



TONY KURTZ

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 50th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

2023 Assembly Bill 26

Relating to: Funding UW-MIA Recovery Program

March 23, 2023

Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs

Thank you, Chairman Edming, for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 26, and thank you to members of the committee for taking the time to hear my testimony.

Volk Field Air National Guard Base is located in the 50th Assembly District. What you may not know is that it is named after 1st LT Jerome Volk, the first Wisconsin Air National Guard pilot killed in combat in the Korean War. There are members of his family who are still waiting for 1st LT Volk's remains to be found and brought home.

Wisconsin has more than 1,500 service members who, like 1st LT Volk, are listed as missing in action. This bill funds the recovery, identification, and repatriation of these MIA service members. Currently, the UW-Missing-in-Action Recovery and Identification Project (UW-MIA RIP) deploys a team of UW-System experts and volunteers to research and recover the remains of MIA Service Members in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Defense.

This program has already proven to be a more efficient use of tax payer dollars when compared to the DoD's own Department of POW/MIA Accounting Agency. A single federal recovery mission can cost anywhere from \$1-1.5 million and takes up to 2 years to complete. By contrast, the UW project's recoveries only cost an average of \$180,000 per mission and can identify remains within a month.

We have an obligation to do all we can to bring 1st LT Volk and the rest of Wisconsin's fallen troops home. These service members were not just Soldiers, Airman and Marines. They were someone's loved one. Losing them under any circumstance would be a tragedy and the grief is compounded each year the family waits for closure. This bill provides the opportunity for closure while honoring our commitment to the members of our armed forces who have literally given all to defend our freedom.

Thank you again for this opportunity to present my testimony on AB 26. I'd be happy to answer any questions at this time. Please know there will be additional expert testimony today that may be able to answer more detailed questions if necessary.

ROBERT L. COWLES

Wisconsin State Senator, 2nd Senate District

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Testimony on 2023 Assembly Bill 26 Senator Robert Cowles Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs March 23rd, 2023

Thank you, Chair Edming and Committee Members, for holding a hearing and allowing me to testify on 2023 Assembly Bill 26. This legislation will establish parameters and fund investigation and recovery missions by the UW's Missing-in-Action Recovery and Identification Project.

Service members enter the armed forces understanding that they may be putting their life on the line for our country, but these members and their families don't expect, if the unfortunate happens, that their remains will not be seen again. Unfortunately, since World War II, for 80,000 U.S. service members, including more than 1,500 Wisconsin service members, this is their reality as they're still reported as Missing-in-Action.

The University of Wisconsin Missing-in-Action Recovery and Identification Project (UW MIA RIP) was created by a dedicated leader, Charles Konsitzke of UW-Madison's Biotechnology Center, with no commitment from the University other than allowing him to take time and create a team. They work with the Department of Defense (DoD) which assigns missions to investigate, identify, recover, and repatriate Service Members lost in World War II, Korean, Vietnam, and other global conflicts.

UW MIA RIP was the first of its kind in the nation, and remains the only full service University in the United States to offer investigations, DNA identifications, and recoveries. UW MIA RIP has done all of this only with some DoD funding, external fundraising, and the commitment of dedicated students and faculty giving their own time to this important mission to deliver honor to passed service members and provide closure to families.

While UW MIA RIP has done phenomenal work in the past decade, they largely rely on the cases DoD assigns to them, and DoD isn't required to assign missing Wisconsin Service Members to the University. This is where Assembly Bill 26 comes in. By providing state support to UW MIA RIP, we can ensure that the cases of Missing-in-Action Wisconsinites rise to the top of the pile, and Wisconsin families can finally lay their deceased to rest.

Each mission takes time and resources. The funds in AB 26 aren't to provide new UW-Madison staffing – they're to let the experts bring Wisconsin Service Members home. Instead of funding administrators, we're funding extensive investigations to learn of the final moments and likely whereabouts of fallen heroes, they're to fund trips and necessary expenses with the trips to the places there Service Members currently lie, and they're to ensure we can positively identify remains to help clear the backlog of 1,500+ fallen Wisconsin Service Members.

These Service Members, their families, and their brothers in arms have for too long had to go on without closure. The least we can do is dedicate a small bit of funding to provide closure and ensure their honor. A dedicated man at UW-Madison with a vision led to create this nationally-renowned team. Now it's on us to lead by being the first state legislature in the nation to fund this mission for our own state's Missing-in-Action heroes.

Similar legislation has passed the Senate in the previous two legislative sessions and the Assembly in the 2019 Legislative Session, but it has not yet made it to the Governor to be signed into law.



Assembly Committee on Veterans & Military Affairs

2023 Assembly Bill 26

*University of Wisconsin Missing-In-Action Recovery
and Identification Program*

March 23, 2023

Chairman Edming and members of the Assembly Committee on Veterans & Military Affairs:

My name is Charles Konsitzke, and I am the associate director of the University of Wisconsin Biotechnology Center, and founder and team lead of the University of Wisconsin Missing-in-Action Recovery and Identification Project. I would like to begin by thanking you all for the opportunity to testify and express the UW Missing-in-Action Recovery and Identification Project's support for Assembly Bill 26, which would provide over \$180,000 annually to our team for investigating, scouting and recovery attempt missions of missing in action service members from our state.

Of the over 82,000 American service members from around the country that remain unaccounted for from conflicts spanning from December 7th, 1941 at the outset of America's involvement in the Second World War, to the present, over 1,500 are from Wisconsin. Every corner of the state is still missing at least one servicemember.

These missing include those of a group of young Wisconsin men who fought and were trapped in the Philippines in spring of 1942, captured by the Imperial Japanese Army, and endured the Bataan Death March. Over three years of harsh imprisonment they faced disease, malnutrition, negligence, and brutality, and collectively came to be known as "the Janesville 99."

Missing servicemembers also include Wisconsin soldiers whose remains are somewhere in the jungles of New Guinea, Wisconsin Coast Guardsmen who went down in the icy North Atlantic on the USS Escanaba in 1943, Wisconsin airmen whose remains are below the surfaces of the fields of Northern France, Wisconsin soldiers whose remains are still buried somewhere on a Belgian hillside after their loss during the initial stages of the Battle of the Bulge, and Wisconsin soldiers,

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our heroes
home.**

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airmen, and Marines at or above the 38th Parallel on the Korean Peninsula, to name only a few.

This team has been the most dynamic collaboration of fellow students (including student veterans), staff, faculty, and alumni that I've witnessed across UW-System institution campuses, consisting of individuals from a host of interdisciplinary backgrounds that include history, anthropology, archaeology, biology, business, computer science and genetics.

With the state's support, our team will be enabled to focus on these 1,500 missing Wisconsinites. It will allow the team to begin to locate and recover as many of these individuals as possible and bring them home while also continuing our partnership with the federal Defense Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Accounting Agency.

I would like to close by thanking all the bill authors, Representatives Kurtz and Sinicki and Senators Cowles and Hesselbein, as well as all legislative staff who have assisted us along the way. Thank you again to the committee and, at this time, I am available to answer any questions.

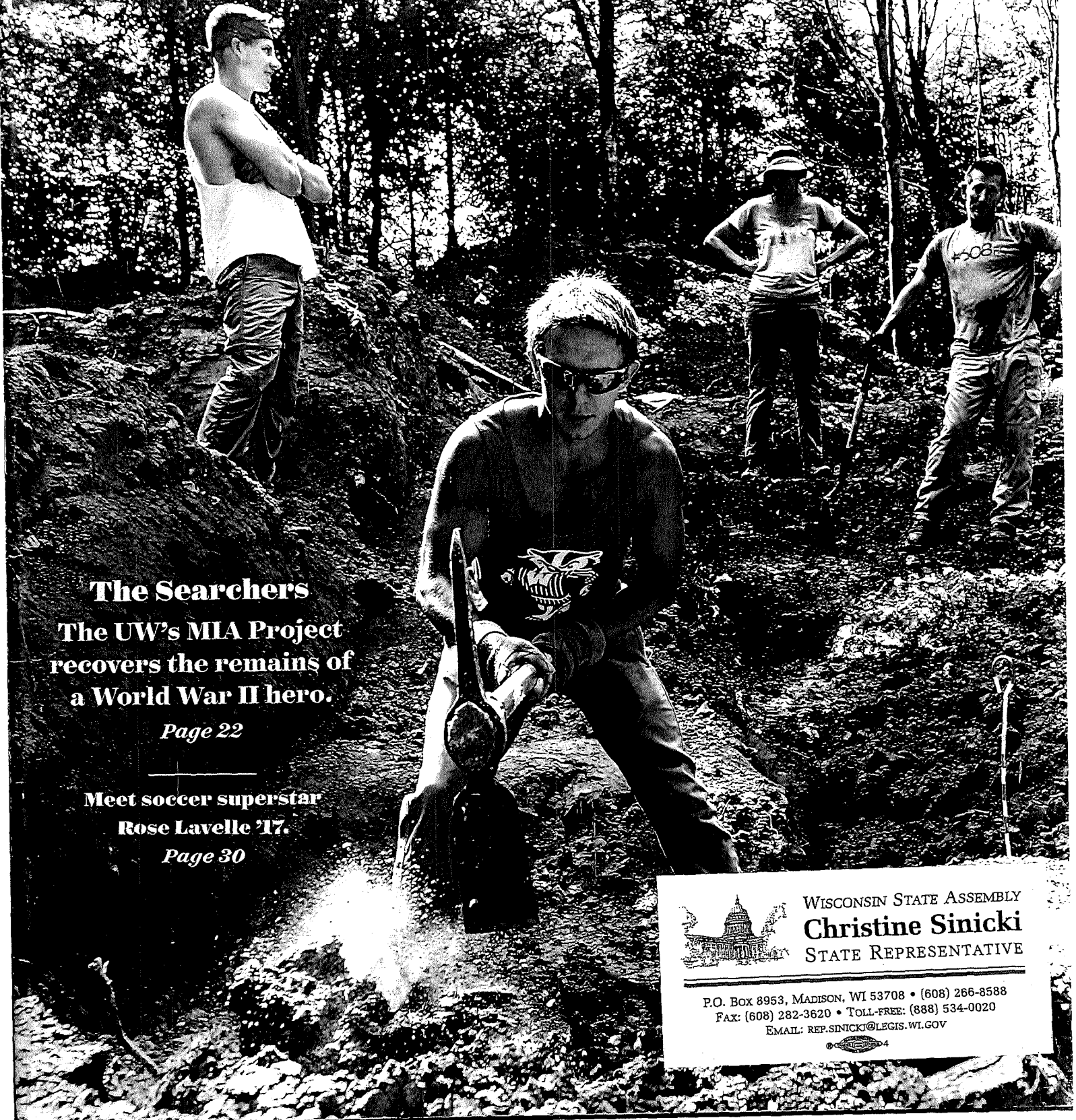
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On Wisconsin

FOR UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MADISON ALUMNI AND FRIENDS FALL 2019



The Searchers

**The UW's MIA Project
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Rose Lavelle '17.**

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OnWisconsin

Fall 2019

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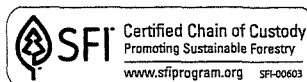
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Quarterly production of *On Wisconsin* is supported by financial gifts from alumni and friends. To make a gift to UW-Madison, please visit supportuw.org.

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BRUCE RICHTER

Locating the remains of missing World War II pilot Walter "Buster" Stone was a labor of love for the team of UW researchers and students who journeyed to his crash site near Saint-Omer, France, in August 2018. Putting together our cover story on the recovery efforts was a labor of love, too — and an emotional experience for our staff.

Writer Chris Barncard explains how volunteers from the UW's Missing in Action Recovery and Identification Project collaborated with the U.S. Department of Defense to return 2nd Lt. Stone to his hometown of Andalusia, Alabama, where he received a proper burial 76 years after his death. Barncard was touched by the family's gratitude during his interview with Mark Stone, the pilot's great-nephew.

"This was the third time the MIA Project had identified the remains of a missing serviceman," Barncard says. "Even though I've written stories about each case, I really wasn't prepared for his family. He was so grateful and happy and relieved for his family. He wanted to thank anyone from Wisconsin he could find. They've been telling stories about Uncle Buster for generations, and they'll be telling them generations from now. But now UW-Madison will be part of those stories, and you can't help but be proud to be part of an institution that can change lives that way."

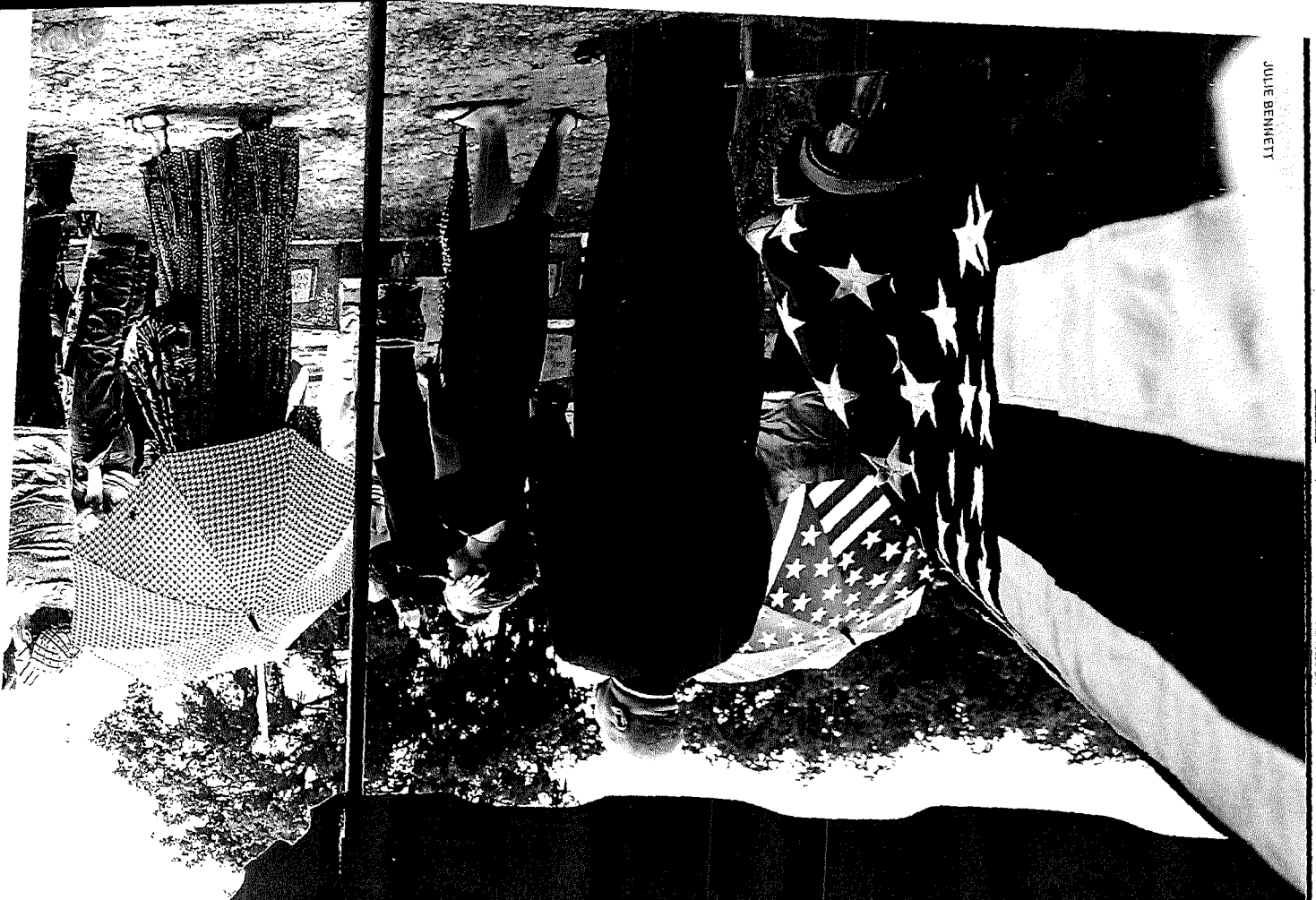
On Wisconsin photographer Bryce Richter traveled to France to document the excavation, pitching in with a shovel when the team needed an extra pair of hands. Richter came back with more photos than we could use in the magazine, so we've included additional images online at onwisconsin.uwalumni.com. The online package also includes his evocative video from the site.

"This assignment was not only an amazing experience — it was an honor to help tell the story of the recovery efforts by the team in France," Richter says. "Experiencing the dedicated work they performed and having a front-row view to such an important project is something I'll always remember."

In a divided world, we're proud to celebrate an expedition that brought together fellow Americans from Wisconsin and Alabama and left all of us with a profound feeling of closure.

DEAN ROBBINS

We're proud to celebrate an expedition that brought together fellow Americans from Wisconsin and Alabama.

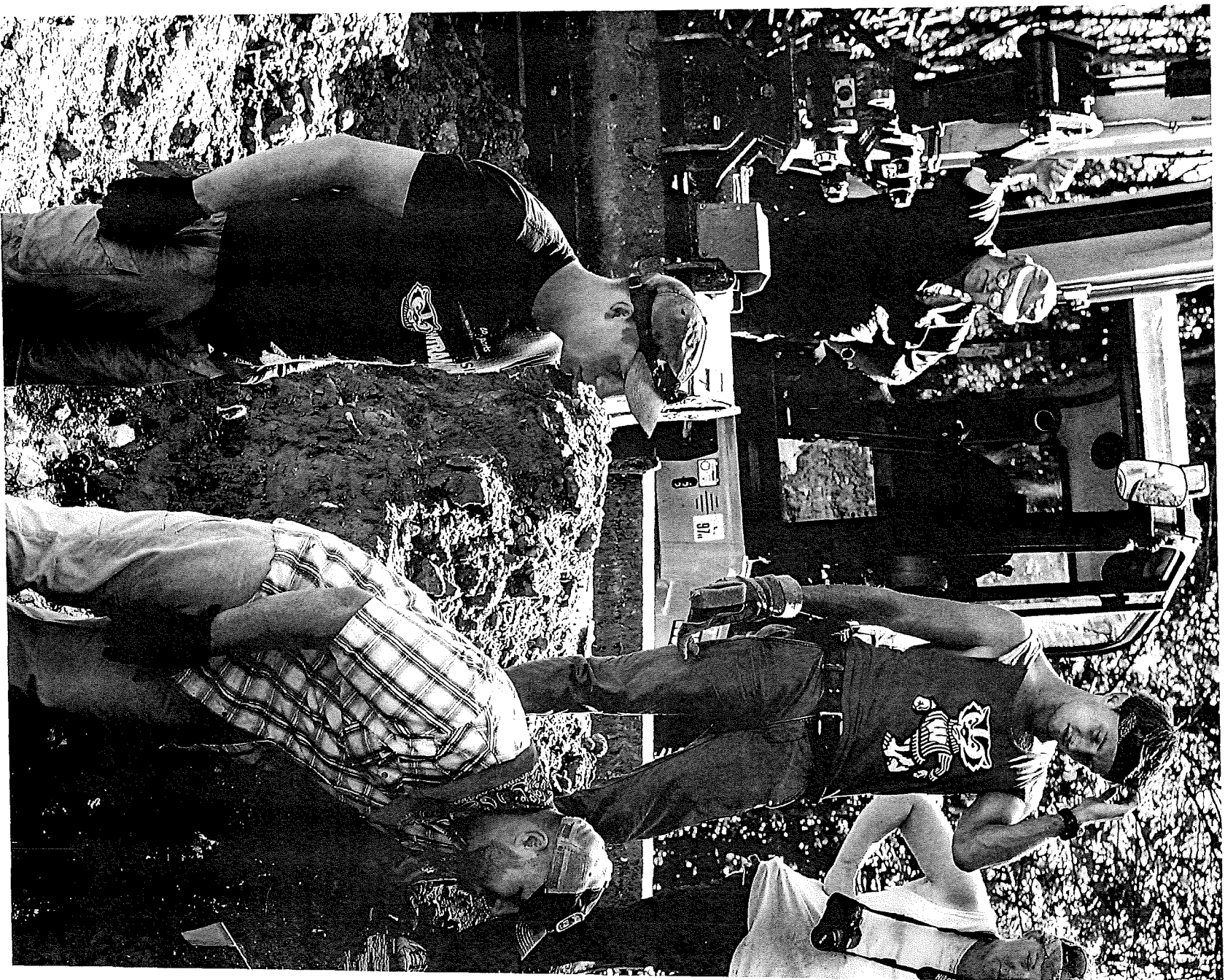


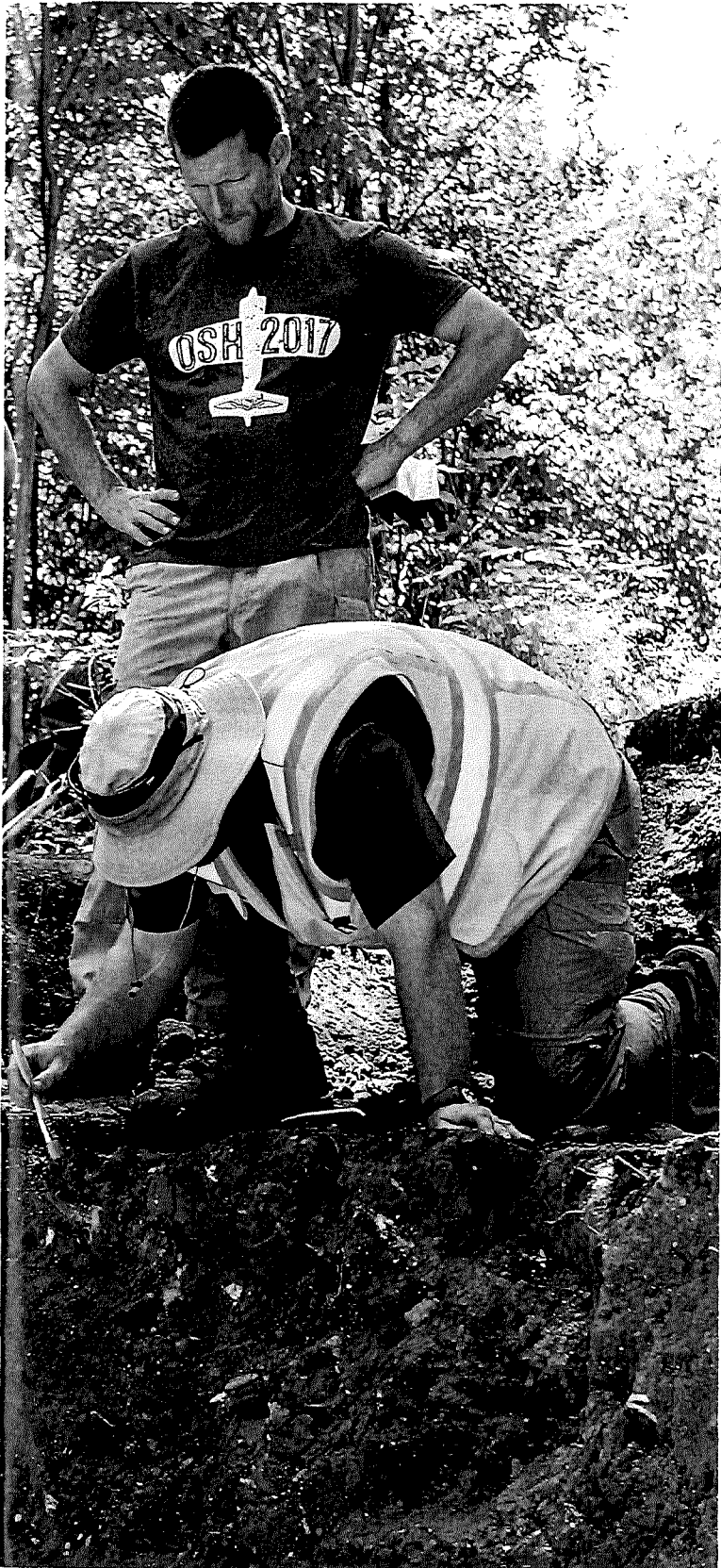
MIA PROJECT PHOTOGRAPHY
BY BRYCE RICHTER

BY CHRIS BARNCARD

*The UW's MIA Project collaborates with the
Department of Defense to return the remains of a
World War II pilot missing for 75 years.*

A Hero Comes Home





Surrounded by the roar of his P-47 Thunderbolt and buried in a bank of clouds that had cut visibility to less than 100 feet, 2nd Lt. Walter Stone was far from home.

It was October 23, 1943, and the whiteout in the sky had separated Buster — as he was known back in Andalusia, Alabama — from the rest of his Army Air Force 350th Fighter Squadron and the flight of B-26 Marauder bombers they were escorting to targets near Cambrai in Nazi-occupied northern France.

After the trip hundreds of miles down England's eastern coast, the leader of the bomber mission had scrubbed the attack run. It was pointless in the soup they encountered near Saint-Omer. They would regroup and head back across the English Channel.

Escorting bombers may have been the assignment Buster sought out from the beginning, when he was one of James and Lilla Stone's four sons who joined the armed forces as the United States entered World War II.

"One of his brothers was a navigator in the big bombers," says Mark Stone, the pilot's great-nephew. "In his mind, his brother was in one of those bombers he was escorting. Everybody in our family has heard stories like that about Buster."

He was 24, not far removed from his Pleasant Home School graduation and marriage to Miriam Boyette. Buster was well liked and respected, a young man who, like so many others, interrupted his life to do his duty for his country.

"My daddy and his daddy watched Uncle Buster kiss his wife goodbye there in Andalusia," Mark says. "My daddy watched his daddy embrace his brother and then put him on a plane to the war. They were the last family members to see him."

Unlike his three brothers, who would return safely, Uncle Buster would live on only in stories.

The UW team explores 2nd Lt. Walter "Buster" Stone's crash site near Saint-Omer, France, working 10 to 12 hours a day, six days a week. Charles Konsitzke (bottom center) facilitates the MIA Project.

The last his squadron-mates heard from him, he was heading for England and would see them on the ground. But 2nd Lt. Stone never came out of the clouds.

His plane was assumed crashed, and he was declared missing in action. Eventually his name was added to the Tablets of the Missing at the Ardennes American Cemetery in Belgium and to the list of American fighters killed but still not recovered. But a piece of him stayed alive back in Alabama with Lilla and the large and tight-knit Stone family.

“His mother — we all called her Mama Stone — had a memorial for him put in the family cemetery plot by the church in Andalusia,” says Mark. “She never gave up hope that Uncle Buster would come home. She talked about it until she died, and she was buried right by that memorial.”

Buster was buried somewhere in France, but it would take nearly 75 years and a team of volunteers from the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Missing in Action Recovery and Identification Project to prove Mama Stone right.

“The Least You Can Do”

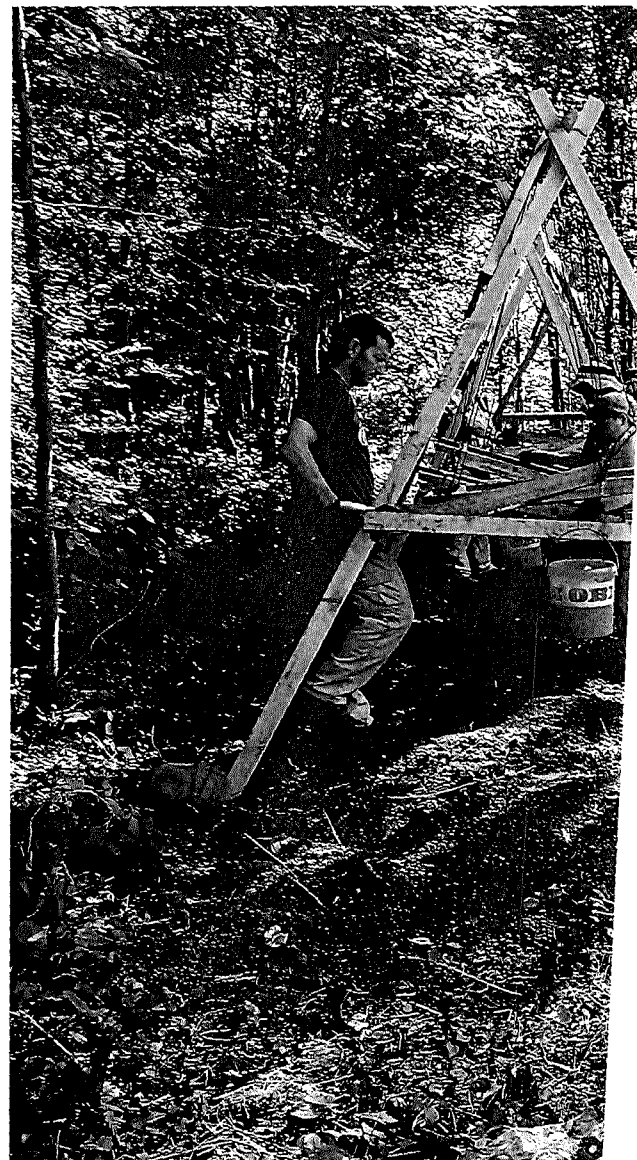
Organized by UW–Madison researchers skilled in identifying ancient and degraded genetic material, the MIA Project in 2013 helped the Department of Defense identify the remains of Private First Class Lawrence Gordon, who was killed in Normandy in a firefight with retreating Germans in 1944 and incorrectly buried as a German soldier.

In 2016 and 2017, the MIA Project broke ground near Buysscheure, France, as the first academic partner of the Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), the agency tasked with accounting for the country’s missing service members. An MIA Project crew carefully excavated a farm field for several weeks in consecutive summers until they had conclusively identified the plane and then recovered the remains of another missing young World War II pilot, 1st Lt. Frank Fazekas.

“It’s not the kind of thing you want to do just once,” says Charles Konsitzke, associate director of the UW Biotechnology Center and facilitator for the MIA Project. “When you think about how many are still missing — more than 72,000 just from World War II — and how every day there are fewer of their friends and family members left to remember them, you feel a great sense of urgency to take on the next case.”

In the spring and early summer of 2018, the UW team went to work on a pool of new cases. They would need to be ready to travel, to acquire permits to work on public or private land, and to have a plan in mind for a dig in a swamp or woods.

When they got the green light from DPAA to mount a search at Stone’s suspected crash site on national forest land near Saint-Omer, the team was

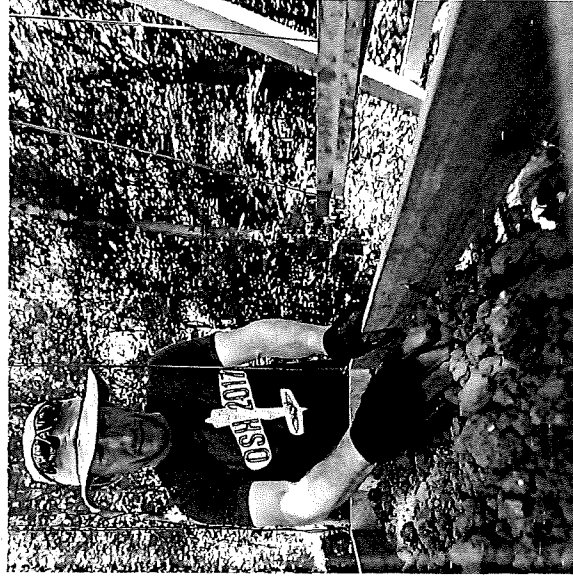


Ryan Wubben MD’97 (bottom left), medical director of UW Med Flight, works at a sifting station alongside the excavation site, while scientific-recovery expert Gregg Jamison MS’06, PhD’17 (bottom right) consults a book of historic military equipment.





*Top left: UW-Madison volunteers
Torrey Tiedeman x'20 (center) and
Tristan Krause '18 (right) put their
academic experiences in archae-
ology, anthropology, and history
into practice. Below: Ella Axelrod,
a student at Colorado College, sifts
for artifacts.*





Top: Tiedeman transports supplies to the dig site where investigators found Stone's identification tag. Bottom: The crew recovers machine guns from Stone's P-47 Thunderbolt, gnarled by the force and heat of the crash.

equipped with research and expertise across several academic disciplines. Volunteers like Trista Krause '18, Torrey Tiedeman x'20, and Samantk Zinnen '19 would put their academic experiences in archaeology, anthropology, and history into practice during the mission. Gregg Jamison MS'06, PhD'17, UW-Milwaukee at Waukesha anthropology professor, would be the scientific-recovery expert on site directing a volunteer crew of UW-Madison students and staff, as well as anthropology students from Colorado College and volunteer veterans.

As in the Fazekas case, DPAA would be represented by lead forensic anthropologist William Belcher PhD'98, a professor of anthropology who brought one of his students from the University of Hawai'i-West O'ahu to the recovery.

After months of preparation, members of the UW-Madison MIA Project spent three weeks in the woods near Saint-Omer, carefully clearing trees and tons of earth from a site where, in 2017, DPAA investigators had found Walter Stone's identification tag.

Using picks and shovels they carried into the forest every day, hauling dirt by buckets to sifting stations they built alongside the excavation site the MIA Project group worked 10 to 12 hours a day six days a week. They recovered identifying parts of Stone's plane — like .50 caliber machine gun gnarled by the force and heat of the crash — along with the pilot's remains and some of his personal items.

"So much happens before you even start digging. And then it's just hard work. We were tired every day," says Krause. "But to be able to do that for someone who sacrificed so much is an honor. It feels like the least you can do."

"They Found Uncle Buster"

Mark Stone was on his way to the tractor supply store near Pensacola, Florida, in February when his father called and asked him if he was sitting down.

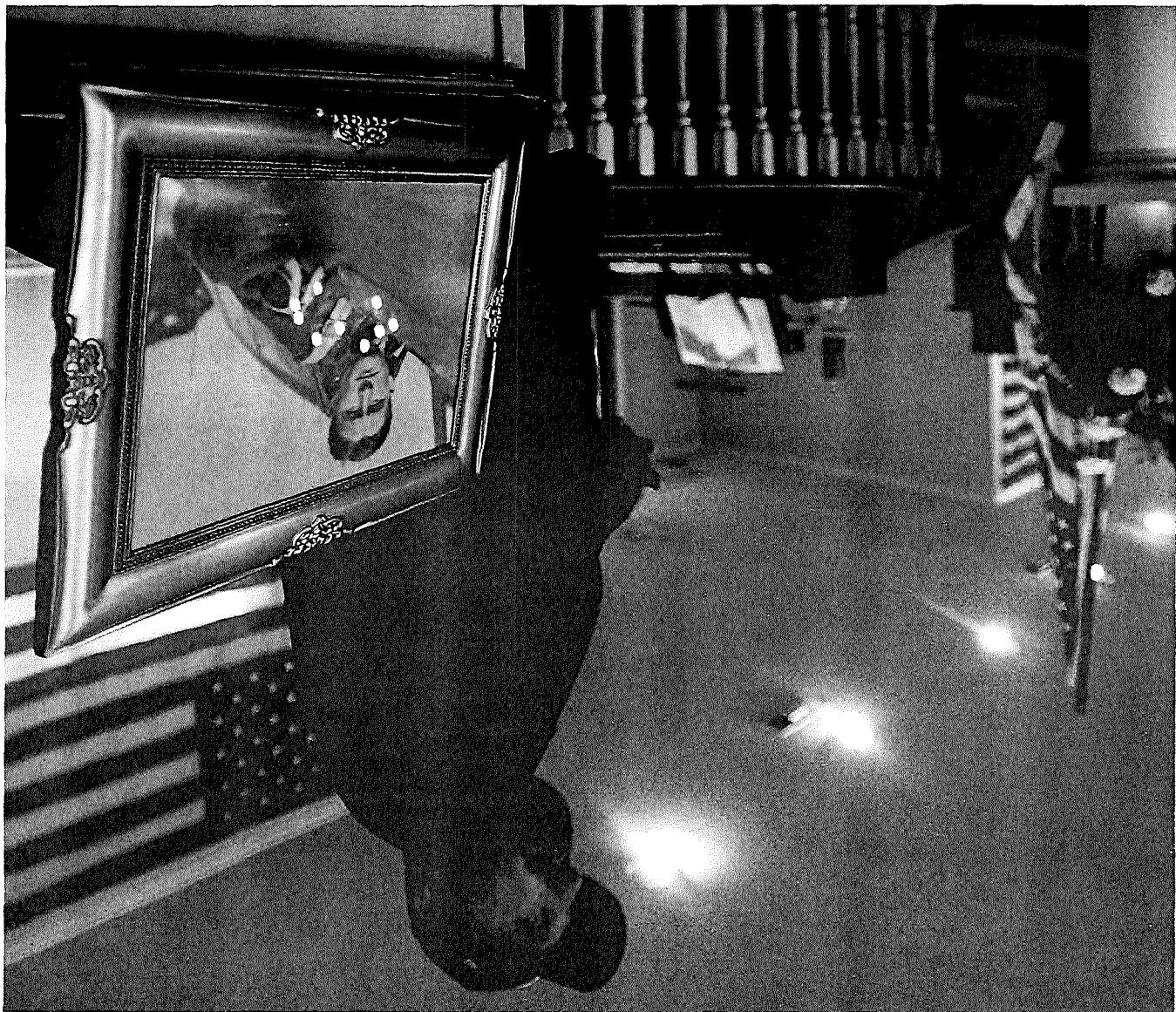
"He was so excited," Stone recalls. "And he said, 'They found Uncle Buster.' I just couldn't believe it."

The Tablets of the Missing would be engraved with a rosette to mark the recovery, and Buster would finally come home to Andalusia. He was buried with military honors on May 11 — just days after what would have been his 100th birthday, and one day before Mother's Day — in the family plot near the ever-hopeful Mama Stone.

"It means so much that there are people out there in this country — from Wisconsin, from the military — that would work so hard to do something like this to do right by someone who served his country, and for his family," says Mark Stone. "We owe them a lot. It makes us proud we're all Americans." ●

Chris Barncard writes about research at UW-Madison.

Mark Stone with a photo of his great-uncle at the May II funeral service in Andalusia, Alabama (also pictured on pages 22 and 23). Walker "Buster" Stone was buried days after what would have been his 100th birthday at the marker erected by his mother. "She never gave up hope that Uncle Buster would come home," Mark says. "She talked about it until she died, and she was buried right by that memorial."



JULIE BENNETT (2)

Good morning to all of the members of the Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs. It's an honor to speak before you. In September 2021 I had the honor to speak as we held the formal ceremony dedicating the placement of the POW/MIA Chair in the Rotunda area of the capitol. During that speech I spoke about the over 83,000 service members who have gone missing in action since World War II to present, with over 1,500 of those service members being from Wisconsin. I spoke about our solemn oath to those service members and their families to never stop our efforts to find them and bring them home to those families and their communities. We would not stop until the VERY...LAST...ONE...COMES HOME! These service members are not just name on a document that we take some time to review. They are not names that we take some time to remember. These fellow service members were friends, fathers, wives, brothers, and sisters. They were our sons and daughters. They left home to serve and defend this great country of ours. They hugged their loved ones close and said Goodbye, not knowing it was the last time they would ever see them.

For any members of the committee who have served, you should know that while it's not part of the oath of service, there is an unspoken oath to each other and for those who haven't served, this is an opportunity to learn of this oath. That unspoken oath is that we NEVER leave anyone behind. EVER...! We have a duty to make sure that all those who serve with us come home, alive or dead, they all come home.

The University of Wisconsin Missing in Action Recovery and Identification Project is the premier program in the United States that is helping in those efforts to bring our missing in action home. They were the first academic institution to partner with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, or DPAA, which is a part the Department of Defense and is responsible for identifying and repatriating the remains of our missing in action.

While the UW MIA RIP Program is able to partner with the DPAA to bring home our missing, they can only focus on those that are funded by the Department of Defense. This means that they cannot focus as much on the missing in action from Wisconsin. In order to focus on Wisconsin missing in action they have to raise funds to do this research separately. The funding to help bring home our Wisconsin missing in action was brought forward last year and we asked for \$180,000 per year for 4 years. That's only \$720,000 in a 4 year period to help bring our Wisconsin missing in action home. While I understand there are budget issues, but there will always be budget issues. While I understand we have differences of political views between Republicans and Democrats. Those differences need to be set aside. What price tag can we put on honoring our service members who are missing in action? What price tag can we put on the unspoken oath to never leave anyone behind?

My special project for the last 5 months as VFW State Commander in 2022 was to raise funds for the UW MIA RIP Program. From February to June, as part of Operation Bring Them Home, the VFW posts and members in Wisconsin raised over \$62,000! If the Veterans in this state thinks it's important to honor and bring home our missing in action, what is the State of Wisconsin willing to chip in? This is why I urge you to pass AB 26 and BRING OUR FALLEN HOME!



KEEPING OUR PROMISE TO
AMERICA'S VETERANS

Department of Wisconsin

**STATEMENT OF
MATTHEW KEMPAINEN
DAV ADJUTANT
DEPARTMENT OF WISCONSIN
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AND MILITARY AFFAIRS
WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY
MARCH 23, 2023**

Chairman Edming and Members of the Committee:

Good morning (afternoon)! Thank you for allowing DAV (Disabled American Veterans) this opportunity to present our view on Assembly Bill 26 (AB 26) Relating to: *the University of Wisconsin Missing-in-Action Recovery and Identification Project and making an appropriation.*

An unfortunate reality of military engagement is that sometimes service members are held against their will as prisoners of war. Even worse, their whereabouts may become unknown, and they are then classified as missing in action or MIA.

Initially, the responsibility of search and recovery fell on the Department of Defense or DOD's Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office and the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command. In early 2015, these organizations merged to create a new government group, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency or DPAA.

In Wisconsin, we are fortunate to have the University of Wisconsin Missing in Action Recovery and Identification Project. The Project works to recover, identify, and repatriate United States MIA service members. They were the first academic institution to partner with DPAA.

Since 2014, the UW MIA Recovery and Identification Project has repatriated the remains of three (3) World War II veterans – none from Wisconsin.

DAV WISCONSIN, 1253 Scheuring Road, Suite A, De Pere, WI 54115-1070
Phone: (920) 338-8620 Fax: (920) 338-8621 e-mail: gbdav@sbcglobal.net

Currently, there are over 1,500 Wisconsin MIAs. In the future, the Project's goal is to solely focus on the recovery and identification of MIA service members from Wisconsin. We are grateful for the admirable work being done by them.

DAV, Department of Wisconsin considers the MIA issue a high priority. The brave families of the missing continue to live in uncertainty and anguish, many for years, some for decades. Finding and repatriating the remains of the missing is essential to finally give them a sense of closure.

On a personal note, last summer (June 26 to July 21, 2022) I had the great honor of participating in one of their MIA missions in Belgium. The experience humbled me. As a combat veteran "Leave No One Behind" has great meaning. The mission was inspiring and made me proud.

Under AB 26, the UW MIA Recovery Project may request the Joint Committee on Finance to provide \$180,000 in each fiscal year of the 2023-2025 fiscal biennium for missions to recover and identify Wisconsin veterans who are missing in action.

The request must include a research prospectus and spending plan for the requested MIA mission. Upon completion, the UW MIA Recovery Project must submit a Report. DAV finds the bill reasonable and well crafted. Its intent is certainly humane.

Thank you, Chairman Edming, for holding this important hearing and being a sponsor. Thank you also go to Rep. Tony Kurtz and Sen. Rob Cowles for introducing this important bill. Finally, thank you to Committee members Petryk, Tittl, Riemer, Sinicki, Andraca, Ortiz-Velez, and Radcliff for being sponsors.

Pursuant to DAV National Resolution 003¹, DAV strongly supports AB 26 and urges this Committee and the legislature to pass the bill unanimously, in an expeditious manner.

¹ Resolution 003, *Seek the immediate release of any Americans who may still be held captive following any war and the return of the remains of any Americans who died during these wars* passed at DAV National Convention held in Orlando, Florida on August 10, 2023.

This concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you or other Committee Members may have.