Sergeant missing since 1964 given Arlington burial

Troops gather Friday at Arlington National Cemetery at a burial service for Army Staff Sgt. Lawrence Woods and seven others whose plane was shot down in Vietnam in 1964.NYT PHOTO / GABRIELLA DEMCZUK

By ELENA SCHNEIDER The New York Times

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ARLINGTON, Va. - Nearly 50 years after Army Staff Sgt. Lawrence Woods disappeared while fighting in the Vietnam War, a funeral service was held for him at Arlington National Cemetery.

Woods and an Air Force and Army crew were on a plane that was shot down over Vietnam on Oct. 24, 1964, during a resupply mission. Capt. Valmore W. Bourque, 1st Lt. Edward J. Krukowiski, 1st Lt. Robert G. Armstrong, Staff Sgt. Ernest J. Halvorson, Staff Sgt. Theodore B. Phillips, Airman 1st Class Eugene Richardson and Pfc. Charles P. Sparks were killed, and their remains were recovered by U.S. forces in 1964, according to the Defense Department. But Woods remained missing.

"We know that he was part of the crew that crashed," said Lt. Col. Melinda Morgan, spokeswoman for the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office, "but his individual remains were never identified."

On Friday, dozens of relatives of the eight soldiers attended the burial at Arlington, where the servicemen were given an "active-duty funeral," said Melissa Bohan, a spokeswoman for Arlington National Cemetery. Three rifle volleys were fired to honor the men.

In December 2009 and January 2010, a joint team from the United States and Vietnam excavated the site where the plane most likely crashed. They uncovered human remains but were unable to identify them.

"Therefore today, they were all buried in this one ceremony to include Woods," Morgan said. The remains were buried in a single coffin.

Woods' children, Steven R. Woods and Lisa Szymanski, and other soldiers' relatives accepted a folded American flag while the Air Force band played.

Steven Woods clutched a framed picture of his father during the service.

The POW/Missing Personnel Office usually identifies 60 to 80 missing veterans in a year.

For now, there are still 1,642 Vietnam War veterans unaccounted for.

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