



A MARINE IS NEVER LEFT BEHIND: ON TARAWA OUR JOB ISN'T DONE



The 76-hour battle to seize the island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll resulted in the deaths of over 1,200 Marines and sailors and over 5,000 Japanese and their Korean conscripts. On D+3, November 23, 1943 the weapons fell silent. For urgent health reasons, mass graves were dug using bull dozers. Large ones had Americans at one end and Japanese/Koreans at the other end. Smaller regimental graves were built nearby where the men fell. Last fall *Follow Me* detailed what transpired in the six decades since the end of that battle, particularly where island construction took place above and within those graves. In this feature *Follow Me* will cast a light on the difficulties that will be encountered in the speedy return of the remains to the men's homes.

By Dave Brown

On June 28, 2011 *Follow Me*, Mark Noah—the intrepid, tenacious friend of the Second Marine Division Association who had led many teams to Betio in the past four years—and two of his colleagues visited the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) at the Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, in Hawaii. We had the opportunity to convince the JPAC commander, MG Steven Tom, and his staff that the motives of Noah's scientists, historians and grave detection investigators regarding the men buried in Tarawa mass graves align directly with JPAC's motto, *DONEC SINT DOMI: Until They Are Home*. It is crucial that Association members know more about JPAC, our host on June 28th, who will bring home the warriors buried on the island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll in 1943. This knowledge will give us all

some perspective on the enormity of project.

To begin with, JPAC cannot afford to err when it comes to the identification of a serviceman's remains. They are driven by caution to prevent anything similar to that what happened at Arlington National Cemetery involving mismanagement, poor record-keeping and other burial and misidentification issues. At the same time the JPAC staff receives intense pressure from Congress, relatives and friends clamoring to expedite the return of the remains of loved ones in order to bury the serviceman and give them closure. Their caution and extreme thoroughness consumes, perhaps, too much time and has lead members of Congress to urge them to begin working with competent Non Government Organizations (NGOs).

Research and Analysis

JPAC's mission to recover and identify our missing servicemen begins with research and analysis. Military and civilian intelligence analysts and research historians review extensive case files to examine the circumstances of loss for each case. Information from primary and secondary source documents to include survivor interviews, Search and Rescue Logs, war era imagery, statements from local witnesses and foreign archival materials are analyzed to generate leads for field investigation teams.

JPAC Investigation Teams deploy worldwide to locate incident sites associated with missing American personnel and to assess each site's potential to yield remains. The investigative teams are sourced from JPAC detachments headquartered in Bangkok (Thailand), Hanoi (Vietnam), Vientiane (Laos) and Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, (Hawaii). The latter detachment is the home base of the team members when they are not deployed. Teams are sent all over the world, to include Europe, Africa, and India.

The 11 year-old command is comprised of 400 handpicked soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, civilians, and contractors. Their operations are divided into phases involving research, investigation, recovery and identification.

At any given time there are 700 active case files under investigation—Tarawa being one of them. In the search for missing persons, analysts, historians, and scientists investigate sources ranging from archives of the US and foreign governments, families of the missing Americans, and potential local witnesses. Due to the isolated locations of missing servicemen, four-to-nine person investigative teams include communication specialists, linguists and medics.



Dave Brown, JPAC's MG Steven Tom, History Flight's Mark Noah, JPAC's Johnnie Webb Jr., History Flight's Jennie Sturm, History Flight's Marc Flagg.