

Until They Come Back Home

Leo Copeland

Veterans Day is also called Remembrance Day. As we pause to remember and appreciate the men and women who served in the military. We hold a special feeling for the loved ones those who fought and died on foreign soil. But it is even more tragic if their bodies were never found and returned home?

You might wonder what effort is being made to find them or their remains so their families can have closure? And how long will anyone continue to search for them before giving up?

There is an organization whose purpose is to seek and find those lost soldiers. It is called JPAC. The initials stand for "Joint Pow/Mia Accounting Command." It is a joint task force, involving all branches of the military, and is within the United States Department of Defense (DOD).

JPAC's mission is to conduct global search, recovery, and laboratory operations to identify unaccounted-for Americans from past conflicts in order to account for Americans who are listed as prisoners of war, (POW), or missing in action, (MIA). The mission is to achieve the fullest possible accounting of all Americans missing as a result of the nation's past conflicts.

JPAC does extensive investigation, even diving underwater to gather evidence on missing military personnel. How long do they continue to search? Their motto is--- "Until they are home."

Major Jason Murray, the son of Jack and Judy Murray, of Seminole grew up here in Seminole, is a part of JPAC. He graduated from Seminole High in 1999, and after college and active military service in the US Army in Iraq, became a part of JPAC in 2010. He is stationed at its headquarters in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

He became the Aid-de-Camp to Army Major General Stephen Tom, commander and flag officer of JPAC, a one year

The command of JPAC passed from Major General Stephen Tom to Major General Kelly McKeague November 1,

teams whose members travel throughout the world to recover the missing from past wars. A typical recovery team is made

airplane crash, a recovery site can be quite large.

Once the recovery effort is completed, the team returns to

military plane to JPAC's Central Identification Lab, (CIL), which is the largest and most diverse forensic skeletal laboratory in the world.

Upon visiting the CIL, Judy Murray said there was table after table with bones and bone fragments, from almost complete skeleton down to just a small bone fragment or a tooth. She said everything was very orderly and the people were friendly and courteous. She also said the remains are handled with the greatest respect.

The next step is Identification. Upon arrival at the laboratory, all remains and artifacts recovered from a site are signed over to the custody of the CIL and stored in a secure area. Forensic anthropologists carefully analyze all remains and artifacts to determine the sex, race, age at death and height of the individual. Anthropologists may also analyze trauma caused at or near the time of death and pathological conditions of bone such as arthritis or previous healed breaks. Lab scientists use a variety of techniques to establish the identification of missing Americans, including analysis of skeletal and dental remains, sampling mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), and analyzing material evidence, personal effects, aviation life-support equipment or other military

See Page 4C



assignment. They travelled all over the country, and visited sites in Germany and the concentration camps in North Korea, including the infamous POW camp called "The Hanoi Hilton."

It is shocking to hear there are over 83,000 American troops who are either MIA or POW. The numbers are broken down thusly, World War II: 73,690. Korean War: 7,978. Vietnam War: 1,679. Cold War: 125. Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq War): 1. Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan War): 1.

2012. JPAC operations are divided into four areas: (1) Analysis and Investigation; (2) Recovery; (3) Identification; and (4) Closure.

Analysis and investigation involves investigating leads concerning Americans who were killed in action but were never brought home. This involves close coordination with other U.S. agencies as well as technical negotiations and talks with representatives of foreign governments.

JPAC has 17 recovery

up of 10 to 14 people, led by a team leader and a forensic anthropologist. Other members of the team typically include a team sergeant, linguist, medic, life support technician, forensic photographer, RF (Radio Frequency) Systems Communications Technician/operator and an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician. Additional experts are added to the mission as needed, such as, mountaineering specialists or divers. The team carefully excavates the site and screens (sifts) the soil to locate all possible remains and artifacts. In the case of an

Hawaii. All remains and artifacts found during recovery operation are then transported from a U.S.

Harris: from page 2C

the way. Huey Harris was one of the survivors. Many died from starvation, disease, and strafing from allied planes who, again, didn't know they were POWs. When someone was injured or too sick to walk, they would shoot him and kick his dead body out of the path and keep on marching.

When they heard running water from a spring near the path they would run to it and start drinking. The guards would beat them across the back with sticks, bayonet or whatever they had. Harris said, "we would drink until the pain became so great we couldn't bear it any more then we would go get back in line and march until we arrived at Chong Song."

Harris said, "The job of the Chinese was to brainwash the POWs hoping to make Communists out of them. They thought if a lot of GIs went home as communists, the US would become a communist state. But we could out talk them and out think them so they weren't successful." They called this Camp, "Chong Song University."

He said, "When they quit dying, there were about 800 Americans and 600 British POWs at this camp."

Huey said everyone had lice, even the Chinese. A daily routine was to pick and squash the lice off your body, or they would sap your blood from you. Harris said before they left the Camp, the Americans had wiped out all the lice by cleaning everything up.

Even though the temperature would drop to as low as minus 40 degrees in the winter they were issued only one blanket each. They learned to share. With ten to a room they huddled close, the two on the outside got two blankets each and the others overlapped their blankets. "Body heat was all that kept us from freezing to death," said Harris.

One day the Chinese loaded them all in trucks and didn't tell them anything. They had no way of knowing the Armistice had been signed and they were headed for Freedom Village. As they went up a hill there were

Chinese soldiers everywhere, but when they reached the top it was all American soldiers from there on. They were turned over to the Americans.

They were given a warm bath and clean clothes, and were interrogated to see who needed what. "There were many who were sick, and some who were crazy, others had broken bones and so forth," said Harris. They were issued necessities including Ivana toothpaste which tasted so good Huey ate his. Doctors gave them the right vitamins and minerals and advised them how and what to eat after years of starvation. Harris, seemingly, has no ill affects of his ordeal at the present time.

From Freedom Village they boarded the Marine Adder for a 14 day trip home. Huey gained from 92 to 105 pounds on this trip.

He arrived home on Sept.

6, and married Charlene Hutchings on Sept. 26. They have one daughter, Valina Holmes who lives in Lamesa and is her father's delight. He has two grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Huey was issued a Gideon Bible when he joined the army and carried it with him even though he wasn't a Christian. He thought it strange the Chinese never took his Bible away. They took most of the men's Bibles and destroyed them saying, "There is no God!" His would drop to the ground during inspection but he would pick it up when they left. He has since become a devout Christian.

In 2000 Harris received a document from Kim Dae-jong the President of the Republic of Korea thanking him for helping bring 50 years of freedom to South Korea. He is very proud of this document.



VETERANS DAY
HONORING ALL WHO SERVED



SEMINOLE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
432-758-2352
119 SE Avenue B, Seminole
VISIT US ONLINE AT
www.seminoletxchamber.org

DEFENDERS OF THE PEACE



They fought in the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, World Wars I & II, Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Korea, Iraq and Afghanistan. They are America's soldiers. Say thank you today for your freedom!

Location:
Seagraves Hwy.

Phone:
758-2487



Thank You



COURAGE

Bravery doesn't mean you aren't scared. It means you go anyway.

Carter & Co. Irrigation
Hobbs Hwy. 758-2053