

PROJECT RECOVER

How To Research Your Family's MIA:

First Three Steps

Many families want to research their family's MIA (Missing in Action) service member but don't know if it is possible or where to start. Project Recover has had the privilege of attending the funerals of several repatriated World War II MIAs, including [ARM2c Rybarczyk](#), [AOM2C Sharninghouse](#), and [LT. Punnell](#).

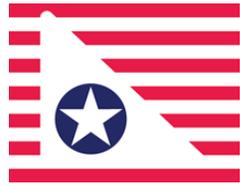
Locating an MIA is possible, profound, and still statistically rare. Still, it is very possible to learn more about your family's MIA. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) is the government agency responsible for the recovery, identification, and repatriation of MIAs and POWs from past wars and conflicts. While they encourage interested families to take action, they caution against false hope.

"Our mission incorporates 82,000 who have not been accounted for. Nearly early 75% of those are lost in the Indo-Pacific. About 41,000 are assumed to be lost at sea. Approximately 34,000 of those are considered recoverable. The rest are deep water losses and not recoverable," according to Chuck Prichard of the DPAA.

First Three Steps

1) Call Service Casualty Office

Call the relevant [Service Casualty Office](#) for your family's MIA. They are friendly, engaging, and it is their job to work with families around the death of a loved one. Every branch of service has one. When you call, they will first determine how you are related to the MIA. After that, you are free to request the Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF) for your family's MIA. Though it was once classified information, the IDPF now can be released to a designated family member. The IDPF may contain information including Missing Aircraft Crew Report (MACR), Aircraft Accident Report (AAR), death certificate, letters, maps, eye-witness reports, and perhaps even personal effects. Phone numbers are listed below.



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2) Attend DPAA Family Meeting

[Register to attend a DPAA family meeting](#). DPAA holds eight meetings throughout the year in major metropolitan areas. The family meeting provides general information for the community as well as information for individual needs. If you're researching your family's MIA, you can plan for a one-to-one meeting with a government official at the family meeting. Ask your Service Casualty Office for more information. Generally, the meetings have 150-200 attendees with approximately 30 government officials present. They talk about what is happening regarding MIA/POW accounting, and what you can do. You may also get a chance to hear from families who have been through the process. Dennis Kelvie, the nephew of a recently repatriated WWII pilot, spoke at a DPAA family meeting to share his experience with other families and encourage them to 'not give up hope.'

3) Submit a DNA sample

There is a sense of urgency around collecting DNA samples. Family DNA samples are extremely valuable in helping the DPAA identify remains, and time is running out. Many MIAs died fatherless, and generations from WWII and the Korean War are quickly dying out. The DPAA keeps a DNA sample on file so they can identify as many MIA/POW remains as efficient as possible. The larger their database of DNA samples, the more remains they can identify. Submitting a DNA sample involves simply swabbing the inside of one's cheek and is a painless procedure. While cheeks swabs are preferred, it is also possible to submit a DNA sample from an MIA's personal effects, for instance from the envelope of a letter your MIA sent home or perhaps his service cover (hat). The DPAA has compiled an exhaustive page on [DNA FAQ's](#)

Files & Forms: What to Look For

Initially, families will want to fill in all the basic information about their family's MIA and the circumstances of their death, such as:

- **Aircraft type, name, and serial number** (or other vehicle/vessel if applicable)
- **Crew members names, rank, position**
- **Mission reports / details**
- **Crash and/or eyewitness reports**
- **Location / Geographic details**
- **Military acronyms** can be confusing in the routine of modern life. Going back in history 50 or 75 years can be even more complicated. It's important to keep track of and organize your information. The following are the files and forms that are most informative.



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- **Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF)** – The file may contain documents such as death certificates, letters, and perhaps even personal effects.
- **Missing Aircraft Crew Report (MACR)** – This report may include details of the crew, aircraft, mission, eye-witness reports, and maps. The MACR of a crash with many affiliated MIAs may be filed in the pilot's IDPF.
- **Aircraft Accident Report (AAR)** – This report may contain more information about the accident.

Will You Find Your Family's MIA?

It is possible to locate an MIA — and it is a long shot. The first step is to contact your Service Casualty Office. They will track down any reports associated with the name of the service member. It can take months to track down associated reports. The size of the file you ultimately receive varies.

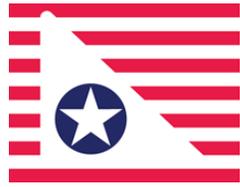
As you learn more about your family's MIA, the Service Casualty Office will determine if your family's MIA falls into the group of 34,000 MIAs whose remains are potentially recoverable. If so, then they may talk to you about anticipated missions, if any, planned for the relevant area. There is a myriad of details that must dovetail to make a mission possible, including budget, geography, weather, and current projects. Again, the DPAA cautions against false hope.

Forensic Archaeology Takes Time

Regardless of the circumstances, this process takes time. It may take months to receive the IDPF. Accounting for your family's MIA typically takes years to accomplish, if it is possible at all. The Kelly family spent 5 years researching and collaborating before Project Recover located the B-24 submerged under 213 feet of water. It will take more time to see if DPAA is willing and/or able to embark on the process of recovery, identification, and repatriation of the remains.

After you've done all you can do, be prepared to wait. The science of locating, recovering, and identifying human remains from conflicts around the world is time and labor intensive — and there are many. Recently, for example, the remains of 388 sailors who died aboard the USS Oklahoma in WWII were exhumed. The DPAA is involved in the process of piecing together skeletal remains for identification.

The medical examiner makes a positive identification based on a multitude of factors, not just one. Both the historical evidence, such as witness reports, and all the available material evidence, such as dental records, medical background, and uniform, must align.



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Service Casualty Office Phone Numbers

If your family has a loved one who is listed as Missing In Action, call the appropriate Service Casualty Office. They will guide you through the first steps.

U.S. Air Force: (800) 531-5501 – The Air Force was formed in 1947 so WWII servicemen in the Army Air Corps are handled by the U.S. Army Casualty Office.

U.S. Army: (800) 892-2490

U.S. Marine Corps: (800) 847-1597

U.S. Navy: (800) 443-9298

State Department: (202) 485-6106

More DPAA Links

Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has other helpful links on their website. Some of those links follow.

[Frequently Asked Questions](#) – DPAA's answers to frequently asked questions regarding POW/MIAs and efforts to bring them home.

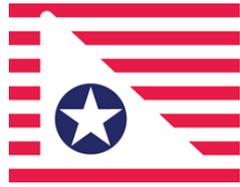
[Service Personnel Not Recovered Following World War II](#) – DPAA's list of missing service members from World War II.

[New Family Member Orientation Handbook](#) – DPAA's 38-page handbook to familiarize you with organizations and specialists that are working to resolve the POW/MIA issue.

More Project Recover Links

Project Recover is honored to help bring recognition to those who served and sacrificed and closure to their families. Following are some other articles you may find helpful and interesting as you research your family's MIA.

[Finding 'Heaven Can Wait': Family Shares MIA Research](#) – This Project Recover article reveals the steps that the Kelly Family Research Team took to research the possible location of the downed B-24, Heaven Can Wait. After five years of research, they turned their findings over to Project Recover which located the B-24 in October 2017.



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How To Research Your Family's MIA:

DEEPER RESEARCH:

MIA Research Links: Here are some links and easily accessible websites where you can research different aspects of your family's MIA:

www.aviationarchaeology.com/src/db.asp - This website has small summaries of aircraft accidents and World War II losses from all services. It is a tremendously helpful place to start if you do not know much about your family member's unit, aircraft, or location of loss.

www.fold3.com - With a subscription, you can research your MIA's Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) or After Action Reports (AARs) of the Navy, as well as Air Force photographs and hundreds of other military-related collections.

www.ancestry.com - With a subscription, you can research your MIA in the context of birth, death, and census records. You can also find things like Marine Corps Muster Rolls and the official Roster of World War II Dead here.

www.newspapers.com - With a subscription, you can research newspaper articles where your family member may be remembered or have news about their life and death.

www.abmc.gov/database-search - Here, you can see which memorial wall has your family member's name. You can also find unit information and the date of death. This only covers those who were buried in American Battlefield Monuments Commission cemeteries or those who are missing and buried at sea and does not include all deaths from World War II.

www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/ - Here, you can read publicly available histories and reports from World War II.

<https://gravelocator.cem.va.gov/index.html> - Here, you can research your family member's gravesite if they were buried in a Veterans Administration (VA) cemetery.

www.pacificwrecks.com/ - Here you can research the available information on the majority of U.S. losses in the Pacific. There are also photographs of airfields and major targets in World War II.

<https://catalog.archives.gov/> - This is the catalog of the National Archives. Searching this catalog is just the beginning of your research at NARA. It will guide you to the types of files available, but it does not necessarily reflect all of the archives available to the public, because many of those finding aids have not been digitized for this system.

www.Airforcehistoryindex.org - This is a complicated database of the holdings at the Air Force Historical Research Agency. It is difficult to navigate at times, but it will ultimately show you the IRIS and other registration numbers of archival records that can be pulled (or in some cases even e-mailed!) when you request them. It may take a trip to Montgomery, Alabama, but they are still the safe keeper of the USAAF's records from World War II.