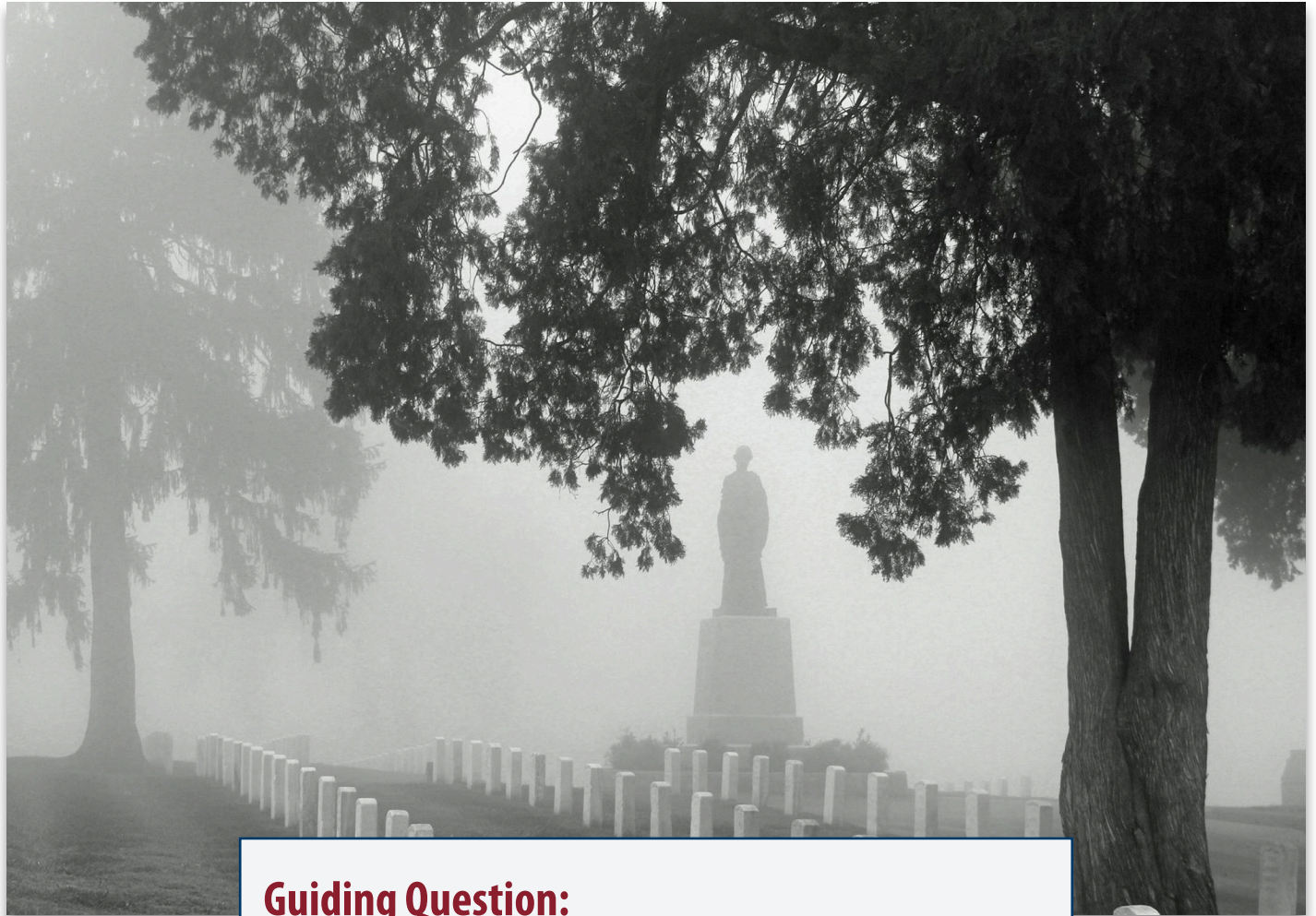


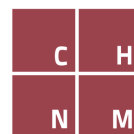
# Honoring the Fallen at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery

DEVELOPED BY LYNNE O'HARA



## Guiding Question:

How do national cemeteries memorialize those killed in war as well as veterans?



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Center FOR  
History AND  
New Media

## Overview

Students will explore (virtually or in person) a variety of types burials and memorials and analyze how cemeteries honor service members buried under varying circumstances.

## Objectives

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to:

- Describe how U.S. national cemeteries honor those killed in action whose remains are not easily identified; and
- Analyze how the U.S. government works to identify and memorialize those lost in combat, even many years later.



*Jefferson Barracks is a unique national cemetery in that it contains a variety of types of burials, including more than 560 group burials (second in the nation only to Arlington National Cemetery).*

— Lynne O'Hara

**O'Hara is the Director of Programs at National History Day in College Park, Maryland.**

## Spotlight: Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery

Jefferson Barracks, one of the National Cemetery Administrations oldest interment sites, has served as a burial place soldiers from all wars. The original military post was built south of St. Louis, Mo., on the banks of the Mississippi River to replace Fort Bellefontaine. Selected for its strategic geographic location, the post was opened in 1826. Jefferson Barracks became the army's first permanent base west of the Mississippi River.

The old cemetery contains approximately 20,000 gravesites, including more than 1,000 Confederate dead. During this era, Union dead were interred in sections by state.

World War II casualties introduced a new focus to the cemetery as the central repository for group interments resulting from national disasters, when individual remains cannot be identified. Among the more than 560 group burials—meaning two or more veterans in a common grave—are 123 victims of a 1944 Japanese massacre of POWs in the Philippines, and the remains of 41 unidentified marines who perished in a South Vietnam helicopter crash in 1968.

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# Standards Connections

## Connections to Common Core

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.3** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

# Documents Used

## Primary Sources

Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463 Command Chronology for February 1968 (excerpt)  
Vietnam Center, Archive, & Museum of the Vietnam War, Texas Tech University  
<https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/reports/images.php?img=/images/1201/1201105029.pdf>

Marine Observation Squadron 2, Marine Aircraft Group 16 Command Chronology, January 31, 1968 (excerpt)  
Vietnam Center, Archive, & Museum of the Vietnam War, Texas Tech University  
<https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/reports/images.php?img=/images/1201/1201070009.pdf>

Missing Air Crew Report #42-32291  
National Archives and Records Administration

## Secondary Sources

"Bruce A. Van Voorhis, LCDR, USN"  
U.S. Naval Academy Virtual Memorial Hall  
[https://usnamemorialhall.org/index.php/BRUCE A. VAN VOORHIS, LCDR, USN](https://usnamemorialhall.org/index.php/BRUCE_A._VAN_VOORHIS,_LCDR,_USN)

DPAA Agency Video  
Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rkxi644lb9c>

Mary Delach Leonard, "African-American Union Army soldiers died on their way home from war; then history lost their names," May 24, 2015  
St. Louis Public Radio  
<http://news.stlpublicradio.org/post/african-american-union-army-soldiers-died-their-way-home-war-then-history-lost-their-names>

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### VETERANS LEGACY PROGRAM

Map, Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery

National Cemetery Administration

<https://www.cem.va.gov/CEM/cems/maps/JeffersonBarracks852.pdf>

“Michael Blassie: Unknown No More”

U.S. National Library of Medicine

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/visibleproofs/galleries/cases/blassie.html>

Veteran Profile, Corporal Alva P. Hilscher

National Cemetery Administration

<https://www.cem.va.gov/legacy/>

## Materials

- Veteran Profile, Corporal Alva P. Hilscher
- Map of Jefferson Barracks
- “African-American Union Army soldiers died on their way home from war; then history lost their names” handout
- Group Activity A handout
- Group Activity B handout
- Group Activity C handout
- Group Activity D handout
- Pens or pencils

## Activity Preparation

- Divide students into four groups (A, B, C, and D).
- Make one copy of the Veteran Profile, Corporal Alva P. Hilscher for teacher use.
- Make five copies of the Map of Jefferson Barracks (one for teacher use and one for each group of students).
- Make copies of “African-American Union Army soldiers died on their way home from war; then history lost their names” handout (one for every student and the teacher).
- Make copies of Group Activity A handout (one for every student assigned to Group A and the teacher).

- Make copies of Group Activity B handout (one for every student assigned to Group B and the teacher).
- Make copies of Group Activity C handout (one for every student assigned to Group C and the teacher).
- Make copies of Group Activity D handout (one for every student assigned to Group D and the teacher).
- Bring a device to listen to the St. Louis Public radio story (or print out the story if preferred).
- Gather pens or pencils.

## Procedure

### Activity One: Cemetery Etiquette (15 minutes)

- Board the bus at school and ask students: *What do you think is the proper behavior at a cemetery and why? Do you think there is a different way to behave at military cemeteries than at regular cemeteries? Why is it important to respect this space?*
- Inform students of any cemetery behavior they have not come up with themselves.

**Teacher Tip:** *Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery is an active cemetery, and it averages 17 burials each day. Please remind students to be extra respectful if they encounter a service.*

### Activity Two: Visit to Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery (60 minutes)

- Take students to the grave of Corporal Alva P. Hilscher (Section I, Grave 2555).
  - Ask students, *What clues to Corporal Hilscher's life can we learn from his grave stone?*
  - Ask a student to read the Veteran Profile, Corporal Alva P. Hilscher.
  - Ask students,
    - *How does the profile give you insight to this man's life?*
    - *Look around you. How is Corporal Hilscher similar to or different from the men and women buried in this section?*
    - *What other observations can you make about the graves in this section?*

- Walk or drive to section 57 and find the stone obelisk, a group burial monument to the members of the 56<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops who died of cholera in August 1866 (Section 57, Grave 15009).
  - Distribute one “African-American Union Army soldiers died on the way home from war; then history lost their names” handout to each student.
  - Play the story, “African-American Union Army soldiers died on their way home from war; then history lost their names” from St. Louis Public Radio. If preferred, you can print the story and read it aloud.
  - Allow students time to complete the response on the handout.
  - Invite students to share their responses with the group.
- Walk or drive to the area containing sections 79, 80, 81, and 82.
  - Divide students into pre-assigned groups.
  - Distribute one map to each group.
  - Explain how the grave numbering system works. Students can follow the map to the correct section and use the numbers on the back of the graves to find their assigned location.
  - Explain that Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery is unique because there are more than 560 group burials, many in this area.
  - Ask students, *Why might group burials be needed?*
  - Distribute the appropriate Group Activity to each group so that every student has a copy.
  - Direct each group of students to find their particular grave, complete the response, and return to the meeting point. Give students a specific time to return.
- Ask members of each group to share the story of the grave that they visited. Share in order to maintain chronology (A, then B, etc.)

## Assessment

- Assign the reflection question to be completed upon return to school: *How do national cemeteries memorialize those killed in war as well as veterans? Based on what you learned today, what questions do you have and how might you go about finding those answers?*

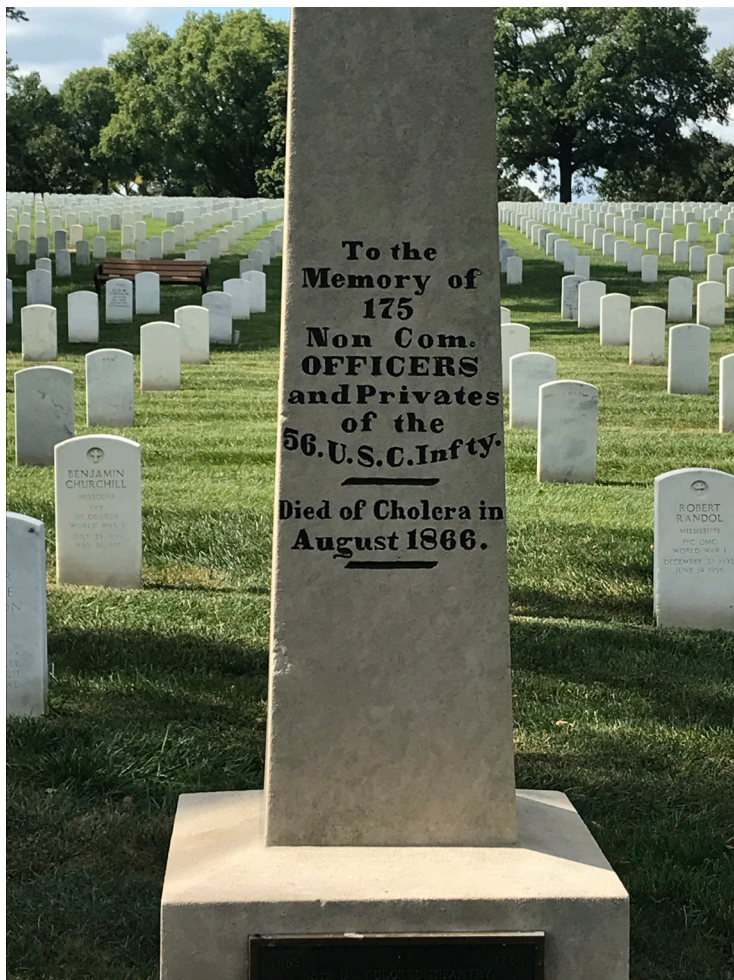
## Methods for Extension

- Students can select a grave at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery to research on their own.
- Students interested in learning more about the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) can explore their website or watch the DPAA Agency Video on YouTube.

## "African-American Union Army soldiers died on their way home from war; then history lost their names"

### Memorial to members of the 56<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops who died of cholera in August 1866

Location: Section 57, Grave 15009



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National Cemetery Administration | American Battle Monuments Commission | National History Day | Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media



# Group Activity A

## Grave of Bruce Avery Van Voorhis and his crew of Bombing Squadron 102, July 6, 1943

Location: Section 79, Graves 279-281

**Task:** Read the following story, from the U.S. Naval Academy, of Bruce Avery Van Voorhis.

### Biography

"Bruce Avery Van Voorhis (29 January 1908 - 6 July 1943) was a United States Navy aviator who was shot down in the Pacific theater during World War II. For his heroic action on July 6, 1943, he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. Van Voorhis was born on 29 January 1908 in Aberdeen, Washington, and grew up in Nevada. He was appointed to the Naval Academy in June 1925.

"Following graduation from the Academy on 6 June 1929, Ensign Van Voorhis reported for duty in the battleship *Mississippi* (BB-41). That assignment lasted until November 1930 when he transferred to the Naval Air Station at Pensacola, Florida, for aviation training.

"He received his wings on 3 September 1931, and was assigned to the *Maryland* (BB-46) as a member of Observation Squadron 4B (VO-4B). In June 1934, he transferred to Bombing Squadron 5B on board the aircraft carrier *Ranger* (CV-4), and soon thereafter, to VB-2B attached to *Saratoga* (CV-3). From July 1935 until May 1937, he served in the Panama Canal Zone and flew patrols from Coco Solo with Patrol Squadron 2F (VP-2F). The following June, 1938, Van Voorhis returned to carrier-based aviation and served first in *Enterprise* (CV-6), then in *Yorktown* (CV-5), and finally back to *Enterprise*. In June 1940, Van Voorhis joined the aviation unit assigned to the light cruiser *Honolulu* (CL-48) where he served for a year. In July 1941, he reported for duty at the Naval Air Station, Anacostia, where he served until November 1942.

"In December 1942, Van Voorhis, a Lieutenant Commander since July, assumed command of VP-14, but soon thereafter took command of VB-102. While serving in that capacity, LCDR Van Voorhis gave his life for his country near Hare Island of Kapingamarangi Atoll, the southernmost of the Eastern Caroline Islands. After a 700-mile flight alone, LCDR Van Voorhis launched successive bombing and strafing attacks on the enemy ground installations. During his onslaught, he succeeded in destroying a radio station, anti-aircraft emplacements, and at least one airborne fighter as well as three others on the water.



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However, the strength of Japanese aerial opposition eventually forced Van Voorhis lower and lower until either the intense anti-aircraft barrage, the fighters, or-perhaps-his own bomb blasts knocked him out of the sky near the island. For the 'conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity' he displayed in his 'lone but relentless battle against overwhelming opposition . . .' He died on July 6, 1943 and was awarded the Medal of Honor, posthumously."

### **Medal of Honor Citation**

"The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Lieutenant Commander Bruce Avery Van Voorhis, United States Navy, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as Squadron Commander of Bombing Squadron ONE HUNDRED TWO (VB-102) and as Plane Commander of a PB4Y-1 Patrol Bomber operating against the enemy on Japanese-held Greenwich Island during the battle of the Solomon Islands, 6 July 1943. Fully aware of the limited chance of surviving an urgent mission, voluntarily undertaken to prevent a surprise Japanese attack against our forces, Lieutenant Commander Van Voorhis took off in total darkness on a perilous 700-mile flight without escort or support. Successful in reaching his objective despite treacherous and varying winds, low visibility and difficult terrain, he fought a lone but relentless battle under fierce anti-aircraft fire and overwhelming aerial opposition. Forced lower and lower by pursuing planes, he coolly persisted in his mission of destruction. Abandoning all chance of a safe return he executed six bold ground-level attacks to demolish the enemy's vital radio station, installations, anti-aircraft guns and crews with bombs and machinegun [sic] fire, and to destroy one fighter plane in the air and three on the water. Caught in his own bomb blast, Lieutenant Commander Van Voorhis crashed into the lagoon off the beach, sacrificing himself in a single-handed fight against almost insuperable odds, to make a distinctive contribution to our continued offensive in driving the Japanese from the Solomons and, by his superb daring, courage and resoluteness of purpose, enhanced the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country."

**Response:** How does this story impact the way that you view this grave?

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# Group Activity B

Grave of the crew from the 13th Air Force, killed in action January 28, 1944

Location: Section 81, Graves 387-388

Task: Read the following Missing Air Crew Report (MACR).



Page 1

**Classification changed to RESTRICTED**  
by E. A. BRADUNAS, Lt. Col., AO  
by F. M. MUECH, Capt., AO  
Date WAR 1 5 1948

WAR DEPARTMENT  
HEADQUARTERS ARMY AIR FORCES  
WASHINGTON

**MISSING AIR CREW REPORT**

IMPORTANT: This report will be compiled in triplicate by each Army Air Forces organization within 48 hours of the time an aircraft is officially reported missing.

1. ORGANIZATION: Location RUSSELLS; Command or Air Force 13th AF;  
Group 42nd Bomb; Squadron 70th Bomb; Detachment \_\_\_\_\_

2. SPECIFY: Point of Departure Stirling Field; Course Direct;  
intended Destination Tobera Airdrome; Type of Mission Bomb-Strafe

3. WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST REPORTED: Good

4. GIVE: (a) Date 1/28/44; Time 1640L; and Location Tobera Airdrome of last known whereabouts of missing aircraft.  
(b) Specify whether ( ) Last Sighted; ( ) Last Contacted by Radio; ( ) Forced Down; (X) Seen to Crash; or ( ) Information not available.

5. AIRCRAFT WAS LOST, OR IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN LOST, AS A RESULT OF: (Check only one) ( ) Enemy Aircraft; (X) Enemy Anti-Aircraft; ( ) Other Circumstances as Follows \_\_\_\_\_

6. AIRCRAFT: Type, Model and Series B-250-1; A.A.F. Serial Number 42-32291

7. ENGINES: Type, Model and Series \_\_\_\_\_; A.A.F. Serial Number (a) \_\_\_\_\_; (b) \_\_\_\_\_; (c) \_\_\_\_\_; (d) \_\_\_\_\_

8. INSTALLED WEAPONS (Furnish below Make, Type and Serial Number)  
(a) 12 - .50 cal.; (b) \_\_\_\_\_; (c) \_\_\_\_\_; (d) \_\_\_\_\_  
(e) 2 - .30 cal.; (f) \_\_\_\_\_; (g) \_\_\_\_\_; (h) \_\_\_\_\_

9. THE PERSONS LISTED BELOW WERE REPORTED AS: (a) Battle Casualty battle or (b) Non-Battle Casualty \_\_\_\_\_

10. NUMBER OF PERSONS ABOARD AIRCRAFT: Crew 6; Passengers \_\_\_\_\_; Total 6  
(Starting with pilot, furnish the following particulars: If more than 10 persons were aboard aircraft, list similar particulars on separate sheet and attach original to this form.)

Crew Position	Name in Full (Last Name First)	Rank	Serial Number
DED 1. Pilot	Gilliland, Leslie D.	F/O	T-185547
DED 2. Co-Pilot	Stephens, Marion O.	F/O	T-375
DED 3. Bombardier	Bobal, Andrew V.	2nd Lt.	O-6/2553
DED 4. Engineer	Goldsmith, James A.	Sgt.	6975694
DED 5. Radio Operator	Freeman, Benton (NMI)	S/Sgt.	16004461
DED 6. Gunner	Dintaman, Charles D.	Sgt.	6850535
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

11. IDENTIFY BELOW THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LAST KNOWLEDGE OF AIRCRAFT, AND CHECK APPROPRIATE COLUMN TO INDICATE BASIS FOR SAME:

*Sup 1834*

- 1 -

**RESTRICTED**

**FILE**

CONFIDENTIAL  
~~SECRET~~

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT - Sample Form (Cont'd).

Name in Full (Last Name First)	Rank	Serial Number	Contacted By Radio	Check Only One Column		
				Last Sighted	Saw Crash	Saw Forced Landing
1. <u>Lafortune Jr., Arthur A.</u>	<u>F/O</u>	<u>T-60463</u>				
2.						
3.						

12. IF PERSONNEL ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE SURVIVED, ANSWER YES TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS: (a) Parachutes were used \_\_\_\_\_; (b) Persons were seen walking away from scene of crash \_\_\_\_\_; or (c) Any other reason (Specify) See below.\*

13. ATTACH AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH, MAP, CHART, OR SKETCH, SHOWING APPROXIMATE LOCATION WHERE AIRCRAFT WAS LAST SEEN.

14. ATTACH EYEWITNESS DESCRIPTION OF CRASH, FORCED LANDING, OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES PERTAINING TO MISSING AIRCRAFT.

15. ATTACH A DESCRIPTION OF THE EXTENT OF SEARCH, IF ANY, AND GIVE NAME, RANK AND SERIAL NUMBER OF OFFICER IN CHARGE HERE \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Report 9 February 1944

(Signature of Preparing Officer)  
HUBERT E. HALL  
2nd Lt., Air Corps.

\*12. Plane crashed but was not observed to have burned.

S T A T E M E N T

Just as we were passing over the runway I looked over the left and saw F/O Gilliland's ship as it was about 100 ft. above the trees with the left wing pointed to the ground. The nose dropped immediately and he made about 1 1/4 turns very fast, before he was out of sight in the trees and a moment later struck the ground. I saw no smoke or indication that the ship was on fire. It was still in one piece. Believe that the pilot was hit with M/G fire or his cables shot away causing the ship to go out of control.

/s/ Arthur A. Lafortune, Jr.,  
ARTHUR A. LAFORTUNE, JR.,  
F/O, 70th Bomb Squadron (M)

A TRUE COPY: Hubert E. Hall  
HUBERT E. HALL,  
2nd Lieut., Air Corps,  
Adjutant.

**Response:** The crew of this plane was discovered and interred here at Jefferson Barracks in 1959. How does this primary document impact the way that you view this grave?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

# Group Activity C

Grave of the crew and passengers from the Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463, killed January 8, 1968  
18 miles south of Dong Ha, South Vietnam

Location: Section 81, Graves 270-272

**Task:** Read the following excerpts from documents from the U.S. Marine Corps documenting the crash. This is one of the worst crashes in the history of helicopters.



## From Marine Observation Squadron 2, Marine Aircraft Group 16 Command Chronology January 1-31, 1968

"At 19:15 Hours one HMH-463 CH-53A (YH-37 Bureau Number 153710) was declared overdue and missing after disappearing during an IFR flight. Search and rescue operations commenced."

On January 9 and 10, "The search for the missing CH-53A aircraft continued with negative sightings and search operations hampered by inclement weather." On January 11, "The wreckage of the missing CH-53A aircraft was sighted by search aircraft at coord. YD234260, no apparent survivors. Adverse weather conditions precluded a search of the crash site until 19 Jan when a recon team was inserted. The aircraft suffered severe burn damage and there was no possibility of survivors."

The crew was declared killed in action on February 26, 1968.

## Casualty List (Military)

### Crew (5):

Chapman, John Thomas Capt Co-Pilot HMH-463 MAG-16  
Olson, Bennett Walfred SSgt Gunner HMH-463 MAG-16  
Schram, Frederick Lloyd Capt Pilot HMH-463 MAG-16  
Strand Jr., Philip Stanley Cpl Crew Chief HMH-463 MAG-16  
Venegas, Vernon Bernabe Cpl Gunner HMH-463 MAG-16

### Passengers (41):

Bardach, Alan Jensen 1stLt HHC 507thTransGrp USARV  
Barry, Kenneth Donald PFC H&SCo/1/1 1stMarDiv  
Curry, Hovey Rice PFC A/1/1 1stMarDiv  
Cyr, Lawrence Joseph SgtMaj HQBtty/4/12 3rdMarDiv  
Day, Michael Robert Sgt A/3rdTankBn 3rdMarDiv  
Diaz, Daniel PFC HQCo/3rdMarines 3rdMarDiv  
Dietz, Gary Philip Cpl B/1stAmtracBn 3rdMarDiv  
Dornak, Leonard Edward 1stLt CommSuptBn/7thCommBn 1stMarDiv  
Eaddy, Ishmell PFC E/2/9 3rdMarDiv  
Ellis, George Walter Col H&SCo 3rdMAF

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Fennell, Alton Jimmy PFC 3rdMAF  
 Fox, Ronald Lee LCpl Battl/1/12 3rdMarDiv  
 Freeman, Glenn Wayne Cpl 3rdMAF  
 Fulwider, Daniel Raymond Sgt 3rdMAF  
 Garza, Vicente Sgt 3DATCo/3TANKBn 3rdMarDiv  
 Grimes, Thomas Allen SSgt K/3/26 3rdMarDiv  
 Hall, Michael Jennings 2ndLt H&SCo/FLSG"B"/ForceLogCom  
 Hetland, Ronald Lee LCpl BttyE/2/12 3rdMarDiv  
 Jackson, Donney Lyrce HM3 Corpsman 4/12 3rdMarDiv  
 Jones Jr., Halcott Pride HM2 Corpsman 1/4 3rdMarDiv  
 Kirschner, Stephen Benjamin PVT HQBtty/1/12 3rdMarDiv  
 May, Craig Nolan LCpl H&SCo/1/1 1stMarDiv  
 Miller, James Irvin LCpl C/1/1 1stMarDiv  
 Nicholson, David Donell Cpl E/2/9 3rdMarDiv  
 Patrick, Jerry PFC H&SCo/1/1 1stMarDiv  
 Pintar, James Albert LCpl H&SCo/1/1 1stMarDiv  
 Price Jr., Millard Ernest WO HQCo/HQBn/3rdMarDiv  
 Protano Jr., Guy Jerry LCpl G/2/1 1stMarDiv  
 Rumley, Richard Allen Cpl A/1/1 1stMarDiv  
 Schautteet Jr., Louis L LCpl A/1/1 1stMarDiv  
 Shaffer Jr., Wallace Clair HM3 Corpsman 3rdMedBn 3rdMarDiv  
 Sigmon, Harold Wayne Sgt B/1/4 3rdMarDiv  
 Skarman, Orval Harry Sgt L/3/3/3rdMarDiv  
 Smith, Charles Herbert LCpl H&SCo/3/2 3rdMarDiv  
 Teeter, Gary Alan LCpl C/1/1 1stMarDiv  
 Ugino, John Joseph PFC M/3/26 3rdMarDiv  
 Vaught, Michael Eugene LCpl A/1/4 3rdMarDiv  
 White, Craig Preston LCpl C/1/1 1stMarDiv  
 White, Raymond PFC A/1/1 1stMarDiv  
 Wilson, Robert Charles PFC 1/D/1/1, 1stMARDIV  
 Zirfas, Ewald Capt 507thTransGrp/TMA/MACV

### **Casualty List (Civilian)**

Claudio, Thomas C.  
 Nicely, Coy

Of those killed in this crash, 43 were interred at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery on July 23, 1968.

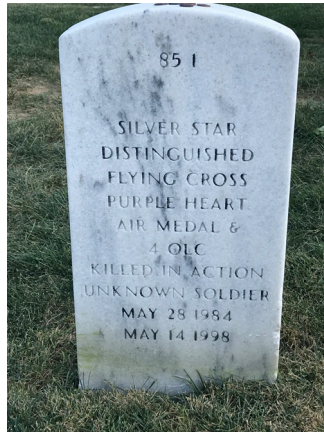
**Response:** How does this grave remember the crew and passengers of this crash? How do these primary documents impact the way that you view this grave?

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# Group Activity D

## Grave of Michael Blassie

Location: Section 85, Grave 1



**Task:** Read this article from the U.S. National Library of Medicine and respond to the question at the end.

“Michael Blassie: Unknown No More,” U.S. National Library of Medicine

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/visibleproofs/galleries/cases/blassie.html>

*We want the truth, we want to bring him home.*

—Jean Blassie, mother of 1st Lt. Michael Blassie, 1998

*It may be that forensic science has reached the point where there will be no other unknowns in any war.*

—William S. Cohen, U.S. Secretary of Defense, 1998

“On Memorial Day 1984, the remains of a soldier killed during the Vietnam War were laid to rest in the Tomb of the Unknown at Arlington National Cemetery. A decade later, however, questions began to arise about the identity of this unknown soldier.

“First Lieutenant Michael Joseph Blassie, 24, was shot down over South Vietnam in 1972 and presumed dead. When family members received word that his remains might be buried in the Tomb of the Unknown, they petitioned the Department of Defense to open the site and conduct previously unavailable DNA testing. In 1998 the Tomb of the Unknown was opened and the remains of the Vietnam Unknown—identified as X-26—were removed.

“Forensic anthropologists took the aged and damaged samples of bone for mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) testing. Because mtDNA is passed along the maternal line, scientists compared the Unknown Soldier's DNA against two samples submitted by First Lieutenant Blassie's mother and sister and found a match.

“On July 11, 1998, 1st Lt. Michael Blassie was buried with full military honors in Jefferson National Cemetery, Missouri, near his hometown, in the same cemetery as his father.



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## Going further: Lt. Blassie and the unknown soldier

"Michael Joseph Blassie, the oldest of five children of a St. Louis meat cutter, entered the Air Force Academy in 1966 and received his officer's commission in June 1970. During a tour of Vietnam, he served as a member of the 8th Special Operations Squadron. On May 11, 1972, at age 24, his A-37B Dragonfly aircraft was shot down near An Loc, about 60 miles north of Saigon.

"Immediate recovery attempts were launched, but Blassie had crashed in an area controlled by enemy forces so it was impossible to examine the crash site. Five months later, during a sweep of the area, a South Vietnamese Army patrol recovered a pelvis, an upper arm bone, and some ribs, as well as the remnants of a flight suit, a life raft, pieces of a parachute, and part of a USAF holster. The remains and associated materials were eventually turned over to the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii for analysis and identification. They were initially classified as belonging to Lt. Blassie. However, analysis at the time suggested that the remains were not a compelling match to Blassie's age and height. With the conflicting information between the forensic analysis and the physical evidence, the remains were designated as "Unknown" and assigned the number "X-26."



"The timely and accurate identification of men and women who die while serving in the armed forces has long been a priority for the United States government. The Armed Forces have adopted the latest advances in fingerprint and dental identification, and forensic anthropology and radiology. But not all remains can be identified with such methods. Records can get damaged or destroyed, and post-mortem materials can be affected by decomposition, body fragmentation and exposure to heat.

"With the invention of the polymerase chain reaction in 1985, DNA analysis moved to the forefront of forensic technologies. In 1991 the Department of Defense founded the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL). AFDIL has used DNA analysis to identify the remains of at least 150 military personnel from Vietnam, Korea, and World War 2, and assisted in the identification of victims from high profile disasters, both natural and man-made. Now that DNA samples are taken from everyone who joins the U.S. Armed Forces, there may never be another American 'unknown soldier'."

## Mitochondrial DNA testing

"Human beings have copies of DNA from each biological parent, stored in the nucleus of every cell. DNA is also stored in tiny, energy-producing structures in the cells, called mitochondria. Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) differs from nuclear DNA because human beings inherit mtDNA solely from the mother and share this information with siblings and maternal relatives. Unlike nuclear DNA, each cell carries more than a hundred copies of mtDNA, since each cell contains many mitochondria but only one nucleus. The ability to match mtDNA between related individuals, and the fact that it does not degrade as rapidly as nuclear DNA, makes it a valuable tool in the identification of human remains.

**Response:** How has science impacted history? How does the story of First Lieutenant Blassie give hope to other families whose loved ones may be buried here in Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# JEFFERSON BARRACKS NATIONAL CEMETERY

2900 Sheridan Road, St. Louis, MO 63125

Phone: (314) 845-8320 Fax: (314) 845-8355

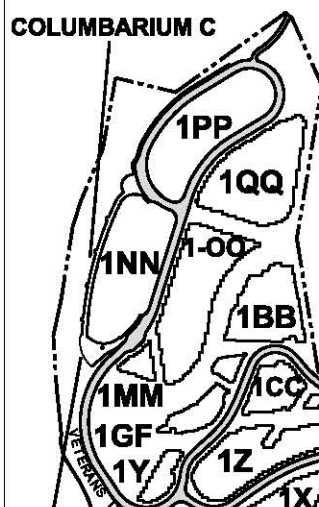
## LEGEND

**MS-** MEMORIAL SECTION  
★ COMMITTAL SHELTER

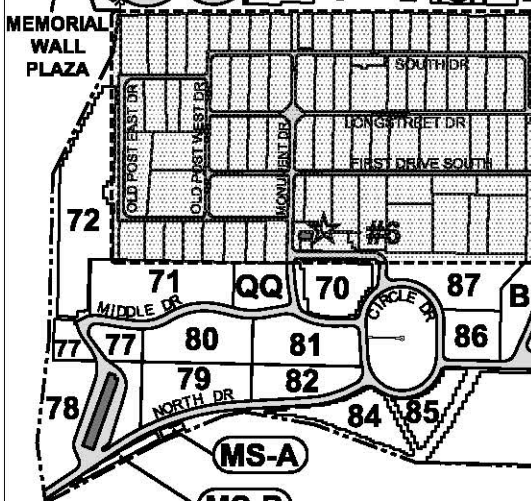
## ENLARGED AREA

5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	15 1/2	16	17	18	19	66	67	68	69
1	2	3	4	30	29	28	27	26	25	24	23	22	21	20	62	63	64	65	
OPS 1	OPS 3	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	61	60	59	58				
OPS 2	45	41	44	43	42	41	88	57	1/2										
46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57								

## COLUMBARIUM C



## MEMORIAL WALL PLAZA



ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

MAIN ENTRANCE

PARKING AREA

MAINTENANCE AREA



# Corporal Alva P. Hilscher

RESEARCHED BY KATIE HOERNER AND MARION TOUZEL



February 16, 1931 - May 11, 1981

**Hometown:** Belleville, Illinois

**Entered Service:** July 23, 1948

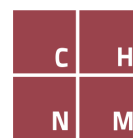
**Unit:** 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, 1<sup>st</sup> Shore Party Battalion, Company B

**Rank:** Corporal, U.S. Marine Corps

**Cemetery:** Site 2555, Section I  
Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery  
St. Louis, Missouri



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## Before the War

On February 16, 1931, Alva Paul Hilscher was born in Leavenworth County, Kansas to Herman and Carolyn Hilscher. He had an older brother, Herman, Jr. According to the 1930 census, Herman Hilscher, Sr. worked as a carpenter at a machine manufacturing company.

Herman and Carolyn divorced at some point after Alva's birth. According to the 1940 federal census, Alva and Herman, Jr. lived with their father and his new wife, Virginia F. Hilscher. Herman, Sr. was now employed by the federal government as a carpenter at a military base (most likely at Fort Leavenworth).

At age 17, Alva petitioned to join the U.S. Marine Corps. His mother, Carolyn Hilscher McCasland (she was remarried at this time) gave permission for him to enlist underage. He indicated two years experience as a farm hand as well as experience operating a donut fryer.

Hilscher, Herman J	Head	R	15
—, Caroline	Wife		
—, Herman Jr	Son		

The Hilscher family in Leavenworth County, Kansas, shortly before Alva's birth, 1930. National Archives and Records Administration.

Hilscher Herman J.	Head	m	w	35
— Virginia F	Wife	F	w	34
— Herman Jr.	Son	m	w	11
— Alva P.	Son	m	w	9

The Hilscher family in Leavenworth County, Kansas, 1940. National Archives and Records Administration.

### Consent of Parents or Guardian to Enlistment of a Minor in the Marine Corps

We, CAROLYN McCASLAND and \_\_\_\_\_  
 residing in RR#1, Clark, county of Audrain  
 and State of Missouri, do freely consent to the enlistment of  
ALVA PAUL HILSCHER in the United States Marine  
 Corps as a PRIVATE, to serve for (3) Three. unless sooner discharged,  
 subject to all the requirements and lawful commands of the officers who may, from time to time, be placed  
 over him; do hereby relinquish all claim to his service, and to any wages or compensation for the same, and  
 do hereby certify that he was born in Leavenworth, Kansas on the  
16 day of February, 1931  
 And I \* do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I am the father and only surviving parent \* of the  
I am the mother and only surviving parent \*  
I am the legally appointed guardian \*  
 said ALVA PAUL HILSCHER, that he has no other legal guardian,  
is \* married, has \* had military service, and has never been convicted of any crime or com-  
 mitted an act such as would render him liable to criminal prosecution in any court: So help me God.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (Signature of father or guardian)  
Carolyn McCasland  
 (Signature of mother)

Carolyn McCasland signed for Alva Hilscher to enlist in the U.S. Marine Corps, July 21, 1948. National Archives and Records Administration - St. Louis.

### VETERANS LEGACY PROGRAM

# Military Experience

Hilscher enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps on July 23, 1948 and arrived at Parris Island, South Carolina, on July 25. His service took him to various places, including training exercises in Puerto Rico and Cuba in February and March 1949.

As tension escalated in Korea, he sailed on the USS *General H.W. Butner* from San Diego to Japan, arriving on August 29, 1950 and then aboard LST Q-036 from Kobe, Japan to Korea. He arrived in Korea on September 15, 1950 with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, 1<sup>st</sup> Shore Party Battalion, Company B.

Hilscher's primary job in the Marines was to work as a Shore Party Man. He marked beaches, unloaded ships, controlled traffic, removed mines, set up communications, established dump and supply points, and engaged in reconnaissance missions. The 1<sup>st</sup> Shore Party Battalion moved cargo inland to support Marines as they advanced.

Hilscher's unit participated in the Incheon landings, the assault and seizure of Seoul, and the Wonsan-Hungnam-Chosin Campaign. He served in Korea from September 15, 1950 to September 11, 1951. He was hospitalized for part of his deployment in November and December 1950.

He returned to San Francisco on the USS *Menald*, sailing from Kobe, Japan, on November 25, 1951.



Records indicate that Hilscher and Company B sailed aboard the USS *Noble* from San Diego, California to Kobe, Japan. This photograph of the ship was taken on October 26, 1950. National Archives and Records Administration (421311).



Six U.S. Navy LSTs beached during the Wonsan invasion, October 26, 1950. National Archives and Records Administration (421389).

## VETERANS LEGACY PROGRAM

## Veteran Experience

After returning to Belleville, Illinois in 1952, Hilscher married Patricia Rosemary Boothman. Together they had seven children, four sons and three daughters. Hilscher worked as a maintenance man for the local hospital. Alva Paul, Jr. still resides in Irvington, Illinois.

Hilshcer died of cancer on May 11, 1981. His widow moved to Virginia Beach to live with their eldest daughter, Patricia, until her death on November 11, 2016.

## Commemoration

Alva Paul Hilscher, Sr. was laid to rest in Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis County, Missouri.



Alva Paul Hilscher, Sr.'s grave at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis, Missouri. Courtesy of Lynne O'Hara.

# Bibliography

1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, Korea; General Administrative Files, September 1950-March 1955, Record Group 127 (Box 226); National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

"17 from St. Louis Area Return from Far East." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. November 26, 1951. Newspapers.com (140049696).

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Gilbert, J. A. *The USS Noble (APA-218) unloads troops and supplies at invasion of Wonson...* Photograph. October 26, 1950. National Archives and Records Administration (421311). Image.

Hilscher, Patricia. E-mail message to author. September 24, 2018.

Kansas. Leavenworth County. 1930 U.S. Census. Digital Images. <http://ancestry.com>.

Kansas. Leavenworth County. 1940 U.S. Census. Digital Images. <http://ancestry.com>.

Rose, C. K. *Invasion of Incheon, Korea. Four LST's Unload Men...* Photograph. September 15, 1950. National Archives and Records Administration (470027). Image.

Rose, C. K. *Six Navy LSTs beached during Wonson invasion...* Photograph. October 26, 1950. National Archives and Records Administration (421389). Image.