



## Physical Anthropology Section – 2011

### H69 Recovery and Identification of a WWI American Doughboy in Rembercourt-sur- Mad, France

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The goal of this presentation is to provide the attendee with a case example involving the remarkable recovery and identification of an individual from World War I. After this presentation, attendees will gain a better understanding of the complexity of cold cases, a greater awareness of the importance of the multiple lines of evidence that are required for identification, and a heightened appreciation for community responsibility.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing an example of a successful forensic recovery in the international setting, by demonstrating how a positive identification was attained despite having multiple name associations, by broadening our understanding of factors that may influence preservation of remains, and by further demonstrating the significance of proper archaeological techniques and methodical data collection. With this case, the forensic community may gain additional approaches that can be applied to a variety of cold cases or cases in the international setting.

The Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command's Central Identification Laboratory (JPAC-CIL) has the mission to search, recover, and identify service-personnel still missing as a result of past U.S. conflicts. Anthropologists at the CIL regularly conduct recovery missions around the world related to World War II and the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. However, recoveries and identifications from earlier conflicts are uncommon. Even more uncommon are those that result in a well preserved burial of a World War I American Doughboy Marine whose identification was obfuscated by dog tags recovered with his remains that were inscribed with the name of another marine.

Shortly after a discovery by French relic hunters, JPAC was notified in September 2009 of an alleged burial of a World War I American Marine in the village of Rembercourt-sur-Mad in northeastern France. Initial verification of the plausibility of the burial involved investigation of archival records. This confirmed that the first U.S.-led offensive of the war by the American Expeditionary Forces, under the command of General John J. Pershing, occurred on September 12, 1918, at St. Mihiel, approximately 17 miles northeast of Rembercourt-sur-Mad. Among the approximately 7,000 Allied casualties were 2,000 American KIA. Forty-six U.S. Marines are memorialized at the Saint Mihiel cemetery (with 11 listed as unaccounted for).

Anthropologists from the JPAC-CIL traveled to Rembercourt-sur- Mad, France, where they recovered a superbly preserved human burial. Thirty-five kinds of artifacts were recovered from the burial; their *in situ* locations on the skeleton mimicked where they would have been worn on the body during life, including a wallet, dog tag, and badge in the front left breast pocket, a first-aid kit, shaving kit, canteen, and side arm ammunition on the hips, and six complete clips of rifle ammunition still slung across the chest. In addition, tree roots had grown, over time, through the burial site. Some had penetrated the thorax, but rather than damaging the remains, they gently moved and shifted skeletal elements. This preservation was welcome, as roots can be a very disruptive taphonomic force. All archaeological signs pointed to a considerate burial by friendly forces.

After international transport, the skeletal remains and artifacts were analyzed at the CIL. A name engraved on the badge and initials inside the wallet were consistent with one of the 11 unaccounted-for U.S. Marines, but a different person's name engraved on the dog tag warranted caution of any presumptive identification. After further investigation, and using numerous lines of evidence, the individual was identified in March 2010. Personnel records included a letter written to the individual's brother by a witness to the death incident. In that letter, the witness recounted their hasty but respectful burial of the individual, as well as a map of its location. Shortly after the war, a search for his burial using this map was unsuccessful. Ninety-two years later, his remains were found, recovered, and identified. He was buried in June 2010 in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.

#### **Cold Case, WWI American Doughboy, Presumptive Identification**