



Dee Dee King

Certified GenealogistSM

Forensic Genealogy Services, LLC
PO Box 1085, Manvel TX 77578

F
telephone/fax 281.431.3525
email king@ForensicGenealogyServices.com

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**Dee Dee King, Certified Genealogist,
Forensic Genealogist
Contract Genealogist for the Navy POW/MIA Branch, Casualty Department
PO Box 1085
Manvel TX 77578
281-431-3525
King@forensicgenealogyservices.com**

Chairman Johnson Announces a Hearing on Social Security's Death Records
Submission for the record: waysandmeans.submissions@mail.house.gov

I am a forensic genealogist. My job is to document kinship determinations for cases with legal implications. These cover a wide range of possibilities:

- Probate and estate cases - known heirs, unknown heirs, missing heirs.
- Heirs and beneficiaries of trust and insurance accounts.
- Due diligence affidavits.
- Next of kin in guardianship cases, youth transitioning from foster care, adoption.
- Capital mitigation in death sentence cases.
- Immigration and citizenship cases.
- Civil pension, Social Security, and veteran's benefits.
- Land issues involving title, adverse possession, rights of way, *lis pendens*, or muniment of title.
- Oil, gas, and mineral royalties.
- Identification and location of next of kin or DNA donors in matters involving unclaimed decedents or POW/MIA personnel repatriation.
- Identification of next of kin prior to cemetery removals.
- Provenance, class action claimants, intellectual property-rights.

In many of these cases I am either appointed by courts or hired by attorneys to conduct this genealogical research. I also serve as the contract genealogist for the US Navy Casualty POW/MIA Branch. My job there is to research and document kinship in order to identify and

locate those eligible to contribute DNA Family Reference Samples to aid in the repatriation of remains of our unaccounted-for Navy servicemen.

I could NOT effectively conduct this vital genealogical research in these cases without access to the Death Master File, Social Security Death Index (SSDI). Research in many of the cases mentioned above must extend back before state vital records were mandated. Most states have closed public records. Many do not publish death indexes. SSDI is an **irreplaceable** resource.

The Department of Defense is mandated by Congress to repatriate the remains of our unaccounted-for service personnel. The vast majority of American losses date from World War II. Research for family members of servicemen in World War II and the Korean conflict is especially dependent upon access to SSDI. Many servicemen from this time period were born prior to state vital records, as certainly were their parents. With the mass migrations during the 1930s, 1940s, and to some extent the 1950s, SSDI is very often the only resource that military contract genealogists have to trace deceased relatives. This genealogy is vital to identifying family members eligible to submit DNA Family Reference Samples.

These facts also apply to those organizations which work with coroners to find the families of unclaimed service personnel and other deceased persons.

This also applies to many probate cases in which intestate decedents were quite elderly, many times with parents born in the late 1800s. I am required to submit reports that meet the Rules of Evidence in Texas courts. When state death records are closed to me, the only alternative is to produce and document evidence of a death from the SSDI. If that resource is made unavailable, I will have nothing to rely upon in its place.

My company is a small, woman-owned, and Vietnam veteran-owned business. Subscription directly through the Social Security Administration for access to the SSDI is exorbitant beyond our means. The loss of public access to the SSDI will have one or all of the following effects:

- Cause such extended research for alternative documentation that my rates become exorbitant;
- Further burden the stretched budgets of legal jurisdictions and the military branches;
- Result in failed research and documentation.

Please work with the public to find ways to help protect the privacy of the living while keeping this vital record of deaths available for legitimate use. Please hold the Internal Revenue Service accountable for the proper use of the SSDI in preventing identity theft and fraud with improper use of Social Security numbers.