

MEMORANDUM FOR CORRESPONDENTS

No. 189-M
December 3, 1998

The remains of two American airmen previously unaccounted-for from the war in Southeast Asia have been identified and are being returned to the United States for burial. They are identified as Air Force Col. Gregory I. Barras, Jackson, Miss., and Air Force Capt. Joseph O. Brown, Norwalk, Conn.

Barras was flying his A-1H Skyraider on a night armed reconnaissance mission on Dec. 18, 1968, over Khammouan Province, Laos. The target of his flight of aircraft was a truck convoy. Barras radioed that he was beginning the attack on the target, but in the darkness, eyewitness pilots saw only a large flash near the target area followed by a series of explosions that formed a line 200-300 meters long. The other pilots were unable to establish radio contact with Barras, and heard no emergency beeper signals. In the light of flares dropped from other aircraft, searchers could see only wreckage of an aircraft, but no signs of a survivor.

In 1991, a joint team of specialists from the U.S. Joint Casualty Resolution Center and from Laos interviewed a local informant in a small village near the crash site. He recalled burying an American pilot nearby amid the widely scattered wreckage of an aircraft. The team excavated the site and found pilot-related items, personal effects and human remains.

Brown was the pilot of a O-1F Bird Dog aircraft flying a forward air control mission over Khammouan Province, Laos, on April 19, 1966. He radioed that his aircraft's horizontal stabilizer had been shot away by enemy fire, and was climbing to a higher altitude. But as the crew of the other aircraft watched, Brown's aircraft went into a dive, rolled twice and crashed. They saw no parachute and heard no emergency beeper signals.

Joint teams of U.S. and Laos specialists visited the area of the crash on two occasions in 1994 and 1995. Led by the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting, the teams recovered pilot-related items, an aircraft data plate from Brown's aircraft, as well as human remains.

Anthropological analysis of the remains and other evidence by the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii established the identification of both Barras and Brown.

With the identification of these two Air Force officers, the remains of 507 Americans have been accounted for since 1973, and 2,076 are still unaccounted-for from the war in Southeast Asia. The U.S. government welcomes and appreciates the cooperation of the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic which led to 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.