

Volunteer assisting in data conversion and interactive map development

Volunteer assisting in data conversion and interactive map development Ken Breaux, Founder of MIA Recovery Network

MIA Recovery Network, a 501(c)(3) organization, requested the assistance of GISCorps volunteers with Esri (ArcGIS Online & ArcGIS Desktop) expertise in the development of an interactive map product linked to a WWII database which would display geographic positions of recovered unknown remains from WWII. Renato Salvaleon, a Senior GIS Specialist with Alabama Power Company, was recruited and after weeks of research and multiple meetings & iterations, provided a proof of concept, developed a web map, and also assisted MIA Recovery Network in providing improved data formats in MS Access so that data would be uniform and more easily retrieved in the final product. Renato also provided a written training and task outline for MIA Recovery Network to use in the application of the final product. MIA Recovery Network is very grateful for the assistance of the GISCorps, and believes that the volunteer's help will enable them to provide a data structure that will be utilized in the eventual recovery of those Missing in Action from World War II across the globe.

Renato approached the project as if it were his own. He put in a great deal of time, and he worked through each one of the many challenges he faced in building us a great tool for the work we are interested in doing. His thoroughness is what impressed us most. He had a real understanding of what we wanted to do and had a personal interest based on his experience as a military officer, and also an appreciation of his father's experience that brought value to his approach.
Ken Breaux

Renato Salvaleon, GISCorps Volunteer

The MIA Recovery Project is my first GISCorps mission. I have been a GISCorps volunteer since 2011 but getting picked for a mission is something I've been waiting for a while to happen. When I saw the Call for a Volunteer for this project I saw the opportunity to do a mission that perfectly fits my GIS experience and previous Army service; my interest in military history and a sense of duty to help the people that help families of those who died in America's wars - identify and assist in recovering the remains of their dearly departed love ones. Since my father was a US Army World War II and a Vietnam vet who survived both wars, the project also hit a personal chord. When I was tasked with the mission, I talked to my employer – Alabama Power Company - and asked my manager and team lead for permission to use volunteer time supported by a company program that promotes its employees to serve our communities, and to use minimal company tools to get the job done. I am really thankful and proud of working for a company that values giving back for the right cause. Our parent company, Southern Company is one of the biggest supporters of military veterans among utilities.

As I began working with Ken Breaux (with MIA Recovery Project) and his team, we went through the process of developing a proof of concept converting their Access database – with 2500 unknown grave records - to a geodatabase and a web app stored in their own ArcGIS Online (AGO) for Home Use account. I was also tasked to provide a technical document so that they can support themselves when the mission is over. The deliverables were the easy tasks to the mission. The most challenging piece was finding the optimum data maintenance workflow that would help Ken and his team to be independent without any additional GIS help. With several web meetings and sessions with Ken and Jana Churchwell, who's the database expert in their team, a couple of options were made using AGO, Access, and Excel with ArcGIS Maps add-in.

Hopefully, with GIS data and a web map, supplementing all the information at their fingertips, it would help Ken and his team locate and identify more Unknown graves to accomplish their mission. I am proud to be part of their project and feel very accomplished as have contributed in my own small way to the mission of the GISCorps. I am looking forward to volunteering for more missions in the future. Thanks to the Corps for the opportunity.