



Photo from the Battle of Tarawa (National Archives #80-G-57405)

“You Are Forgotten,” Claims a Veteran of the 79,200 MIAs OF WWII

Malibu, CA, July 21, 2009 – Leon Cooper, a WWII Naval officer who took part in six battles during his three years in the Pacific, says the above headline is America’s Shame. According to the Department of Defense, there are currently 88,000 missing and unknown American military dead from WWII, Korea and Vietnam, with 90% from WWII, 8% from Korea and 2% from Vietnam.

Sadly, each year the Military recovers the remains of only 25 dead per year from all three wars combined. The Department of Defense estimates that 24,000-35,000 are still “recoverable,” so it is idle to speculate when, if ever, the job will be finished.

The Department’s policy, such as it is, gives priority to the recovery of the dead from the most recent wars. Thus, those killed in Iraq and Afghanistan are repatriated first. According to Leon Cooper, “All wars prior to Vietnam are considered ‘Ancient Wars,’ in the Department’s arcane classification system. It is contemptible to treat the recoverable dead of WWII as if they were fossilized remains.”

The Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) is the organization in the Department of Defense that is in charge of the recovery program, with the actual recovery and identification conducted by Joint Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Account Command (JPAC).

Cooper’s new award-winning documentary, “Return to Tarawa: The Leon Cooper Story”, narrated by acclaimed actor Ed Harris, and recently shown on the Military Channel, Hulu and SnagFilms, offers proof that the remains of more than one hundred Americans still lie in unmarked graves in Betio, the island where the battle of “Bloody Tarawa” was fought in 1943. One of the unrecovered casualties was Lt. Bonnyman, a Congressional Medal of Honor winner.

Cooper produced his film because he grew tired of urging the “usual suspects” in Washington to take necessary action in Tarawa. Typical of the government’s seeming indifference to the recovery of the dead of WWII, Cooper points to a 1946 US Army report of the “Graves Registration Company” which claimed that “only 49% of the bodies said to be interred in the Tarawa atoll were actually located... (while admitting)... that there were said to be more remains present in Tarawa, but they were impossible to locate because the burial places were not marked in any way.” The government has done nothing since.

Tarawa was Cooper’s first battle experience. He was a Navy landing craft officer taking assault troops to the beaches of that Japanese island stronghold. The film offers a window of those three days of savagery – during which more than 6,000 men were killed. The film shows the aftermath of the battle and explains what Cooper wants the government to do about the remains of the American dead, the garbage on Red Beach

and the live ammunition scattered among the relics of that ancient battle.

Mr. Cooper is available for interview. For further information visit his Web sites at:

- ▶ <http://www.returntotarawa.net/>
DVD of his documentary "Return to Tarawa : The Leon Cooper Story" is available here.
- ▶ <http://www.90daywonder.net/>

Leon Cooper's blog:

- ▶ <http://www.90daywonder.org/>

Watch the entire documentary at:

- ▶ Hulu
<http://www.hulu.com/watch/74507/return-to-tarawa>
- ▶ SnagFilms
http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/return_to_tarawa
- ▶ Indiepix
<http://www.indiepixfilms.com/film/3774>

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