

WITNESSES ASSIST IN IDENTIFYING REMAINS OF A MISSING DESERTER

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On March 27, 1971, a private in the United States Army disappeared near Tinh Binh village, Quang Ngai Province, Republic of [South] Vietnam. At the time, he was pulling guard duty on a landing zone. When he failed to report to duty on March 28, his unit declared him Absent Without Leave (AWOL), and on April 25, 1971 his unit declared him Deserter.

In April 1988, remains were returned to the United States from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) consisting of thirty boxes presumed to contain remains on U.S. servicemen lost during the Vietnam War. The remains were taken to the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii (CILHI), where forensic anthropologists and odontologists analyzed them. Analysis of the remains from one of the boxes suggested that they were most likely those of an adult Negroid male who stood approximately 66.4-73.8 inches tall. Dental remains included eight unrestored teeth, one restored tooth, and fragments of the maxilla and mandible. Documentation from the S.R.V. indicated that these remains were recovered from Son Tinh District, Nghia Binh Province. Since the private above had been declared a deserter, CILHI did not have his records to make a comparison as they do for most unaccounted—for personnel that are carried as Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered (KIA/BNR). The link between Private John Doe* and the remains came from interviews with Vietnamese.

In February 1998, a report from the Vietnamese Office for Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP) uncovered some background for the aforementioned remains. According to several individuals, the Vietnamese Communist Forces (Viet Cong) captured a young Black, American soldier after he had left the American base near Tinh Binh village. He was shot and buried in the Son Tinh District of Quang Ngai Province; later the remains were disinterred and turned over to officials of the S.R.V. Based on the information obtained from the VNOSMP, the osseous remains were tentatively associated with an unaccounted—for Negroid soldier and possibly Private John Doe.

In May 1998, the CILHI collected six osseous samples from the remains and sent them to the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) for mitochondrial DNA analysis. The samples consisted of portions of the right humerus, right ulna, right femur, right tibia, right fibula, and the frontal bone. Four of the specimens gave 535 bp of sequence that was consistent with one another; two specimens yielded inconclusive results. The sequence obtained from the four reported specimens is unique within the SWGDAM database of 4142 individuals. References from two maternal relatives of the private were found to be consistent with the four specimens. Anthropological, odontological, and mtDNA analysis were all consistent in associating the remains with Private John Doe.

*Name has been changed to protect the privacy of the family.

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