



John Henry Walker

Morning Sun soldier finally returning home seventy-four years after he disappeared

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John Walker Missing In Action

Mr. and Mrs. S. N. Walker have been officially notified that their son, Pvt. John Walker, is missing in action on November 24 in France. Pvt. Walker entered the army in March 1944 and was sent to overseas duty in early September. He is a member of the 1st Army that has figured in a great deal of action during the last few months. John was a Morning Sun visitor last August when he was enroute from a California camp to the embarkation center.

From the January 11, 1945 Morning Sun News-Herald

By Jim Rudisill
MORNING SUN - Nearly seventy-four years after he disappeared while fighting in a German forest during World War II, Morning Sun native son John Henry Walker is finally coming home.

Family members recently confirmed that following a two-year wait, DNA testing had finally determined that Walker had been buried in a Netherland cemetery after falling in battle in 1944.

Walker was 19 when he was inducted into the U.S. Army in March 1944, a little more than two years after the United States had entered the war. His last visit home came in August of that year, about one month after he had turned 20.

In September he was sent overseas, first to England and eventually to the front lines in France and Belgium. According to a Feb. 15, 1945 issue of the Wapello Republican, which is part of an online family genealogy history on Walker and other family members, he was serving as a private in one of two battalions of the 1st Infantry Division involved in surrounding Aachen, Germany on Nov. 24, 1944 when he became listed as missing in action.

Despite searches by military personnel and two older brothers who were also serving in the European theatre of the war, no official trace of him was ever found following the two-week battle in the Hurtigen Forest near Schonthal, Germany.

One year after being listed as MIA and following the law at that time, the defense department set a presumptive date of death as Nov. 25, 1945.

"I regret the necessity for this measure, but trust that the ending of a long period of uncertainty may give at least some small measure of consolation," Maj. Gen. Edward F. Witsell wrote in a notification sent to John's parents, Sam and Reil "Jennie" Walker. The family later received another letter explaining a Purple Heart had been awarded to John.

The mystery of where John rested however continued to

John's younger sister Marge (Mrs. Trevor Kimble), Morning Sun, who died in 2015, was as determined as Sam and Jennie to bring John home.

"I think my mom always held out hope that eventually something would turn up," Becky said.

However, Debbie said her father was never that certain, partly because of what the family had learned about the battle where John had been lost.

"What Dad said was their parents were always led to believe that it was a really bad battle and he was just gone," she reported.

Becky said reports from her mother indicated the ordeal was noticeably difficult for her grandmother.

"(My mother) talked about her mother going to the door and looking for (John) to come home and how devastating it was for her," she recalled.

There seemed to be a break though in 1972 when by chance a Sigourney, Iowa man, who had also fought in the same battle that claimed John, learned about the family's search.

According to reports, Roger Aldinger, who died in 2002, was talking to a former Wapello resident who had recalled seeing one of the earlier notices John's parents had published, and Aldinger realized his own battlefield connection to the family.

Aldinger eventually discovered John's name on the Tablet of the Missing at the Netherlands American Cemetery in Margraten, Holland and provided that information to Marge and other family members.

Debbie also traveled later to the cemetery and photographed the memorial with John's name.

Despite that discovery, it wasn't until two years ago, after Marge had died, that the U.S. Defense POW/MIA Account-



John Henry Walker

ing Agency (DPAA) contacted the family. DPAA authorities reported they had exhumed the remains of seven unidentified servicemen in the cemetery and asked for the family's help in identifying them.

"They told us they needed our DNA," Becky said.

Although Bob could provide a DNA sample as one of only two living siblings, the DPAA scientists also wanted other samples, including one from a female child of one of John's sisters.

Becky provided that sample, while a third sample was also provided by Bob's son.

"We didn't hear anything for the first year," Becky said.

But about two weeks ago the family received word the samples had matched - John had been positively identified as one of the seven previously unidentified sets of servicemen remains that had been exhumed.

"It's amazing to us. I don't know how to describe it," Debbie, who recently retired after 30 years of working for the U.S.

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Mystery of missing Morning Sun GI in World War II unravels

HAWK EYELAND
by the Red
Page 21, Sunday, September 18, 1945

The clipping contains a photograph of a man in a military uniform and several columns of text. The text appears to be a continuation of the story about John Walker's discovery.

Walker

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Department of Veterans Affairs, said about hearing the report. She said her father was still emotional from the news and uncomfortable talking about it yet, but was looking forward to a briefing in a few weeks and would have more to say then.

However, she also said the news that John had been identified was bittersweet for her father because his and John's only remaining living sibling, sister Viola Van Houten, Corpus Cristi, Texas, had passed away less than two weeks before the report was released.

"Aunt Viola never thought (John) would be coming back. She was like Dad," Debbie said

Becky agreed with her cousin. "How sad it

took so long, (but) we are very happy and very thankful," she said.

Family members said John's remains have already arrived back in the U.S. and are temporarily being held at Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha until the family finalizes burial arrangements. A ceremony is expected sometime in June.

"The military is handling all the arrangements," Becky said, explaining an honor guard will accompany John home once everything is settled.

John Walker Declared Dead By War Department

The clipping includes a photograph of John Walker and text reporting that the War Department has officially declared him dead. It also mentions the date of his death as November 24, 1944.

"He is close to home," she said.

Debbie said her father was looking forward to getting his brother all the way back.

"(Dad) just wants (John) to be up there with his parents. That's the important thing," she said.