

MEMORANDUM FOR CORRESPONDENTS

No. 067-M
April 30, 1997

The human remains of three American servicemen previously unaccounted-for from Southeast Asia have been identified and are being returned to their families for burial in the United States.

They are identified as Capt. Charles H. Blankenship, USAF, of Suitland, Md. and 1st Lt. George E. Jones, USAF, of Aberdeen, Miss. The name of a U.S. Navy aviator will not be released at the request of his family.

On July 7, 1967, Blankenship and Jones were en route from Guam on a bombing run toward a target in South Vietnam. While over the South China Sea, their B-52D Stratofortress collided in mid-air with another B-52D in the flight. Both stricken aircraft crashed into the ocean about 22 miles off the coast of South Vietnam. An extensive search and rescue operation resulted in the recovery of seven crewmen from the two aircraft. However, Blankenship and Jones were not found.

In 1993-94, joint U.S.-Vietnamese investigative teams interviewed a Vietnamese fishermen who claimed to have located wreckage and human remains from a large aircraft in 100 feet of water. The fishermen turned the remains over to U.S. authorities. In 1995, an extensive underwater search operation was conducted by a joint U.S.-Vietnamese team. The team found aircraft wreckage but no further remains.

The remains of Blankenship and Jones were identified individually, and are part of a group remains identification. Mitochondrial DNA testing was used to confirm the two identifications. Their remains will be shipped from the U.S. Army's Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii at a later date determined by the families.

With the identification of these servicemen, 2,124 Americans remain unaccounted-for from the war in Vietnam.

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