



**NATIONAL LEAGUE OF FAMILIES
OF AMERICAN PRISONERS AND MISSING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**
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Newsletter: March 18, 2012

AMERICANS IDENTIFIED: There are **1,677** Americans listed by the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) as missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War. Only four US personnel have been listed on the DPMO website as accounted-for from the Vietnam War since the November 4, 2011, League newsletter:

CAPT Charles R. Barnes, USA, PA, MIA 3/16/69, SVN, RR 6/27/00, ID 8/8/11
1Lt Robert E. Bennett, III, USAF, NJ, KIA/BNR 12/13/67, SVN, RR 5/15/10, ID 11/18/11
SGT David E. Lemcke, USA, NY, KIA/BNR 5/21/68, SVN, RR 6/23/11, ID 11/12/11
Lt Col Charles M. Walling, USAF, AZ, MIA 8/8/66, SVN, RR 4/13/10, ID 11/30/11

The number of Americans announced as returned and identified since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is now 906. (Five more Americans previously listed as KIA/BNR in Cambodia (4) and Laos (1) have been accounted-for, though not yet named/announced by DPMO.) Another 63 US personnel, recovered post-incident and identified before the end of the war, bring the officially listed total recovered and identified to 969. Of the 1,677 still missing or otherwise unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War, 90% were lost in Vietnam or in areas of Laos and Cambodia under Vietnam's wartime control: Vietnam-1,286 (VN-472, VS-814); Laos-326; Cambodia-58; Peoples Republic of China territorial waters-7; more than 450 were over-water losses.

ACCOUNTING COOPERATION: JPAC is continuing a process in **Vietnam** with Vietnamese Recovery Teams (VRTs) handling logistic requirements and advance preparation, before being joined by a smaller number of US personnel. This recovery construct is viewed as a way to expand the pace and scope of field operations, called for by Vietnam since the League Delegation's visit in March 2009. The Joint Field Activity (JFA) conducted in November included investigations, Last Known Alive (LKA) investigations, a VRT and four recoveries, with two Recovery Teams (RTs) extended until December 15th, when they redeployed to Hawaii, ending 2011 Vietnam War field operations.

Another JFA is now underway in **Vietnam**, the largest such operation in some time, including six recovery teams and two investigation teams. Joint Advance Work took place from February 27th until March 8th, and full scale investigations and recoveries began on March 9th at multiple sites. Until now, the US had largely failed to respond adequately to the Vietnamese 2009 proposal to increase the pace and scope of such operations. This pace must be continued and, where possible, further expanded to enable getting answers before witnesses are no longer available and remains have disintegrated even more due to the acidic soil in the region.

A small US team successfully conducted recovery operations in **Laos** in November but, in early December, JPAC Commander MG Stephen Tom, USAR, conveyed the message to the Lao government that cost factors precluded extending the helicopter contract. In fact, most Lao Air helicopters do not meet safety requirements for transporting US military personnel and, unfortunately, the Lao government did not extend the contract with privately owned Lao West Coast Helicopter Company (Air New Zealand). Negotiating a new contract proved to be very difficult, and JPAC had to make a go/no-go decision by December 31st.

All hoped the Lao would respond positively by that date to appeals from US Ambassador Karen Stewart, JPAC and the League to use ground transportation for the January JFA. Inexplicably, the Lao leadership denied the request, noting concern for team safety, a rationale justified 25 years ago, but not in today's environment. **As a result, January accounting operations in Laos, already reduced in size and scope, were cancelled.**

MG Tom returned to Vientiane in late February for semi-annual POW/MIA Consultations, trying to work out an agreement that would serve as an interim solution. Initially, Lao Air (owned and controlled by the Lao Ministry of National Defense-MND) proposed tripling the cost for helicopter support. Had they held firm on that position, it would have caused a halt to further accounting cooperation between Laos and the US until a reasonable solution could be found. The League and Department of State urged JPAC to hold firm against any attempt to use accounting cooperation as a basis for virtual extortion as it would denigrate the service and sacrifice of America's unreturned veterans, our missing loved ones. Agreement was finally reached on helicopter costs for the current JFA in **Laos**, but the difficulty is far from over. It now appears that separate negotiations will be required for each JFA, a time-consuming and difficult way to proceed, but apparently doable, according to JPAC's Commander.

Despite the above, for the first time in years, DIA's POW/MIA specialist in **Laos**, Dustin Roses of the Stony Beach Team, is participating in joint field operations, conducting interviews of sources with potentially useful information. While this is an important step toward fully utilizing this specialist and, though long overdue, the Lao government has yet to agree for him to conduct such interviews outside the timing of JPAC field operations. The Lao government's objections have continued despite the fact that all Stony Beach interviews would be fully coordinated with the Lao government, and trips outside Vientiane would be in the company of a designated Lao official. The League is hopeful that this initial step will demonstrate to skeptical Lao decision-makers that this highly qualified specialist is focused solely on POW/MIA matters, and there is no viable rationale for limiting his ability to help locate information useful to the accounting mission.

A successful JFA was recently completed in **Cambodia**. One JPAC recovery team and a trilateral investigation team worked with Cambodian counterparts, the first such operations in Cambodia this year. More investigations and recoveries should be scheduled in FY12, instead of completing only one per year, as has been the norm in recent years. With only 54 US personnel still unaccounted for in Cambodia, and six or so incidents located and awaiting excavation, an all-out push by the US, ably assisted by Cambodian officials whose cooperation is the most highly praised and reliable, could actually achieve "fullest possible accounting" objectives in the near term. Expectations must be reasonable, tempered by the horrors inflicted by the Khmer Rouge on the Cambodian people.

STATUS OF JPAC FUNDING & PERSONNEL: According to JPAC Commander MG Steve Tom, USAR, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs Bob Newberry, full funding for FY12 scheduled operations should not be a concern. According to Mr. Newberry's letter to the League, dated January 4, 2012, *"...the Department increased funding for JPAC beginning in 2012 to meet the statutory requirements to increase accounting for missing Americans from all past conflicts and will continue to support the program to meet the emergent North Korea requirement. There should be no effect on JPAC operations in Southeast Asia as a result of a lack of funding."* That assurance is welcome, but there are some aspects that raise questions; namely, what about 2013 and beyond in this era of budget cuts? And, though assured there is no funding obstacle to the pace of Vietnam War accounting operations, JPAC could change schedules, especially if the assured funding does not arrive in JPAC accounts before deadlines for making go/no-go decisions. This situation warrants very close monitoring. (The League thanks each of you who wrote Members of Congress to urge full funding for POW/MIA accounting organizations to accomplish the mission.)

In addition to planned resumption of excavations of burial sites in **North Korea**, momentum is also building to resume recovery operations in **Burma/Myanmar**, offering the prospect of bilateral humanitarian cooperation. This is a scenario the League has advocated and welcomes, but NOT at the expense of reducing Vietnam War accounting efforts. As above on funding and personnel concerns, this is something to closely monitor and to ensure that Members of Congress understand the need to simultaneously pursue accountability for personnel missing from all wars. The signals to today's active duty, all-volunteer military are undeniable. Those now serving must have confidence that should they be captured or become missing, our nation will do everything feasible to recover them. This includes **S/SGT Bowe Bergdahl, USA**, captured in Afghanistan and believed held by the Taliban in Pakistan.

JPAC PLANNING EXERCISE: Some in JPAC, primarily the Lab leadership, appear to view the accounting mission as little more than an expanding remains recovery and identification process. Consideration of access agreements reached through difficult negotiations is minimal, as is focus on discrepancies, even LKA cases. JPAC recently concluded its FY13 operational planning conference in Hawaii. A "Tiger Team" conference was scheduled to follow, looking at long term plans, efficiencies, and operational effectiveness in meeting established goals, but was postponed due to premature and unauthorized distribution of an "efficiency study" by a contracted employee working closely with the Lab. Though not approved by the JPAC Commander or Deputy Commander, the study was distributed internally in JPAC. To his credit, MG Tom rejected the study, restricted distribution by classifying it FOUO (For Official Use Only), and called for its removal from circulation and withdrawal from consideration for any purpose. However, the now-withdrawn "efficiency study" is in the possession of House and Senate staff, DPMO and others. With past such exercises as precedent, the outcome can be dangerous, especially if there is, as rumored, discussion of closing or consolidating JPAC Detachments in Vietnam, Laos or Thailand/Cambodia. Hopefully, this "rumor" will be shot down with clear affirmation that the pace and scope of Vietnam War operations will be sustained and, where possible, increased. The "Tiger Team" conference begins on March 14th, is scheduled for two weeks and is under strict requirements for secrecy.

CHANGES COMING TO DPMO: There has long been the need for changes in DPMO and it is clear that there will shortly be a new Deputy Assistant Secretary replacing Bob Newberry. It is no secret that the League has strongly supported additional funding and personnel for JPAC to enable expansion of field operations. This entailed opposition to some DPMO initiatives that would have meant engaging in operations, rather than providing the policy guidance and support for which DPMO was established. A major factor that caused united action by the major national veteran organizations and the League was DPMO's attempt, backed by DoD and others, to control the US-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs and subsume it under DoD-controlled working groups as part of a broader "reset" in US-Russian Federation relations. Whoever is selected as Mr. Newberry's replacement, it is hoped that he/she will not fall victim to listening to those in DPMO whose vision was not shared or supported by those of us most directly affected, the POW/MIA families and our nation's veterans.

US-RUSSIA JOINT COMMISSION ON POW/MIA AFFAIRS (USRJC): Despite repeated assurances that the White House wants the USRJC to remain a Presidential Commission and that decisions would soon make this clear, the ambiguity has continued. Even a unified appeal from the League, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Jewish War Veterans (JWV), Marine Corps League (MCL), American Veterans (AMVETS), and Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) brought no public clarification. Notwithstanding the frustrations and specific DPMO actions to undercut the USRJC, **US Chairman General Robert "Doc" Foglesong, USAF (Ret)**, is still awaiting decisions. Despite Russian President Medvedev's naming a new Chairman and 30 Commissioners over six months ago, and the new Russian Chairman's request for a meeting this past February with General Foglesong and the US Commissioners, the urgency appears lost on the White House staff and DoD leaders. In this era of alleged commitment and transparency, the USRJC continues to languish alongside other serious problems, without real knowledge or priority at the top.

43rd ANNUAL MEETING-JUNE 13-16, 2012: Since the 2011 meeting, issue-related events have occurred that make it crucial for as many as humanly possible to attend this year's annual meeting. Funding, personnel and leadership challenges and changes within the POW/MIA community ensure availability of information vital for all to hear. The Keynote Speaker at the **Opening Session on Thursday, June 14th, 9:00 a.m.**, is not yet known, but **President Obama** and senior Administration and military officials have been invited. There will be two full days of presentations, during which they could accept our invitation and convey their sentiments personally, as we hope will occur. Presentations by former and current senior US officials will be followed by briefings from analytic personnel, field operators, scientists and guest presenters on the complete range of issue-related policy and operational matters. This year's program will also include four topical workshops open to all League members on Friday prior to the **Service-hosted Luncheons**, with Regional Forums after the luncheons. A three-hour Q&A session with working level officials from DPMO, DIA/Stony Beach, JPAC, AFDIL and LSEL will be held on Saturday morning, June 16th, followed by the bylaw-required League Business Session.

Registration: The form to register for the 43rd Annual Meeting is the last page of this newsletter, with the 2012 Program Ad Rate Flyer on the reverse. League members (family and associate), please complete and return the form to the League office with your check for \$80.00, the combined cost for registration and 43rd Annual Dinner, if you plan to attend the dinner. The cost to register for the meeting only is \$50.00 for League members and \$65.00 for non-League members. Registration forms are also available online at www.pow-miafamilies.org. Credentials will be available **Wednesday, June 13th from 3:30-5:00 p.m. and 7:00-9:00 p.m.** in the Admiralty Foyer. An orientation meeting will be held that same evening from 7:45-8:45 p.m. in Dewey I Room, Plaza Level, and a special **Hilton-hosted reception** will be held from 7:00-9:00 p.m. for those who are registered and have picked up their credentials and meeting materials. If so inclined, your bank's "bill-pay" program can also be used to register, thus saving check-writing, stamps and time.

Special Events: The **43rd Annual Dinner & Candlelight Ceremony** will be on Thursday, June 14th. For those wishing to invite guests for the dinner, the cost will again be \$55.00 per person. **The US Army Chorus** is being asked to perform patriotic selections at the beginning of the annual dinner and a concert at the US Navy Memorial by the **US Navy Sea Chanters** has been requested for Friday evening. As in previous years, **BINGO Night** will be held at the close of activities on Saturday, June 16th. This year, however, a "pie toss" is being held that will include high-profile members of the POW/MIA accounting community; details are to be determined.

Reservations: In further apology for problems at last year's meeting, the Hilton Crystal City Hotel is offering, this year only, the deeply discounted rate of **\$141.50** (plus taxes) per room, per night, single or double. To make your reservations, call 800-HILTONS (800-445-8667), noting affiliation with the League's 43rd Annual Meeting. You can also go to www.hilton.com and use the code "MIA." Deadline to secure this special rate is May 9th. The room-block is limited, so early reservations are encouraged.

Transportation: As stipulated by Congress, the Secretary of Defense is expected to again authorize transportation (COIN Assist) for two family members, representing each Vietnam War missing and unaccounted-for US serviceman or civilian, to attend the annual meeting during which official briefings will be given. Service Casualty Offices (SCOs) will be sending information to some (not all) family members about the annual meeting (too often with VERY confusing content) and forms to complete for requesting COIN Assist transportation, file reviews, attendance at Service-hosted Luncheons, and transportation to the Friday evening concert. 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 League annual meetings at which official briefings will be given, though some League events are open only to those who register for the full League 43rd Annual Meeting. If you have questions, call the League office, 703-465-7432.

League Boutique: This year, the Boutique (formerly Silent Auction) will be held in the Board Room, first floor. In view of the tremendous success in years past, the League is again seeking suitable items for display and purchase. Please be very selective. Either bring the item(s) with you and deliver them to the Board Room or send them to the League office. Please include an itemized list, noting each item's value. The Boutique will also have available containers to receive donations related to nominated "targets" for the Saturday night pie-toss. The person honored with the most donations by the end of the League Business Session on Saturday, June 16th, will receive a pie in the face. Bidding for the privilege of tossing the pie will follow BINGO on Saturday night from 7:30 - 9:30 p.m.

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 7th page of this newsletter provides the 2012 Program Ad Rates. **The deadline for receipt of ads is May 25th.** If possible, email your camera-ready ad to Annual.Meeting@pow-miafamilies.org, and mail a copy with payment to the League office.

Meet Your Congressman: It continues to be critical that elected Representatives and Senators know what POW/MIA family members and concerned supporters want from Congress. If you can possibly participate, plan to arrive in Washington, DC, one day early, on Tuesday, June 12th, and be available on the morning of Wednesday, June 13th, to meet with Chairman Allen Harvey, Assistant Region II Coordinator, and obtain current information materials and points to raise.

One example is to seek support of **House Resolution 485**, introduced by Representative Walter Jones (R-NC), calling for several steps by the Secretary of Defense and, most importantly, signaling the need for funding and personnel to ensure that priority on the accounting mission is sustained and expanded to meet additional requirements related to the Korean War and World War II. As expected, H. Res 485 was not voted on before Congress recessed for the holidays last December; therefore, it is very important that additional House Members sign on to co-sponsor and register their support. **PLEASE CONTACT YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE**, asking him or her to contact Congressman Jones' Staff Assistant Ray Celeste by email Raymond.Celeste@mail.house.gov or phone, 202-226-5241. H. Res 485 is assigned to the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) where it will undoubtedly sit unless there is significant support from Representatives in the House. **YOU CAN HELP** in person and by mail, email or phone.

BOARD MEETS IN ELKO, NV: This year's February Board of Directors Meeting was held in Elko, NV, during the Elko POW*MIA Awareness Association's **6th Annual Chili Feed**. You may recall Elko group members serving as Sergeants-at-Arms for the 42nd Annual Meeting in 2011, and we are delighted to have them back for the 43rd Annual Meeting. Board members flew out to participate in a two-day board meeting that was held in a conference room donated by the Hilton Hotel in Elko, with overnight accommodations generously donated by Super 8 and Travel Lodge.

This year's Chili Feed was most enjoyable, bringing together the City of Elko and the surrounding area to help raise funds for the League. The event began with an opening ceremony featuring an impressive **Missing Man Honors Ceremony** and drill team demonstration. Special attention was given to members of the board and the parents of S/SGT Bowe Bergdahl, USA. The evening included a silent auction and the chili dinner, ending with a live auction of items ranging from computers and household items to shotguns and a horse! **Proceeds** from the auctions and the raffle of a special edition POW/MIA Sig Saur 911 pistol, K-bar, and display case, raised **\$20,000 for the League**.

HELP THE LEAGUE WHILE USING THE INTERNET: At no cost to you, you can use **iGive.com** or **GoodSearch.com** to benefit the League every time you search for information on the Internet or make online purchases. Together we can make a big difference.

VIETNAM WAR 50TH COMMEMORATION: This coming Memorial Day, the “kick-off” event for the Vietnam War 50th Anniversary Commemoration will be held at the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The ceremony will have many high level participants, and the list of invited dignitaries is both national and international. While the Commemoration begins this year, it will run through 2025, with the most significant events taking place between 2015 and 2017.

The Commemoration Commission is headed by Lieutenant General Claude “Mick” Kicklighter, USA (Ret) and the Commission is currently seeking Commemorative Partners. Groups and businesses that would like to help honor the service and sacrifice of Vietnam veterans – returned and still missing – and their families are encouraged to visit the Commission’s website at www.vietnamwar50th.com. The website details the Commission’s goals and objectives, promotes educational tools for the public, and will have regular updates on events taking place throughout the country.

The League is actively working with LTG Kicklighter and his team and encouraging our supporters around the country to do the same by linking to the Commission’s projects and forming partnerships, with assets and resources available for this purpose. Although this will be an ongoing process for over a decade, there are many landmark events, and the contributions of Vietnam veterans and their families will be highlighted. Also central to commemoration objectives is renewing our Nation’s commitment to accounting as fully as possible for those still missing, the League’s primary focus.

LEAGUE CHAIRMAN’S COMMENTARY: There is an increasing pattern of unilateral decision-making within DPMO and JPAC that can mean imminent danger or, at least, potential harm to the issue, the result of talking internally, instead of seeking input from those of us most affected. And, as too often occurs within a bureaucracy, if enough people – internal or external – are too tired of fighting, or closely monitoring, all that is being done behind closed doors, then regulations get slipped through that can, and have, changed policy and direction. Of course, all this occurs while professing adherence to Obama Administration guidance concerning transparency in government.

On this issue, sadly, you can rest assured that there is seldom any voluntary consultation or coordination, especially by DPMO, unless the League discovers information and makes inquiries. It is really shameful that the accounting for America’s POW/MIAs seems to be one of the few issues on which policy changes are considered, and even made, without input and views from those most directly impacted – the POW/MIA families and our Nation’s veterans.

If higher level policy officials don’t get more involved and gain better control of potentially damaging trends, it may be time to call for hearings in Congress. **That does NOT mean another select committee or “investigation,”** but hearings before responsible committees of the House and Senate. With all that is ongoing in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and other countries already engaged, plus the potential for operations in Burma (Myanmar) and North Korea, the massive scope of this issue may require hearings before the House and Senate Armed Services Committees and the Senate Foreign Relations and House Foreign Affairs Committees as well.

In looking ahead, and despite the rather gloomy picture outlined in this newsletter, the League is determined and optimistic, largely due to Vietnam’s improved cooperation. Changes now being made internal to the US, as well as those to come, should bring about a renewed focus on the core mission for which DPMO and JPAC were formed. It will take significant effort to overcome major challenges that have arisen, but it won’t be the first time the League and our Nation’s supportive veterans have overcome obstacles in our determined quest for answers. We plan on making 2012 a year of productive, efficient and increased success. If all – in and out of government – work with the unity of purpose needed, the outcome will be significant progress on the accounting!

2012 MEMBERSHIP DUES OF \$25 DUE ON JANUARY 1ST. If you received a reminder card recently, and haven’t yet paid your dues, please do so. Questions? Call or email the League office.