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# FINAL DISPOSITION OF WORLD WAR II DEAD

## 1945-51

By  
EDWARD STEERE  
and  
THAYER M. BOARDMAN



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
OFFICE OF THE QUARTERMASTER GENERAL



**I**n deep and everlasting appreciation of the heroic efforts of those who, in keeping their country free, made the supreme sacrifice in World War II, the entire nation has been dedicated to disposing of the mortal remains of those honored dead in a manner consistent with the wishes of their next of kin.

*Harry Truman*  
President of the United States

7345451

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By  
Edward Steere  
and  
Thayer M. Boardman

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**T**HIS publication is the fourth of a new series of QMC historical studies covering the post World War II and Korean emergency periods. This new series (Series II) succeeds the 21 consecutively numbered QMC historical studies dealing primarily with World War II, which were published during the 9-year period, 1943-51. (For a list of all QMC historical publications and historical works in progress, *see Appendix.*)

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## PREFACE

**T**HIS study is a sequel to QMC Historical Studies No. 21, *The Graves Registration Service in World War II*, by Edward Steere.

It attempts to cover the postwar graves registration program in all pertinent details and aspects and in all important combat areas of World War II. Since this program proved to be by far the largest of its nature ever undertaken by any nation at any time, and since the officers responsible for it from the beginning expressed a desire for an elaborate and thorough account of all phases of postwar graves registration activities, this study is necessarily long and voluminous. Its major purpose is to serve as a guide to future graves registration planners and operators by relating in detail the experiences, problems, weaknesses, and accomplishments of the postwar program.

The reader may gain some idea of the enormousness of the postwar graves registration task from the fact that it involved the final disposition of over 280,000 recovered remains from all parts of the world. Of this number, over 171,000 were eventually returned to the United States and sent to various distribution centers throughout the country for final burial according to wishes of next of kin. The total cost of the program reached the sum of some \$163,869,000. At the peak of the program, more than 13,000 persons, military and civilian, were engaged in its execution.

It should be noted that throughout this study, the term "repatriation," although actually a misnomer, is almost constantly used in referring to the program of returning war dead to their homeland. The authors have accepted this term because nearly all documents use it and because the phrase, "return of the dead program" would be too cumbersome, even though more accurate in describing the activity.

The study begins with a very detailed examination of the various planning phases which preceded actual operations; this planning was centered mostly on organizational problems in the European Theater. Next comes an extensive account of major graves registration operations in the European Theater that describes search and recovery of the missing dead, establishment and care of the ten permanent cemeteries in Europe, and plans and operations involved in the actual return to the United States of those war dead whose next of kin desired final burial in native soil.

Turning to the Pacific Theater of Operations, the study deals with graves registration organization, problems, and operations in that area. One chapter each is devoted to activities in the Africa-Middle East and Mediterranean areas, followed by a full account of the vital world-wide identification operations, including the technical aspects and accomplishments of this activity, which resulted in positive identification of nearly 97 percent of all recovered dead of World War II. The study closes with a chapter on the operations and accomplishments of distribution centers in the United States whereby the returned deceased received final interment in a cemetery chosen by their relatives.

In general, Mr. Steere was responsible for the chapters pertaining to planning and organizational matters, especially in the European Theater. Mr. Boardman, originally assigned the part of the study dealing with the Pacific Theater of Operations, completed this task, and upon Mr. Steere's retirement, owing to ill health, at the close of May 1955, also prepared the chapters on operations in other theaters and those dealing with permanent cemeteries and repatriation of the dead from Europe.

Source materials consulted in research for this study include the records of the Office of The Quartermaster General and Quartermaster field offices. The principal types of records were general and special orders, staff memoranda, staff studies, transcripts of conferences, policy letters, special reports, and organizational charts. Also much utilized were records of the Federal Records Center in Alexandria, Va., and the Kansas City Records Center at Kansas City, Mo. Records of the American Battle Monuments Commission also proved valuable.

Working more or less independently in clearly marked phases of the Return Program, the authors wish to express their appreciation separately to various individuals who assisted them in their work. Those to whom Mr. Steere feels particularly indebted include, first of all, Maj. Gen. George A. Horkan, Director of the Memorial Division during the culminating period of planning and transition to the world-wide operation, and later The Quartermaster General. On General Horkan's insistence, this study was prepared as a special report on the activities of The Quartermaster General in his extraordinary capacity as Chief, American Graves Registration Service. Brig. Gen. Everett Busch, Assistant Director under General Horkan, gave indispensable help in establishing useful contacts between Mr. Steere and historical units of the AGRS overseas commands. Mr. Steere wishes also to express appreciation to the following officers who directed the Memorial Division during the Return Program: Col. E. V. Freeman, Maj. Gen. K. L. Hastings (later The Quarter-

master General), Col. James B. Clearwater, and Col. John D. Martz, Jr.

It is difficult to select from the roster of officers and civilian officials of the Memorial Division those who deserve special acknowledgment. Particular mention must be made, however, of the following: Col. George H. Hinman, Chief, Liaison Branch; Mrs. Helen T. McDonald, Information Specialist on Memorial Division matters; Col. L. R. Talbot, former Chief, Cemetery Plant Division, AGRC-EA, and later head of the Operations Branch, Memorial Division; Col. Leslie W. Allen, successor to Colonel Talbot in the Operations Branch; Lt. Col. Carl Allbee, Operations Branch; Col. Horace B. Speed, Chairman, Board of Review; Col. T. H. Metz, Chief, Identification Branch; Lt. Col. James F. McFarland, who took over the Identification Branch after a tour of duty in AGRC-EA; Mr. Jesse D. Myers, Chief, Management Branch, who performed the indispensable task of co-ordinating the activities of the historical project within the Memorial Division; Mr. Herbert S. Edlis, who succeeded Mr. Myers in this office; Mr. Fred A. Moore, Chief, European Section, Operations Branch; and Mr. Herbert J. Elliott, Chief, Mediterranean and North Africa Section. Mention should also be made of the group of professional morticians who gave valuable assistance, notably Lt. Col. M. A. Meyer, Mr. C. T. Noll, and Capt. F. A. Missey.

Although few participants in graves registration planning were available for consultation, Mr. Boardman wishes to express special appreciation for invaluable assistance rendered by various officers and civilians of the Memorial Division, particularly Col. Robert J. Thomas, Lt. Col. Samuel F. Fritz, Lt. Col. Carl Allbee, Mr. William M. Annetti, and Mr. John M. Fisher.

Mr. Boardman also wishes to express his appreciation for the many courtesies extended by custodians of various file collections. The staff of the Federal Records Center, Alexandria, Va., especially Mrs. Margaret V. Nester and her assistants, Mrs. Mary K. Stuart, Mrs. Annie L. Griffin, Mr. Francis Knapper, and Mr. Vincent Boone, proved to be most helpful and co-operative in the search for pertinent information. At the Kansas City Records Center, where Mr. Boardman gathered vital material for the study, he found an attitude of utmost helpfulness matched by a highly efficient performance in the location of needed files. The staff of the Mail and Records Branch, OQMG, also deserve credit for much needed aid in the location of pertinent records.

Finally, the authors wish to thank Dr. Alvin P. Stauffer, Chief, Historical Branch, OQMG, who rendered invaluable assistance in reviewing, editing, and offering advice for the improvement of the

various chapters as they were presented. In the same Branch, Mr. William H. Peifer and Mr. Herbert R. Rifkind edited and prepared the galleys and page proofs for publication. Grateful acknowledgment is also made to Mr. Henry U. Milne, who cheerfully co-operated in the selection of illustrations for the study; to Mr. Alfred J. Holston, Printing Specialist, who performed a vital service in developing the format and design of this publication; and to Mrs. Hadasel W. Hill, Mrs. Charlesette Logan, and Miss Helene M. Bell, whose efficient performance in the typing of the manuscript was indispensable.

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EDWARD STEERE  
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