How do you identify an individual when his bones are mixed in with the remains of six hundred other people? This is the situation I run into on a daily basis. During the Korean War (1950-1953), 36,000 American service members lost their lives. Despite the recovery efforts during and after the War, the remains of 7,800 individuals are still unaccounted for. The North Korean government repatriated 208 caskets in the early 1990s claiming that each box represented one American. However, multiple individuals were mixed in across the caskets. When the U.S. government conducted recovery operations in North Korea (1996-2005), additional hundreds of sets of remains were recovered. The lab analysis confirmed that one person’s remains were frequently mixed in between the 208 caskets and the excavated assemblage. As a forensic anthropologist, I analyze these remains to solve the commingling issue with the ultimate goal of identifying and sending them home using a wide variety of information gathered from anthropology, history, and genetics.

- U.S. service members identified from the Korea 208 Project -

Dr. Jennie Jin is an anthropologist at the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). She manages the Korea 208 project, which has produced more than 150 identifications of the U.S. service members. Dr. Jin occasionally deploys to Korea and Vietnam to lead recovery operations and forensic reviews. She received graduate degrees from Stanford and Penn State University prior to joining the DPAA in 2010.

For more information, please contact anthprog@hawaii.edu