



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

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AMERICANS ACCOUNTED FOR: Since the League Newsletter, November 24, 2014, 10 US personnel have been announced as accounted for; those most recently announced are:

Capt Richard D. Chorlins, USAF, MIA, LA, 1/11/70, RR 2/11/03, ID 12/17/14
LT Richard C. Clark, USNR, MIA, NVN, 10/24/67, RR1/17/91, ID 11/7/14
Col William E. Cooper, USAF, MIA, NVN, 4/24/66, RR 11/16/98, ID 12/4/14
MSG James W. Holt, USA, MIA, SVN, 2/6/68, RR 6/21/89, ID 1/10/15
CMSgt Edwin E. Morgan, USAF, MIA, LA, 3/13/66, RR 11/19/11, ID 1/29/15
SSG Warren E. Newton, USA, MIA, SVN, 1/8/68, RR 9/8/11, ID 5/30/14
CW3 Larry Phipps, USA, MIA, SVN, 1/9/68, RR 9/8/11, ID 5/30/14
SSG Bunyan D. Price, Jr., USA, MIA, CB, 5/2/70, RR 4/3/14, ID 1/27/15
CW3 Ranier S. Ramos, USA, MIA, SVN, 1/9/68, RR 9/8/11, ID 5/30/14
LTJG Neil B. Taylor, USNR, KIA/BNR, 9/14/65, RR 6/24/13, ID 11/25/14

Several of those named serve as examples of how remains repatriated many years ago can now be identified using contemporary science that wasn't available in the early years. The number of Americans now listed by DoD as returned and identified since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is 954. Another 63 US personnel, recovered by the US and identified before the end of the war, bring the total of US personnel accounted for from the Vietnam War to 1,017. Of the 1,629 still unaccounted-for, 90% were lost in Vietnam or in areas of Cambodia and Laos under Vietnam's wartime control: Vietnam-1,269 (VN-467, VS-802); Laos-302; Cambodia-51; PRC territorial waters-7. Over-water losses on DoD's list of No Further Pursuit cases number well over 600.

ONGOING POW/MIA REORGANIZATION: In response to growing concerns over direction, a Veteran Service Organization (VSO) and League letter was sent to former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel on December 11, 2014, laying out very serious concerns over lost momentum and lack of confidence in the ongoing reorganization effort. The former Secretary again responded to our concerns, but it was not until January 9, 2015, that specific decisions were announced. While Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USDP) Christine Wormuth will continue to be the senior DoD official directly responsible, RADM Michael T. Franken, USN, was named Interim Director of the new Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) and former JPAC Commander Maj Gen Kelly K. McKeague, USAF, was named the Interim Deputy Director. In addition, and as promised, LTG Michael Linnington, USA, currently serving as Military Deputy to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, was named as special advisor to USDP Wormuth.

The PACT (Personnel Accounting Consolidation Task Force) was terminated, as were the PACT-directed Working Groups. The Clearing, a private consulting firm retained by the PACT Director, is continuing to provide assistance, though now to newly organized and directed functional task forces. Despite former Secretary Hagel's admonition to be fully transparent, Working Group recommendations were not released publicly; therefore the League is unable to provide insights on the usefulness of their efforts. The League, Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and other groups received pledges from senior DoD officials that secrecy was over, there would be full transparency and a real working partnership would be established with the families, in particular.

Chairman's Assessment: Secretary Hagel's personal involvement and commitment gave reason for cautious optimism that the reorganization he directed would prove to be beneficial. The outcome is now less certain; however, senior military officers were selected to restructure the various elements into one efficient, effective agency with higher priority and support. Clearly, former Secretary Hagel was determined to "get this right" and was not tolerant of excuses; however, initial implementation by the PACT, The Clearing and other inexperienced staff showed reluctance to build on strengths and look for ways to improve the existing process. While that may seem simple enough, educated insights from experienced, dedicated professionals were neither sought nor welcomed by the earlier transition team. We urged Under Secretary Wormuth to proceed thoughtfully, and she did, supported by Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD/SOLIC) Michael Lumpkin and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Community Outreach René Bardorf. Now, the reorganization is in the hands of RADM Michael T. Franken, USN, for the initial six months. A permanent Director is due to be in place before the League's 46th Annual Meeting in June so, again, we wait and see.

LEAGUE DELEGATION TO SOUTHEAST ASIA

January 23 – February 10, 2015

Summary: League Chairman of the Board Ann Mills-Griffiths, Vice Chairman Mark Stephensen and Senior Policy Advisor Richard Childress comprised the League Delegation that represented all the Vietnam War POW/MIA families, as well as the interests of working level US officials and our nation's veterans, in meetings with US and foreign officials in Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand from January 23 – February 10th. Our schedule was thoughtfully coordinated by then JPAC Policy & Plans Director Jennifer Nasarenko, to whom we express sincerest appreciation.

The League is especially grateful to our Senior Policy Advisor, Richard T. Childress, who has served in this position since retiring from the Army in January, 1989, the very day he left his key position (after a record eight years) as Director of Asian Affairs on President Reagan's National Security Council staff. Trained as a Thai Foreign Area Officer (FAO) with unparalleled knowledge, experience and friendships across Southeast Asia made him invaluable to the League, to the success of the POW/MIA accounting mission, with commitment amply demonstrated since 1981. After hours of conversations and briefings by the League and dedicated US officials then in place, he developed the Reagan Administration's "10-point strategy" to resolve the issue and never stopped pushing. He and his wife, Elli, have attended every annual meeting since 1981, though his early participation was official. He took the issue seriously, understood the families' perspective and, despite unwarranted attacks, set about implementing President Reagan's assigned priority. This League Delegation was the 5th since he assessed Vietnam's cooperation and decided he could, in good conscience, return to Vietnam. The significant results achieved since priority was raised in 1982 are in large part due to the efforts of Richard T. Childress, to whom all the POW/MIA families owe a tremendous debt of gratitude.

US Ambassadors, Deputy Chiefs of Mission and Embassy staff members, Detachment Commanders and staff, and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) Stony Beach Team specialists participated in all official discussions. The League appreciates the briefings from those most directly engaged with counterpart governments in all countries visited, as we did their support during working-level meetings and calls on senior officials.

Following several meetings at US Embassy Bangkok, including with US Chargé d'Affaires Patrick Murphy, DIA's Stony Beach Program Chief Brad Taylor and Lao/Thai specialists Jared Ellison and David White, Detachment 1 Commander Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col) Rob Culpepper, USAF, Deputy Commander Major (MAJ) Dan Robinson, USA, and Cambodia specialist personnel Vina Chhouk, the Army Attaché, and others on the Country Team, the Delegation first traveled to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, for discussions with US Ambassador Bill Todd and his Country Team.

In Cambodia, meetings were held with Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) and Minister of Interior (MOI) Sar Kheng, President of the National Assembly Heng Samrin, General Moeang Samphan, Secretary of State in the Ministry of National Defense (MND), and MOI Secretary of State and Permanent Vice Chairman of the Cambodian POW/MIA Committee Sieng Lapresse, before flying by helicopter to Koh Tang, island site of an ongoing effort to recover personnel still unaccounted-for from the 1975 USS Mayaguez incident, including three Marines who were tragically left behind alive.

The next stop was Vientiane, Laos, for discussions with US Ambassador Dan Clune and his Country Team before visiting three of four ongoing field recoveries, a completed and closed site, and returning to the Lao capital. Discussions were held with DPM and Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Thongloun Sisoulith, Vice Minister of National Defense (MND) Lieutenant General (LTG) Chansamone Chansylath, President of the Lao National Veterans Federation Brigadier General (BG) Somphone Keomixay and Ambassador Khouanta Phalivong, Director General of MFA's Americas Department and head of the Lao POW/MIA Team, comprised of MFA, MND and Ministry of Public Security (MPS) officials.

Always central to many of the League's overall goals, Vietnam was the final stop. Detailed discussions took place with the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP), the accustomed prelude to senior policy-level discussions with Vice Minister of National Defense (MND) Senior LTG Nguyen Chi Vinh, Vice Minister of Public Security (MPS) To Lam, and Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Ha Kim Ngoc Ngoc, all of them known to the League from past years.

Mrs. Childress and Mrs. Stephensen accompanied their husbands and, along with DIA's Stony Beach Program Chief Brad Taylor, visited (by road and boat) one of the field recovery sites in Laos. The ladies also attended several social events in each country and added significantly to the Delegation's efforts by their presence. As is customary since 2003, expenses for individual travel and accommodations, as well as most meals, were voluntarily paid by the participants, for which the League expresses sincere appreciation. In each country, the ladies, aided by the Chairman, purchased locally crafted items to raise funds for the League at this year's Annual Meeting Boutique, a very successful side-event, chaired by League State Coordinator Elaine Palen, assisted by Mrs. Childress.

We are also grateful for the support extended by the Washington, DC-based Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodian Ambassadors and their Embassy staffs. For many years, League Delegations have received courtesy visas prior to departure; a gesture of significant respect for the League and our mission, and this year was no exception. The League Chairman and Office Administrator Leslie Swindells met over lunch with long-serving Lao Ambassador Seng Soukhathivong while his staff worked to accomplish issuing the visas. The Royal Cambodian Embassy was equally accommodating, though Ambassador Hen Hem was ill, so we met with Special Assistant to the Ambassador Peang Gafour. Finally, special appreciation and a warm welcome are extended to Vietnam's new Ambassador to the US Pham Quang Vinh. He has tough shoes to fill with the return to Hanoi of his predecessor, Ambassador Nguyen Quoc Cuong, a uniquely talented individual who delivered stirring, thoughtful remarks at the League's 44th Annual Meeting Dinner in June 2013 and was very successful as his Nation's Ambassador to the United States.

Cambodia: Consistently cooperative for decades, Cambodia continues to provide the highest level of support and assistance, responding positively to all requests. Failure to achieve answers in recent years has been due to US-imposed legal obstacles to operations, budget shortages and scheduling glitches. As a result, the primary focus in Cambodia is to express the families' and our nation's appreciation for their willingness to assist all POW/MIA accounting efforts on a humanitarian basis.

We first called on US Ambassador to Cambodia Bill Todd, a talented asset and advocate for all US interests and, in our case, specifically on the accounting mission. He and his Country Team, including long-serving DIA Stony Beach Cambodia specialist Pete Loverde, were informative and helpful in briefing the Delegation on all aspects of US objectives in Cambodia, including the level of humanitarian assistance and support through USAID and the NGO community, the increase in military-to-military cooperation, bilateral and multilateral efforts on mutual concerns, such as addressing international terrorism, narcotics and human trafficking, etc. Lt Col Rob Culpepper, USAF, Commander of Detachment 1 in Bangkok, also leads POW/MIA operations in Cambodia and was supporting us throughout our visit.

League delegations over many years have been received at the highest levels in the Kingdom of Cambodia, including by His Majesty King Norodom Sihamony and long-serving Prime Minister Hun Sen though, on this visit, these two leaders were out of the country. In Phnom Penh, we met with His Excellency Heng Samrin, President of the National Assembly, DPM/MOI Sar Kheng, Secretary of State in the MND General Moeang Samphan, and Permanent Vice Chairman of the Cambodian POW/MIA Committee Sieng Lapresse, who also serves as Secretary of State in the MOI. Due to a death in his family, we were unable to meet with long-time friend General Pol Saroeun, Commander in Chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and Chairman of the Cambodian POW/MIA Committee.

The League Delegation expressed appreciation for Cambodia's decades of cooperation and the expectation that US funding and personnel would become more stable and predictable, plus likely increase as a result of the complete reorganization now ongoing. We thanked them for their total support and integration of the DIA Stony Beach Team specialist and stressed the fact that Cambodia continues to lead all countries in providing support and assistance. We asked them to try to ensure that sensitive border conflicts with the Lao and Vietnamese are not permitted to interfere with humanitarian cooperation, as had just occurred on the Lao-Cambodia border, causing cancellation of a field recovery in a border province. Though believed to be a localized action by uniformed border guards, Cambodian officials expressed concern and their intention to follow-up with the Lao. They also stressed continuing commitment to do whatever was needed for however long to help the US account for our missing personnel.

We were flown by helicopter to the USS Mayaguez excavation site in Koh Tang, an island off the southern coast of Cambodia. During this field visit, we also saw long-serving POW/MIA Committee Deputy Chairman LTG Kem Channee. We deeply appreciated this opportunity, facilitated by Detachment 1 Commander Lt Col Rob Culpepper, USAF, and his specialists. Senior Lab archeologist Brad Sturm, on his 66th field recovery as scientific leader, demonstrated his customary leadership and professionalism, motivating all involved with his commitment, positive attitude and commendable skill. All were impressed with the breadth and scope of the recovery and deeply appreciated the tremendous support and assistance provided.

Laos: We were met at Wattay International Airport by Detachment 3 Commander LTC Marcus Ferrara, USA, and long-time Casualty Resolution Specialist (CRS) Bill Gadoury, plus other Det 1 staff facilitating our arrival through customs. Discussions in Vientiane with US Ambassador to Laos Dan Clune and his Country Team were most helpful throughout the visit. Ambassador Clune and his wife, Judy, graciously hosted the League Chairman and the Childresses for the first three nights at their official residence, site of a lovely reception in the League's honor they hosted for many Lao and US officials. The Country Team meeting, broad in scope, highlighted the need for renewed US efforts to increase the effective US Aid for International Development (USAID) program, a big component of longstanding efforts to demonstrate humanitarian reciprocity.

The Delegation's initial in-country mission was to visit three of four ongoing field recoveries and one site previously completed and closed. After flying commercially on Lao Aviation to Savannakhet, we drove with Detachment 3 Commander LTC Ferrara to Xekong and overnights at the base camp, the Xieng Khoang Hotel. We flew by helicopter to three recovery sites, received briefings, touring each and talking with the military teams and scientists, archeologists and anthropologists, all of whom were most impressive and committed, despite the difficulties faced.

We also surveyed a completed and closed site involving a reported burial location of a discrepancy Last Known Alive case. We all were extremely impressed by the scope and extent of this repeat recovery effort, symbolic to us of the extent to which US specialists go to account for US personnel still missing and unaccounted-for, whether an aircraft incident or a case of someone captured, held and reported to have died and been buried, perhaps the most difficult of sites to successfully locate and recover. While no additional remains were located during this follow-up recovery, it was meaningful to see firsthand the extraordinary effort made on this case, circumstances too often necessary.

At all of these sites, the League donated family size mosquito nets to village-level Lao officials, symbolic of additional nets, purchased by the League, that will be delivered by US field teams to Lao people helping with field recoveries in the various areas we visited. This small humanitarian gesture was meant to demonstrate the League's continuing support for humanitarian assistance, an initiative begun by the US Government in the early years of the Reagan Administration and long since expanded.

The level of support and assistance provided by LTC Ferrara and his team throughout our time in Laos, but especially as we flew by helicopter and traveled by road and boat (in the case of the ladies and DIA's Stony Beach specialist) to the field sites was extraordinary and deeply appreciated. We also were inspired by the dedicated field personnel with whom we were privileged to spend some time, including Lao personnel who were with us throughout. These mostly senior US enlisted personnel knew precisely why they were there, working in difficult locations under often dangerous circumstances, eating primarily self-transported food when in the field, more or less on the run between shifts. We are most grateful for their efforts and those of their leaders, military and civilian.

Following our return to Vientiane, significant discussions were held with Lao Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) and Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Thongloun Sisoulith, raising points related to operational requirements necessary to be more efficient and effective in achieving accounting results, and again clarifying the role and status of DIA's Stony Beach specialist in Laos. We briefly explained the ongoing reorganization of the US accounting community and expressed optimism that formation of the new Defense agency would help ensure full and predictable funding for field operations.

To move cooperation forward, we urged the Lao Government to: 1) initiate another internal search for relevant records, few as they may be due to wartime circumstances, and request Vietnam's assistance in providing relevant records on incidents where their troops operated during the war; 2) agree to an increase, as needed, in

the number of US personnel allowed in-country simultaneously, to conduct field operations; 3) approve more US teams to operate from additional base camp locations near remote incident sites, when needed and requested, to expedite accounting results; 4) reassess and reduce imposed requirements for Lao escorts (security personnel) to help reduce costs; 5) raise an unnecessarily restrictive 8:00 p.m. curfew on US team participants; and 6) increase flexibility and participation by DIA's Stony Beach in the investigation process. (Though assigned in Laos for over five years, with prior Lao agreement on increased flexibility within and outside of Joint Field Activities (JFAs), imposition of excessive escort and advance notice requirements continue to impede cost-effective, small team investigations, as initially and repeatedly proposed and long understood. Our dismay over this practice was cited as unbecoming in today's environment.)

Related to all these points and suggestions, the League noted changed and changing circumstances in Laos, with freedom of movement by NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) and traveling tourists, no escort/security requirements imposed, etc. Given prior successes with Vietnam in 2011 and earlier in raising archival research in a detailed format, we provided a compelling reference summary of archival documents that the Lao should be able to locate, in Vientiane or Hanoi, and provide to the US or, at a minimum, produce a reasonable explanation as to why the archival documents might be unavailable. (All of the above points were raised in significant detail at an earlier "roundtable" discussion with working-level officials who grasped the proposals and agreed to raise them with their superiors, including focus on the small-team concept for Stony Beach-led investigations.)

DPM Thongloun's positive reaction was notable, as was his reasoning in responding that all of these issues warrant a closer look to see what the Lao Government can recommend to solve such challenges. He recognized the difficulties of the archival document issue and indicated willingness to communicate with Vietnam, noting that unlike the Lao, the Vietnamese had the wartime ability to report and retain documents. He committed to looking closely at the current situation and how the proposed changes could be accommodated, stressing the importance of archives to reach the fullest possible accounting.

The DPM noted that security needs can be unpredictable, based on local understanding and acceptance, but pledged to look at the guard/escort requirements and step-by-step improvements. The Minister recognized the urgency in working to resolve any border issues so as not to adversely impact joint field operations and agreed to contact Cambodian officials. He expressed understanding of the small-team proposal related to the DIA Stony Beach investigations and indicated that the arrival of the new Stony Beach specialist in the spring will provide an opportunity to review the concept and look for ways to overcome any obstacles.

It was clear that DPM Thongloun recognizes some of the restrictive measures of the past need to be modified, and changes for the better need to come with the ever-improving bilateral relationship. It is also evident that the loss of two key Lao national security officials in 2014 severely impacted the leadership of the Ministries of Defense and Public Security, leaving both with newly appointed senior officials who may or may not be permanently assigned in these positions. We are hopeful our visit will help them to better understand the history of our joint efforts over many years.

The gap caused by losing two such highly placed national security officials in the same helicopter accident is understandable and the situation is still in flux, possibly shifting to generational changes as in other areas. Time will tell but, in the interim, the Lao had an opportunity to respond further on all issues raised by the League during the semi-annual POW/MIA Consultations held February 20th in Vientiane by DPAA's Interim Deputy Director Major General Kelly McKeague, USAF. (In these consultations following our return, the Lao responded in some areas, i.e., lifting unrealistic curfew restrictions, affirmed flexibility in permitting small team Stony Beach investigations outside of the Joint Field Activities, and agreed to reassess their archival holdings and communicate with Vietnam on their holdings that may be helpful but, as expected, deferred other matters for higher level consideration and decision.)

While, it seemed little short of miraculous to expect positive responses in such a short time (less than a month), shortly before the League Delegation's arrival Ambassador Clune had sent the DPM/FM a very effective, succinct letter laying out some of these same concerns. The impact of a unified position by DoD, State and the League prompted some progress and, if DPM/FM Thongloun can manage to persuade the Lao leadership to react positively in other respects, it would be most welcome and mutually beneficial. DPM/FM Thongloun's openness, warmth and receptiveness during discussions were welcome, encouraging, and revealed vision in looking to the future with cautiously optimistic realism.

Minister of Posts & Telecommunications (former Lao Ambassador to the US) Hiem Phommachanh and his wife, Kanika, retired senior official in the Lao MFA, hosted a luncheon in the League Delegation's honor at the lovely new Landmark Hotel in Vientiane, during which much on POW/MIA accounting was discussed. The Minister's current, challenging portfolio covers expanding telecom interconnectivity with neighboring countries, cybersecurity, and the issue of national telecom interface with worldwide networks/telecommunication.

Substantive discussions were also held with the Deputy MND LTG Chansamone Chanyalath and with President of the Lao National Veterans Federation BG Somphone Keomixay, the first such meeting by the League with a Lao official in charge of Veterans Affairs. BG Somphone indicated he looks forward to meeting any veteran delegations that may come to Laos and showed great familiarity with US-Lao accounting efforts, expressing his full support. The same basic points on POW/MIA accounting issues were raised in each meeting, though the focus for specific issue-related matters was during discussions with DPM/FM Thongloun, the ranking Lao official, and Ambassador Khouanta Philavong and the interagency specialists who participated in roundtable discussions.

Vietnam: Going into discussions with senior Vietnamese officials, a more cooperative attitude was evident, a positive spirit of mutual collaboration to address and solve any problems that exist and to seek solutions to new challenges. Due to 2013 discussions in Washington, DC, on the sidelines of bilateral US-SRV Defense Dialogue, it was clear that initiatives to expand bilateral and multilateral POW/MIA accounting cooperation would be given positive consideration. This was in keeping with Vietnamese proposals – to the League since 2009 and repeatedly since to the League and US officials – to expand the pace and scope of field operations and overall cooperation. US responsiveness to Vietnamese proposals had been sporadic at best and undermined perceptions of US seriousness in the minds of many, domestically and internationally. As a result, we looked forward to positive, thoughtful discussions with officials in the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP), the coordination point within the SRV Government for all POW/MIA accounting-related matters, followed by meetings with senior Vietnamese officials.

We were met upon arrival on February 3rd at Noi Bai International Airport by Detachment 2 Commander LTC Julian T. (JT) Tran, USA, and long-time Casualty Resolution Specialist Ron Ward, transported to the Hilton Hanoi L'Opera Hotel where we were met by DIA's Stony Beach Team Vietnam specialist Mike Najim. The following morning, US Ambassador to Vietnam Ted Osius hosted a Country Team Briefing at his residence in downtown Hanoi, after which we returned to the Hilton, prior to departure for the VNOSMP's Office at the Ministry of Defense where extended, very positive and detailed discussions were held with Director Mr. Tran Thanh Tam and interagency members of the VNOSMP. In addition to specific requests, we briefly explained the ongoing reorganization of the US accounting community and expressed optimism that formation of the new Defense agency would help ensure full and predictable funding for field operations.

This substantive discussion was followed by an office call with Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Ha Kim Ngoc, known to the League from earlier years in MFA and VNOSMP, with significant experience dealing with Americans during his tenure at the United Nations. A lovely dinner that evening was hosted by Mr. Nguyen Ba Hung, MFA's Americas Director and former head of the VNOSMP, also known from prior VNOSMP chairmanship and other MFA assignments. He was the Consul General in San Francisco prior to returning to Hanoi.

The first formal meeting on Thursday, February 5th, was with Mr. To Lam, Vice Minister of Public Security (MPS) at the Ministry's External Affairs Office. Again, Vice Minister To Lam was familiar to the League from our call in 2011, also at the Ministry. This important session was followed by the all-important meeting with Senior Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh, Vice Minister of National Defense (MND) and he was also known to us. (In addition to the League Delegation in 2011, the League Chairman had met with LTG Vinh in 2014 when he was in Washington, DC, for the Defense Dialogue with the US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs (ASD/APSA), a position since assumed by former US Ambassador to Vietnam David Shear.)

The same points were raised at all meetings, in greater detail with the VNOSMP, and a hard copy was left to ensure there were no misunderstandings, though interpretation support was outstanding, whether by Ron Ward or a Vietnamese official. We first recognized how far things had come since cooperation was seriously begun in the early 1980s, noting that this year marks the 30th anniversary of the first joint recovery in Vietnam, cooperation that served as a bridge leading to normalization of the bilateral relationship celebrating the 20th anniversary this year. We expressed sincere gratitude to the government and people of Vietnam for the humanitarian assistance that has brought answers and peace of mind to several hundred American families and the continuing improvements that are making today's efforts even more efficient and effective.

In light of the increasingly close partnership between our countries and the ever-expanding political, economic and military relationship, we noted it is increasingly hard to explain to the families and veterans why there would be any remaining obstacles to full, open cooperation. Thus, in light of current circumstances, we noted we are urging both countries to intensify cooperation – both unilateral and joint – before more immediate family members as well as case-related witnesses, pass away.

Specifically, we asked Vietnam to 1) waive the 100-person limit on US personnel allowed for each JFA when the need arises or additional personnel unexpectedly become available; 2) approve more than two recovery teams operating in one province simultaneously, when justified on a case-by-case basis; 3) approve the two DIA Stony Beach Team Vietnam specialists for permanent relocation to Hanoi; 4) renew and expand unilateral research to other-than-military archives and provide long-requested documents on last-known-alive and other discrepancy cases in Vietnam and in areas of Laos and Cambodia where Vietnamese forces operated during the war; 5) locate and provide the remains, or remains fragments, of US personnel who died while in Vietnam's control that have not yet been returned and are unlikely to be recovered jointly.

Responsiveness at all levels was positive, both generally and specifically, with clear affirmation of commitment and willingness to renew archival research, noting it has become routine since 2011 and will continue. The Vietnamese noted they had provided 82 documents since the League's last visit and that some archives are not filed by POW/MIA as a topic, thus are more difficult to locate. They added that they will accept the Lao cases for ideas on how to search their archives and will work with the Lao, if asked. They affirmed their intention to continue the unilateral Vietnamese Recovery Team (VRT) concept, jointly tested and determined to be very productive and less costly. They offered to expand the VRT process to take on more and more difficult cases if the US wishes to do so.

They noted that from the initial list of 34 restricted cases, there are now only two sites still in that category, both off shore and too sensitive for joint operations in the current environment. (Unspoken were concerns over dissension in the South China Sea.) The Vietnamese agreed to further increase the pace and scope of operations, adding that both sides must prepare personnel for expansion, citing the US need for more team leaders, linguists, archeologists and anthropologists, noting their need to train Vietnamese personnel to develop skills necessary for conducting advance negotiation and coordination with provincial officials. They added that we, collectively, must not lose effectiveness. They also opined that the remaining cases in Vietnam are increasingly difficult and pose significant risks to all personnel, asking that the League convey this concern over health and safety to US officials. We replied by stating our view that the US Government was not legally permitted to offer health insurance protection, as previously requested, but that safety of Vietnamese and Americans on the joint teams was also highest priority to the US side.

Related to longstanding, repeated US requests for acceptance of the two Stony Beach specialists on a permanent basis, Vice Minister of Public Security To Lam indicated he saw no problem with them working in the MIA office and, after hearing that they don't work for the Detachment, but to augment the Detachment's investigations, the Vice Minister indicated that the Stony Beach visas could be extended (1 year vs 3 months) as an interim step while this was further considered. (Ultimately, this will be resolved at a higher level, but the attitude for consideration was positive.)

Vice Minister of Defense Senior LTG Vinh agreed to increase cooperation and look closely at all initiatives discussed with the VNOSMP and raised to Vice Minister Ngoc and Vice Minister To Lam. He asked for greater assistance by the US to locate remains of their servicemen and, in particular, asked the League to help spread the word about our collective efforts. He mentioned having traveled with SRV President Truong Tan Sang to the US in 2013 and meeting with veterans group representatives at that time, an opportunity he viewed as invaluable to increase understanding between the veterans in the two countries.

He also expressed appreciation for the humanitarian assistance the US has provided to help ameliorate the dangers of unexploded ordnance and damage suffered from Agent Orange, especially in the Da Nang area that was heavily impacted. We provided suggested archival locations in the US on which Vietnamese researchers could focus and pledged to notify the major national veterans organizations, through League channels, of their impending visit and need for assistance in this area.

Personal Reflections of Vice Chairman of the Board Mark L. Stephensen, February 4, 2015, raised in concept during the VNOSMP meeting:

"My father, Col Mark Stephensen, USAF, MIA/remains returned, flew 94 missions over North Vietnam before his RF-4C crashed evading hostile fire. The last two days, I've been privileged to be on a field visit to 4 field Recovery sites in Savannakhet Province, Laos. As we were transiting to the sites via ground vehicles and helicopters, I was struck by the thought that I was witnessing the same terrain and environment my father saw as he executed his missions from Northeast Thailand into North and, perhaps, South Vietnam.

I could see the majestic mountain ranges with formidable karst formations. I stood under the jungle canopy, sometimes in double and triple thickness. Looking up from the ground and down from the helicopter as we flew, I could appreciate how someone on the ground could hear and almost see a rescuer, but not be seen by him. I saw the smoke and haze and clouds that could hide an entire mountain range blocking line-of-sight-style radios and rescue beacons. I appreciated how easy it was to hide deadly, radar-guided anti-aircraft missiles and artillery in the dense foliage and rocky terrain. I could only imagine the desperation of wounded crewmen in badly damaged aircraft trying to get back to the safety of Thailand through this deadly landscape.

The province we visited was directly on the Ho Chi Minh trail which was used by the North Vietnamese Army to supply combat missions into South Vietnam and support the Viet Cong already there as well. Two of the sites we visited were other RF-4C losses. Of the four crewmembers on these two aircraft, two were accounted for and the other two are still missing in action, with a presumption of death. Both incidents were similar to my father's circumstances of loss; both resulted in high speed impacts with considerable destruction of the aircraft.

Fortunately for our extended family, my father's remains were recovered by the NVA, initially buried, later exhumed, stored, then unilaterally repatriated and identified. My father was afforded proper burial with full military honors. The effort we witnessed was to affect the same for these two unreturned US veterans. I also saw brave, dedicated US service personnel who volunteer to work in harsh and uncomfortable conditions, away from home for months, searching for their missing comrades. Most weren't even born when these men fought and died. They are all heroes.

As I rode in the van and in the helicopter, I thought to myself, as Dad was flying over this country, he probably could not have imagined in his wildest dreams that his oldest son would someday be driving in that same country looking for missing Americans. With indescribable irony, I can only imagine that he was thinking of his family, but those thoughts would have been back at home in Idaho, certainly not in Laos."

DPAA & CASUALTY OFFICE CONTACTS FOR YOUR USE:

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STATE: Ms. Linda McFadyen, McfadyenLP@state.gov

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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. **Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USD-P) Christine Wormuth has been invited as Keynote Speaker at Opening Session, Thursday, June 25th, 9 a.m.** She was designated by former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel as the primary DoD official responsible for overseeing development of the new Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). 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!** Funding, personnel and leadership changes and challenges within the POW/MIA community ensure information provided during this year's briefings and panels will be critical and will affect every family member.

There will be two full days of presentations by current and former US officials and noted private experts, as well as official briefings from analytic personnel, field operators, scientists and guest presenters on the complete range of issue-related policy and operational matters. A decision has not yet been made as to the guest speaker for the **46th Annual Dinner & Candlelight Ceremony** the evening of June 25th. This year's program includes special workshops on Friday, June 26th, before the **Service-hosted Luncheons**, and Regional Meetings scheduled immediately following the Service Luncheons. Saturday morning, June 27th, a three-hour **Q&A session** will be held with working-level officials from DPAA. DIA's Stony Beach Team, AFDIL and the Service Casualty Offices, followed by the **League Business Session** and a closing **League-hosted Farewell Reception**. It is imperative that family members make travel arrangements to ensure participation at the business meeting and be available to vote on policy resolutions geared toward developing League positions on the way forward to achieve our shared accounting mission.

Registration: To register for the 46th Annual Meeting, use the last two pages of this newsletter (page 11-12). PLEASE COMPLETE BOTH SIDES and return the form to the League office with your check covering the cost of meeting registration and dinner (if you choose to attend). Credentials for the meeting will be available for pick-up **Wednesday, June 24th from 3:00 – 9:00 p.m.** in the Virginia Ballroom Foyer, Plaza Level. Orientation for newcomers will be held that same day from 4:00 – 5:00 p.m. in the Monroe Room, Plaza Level. The cost to **register for the meeting only is \$50.00**. Registration forms can also be found online at www.pow-miafamilies.org. If so inclined, your bank's "bill-pay" program or PayPal can be used to submit payment for registration, thus saving check-writing, stamps, and time.

Special Events: On Wednesday, June 24th, the **US Army's Twilight Tattoo** at historic Fort Myer has been scheduled for those who have picked up credentials. Bus transportation will be available starting at 5:30 p.m. The **46th Annual Dinner & Candlelight Ceremony** will be held on Thursday, June 25th. For those inviting dinner guests, the additional cost will be \$55 per person. We hope to have a **Strolling Strings Concert** and **Non-denominational Service** on Friday, June 26th, at the close of that day's session, 6:00–7:30 p.m. The final event will be a **League-hosted Farewell Reception, 5:30–6:30 p.m. Saturday, June 27th**.

Reservations: This year, the hotel rate for rooms at the **Hilton Crystal City Hotel** is again **\$149.00** (plus tax), per room, per night – single or double, with a charge of \$20 per night for each additional adult in the room. To make reservations, call 800-HILTONS (800-445-8667), noting affiliation with the League's 46th Annual Meeting. You can also go to www.hilton.com and use the code **MIA2015**. **The deadline to secure the special rate is May 16th**. The room-block is limited; early reservations are encouraged. If you have any problems with reservations, please contact the national office.

Transportation: As stipulated by Congress, the Secretary of Defense will again authorize COIN Assist transportation for two family members of each Vietnam War missing and unaccounted-for serviceman or civilian to attend. Service Casualty Officers will be sending information to the **Primary Next of Kin (PNOK)** about the 46th Annual Meeting, as well as forms to complete for requesting COIN Assist transportation, case file reviews, and attendance at Service-hosted Luncheons. In authorizing COIN Assist, original Congressional intent was to ensure that each missing American would be represented at the League's annual meetings. Please help spread the word: **All family members** are eligible to attend the League's annual meeting at which official government briefings will be given. Some League events are open only to those who register for the full League 46th Annual Meeting. If you have questions, call the national office, 703-465-7432.

Boutique: This year, the Boutique will again be held in the **Old Dominion Executive Board Room, Plaza Level**. In view of the tremendous success in years past, the League is again seeking suitable items for display or purchase. Please be selective, and either bring the item(s) with you and deliver them to League officials at Registration or send them in advance to the League office, including an itemized list noting each item's value. Note in the Trip Report that unique items were purchased specifically for the Boutique at each country visited – Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. If you are interested in learning more about suggested donations or items that have sold well in the past, request a list from the national office, 703-465-7432.

Commemorative Program: Each year, the League publishes a special program that includes individual "ads" honoring missing US personnel, organizational ads with best wishes to the families gathered for the meeting, ads promoting POW/MIA-related and other products, etc. The green flyer enclosed with this newsletter provides the 2015 Program Ad Rates. The **deadline for receipt of ads is close of business on May 29th**. Email your camera-ready ad to Betty Bartels Murphy, MIA101925@aol.com, or Office Administrator Leslie Swindells, leslie.swindells@pow-miafamilies.org, and mail a copy with payment (or a PayPal receipt) to the national office.

Meet Your Congressman: It is more important than ever that elected Representatives and Senators know what POW/MIA family members, veterans and concerned citizens expect from Congress regarding support for the accounting mission. We urge you to call on your elected members of Congress to urge full funding and support for necessary personnel to accomplish our longstanding, reasonable objective: The fullest possible accounting for America's unreturned Vietnam Veterans, our missing POW/MIAs. Plan now to participate in Congressional visits this year, and **make your appointment**. Plan to arrive in Washington, DC, one day early, on Tuesday, June 23rd, to be available on the morning of Wednesday, June 24th, to meet with Congressional Visit Chairman Sue Scott to obtain points to raise and materials with current information for your visits on Capitol Hill.

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 coming soon. Send your check to the League's national office or use PayPal.

LEAGUE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION: The Application to be a candidate for the seven-member Board of Directors 2015 – 2017 Election is enclosed for family members only. 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 those elected to serve, including travel and accommodations to attend meetings called by the Chair, most often in the Washington, DC, area, including sessions held during each annual meeting. Please give serious consideration to your ability and willingness to serve. **Deadline for post-marking envelopes or receipt of applications by email is April 15, 2015.** Please send to League Office Administrator Leslie Swindells, leslie.swindells@pow-miafamilies.org.

ONE MORE THING – VIETNAM WAR CASE-COORDINATION PROCESS: US Officials from throughout the accounting community met in Hawaii February 24-28th for the 48th Case Coordination Conference to determine the way ahead for nearly 400 of the 1,629 US personnel still unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War. The process involves analysts and field investigators meeting for discussion and review of all available information on as many cases as the analytic community believes are prepared in terms of pursuing further action that could bring accountability.

This process demonstrates that despite whatever dysfunction and turbulence may occur within the leadership, the Vietnam War accounting process is relatively mature and successful. One can only hope that those conducting archival research to retrieve information from US archives related to WWII losses will develop as outstanding a working relationship as has long existed among the talented Vietnam War-related professionals who work together productively and well. It is understood that, on this occasion, other senior accounting community officials observed the coordination process and gained a better understanding of how the two different Research & Analysis components in DPAA-East (DPMO) and DPAA-West (JPAC), plus DIA's Stony Beach and the field operators from the Detachments, are complimentary, not duplication of efforts, as often alleged. This is an invaluable lesson that one hopes the many officials recently conducting internal and external investigations and assessments fully recognize and appreciate.