



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

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AMERICANS ACCOUNTED FOR: There are now **1,637** personnel listed by the Department of Defense as missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War. Unilaterally repatriated by Vietnam on June 21, 1989, the remains of **MSG James William Holt, USA**, were identified on January 10, 2015. MSG Holt, of the 5th Special Forces Group, had been listed as MIA in South Vietnam since February 6, 1968. This latest ID provides another example of how remains repatriated many years ago can be identified using contemporary science that wasn't available in the early years. The number of Americans listed by DoD as returned and identified since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is now 946. Another 63 US personnel, recovered by the US and ID'd before the end of the war, bring the total of US personnel accounted for from the Vietnam War to 1,009. Of the 1,637 still unaccounted-for, 90% were lost in Vietnam or in areas of Cambodia and Laos under Vietnam's wartime control: Vietnam-1,272 (VN-468, VS-804); Laos-306; Cambodia-52; 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 Veterans Service Organization and League letter was sent to Secretary of Defense Hagel on December 11th, laying out serious concerns over lost momentum and lack of confidence in the ongoing reorganization effort. He again responded to our concerns, but it was not until January 9th that specific decisions were announced. While Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Christine Wormuth will continue to be the senior DoD official directly responsible, RADM Michael T. Franken, USN, has been named Interim Director of the new agency and current JPAC commander Maj Gen Kelly K. McKeague, USAF, has been named the Interim Deputy Director. In addition, and as promised by Secretary Hagel, LTG Michael Linnington, USA, currently serving as the Military Deputy to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, has been named as special advisor to Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Christine Wormuth.

Reportedly, the role of the Personnel Accounting Consolidation Task Force (PACT), directed by senior civilian Alisa Stack, assisted by senior civilians Ross Brown and Scott Schless, has ended, as have the Working Groups directed by the PACT, facilitated by The Clearing, a consulting firm, hired for over \$8 million dollars by Ms. Stack; however, she and her PACT colleagues continue to be involved, and it is unknown when they will move to other positions within DoD. Ms. Stack has been selected as Principal Director for Detainee Affairs, working for Under Secretary Wormuth. Once again, the League and other "family groups," Military Service Organizations (MSOs) and Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) have received pledges from senior DoD officials that the reign of secrecy is over, and there will be full transparency and a working partnership with the families, in particular. As a positive step in that direction, the League and others have been offered an opportunity to provide input to the document that will instruct the new Agency Director, when selected, of his duties and responsibilities.

Secretary Hagel's personal involvement and commitment gave us reason for cautious optimism that the reorganization he directed would prove to be beneficial. Now that he is leaving, the outcome is somewhat uncertain; however, reinforcing the positive was selection of the senior military officers to lead restructuring, and reorganizing of the various elements into one efficient, effective agency with higher priority and support. Now, as President Reagan advised, "Trust, but verify," and that is precisely what all should do, and the League will.

There is no question that Secretary Hagel was determined to "get this right" and was not tolerant of excuses; however, initial implementation by the PACT, The Clearing and inexperienced staff showed reluctance to build on strengths and look for ways to improve the existing process. While that seemed 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. It is obvious that she did so, supported throughout by ASD/SOLIC Lumpkin and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Community Outreach René Bardorf.

FIELD OPERATIONS: JPAC hosted Lao officials for POW/MIA Consultations in Hawaii in mid-August for necessary exchanges related to field operations. The 134th Joint Field Activity (JFA) in **Laos** was conducted October 21 – December 7th in Xekong and Salavan Provinces and was the first in a long time to nearly maximize the number of US personnel allowed in-country at one time, i.e. 53 personnel. The 135th JFA began January 10th and will continue through February 15th, with four recovery teams.

Operations in **Cambodia** have been sporadic at best, with only one JFA in 2014, postponed twice in 2013. The 50th JFA began January 14th and will continue through March 23rd; however, due to border disputes in Stung Treng Province, and concern for team safety, the JFA was reduced to a single recovery team which will conduct an excavation on Koh Tang. Maj Gen McKeague is scheduled to make a visit to Cambodia in late February to meet with Cambodia's POW/MIA Committee leaders.

On September 23rd, JPAC hosted annual Technical Talks in Hawaii with Vietnamese counterparts. Once again, US officials heard Vietnamese requests for expanding the pace and scope of field operations that have been sporadic at best, depending on funding and weather-related challenges. A total of nine US teams conducted the 117th JFA from October 30th to December 7th, with Recovery Teams excavating sites in Dien Bien, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh and Son La Provinces. These operations in **Vietnam** were said to be the largest deployment ever, finally responding to Vietnam's 2009 offer to the League, repeated often to US officials. The 118th JFA is scheduled to begin March 8th and continue through April 14th, with Recovery Teams scheduled to excavate sites in Kontum, Khanh Hoa, Tra Vinh, Quang Ngai and Gia Lai Provinces.

LEAGUE DELEGATION TO SOUTHEAST ASIA: League Chairman of the Board Ann Mills-Griffiths will again lead a delegation to Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, meeting up with Senior Policy Advisor Richard Childress and Vice Chairman of the Board Mark Stephensen in Bangkok to unite the three-member delegation. Elli Childress and Doneta Stephensen will accompany their husbands and, as has been the case for years, all are paying their own expenses for travel, accommodations and meals. The schedule is very full, with senior level appointments in the three Indochina countries and field visits to ongoing recovery operations at two sites in Laos and one in Cambodia. No operations are taking place in Vietnam during this timeframe, January 20th–February 10th.

The Delegation will meet with US Ambassadors Dan Clune, Bill Todd and Ted Osius, and Chargé d'Affaires, Patrick Murphy, all of whom have been very helpful and supportive. Ambassador Clune has graciously invited the Chairman and the Childresses to stay at the official residence, very familiar to Mills-Griffiths and Mr. Childress from government and League delegations over the years, and the Detachment 3 Commander has invited the Stephensens to stay at the Detachment Team House. These are very welcome invitations and will provide a unique experience for the delegation and save hundreds of dollars. The group will also have briefings by each Embassy's Country Team, JPAC and DIA's Stony Beach specialists to get updates before meeting with foreign officials. The League sincerely appreciates the assistance and support provided by JPAC Headquarters and Detachment personnel, analysts at DPMO, officials at State Department, DIA and, lastly, the Ambassadors and Embassies of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia for again extending courtesy visas as they have over the years. The Chairman will provide a written trip summary in the late February Newsletter and give a full report at the **46th Annual Meeting, June 24-27th**.

LEAGUE 46TH ANNUAL MEETING: This national convention will be the first opportunity to receive an In-Process Review (IPR) on complete reorganization of the accounting process. **The Secretary of Defense will be invited as Keynote Speaker at the Opening Session** on Thursday, **June 25th**, 9 a.m. Initial Operating Capability (IOC) of the new Agency will have been in place for six months, so there should be ample information to share with the families. Certainly, Interim Director RADM Michael Franken and Interim Deputy Director Maj Gen Kelly McKeague will be asked to provide their views and, in this era of mandated transparency, it should be very informative. We also hope to see the return of Johnie Webb, Tom Holland, Jennifer Nasarenko, Ron Ward, Bill Gadoury, Bob Maves, Bill Habeeb, all of our Stony Beach specialists, and many other dedicated civilians who play a key role in the accounting mission. **IT IS CRUCIAL THAT ALL LEAGUE MEMBERS ATTEND!** COIN Assist transportation – Congressionally mandated, DoD-directed and Service-provided – will once again be available for two family members per man still missing and unaccounted-for to attend. Funding, personnel and leadership changes, and challenges within the POW/MIA community ensure information provided during the briefings and panels will be critical and will affect every interested family member.