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Emotions running high as ring finds way home

Family learns about downed pilot's last days in N. Vietnam

By Kevin Kelly
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ERLANGER - Michael Wynne gently placed the silver canister containing his older brother's Air Force Academy class ring into a velvet pouch and tightened the drawstring.

The former secretary of the Air Force had traveled with his wife to Consortium Companies headquarters Wednesday to retrieve the ring that Maj. Patrick Wynne had with him Aug. 8, 1966, when his plane was shot down over North Vietnam.

"This is about one humanity. This is about humans helping humans," Wynne said after an emotional ceremony.

Consortium Companies makes point-of-purchase displays and has an office in Guangzhou, China. Employee Herb Schaffner, who lives in Boone County, is married to a Chinese woman. And at a recent family reunion in China, an uncle told the couple how he and his father had found an injured American pilot in the mountains near the border and cared for him.

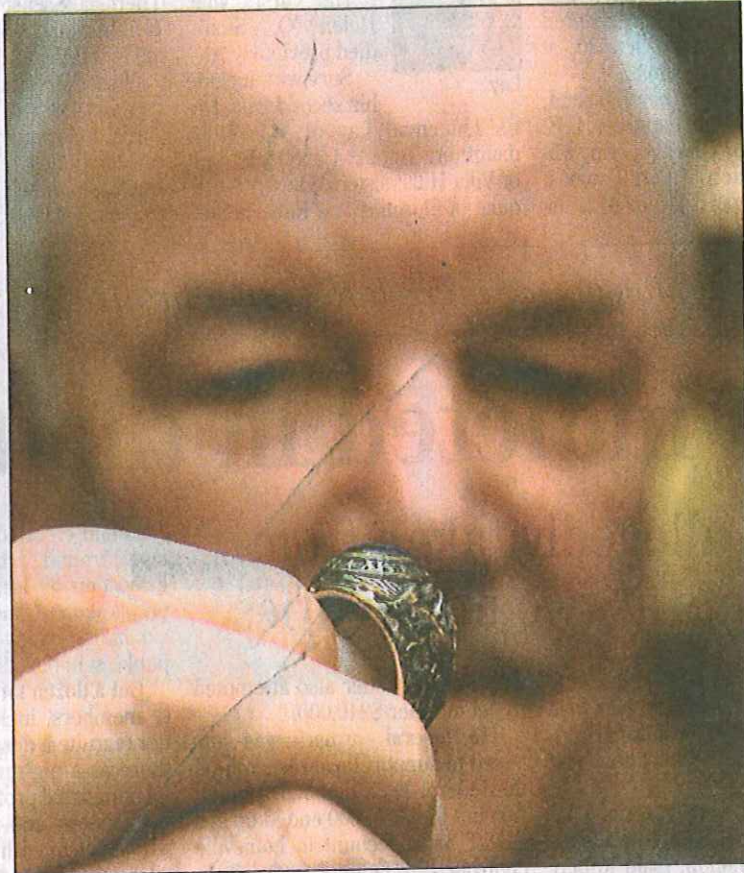
How long Patrick Wynne survived after the crash is unclear. Michael Wynne thinks his brother at some point was taken by North Vietnamese forces.

Herb Schaffner brought the ring to the United States last month. The inscription in the Class of 1963 ring gave Consortium Companies CFO Roger Schreiber a lead to the family.

Wynne, who earlier this year stepped down as secretary of the Air Force, was in a meeting in Washington when Schreiber called.

"I said, 'I don't know if I have the right Michael Wynne, but did you have a brother named Patrick Edward Wynne?'" Schreiber recalled. "He said, 'I most certainly did.' And I said, 'Please sit down.'"

Patrick Wynne, 24 years old when his plane was shot down, was listed as miss-



The Enquirer/Patrick Reddy

Michael Wynne holds the 1963 U.S. Air Force Academy class ring of his older brother, Patrick, an Air Force pilot shot down over North Vietnam in 1966. Michael Wynne, a former secretary of the Air Force, was presented the ring at a ceremony at Consortium Company, Erlanger.

ing in action until 1974. Three years later his remains were returned and buried at the Air Force Academy's cemetery in Colorado Springs, Colo.

"One of the things that struck me was the fact that he lived at all after he went down," Michael Wynne said. "The fact that there were caring human beings around to shepherd him through the last hours of his life is heartening. The fact that they cared enough to hold this relic, this artifact, and thought to bring it back to the family is also very heartening. And the fact that they ran into a caring company like Consortium to essentially connect the dots was remarkable."

The ring's discovery has brought a flood of emotions and memories of a multi-talented man who lived a robust but short life.

Patrick Wynne's widow has since remarried and lives in Birmingham, Ala.

When Michael Wynne called and told her about the ring, her reaction was, "I just want to hold it and see it."

She will. Michael Wynne would like the ring to be permanently displayed in the Association of Graduates building at the Air Force Academy.

"It's extraordinary when a ring is recovered from a combat operation," he said. "It's extraordinary that it has been retained, found, refound after 42 years and returned."

"This story will resonate. We have an opportunity to essentially use it in such a way to encourage the wing of cadets at the Air Force Academy to persevere. We have it as an opportunity to encourage the veterans of the Air Force, the Army, the Navy, the Marines that we really do believe in bringing stuff back and bringing it to life again."

Hur won turn blue

By Sheila McLau
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