

MEMORANDUM FOR CORRESPONDENTS

No. 138-M
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The 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 Army Capt. Clyde D. Wilkinson of Mineral Wells, Tex., Army Warrant Officer Arthur E. McLeod of Bay Shore, N.Y., and Navy Lt. Cmdr. V. King Cameron of McAllen, Tex.

On Feb. 12, 1971, Wilkinson and McLeod were flying an armed reconnaissance mission approximately 37 miles west of Quang Tri, South Vietnam, when their AH-1G *Cobra* gunship was struck by enemy ground fire. The crew attempted to fly the helicopter back to the home base at Khe Sanh when the aircraft began to smoke and burn, forcing an emergency landing. Shortly before touchdown the helicopter exploded and crashed. An intense fire, fed by exploding ordnance, engulfed the aircraft. Other aircraft crewmembers involved in the mission flew over the crash site, but saw no evidence of survivors. The presence of enemy forces in the area precluded a ground search.

In July 1993, a joint U.S./Socialist Republic of Vietnam team, led by the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting, traveled to Quang Tri Province and interviewed a villager claiming to have knowledge of a U.S. helicopter crash. However, the team found no evidence of a crash at that time. In May 1995, another team interviewed two local villagers claiming to have information about two U.S. crash sites in the same province. One of the sites was scheduled for excavation.

During May and June of 1997, a third team excavated the crash site. They recovered human remains as well as personal effects and pilot-related items.

On July 29, 1966, Cameron took off from the USS *Constellation* on an armed reconnaissance mission over the coastal waterway of North Vietnam. As he attacked a barge near Nghe Tinh Province, his A-4E *Skyhawk* was hit by enemy fire. The mission flight leader observed fuel streaming from Cameron's right wing shortly before his plane crashed. There was no sign of an ejection and when the flight leader flew over the crash site, he concluded that no one could have survived the impact.

In 1990, Vietnam repatriated to the United States 20 boxes containing remains believed to be those of U.S. servicemen. Documents supplied at the time suggested that the remains in one of the boxes were those of an American pilot who died in a crash in Nghe Tinh Province. Analysis of these remains failed to associate them with any known U.S. loss.

In June 1993, a joint U.S./Vietnam team traveled to Nghe An Province (formerly Nghe Tinh) and interviewed several villagers who reportedly had information about the crash of a U.S. aircraft which might correlate with Cameron's loss. The team found no wreckage during their investigation, but one of the villagers turned over a fragment of aircraft wreckage taken from the crash site. However, after analysis it was found that fragment was from an F-105 *Thunderchief* and thus not associated with his crash.

Two other teams investigated alleged crash sites in 1994 and 1998 with negative results.

In February 1998, Vietnam issued a report stating that the remains repatriated in April 1990 may be those of Commander Cameron. The date of loss supplied by the Vietnamese in 1990 actually related to an individual whose remains had been repatriated in 1989 and subsequently identified. The correction of this information ultimately led to the identification of the 1990 remains as those of Cmdr. Cameron.

Anthropological analysis of the remains and other evidence by the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii confirmed the identification of Wilkinson, McLeod and Cameron. With the accounting of these three servicemen, 529 Americans have been identified from the war in Vietnam and returned to their families. There are currently 2,054 Americans unaccounted-for from that 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 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.