



News Release

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MARINES MISSING FROM VIETNAM WAR ARE IDENTIFIED

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the remains of four U.S. servicemen, missing from the Vietnam War, have been identified and will be returned to their families for burial with full military honors.

They are Lance Cpl. Kurt E. La Plant, of Lenexa, Kan., and Lance Cpl. Luis F. Palacios, of Los Angeles, Calif. Remains that could not be individually identified are included in a group. Among the group remains are Lance Cpl. Ralph L. Harper, of Indianapolis, Ind., and Pfc. Jose R. Sanchez, of Brooklyn, N.Y. All men were U.S. Marine Corps. Palacios will be buried Friday in Bellflower, Calif., and the other Marines will be buried as a group in the Spring in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C.

On June 6, 1968, these men were aboard a CH-46A Sea Knight helicopter that was attempting an emergency extraction of elements of the 1st Battalion, 4th Regiment, 3rd Marine Division then engaged against hostile forces in the mountains southwest of Khe Sanh, Quang Tri Province, South Vietnam. The helicopter was struck by enemy ground fire and crashed, killing 12 of the 23 crewmen and passengers on board. All but four of the men who died were subsequently recovered and identified.

Between 1993 and 2005, joint U.S./Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) teams, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), investigated the incident in Quang Tri Province, interviewed witnesses and surveyed the crash site three times. The team found a U.S. military boot fragment and wreckage consistent with that of a CH-46 helicopter.

In 2006, a team began excavating the site and recovered human remains and non-biological material evidence including La Plant's identification tag. While at the site, a Vietnamese citizen turned over to the team human remains he claimed to have found amid the wreckage. In 2007, another team completed the excavation and recovered additional human remains, life support material and aircraft wreckage.

Among other forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory also used mitochondrial DNA and dental comparisons in 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 www.dtic.mil/dpmo or call (703) 699-1420.

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