

Lost Airmen Laid to Rest at Arlington

Contributed by 1st Lt. Jeff Roberson
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WASHINGTON - After spending the last 37 years entombed in a glacier, two Airmen were finally laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery.

Air Force News | J.G. Buzanowski
| December 08, 2005 Col. Wilfred B. Crutchfield and Lt. Col. Ivan E. O'Dell received full military honors at their Dec. 7 burial ceremony, with several family members in attendance.

"I appreciate that the Air Force never forgets its own," said Hayden Crutchfield, the colonel's youngest son. "We're so grateful to the Air Force for taking the time and effort to go and retrieve them. This gives an appropriate level of honor for the sacrifice they made."

The Airmen were flying home to McChord Air Force Base, Wash., in their T-33 Shooting Star when they crashed into Mount Rainier April 15, 1968, some 10,800 feet above sea level. The wreckage and remains were embedded in a glacier, preventing a recovery team from reaching them.

Over time, parts of the glacier melted as it moved down the mountain. In September 2004, a scientist found wreckage debris. Two weeks later, teams from the National Park Service and the Air Force services mortuary found and recovered remains of the missing men.

"I never stopped believing they would find them," said Colonel O'Dell's widow, Marjorie. "My children were astonished when we got the phone call."

The colonels both led very successful Air Force careers. Colonel Crutchfield flew in three wars. Colonel O'Dell received the Distinguished Flying Cross and Bronze Star for his aerial achievements.

"Dad loved being a fighter pilot," said Mr. Crutchfield, who was 9 years old when his father died. "He was larger than life. He'd come home in his wool uniform and I'd jump in his arms. I still remember what it smelled like."

The families were impressed with the horse-drawn caisson, band and members of the Air Force honor guard participating in the funeral service.

The ceremony says something about how the military takes care of its own and honors not only the fallen, but their families as well, said Rev. Kendall Crutchfield, the colonel's eldest son.

He also said the funeral is a way to gain some closure to losing his father.

"We didn't really get to say good-bye," Reverend Crutchfield said. "Now we know where he is and can always come to visit him. I'd never been to Arlington Cemetery, and to have my father buried here, well you don't get better than that."