

MIA's Remains Identified as ESU Graduate

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Staff Writer

The remains of an American serviceman killed in Vietnam more than 20 years ago have been identified as those of an Emporia State University graduate who was shot down over North Vietnam more than 20 years ago, the Pentagon said Tuesday.

But while the Pentagon was announcing that the remains of Lt. David M. Christian would be returned today to his family in California, the pilot's mother said she may never be able to stop hoping for the safe return of her son.

"Emotions rise and fall as the years go by," Ethel Christian said from her home in Lakewood, Calif. "It's going to be a relief. I'll never again have to wonder if they'll send the remains home and say, 'This is your son.'"

But Ethel Christian says the Pentagon's announcement has brought her family a new dimension of uncertainty — uncertainty about whether the remains arriving today indeed belong to the athletic young man who sang in a Youth For Christ quartet before he enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1963.

"After a while, you wonder how accurate anything

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Mother of MIA Expresses Relief

Still, She Says, Some Doubts Will Always Remain

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could be," she said. "You're looking at remains that are quite old. How could anyone ever say absolutely the remains are who they say they are?"

Like the mothers of many of the other 2,400 missing Vietnam servicemen — 37 of them from Kansas — Ethel Christian has spent a lot of time trying to get the United States government to intensify its efforts to account for all the American servicemen who didn't return from Vietnam.

"I've talked a lot in the last 22 years. Written a lot of letters," she said. "At this point, it's time to settle it. I've learned all there is to know. The government believes it is the remains of my son. . . . The probability is greater that it is David than that it is not. It is time to close it."

Although he was born in California, David Christian came to Kansas in the early 1960s when his family moved to the Franklin County town of Lane to help relatives with a business there. The Christians returned to California three years later, but David

Christian completed his education in Kansas. He spent one semester at Kansas State University before enrolling at Emporia State, where he majored in sociology and psychology.

When David Christian left college, he learned to fly Navy jets. He was piloting an A-4 attack jet over North Vietnam when he disappeared on June 2, 1965.

Ethel Christian said she knew little about the fate of her son until a year ago, when the Vietnamese government returned the remains of 21 soldiers to the United States. The Vietnamese also supplied names taken from the soldiers' dog tags.

The bodies were taken to the U.S. Army's Central Identification Laboratory in Honolulu for identification. Christian was the 10th soldier to be identified.

A full military honors ceremony will be held for David Christian today at Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii. The remains will then be returned to California. Ethel Christian says she plans a quiet burial at sea after the remains are cremated. She says she isn't sure she'll ever be able to set aside hopes that her son is still alive.