



G23 The Recent Identification of a World War II Canadian Soldier: A Multidisciplinary Teamwork Approach

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the skills, knowledge, and techniques involved in the identification via forensic odontology of the skeletal remains of a Canadian soldier killed in action during World War II. This presentation will also discuss the challenges encountered when using forensic odontology for historical cases within the context of war.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by sharing the ongoing responsibility and commitment by the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to honor its war dead. Applying current forensic science principles to historical cases allows CAF to identify recently discovered skeletal remains of Canadian soldiers and provide their families with peace of mind that their loved ones now have a proper final resting place and a headstone with their name.

The CAF, Canadian Army Dental Corps, was established on May 13, 1915. Its time-honored tradition of operationally focused dental care, both at home and abroad, has ensured that troops, past and present, have sustained the highest level of dental fitness for virtually every military operation in peace and war. As such, the present day Royal Canadian Dental Corps (RCDC) has served overseas in both the First and Second World Wars, the Korean Conflict, and in Afghanistan, as well as during peace making, peacekeeping, humanitarian, and forensic operations.

As catastrophes are of varying degrees of magnitude, Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) resources are often rapidly exhausted. Therefore, the RCDC was called upon by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to aid in the DVI for catastrophes such as the Swiss Air Flight 111 crash in 1998, the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, and the First Air Flight crash 6560 in 2011. Following these disasters, the formation of the Canadian Forces Forensic Odontology Response Team (CF FORT) was created under the Canadian Forces Expeditionary Command as part of the Humanitarian Operations and Disaster Relief Contingency Plan.

The Department of National Defence's Director of History and Heritage (DHH) also relies upon the CF FORT to aid in the identification of Canadian soldiers discovered worldwide from former battlefields. DHH was founded in 1996 and is mandated to preserve and communicate Canada's military history and foster pride in a Canadian military heritage. Canada has a legal and moral obligation to care for newly discovered remains of servicemen and women from 20th-century wars.

The Casualty Identification Program was formally established in 2007 to respond to an increasing number of discovered human remains of the more than 27,000 Canadian war dead with no known grave from the First and Second World Wars and the Korean Conflict. The program's mandate is to identify these remains, whenever possible, through historic and scientific analytical techniques, and bury these remains. When the Casualty Identification Program's investigation is successful, identified human remains are buried with a name, by their unit, and in the presence of their family. Since its inception, the Casualty Identification Program has successfully identified 31 Canadians and helped with the identification of 19 foreign nationals.

On June 7, 2019, the partial remains of Sergeant John Albert Collis, discovered in January 2017, were reunited with his grave during a Government of Canada ceremony at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Bretteville-sur-Laize Canadian War Cemetery commemorating the 75th anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy. Sergeant Collis's immense sacrifice was recognized with his grandson, nephews, and other family members in attendance. Veterans from the Second World War, the Commander of the Canadian Army, as well as Canadian and local French dignitaries were also present to witness the interment. This positive outcome was made possible due to the strong collaborative commitment of CF FORT and the Casualty Identification Program.

Canada, Soldiers, Honor