

[Current News](#)
[Older News](#)

[Web Site Search Engine](#)
[Sections](#)

37 YEARS LATER, CLOSURE

21 DECEMBER, 2006

Decades on, MIA's family gets closure

By S.A. REID

Cox News Service

ATLANTA Ñ For nearly 37 years, memories were all the family of U.S. Army Capt. Herbert C. Crosby had left of the South Georgia soldier who disappeared after his helicopter crashed over Vietnam in 1970.

Now they have a tooth and military identification tag to cherish Ñ and bury.

Military officials recently announced their positive identification of remains belonging to Crosby and two other U.S. servicemen who went down in the helicopter with him.

Relatives plan to bury those items along with Crosby's uniform at Arlington National Cemetery during the upcoming Memorial Day holiday in honor of his May 30 birthday.

Family members have greeted news of his whereabouts with a mixture of joy and sadness after decades of uncertainty.

"It's probably one of the best Christmas gifts I could have," said Janie Crosby, a sister who lives in Pine Mountain, Ga. "Not to take anything away from MasterCard, but this is priceless."

Nina Pritchard, Crosby's childhood sweetheart and wife at the time of his death, married him in 1969 when he was on leave in Hawaii. They were together as a married couple for four days before he returned to finish the final three months of his tour. He disappeared two months later.

For several years Pritchard did not know if her husband had been killed or was being held as a prisoner. After several years, she came to terms with the fact that he was not coming back. She remarried in 1975, but said "Not a day goes by that I don't think about him."

Pritchard still lives in Donalsonville, in the southwest corner of the state, where

they both grew up. She teaches kindergarten at Seminole County Elementary in the same classroom where she and Crosby attended home room as high school seniors.

"There are memories everywhere," she said. After years of uncertainty, she is relieved to know that her husband was not tortured as a prisoner of war. Otherwise, she said, "I don't know how I'm supposed to feel."

Crosby is among 855 servicemen the military has identified since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, according to Larry Greer, a spokesman for the U.S. Defense Department's POW/MIA office. Nearly 1,800 are still missing in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and China, he said.

Defense department scientists identify as many as 100 a year. Mitochondrial DNA testing has become a vital tool in putting a face on remains that sometimes are only bone shards.

Crosby, known by family as "Herbie," was one of the lucky ones. His sisters provided DNA for testing six years ago that scientists used to make a positive identification of several bags of human remains and a metal box discovered by U.S. and Vietnam officials in 1989 and 1994.

"Families should not give up," Greer said, urging them stay in touch with the government contacts and provide DNA samples.

Military representatives presented Crosby's mother, Jane Crosby Wesley, with his dog tag, which was in a box of remains returned by the Vietnam government, Mary Lou Wade said.

The tooth is still in Hawaii, but will eventually make its way with any other remains officials positively identify to a Washington, D.C., funeral home for burial, family members said.

Janie Crosby regrets her father, also named Herbert, is not around for the positive identification of his son. The elder Crosby died May 27, 1991 at age 71 after years of waging a campaign to find his son and to make sure other MIAs and POWs were not forgotten. He also was a big crusader for Vietnam veterans.

Crosby first joined the Army in 1966 after the death of his best friend, Mike Bowers, in Vietnam. He served as a helicopter pilot. He began his tour in that Southeast Asia country in 1969.

Bad weather forced Crosby's UH-1C Huey helicopter down Jan. 10, 1970 over Quang Nam Province. He and two other soldiers, whose remains also were

recently identified, were returning to their base at Chu Lai, South Vietnam. A subsequent search failed to turn up the helicopter or crew.

Crosby, who was 22 at the time of his death, might have been on a volunteer mission when the helicopter crashed, having replaced the regularly scheduled pilot who was ill, family members said.

He was one of 10 from Seminole County killed in Vietnam, Janie Crosby said. He left behind Jason, an adopted brother, in addition to his parents and sisters.

The news of the crash and his missing-in-action status devastated the Crosby family, particularly his parents. Janie Crosby said her father's hair turned from a salt-and-pepper mix to completely white in the weeks that followed. Their mother suffered an emotional breakdown, but subsequently joined her husband in the search for their missing son.

Said Janie Crosby: "I don't think there was a waking moment when he wasn't trying to find out some information."

Mary Lou Wade, another sister, is happy to have the closure her brother's return brings, but says the families of more than 1,700 military personnel are still waiting word of their missing loved ones.

"Although our news is confirmed, we will never give up hope for the other families," said Mary Lou Wade, who lives in Titusville, Fla. "They are not forgotten in our family."

The family has started a scholarship fund in his memory at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. All contributions to the Herbert C. Crosby fund should be made directly to the school.

S.A. Reid writes for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

©2006 Cox Ohio Publishing, Dayton, Ohio, USA

DISCLAIMER: The content of this message is the sole responsibility of the originator. Posting of this message to the POW-MIA InterNetwork© does not show AII POW-MIA endorsement. It is provided so you may make an informed decision. AIIPOWMIAI is not associated in any capacity with any United States Government agency or entity, nor with any non-governmental or private organization.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: In accordance with Title 17 U. S. C. Section 107, any copyrighted work in this message is distributed under fair use without profit or payment to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for nonprofit research and educational purposes only. [Ref. <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>] AII POW-MIA does not endorse any offsite material, organization or individual. For information purposes only.

Archive ©AII POW-MIA