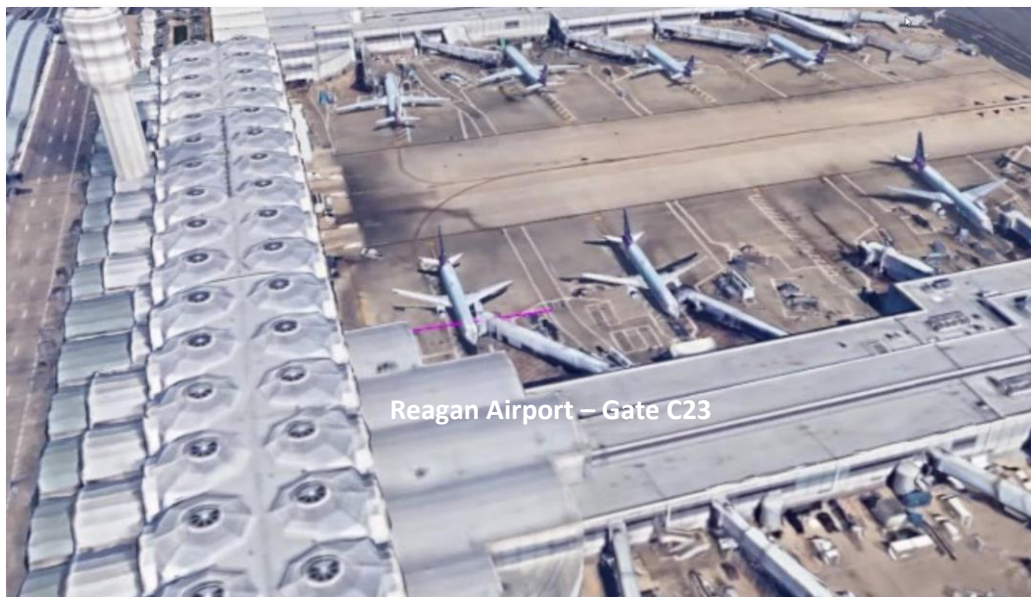
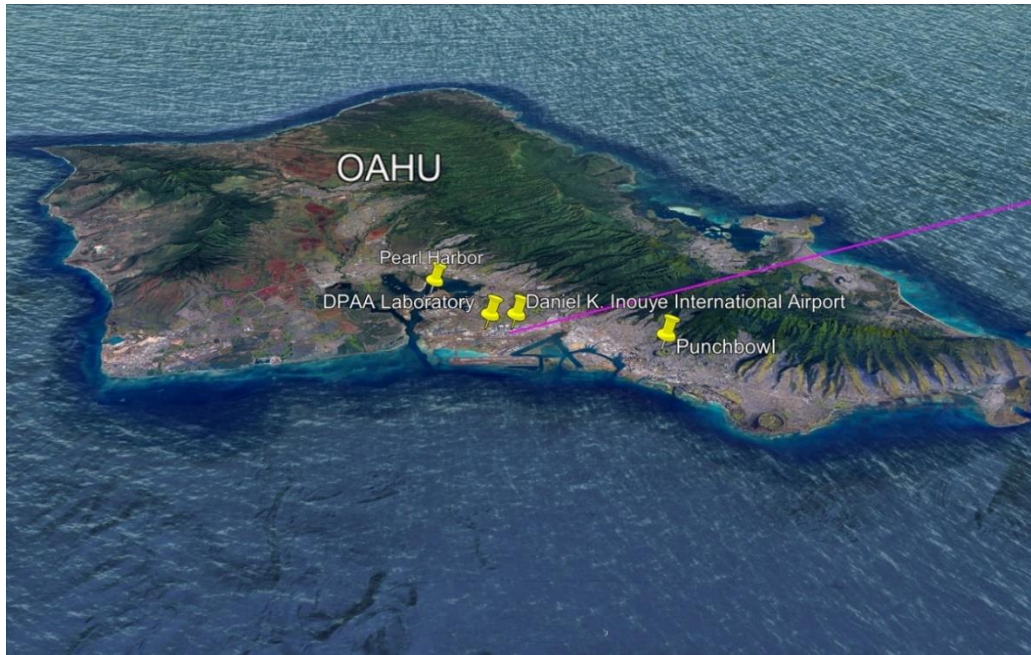


CHAPTER 15 – COMING HOME

CHAPTER 15

The Final Journey Home

By March of 2025, the Rauh family decided Arlington National Cemetery would be Gibby's final resting place after eighty-two years away from home. His 'Longest Mission' would come to an end on 14 July 2025. Arrangements were made to transport his remains on 10 July in a flag-draped casket from the DPAA Central Identification Laboratory at Hickam Field to Inouye International Airport for an American Airlines flight to Reagan Airport in Washington, DC, connecting through Dalla/Fort Worth. The plane was diverted to LA due to weather but arrived at DC on time, nonetheless.



CHAPTER 15 – COMING HOME

On 10 July 2025 at 4:16 PM as American Airlines Flight 1414 pulled up to the jetway, the pilot asked the passengers to remain seated for a few minutes to allow for the family of a returning World War II hero to pass through the jetway and on to the tarmac. They graciously obliged. My grandson, Peyton, and I, and representatives of the Army, Air Force and Pentagon walked down the jetway passed the passengers queued up waiting to deplane.¹⁶

Standing on the tarmac off to the left was an honor guard of eight immaculately uniformed soldiers. They looked very somber, serious and professional. I was joined by several officers from the Pentagon as well as Rachel Jones, my acting Casualty Assistance Officer. There was a tap on my shoulder. I turned to see the American Airlines pilot who had read about Gibby and wanted to both express his sincere condolences and say how proud he was to have had a part in bringing him home. That was the first of many unexpected touching moments that would occur over the next few days.



The Honor Guard snapped to attention and in precision slow motion marched to the bottom of the conveyor as the casket slowly came down. They were at attention, saluting the entire time. Then, on command, three men to a side lifted the casket for a short slow march to the waiting hearse. It was placed in the hearse ever so gently, then they stepped back at attention and saluted again. They did an about face, marching several steps away from the hearse, stopped, turned again to face the hearse, snapping to attention again and saluting one more time as the hearse pulled away.

¹⁶ I asked Peyton to join me on this trip to Washington as my photographer knowing full well it would be both physically impractical and emotionally impossible for me to record the events that would unfold. Peyton has a great eye for composing images and is good with a camera, so I was pleased he agreed to come. You can make your own judgement knowing all of these photographs are his.



CHAPTER 15 – COMING HOME



CHAPTER 15 – COMING HOME



CHAPTER 15 – COMING HOME



CHAPTER 15 – COMING HOME



As they about-faced to march away, again in slow motion, I turned and what I saw took my breath away.

Behind and above us were the terminal's windows at the gate where the plane was parked. What had been the scene of a bustling maelstrom of animated people moving in all directions moments ago, was frozen in time. It seems the world had stopped for an instant to pay its respects to a hero it never knew. I looked up, choking on the moment, gave a brief smile and small, nodding thank-you. Several nodded back – some just touched their hearts. Wow! What a touching moment in a world that rarely slows down.



CHAPTER 15 – COMING HOME

Killing Time

The deplaning ceremony was over by 5:30 PM on Thursday and now Peyton and I had three days to kill in Washington, DC, before the 11:00 AM funeral at Arlington on Monday, 14 July. We walked to and visited all of the Monuments during the day and at night under the lights. At one point standing by the Washington Monument looking up the Great Front Lawn at the White House, we were circled for several minutes by police and military helicopters. They seemed strangely interested in the area – then the “Big Guy” flew right overhead on Marine One. How coincidental is that?

We spent the second day touring Arlington National Cemetery by tram stopping along the way at the Kennedy grave site, Robert E. Lee’s Arlington House and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. I thought the pomp and circumstance of ‘The Changing of the Guard’ was very emotional and beyond stunning to see - and I had no idea what was coming on Monday would be even more magnificent and moving.

Smithsonian Natural History and Air & Space Museums filled another day and after walking over 12 miles in three days in 95+ degree heat, we were ready to wrap it all up on Monday.

