



News Release

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MARINE MIA FROM VIETNAM WAR IS IDENTIFIED

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing in action from the Vietnam War, have been identified and returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

He is Pfc. James E. Widener, U.S. Marine Corps, of Churchville, N.Y. He will be buried on Friday at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C.

On June 11, 1967, Widener was one of 11 passengers on board a CH-46A Sea Knight helicopter that was inserting ground forces into Quang Tri Province, South Vietnam, when the aircraft crashed. Pilots from two nearby helicopters saw the crash and reported that none of the men on board could have survived. Aircraft flew over the site for several hours, but aircrew didn't observe and survivors. A patrol was sent the next day to confirm the status of the 11 crewmembers, but the site could not be accessed due to enemy forces in the area. Later that month, enemy activity prevented a second attempt to patrol the site.

Between 1993 and 1994, U.S./Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) teams, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), conducted two surveys of an area that was believed to be Widener's crash site. The teams also interviewed several Vietnamese citizens who recalled the crash. Two of the citizens claimed to have seen bone fragments while scavenging the site years earlier. When the teams visited the purported crash site, they found small pieces of wreckage, but found no human remains.

In May 2005, Vietnamese officials notified U.S. specialists that possible human remains were present at a district security compound in Quang Tri province. The Vietnamese claimed to have confiscated the remains and other items, including Widener's identification tag, from a Vietnamese local in 1996. The remains were then buried in the security compound, but the ID tag and other material evidence had supposedly been lost over the years. Later that month, a U.S./S.R.V. team excavated the burial site in the security compound and recovered a box containing human remains.

Among dental records and other forensic tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory also used mitochondrial DNA from two known maternal relatives to confirm the identification of the remains.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO web site at or call (703) 699-1169.

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