

POW/MIA Investigations in Vietnam  
Vietnam Research and Investigation Update  
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48th Annual League of Families Meeting  
Saturday, June 24th, 2017

Good morning. I feel at a disadvantage following so many great presentations this week, including by naturally gifted orators like Tom Holland, Johnie Webb, and General Mark Spindler. Not only that, but I don't think many can imagine how awe-inspiring it is to stand up here and look at you, the League of Families. It's pretty humbling.

When President George H. W. Bush visited us in Hanoi in the mid-1990s, speaking of the League, he said, and I paraphrase, "If you ever have to address them, be careful, they can be a tough crowd." So, if you can shake up the President of the United States, imagine how I feel. But I overcome my trepidation by just pretending that I'm among a group of surrogate moms, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Because over the years, that's the way you've made me feel.

When I attended my first or second meeting over a decade ago, Barbara Grzyb caught me outside a meeting and pressed into my hand a small black and white photograph of a young Army soldier, sitting on a cot, shining his boots. One look at his smiling face and you could tell he couldn't have been more than 20 years old. Barbara said to me, "When you look for my brother, don't forget his face." I have never forgotten that sentiment and the photo is taped above my desk in Hanoi, where I can see his face every day as I do my work.

As Richard Childress said earlier this week, we must never forget that caring is perhaps the most important element of what we in the government do as we look not only for Robert Grzyb, but also for your sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers.

It's been a few years since I've had the chance to address this group and I must say I've missed being here with you, since in the end it is you, along with those who gave their last full measure of devotion, who are the reason for our efforts every year, day in and day out, to account for the missing. I'm honored to again stand before you and though today is the final day of this annual meeting, during which many of you have received updates on your cases and we hope gained useful information, my task this morning is to provide you with an update on accounting operations in Vietnam, primarily on investigation programs and our efforts and initiatives to collect information within Vietnam to help account for your absent loved ones.

For the past decade I've worked and lived in Hanoi as DPAA's Casualty Resolution Specialist at Detachment number 2 in Vietnam. It's rewarding work, since we often get to see firsthand the successful results of our search and recovery operations, as well as coordinating with the government of Vietnam to ensure we gain access to the sites and witnesses we need. Every year has proven to be literally packed with events related to this business and this year was no different. In addition to the scheduled investigations and excavations inherent to DPAA's annual operations plan, this year saw the advent of new initiatives between the U.S. Embassy and Detachment 2, the continued successful collection of information by our Research and

Investigation Teams, and increased assistance by the Vietnamese government in underwater investigations within Vietnamese coastal waters.

First, as I mentioned, here is an update on the scheduled investigation and recovery operations in Vietnam over the past year. These operations are aligned with the U.S. government fiscal quarters as missions we call Joint Field Activities – or JFAs. In Vietnam, since the last League meeting, we have conducted four JFAs with participation by a number of types of teams: Research and Investigation Teams, Field Forensic Review Teams, Trilateral Investigation Teams, Recovery Teams, Vietnam Recovery Teams, Unilateral Excavation Teams, and Underwater Investigation Teams. The two RIT teams – RIT-A and RIT-B – investigated 137 cases, which consisted of site surveys and witness interviews. I'll give specific examples of those later. The recovery teams excavated a total of 21 cases, resulting in four repatriations of remains. Five more remains repatriations were the result of Field Forensic Reviews, for a total of nine repatriations this year. Please keep in mind these numbers are just for missions since the last League meeting, not for the fiscal year. These operations included the participation of hundreds of American service members and civilians and an even greater number of Vietnamese workers and government officials, representing a substantial portion of DPAA's annual worldwide effort and a huge amount of work accomplished for the furtherance of the accounting mission in Vietnam, though admittedly only a fraction of the remaining work still to be accomplished there.

To begin addressing examples of specific investigative events this year, I'd like to highlight the Detachment 2 Call Center. This is a program by which we collect potential POW/MIA-related information from Vietnamese citizens and visiting Americans through walk-ins, telephone calls, emails, and from social media sites such as Facebook. Over the many years since DPAA's POW/MIA Office – officially named Detachment 2 – was established in Hanoi, it has become generally known among Vietnamese citizens that the Detachment is the office to contact to report information on Americans missing from the Vietnam War. The detachment's efforts started in the early 1990s, mainly with Vietnamese citizens visiting our office or calling to report information they believed related to U.S. MIAs. More recently, with the development of the internet and social media, we've seen a greater influx of information from Vietnamese citizens, and sometimes visiting Americans. This has given us the opportunity to organize this collection mechanism into a more coordinated effort. In addition to our phone number, which is readily available through the Vietnamese telephone information service, we now have a special email address designed specifically to collect information from Vietnamese citizens. The email address is posted on the U.S. Embassy's Vietnam-language Facebook site, which has become a frequent source of information for us. In the last year, we've received potentially POW/MIA-related information from 72 sources through the Call Center, a number of which have provided lucrative leads on unresolved cases.

Here is an example of one instance in which the Call Center helped lead to the recovery and identification of two long unaccounted-for service members, First Lieutenant Daniel W. Thomas and Captain Donald G. Carr. On July 6th, 1971, first Lieutenant Thomas and Captain Carr were the crew of an OV-10 aircraft conducting a reconnaissance mission over southern Laos when they failed to return to base. Search and rescue forces at the time of the incident were unable to locate any trace of the missing aircraft or crew and the case was put into the category

of an “off-the-scope” loss, meaning the plane had disappeared from friendly radar scopes and the U.S. government did not know where it had crashed. We could only assume the crash site was somewhere in southern Laos, where it was last known to have operated.

For many years, DPAA and its predecessors searched for the aircraft in Laos, but with negative results. Then on April 25th, 2014, a man from Saigon walked in the front gate of Detachment 2’s office at 53 Tran Phu Street in Hanoi. He told our investigators he was acquainted with a group of tribal people – ethnic minorities we used to call Montagnards – in Kon Tum Province, Vietnam, who had found a crash site with human remains. He showed us a photograph of a U.S. military identification tag – commonly known as a “dogtag” – with the name Carr, Donald G. After quickly checking our databases, we knew we were onto something. We asked our counterparts in the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons – or VNOSMP – to help us contact the individuals who had found the crash site and were holding the dogtag and possibly associated remains.

On August 24th of that year, a joint Field Forensic Review team comprised of Dr. John Byrd, DPAA’s Laboratory Director, and I traveled to Kon Tum Province to conduct the investigation. The items present for examination were Captain Carr’s original identification tag, his blood chit, leather pistol holster, some uniform items, and a number of human remains. We sent the remains and personal items to DPAA’s Lab for further analysis. The Montagnards had discovered the crash site and associated items while scavenging for scrap metal in the forest and they reported that the aircraft wreckage, which was near the Vietnam-Laos border, was virtually intact. After a Vietnamese team located the crash site, DPAA scheduled the site for priority excavation.

Our first attempt at excavation, using a U.S. excavation team, was unsuccessful because the altitude at which the site was located was too high for Vietnam’s helicopters to safely reach. Without helicopter support for a medical evacuation contingency, DPAA’s U.S. teams were not able to conduct the excavation. After careful consideration, we asked the VNOSMP to organize a team to excavate the site. They had been the only ones to reach the site in the past and they volunteered to base camp at the site and conduct the excavation. We conferred with the Vietnamese team to ensure they understood the standard to which we expected the site to be excavated. After two unilateral excavations and the successful recovery of remains, Captain Carr and First Lieutenant Thomas were identified on September 4th, 2015, and February 25th, 2017, respectively.

This example not only illustrates how the Call Center can help solve POW/MIA cases, but also the efficacy of our Field Forensic Review Program and the VNOSMP’s increasing capacity to assist us with the unilateral recovery of remains. There are many such examples from the past year, including a recent message to the special email address that tipped us off to a group of Vietnamese veterans who are aware of the death and burial of a U.S. soldier currently listed in the Last-Know-Alive category. We are in the process of investigating that information and hope the results will be as good as the Carr and Thomas cases.

The next area related to investigations in Vietnam that continues to provide answers is the Research and Investigation Team – or RIT. There are two types of RITs in Vietnam. The first

team – which we call the RIT-A – conducts case-related archival research and witness interviews and the second – which we call the RIT-B – conducts case-related site surveys. These are the teams that do the in-country research on cases and identify sites for excavation. Perhaps just as importantly, these teams collect new information which adds to the narrative on each case – in essence clarifying what happened to each individual in his or her final days and minutes, both in an attempt to recover identifiable remains and to provide that story to the family.

This year the RIT-A had quite a few significant breakthroughs, but one in particular has captured a great amount of attention, both within DPAA and among the U.S. Special Forces veterans community. The RIT-A team gains the majority of its investigative leads through archival documents and interviews with Vietnamese veterans who participated in U.S. loss incidents. To obtain these archival documents and access to witnesses, the RIT-A, which is permanently stationed at Detachment 2 in Hanoi, coordinates closely with researchers and investigators from the VNOSMP. As I have explained to you in past years, the new generation of the VNOSMP increasingly utilizes professional military police investigators for POW/MIA investigations, as opposed to the more conservative political officers assigned in the past. The new VNOSMP investigators take advantage of Vietnam's comprehensive security apparatus at all levels of the country, including public security police and local informants, to collect information for the RIT-A. When our RIT-A analysts identify wartime Vietnamese units we believe could have been involved in unresolved cases, Detachment 2 requests that the VNOSMP search for members of these units. The VNOSMP investigators then begin exhaustive country-wide searches for knowledgeable witnesses, using rosters of veterans provided by Vietnamese veterans liaison committees. This process can be lengthy, but it has the potential to locate new witnesses for groups of unresolved POW/MIA cases in the areas where the wartime Vietnamese units operated.

This method proved particularly effective this past year when the RIT-A asked its VNOSMP counterparts to locate a Vietnamese unit, designated "C75," which we believed could have been involved in a group of MAC-SOG Special Forces losses in southern Laos. These cases had long been problematic for DPAA researchers and investigators, because the losses occurred in an area of Laos where there was no indigenous Laotian population during the war, only People's Army of Vietnam units operating on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. American Special Forces veterans had repeatedly asked us about the existence of Vietnamese "Counter-SOG teams," which they had encountered during their wartime long-range reconnaissance patrols in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Our searches for such units had always come up empty, until this year when the VNOSMP discovered members of the relatively small C75 Company, whose mission had been to guard warehouses and transportation routes along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in extreme southern Laos. One by one, over a series of lengthy interviews, the C75 veterans began to recount to our RIT-A investigators a succession of encounters with U.S. Special Forces patrols in southern Laos in late 1970 and early 1971. We asked the C75 veterans, all of whom are now quite elderly, if they were in fact "Counter-SOG teams." They replied that their primary duty was to protect the Trail from all enemies, including U.S. Special Forces Patrols, which were their most frequent and formidable foe. So in effect, while they considered themselves to be the protectors of the Vietnamese strategic transportation routes, they were in fact one of the "Counter-SOG teams" we had been hearing about.

Another twist to this particular story is that, while canvassing for C75 veterans with knowledge of U.S. losses, the VNOSMP discovered that the historian of the unit had used his wartime notes and witness interviews to compile an official history of the unit, complete with the dates and circumstances of significant battles. The RIT obtained this document and used it to help us correlate the information from the witness statements with specific unresolved Special Forces cases in southern Laos. The information we have gathered so far points to three unaccounted-for Special Forces individuals lost while on long-range reconnaissance patrols deep in enemy territory. Since these cases have not yet been completely resolved, I'll not get into the specifics of each case out of respect for the families, but I will say that the next logical step for this investigation is to take members of the Vietnamese C75 Company to Laos at some point for a trilateral investigation with a view towards locating the isolated graves sites of these brave Special Forces recon men.

The mission of our second type of investigation team, the RIT-B, is to follow up on information provided by witnesses, often those first interviewed by the RIT-A, and survey sites to identify them for subsequent excavation. This team also includes a mechanism for the VNOSMP to canvass new witnesses, similar to the RIT-A mechanism, so there is always potentially new information being considered. I can't emphasize enough how important the Vietnamese contribution to these investigations is, because without that constant input of new witnesses and other sources of information, the investigations would stagnate, as has happened at times over the years, due to lack of information. Another trend with this team is the participation of U.S. veterans on investigations as witnesses to incidents. Researchers and analysts in Hawaii and here in Washington D.C. contact veterans with potential knowledge of burial sites and DPAA coordinates with the Vietnamese government to have the American witnesses accompany the RIT-B to the sites. A Stony Beach strategic debriefer participated in one JFA this year on the RIT-B, enhancing the team's linguistic and interviewing capabilities for that JFA. The RIT-B conducted 57 investigations in the past year, tentatively recommending seven sites for excavation and those recommendations are being reviewed at DPAA.

The Field Forensic Review Program, which we use to investigate possible American remains in the hands of Vietnamese citizens, was again productive, with 14 forensic examinations conducted, resulting in five of the nine remains repatriations from Vietnam this year. The information which generated these forensic examinations came from Call Center sources, information provided by the VNOSMP, and investigative work by the RIT-B. In one case, we were able to obtain the remains of Lieutenant Junior Grade Charles B. Goodwin from Vietnamese citizens in Quang Binh Province who had obtained the remains from a crash site. On September 8th, 1965, LTJG Goodwin was flying an RF-8A aircraft on an early morning photo reconnaissance mission over North Vietnam in a heavy thunderstorm and did not return to his ship, the USS Coral Sea. Because his last known position was overwater, the U.S. government initially believed he had crashed at sea. Then in 1988, a Vietnamese refugee in Thailand showed U.S. investigators data from LTJG Goodwin's identification card, which the refugee said an acquaintance had taken from a crash site in Hoa Son Village, Quang Binh Province. Unfortunately, that man had died while attempting to escape Vietnam by boat, so we had no way of determining the crash site location or confirming the validity of the information. After multiple attempts at finding witnesses in Hoa Son Village with knowledge of the crash site, the VNOSMP located a man whose father had been holding remains from a reported crash site

since the 1980s. Dr. Paul Emanovsky of DPAA's Laboratory and I interviewed the man and examined the remains, which were chosen for repatriation and subsequently identified as those of LTJG Goodwin on June 1st 2017. In this instance, persistence, analysis, and cooperation paid off again and we will continue to look to the Field Forensic Review Program to account for more remains when Vietnamese citizens have come into possession of those remains.

An area that experienced significant progress this year was Vietnamese assistance with underwater investigations in their coastal waters. Beginning in 2009, we began a project to determine how many of the losses off the Vietnamese coast might be recoverable. Underwater recovery operations in Vietnam had historically been passive, that is, based on information from fishermen and local scrap hunters instead of active investigations by our teams. Since new technology is continually being developed, and with the support and at the urging of the League, we decided to enlist the assistance of U.S. Navy hydrographic research ships in 2009 and 2011 in an attempt to locate underwater crash sites that offered the possibility of recovering remains. Using state-of-the art sonar and magnetometer equipment, those two missions identified dozens of items on the ocean's floor which we believed could be U.S. aircraft. Having identified those so-called "anomalies," we still needed to "ground-truth" the items to determine if they were, in fact, the aircraft for which we were searching. After considering several courses of action, we decided to ask the VNOSMP's assistance in finding a Vietnamese diving company to support these underwater investigations. They have introduced DPAA to a professional Vietnamese diving outfit with the equipment and experience to support U.S. teams in ground-truthing items off the coast of Danang which we believe could be U.S. aircraft. This arrangement with the Vietnamese will expand our underwater search capabilities, reduce the U.S. "footprint" on the joint field activities, and could potentially provide an avenue to help us investigate underwater cases currently considered sensitive at-sea sites affected by the political geographic environment. But the most immediate result will be to determine whether we can effectively use the technology employed in 2009 and 2011 to locate and excavate underwater crash sites off the coast of Vietnam. If the results are positive, we could see more progress in the area of Vietnam underwater recoveries in the future. The next underwater investigation operation, a U.S. investigation team supported by the Vietnamese diving company, is scheduled for Joint Field Activity 17-4VM in August of this year.

As I said, it's been a busy year and the items I've mentioned this morning are just a few examples of investigation work accomplished in Vietnam. It's worth mentioning that we also spent time enhancing and professionalizing our investigation skills, with two of our RIT members completing a Public Training Council interrogation course at the Denver, Colorado, Sherriff's Department. Also of note, we continued the program to provide specialized training to the VNOSMP's investigators, as in December, Dr. William Belcher of DPAA's Laboratory conducted site survey training in Danang for a dozen Vietnamese specialists. With the extremely complex nature of the investigation environment for POW/MIA cases in Vietnam, it is important for us to stay abreast of the latest investigation techniques, as well as reinforcing basic investigative skills, as DPAA continues with investigations in Vietnam and elsewhere around the world.

It has been a pleasure speaking to you this morning and I look forward to answering any questions you may have during the government panel later today. Thank you.