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**AFTER THE
TSUNAMI**



SPECIAL REPORT

Plastic surgeon joins tsunami forensics

WAT BANG MUANG, Thailand (AP) -- As a ringside boxing physician in the United States, Dr. Paul Wallace spends much of his time patching up the bruised, lacerated faces of professional fighters. In Thailand, he's using those and other skills with the deceased victims of Asia's tsunami -- to help identify them.



Dr. Wallace puts on gloves before entering a makeshift morgue.

The 50-year-old plastic surgeon from Beverly Hills, California, is helping Thailand's leading forensics expert identify dozens of corpses by digitally reconstructing their faces at a makeshift morgue just kilometers (miles) from where the towering waves crashed ashore on December 26.

"I deal with facial trauma," said Wallace, best known for halting a 2003 heavyweight championship bout between Lennox Lewis and Vitali Klitschko because of a laceration over Klitschko's left eye -- a decision that allowed Lewis to retain the title.

More than 5,300 people died in Thailand when massive ocean swells, powered by an underwater earthquake, swept southern coastlines.

Some 3,100 others remain missing. Many victims were foreigners vacationing at the area's world renowned beach resorts.

Hundreds of corpses have been stored in refrigerated containers at two

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Buddhist temples where they are being examined by international forensics teams and Thailand's top pathologist, Dr. Pornthip Rojanasunand. Interpol has opened an extensive disaster victim identification center in nearby Phuket.

But many of the bodies are badly decomposed, making the identification process difficult. Technicians are using photos, dental records, fingerprints and DNA tests in the effort.

Wallace said his ringside experience treating the cut eyes of boxers, together with the reconstructive and cosmetic surgery he has performed on other patients, has helped him in analyzing the facial features of those killed.

"The job that I'm doing is to help recreate a facial structure, a facial image," said Wallace, who started work at one of the temples, Wat Bang Muang, earlier this week.

"What we do is to take a picture of the corpse and then we manipulate it, and I work on eyelids and on the landmark things you would see."

Wallace, who is also medical director for the World Boxing Council, said he adds facial features – a nose, eyes, teeth – to the digital images using a laptop computer to produce pictures that victims' relatives might recognize.

"Hopefully, there will be two or three images that we can come up with to allow some prospective family member to say with some degree of imagination that that's it," said Wallace, who wore green scrubs and sunglasses.

The doctor said he has digitally reconstructed the approximate facial features of more than 100 of the best-preserved corpses. More than 12 bodies have already been identified using various forensic techniques, he added.

Around the temple, bodies are kept in more than two dozen refrigerated trailers and wooden coffins are stacked high. The air reeks of formaldehyde and rotting corpses.

Wallace volunteered to assist in Thailand's tsunami recovery effort after having visited the country last October for an annual boxing convention in Phuket. He is scheduled to leave next week.

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