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# Wife, Son of Ex-POW Fly Here for Burial

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The body of U.S. Navy Capt. John Abbott, one of 23 American prisoners of war whose remains were released by North Vietnam two months ago, was buried at Arlington National Cemetery yesterday with his wife and son standing at the gravesite.

Their transportation expenses, thanks to a new federal law that Mrs. Abbott was instrumental in having passed, was paid for by the federal government.

Cecile Abbott and her 12-year-old son Jay, who are from Sacramento, Calif., blinked back tears during the one-hour ceremony, and afterward she said, "I feel like my clothes are holding me together."

The funeral, she said, "meant everything in the world to me. We can say goodbye, he's home at rest. And now we start life all over again at day one, year one."

Yesterday's service ended an eight-year wait for Mrs.

Abbott. She learned in April, 1966, that her husband, a Navy fighter pilot, had been shot down over North Vietnam, but she did not find out that he had died until the Paris peace accord was reached in 1973 and North Vietnam released information on POWs.

The ceremony yesterday was attended by about three dozen people, most of them bemedaled Navy aviators dressed in formal white uniforms. They followed the horse-drawn caisson to the burial plot and stood by Mrs. Abbott and her son on a brilliant, sunny afternoon through the eulogy, the rifle volleys, "Taps" and the folded flag.

Navy Chaplain Robert L. Mole said in his eulogy that "1966 to 1974 is a long time to wait for the captain to come home. Now he has come home to rest among his fellow warriors who also have fallen in battle, in de-

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Photos by Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

Cecile Abbott and her son Jay at Arlington burial.

## ABBOTT, From B1

fense of ideals, in defense of country."

Mrs. Abbott accepted the folded flag from the honor unit and handed it to her son.

Later the Navy aviators at the funeral, friends of John Abbott, talked emotionally about the battles, the heroics, the exploits that marked his career.

Capt. James R. Foster, who flew with John Abbott many times, nodded toward Jay Abbott and said: "The kid needs to know his dad was a hero. He didn't know him. He needs to know that."

Jay and his mother were there by courtesy of the federal government because she "got to thinking" about the fact that the government was not going to pay funeral travel expenses for the families of the 23 dead POWs returned by North Vietnam, and she contrasted that with the return of the live POWs.

"It seemed in equitable that President Nixon could fly POWs and their wives to Washington for a big whingding at the White House, but someone at the top couldn't provide travel for 23 families of (dead) men returning from Vietnam.

"Just because men come

home in a coffin does not make them any less heroes than the ones who came back alive," Mrs. Abbott, 42, said at the time.

Evidence of her concern appeared in The Washington Post on March 22, and the Senate passed a bill by voice vote, without the usual study and hearings, that day. The bill provided funeral travel expenses for relatives of deceased POWs.

The House passed that bill the next time it met and President Nixon signed it into law on March 30.

"I just wanted to express my concern," Mrs. Abbott, who has not remarried, said later. "I'm not mad at the Navy, they've been good to us."

It was the Navy that brought Capt. Foster, 48, and John Abbott together. Yesterday the captain spoke softly and tearfully of his friend.

"He was an orphan, very hard to get to know, but was extremely warm when you did. He was awfully smart, and a very, very competent aviator.

"... I owed my life to him and he to me."

On Jan. 22, 1952, Capt. Foster said while on a combat mission over North Korean positions, "his (Abbott's) plane caught fire and he jumped out just before the Corsair blew up. He landed in a cove near the shore, the water was just freezing.

"They were shooting at him all the way down and while he was in the water. I kept strafing every time they shot at him and just before he passed out he said on the radio, 'Goddamn it, Jim, don't come so low.' He was afraid I would fall in the water.

"When they fished him out and dropped him on the deck of a destroyer, ice fell out of his ears. He wasn't breathing, but a (medical) corpsman dumped soapy water on him and he came around."

"Once when my plane was hit, I flipped over, lost the horizon, and was heading straight for the ground. We were taking fire, but he followed me, coaching me out of it. I bawled him but for staying with me and he said 'I can't help it, they've shot my wing off.' He was just as calm as could be, bless his heart." Both crash-landed and were rescued.

"I thought in '66 that if anyone ever would come out of this thing (the Vietnam war) it would be John," Capt. Foster said. "He had such strength, never panicked."

But in April 1966 Capt. Abbott, leading a four-plane raid over Vinh, North Vietnam, was hit by anti-aircraft fire and headed for the sea, according to fellow flier, Lt. Cdr. Richard Willett, who escorted Mrs. Abbott yesterday. The captan was within a mile of the coast when he

had to eject from his A-7 Skyhawk at about 550 miles per hour. He suffered multiple fractures from ejecting at that speed and that's undoubtedly what killed him, Willett said.

"It sounds kind of corny but we have to classify John as a hero. He took all kinds of punishment, bad duty as well as good and never gave up. He flew over 300 combat missions and John's were never easy. Few people in this world have been shot at more than John," said Capt. Foster.

While standing before the gray casket, the captain said he had looked around at his friends, fellow war combatants and thought "We are the lucky ones . . . then I looked at my wife and said, no, she is the lucky one. Cecile was the unlucky one—what she's been through for eight years, not knowing whether she was fish or fowl. Look how well she's held up. She's really a solid citizen, that woman."