



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

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UPDATE: November 1, 2013

AMERICANS ACCOUNTED-FOR: There are still **1,643** personnel listed by the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) as missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War. DPMO recently posted the identification of **SSG Lawrence Woods, USA/SF**, of TN, listed as KIA/BNR in South Vietnam on October 24, 1964. His remains were recovered on April 13, 2010 and identified September 4, 2013. Earlier, DPMO posted the identification of **Colonel Francis J. McGouldrick, USAF**, CT, listed as MIA in Laos on December 13, 1968, as now accounted for. His remains were repatriated May 22, 2012 and identified August 28, 2013. The number of Americans announced by DPMO as returned and identified since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is now 940. 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 1,003. Of the 1,643 unaccounted-for personnel, 90% were lost in Vietnam or in areas of Cambodia and Laos under Vietnam's wartime control: Vietnam-1,275 (VN-469, VS-806); Laos-308; Cambodia-53; PRC territorial waters-7; over-water losses on DPMO's list of No Further Pursuit cases number well over 600.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE & CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, PLEDGE SUPPORT: On September 20th, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, in remarks at the Pentagon's ceremony commemorating National POW/MIA Recognition day, stated in part, *"Words and promises cannot make the lingering uncertainty, the headache, and the heartache go away. But I hope it provides comfort to know that as long as members of our Armed Forces remain unaccounted for, the Department of Defense will do everything – whatever we can to find them and bring them home....we will not rest until we fulfill this pledge – no matter how long it takes.....Today, as the POW/MIA flag is raised in communities across America, we pledge to live by its creed, 'You are not Forgotten.'"*

Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Martin E. Dempsey, USA, speaking at the Pentagon, stated in part, *".....a special welcome to the families of those still missing in action and all who remain dedicated to bringing them home. It's a great honor to share this day with you... I am also inspired by the efforts of the countless individuals and organizations that are dedicated to honor American prisoners of war and who continue the search for those missing in action....Their efforts reach deep into the four corners of the globe, into foreign lands far from home..... Today, as we fly the familiar black and white flag across our country, it's not only a symbol to remember the POW and MIA community, it's a charge – to keep faith with every prisoner of war, those still missing in action, their families, and our military community ... to remain undaunted by time and undeterred by challenges... wherever our missing lie, wherever a prisoner waits, we will remain committed to freeing them....to not rest... to not call our mission complete ... not until our family is whole again."*

VIETNAM: US-Vietnam POW/MIA Consultations were held September 26th, led by JPAC Commander Maj Gen Kelly McKeague, USAF, with DPMO, DIA's Stony Beach and Embassy-Hanoi participation. A commemorative dinner was held the night before to celebrate recent years of steadily improving POW/MIA cooperation. Although invited to attend, the League's Chairman of the Board regretted and sent a letter that was read aloud and well-received, according to the JPAC Commander. The Joint Field Activity (JFA) in Vietnam, scheduled for November, was initially postponed due to lack of funding. Once agreement was reached on a Continuing Resolution to temporarily fund the government, the Vietnam JFA was back on, though significantly reduced in scope. **JFAs scheduled earlier in Laos, Cambodia and the PRC were indefinitely postponed due to lack of funding in time to continue, even at a reduced scope.**

In a very important development, **Vietnamese Deputy Minister of National Defense LTG Nguyen Chi Vinh** was again in Washington, DC, for October 29th bilateral Defense Policy Dialogue. In response to a League request, Minister Vinh and his delegation agreed to meet with **Chairman of the Board Ann Mills-Griffiths** on Sunday, October 27th. After thanking Minister Vinh for taking the time to meet and for significant improvements in cooperation, particularly since 2009, including increased provision of archival documents, access to previously restricted areas, and improved quality and professionalism of SRV participants working with US counterparts, Mills-Griffiths highlighted two areas on which support is needed: 1) agreement for the US to field additional teams in the central highlands where most of the remaining unresolved losses occurred; and 2) agreement for the two DIA Stony Beach POW/MIA investigation specialists to be permanently assigned at the US Embassy in Hanoi.

In response, Minister Vinh stated 1) he had brought more documents sought by the US to turn over to DoD officials, 2) agreed to additional US personnel operating in the central provinces, and 3) that he saw no problem with permanent stationing of the two DIA specialists, providing their mission was clear, i.e. focused solely on POW/MIA-related information, indicating it should simply be handled as other assignments to the USEMB. Minister Vinh asked for additional US emphasis on and support for addressing “war legacy issues,” including demining and humanitarian assistance for the disabled and their families, and for information that might help locate Vietnamese who died and whose remains are not yet recovered. He suggested that bilateral US-Vietnam cooperation on the humanitarian accounting mission should serve as an example to the world of what can be accomplished by working together on such matters. In a post-DoD meeting wrap-up, observers reported that Minister Vinh indicated there were no barriers to his government’s willingness to assist and again suggested publicizing the success of bilateral US-Vietnam cooperation on the humanitarian accounting mission.

Chairman’s Comment: There was noticeable warmth and responsiveness during discussions with the Deputy Defense Minister, a willingness to cooperate that has been evident to the League since 2009 and, along with the improved level of cooperation, there has also been a significant increase in the professionalism and quality of working level officials, clearly having received authorization and encouragement from senior officials. These welcome developments related to Vietnam’s level of cooperation, especially a commitment that there are “no barriers” to POW/MIA accounting cooperation by such a senior MND official as Senior LTG Nguyen Chi Vinh, bode well for achieving greater success on Vietnam War accounting, so long as the US Government sustains funding and personnel levels and meets long-established agreements.

CAMBODIA: Consultations were held September 30th in Phnom Penh, also led by the JPAC Commander, with DPMO, DIA’s Stony Beach and Embassy-Phnom Penh participation. It is hoped the legal obstacles raised by the US bureaucracy will not recur to pose further difficulties for JPAC teams and counterpart Cambodian officials who, though puzzled, have been most patient. **The long-delayed JFA in Cambodia was scheduled to take place from October 23 – December 6th but was again postponed**, as noted above. Operations in Cambodia by two Recovery Teams (RTs) and one Underwater Recovery Team (URT) have been postponed twice this year.

LAOS: On August 16th, US-Lao Bilateral POW/MIA Consultations, led by JPAC Commander Maj Gen Kelly McKeague, USAF, with Embassy-Vientiane and DPMO representatives participating, were held in Vientiane, Laos. The talks were the most productive such discussions in quite some time. At long last, the Lao Government agreed to allow the Defense Intelligence Agency’s (DIA’s) Stony Beach POW/MIA specialist to pursue field investigations year-round, on an as-needed basis. Though the details have yet to be worked out, the League welcomes Lao responsiveness to specific appeals, including on Stony Beach, contracting the use of smaller helicopters and on-site base-camping. These Lao Government decisions are in keeping with the improved political, economic and military relationship. This latter agreement was to have been tested during **the October 16 – November 29th JFA that was postponed due to lack of funding.**

JPAC PUBLIC AFFAIRS PRACTICE: Investigative journalist Bill Dedman recently published a story on what he touts as JPAC’s “fake” arrival ceremonies. JPAC’s attempt to honor those recovered by re-creating a formal arrival ceremony should be viewed for what it was – a well-intentioned effort to honor deserving US personnel missing and unaccounted-for from our nation’s past wars and conflicts.

Comment: JPAC’s determination to keep the issue visible is based on several factors, including the need to sustain adequate funding and personnel levels, but practical considerations such as cost were also paramount. In reality, JPAC was re-enacting what used to be real-time ceremonies, by transporting flag-draped transfer cases (caskets), returned at varying times in recent weeks/months (often in the middle of the night), inviting the media and local veterans, and holding the “arrival ceremony” with all the tradition and formality earned by those being honored. The “sham” was that they had arrived earlier and the timing was staged. Was it smart? Not really! Was it well-intended? Yes, but it was also short-sighted and misled those attending. In the current poisonous environment of unproven accusations, investigations, legal actions and EEO complaints, the timing further undercut JPAC, the command at the heart of the accounting process. It is very sad, but this relative “hiccup” in the process should not be allowed to destroy confidence in the quality of in-country investigations, interviews, and surveys based on responsible analysis, nor in the end-result, the identification processes. Over-reaction by uninformed senior US officials and concerned citizens were most unfortunate, but demonstrate why DPMO and JPAC, as well as DoD, need to develop carefully thought out programs to educate currently serving military and civilian officials. Such programs could easily be made available through existing official channels and demonstrate, with briefings related to JPAC’s ongoing, worldwide accounting missions, that the US Government stands solidly behind those who serve, including if captured or listed as missing.