

NEWS RELEASE

Whitehall Township
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After Almost 82 Years, a Whitehall Township Soldier is Finally Coming Home

Whitehall, PA, September 14, 2026 – After almost 82 years missing in action in World War II, Private First Class Howard G. Krapf, U.S. Army, is finally coming home to Whitehall Township to be laid to rest in Fairview Cemetery next to his mother, Stella V. (Clay) Krapf.

PFC Krapf entered the military on November 13, 1942. He served with Company B, 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, in the European Theater during the Second World War. Between September 1944 and February 1945, a fierce series of clashes took place over an area of only 50 square miles along the Belgian-German border in an area known as the Hürtgen Forest. The Hürtgen Forest offensive was one of the longest battles the United States fought in World War II, as it lasted from September 19, 1944 to February 10, 1945. It was the U.S. Army's first attempt to engage and detail German forces that might have reinforced the city of Aachen, which was under siege by the Allies.

In early November 1944, the 4th Infantry Division moved into the Hürtgen Forest anticipating a major offensive. By the time the 4th Infantry Division moved into the Hürtgen Forest, its men had fought across northern France and Belgium, as well as grappling with enemy troops just inside Germany's border near Luxembourg through the summer and early fall.

At 1:00 pm on November 8, 1944, PFC Krapf's unit advanced through the Hürtgen Forest. They received no opposition for the first few hundred yards, but the thick vegetation and uncertainty ahead showed their progress. Around 2:00 pm, PFC Krapf took cover behind a log. According to another soldier nearby, PFC Krapf was hit in the hand by German fire. The sudden wound caused him to jump up in pain and surprise, at which point enemy machine gun fire killed him. Based upon unit records describing the 1st Battalion's position, he was likely killed near the German defensive line on the west side of the valley. Although members of Company B witnessed PFC Krapf's death, graves registration personnel did not have his remains to confirm that he had been killed in action. Therefore, Army officials listed him as missing in action. He remained in that status until almost a year after his disappearance, well after the end of the war. On October 29, 1945, the War Department changed his status to killed in action, when evidence considered sufficient to establish the fact of death was received by the Secretary of War.

Following the end of hostilities, the American Graves Registration Command (AGRC), U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps, was tasked with the investigation and recovery of missing American service members in the European Theater. The AGRC conducted extensive investigations in the Hürtgen Forest between 1946 and 1950. As part of their work, AGRC units frequently recovered remains that could not immediately be identified. They would transport these remains to the nearest concentration point or temporary American military cemetery. The AGRC designed these "Unknowns" with an "X" and a number, usually followed by the name of the temporary cemetery

where they were initially buried. Medical technicians compared the details of the Unknown remains recovered from Germeter and the Hürtgen area to PFC Krapf's dental and medical records but could not make an identification. On December 10, 1951, having received no further evidence that could lead to the recovery of PFC Krapf's remains, the Memorial Division, Office of the Quartermaster General declared that his remains as "Non-Recoverable," along with those of 161 other soldiers missing from combat in and around the Hürtgen Forest.

In 2019, a Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency historian analyzed AGRC reports regarding X-7433, a set of unidentified remains reportedly recovered from the Hürtgen Forest in April 1948. The remains were originally found by a German demining team working in the forest west of town of Hürtgen. An AGRC team gathered several human bones and U.S. Army clothing scattered on the surface of the ground and transferred them to United States Military Cemetery Neuville in Belgium for processing. Due to the condition of the remains, they could not estimate the individual's original height, weight, or age. The material items with the remains did not have any legible markings to aid in identification, though technicians did find PFC chevrons on the shirt. Unfortunately, all efforts by the AGRC to identify the X-7433 remains were unsuccessful. In April 1949, AGRC officials declared the remains as "unidentifiable." In July 1949, the AGRC interred the X-7433 remains in Plot A, Row 23, Grave 14 at USMC Neuville (now Ardennes American Cemetery).

In July 2023, the Department of Defense and the American Battle Monuments Commission exhumed unknown remains designated X-7433 Neuviolle from Ardennes American Cemetery in Neupré, Belgium, for forensic analysis and comparison with unresolved soldiers lost in the Hürtgen Forest, including PFC Krapf. The remains were transferred to the DPAA laboratory at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, where, based upon extensive historical research of combat in the Hürtgen Forest and DNA analysis, those remains were identified, with reasonable certainty, as those of Private First Class Howard G. Krapf.

The public is invited to join in the historic homecoming of PFC Krapf on Monday, September 21. Events will start at 10:00 am at the Whitehall Township Veterans Memorial, 3219 MacArthur Road, Whitehall PA, where local honor guards will gather to welcome PFC Krapf home. At 10:30, a procession will begin, leading PFC Krapf past his childhood home on Front Street in Fullerton to his final resting place at Fairview Cemetery, 2584 Lehigh Street, Whitehall, PA, where a funeral with full military honors will begin at 11:00 am. In the event of inclement weather, the procession will proceed to Cementon Park, 5185 Dewey Street, Whitehall, PA, where the funeral will be held indoors. For those who cannot attend in person, the service will be livestreamed at <https://youtube.com/live/CfhV9INFB8c>. Please join us as we celebrate one of our own.

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