

WWII POW's Remains Return to Illinois Following Identification

Rosemarie Dillon, of Chicago, was about five years old when her Uncle Harry, who was serving in the Illinois Army National Guard's Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion, was activated for federal service, arriving in the Philippines just days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and the next day, the Philippines.

The flag-draped coffin containing his remains arrived Oct. 1 at Chicago O'Hare International Airport, aboard American Airlines Flight 2412.

With the thanks of a grateful nation, Jerele was laid to rest with full military honors at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery Oct. 4.

"This is a miracle," said Dillon, Jerele's primary next of kin, about the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's (DPAA) accounting for Jerele's remains. "We've been trying for about 10 years to positively identify his remains. It's been a long time coming. What a joyous occasion it will be when he is finally laid to rest in his home country."

DPAA announced April 18 that the remains of U.S. Army Pfc. Harry Jerele, 26, of Berkeley, Illinois, were identified Dec. 20, 2023, using anthropological analysis, as well as circumstantial evidence. Additionally, scientists from the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System used mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) analysis.

Jerele was an Illinois National Guard Soldier who was deployed to the Philippines with the rest of the Guard's 192nd Tank Battalion before Pearl Harbor. He was part of the first U.S. Army Soldiers to engage the enemy in tank warfare in World

War II. After the unit was forced to surrender several months later, its Soldiers were the longest serving U.S. POWs in World War II and many were part of the Bataan Death March and the Japanese POW Hell Ships.

Dillon said the family had been trying for about 10 years to positively identify his remains.

"We were like, did we really hear this right?" Dillon said, of the call the family received of the positive identification of Jerele's remains. "I'm just glad I'm still alive to witness this."

Jerele was serving in Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion, based in Maywood, when the unit was activated for federal service in November 1940. After training stateside, the unit arrived in the Philippines just days before Japanese forces bombed Pearl Harbor and just hours later, the Philippine Islands.

Intense fighting continued until the surrender of the Bataan peninsula on April 9, 1942, and of Corregidor Island on May 6, 1942. Thousands of U.S. and Filipino service members were captured and interned at POW camps. Jerele was among those reported captured when U.S. forces in Bataan surrendered to the Japanese.

They were subjected to the 65-mile Bataan Death March and then held at the Cabanatuan POW camp. More than 2,500 Prisoners of War perished in this camp during the war.

According to prison camp and other historical records, Jerele died Dec. 28, 1942, and was buried along with other deceased prisoners in the local Cabanatuan Camp cemetery in Common Grave 804.

Following the war, the re-



A Military and Funeral Honors team carries the flag-draped coffin of Illinois Army National Guard Pfc. Harry Jerele to the awaiting hearse at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago Oct. 1. Jerele was a World War II Prisoner of War who died in captivity in 1943.

mains of those buried at the Cabanatuan cemetery were exhumed and relocated to a temporary U.S. military mausoleum near Manila. In 1947, the unidentified remains were buried at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial as Unknowns.

Dillon said she remembers her uncle as a very quiet man whom she saw on weekends.

"He liked to sing and play guitar," she said. "He was an unassuming man, but he had



Rosemarie Dillon, of Batavia, the 89-year-old niece and primary next of kin of Illinois Army National Guard Pfc. Harry Jerele, touches his flag-draped casket after it arrives at O'Hare International Airport, Chicago, Oct. 1.



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, presents Illinois Army National Guard Pfc. Harry Jerele's funeral flag to Rosemarie Dillon, the 89-year-old niece, and Jerele's primary next of kin during Jerele's services at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood Oct. 4. (U.S. Army photos by Barbara Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office.)



Prior to the Oct. 4 funeral services for Illinois Army National Guard Pfc. Harry Jerele, Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion, Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, visits with Rosemarie Dillon, the 89-year-old niece, and Jerele's primary next of kin.

great friends who joined up with him.”

Dillon said the only thing which makes this homecoming bittersweet is her mother and grandmother, Jerele’s sister and mother, are no longer alive to welcome him home.

“It’s a great feeling to finally accomplish this identification,” Dillon said. “I only wish my mother and grandmother were here to witness his homecoming.”

Dillon says she can’t say enough about DPAA’s important work in identifying remains of missing service members.

“It is of utmost importance their work continues,” she said. “Years ago, DPAA had to rely on little things that were found with the remains, like dog tags, to help with the identification. Oftentimes, it left families with no real ending. Now that DNA is used, it’s amazing. I’m so glad my family and I decided to give DNA samples. It definitely gives us closure.”

Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion, included 104 Soldiers from Illinois. The unit experienced 43 casualties during World War II, including 28 who died from diseases, illnesses, and wounds. Seven were killed when aboard various Japanese POW ships, called “Hell ships” by U.S. troops, which sank. Eight were killed in action, and five were declared missing in action.

Headquarters Company, 192nd Tank Battalion, included 31 Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard, of which

19 died due to diseases, illness, and wounds, one died aboard a Japanese ship, and one killed in action.

The men of Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion, many from Maywood, were mostly kids from the same high school. In 1940, a federal draft act had passed, and they knew that it was just a matter of time before they would be drafted into the Army. Having heard that the federal government was going to federalize National Guard units for a period of one year of military service, these men decided

to join the National Guard to fulfill their military obligation.

Arriving in the Philippine Islands at Manila on Thanksgiving Day, Company B had barely settled in at Clark Field when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor days later. A mere 10 hours after the enemy raid at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese followed with a surprise attack at Clark Field. The attack wiped out the American Army Air Corps, and the first member of the battalion, Pvt. Robert Brooks, of Kentucky, Company D, 192nd Tank Battalion, was killed during the

attack. The main parade ground at Fort Knox, Kentucky, bears his name.

At Lingayen Gulf on Dec. 22, 1941, a platoon of the battalion’s tanks engaged enemy tanks for the first time in World War II. Another Soldier died during the engagement and four other Soldiers in the battalion became Prisoners of War. A little under two weeks later, another platoon of 192nd tanks would engage and destroy a platoon of Japanese tanks. For the next few weeks, the members of the battalion fell back toward

the Bataan Peninsula with the other Filipino and American troops. At Plaridel, the tankers fought a frantic battle against the Japanese. As they fell back, they were constantly strafed and shelled. Since they had no air force, enemy planes could destroy the tanks at will.

The 192nd Tank Battalion was the last American military unit to enter the Bataan Peninsula just moments before the last bridge into the peninsula was blown up by the engineers. There, they fought without food, without adequate supplies, without medicine, and with only the hope of being reinforced.

“On behalf of the State of Illinois, I want to thank all those involved in bringing Harry Jerele home to his family in Illinois,” Governor JB Pritzker said. “The epic tale of Maywood’s B Company, 192nd Tank Battalion lives on thanks to many who have never forgotten what these Illinois Soldiers sacrificed for their nation.”

“The story of the 192nd Tank Battalion is both extraordinarily heroic and horrific. More than 80 years later we continue to draw inspiration from Private First Class Harry Jerele and the rest of the 192nd,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “I applaud the continuous efforts of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency to identify and return the remains of our heroes. I pray this finally brings some closure to the Jerele family.”



Members of the Illinois VFW were among veterans joining in a salute to Illinois Army National Guard Pfc. Harry Jerele, a World War II Prisoner of War who died in captivity. Jerele’s remains were repatriated to his family Oct. 1 and buried at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery Oct. 4.



Members of the Illinois VFW, including James Clausen from Post 367, were among veterans joining in a salute to Illinois Army National Guard Pfc. Harry Jerele, a World War II Prisoner of War who was buried at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery Oct. 4.



A Military Funeral Honors Team folds the flag during the funeral for Pfc. Harry Jerele at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery Oct. 4.

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