

KOREAN WAR MIA – STATUS UPDATE

The purpose of this statement is to provide the reader with an understanding of current efforts to recover and identify missing Australian service personnel from the Korean War. It is written based on policy information as at April 2023. This is a working document to be updated as significant changes occur.

This document is intended to be read in conjunction with the [DNA Factsheet](#). The DNA Factsheet was created for families to understand the DNA Family Reference Sample (FRS) comparison process, with an emphasis on how their personal genetic information was being collected, stored, and analysed. DNA is one of the forensic methods used for identification purposes. Other approaches may include anthropological, dental and historical analysis.

The vast majority of Australia's unrecovered casualties were last believed to be in areas which are extremely difficult to access. The majority of Army losses were in what is now the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ). These are investigated by Unrecovered War Casualties-Army (UWC-A) on behalf of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The majority of Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and Royal Australian Navy (RAN) losses were over what is now the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea). These are investigated by Historic Unrecovered War Casualties-Air Force (UWC-AF) on behalf of the ADF.

Given the passage of time and complex authorities and movement of remains at the time of the armistice, it is conceivable that some Australian human remains might have been transferred to other locations. Plausible locations could include:

- the Republic of Korea (South Korea);
- North Korea;
- the DMZ between the two Koreas.
- the United Nations Memorial Cemetery Korea (UNMCK) in Busan, South Korea;
- the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP or 'the Punchbowl') in Hawaii;
- the Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii; and
- lost at sea

Republic of Korea and the RoK portion of the DMZ

The Ministry for National Defence Agency for KIA Recovery and Identification (MAKRI) is the RoK agency with authority for remains recovered within the RoK, including the southern portion of the DMZ. A Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation on remains recovery and identification has been in place with MAKRI since 2019, and is published on the UWC-A website. The United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission (UNCMAC) is the authority for access to the DMZ according to the armistice agreement.

There is one Australian serviceman with a last known location in the RoK. The circumstances of this case indicate remains were moved so excavation is not warranted. Six soldiers had a last known location in the southern portion of the DMZ. Current search efforts in the DMZ are coordinated by UNCMAC and have not yet covered areas where Australians are believed missing.

In conjunction with UNCMAC, MAKRI has conducted demining and recovery operations in the DMZ since 2019. No recovery sites to date have been in the vicinity of any Australian

MIA last known location. The ADF maintains ongoing liaison with UNCMAC and MAKRI for visibility of this ongoing process. The ADF continues research into the events in which service personnel went missing in order to be prepared for the possibility of future access.

Since 2020, MAKRI has held Australian FRS DNA profiles for missing service personnel. These will be compared against remains recovered in the RoK in future that are believed to be Australian or allied.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the DPRK portion of the DMZ

Demining and recovery operations were planned to include the DPRK and the northern portion of the DMZ as part of the Comprehensive Military Agreement, however the DPRK has not participated. Access to the northern portion of the DMZ, and the remaining last known locations of RAAF and RAN aircrew in the DPRK are dependent on diplomatic relationships with the DPRK. The ADF continues research into the events in which service personnel went missing in order to be prepared for the possibility of future access for archives and searches in those locations, or in the event of future turnovers of remains from the DPRK.

United National Memorial Cemetery Korea - Busan

The United Nations is the authority for remains within the UNMCK. There are no graves in the UNMCK that are classified as unidentified Australians. The ADF continues to conduct investigations on allied unknown graves based on examination of available historical, anthropological and dental information. The ADF has extensively considered a proposal that there may be an Australian among four unidentified allied service personnel. This investigation concluded it was extremely unlikely an Australian was among the four. The ADF has actively considered all unidentified British service members and compared them to the missing Australian service personnel. No compelling case to link a missing Australian to an unidentified British grave has yet been found.

National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific - Hawaii

The NMCP contains unidentified US remains from Korea, as well as remains returned from the DPRK after the armistice in July 1953 (Operation GLORY). There are no remains that were buried classified as Australian.

It is possible that an Australian may have been misclassified as a US service member and repatriated to the NMCP. The ADF maintains close liaison with US authorities to manage this possibility.

The Defence POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) is the US agency with authority for US remains. An MoU for recovery and identification collaboration has been in place between the ADF and DPAA since 2018, and this is published on the UWC-A website. DPAA holds Australian FRS profiles for missing service personnel.

A systematic disinterment program commenced at the NMCP in 2018. This is a seven-phase operation over several years, phased according to the recovery location. More detailed information is available on the [DPAA website](#) under NMCP Disinterment Program

and the Korean War Identification Project. Phases six and seven offer the highest potential for identifying remains that may be Australians.

As remains are progressively processed they are added to the mass comparison DNA database. In the mass comparison process, every sample is compared against every collected mitochondrial DNA FRS. This process occurs multiple times per year to include new samples. Where there is sufficient commonality of genetic information, these are further investigated using y-chromosome FRS.

Central Identification Laboratory (CIL)

The CIL is a team within the US Defense Department's DPAA. They conduct the scientific analysis of recovered remains believed to be unidentified US service personnel. This includes those disinterred from NMCP, those found in the field and those handed over by other nations. Samples to date have been taken from remains handed over by the DPRK since the conclusion of Operation GLORY in 1954, including as recently as 2018. These are included in the mass comparison database process outlined above.

Lost at sea

One RAN aviator has a last known location over water off the coast of North Korea. Another RAN aviator was known to be killed, and his body buried at sea at a known location per naval custom at the time. One soldier has a last known location aboard a merchant troopship sailing from Japan to Hong Kong.