Beat: Miscellaneous

Remains found of 4 U.S. sailors who died in Vietnam War chopper crash

-, 01.05.2013, 17:35 Time

USPA News - The remains of four U.S. service members who went missing when their helicopter was shot down during a rescue operation over North Vietnam in 1967 have been recovered, the U.S. Department of Defense announced on Wednesday. They will be buried together later this week.

The four service members went missing in July 1967 while participating in a search-and-rescue operation in Ha Nam Province, which at the time was part of the communist state of North Vietnam that ruled the northern half of present-day Vietnam. The crew was looking for another aircraft that had also been shot down. According to U.S. officials, the SH-3A helicopter, which had taken off from the aircraft carrier USS Hornet, crashed in Ha Nam Province after it was targeted by an enemy concealed 37mm gun position. "The helicopter was hit by the anti-aircraft gunfire, causing the aircraft to lose control, catch fire and crash, killing all four servicemen," the defense department said. The aircraft and its crew remained missing for decades until 1993 when a joint U.S.-Vietnamese team investigated a possible crash site in Ha Nam Province. The team interviewed a number of villagers, including one man who claimed to have buried two of the crew members near the wreckage, but indicated that both graves had since been exhumed. Between 1994 and 2000, three joint teams excavated the site and recovered human remains and aircraft wreckage that correlated to the missing SH-3A helicopter. In 2009, remains that were inside five boxes handed over by the Vietnamese government in October 1982 were identified as belonging to three of the four crew members. Subsequent analysis of human remains recovered at the crash site in 2000 positively identified them as belonging to all four crew members. They were identified as Navy Lt. Dennis W. Peterson of Huntington Park, California, Ensign Donald P. Frye of Los Angeles, and Aviation Antisubmarine Warfare Technicians William B. Jackson of Stockdale, Texas and Donald P. McGrane of Waverly, Iowa. With the remains of all four crew members now positively identified, using both forensic tools and circumstantial evidence, the service members will be buried as a group at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. The funeral is expected to take place on Thursday with full military honors. Since late 1973, the remains of 1,014 Americans killed in the Vietnam War have been accounted-for and returned to their families. With the accounting of the four men, 1,632 Americans remain missing from the conflict, which ended in April 1975 and left more than 315,.000 people killed. Last month, the U.S. military said it had completed the identification procedures for 13 service members who died in the Mayaguez incident on the island of Koh Tang in Democratic Kampuchea, which is today part of Cambodia. The service members will be buried as a group with full military honors on May 15.

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-890/remains-found-of-4-us-sailors-who-died-in-vietnam-war-chopper-crash.html

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:
UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619