

19 October 2012

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

My name is Ronald L. Croft, Jr. I enlisted in the US Army in April 1944 (11108605). I received a Commission at Fort Benning, GA as a Second Lieutenant (Infantry) in October 1945 (01339145). With the war having ended, I volunteered to serve as a Graves Registration Officer, and after GR training at the Quartermaster School at Camp Lee, VA, I was deployed to the European Theater of Operations in December 1945. I continued that service in Europe until my demobilization in March 1947.

In the ETO, I was assigned to the American Graves Registration Command, Second Field Command, 531st QM Group - which operated in Northern France, Belgium, and Holland. I was initially assigned to one of several small composite field Detachments, which typically consisted of four Lieutenants and approximately 20 to 25 enlisted men. My primary specific assignment was as the Disinterment and Identification Officer. We also had temporary help from a TDY American War Department Civilian Identification Specialist; and a small group of indigenous civilian interpreters. Each detachment was assigned, and deployed to a specific geographic area (approximately the size of an average U.S. county, e.g.).

Our mission was to conduct a complete search of our assigned area for any American or Allied personnel who were killed or missing in action (KIA or MIA); to locate and recover the remains; identify the remains (to the extent possible); investigate and document any and all information pertinent to the case; and prepare the remains for transfer to the appropriate US Military cemetery. Certain ID criteria would allow us to make "positive" identification (E.G. Dog Tags worn around the neck). Other valid, but less positive criteria (E.G. ID in a pocket or wallet, and also corroborating clothing marks, etc.) could, when combined without contradiction, also constitute "Positive ID". The identification procedures at the field level were prescribed by directives and/or Standard Operating Procedures and all concerned were careful to ensure that they were followed explicitly.

The cognizant cemetery issued a "Block" of "X-numbers" to the Field Detachments, which could be assigned by the Detachments to keep track of each set of remains that could not be positively identified at the field level. With respect to trying to identify an "Unknown", we would investigate all possible leads, and compare those leads to information in a booklet which listed all MIAs, in an attempt to find a "Probable" or "Possible" identification match. With each set of remains, whether positively identified, or whether assigned an "X-number", the same care was taken to treat the remains and all of the related documentation identically, to ensure that due respect was given to each of our fallen brothers.

When the processing of a case was complete, the set of remains was delivered to the US cemetery, together with the complete set of records developed during the investigation, recovery, and identification processes. At the cemeteries, the identification process would then be reviewed and expanded by more highly trained technical personnel and by the use of more elaborate techniques and equipment.

All of the personnel involved in the work well understood the importance of their work, and that back home, there was a grieving parent, wife or other next of kin, who was desperately yearning

for information regarding their loved one who had made the supreme sacrifice for their country. It was a difficult task for all concerned, but each individual could relate first hand to the old adage "There but for the grace of GOD, go I". Each set of remains, whether "Identified" or "Unknown", was treated with utmost dignity and respect.

In retrospect, over some sixty years after the fact, I can look back with a great feeling of pride, that I had perhaps contributed in some small way, to possibly help bring closure to some "next of kin" who might have never known the ultimate resting place of their loved one. It was my distinct honor to have served them in that respect - - and if I were young, would I do it again ?? You bet I would !!!

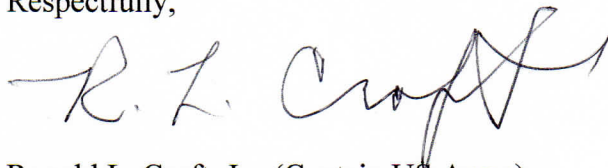
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I have recently been put in touch (by a historian of one of the armored combat divisions), with Mr. Jed Henry, another historian, to try and help him understand some of the Graves Registration processes, and to help in his search for some of the important records he requires to locate the documents he needs to facilitate his work identifying MIA's. It seems significant to point out that all the difficult work we performed in developing as much information as we did about many of our missing comrades, that it is a shame that those documents are unable to be located at this time - - making the identification of PFC Gordon and Pvt. Grimes (and countless other Unknown soldiers) more difficult.

I heartedly endorse Mr. Henry's efforts on behalf of him, his research team, and the families of PFC Lawrence S. Gordon and Private Ray Grimes (and other MIA families), and I support his request that the US Army do their utmost to locate the missing records - and to recognize the true value of providing these documents.

(I too, have spent several hours working at the National Archives in Maryland, and understand the magnitude of the effort, but I feel that some of the searches I have witnessed there - many by foreign nationals - are quite trivial compared to this one).

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. L. Croft, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Ronald L. Croft, Jr. (Captain US Army)

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