



G34 Dental Identification of World War II Remains: The Battle of Saipan, June 1944

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the role of the forensic odontologist as it applies to the identification and repatriation of decedents from the Battle of Saipan during World War II.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the importance of using dental comparison as a means of identification.

This presentation will supply a brief historical overview of the fierce fight to control a Japanese-held island in the Pacific Ocean, the disposition of American remains, and the attempt at identification and repatriation of several United States Marines. Several example cases of previously unidentified United States Marines will be cited, and the implementation of military records to positively identify previously unidentified American heroes will be shown.

The Battle of Saipan marked the beginning of the end of World War II. The second largest island in the Marianas chain is located 1,200 miles southeast of Japan. The significance of its capture by United States troops was due to the location of the base, which enabled United States bombers to fly non-stop to attack the Japanese mainland. This relatively small island, 72 square miles, was the first location that United States Marines placed foot on Japanese soil during the war. Seventy-five Landing Vehicles Tracked (LVTs), amphibious landing vehicles, attacked from the sea, carrying nearly 8,000 United States Marines on D-Day, June 15, 1944. Seven hours into the attack, having gained only 400 yards of beachfront, 2,000 Marines had been killed or wounded.

The final battle for control of the island featured the largest Banzai attack of the war, when 3,000 Japanese soldiers stormed the American positions under the cloak of darkness. By day's end, 3,500 Marines had been killed and 13,000 were wounded as the United States gained control of the island. Due to the vast number of casualties, there was little time left for proper burial and many of the deceased were placed in mass grave trenches on the beach. Several other brave men were lost at sea and their bodies never recovered.

Six years later, in 1950, the trenches were excavated, the remains disinterred, and either repatriated to the United States or reburied in the present-day Manila American Cemetery and Memorial in the Philippines.

This presentation will demonstrate the identification process utilizing antemortem and postmortem military dental records.

Forensic Odontology, Unidentified Remains, Battle of Saipan