

Mrs. Patricia Scharf
Wife of USAF Colonel Chuck Scharf

National POW/MIA Recognition Day
The Pentagon
Friday, September 21, 2007

General Pace, Thank you for that introduction, and thank you for your long years of service to this country.

Secretary Gates, Thank you for the invitation to be here today. It is an honor to be part of such a ceremony. You do us all great honor by hosting this event today here at the Pentagon.

I have attended many of these commemorations here, and I know how rare it is for an MIA family member to be invited to speak. Like me, many of you have waited and worked hard to learn more about the fate of your missing loved one. Others served your nation honorably, and made so many sacrifices as a POW. We will never forget what this nation owes to you.

My story is a personal one, and I don't share it often. But this is the right day.

My husband, Colonel Chuck Scharf, flew off on a mission to Vietnam in 1965, and never returned. That is, until November of last year.

You see, Chuck had been missing in action for 41 years, until your team of specialists brought him home again. Right now, he rests in peace just over the hill there in

Arlington Cemetery. I visit him during the week -- most weeks -- just for a few moments of peace.

Chuck and I met when I was 16, and we were married just two years later. Yes, we were full of romance back there in the 60s, but the other love of Chuck's life was the Air Force, and flying. And I loved him for that, too.

Early in our marriage, we had some wonderful times in Hawaii while he was training some Air Guard and Reservists when the Vietnam War began heating up. And it wasn't too long after that that Chuck joined the thousands of others headed for Southeast Asia.

Then came that dreadful day in 1965 when he and other F-4s were attacking targets near Hanoi. His plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire, and it crashed in an isolated area, unable to be reached by American forces.

Then in 1990, the North Vietnamese said they had found a place where two Americans had been buried near their crash site. Within a month, specialists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, had interviewed witnesses in nearby villages. The villagers took them to the crash site where our specialists found aircraft wreckage. Later, a joint excavation found personal items along with remains that turned out to be Chuck's. But they didn't quit.

They dug two more excavations in 1993 and 2004, finding more evidence, and confirming that the crash was that of Chuck's F-4.

By this time, DNA was being used to help identify remains, but our scientists could not match the DNA in his remains, with that from a DNA sample submitted by a member of his family. Then they came to me.

They asked, “Do you have anything that might have Colonel Scharf’s DNA on it? Hairbrush, comb, something he might have touched?”

I asked, “How about the envelopes from his love letters?” I had a small box full of them, and I gave eleven of them to the scientists. These were envelopes where he had licked the stamp, and licked the seal. To my shock, amazement and excitement, our scientists were able to match the DNA on those envelopes, to the DNA found in the remains found at the crash site.

It was Chuck. And it was time for him to come home. With the help of the Air Force Casualty and Mortuary Offices, I flew to Hawaii to pick him up last year. I flew with him all the way back here, and I helped lay him to rest at Arlington, along with his uniform, his medals, and a few of those love letters.

It was an extraordinary miracle that brought Chuck back to his beloved country, and to me. Mr. Secretary, you have a wonderful team of people doing this. They are just beyond belief. Your Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office oversees the worldwide policies that help bring our men home; the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command in

Hawaii found Chuck, and identified him. The Armed Forces DNA Identification Lab made it all happen when they checked his love letters to me. The Air Force's Casualty and Mortuary Offices, and their Life Sciences Equipment Lab.....all wonderful, caring people.

They're all just like the close-knit squadron members of Chuck's flying units. They may wear different uniforms, but they're all part of my military family. They have sustained me -- and others like me -- and they have given me closure and peace.

To all of you, I thank you for "Keeping the Promise."