



THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
2100 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2100



In reply refer to:  
I-99/01580

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS  
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF  
UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND  
READINESS  
GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (PUBLIC AFFAIRS)

SUBJECT: Disinterment Policy for the Purpose of Identification

This memorandum provides policy to guide decisions regarding the disinterment of remains of U.S. servicemen previously buried in grave sites marked "unknown."

The Department of Defense is charged with making the fullest possible accounting of personnel missing in action. Advances in forensic sciences, specifically the use of mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), now make it possible to identify certain remains previously interred yet unidentified.

A decision to disinter must be based on sufficient circumstantial and anatomical evidence which when combined with current forensic science techniques would lead to a high probability of positive identification. The process of selecting a case, evaluating it, and making a decision to disinter will be as follows:

- The Central Identification Laboratory—Hawaii (CILHI) will evaluate and prioritize cases which it believes meets this policy's criteria; CILHI will also consider cases brought to its attention by other government offices, non-governmental organizations, or families of servicemen missing in action.
- If CILHI determines there is sufficient evidence to narrow the number of potential candidates to a point where mtDNA testing offers a high probability of positive identification, the Casualty Mortuary Affairs Operations Center will coordinate with appropriate agencies to ensure it will be able to obtain the necessary mtDNA samples.
- If CILHI believes positive identification is highly probable, it will coordinate with the appropriate cemetery authority for disinterment.
- CILHI and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory will conduct the forensic testing.



- Disagreement with a CILHI decision regarding disinterment, or regarding prioritization of cases, may be appealed to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Defense Prisoner of War and Missing Personnel Affairs Office.

This policy does not apply to remains that have already been positively identified and interred.

The Department of Defense will work closely with affected families to ensure that their desires and wishes are considered when implementing this policy.

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