

### **Statement from Department of Defense for NBC News:**

“In Sept. 2006, JPAC began conducting periodic “arrival” ceremonies for remains flown to the U.S. from recovery sites. These pre-planned ceremonies are symbolic in nature, with the purpose of honoring those Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in support of our nation. “Arrival” ceremonies are open to the public and supported by a joint service honor guard, senior officers from each service, as well as veterans, community members, and local active-duty military who attend to pay their respects.

Part of the ceremony involves symbolically transferring the recovered remains from an aircraft to a vehicle for follow-on transportation to the lab. Many times, static aircraft are used for the ceremonies, as operational requirements dictate flight schedules and aircraft availability. This transfer symbolizes the arrival of our fallen servicemembers.

It is important to note that recovered remains ceremoniously transferred from the aircraft to the CIL vehicle have been in the lab undergoing forensic analysis to determine identity. When remains first arrive in Hawaii, JPAC cannot confirm if the remains are those of an American service member. JPAC adheres to a strict chain of custody to ensure the integrity of the identification.

Due to the increased media interest in the command; its missions and activities, JPAC leadership is more cognizant of how these ceremonies are perceived by the public. Based on how media announcements and ceremony remarks are currently written, it is understandable how these “arrival” ceremonies might be misinterpreted, leading one to believe the ceremonies are “dignified transfer ceremonies,” which they are not. In April 2013, JPAC commander, Maj. Gen. Kelly K. McKeague, authorized the renaming of the ceremonies to more accurately reflect the purpose of these events.

Department of Defense (DoD) and JPAC are committed to working with the many civilian organizations, such as the National League of POW/MIA Families to ensure all recovery activities are conducted honorably. Department of Defense (DoD) and JPAC senior leadership take the concerns expressed very seriously, and are currently reviewing all ceremonial activities and procedures.”

### **Additional clarifications from Department of Defense:**

- Are remains in the cases during these ceremonies?

Every transfer case in the Honors Ceremony contains the remains of a fallen hero. Chain of custody procedures are in place and adhered to by all JPAC personnel who come in contact with the remains of unaccounted for service members. From the moment the anthropologist recovers the remains on mission, through the flight home and arrival at the base, and the initial transfer to JPAC's Central Identification Lab, the remains are secured and tightly controlled to preserve the scientific integrity of the identification process. When service member remains are to be honored at a ceremony, lab managers place them in a locked and sealed case. JPAC mortuary affairs NCOs then sign for the cases and place them in a transfer case, which is only the external container that is draped with an American flag. In adhering to the chain of custody, JPAC scientists and mortuary affairs specialists treat the remains with the utmost of care, attention, integrity, and above all, honor.

- Were there ever any human remains in the flag-draped cases:

Yes. Any information stating otherwise is inaccurate.

- Current and former JPAC employees told NBC that the emcee often announces that the remains are from specific locations when JPAC staff had not recently recovered remains from the countries named.

As a symbolic tribute to fallen heroes who are returned home, Honors Ceremonies are representative of the conflicts in which those recovered service members paid the ultimate sacrifice. The countries announced during the ceremony are exactly those from which the honored unaccounted for heroes were recovered. They are selected because JPAC teams in the few months prior to the ceremony were able to recover those remains. Also, JPAC occasionally receives remains from different theaters and conflicts via unilateral turnovers from other countries. Even though these individuals were not recovered by a JPAC team we still treat them with the same respect and dignity, and we honor them at these ceremonies.

- JPAC, Army Maj. Gen. Kelly K. McKeague, authorized in April the renaming of the ceremonies "to more accurately reflect the purpose of these events." However, public affairs staff at JPAC, which organized the events, continued to call them "arrival ceremonies" on into the summer, and they're still identified that way on the agency's website – The "Arrival Ceremony" was April 26. Since then, JPAC has not held an Honors Ceremony. The ceremony scheduled for July was cancelled due to operational demands. The command's website has just been updated today to reflect commander's guidance. All future press releases, scripts, and announcements will reflect the official name change.