



KEN SKOWRONSKI

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 82nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 266-8590
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0082
Rep.Skowronski@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953

Good Morning Chairman Murphy and committee members,

Thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 639. AB 639 appropriates funds to the University of Wisconsin Missing-In-Action Recovery and Identification Project (MIA RIP) which works to identify and bring home Wisconsin Veterans who are Missing-in-Action.

The UW MIA project, by conducting annual field excavations and year-round research assistance, works to recover, identify, and repatriate MIA service members. In order to facilitate this, AB 639 gives the UW MIA Project the opportunity to request \$180,000 from the Joint Finance Committee each fiscal year during the 2021-2023 biennium. By giving the MIA project the ability to request these funds, UW can continue to work to bring all Wisconsin soldiers home.

Although it is not an easy task, it is the hope of the UW MIA Project to expand its service, and to serve as a resource for the families of the over 1,500 MIA Wisconsinites. This legislation gives families of these service members the opportunity to find closure. Although we may never find all MIA Wisconsinites, we must strive to do all we can. This bill passed the Senate Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs and Constitution and Federalism unanimously.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and for your support of this important piece of legislation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Skowronski".

Ken Skowronski
State Representative



Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities

2021 Assembly Bill 639

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

January 26, 2022

Chairman Murphy and members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities:

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 639, which would provide over \$180,000 annually to our team for 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, airmen, and Marines at or above the 38th Parallel on the Korean Peninsula,

**Help us bring
our heroes
home.**

To make a contribution, visit
mia.biotech.wisc.edu/donate/

**UW Missing in Action
Recovery & Identification Project**
425 Henry Mall, Suite 3130
Madison, WI 53706
(608) 890-4889



to name only a few.

This team has been the most dynamic collaboration of fellow students (including other 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, forensic anthropology, archaeology, biology, 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 identify 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's authors, Representative Skowronski and Senator Roth, 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.

**Help us bring
our heroes
home.**

To make a contribution, visit
mia.biotech.wisc.edu/donate/

**UW Missing in Action
Recovery & Identification Project**
425 Henry Mall, Suite 3130
Madison, WI 53706
(608) 890-4889



FULLFILLING OUR PROMISES
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

Department of Wisconsin

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
AL LABELLE
DAV BENEFITS PROTECTION TEAM LEADER
DEPARTMENT OF WISCONSIN
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY
JANUARY 26, 2022**

Chairman Murphy, and Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon! Thank you for allowing DAV (Disabled American Veterans) this opportunity to present our view on Assembly Bill 639 (AB 639) Relating to: *the University of Wisconsin Missing-in-Action Recovery and Identification Project and making an appropriation.*

DAV is a congressionally chartered national veterans' service organization of more than one million wartime veterans, all of whom were injured or made ill while serving on behalf of this nation. In Wisconsin, we have approximately 15,000 members.

Each year, we help more than 1 million veterans with Benefits, Transportation, Advocacy, Employment, and Volunteerism. Over Eighty percent (80%) of our total expenditures go to Service.

DAV Wisconsin considers the Missing in Action or (MIA) issue a high priority. The brave families of the missing continue to live in uncertainty and anguish. Finding and repatriating the remains of the missing is essential to finally give them a sense of closure.

We are grateful for the admirable work being done by the University of Wisconsin MIA Recovery and Identification Project (UW MIA Recovery Project) in conjunction with the United States Government's Defense POW/MIA Accounting

Agency or DPAA. Finding the remains of three (3) World War II veterans in their short existence speaks volumes about the excellence of their work.

Under AB 639, the UW MIA Recovery Project may request the Joint Committee on Finance to provide \$180,000 in each fiscal year of the 2021-2023 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. DAV Wisconsin finds the bill reasonable and well crafted. Its intent is certainly humane.

Thank you, Chairman Murphy, for holding this important and thank you to the nine Committee members who cosponsored the bill.

Hope I do not leave anyone out. Thank you, Representatives Wittke, Summerfield, Petryk, Cabral-Guevara, Hesselbein, Shankland, Anderson, Emerson, and Stubbs.

In the interest in time, I urge the Committee to read the background document attached to my written statement. It gives specific details on the MIA issue which you may find of some help.

Pursuant to DAV National Resolution 176¹, DAV Wisconsin strongly supports AB 639 and urges this Committee and the legislature to pass the bill unanimously, in an expeditious manner.

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

¹ Resolution 176, *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 6, 2019.

UW MIA Recovery Identification Project (UW MIA RIP)

Background

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.

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 were merged to create a new government group, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency or DPAA.

The DPAA mission is "to provide the fullest possible accounting for our missing personnel to their families and the nation." Despite ongoing efforts, DPAA estimates that more than 80,000 individuals never returned home. The locations of these individuals are concentrated in the Philippines, Solomon Islands, Korea, South Pacific, North Atlantic and throughout Western Europe.

The DPAA Laboratory is the largest and most diverse skeletal identification laboratory in the world. It is staffed by more than thirty forensic experts and is the only accredited forensic laboratory.

In the Field, recovery teams use standard archaeology methods. Standard recovery missions that last 35 to 60 days.

Initial analysis occurs at the site, and the material is then brought back to the lab for additional examination. The lab procedure is conducted in the "blind," meaning lab personnel do not know the identity of the individual. A biological profile is used which includes sex, race, age at death, DNA, and dental records.

Regarding the Vietnam War, originally there were 2,646 MIAs. The total includes MIAs in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and China. The April 27, 2021, update shows 1,062 remains were repatriated, leaving 1,584 MIAs. Of the remaining 1,584 MIAs, 470 are listed in a non-recoverable category.

For Fiscal Year 2021, 119 MIAs have been identified. These include 105 from WWII, 13 from the Korean War, and 1 from the Vietnam War.

The 105 repatriated number from WWII come mainly from the *USS Oklahoma*, which was sunk on December 7, 1941, during the attack on Pearl Harbor. In 2015, the unidentified remains of crew members from the *Oklahoma* were disinterred for DNA analysis from the Punchbowl National Cemetery in Hawaii. Currently, 346 of the 394 crew members have been identified.

In June 2021, 19 *Oklahoma* crew members were identified. Among the identified remains were three brothers from New London, Wisconsin.

They are Navy Fireman 1st Class Malcolm J. Barber, 22; Navy Fireman 1st Class Leroy K. Barber, 21; and Navy Fireman 2nd Class Randolph H. Barber, 19.

UW MIA RIP

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 MIA U.S. service members. They were the first academic institution to partner with DPAA. Today, DPAA partners with over fifty other academic and non-profit institutions.

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

On October 8, 2021, State Senator Roger Roth introduced SB 602 which will help the UW MIA Recovery and Identification Project reach its stated future goal. The Senate Bill requests the Joint Committee on Finance provide \$180,000 to the UW Project in each fiscal year of the 2021-2023 fiscal biennium budget. The money will be used for missions to recover and identify Wisconsin veterans who are missing in action.

A companion Assembly Bill (AB 639) was introduced on October 21, 2021, by State Representative Ken Skowronski. The bills will be a legislative priority for DAV. Your support will be needed to ensure passage of this vital legislation.

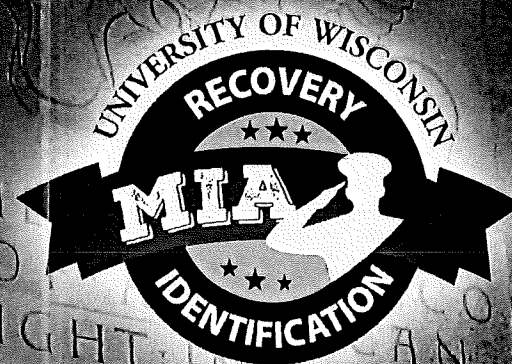
Finally, the brave families of the missing continue to live in uncertainty and anguish. Finding and repatriating the remains of the missing is essential to finally give them a sense of closure. Please keep these families in your thoughts and prayers.

Thank you allowing me to convey this important information.



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Missing in Action Recovery and Identification Project (MIA-RIP)



NAME OF SOLDIER
SERIAL NUMBER
FOUGHT IN
SEARCHED
KNOWN ONLY TO GOD

MILTON .. PVT .. 369TH INF .. 93RD DIVISION .. SEPT 12 1918
OSCOE C .. PVT 1ST CL .. 362ND INF .. 91ST DIV .. SEPT 29 1918
EDWARD R .. PVT .. 312TH INF .. 78TH DIVISION .. OCT 19 1918
ANK .. PVT 1ST CL .. 147TH INF .. 37TH DIVISION .. SEPT 27 1918
EARL F .. PVT .. 28TH INF .. 1ST DIVISION .. OCT 5 1918
A .. PVT .. 166TH INF .. 42ND DIVISION .. JULY 19 1918
GIUSEPPE .. CORP .. 307TH INF .. 77TH DIVISION .. SEPT 30 1918
MES .. PVT .. 115TH INF .. 29TH DIVISION .. OCT 10 1918
ARLIE .. PVT .. 108TH INF .. 42ND DIVISION .. OCT 3 1918
RL C .. PVT .. 108TH INF .. 42ND DIVISION .. OCT 16 1918
WALTER .. PVT .. 308TH INF .. 77TH DIVISION .. OCT 17 1918
ALBERT .. PVT .. 141ST INF .. 36TH DIVISION .. OCT 17 1918

Visit: biotech.wisc.edu/missing-in-action
Find us on Facebook: [facebook.com/UWMissingInAction](https://www.facebook.com/UWMissingInAction)



UW-Madison MIA Project by the Numbers

Over **82,000** US Servicemembers Remain MIA since 1941. Over **1,500** of them Enlisted from Wisconsin. Our Historical Research is Wisconsin Focused!

The MIA Project Works with **Roughly 30** Student Volunteers Each Year to Help Research and Recover MIAs!

The UW-Madison MIA Project Was the **1st Academic Institution** To Partner with the Defense POW-MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) beginning in **2015!**

Our Field Team Has Recovered **3** MIAs from Europe with More Missions in Progress Each Summer!

The UW-Madison MIA Project Sponsors **2** US Military Veterans Returning to Academia to Enroll in Courses at UW-Madison In the "Boot on the Ground" Program!

But We Can Do More with Your Help!

Yes, I want to help recover and identify MIAs

Our Mission is a Race Against Time

Every day, we lose veterans and eyewitnesses who can provide information and pinpoint possible MIA locations. We are driven by our desire to make as many recoveries from conflicts starting from the World War II-era as possible. You can help us beat the clock.

Our Mission Offers Students Real-World Research Experience

We rely on research volunteers, mostly unpaid University of Wisconsin students, who offer their time and research skills to make a difference for the larger Wisconsin community. You can help us expand our budget to compensate our loyal volunteers!

Our Mission Brings U.S. Servicemembers Back Home

The UW-Madison MIA Project team has participated in three field missions abroad to help recover the remains of MIAs. You can be an integral part of this process.

Thank you for your interest in the UW-Madison MIA Project. We appreciate your support of our ongoing mission.

Check out our website for further information:

<https://www.biotech.wisc.edu/missing-in-action>

Please consider supporting us with a gift at:

<https://www.biotech.wisc.edu/missing-in-action/donate>



Photo by Bryce Richter / UW-Madison

The American Legion is committed to achieving a full accounting of all POW/MIAs from the Gulf War, Vietnam War, Cold War, Korean War and World War II. This means returning living POWs, the repatriation of their remains, or finding convincing evidence why neither of these is possible.

The American Legion supports the continued declassification of all POW/MIA information, the strengthening of joint commissions with Russia, North Korea and China, and adequate resourcing of investigative efforts and field operations to resolve POW/MIA issues. The American Legion has also worked continuously with both Congress and DoD to improve the policies and programs for the accountability of missing persons. This includes urging the president and Congress to fully fund the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Office (DPAA) for its current and future mission of ensuring the accountability of U.S. servicemembers. The American Legion will continue to speak out and exert maximum pressure on both the administration and on Congress to fully account for America's POW/MIAs.

National POW/MIA Recognition Day

For years, The American Legion supported a National POW/MIA Recognition Day, which is now recognized annually on the third Friday of September. This commemoration is set aside to honor the commitment and sacrifices made by this nation's prisoners of war and those who are still missing in action, as well as their families.

Until July 18, 1979, no commemoration was held to honor POW/MIAs. In the first year, Congress passed resolutions and the national ceremony was held at the National Cathedral in Washington. The 1st Tactical Squadron from Langley Air Force Base in Virginia flew the Missing Man formation. A poster was published by VA which contained only the letters POW/MIA. That continued until 1982, when a black and white drawing of a POW in captivity was used to show urgency of the situation.

Every year, National POW/MIA Recognition Day legislation was introduced until 1985, when Congress determined that commemorative days would no longer be considered. The president now signs a proclamation each year.

The National League of Families proposed the third Friday of September as a commemoration date. Most of the National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremonies have taken place at the Pentagon. Now, they're held throughout the nation and around the world on military installations, ships, schools, churches, etc. The focus is to ensure that America remembers its responsibility to stand behind those who serve it and to make sure that we do all that is possible to account for those who have not returned.

POW/MIA Empty Chair

Resolution 288, adopted at the 67th American Legion National Convention, calls for designating a POW/MIA Empty Chair at all official meetings of The American Legion as a physical symbol of the thousands of American POW/MIAs still unaccounted for from all wars and conflicts involving the United States.

Informational Points

Overview:

- The University of Wisconsin Missing in Action Recovery and Identification Project (UW MIARIP) honors the sacrifice of brave Americans who paid the ultimate price for our freedoms.
- This bill utilizes \$180,000/year in state funding for the UW MIARIP to recover, repatriate, and identify specifically Wisconsin MIA Service Members.
- *Wisconsin could be the first state in the nation to fund this mission for its own MIA Service Members.*

1.) Mission/Purpose of the UW MIA RIP, and its Relationship with the DPAA:

- The UW MIA Recovery and Identification Project (UW MIA RIP) deploys an interdisciplinary team of UW-System experts and student volunteers in the fields of history, archaeology, anthropology, and biology.
- The project's primary goal is to research, recover, and biologically identify the remains of MIA Service Member.
- The UW MIA Project was the first academic institution to partner with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), the Department of Defense agency responsible for identifying and repatriating the remains of U.S. Service Members. This partnership has grown to include 30 other academic institutions.
- The DPAA assigns the UW MIARIP with MIA recovery cases and provides informational and logistical support to aid in recovery efforts.
- With state support, the group can begin to focus on recovering Wisconsin MIA Service Members.

2.) History of the Organization and Past Recoveries:

- The University of Wisconsin Missing in Action Recovery and Identification Project was founded in 2014 at the UW-Madison Biotechnology Center by Charles Konsitzke, the Associate Director of the center.
- Historically, the DPAA has assigned the team MIA from World War II in the European Theater.

- The project has recovered three MIA American service personnel from World War II:
 - Identification of Pfc. Lawrence Gordon in 2014
 - Recovery of fighter pilot 1st Lieutenant Frank Fazekas in summers 2016 and 2017
 - Recovery of fighter pilot 2nd Lieutenant Walter B. Stone in summer 2018
- Ongoing efforts began in summer 2019 in Belgium for a WWII missing U.S. Army Air Force Service Member.

3.) Wisconsin MIAs:

- There are over 82,000 American MIA Service Members since WWII.
- *Over 1,500 of these cases are from Wisconsin*
 - *MIAs are from every corner of the state.*

4.) UW MIA RIP's Current Capabilities and Limitations:

The DPAA has not assigned the UW MIARIP any Wisconsin MIA recovery missions, despite past requests.

Current funding from the DPAA allows for the attempted recovery of one American service member per year.

The team will continue to perform their contracted missions with the DPAA alongside state supported missions.

5.) What We Hope to Accomplish Through Passage of this Bill to Fund the Project:

- The passage of the bill will build off the group's past success with the DPAA, but will allow a sole focus on serving the citizens of Wisconsin;
- Recovery of the remains of one to three Wisconsin MIA Service Members each year;
- Provide historical updates to Wisconsin families about their MIA relatives who are unrecoverable
 - i.e., Service Members lost at sea;
- More rapid DNA analysis of recovered remains at the UW Biotechnology center (DPAA genetic analysis may take upwards up fifteen months);
- Develop the capacity to conduct DNA analysis on site in the field;
- Conduct MIA recovery operations in areas off limits to DoD-sponsored missions
 - i.e., in North Korea and China.

The American Legion,
Department of Wisconsin
2930 American Legion Dr.
Portage WI 53901
(608) 745-1090
wilegion.org



Founded on four pillars:

- Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
- National Security
 - Americanism
- Children & Youth

The mission of The American Legion, Department of Wisconsin is to provide service to veterans, their families and their communities.

January 24, 2022

Chairman and members of the committee, I am Paul Fisk Legislative Chair of The American Legion, Department of Wisconsin.

The American Legion is the largest Veterans Service Organization in the Nation. In Wisconsin, we have over 50,000 members with just over a century of advocating for veterans.

I wish to thank the University of Wisconsin for developing this project. It will provide valuable experience for those members of the University Community who work on it. I also want to thank all of the members of the Legislature and their staffs for putting this valuable piece of legislation together.

Assembly Bill 639 relating to the University of Wisconsin Missing-in-Action Recovery and Identification Project and making an appropriation has the full support of The American Legion. For a generation The American Legion has supported legislation and programs to account for those missing in action and the recovery of their remains. We must work to bring closure to the families of our comrades. It is important to the families that they know what happened to their loved one. It is a step forward that Wisconsin will work to bring this needed closure to Wisconsin families. The active role of the people of Wisconsin will make a difference.

The American Legion on both the national stage and here in Wisconsin works tirelessly to keep this issue front and center. At each Legion event there is either an empty chair or table to focus attendee's attention to those still missing. In many communities there is a silent march held in September. The participating Posts bring their colors and march several blocks to only the beat of a drum. It is a moving experience.

This bill gives hope to many families. We have seen the effect on families when they learn the fate of their loved one and the remains are returned home.