



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

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

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

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

Operations in **Cambodia** have been sporadic at best, with only one JFA thus far in 2014, postponed twice in 2013. Due to the "complete reorganization" now ongoing, the PACT (for DoD) has authorized JPAC to proceed with planned field operations, whether or not Congress has approved the budget for FY15 or a Continuing Resolution to carry over the existing budget for contracting and other operations requirements. The Cambodia Stony Beach specialist is permanently in-country and conducts investigations when and where needed. No JFAs were scheduled in Cambodia until early 2015, but that could still change. For the first time in over 20 years, technical level talks were not held with Cambodia in FY2014, ending September 30<sup>th</sup>, but plans are being considered for senior level discussions with Cambodia's POW/MIA Committee leadership before the end of the calendar year.

Another series of field operations took place in **Vietnam** from August 5<sup>th</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup> that included a Joint Forensic Review (JFR), and it was a busy year in Vietnam with regularly scheduled, implemented joint operations. On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, JPAC hosted annual Technical Talks 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, again depending on funding, as well as weather-related issues. On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, JPAC hosted annual Technical Talks with Vietnamese counterparts. A total of nine US teams will be fielded in the upcoming JFA, the largest deployment ever, finally responding to the Vietnamese offer to the League in 2009 to expand the pace and scope of field operations.

**DIA'S STONY BEACH:** While DIA's Acting Director David Shedd and his team at Headquarters continues to strongly support their specialized, highly trained and motivated team, only in Cambodia are Stony Beach specialists allowed to perform their assigned tasks as intended. In Laos, despite agreement at long last to allow PCS (permanent change of station) for the one SB specialist, he has not been allowed to conduct small-scale investigations and interviews that best serve the mission. In Vietnam, the leadership has thus far failed to approve PCS for the two Vietnam specialists, but I am optimistic that such will soon occur due to the ever-increasing, broadening military-to-military cooperation

**ONGOING REORGANIZATION:** Ongoing efforts are led by Senior DoD civilian, Alisa Stack, head of the Personnel Accounting Consolidation Taskforce (PACT). The PACT reportedly includes government specialists with expertise ranging from how to structure the new agency, to the number of personnel, budget requirements, interface with other departments and agencies, archival research, strategy and integration, and communication with the families. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations & Low Intensity Conflict (ASD/SOLIC) Michael Lumpkin both stated that communication with the families must be a very high priority consideration in how the new agency performs. Since appointment, PACT officials, aided by **The Clearing** (see below) have been conducting many interviews and appear to be focused on ensuring that a wide variety of voices are heard – responsible and irresponsible, rational and irrational – so the outcome could be interesting.

The Clearing, an outside consulting firm, was initially contracted for a reported \$2,000,000, and more recently, an added \$6,689,586 (yes, millions) to obtain input from family members from all wars on their experiences in dealing with various accounting community organizations. In addition to DPMO, JPAC and LSEL (specifically named in Secretary Hagel's restructure directive and by Congress), these include the Service Casualty Offices, AFDIL and DIA's Stony Beach POW/MIA team. The Clearing is reportedly also interviewing and receiving input from all US officials willing to provide it concerning the overall mission and their own specific agency/organization. The Clearing staff can be reached by emailing [voiceofthefamilies@theclearing.com](mailto:voiceofthefamilies@theclearing.com). In light of the comparatively small number of Vietnam War family members, the League is hopeful that ALL Vietnam War families take this opportunity to remind PACT staff, The Clearing and senior DoD officials that the greatest uncertainty surrounds Vietnam War missing, though the same can be said of a relatively small number of Korean War servicemen who were last known alive or in POW camps, but never returned; therefore, the need for concrete answers is urgent. Recovery and identification of known dead from earlier wars and conflicts, as well as disinterment of personnel buried as "unknowns" in American cemeteries, are important, but their families are not dealing with uncertainty. The League supports efforts to account for WWII, Korean War and Cold War losses as an important, though vastly different from ending uncertainty surrounding the missing.

Secretary of Defense Hagel personally directed the "complete reorganization" of the accounting community and offered assurance to the League of his personal engagement, it is to him the League will look for confirmation that he is satisfied with the prospects for success of the reorganized community. Several interim briefings have been given, though without details or specifics in which we have keen interest. Another conference call briefing was held September 26<sup>th</sup> with USD(P) Wormuth. Unfortunately, nothing new was learned; it was more or less an introductory session, lacking any specific details in which the League, other family members and the major national VSOs have great interest. Hopefully, the PACT will become more transparent and consult knowledgeable, responsible current and former officials, as well as the League and the major national veteran organizations, before plans are finalized. Valid input into the process can help assure acceptance by those most directly impacted, the Vietnam War POW/MIA families and family members of US personnel lost in earlier wars and conflicts.