

MEMORANDUM FOR CORRESPONDENTS

No. 088-M
June 1, 1998

The remains of an American serviceman previously unaccounted-for from Southeast Asia have been identified and are being returned to his family for burial in the United States.

He is identified as U.S. Marine Corps Capt. Harold J. Hellbach of New Orleans.

On May 19, 1967, Hellbach was flying a close air support mission over Quang Binh province, North Vietnam, when he radioed to his wingman that his F-8E Crusader had been hit by enemy fire. Hellbach said he was losing hydraulic power and was attempting to head for the coast. As the wingman watched, however, the aircraft rolled, inverted, and crashed. No parachute was sighted, and no emergency beeper signals were monitored. The follow-on search and rescue effort met with negative results.

During two archival team visits in 1993 by the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting, researchers found photographs in two military museums of aircraft wreckage that seemed to correspond to the date of Hellbach's loss.

In January 1997, a joint U.S./Socialist Republic of Vietnam team visited the area depicted in the photographs and interviewed local villagers. The villagers led the team to a cultivated field where they indicated an aircraft had crashed. The team recovered fragments of cockpit glass and pieces of an aircraft engine.

Another joint team returned in August 1997 to excavate the crash site. They recovered numerous pieces of aircraft wreckage, pilot-related and life-support items and human remains.

Anthropological analysis of the remains and other evidence by the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii confirmed the identification of Hellbach. With his identification, 2,089 Americans remain unaccounted-for from the Vietnam war.

The U.S. government welcomes and appreciates the cooperation of the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, which resulted in the accounting of this serviceman. 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.