



News Release

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AIRMEN MISSING FROM VIETNAM WAR IDENTIFIED

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the remains of six U.S. servicemen, missing in action from the Vietnam War, were recently identified and are being returned to their families for burial with full military honors.

Air Force Col. Joseph Christiano, 43, of Rochester, N.Y.; Col. Derrell B. Jeffords, 40, of Florence, S.C.; Lt. Col. Dennis L. Eilers, 27, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Chief Master Sgt. William K. Colwell, 44, Glen Cove, N.Y.; Chief Master Sgt. Arden K. Hassenger, 32, of Lebanon, Ore.; and Chief Master Sgt. Larry C. Thornton, 33, Idaho Falls, Idaho, will be buried as a group July 9, in a single casket representing the entire crew, in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C. On Dec. 24, 1965, the crew was aboard an AC-47D aircraft nicknamed "Spooky" that failed to return from a combat strike mission in southern Laos. After a "mayday" signal was sent, all contact was lost with the crew. Following the crash, two days of search efforts for the aircraft and crew were unsuccessful.

In 1995, a joint U.S./Lao People's Democratic Republic (L.P.D.R.) team investigated a crash in Savannakhet Province, Laos. Local villagers recalled seeing a two-propeller aircraft, similar to an AC-47D, crash in December 1965. A local man found aircraft wreckage in a nearby field while farming, and led the team to that location. The team recovered small pieces of aircraft wreckage at that time and recommended further investigative visits.

Joint U.S./L.P.D.R. investigation and recovery teams re-visited the site four times from 1999 to 2001. They conducted additional interviews with locals, recovered military equipment, and began an excavation. No human remains were recovered, so the excavation was suspended pending additional investigation.

In 2010, joint U.S./L.P.D.R. recovery teams again excavated the crash site. The team recovered human remains, personal items, and military equipment. Three additional excavations in 2011 recovered additional human remains and evidence.

Scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command used dental records and circumstantial evidence in the identification of their remains.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703) 699-1420.

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