

HEADQUARTERS  
AMERICAN GRAVES REGISTRATION SERVICE  
CHINA ZONE

APC 917  
5 April 1947

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SUBJECT: A.G.R.S. Teams to tackle most difficult missions in completion of their task in China. Report on obstacles entailed in finding plane crashes.

Intensifying field operations to complete the most arduous, and as yet unfinished missions of American Graves Registration Service, Colonel C. F. Kearney, Chief of China Zone, announced today that search and recovery teams are now girding for some of the most difficult and dramatic recoveries of American war dead in the organization's history.

Major areas of operation, Kearney said, will be Kweilin and Hankow, former landmarks of bomb bounding air thrusts at the Japanese. While search and recovery teams in the past have undergone extreme travail in reaching the remains of heroic dead, it is anticipated these last remaining crash recoveries will require the utmost endurance, brawn and Chinese patience.

Team leaders will have to rely on their own ingenuity at times in finding their way through sketchily mapped areas, building their own rafts or makeshift bridges or hiring sampans, and climbing steep upgrade mountains.

Before search teams are sent to the farflung scenes of air crashes of long process of checking and compiling clues of reported plane losses is undergone at Shanghai Headquarters. Ofttimes this does not serve as an invisible arrow leading the grave registration men to the spot. Not long ago a plane wreckage was sought in a mountainous area where the pilot made his last radio report. Nothing was found. Weeks afterward the plane's crumpled remains were found about 200 miles away, the pilot apparently having flown that far before attacked by the enemy or the plane crashed through engine failure.

An unusual case in the exact reverse is on file. A wartime plane bound for Shanghai was reported to have crashed in the sea. Some time later, a report came through that an intercepted Japanese code radio message told of a plane crashing on a small unnamed island off the central coast of China.

Some measure of the great problem confronting A.G.R.S. Teams might be drawn from the comparatively recent crash of a

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CNAC plane in the Chungking area. Although the disaster occurred in a fairly well known area and the airline had complete details of its location, it took a salvage expedition three weeks to traverse 100 miles to the stricken plane.

Add these physical handicaps to a delay of several years, war harrowing years; the fear of Chinese magistrates to keep complete records of American plane crashes under threat of death by the Japanese; the discrepancies of military records and the current civil war which has blocked teams from strife ruptured areas.

As though these obstacles weren't enough, at one time the Americans had to cope with bandits who would kidnap buried bodies and hold them for ransom. When the Americans ceased paying rewards for the bodies, the bandits stopped robbing graves and resumed business as usual!

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AMERICAN GRAVES REGISTRATION SERVICE  
CHINA ZONE

For Immediate Release

9 January 1947

SUBJECT: AGRS soldier thrown from horse returning from mission in Hump area, suffers wrist fracture, administers morphine to himself and rides three days before receiving medical aid.

Heavy rain beat down dismally on the solemn little caravan threading its way along a treacherous mountain trail of the Hump not far from the Burma border. The small Mongolian horses picked their way carefully. On their backs were strapped wooden boxes containing the remains of American airmen whose plane had crashed midway on its wartime mission across the Hump.

Leading the group was an American Corporal from American Graves Registration Service, a Chinese interpreter from Yunnan Province and a number of guides furnished by the magistrate of the small mountain village where the search party had assembled. The men were fully armed having been warned of fierce mountain bandits inhabiting the area, bandits who killed first and robbed afterward.

Suddenly the short legged pony carrying the Corporal slipped and fell throwing its rider headlong on the narrow mountain trail. The Corporal lay stunned for a second, then slowly, painfully rose to his feet. His arm was injured and he winced as he examined the bones of his wrist. Fractured. The pain was excruciating. That wrist was already scarred, memento of a ghastly shrapnel wound suffered in Normandy. Flesh had been grafted to the wrist and it had always been sensitive. Now --

"Hand me the musette bag," he gasped turning to his interpreter. In the bag was a pack of combat morphine. In a few seconds he injected his leg with the pain numbing drug and after resting a while, climbed back on his horse.

"Come on," he ordered, "let's get going. We've still got a long way to go."

They rode three days before arriving in a mountain village where by chance they found an UNRRA doctor who treated the Corporal's arm. After a few days the group returned to Team Hdgs where the soldier's wrist was treated at a missionary hospital.

Because of the complicated nature of the injury the wrist failed to heal properly and last week the Corporal was flown into Shanghai for X-ray and special treatment.

Discussing the mission with his commanding officers at the Race Course headquarters of AGRS, the Corporal made scant mention of his accident but told with interest how his small party had found its way through the remote mountain passes by following primitive caravans of merchants who, just as in historic antiquity, were transporting their wares from village to village.

Enroute to the burial site his party had been housed and fed through the generous hospitality of local Chinese magistrates. The AGRS group roused a feeling of great concern among the people who crowded around to warn the fearless young American who only smiled at their warnings of murderous bandits on the mountain trails.

When the party finally arrived at the scene of the crash, the Corporal found the bodies of his countrymen had been buried by a German missionary who lived nearby. The graves were marked and the bodies were identified after careful investigation. One clue to identification was an American dollar bill marked with the typewritten name of its deceased owner.

ARMY GRAVES REGISTRATION SERVICE

Shanghai Headquarters  
11 December 1946

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

One of the most humane and dignified missions of American troops in China, the recovery of its heroic dead temporarily laid to rest in remote and primitive areas of Manchuria, has been temporarily concluded.

Increased tension in the political situation and the numbing, ground-freezing severity of Manchurian winter have caused the suspension of Army Graves Registration Service field team activity in that treasured part of China for whose possession nations have for historic ages waged slaughtering warfare.

Search and Recovery and Cemetery teams left the Northeast with a gratifying record of 47 bodies recovered from isolated villages and 252 remains disinterred from the Mukden POW cemetery.

Cooperation in terms of physical participation in grave removals and true Chinese hospitality proffered with great "face," dinners, speeches and toasts were everywhere accorded the teams. In some areas Chinese refused money for their assistance but were proud to receive impressively chopped letters of thanks. In one small farm village a brass band welcome hailed the approach of the AGRS jeep and over 1,000 school children lined the streets to stare at the first Americans most of them had ever seen.

Newspaper advertisements for information on burial grounds of American airmen furnished many accurate clues, in one case leading to the recovery of 11 bodies of a B 29 crew massed in a common grave.

Recovery missions throughout the Northeast were adventurous and arduous. On one trip heavy rains had completely flooded a wide road crossing and the S & R team was forced to swim across to a grave site on the opposite side. The return trip was even more difficult as the American fliers' remains had to be floated on hastily contrived log rafts to the other side.

The team lieutenants, his two sergeants and the Chinese Police Chief swam across with the raft, acting as human propellers. Three of these amphibious crossings were made before the mission was complete.

The AGRS Cemetery team entered Mukden early in May of this year to exhume the POW burial ground at Camp Hoten, just outside the city.

It was learned very accurate records of prisoners' identity, date and cause of death were kept, possibly by fellow prisoners. Cremated remains of victims who died in Korea or enroute to the internment camp were found in porcelain urns. Inside the lid the prisoner's name serial number and Army-Navy or Marine identification were meticulously listed. Bodies recovered were shipped to Shanghai for repatriation to a permanent military cemetery overseas or in the States. Also recovered from the POW cemetery were the bodies of two English soldiers and one Australian. Their remains were shipped to Shanghai and turned over to British authorities.

Before the cemetery was disinterred, Memorial Day services were conducted with the assistance of two Catholic missionary priests from Mukden. The cemetery that day was a scene of tranquility and irony. Just beyond the burial ground where rows of white crosses were erected in sad comradry, the Japanese Peace Monument, raised after the Manchurian Incident, stood out white and perfidious against the blue sky.

The AGRS Manchurian mission has not been completely closed. One more bomber crash will be investigated when conditions permit a field team to re-enter the area.

ARMY GRAVES REGISTRATION SERVICE

Shanghai Headquarters  
Office of PRO  
Race Course  
Shanghai, China

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The young American Lieutenant was embarrassed.

Here was a situation all right. How to Win Friends and Influence Chinese Officials! He didn't dare offend the feelings of the smiling and proud little group from the nearby Manchurian village.

The lieutenant turned to his Chinese-American GI interpreter.

"Sarge," he said quickly, "for the love o' mike think of the politest, most face saving excuse in Chinese lingo. Explain that we are a Search and Recovery Team from Army Graves Registration Service and our job is to remove all American dead from former battle areas and return their bodies for shipment to a permanent burial site."

"Tell them they've sure erected a beautiful memorial here and we're awfully sorry to knock it all apart..."

As the sergeant began his most effusive apologies and explanations, the lieutenant appraised the well made burial compound erected in honor of two American airmen with funds donated by hundreds of local school children.

The bodies of these two airmen lost on a B-29 bombing raid in Manchuria, had been recovered and buried under cover of darkness in defiance of a Japanese mandate threatening torture or death for removal of American dead. A secret and accurate record was kept of the crash and the unmarked burial spot. After V-J day local officials returned to dedicate the ground where the two brave "meg-wah" (American) heroes lay.

The milling crowd of jet-eyed round faced youngsters and their parents had been proud and gratified that American comrades of the two stranger heroes should see how they, humble Chinese farm folk, had paid homage to foreign dead with all the ancient Chinese tradition of ceremony and reverence.

Now silence fell over the little group standing by the two brick monuments marked with white French style crosses at the head of each grave.

The sergeant looked imploringly at the officer.

And then a slight, solemn-faced scholarly Chinese stepped forward. He was the local high school principal. It was he who had composed the elaborate, deep-felt eulogy inscribed on a tablet opposite the grave.

He spoke slowly in English with the careful precision of a headmaster and the courtesy of a Chinese.

"We are very sorry," he began, "to lose the American heroes we had hoped to shelter in our soil forever. But we can appreciate the deep emotions of relatives in their far away homeland. It does not matter if you take their bodies away. Their brave spirits will be enshrined here in our humble memorial.

Agreement was mutual and the disinterment proceeded.

Before the AGRS Team departed this picturesque Northeastern village they were invited to represent America in the local celebration of the Double Seventh holiday. Each of the three team members was called on to make a speech to the assembled, eager faced throng. Dinners, more speeches and toasts of good will to peoples of our two countries followed.

When the jeep finally departed with the remains of the airmen packed in a trailer, all the school children and their families were there to watch them go.

The lieutenant waved to them. In his pocket he carried a copy of the high school principal's memorial. It had impressed him deeply and when he submitted his official report of the mission he included a copy of it in its entirety.

"American knights got very much damages in materials and spirits in the battle to free Manchuria of slavery and oppression," it went..... "we shall not forget these heroes who for the purpose of accomplishing their great work and holy doctrine threw off their precious bodies in such a strange place, far, far away from their country. How pitiful and sorrowful these heroes are..."

This is one of many instances where Chinese have accorded ceremonious burials for American bomber crewmen lost in remote and often primitive areas of China never before penetrated by white men.

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