



## NATIONAL LEAGUE OF POW/MIA FAMILIES

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Chartered May 28, 1970

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### UPDATE: October 8, 2020

**AMERICANS ACCOUNTED FOR:** The number missing (POW/MIA) and otherwise unaccounted-for (KIA/BNR) from the Vietnam War is now **1,585**. A September 24<sup>th</sup> DPAA release stated that **Air Force Maj. Paul A. Avolese**, 35, was a radar navigator assigned to the 4133rd Bombardment Wing. That day, he was part of the crew of a B-52D Stratofortress bomber conducting a bombing mission from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, to a target in Vietnam. During a maneuver over the South China Sea, Avolese's bomber collided with another B-52, causing both aircraft to fall into the sea. Four of the crew members from his aircraft were rescued, but Avolese was never recovered. He was declared dead on July 24, 1967. There was no mention when remains were recovered or by whom, but interment services are pending. In a July 14<sup>th</sup> release, DPAA announced that **1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Alva R. Krogman, USAF**, KIA/BNR, was accounted for on July 7<sup>th</sup>. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Krogman was flying an O1-F Birdog aircraft on a visual reconnaissance mission over Savannakhet Province, Laos, on January 17, 1967, when his aircraft was hit and went down. Search and Rescue (SAR) operations were initiated immediately, but were shut down within a few hours after one of the SAR aircraft was also shot down. In February of this year, a US team of unexploded ordnance removal specialists initially recovered remains while clearing the site in preparation for an April joint recovery mission. **This was only the second identification of a previously unaccounted-for Vietnam War Veteran to be announced since July 26, 2019.**

Of the 1,585, 90% were lost in Vietnam or in areas of Cambodia or Laos under Vietnam's wartime control: Vietnam-1,245 (VN-442, VS-803); Laos-285; Cambodia-48; PRC territorial waters-7. Since chartered in 1970, the League has sought the return of all POWs, the fullest possible accounting for the missing, and repatriation of all recoverable remains. The total accounted for since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is now **998**. A breakdown by country of these 998 Americans is: Vietnam – 673, Laos – 280, Cambodia – 42, and the PRC – 3. In addition, 63 US personnel were accounted for between 1973 and 1975, the formal end of the Vietnam War, for a grand total of 1,061. These 63 Americans, were accounted for by US-only efforts in accessible areas, not with cooperation of post-war governments in Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia. A total of 288 have been accounted for from Laos, 728–Vietnam, 42–Cambodia, and 3 – PRC.

### **ACCOUNTING OPERATIONS/EVENTS CANCELLED; UNILATERAL SRV RECOVERIES CONTINUE:**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Defense Department banned all DoD travel, initially until May 15<sup>th</sup>, which then extended until June 30<sup>th</sup>. Travel is still limited today but DoD has begun the process of incrementally lifting restrictions. DPAA pulled teams from the field, returned them to the US and cancelled all field operations until further notice; however, Vietnam agreed to conduct unilateral recoveries in several provinces. Reportedly, there have been three such periods, with multiple recovery teams, and one reported repatriation ceremony, plus another period of unilateral SRV recoveries, by three teams, will be fielded by mid-October in northern provinces. Further details will be provided when available.

**ANNUAL US-SRV TECHNICAL TALKS:** Initially planned for mid-September at DPAA Ops Headquarters in Hawaii, the talks were instead held virtually, with DPAA Deputy Director for Operations RDML Darius Banaji, USN, and Mr. Le Chi Dung, Director General of the Americas Department, SRV Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led the DPAA and VNOSMP (Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons) bilateral talks. Importantly, US Ambassador to Vietnam sat in on the talks making an introductory statement and, thereby visibly showing the importance of POW/MIA accounting cooperation and results to the American people, thus the overall bilateral relationship that continues to expand, including in military-to-military and strategic matters, but also in economic, educational, and broader humanitarian cooperation. Of significance was Mr. Dung's vow to designate an interlocutor specifically to coordinate Stony Beach requests for linking up with participants on Vietnam's NSC (National Security Council) 515 teams working unilaterally to recover remains of Vietnamese personnel killed in battle and buried in unknown locations.

**IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITY ALSO LOST DUE TO COVID-19 CORONA VIRUS:** In addition to field operations in Laos and Vietnam being put on hold, the **US-ASEAN Special Summit**, scheduled to be held in Las Vegas on March 14<sup>th</sup>, was cancelled. League Chairman/CEO Ann Mills-Griffiths was scheduled to meet with **Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen** on March 13<sup>th</sup>, and was awaiting confirmation from the Lao and Vietnamese Prime Ministers, when the Summit cancellation was announced.

**DPAA & DIA SIGN FORMAL MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU):** On September 17<sup>th</sup>, DPAA Director Kelly McKeague and DIA Director LTG Bob Ashley, USA, signed an MOU to formally solidify integration of DIA's Stony Beach Team of specialists into Vietnam War accounting operations. Formed in 1986, before the accounting mission broadened to including efforts to recover and identify personnel unaccounted-for from the Korean War, Cold War and World War II, Stony Beach's sole mission was and is Vietnam War accounting, focused on Last Known Alive (LKA) cases of POW/MIA personnel. Unfortunately, fully integrating this small, highly trained team of intelligence specialists ran into obstacles, initially convincing foreign governments that their mission was singularly focused on the humanitarian mission of obtaining answers for the families on our Vietnam War missing. More recently, as the accounting effort expanded, obstacles grew from unwarranted bureaucratic concerns over control, and a separate chain of command and reporting requirements, rather than finding a viable means to fully utilize them for the value they add.

**Comment:** This MOU was far too long in reaching completion, and the League deeply appreciates the efforts made by LTG Ashley and his DIA staff, as well as DPAA's Policy & Plans Director Brian Pearl and Deputy Director Jennifer Nasarenko, with the full support of DPAA Director McKeague. Now, for greater implementation without unnecessary delay, and that may take additional persuasion of Vietnam's leadership. Stony Beach has long been the established US lead in **Cambodia** on accounting efforts, due to the transfer to Bangkok years ago of the Operational Detachment in Phnom Penh. Also, Stony Beach has long had a permanent specialist in **Laos**. At DPAA's request during earlier bilateral talks, the Lao agreed to designate two Lao counterparts to work directly with the Stony Beach Lao specialist, and joint Stony Beach/Lao investigations were conducted during the last week of September. Stony Beach specialists have rotated in and out of **Vietnam** for far too long, and efforts are underway to confirm at least one permanent Stony Beach position permanently authorized and assigned to US Embassy-Hanoi.

**LEAGUE 51<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL MEETING NOW SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 24-28, 2021:** As previously announced, the 51<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting did not take place June 24-28<sup>th</sup> this year, and has been rescheduled for June 24-28, 2021. We just checked with the Hilton Crystal City Hotel, and they are now open on a limited basis, and we're hoping for fewer restrictions and greater normalcy by mid-2021. **DPAA cancelled Family Member Updates** previously scheduled for March, April, May, August and September, previously scheduled in Colorado Springs. **The DPAA-hosted Annual Government Briefings for Korean War/Cold War Families, previously planned for August was also cancelled** Due to the seriousness and unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic, DoD travel restrictions have been applied worldwide. In addition, DoD, DIA, State Department and other US agencies had been teleworking, but are now alternating schedules to try to ensure greater in-person coverage.

**POW/MIA FLAG TO BE DISPLAYED YEAR-ROUND:** On November 7<sup>th</sup>, President Trump signed into law the "National POW/MIA Flag Act." The League-originated POW/MIA flag is now to be visibly displayed whenever the US flag is posted on Federal properties, including the White House, the US Capitol and all Senate and House Buildings, World War II Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial and the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial, every national cemetery, buildings containing the official offices of the Secretaries of State, Defense and Veterans Affairs, the Director of the Selective Service system, all major military installations, as directed by the Secretary of Defense, all VA medical centers, and all offices of the US Postal Service. The League is grateful for this tremendous support, a meaningful signal to counterpart nations from which cooperation is necessary. It also signals all nations that America stands behind and with those who serve – past, present and future – and if captured or missing, all possible efforts will be made to recover and bring home our UNRETURNED Veterans.

**FLAG DAY CONFUSION:** Flag Day is one of the six days each year when previously existing laws required that our POW/MIA flag be flown, in addition to Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, National POW/MIA Recognition Day and Veterans Day. This year, on Flag Day, June 14<sup>th</sup>, and for reasons as yet unclear, our POW/MIA Flag was taken down from atop the White House and placed on a separate flag pole, under the US flag, but scarcely visible in a small cluster of trees just outside the circular driveway around the South Lawn. Strangely, this occurred only six months after the President had signed into law the separate bills passed by the House and Senate requiring visible display of the POW/MIA flag on “all days on which the flag of the United States is displayed.”

**Chairman’s Comment:** When this occurred, DPAA and the League were notified within minutes of each other, but given no reason, nor any indication as to who had made the decision to construct a new flagpole near the South Lawn and remove the POW/MIA flag from atop the White House, especially on Flag Day, June 14<sup>th</sup>, when and where it had proudly flown for decades. Even more bizarre, the POW/MIA flag was not in its rightful position on September 18, 2020, 2020 National POW/MIA Recognition Day. The way this was handled was truly bizarre and, to date, DPAA Director Kelly McKeague and League Chairman/CEO Ann Mills-Griffiths have not been provided the rationale. The League informed White House officials that removal of the POW/MIA flag from atop the White House would send conflicting signals domestically and to counterpart governments which figure prominently in US efforts to achieve the fullest possible accounting, in particular for Vietnam War POW/MIAs. It was also noted that such an action could also be viewed as reducing the priority and seriousness of US intentions, including with the DPRK, as accounting for Americans lost during the Korean War was Point #4 of the 2018 Singapore Agreement. Clarification will be provided when available.

**THE LEAGUE OFFICE IS CLOSED AND ALL ARE TELEWORKING UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.**

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