

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 2, 2025

**WWII PRIVATE FIRST CLASS LEBERT INTERRED AT SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA VETERANS CEMETERY TODAY, 81 YEARS AFTER BEING KILLED IN ACTION**

**BATON ROUGE, La.**—Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Charlton J. Meginley, Col (Ret), USAF joined Southwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery Director Susan Daggett and staff for the interment of Private First Class Harry LeBert today who was Killed in Action during World War II. The family of PFC LeBert was originally notified that he was Missing in Action, but due to the efforts of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, LeBert's remains were identified and returned home to Louisiana.

"Today, we laid to rest one of our nation's heroes, who at the age of 24, left behind his family to defend the freedoms that we hold dear today," said Secretary Meginley. "It gives me great pride in knowing that at our Southwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery, PFC LeBert will be cared for in perpetuity, which is a small token of the appreciation and honor that he is due."

PFC LeBert served with valor in some of the most harrowing battles of the Pacific Campaign during WWII. His journey as a U.S. Marine began in the brutal assault on Tarawa, part of the Gilbert Islands, where American forces launched one of the first major amphibious assaults against entrenched Japanese positions.

During the landing at Tarawa, a tragic miscalculation of the tide forced PFC LeBert and his fellow Marines to disembark their Higgins boat nearly 800 yards from the shore. Laden with equipment and under withering enemy fire, they had to wade through chest-deep water. The beach itself, described by some as feeling like "dried beans," offered little cover. Before LeBert could make it ashore, he was wounded by shrapnel and evacuated for treatment. His life was spared, but the battle continued without him.

After recovering from his injuries, PFC LeBert returned to the front lines, joining his unit for the Battle of Saipan in the Mariana Islands. On the second day of that fierce and pivotal conflict, LeBert was mortally wounded by a mortar barrage. He was temporarily laid to rest in a trench grave alongside his fallen comrades until his remains could be recovered.

In the 1950s, PFC LeBert's remains were identified only as "X-21" and relocated to the Philippines for safekeeping. For decades, his identity remained unknown until recent advances in forensic science and a determined effort by military and family historians brought his story back to light.

In 2022, his remains were transferred to Hawaii, where experts at DPAA were able to extract DNA and match it with surviving relatives. Remarkably, 95% of his skeletal remains were intact—a near-miraculous condition after nearly 80 years—and his dental records further confirmed his identity.

PFC LeBert is now home, with his final resting place of honor at the Southwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery. We remember him not just as a Marine, but as a son, husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather, and most certainly, as a hero who gave his life in the fight for freedom.

###