enemy fire, and subsequently died while in captivity from malnutrition and medical neglect.

Between 2001 and 2005, joint U.S. and Democratic People's Republic of Korea teams, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), conducted excavations of several burial sites near the Chosin Reservoir. The sites correlate closely with defensive positions held by the 31st RCT at the time of the Chinese attacks. The teams recovered remains there believed to be those of U.S. servicemen. Analysis of the remains recovered from the sites led to the identification of several individuals, including Mason and Meyer.

Among other forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory and JPAC also used mitochondrial DNA and dental

comparisons in both Meyer's and Mason's identification.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703) 699-1420.

*NOTE: We reported the information about Pvt. Meyer in the March/April 2008 issue, p. 55.*



## There is a Wyoming Chapter

Chapter 307 - Northern Wyoming was omitted from the Chapters List included in the January/February 2008 issue. Here is the Chapter info:

State/CID	Wyoming 307 107 Rd 16 Powell, WY 82435
Department/Chapter	Northern Wyoming
President/Commander	Paul Rodriguez 307-272-3877 BeeRod54@hotmail.com

Meets: 1st Thu 7pm, VFW Post 2673, 808 12th St., Cody WY

Thanks to Chapter Treasurer Don Rudolph for being persistent enough to make sure we corrected the oversight.

## Wrong picture, right caption...or vice versa

There appeared on page 33 of the Nov/Dec 2007 issue at the very bottom of the right-hand corner a picture that starts out with CID 156. That is not the picture that goes with that caption. The correct photo and caption are below.



Some CID 156 members at the Korean War memorial at Sophia, WV (L-R) Marguerite Bowers, Joe Kartman, Jack Guy, Walter Mankins, David Frame, Chuck Shumaker, Prince Clyburn (in wheelchair), George Weidensall, Bill Wiseman, Sam Birchfield, Jim Sibray

## Val Simon is alive and well

We have learned that Val Simon, who was reported as deceased, is very much alive. The person who originally reported his death wrote, "Sorry I got the wrong information, but happy he's alive."

No doubt the reporter is not nearly as happy as Mr. Simon.