

# WWII Prisoner of War Remains Case Selected as DNA Hit of the Year

TACOMA, WA, May 14, 2024 -- GTH DNA has announced that a case involving the identification of a WWII U.S. servicemember who perished as a Japanese prisoner of war has been selected as the DNA Hit of the Year for 2024. The case was selected from six finalist cases. The other finalist cases were from Guatemala, Louisiana USA, Alabama USA, Indonesia, and Iraq. The selected case and other finalist cases were decided by a panel of international judges with distinguished backgrounds in forensic DNA and law enforcement. The recognition was announced during the annual Human Identification Solutions (HIDS) Conference held virtually this year on May 14 and 15, 2024.

Now in its eighth year, the DNA Hit of the Year program is organized by GTH DNA, an international expert on DNA database policy and programs. "This year's selected case demonstrates the power of using advanced DNA testing and database methods to identify missing persons under extremely challenging circumstances." said Tim Schellberg, GTH DNA's President.

Shortly after the United States officially entered World War II the Imperial Japanese Army invaded the Philippines, forcing the U.S. to abandon the islands, leaving 85,000 U.S. and Filipino soldiers and personnel behind. What followed was the deadly Bataan Death March where soldiers were taken to prisoner of war (POW) camps. At one POW location, called Cabanatuan prison camp #1, 2,764 burials were recorded during the two and half years the camp operated. Some death and burial records were taken by both the Japanese and the American POWs themselves. However, these records were limited.

When the camp was finally liberated in January of 1945, the American Graves Registry Service (AGRS) mapped the prisoner-created graveyard at the camp and exhumed the remains. Efforts to fully identify all of the remains with methods available at the time ceased in 1951. But, in 2014, efforts were reignited. The Department of Defense's Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) rose to the challenge, and began employing advanced Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) DNA identification technology. This sensitive technology allowed the laboratory to examine much more of the human genome (specifically the mtDNA genome) of the POW remains to better differentiate between the many remains in the grave. Then, based on leads generated with NGS, STR and YSTR testing was performed against a database of known family member samples.

Despite limited burial records and extensive comingling of remains at the camp burial sites, on July 7, 2023, AFDIL officially identified Pfc Glenn A. Harris using these forensic DNA

techniques. Pfc Harris died from malaria while in captivity and was buried in Common Grave 225, which was recorded on the back of a milk can label. He was buried with seventeen other U.S. service members, all who died on July 26, 1942.

“The identification of Pfc Glenn A. Harris is emblematic of the Department of Defense’s resolve to identify our missing warriors using all available identification techniques, including Next Generation Sequencing DNA analysis. What was not possible even a decade ago is now possible through advanced DNA sequencing, and we will not give up, no matter how long it takes,” said Dr. Suni Edson, Assistant Technical Leader Past Accounting Section of the Department of Defense’s Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory.

About GTH DNA: GTH DNA [www.dna.gth-gov.com](http://www.dna.gth-gov.com) is globally recognized as experts in forensic DNA database policy, legislation, and law. For over twenty years, consultants at GTH DNA have consulted in over 60 countries and states on legislation and policies to establish or expand criminal DNA databases.