



B73 The Bombing of the USS Cole: The Role of DNA in Sending Seventeen Heroes Home

Kimberly B. Murga, MFS, Demris A. Lee, MSFS, Robert M. Fisher, MSFS, Susan W. Jones, PhD, MFS, Theodore D. Anderson, MFS, Jeanne M. Willard, MFS, William C. Rodriguez III, PhD, James J. Canik, BS, Brion C. Smith, DDS, and Abubakr Marzouk, MD, Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory, 1413 Research Boulevard, Rockville, MD*

The goals of this presentation are to present the use of DNA in the identification and reassociation of remains from the USS Cole bombing.

On October 12, 2000, at 11:18 AM, a 40 X 40-foot hole was blown in the side of the USS Cole by a small harbor craft packed with explosives as it stopped in Aden, Yemen to refuel. The blast injured 39 crewmen and killed 17 U.S. sailors.

Five bodies were recovered October 12, six bodies were recovered on October 17, two bodies were recovered on October 18, and the remaining four bodies were recovered on October 19, 2000. The bodies were relatively intact; however, there were some disassociated remains from a few of the sailors. The bodies and disassociated remains were flown to Dover Air Force Base following each recovery. Specialists in the fields of forensic pathology, odontology, fingerprints, and anthropology examined all remains at Dover Air Force Base. Approximately 28 evidence samples were submitted for DNA analysis to include bone, tissue, and skin (finger stalls). Each of the 17 sailors had a reference bloodstain card stored at the AFRSSIR (Armed Forces Repository of Specimen Samples for the Identification of Remains) for comparison. Of the 17 sailors, 9 were identified via fingerprints, 14 were identified via forensic odontology, and all 17 sailors were identified via DNA analysis. Of the 28 pieces of evidence submitted for DNA testing, 22 were reassociated back to 17 sailors, 3 specimens yielded no results or insufficient data to render a conclusion, and 3 specimens were not tested due to the fact they were duplicate submissions.

In November of 2001, the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory initiated DNA testing on an additional 65 pieces of disassociated remains that were turned over to the Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner (OCME) from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). These specimens were discovered over a period of months as the USS Cole was dry-docked and repairs to the ship were underway. These specimens included bone, tissue, and teeth. Specimens were compared to the DNA results obtained from the bloodstain reference cards pulled from the Repository in October of 2000. Of the 65 additional specimens tested, 42 were reassociated back to 5 sailors, 13 specimens produced mixtures that could not be resolved, and 10 specimens tested yielded no results or insufficient data to render a conclusion. Extraneous DNA profiles that could have originated from 1 of the 2 terrorists during the attack were not discovered by AFDIL.

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Mass Disaster, References, STRs