

Smyth soldier's remains identified after 68 years

Actions of Rich Valley man killed in Korean War described as heroic

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He was just 21 years old, but the Rich Valley man was fighting for his country thousands of miles from home in 1951. That Sept. 21, a prolonged fire-fight in North Korea claimed his life. Later this month, 68 years later, Sgt. William Christopher Holmes' loved ones will be able to bury his remains.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced this week that the U.S. Army sergeant's remains were accounted for this summer on July 24.

According to the DPAA and the Korean War Project, Holmes, called Billy by those who knew him well, was a member of Heavy Tank Company, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He'd been in Korea since August of 1950.

Early in 1951, Holmes was seriously wounded in battle. According to a book on Smyth County service personnel killed in action by Helen Richardson and Carole Rosenbaum, on Jan. 14, 1951, "when the enemy opened fire on both sides of his tank section, Pvt. Holmes voluntarily mounted a tank and manned the .50 caliber machine gun killing 40-50 of the enemy."

Despite his injuries, the Smyth County soldier returned to duty just two weeks later on Jan. 30.

The husband, son and brother continued his service until that day about eight months later when his unit took part in a patrol near the Iron Triangle in the present-day Democratic People's Republic of Korea. A fire-fight ensued, and Sgt. Holmes was killed near Korisil, North Korea. According to Richardson's and Rosenbaum's book, his life was claimed by a land mine



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

U.S. Army Sgt. William "Bill" C. Holmes, of Smyth County, was killed in action during the Korean War. His remains were identified earlier this year. Holmes was 21 years old when he was killed while serving his country.

blast.

Holmes' body couldn't be recovered following the battle. However, on Nov. 1, 1951, an un-

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identified set of remains, designated X-2162, were turned over to the 19th Infantry Regiment's collection point. The body could not be identified and was subsequently buried in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, known as the Punchbowl, in Honolulu.

For his leadership and heroic actions, Holmes was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor and the Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster in addition to the Korean Service Medal, the United Nations Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Korean War Presidential Unit Citation and the Republic of Korea War Service Medal.

In 2018, DPAA disinterred X-2162 to use modern technology in an attempt to identify the soldier.

DPAA scientists used

anthropological and chest radiograph comparison analysis, as well as circumstantial and material evidence. The American Graves Registration Group was able to provide the scientists with an estimated date and area of death. Additionally, scientists from the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System used mitochondrial DNA analysis.

A DPAA spokesperson said Holmes' family doesn't want to speak publicly at this time about this long-awaited identification. However, a family member remembered Holmes and his sacrifice by submitting his photo and information for inclusion in the News & Messenger's Veterans Day Salute section. She reflected in a note to staff, "Isn't it great he's finally coming home."

Holmes will be buried Nov. 23 in Middleway, W.Va.

Holmes' father, Roy Hayden Holmes, predeceased him. He was survived by his mother, Hallie D. Cruet Holmes Crowder;

his wife, Beulah Annabelle Church Holmes; and siblings, Lillian, Maxine, Udessa (Dot), Virginia, James, Albert, Lee and Roy.

Holmes' name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the Punchbowl along with the others who are missing from the Korean War. A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for.

Today, 7,607 Americans remain unaccounted for from the Korean War. Using modern technology, identifications continue to be made from remains that were previously returned by Korean officials, recovered from Korea by American recovery teams, or disinterred from unknown graves.

For more information on the Defense Department's mission to account for Americans who went missing while serving our country, visit www.dpaa.mil or www.facebook.com/dodpaa or call 703-699-1420.