



**NATIONAL LEAGUE OF FAMILIES
OF AMERICAN PRISONERS AND MISSING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

PH ---703/465-7432

www.pow-miafamilies.org

FAX ---703/465-7433

NEWSLETTER: November 24, 2014

AMERICANS ACCOUNTED FOR: There are still **1,639** personnel listed by the Department of Defense (DoD) as missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War. The remains of **SSG James L Van Bendegom, USA**, missing in Cambodia since July 12, 1967, were recovered March 21, 1986, and identified August 26, 2014. The remains of **Capt Richard L. Whitesides, USAF**, missing in South Vietnam on March 26, 1964, were recovered September 9, 2013, and identified September 22, 2014. The number of Americans announced by DoD as returned and identified since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is now 944. Another 63 US personnel, recovered by the US and identified before the end of the war, bring the official total of US personnel accounted for from the Vietnam War to 1,007. Of the 1,639 still missing, 90% were lost in Vietnam or in areas of Cambodia and Laos under Vietnam's wartime control: Vietnam-1,274 (VN-469, VS-805); Laos-306; Cambodia-52; PRC territorial waters-7. Over-water losses on DoD's list of No Further Pursuit cases number well over 600.

POW/MIA ACCOUNTING COMMUNITY REORGANIZATION: In response to growing concerns over the direction being pursued, a meeting was called on October 31st, during which Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel generally acknowledged that momentum had slowed and confidence had diminished in the reorganization effort, then responded with strong pledges of support. In the presence of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Christine Wormuth (senior DoD official directly responsible), Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs/Community Relations René Bardorf, PACT Directors, five major national veteran organization representatives, including VFW Executive Director Bob Wallace, and the League's Chairman of the Board, as well as other family and veteran group participants by conference call, the Secretary made the following specific commitments: 1) Failure is not an option; 2) Secrecy will end now, and there will be full transparency; 3) In consultation with Joint Chiefs Chairman General Martin Dempsey, agreed to name a senior uniformed military advisor to Under Secretary Wormuth; and 4) Expressed full confidence in Under Secretary Wormuth's ability to get the reorganization right. Due to Secretary Hagel's personal involvement and commitment, there was reason for cautious optimism that the reorganization would move forward rationally and prove to be beneficial. The League's optimism has taken a direct hit with the Secretary's resignation today.

Success of the ongoing transition effort is the direct responsibility of Under Secretary Wormuth, with the PACT transition team reporting directly to her and their decisions subject to her purview. Senior Executive Service (SES) civilians Ms. Alisa Stack, Mr. Ross Brown, COL, USA (Ret) and Mr. Scott Schless form the core of the Personnel Accounting Consolidation Taskforce (PACT). Their qualifications for this critical task reportedly include expertise in structuring a new agency, determining budget and personnel requirements, interface with other departments and agencies, and strategy and integration.

During the October 31st meeting, Under Secretary Wormuth stated she wanted "a pause" to assess how the PACT's designated Working Groups were functioning and moving toward Initial Operating Capability (IOC), scheduled for January 2015. Due to family and veteran representatives' concerns about composition and objectives of the Working Groups, the names of participants were requested. In light of the Secretary's firm edict on transparency beginning now, it was surprising to learn PACT Director Alisa Stack has since noted in an email that DoD has not released the names. Under Secretary Wormuth could decide changes are needed, and we encourage her to think in that direction and proceed without delay.

There is no question that Secretary Hagel is determined to “get this right” and will accept no excuses; however, disappointment within the public and private accounting communities lies in initial implementation by inexperienced personnel and reluctance to build on existing strengths, then look for ways to improve the process. While this should be incredibly simple, input from experienced, dedicated professionals is not being sought or welcomed by the transition team.

MORE ON REORGANIZATION: The following PACT document was provided to the League, Korean War and WWII families, and all major Veteran Service Organizations for distribution:

Fact Sheet for the Past Conflict Personnel Accounting Transformation

In March 2014, the Secretary of Defense directed the creation of a new Defense agency that will consolidate all activities related to the accounting of missing personnel from past conflicts. The purpose of the consolidation is twofold:

- 1. To centralize Department of Defense (DoD) authority for past conflict missing personnel accounting; and*
- 2. To resolve issues of duplication and inefficiency within the Department of Defense.*

The Department, through the Personnel Accounting Consolidation Task Force (PACT), is in the process of designing the new agency. The new agency will simultaneously operate more efficiently and effectively while meeting the expectations of families of missing DoD personnel from past conflicts. These families are DoD’s primary focus, and providing them better service is the goal. Throughout this transformation, all operations and activities pertaining to existing personnel accounting missions will continue.

Accomplishments:

- The Administration submitted a legislative proposal to Congress in May 2014 to establish the new agency.*
- A consulting firm, The Clearing, was hired to advise on change management and process design.*
- The Deputy Secretary of Defense approved implementation of the transformation plan. The transformation effort will take at least one year to complete, with some efforts focused on cultural change likely to continue after full operating capability is reached in January 2016.*
- The plan begins by setting the new agency’s mission, vision, and values, followed by process design and organizational structure. Based upon several months of discussions with internal and external stakeholders, the PACT, Joint Personnel Accounting Command (JPAC), and Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) have determined the new vision and mission for the new agency.*
 - o Vision: A world-class workforce fulfills our nation’s obligation to account for missing personnel by maximizing the number of those accounted for while ensuring timely, accurate information is provided to their families.*
 - o Mission: We provide the fullest possible accounting for our missing personnel to their families and the nation.*
 - o Values: Compassion, integrity, teamwork, respect, and innovation.*

Ongoing Activities:

- *Over the next several months, DoD will begin consolidating some activities to achieve initial operational capability (IOC) in January 2015.*
 - o *October: Launch internal working groups on family products and services, collection and analysis, laboratory and forensics, and case management.*
 - o *October-November: medical examiner in place to be the identification authority and oversee scientific operations for the new agency.*
 - o *October: Combine DPMO and JPAC current communications and establish “family experience” lead to shape the systems and processes for family engagement.*
 - o *October: Combine DPMO and JPAC financial operations.*
 - o *October-December: Develop branding identity for the new agency; i.e., name and logo. Solicit and consider suggestions from family groups and veterans’ organizations.*
 - o *November-December: Single process for operations functions and systems are in place to transfer field activities from U.S. Pacific Command to the Office of the Secretary of Defense.*
 - o *By December: Decision on headquarters location and designate an interim director.*
- *The new agency is projected to reach full operational capability (FOC) by January 2016.*
- *Families, family groups, veterans’ organizations, and others will continue to be consulted throughout the agency implementation process through a number of venues:*
 - o *Direct calls and meetings with PACT, The Clearing, and the lead for the future family experience*
 - o *The Office of the Secretary for Defense’ Public Affairs outreach activities*
 - o *Possible focus groups and/or surveys on products and services*

Working Groups:

- *The first round of internal working groups begins in fall 2014. Other working groups will be held in 2015.*
- *2014 working groups are:*
 - o *Family Products and Services*
 - o *Collection and Analysis Methods*
 - o *Lab and Forensics*
 - o *Case Management*
 - o *Field Operations*

- *The working groups are internal to DoD. Working group members are comprised of volunteer employees from all ranks and sections of DPMO, JPAC, AFDIL, and the Services.*
- *They work collaboratively to identify best practices in each of the five areas.*
- *They will make recommendations on functions and processes for the new agency for consideration by senior management.*
- *All options for functions and ways to work are open for consideration.*
- *A Strategy and Integration team exists to draft a strategy for the new agency and incorporate individual working group recommendations into a single process for the new agency. The Strategy and Integration team's recommendations will go to PACT, and as required, to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Deputy Secretary of Defense, and Secretary of Defense.*
- *All members of the workforce are invited to volunteer. Group members were selected based on functional expertise, communication skills, current workload, and diversity within working groups.*
- *Those not on working groups at this time will have opportunities to volunteer for future working groups and support other projects.*

CHAIRMAN'S ASSESSMENT: The PACT'S "Fact Sheet" was provided for publication in late September, has been overcome by events in some instances and, if you have questions, please call or send them in. Since her appointment, Ms. Stack and other PACT members, aided by The Clearing (see below) have interviewed people, in and out of government, and appear to be focused on ensuring that a wide variety of voices is heard, family members and veterans, responsible and irresponsible, so the outcome could be interesting.

The Clearing, a consulting firm, initially contracted for a reported \$2,000,000 and, more recently, an added \$6,689,586 (yes, millions), was hired to obtain input from family members from all wars on their experiences in dealing with various accounting community organizations. In addition to DPMO, JPAC and LSEL (specifically named in Secretary Hagel's restructure directive and by Congress), these include Service Casualty Offices, AFDIL and DIA's Stony Beach POW/MIA team. The Clearing also has been interviewing and obtaining input from all US officials who wish to contribute views related to the overall mission and their own specific agency/organization. Apparently, the number of people willing to talk with The Clearing personnel is significant, and continuing; thus, the need for added funding to keep them engaged.

The Clearing can be reached by emailing voiceofthefamilies@theclearing.com and is seeking views from all who are willing. Family members from all wars are urged to provide their views and, in light of the comparatively small number of Vietnam War family members, the League is encouraging ALL Vietnam War family members to take this opportunity to remind members of PACT, The Clearing and senior DoD officials that uncertainty about Vietnam War missing men remains a significant factor for the families. The greatest uncertainty surrounds Vietnam War missing personnel, though the same can be said of a relatively small number of Korean War servicemen who were last known alive on the ground or in POW camps, but never returned; therefore, the need for answers is paramount, more so than identifications on disinterred remains of deceased personnel from earlier wars and conflicts. This is particularly relevant to disinterments of personnel buried as "unknowns" in US cemeteries abroad; sadly, their families know they perished. The League supports accounting for WWII, Korean War and Cold War losses, as an important though vastly different mission than ending uncertainty with answers.

Following review and approval by Under Secretary Wormuth, PACT recommendations were provided to Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work and, with his approval, implementation began. Several timelines were announced, as shown in the PACT “Fact Sheet.” Incremental steps were set to begin, including naming of an Interim Director for the new Defense Agency sometime this fall. The first of many changes applied to consolidating budget and communications, with instructions to begin acting now as one agency. Interim Operational Capability (IOC) is set for January 15, 2015 and, until that time, DPMO, JPAC, LSEL and all other elements of the accounting community were reportedly directed to continue work uninterrupted by reorganization/transformation/consolidation plans and implementation. In reality, PACT Director Alisa Stack assumed the leadership role and is making operational decisions on personnel hiring, budgeting and travel for DPMO, JPAC and, presumably LSEL as well.

Since Secretary Hagel personally directed the “complete reorganization” of the accounting community and assured us of his personal engagement and commitment, the League was looking to him to confirm prospects for success of the reorganized community. Now that he has resigned, optimism is tough to sustain. Several interim briefings have occurred, though without details or specifics. Hopefully, the PACT and its Working Groups will become transparent, as instructed, and seek input from knowledgeable, responsible current and former officials, as well as the League and the major national veteran organizations, before plans are finalized. Valid input into the process can help assure acceptance by those most directly impacted, the Vietnam War POW/MIA families and family members of US personnel lost in earlier wars and conflicts.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ON NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY: At the national ceremony held at the Pentagon on September 19th, the Secretary stated in part: *“The United States appreciates the ongoing support of many allies and partners across the globe – many represented here today – and on behalf of the men and women of our military, I thank you. You have helped us in recovering our missing. A good example of many of these efforts is Vietnam. Vietnam has been providing an increasing amount of archival documents to support our pursuit of missing Americans. We appreciate these efforts and will continue to build on this partnership going forward.....As many of you know, earlier this year I directed the Defense Department to organize this effort into a single, accountable operation that has the responsibility for personnel accounting resources, research, and operations....making that organization stronger, more effective, more transparent, and more responsive.....DoD has been working closely with everyone who has a stake in this mission – including families, the veterans’ service organizations that are represented here today, and I thank them, Congress, and the agencies’ workforce. We’ve made progress in this transformation, and the new Defense Personnel Accounting Agency will achieve initial operating capability this January.”*

Comment: POW/MIA Recognition Day/Week this year was the most widely commemorated ever, signaling that the American people stand with our missing men and their families in a unified quest for answers. We are deeply grateful to the major Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) for their strong, steady support and assistance. Without such support, the accounting mission would never have survived until President Reagan came in and established serious priority, nor would the effort have grown to what it is today, reaching back to remains recoveries from WWII.

DIA’S STONY BEACH: While Acting Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) Director David Shedd and his team at Headquarters continue to strongly support DIA’s specialized, highly trained and motivated Stony Beach Team, only in Cambodia are Stony Beach specialists allowed to perform their assigned tasks as intended. In Laos, despite agreement at long last to allow PCS (permanent change of station) for the one SB specialist, challenges still exist to conducting small-scale investigations and interviews that best serve the mission. We hope for agreement when his replacement arrives, hopefully before the end of this year. In Vietnam, the leadership has thus far failed to approve PCS for the two Vietnam specialists, but I am optimistic that such will soon occur due to the ever-increasing, broadening military-to-military cooperation.

ACCOUNTING OPERATIONS: Another series of field operations took place in **Vietnam** from August 5th to September 7th that included a Joint Forensic Review (JFR), and it was a busy year in Vietnam with regularly scheduled, implemented joint operations. On September 23rd, JPAC hosted annual Technical Talks with Vietnamese counterparts in Hawaii. Once again, US officials heard Vietnamese requests for expanding the pace and scope of field operations that have been sporadic at best, again depending on funding, as well as weather-related issues. Nine US teams are now operating in Vietnam, the largest deployment ever, finally responding fully to Vietnam's offer to the League in 2009, repeated often, to expand the pace and scope of field operations.

On August 26th, JPAC hosted POW/MIA Consultations with the Lao, in Hawaii, that were not especially significant in terms of results achieved, but important in that views were exchanged, and the US request for renewed cooperation by **Laos** on archival documents was raised and not rejected. Little progress was made on other requests by both governments. The lack of positive Lao responsiveness was somewhat predictable, based on uncertainty within the Lao leadership brought about by the untimely death of the Lao Ministers of Defense and Public Security. Another possible reason was the lack of US dependability on field operations due to budget fluctuations, sequestration and revised JPAC operational plans. Joint Field Activities (JFAs) resumed late last month with five Recovery Teams (RTs), one Investigation Team (IT) and one Research Investigation Team (RIT) conducting a trilateral (LPDR, SRV & US) investigation. This JFA, expected to conclude in early December, will be the first in a long time to maximize the number of US personnel allowed in-country at one time, i.e. 53 US personnel.

Operations in **Cambodia** have been sporadic at best, with only one JFA thus far in 2014, though postponed twice in 2013. A JFA is scheduled in Cambodia in early 2015, but that could still change. For the first time in over 20 years, technical level talks were not held with Cambodia in 2014, but plans are being considered for senior level, operational discussions with Cambodia's POW/MIA Committee leadership in the near future.

LEAGUE DELEGATION RETURNING TO SOUTHEAST ASIA: The League Chairman of the Board will lead another delegation to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia early in 2015. The overdue visit is to reinforce to senior officials in all three countries our appreciation for increased cooperation over the past two-three years and outline specific requirements on which greater assistance is needed. It is also likely that the League officials will be given the opportunity to visit ongoing field operations in Laos and Cambodia, as has routinely occurred over the years. Senior Policy Advisor Richard Childress and Vice Chairman of the Board Mark Stephensen were confirmed by vote of the Board Directors as the other two delegation members.

46TH ANNUAL MEETING IS CRUCIAL: The 46th Annual Meeting will be held June 24-27th at the Hilton Crystal City Hotel. This national convention will be the first opportunity to receive an In-Process Review (IPR) on complete reorganization of the POW/MIA accounting process. **The Secretary of Defense will be invited as Keynote Speaker** at the **Opening Session** on Thursday, **June 24th**, 9 a.m. Initial Operating Capability (IOC) of the new Agency will have been in place for six months, so there should be ample information to share with the families. **IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT ALL MEMBERS ATTEND!** COIN Assist transportation – Congressionally mandated, DoD-directed and Service-provided – will once again be available for two family members per man still missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War to attend. Funding, personnel and leadership changes and challenges within the POW/MIA community ensure information provided during the briefings and panels will be critical and will affect every interested family member. (To place an ad honoring your missing loved one, see page 8.)

LEAGUE ANNUAL DUES - 2015: Each year, the League asks that all League members and Associate Members renew their membership by sending the small donation of \$25. This not only supports the League, but also ensures your information on file is current in preparation for the Board Election early next year. Send your check to the League's national office or use PayPal.

LEAGUE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION: The February League Newsletter will include an application to run for election to the League's seven-member Board of Directors. All League family members in good standing (dues paid current) are eligible to stand as candidates and all are encouraged to give serious thought to placing your name in consideration. Serving on the Board is voluntary, and all expenses are the responsibility of the Board member, including travel and accommodations to attend no more than three meetings called by the Chairman, most often in the Washington, DC, area, excluding sessions held during each annual meeting. Please give serious consideration to your ability and willingness to serve.

POLICY RESOLUTIONS VOTED AND PASSED IN 2012, 2013 AND 2014 APPLY TODAY: During each annual meeting, a required business session is held during which voting is conducted on policy resolutions. Only League family members in good standing (dues paid) are eligible to vote. The following League positions are relevant to ongoing reorganization; they have been abbreviated without changing the full meaning of each policy position:

Resolution Defining "Fullest Possible Accounting: Resolved that the policy statement of the Department of Defense that defines the fullest possible accounting should reflect the previously long-standing elements as follows: the return of a live POW, his identifiable remains, or convincing evidence why neither is possible (in which case all information will be provided to the NOK and the missing man's name will remain on the official US personnel unaccounted-for list. *Passed unanimously*

Resolution on Accounting Process: Resolved that a full spectrum of investigations, research, analysis and archival initiatives should continue at a vigorous pace, along with the surge in excavations, to ensure the Master Excavation List continues to expand. *Passed unanimously*

Resolution to Reinforce SEA Research & Analysis: Resolved, that DPMO should ensure that, under the new organizational structure, the critical functions of research and analysis for Southeast Asia be reinforced with additional resources and personnel. *Passed unanimously*

Resolution on Accounting Priority for POW/MIA Parents: Resolved, that cases of missing men with a surviving parent be given priority attention for resolution. *Passed overwhelmingly*

Resolution on Recovering Life Support Equipment & Artifacts: Resolved that in future site excavations and recoveries, all life support equipment and artifacts will be collected, preserved as discovered, and returned to the Lab for immediate referral to LSEL for evaluation, and that no life support equipment will be discarded or left behind for any reason; and further Resolved that, should personal effects be recovered, the PNOK should be advised as quickly as possible and, after being entered into the accession system, such items should be photographed and returned to the custody of the PNOK. *Passed unanimously*

Resolution on Relationship between DPMO and JPAC: Whereas, the League has been concerned about conflicts over roles and missions between DPMO and JPAC over the past few years and heard pledges of greater cooperation between the two organizations; the League commends the JPAC Commander and DASD for POW/MIA Affairs for public expressions of a new and cooperative relationship and looks forward to joining them in this spirit of full consultation and coordination. *Passed unanimously*

Resolution on Excavation Priority: Whereas there have been instances where possibly correlatable material, artifacts and personal effects indicate an incident site may be recoverable and that such endangered sites are a factor in JPAC's decision-making on scheduling sites for excavation and, in some such cases, over a decade has passed since such materials, artifacts and personal effects were discovered, be it Resolved that, in these instances, the League urges that surveys and excavations be given higher priority for excavation as soon as is possible. *Passed unanimously*

46th ANNUAL MEETING, JUNE 24-27, 2015

PROGRAM AD RATES

INSIDE FRONT COVER - \$1,000*

INSIDE BACK COVER - \$1,000*

FULL PAGE (8 ½" x 11") - \$500*

½ PAGE (8 ½" x 5 ½") - \$250*

¼ PAGE (4 ¼" x 5 ½") - \$125**

BUSINESS CARD - \$50
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"IN HONOR OF" - \$25
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National League of POW/MIA Families
5673 Columbia Pike, Suite 100
Falls Church, VA 22041
703-465-7432

Deadline: June 1, 2015

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