

17Mar69 SAR Sorensen Laos MIA

Local Man Preparing to go to Washington, D.C for Burial of Downed Pilot's Remains

An update to a story about a para-rescue man that tried to rescue a downed pilot in Laos almost a half of a century ago.

Later the man went back to Laos to try and help recover the remains of the pilot just a few years ago.

That man is Aberdeen native Leland Sorensen, who is now getting ready to head to Washington, DC for some long awaited closure and the burial of the pilot's remains.

Over four decades ago, Sorensen was a para-rescue-man for the United States Air Force.

He was sent into Laos to help recover a downed pilot's body.

The recovery mission was unsuccessful do to steep terrain and the body being entangled in the equipment and trees.

Almost a half century later, the Department of Defense asked Sorensen to go back to Laos to help with the search of the pilot's remains.

The only thing that was ever found from that mission was some of the pilot's personal items and an identification card that belonged to the downed pilot.

Recently the Department of Defense went back to Laos and did an excavation where they found bone material and teeth.

DNA testing showed it belonged to the downed pilot.

"I've carried this for a long time, you know, from 1969 when I last saw his body there crammed down in the trees and the hillside wrapped up in his parachute and equipment, you know, all the lines and the canopy around him and some people thought I may have closure by going back to Laos and searching for those remains and it helped, but you know, I think this will be the closure because we will finally have buried him," says Leland Sorensen, Aberdeen.

Leland and his wife are now getting ready to board a plane to Washington, DC this weekend to meet the family of the downed pilot and attend the ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery.

“I’m just feeling proud and privileged to be able to be a part of this, so proud of my husband and proud of our community for the way they’ve stepped up and wanted to help and donate money and just so much love that we’ve been shown and I’m so proud of our country, that they go to this extra work of searching and finding and bringing home these people that have been lost for so long and I’m really grateful for that and very excited to meet his family,” says Laura Sorensen, Aberdeen.

Sorensen and his wife will be leaving for Washington, DC this Saturday.

A service will be held at the Fort Meyer Old Post Chapel which will be followed by graveside military rights at Arlington National Cemetery on Wednesday April 25th.