

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Forensic geneticists identified 79 Finnish soldiers went missing in the WWII**

ZAGREB – In a great action of search, repatriation and identification of Finnish soldiers who died in the World War II, the skeletal remains of about a thousand soldiers have been found and repatriated in the last 14 years. Out of them, 79 were identified by the analysis of genetic material, reports a study published in the new thematic issue of the Croatian Medical Journal.

Altogether 93500 Finnish soldiers lost their lives or went missing in the hostilities during the WWII (mostly on the Russian front), and bodies of 13000 soldiers have never been found. After the collapse of Soviet Union, an agreement between Finland and Russian Federation enabled the beginning of a systematic search for soldiers' mortal remains and their repatriation to Finland.

A total of 111 reference blood samples were collected from relatives of the missing soldiers for the purposes of DNA analysis and comparison. Most samples were from first-degree relatives (sisters or brothers), but more distant relatives were also willing to participate by request. In one case, a positive DNA match was obtained from the grandson of a woman whose sister was a grand-grandmother of the fallen soldier.

Since there is a great public interest in Finland to clarify the fate of the soldiers went missing in the WWII, the forensic experts faced no problems in collecting the blood samples from the potential members of the family – not a single person has declined the possibility to aid in the identification process by donating his or her blood sample.

“Although more than 60 years have passed since World War II ended, our experience is also that this is of uttermost importance for people who had lost their relatives in the war”, conclude the authors of the study. “Repatriation and reliable identification of the Finnish soldiers with previously unknown fates, and subsequent burials by existing relatives underlines the societal impact of forensic know-how.”

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