



WWII DIVISION MEMO

Date: 18 January 2012

From: Ian Spurgeon

Re: Tasker # 2011000633, Question from family of Tec 4 Lloyd Bruntmyer

The family of Tec 4 Lloyd Bruntmyer attended the Wichita family update October 2011. In November 2011, Mr. Raymond L. Bruntmyer, brother of Tec 4 Lloyd Bruntmyer, wrote to Mr. Charles Henley of DPMO asking about the status of the case. Mr. Bruntmyer's comments and DPMO's response are provided below.

While in the one-on-one meeting with Dr Spurgeon and the young anthropologist lady [Dr. Joan Baker], it became obvious that they did not have a complete set of documents from my brother Tech 4 Lloyd Ralph Bruntmyer's IDPF. We discussed the matter and I furnished them three additional pages from the file I received back in 2003. These three pages provided information that corresponded to the dental information displayed on page 21 of the X file X-675 pertaining to remains from the grave site of my brother. After reviewing the three pages I provided, it was determined by Dr Spurgeon and the anthropologist that they were willing to reopen the identification procedure concerning my brother's remains. I would appreciate your assistance in following up on the status of that procedure.

Following the Wichita Family Update, historians from the World War II Division of DPMO obtained a complete copy of the full Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF) of Tec 4 Lloyd Bruntmyer at the Washington National Records Center in Suitland, Maryland. The dental information held by Mr. Bruntmyer was, happily, still present in the original file. Furthermore, DPMO has obtained copies of the IDPFs of eight of the ten individuals (including Tec 4 Bruntmyer) reportedly buried in grave #704 at Cabanatuan for analysis and comparison with X-files of remains recorded as individuals removed from grave #704. Those remains are currently buried as "unknowns" in the Manila American Cemetery.

Dental information found in the complete IDPF of Tec 4 Bruntmyer provides potentially important identifying details for comparison with Manila X-files, particularly Manila #2 X-675. Specifically, documents within Tec 4 Bruntmyer's IDPF note that he had white fillings on two or three upper teeth. A dental chart dated 1 February 1946 in the Manila #2 X-675 file notes that teeth on the badly eroded maxilla did reveal silicate fillings.

While these details suggest possible association between Tec 4 Bruntmyer and Manila #2 X-675, complications within the entire Cabanatuan remains recovery project after World War II, and discrepancies within X-675, created significant problems in associating unknowns recovered from the prison camp cemetery with unresolved service members. The story of the processing of Cabanatuan remains began in December of 1945 when the Cabanatuan Cemetery was disinterred and the remains were moved to U.S. Military Cemetery, Manila #2 (twelve miles north of Manila). At this time, a tooth chart was prepared for each of the recovered remains. Matching these tooth charts with original dental records proved challenging. The POW camp at

Cabanatuan was lucky enough to have a dentist. Fillings were prepared from old coins or other metals, but more often problematic teeth were simply pulled. Also, many of the malnutrition disorders caused the men's teeth to loosen and completely fall out. These factors combined to create significant changes in dentition for men during their imprisonment, causing problems for those attempting to identify remains using pre-war dental records. Despite these problems, between December of 1946 and April of 1947 Graves Registration staff identified approximately three hundred of the unknown remains from Cabanatuan. Most of these identifications were done through dental comparisons.¹

In April 1947, AGRS officers staffed newly formed Field Boards of Review established to approve identifications and laboratories were established to process all unidentified remains. If, after dental comparisons, the remains were still unidentified, they were buried in Manila #2 Cemetery as unknowns. Several hundred sets of remains received approved identifications during this time period and were buried according to the wishes of the next of kin, either in a national military cemetery or at a private cemetery of their choosing.

Beginning in the fall of 1947 and continuing through the spring of 1948, Manila #2 Cemetery was disinterred and moved to the AGRS Mausoleum at Nichols Field to create a permanent cemetery and establish a laboratory for the identification process. Here the remains from Cabanatuan were again processed and stored by embalmers. Identifications were again handled on an individual or group basis as recommended by the Field Boards of Review. Only a few identifications were completed at this time, and many of the recommended identifications put forward for review at the Memorial Division Headquarters in Washington, D.C. were disapproved with the request that further study be completed on the remains. The grounds for disapproval were based upon differences in, and/or a lack of dental data for the unknown remains from the graves in which the casualties were reportedly buried. Sadly, the use of anthropologists to facilitate proper identifications was not deemed necessary by the commanding officer of the AGRS, Philippines Command and the identifications put forward from the field were based upon the recommendations of licensed embalmers, who, while well trained in handling the dead, did not have the requisite skills for associating skeletal remains with the medical and dental records of deceased servicemen. It was determined that Army dental records of the decedents involved were "meager and incomplete" and presented a "marked similarity which would probably compare equally well with any cross-section of remains recovered from the Cabanatuan Cemetery."

In 1951 the American Graves Registration Service initiated a review of the "Cabanatuan Project" to investigate past AGRS practices in the identifications that had already been made, and to determine whether or not additional identifications might result from yet another reprocessing of

¹ Trotter, "Notes: Historical"; La Forte, *With Only the Will to Live*, 178-88; "Background Information Relating to the Identification of Remains from the Cabanatuan Prisoner of War Camp and the Reasons why the Current Project was not instigated at an Earlier Date," 25 October 1951, Declassified Classified Miscellaneous Files; Graves Registration Service; Office of the Quartermaster General; Record Group 92; National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, College Park, MD; "Notes on Conference in Washington Office with Mr. Robert E. Conn," 6-7 November 1950, Declassified Classified Miscellaneous Files; Graves Registration Service; Office of the Quartermaster General; Record Group 92; National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, College Park, MD.

the remaining unknowns. The review arose out of growing suspicion of poor standards and practices for Cabanatuan identifications. The Field Boards of Review referenced above put together identification packets suggesting both individual and group identifications for approval by the Memorial Division in Washington, D.C. The Memorial Division staff reviewed the paperwork, compared the dental and skeletal charts to the medical and dental service records of the individuals proposed for identification. Upon making this paper comparison, this staff would approve the identification, disapprove it, or request a reassessment. For the Cabanatuan cases, the staff doing the paper records comparisons found themselves increasingly at odds with the suggestions put forward from the field. As the approved identifications dwindled and requests for reassessments grew, Colonel Clearwater determined that an experienced team needed to step in and review the Cabanatuan project.

Lieutenant Colonel Abel and Dr. Mildred Trotter, both of whom had extensive prior experience in the identification laboratories of the Pacific theater, reviewed the Cabanatuan remains available in Hawaii and then moved on to the Philippines where they found that the identifications being put forward to the Memorial Division could not be further substantiated by studying the remains and the accompanying paperwork at the same time. Dr. Trotter was dismayed to learn the history of burials, disinterments, identifications, and reburials of the Cabanatuan casualties. She found the remains to be in a terribly eroded state, first from being buried and left in ground sodden with water for several years, and then from being handled too often during processing. She emphatically reported the remains to be “jumbled beyond belief,” “eroded much beyond a state that [could] be illustrated on a black-out chart,” and in “such a state of deterioration that evidence on which identification depends had been largely obliterated.”² Lieutenant Colonel Abel noted particular problems with the dentition. He found that the dental present with the remains did not match the tooth charts recorded in the file. Dr. Trotter and Lieutenant Colonel Abel declared the project a failure and recommended it be ended.

On the basis of these recommendations, and with the view that no further field work could be conducted, the Memorial Division ended the Cabanatuan project. Those families who had already been notified that the remains of their loved one had been recovered received remains for burial. The rest of the Cabanatuan POW Camp remains were permanently interred as “unknowns” in the Manila American Cemetery, Philippines.

During the above described events, Manila #2 X-675 and other remains reportedly from Cabanatuan grave #704, were disinterred, sorted, moved, and reinterred several times (resulting in three X-file designation changes). Documents in the file for Manila #2 X-675 reveal that officials analyzed the remains in February 1946, December 1947, July 1948, December 1949, March 1950, December 1950, and December 1951. Reports from this series of analyses show changes in some parts of the remains. For instance, the skeletal chart dated 2 June 1948 shows a rather complete skeleton. Less than a year later, the skeletal chart of 10 February 1949 lists the entire right leg as missing (although some bones of the right foot were present). The reason for the absence of previously recorded body parts of X-675 is not explained in the X-file, but could have been from poor disinterment practices or sorting of the skeleton and placement of some bones in a different casket.

² Ibid; and Mildred Trotter, letter to Charles Warren, 13 July 1982, T. Dale Stewart Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Museum Support Center, Suitland, MD.

Similarly, while the Manila #2 X-675 dental chart of February 1946 notes the presence of silicate fillings, later dental charts (from June 1948, December 1949, and March 1950) do not record fillings on any upper teeth. The later dental charts also show severe erosion of the maxilla and tooth loss of the X-675 remains not reflected on the February 1946 dental chart.

The exact reasons for discrepancies in the Manila #2 X-675 are not recorded in the file's documents, but may be related to the frequent handling and sorting by mortuary staff involved in the Cabanatuan remains identification project.

Final determination concerning whether or not the unknowns from the Cabanatuan POW Cemetery might be exhumed and identified using current techniques rests with the Central Identification Laboratory of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command. The extensive archival research conducted concerning these cases suggests that no individual case of an unresolved service member who was originally buried in the Cabanatuan Cemetery can be considered in isolation. Instead, the documents reveal that the procedures in place for making identifications of these individuals in the years immediately following the war were flawed and resulted in misidentifications of resolved individuals and the mixing of remains that might potentially have been identified as men still missing after their initial interment in Cabanatuan Cemetery. A modern day attempt at identification would need to consider as a whole all of the medical and dental information for every service member (regardless of their current casualty status) ever buried in the POW cemetery. Should that massive project be undertaken, Dr. Trotter's descriptions of the state of the unknown remains in 1951 suggests that it might still fail to result in the positive identification of Tec 4 Bruntmyer or any of the other still unresolved Cabanatuan cases.