



News Release

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Fulfilling Our Nation's Promise USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted-For From World War II To Be Buried With Full Military Honors

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WASHINGTON— The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced today that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, accounted-for from World War II are being returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

Navy Radioman 2nd Class Walter H. Backman, 22, of Wilton, North Dakota, accounted for on [July 17, 2017](#), will be buried May 28 in Batavia, Illinois. On Dec. 7, 1941, Backman was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Backman.

From December 1941 to June 1944, Navy personnel recovered the remains of the deceased crew, which were subsequently interred in the Halawa and Nu'uaniu Cemeteries.

In September 1947, tasked with recovering and identifying fallen U.S. personnel in the Pacific Theater, members of the American Graves Registration Service (AGRS) disinterred the remains of U.S. casualties from the two cemeteries and transferred them to the Central Identification Laboratory at Schofield Barracks. The laboratory staff was only able to confirm the identifications of 35 men from the USS Oklahoma at that time. The AGRS subsequently buried the unidentified remains in 46 plots at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP), known as the Punchbowl, in Honolulu. In October 1949, a military board classified those who could not be identified as non-recoverable, including Backman.

In 2003, a single casket associated with the USS Oklahoma attack was disinterred from the Punchbowl, however laboratory analysis revealed the remains to be highly commingled. In April 2015, the Deputy Secretary of Defense issued a policy memorandum directing the disinterment of unknowns associated with the USS Oklahoma. On June 15, 2015, DPAA personnel began exhuming the remains from the NMCP for analysis.

To identify Backman's remains, scientists from DPAA and the [Armed Forces Medical Examiner System](#) used mitochondrial (mtDNA) and autosomal (auSTR) DNA analysis, as well as circumstantial evidence and laboratory analysis, to include dental comparisons and anthropological analysis.

Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, more than 400,000 died during the war. Currently there are 72,917 service members (approximately 26,000 are assessed as possibly-recoverable) still unaccounted for from World War II. Backman's name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the Punchbowl, along with the others who are missing from WWII. A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for Americans who went missing while serving our country, visit the DPAA website at www.dpaa.mil, find us on social media at www.facebook.com/dodpaa or call (703) 699-1420/1169.