



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



MAY 13 1999
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 remains previously interred yet unidentified.

A decision to disinter a set of remains now marked as "unknown" 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.
- CILHI will first determine whether there is sufficient evidence to narrow the number of potential candidates to a point where mtDNA testing offers a high probability of identification. When such a determination has been made, CILHI will contact the appropriate Service Casualty/Mortuary office to obtain necessary family reference samples to conduct the testing.
- If an appropriate sample is (or will be) available, and CILHI believes identification is highly probable, CILHI will arrange with the appropriate cemetery authority for disinterment.



- CILHI and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory will conduct the forensic testing.
- Service Casualty Offices will advise the next of kin of the decision/results.

This policy does not apply to remains that have already been 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.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "W. B. Slocombe".

Walter B. Slocombe