

NOAA, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Agree to Share Ocean Exploration Data



In 2018, a multidisciplinary team traveled to Kiska, Alaska, to survey historic battlefields from World War II and document and honor the final resting place of U.S. and Japanese service members who lost their lives in the waters surrounding Kiska Island. The expedition, which was funded by NOAA and coordinated with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, resulted in the discovery of the missing section of the USS Abner Read, a 376-foot Fletcher-class U.S. Navy destroyer that struck a Japanese mine on August 18, 1943, resulting in the loss of 71 U.S. Navy sailors. In this image, the expedition team deploys one of the autonomous underwater vehicles used to survey Kiska Harbor off the side of Research Vessel Norseman II. (Kiska: Alaska's Underwater Battlefield expedition)

Two-pronged partnership will honor U.S. military lost at sea and advance scientific ocean discovery

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NOAA and the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) have signed a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) to share data and scientific information and collaborate on ocean exploration work that contributes to the missions of both federal agencies.

“NOAA is excited to strengthen our collaboration with the agency responsible for locating, recovering and identifying the remains of unaccounted-for U.S. soldiers, sailors and other personnel from past maritime conflicts,” said Steven Thur, Ph.D., NOAA assistant administrator for [Oceanic and Atmospheric Research](#). “Sharing ocean data and collaborating on projects will help our agencies honor courageous military

personnel lost at sea defending our nation and at the same time, enable scientists to better understand our ocean.”

The five-year MOU outlines areas of collaboration between NOAA and DPAA, to:

- Undertake joint expeditions, personnel exchanges and engagements between personnel to share methods of operation related to missions.
- Share data and scientific information resulting from research cruises, expeditions and campaigns.
- Share relevant updates and meet at least annually to share objectives, plans and needs for both the current year and the following five-year period.
- Provide DPAA with access to subject matter experts, vessels and other equipment, mission results and technology expeditions, as well as shoreside facilities and programs throughout NOAA’s ocean, weather, climate and coastal science mission.
- Provide NOAA and its sponsored scientists with access to vessels, technology and other equipment for participation in expeditions.
- Advance the public understanding of both agency’s missions as well as the new partnership when undertaking joint projects and other opportunities as practicable. Engage in cross promotion of activities where practicable and across various media platforms.

“NOAA’s expertise is world renowned, and we are excited about this partnership and our collective commitment to keep our nation’s promise to provide the fullest possible accounting for those still missing from past conflicts,” said Fern Sumpter Winbush, DPAA’s Principal Deputy Director. “Our agencies will learn from one another as we stretch the limits of technology to search for those still missing since World War II, and as we provide answers to their families.”

This MOU builds on an existing partnership between NOAA and DPAA. The two federal agencies have collaborated on past expeditions, including the recent 2023 search for a B-25 bomber during the Seascope Alaska expedition.

[Please go online to read the MOU.](#)

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency is the U.S. government agency responsible for locating, recovering and identifying the remains of the more than 81,000 unaccounted-for U.S. Department of Defense personnel from designated past conflicts. DPAA’s mission involves historical research, archeology, forensic anthropology, laboratory analyses and other related activities.