



News Release

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 23, 2007

CIA PILOT MISSING IN ACTION FROM VIETNAM IS IDENTIFIED

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the remains of an American civilian pilot, missing in action from Vietnam while flying for Civil Air Transport, a proprietary of the CIA, have been identified and returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

He is James B. McGovern, Jr., also known as “Earthquake McGoon,” of Elizabeth, N.J. He will be buried tomorrow at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C.

On May 6, 1954, McGovern, along with his co-pilot, First Officer Wallace A. Buford, and four French servicemen, departed Haiphong, Vietnam, in their Civil Air Transport C-119 on what was to be the last supply drop to the besieged French forces at Camp Isabelle—the remaining French holdout in the battle of Dien Bien Phu. As the aircraft approached the drop zone, it was hit by anti-aircraft fire. The pilots attempted to fly southwest to the relative safety of Laos, but crashed along the Song [River] Ma in Houaphan Province. Only two of the Frenchmen survived and were taken prisoner by Lao forces. One of them died within a few days, and the other was released and returned to France a few months later. McGovern, Wallace and two of the French servicemen were not recovered.

During WWII, McGovern flew in China with the Flying Tigers and is credited with destroying two enemy aircraft in the air and five on the ground. He was captured by the North Koreans and held as a prisoner of war for several months during the Korean War,

Between 1997 and 1998, joint U.S.-Lao People’s Democratic Republic (L.P.D.R.) teams, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), traveled to Houaphan Province two times to investigate the incident. They interviewed several Laotian citizens who recalled the crash. The citizens said that three of the crewmen who died in the impact had been buried near the crash site. When the team surveyed the site, they found small fragments of aircraft wreckage, but did not locate any grave sites.

In 2002, another joint U.S.-L.P.D.R. team excavated the site. They found crew-related equipment and aircraft wreckage, including an aircraft data plate dated 8-21-52, but found no human remains. A few months later, another team revisited the site and recovered human remains from an isolated burial.

Among other forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory also used dental comparisons and mitochondrial DNA in the identification of McGovern’s remains.

For additional information on the Defense Department’s mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703) 699-1169.

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