		No. 255-00
		(703)697-5131(media)
IMMEDIATE RELEASE	May 17, 2000	(703)697-5737(public/industry)

MISSING IN ACTION SERVICEMAN IDENTIFIED

An Air Force officer missing in action from the Vietnam War has been accounted for and his remains are being returned to his family for burial in the United States.

He is identified as Col. Harold V. Smith of Bridgeport, Ill.

On March 7, 1966, Smith was leading a four-aircraft attack mission against enemy surface-to-air missile sites in Thanh Hoa Province, North Vietnam. When the flight reformed after the attack run, Smith's F-105D Thunderchief failed to rejoin the group. Other members of the flight conducted a visual and electronic search of the area with no results.

Teams of U.S. and Socialist Republic of Vietnam investigators, led by the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting, interviewed potential witnesses and conducted local searches in 1993, 1994 and 1995, but neither the crash site nor human remains were found as a result of these investigations.

Then in 1996 the Vietnamese government provided U.S. investigators with documents relating to their unilateral investigation of the case. Following leads from those documents, a joint team interviewed an informant who led them to a burial site which was excavated August-September 1998. There, the team recovered personal effects, pilot-related artifacts as well as human remains.

With the accounting of Smith, 2,028 Americans remain missing in action from the Vietnam War. Another 555 have been identified and returned to their families since the end of the war. Analysis of the remains and other evidence by the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii established the identification of this serviceman.

The U.S. government welcomes and appreciates the cooperation of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam that resulted in the accounting of Smith. We hope that such cooperation will bring increased results in the future. Achieving the fullest possible accounting of Americans missing in action is of the highest national priority.