

## Wife Hopes Husband Is Alive After 31 Years

By Rudi Williams  
American Forces Press Service

ARLINGTON, Va., March 17, 2000 -- Bahar Hess was 24 with a young daughter when her husband's aircraft was shot down over Laos on March 29, 1969. "Hope that he was going to be found" was her initial reaction to the devastating news.

"I still hold on to that hope today, because we don't have an accounting," Hess said recently here at DoD's annual POW-Missing Personnel breakfast. "We don't have anything more than we did the first day the news came."

Air Force 1st Lt. Frederick W. Hess Jr., a native of Kansas City, Mo., was 26 when the F-4D Phantom II jet he was copiloting on a defoliation mission went down in the Laotian jungle. The pilot ejected and was rescued, but rescuers couldn't find Hess, a member of the 390th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Da Nang, South Vietnam.

The Air Force administratively changed his status from missing to killed in action on May 22, 1979, and promoted to him to the rank of major. Since his remains have not been recovered and returned to his family, DoD lists him as unaccounted for in Southeast Asia.

The "unaccounted for" status helps Hess hold onto the hope her husband's still alive. "This is the second prayer breakfast I've attended," she said. "'Without faith in God, I couldn't have survived. That's how I hold onto the hope that he's still alive. And that's why I never remarried."

A member of the National League of POW/MIA Families, Hess said, "when you go to the annual convention, you see people that are kind of in the same boat. It's comforting being with people who have similar situations who share common causes and feelings."

Reminiscently, Hess said she met and fell in love with her husband while she was a Fulbright scholar at Georgetown University in Washington. Her then soon-to-be husband, an Air Force Academy (Colorado Springs, Colo.) graduate, was working on a master's degree at Georgetown.

Hess, a native of Turkey, accepted the Fulbright "because this is the best place to get a higher education." Emigrating in 1962, she majored in international relations with hopes of working at the United Nations. That dream never became a reality, but she spent 11 years as secretary to the ambassador at the Turkish Embassy in Washington.

"When I got married, I started moving all over the country with my husband," Hess said. After he was listed as missing in action, she returned to the embassy secretarial job in 1970 and remained there until 1979.

Today, Hess is concerned that the American public's interest is waning in its unaccounted for servicemen. She tries to keep interest alive in them through local political activities, and since retiring in 1979 also spends her time volunteering for the American Red Cross, Salvation Army and the Women's Club of Arlington.

"I just take each day at a time," she said. "There have been some good days, some terrible days, but every day I'm hopeful that I'm going to find out what happened to my husband. I never had an unmarked grave for him, because it's very difficult to deal with. I would like to have a place where I can go and say this is where he's buried."

Hess said the most difficult time was in 1973, when more than 500 prisoners of war returned home. "I've

relived those few days when we were waiting to see if our loved one's name was going to be on that list," Hess said. "That was even harder than the day the news of him being missing came."

Hess' daughter, Christine Bahar Hess, was a year-and-a-half old when her father was shot down and too young to remember him. "It has always been me and mom," said Christine, who attends the prayer breakfasts with her mother. "My mom did such a great job that I never had anything missing."

Christine Hess said children of missing servicemen who don't remember their fathers sometimes develop memories. "The lack of experiences with their fathers means more as children get older," she noted. "You start thinking about things you never thought about before: Would I have had brothers and sisters? Would we have moved (to another city or another state)? Where would I be living now? How would my life be different?"

There were difficult times during her early years when other children would ask where her father was and other questions.

"I didn't have any easy answers because that's hard to explain to kids when you're a kid," said Hess, today the manager of industry programs at the National Association of Home Builders in Washington.

She was 25 when she joined Sons and Daughters in Touch, an organization formed in 1992 of children of servicemen who were killed in action or are listed as missing.

"It was good talking to and sharing experiences with other people who were a little older than me and had memories that I didn't have," Hess said. She thinks her life would be different had her father been with her as she grew up.

Bahar Hess said not only did she and her daughter lose a wonderful husband and father, "his death was a great loss for humanity and this country. He was a bright individual who would have given so much to his community and his country.

Hess compared her husband to President Kennedy. "There was something special about him," she said. "The only other person I've seen it in was President Kennedy. He has a special sparkle in his eye -- lights of intelligence and compassion. It was almost like he and President Kennedy were super humans."



Air Force 1st Lt. Frederick W. Hess Jr. stands proudly by his trainer jet during pilot training in 1968. The next year, at age 26, he was lost without a trace when his F-4D Phantom II jet went down the Laotian jungle while on a defoliation mission. *Photo by Rudi Williams.*



Bahar Hess, right, still hopes her husband, Air Force 1st Lt. Frederick W. Hess Jr., is alive after being missing in action for more than 30 years. Her daughter, Christine, was a year-and-a-half old when her father's F-4D Phantom II aircraft was shot down over Laos on March 29, 1969. *Photo by Rudi Williams.*