



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

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**UPDATE: December 1, 2014**

**AMERICANS ACCOUNTED FOR:** There are still **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.

**ONGOING POW/MIA REORGANIZATION:** In response to growing concerns over direction, a meeting was called on October 31st, during which then-Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel acknowledged momentum had slowed and confidence in the reorganization had diminished. He responded to our concerns with very specific pledges of support, in the presence of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Christine Wormuth, the senior DoD official directly responsible, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs/Community Relations René Bardorf, PACT staff, five major national veteran organization representatives and the League Chairman, as well as other family and veteran group participants by conference call. The Secretary made the following specific commitments: 1) Failure is not an option; 2) Secrecy will end now, and there will be full transparency; 3) Agreed to name, in consultation with Joint Chiefs Chairman General Martin Dempsey, a senior uniformed military advisor to the USDP; and 4) Expressed full confidence in Under Secretary Wormuth's ability to get the reorganization right. Due to Secretary Hagel's personal involvement and commitment, there was reason for cautious optimism that the reorganization he directed would prove to be beneficial. Now that he has resigned or been removed, the outcome is uncertain. Success of the ongoing transition effort is now the responsibility of Under Secretary Wormuth, with the PACT transition team coming directly under her purview. Senior Executive Service (SES) civilian Alisa Stack leads the Personnel Accounting Consolidation Taskforce (PACT), aided by Mr. Ross Brown, COL, USA (Ret), and Mr. Scott Schless, both also SES civilians. Their qualifications for this critical task reportedly include expertise in structuring a new agency, determining budget and personnel requirements, interface with other departments and agencies, strategy and integration, and communication. During the October 31st meeting, Under Secretary Wormuth stated she wanted "a pause" to assess how the Working Groups were functioning and moving toward reaching Initial Operating Capability (IOC) in January 2015. Due to family and veterans representatives' concerns about composition and objectives of the PACT Working Groups, the names of participants were requested. In light of the Secretary's firm edict on transparency beginning now, it was surprising to learn the PACT Director had since noted in an email that DoD has not released the names. There is no question that Secretary Hagel was determined to "get this right" and would accept no excuses; however, initial implementation by inexperienced personnel shows reluctance to build on existing strengths and look for ways to improve the process. While this seems incredibly simple, educated insights from experienced, dedicated professionals are being neither sought nor welcomed by the transition team. Under Secretary Wormuth should be deciding changes are needed, but her "pause" is long over, and we encourage her to proceed thoughtfully.

**OPERATIONS:** JPAC hosted Lao officials for POW/MIA Consultations in Hawaii in mid-August for necessary exchanges related to field operations. Joint Field Activities (JFAs) resumed in **Laos** late last month, though reportedly downsized from the five Recovery Teams (RTs), one Investigation Team (IT) and one Research Investigation Team (RIT) conducting a trilateral (LPDR, SRV & US) investigation initially planned. This JFA, expected to conclude this week, was to have been the first in a long time to maximize the number of US personnel allowed in-country at one time, i.e. 53 personnel, but apparently, such did not occur. Operations in **Cambodia** have been sporadic at best, with only one JFA thus far in 2014, postponed twice in 2013. A JFA is scheduled in Cambodia in early 2015, but that could still change. For the first time in over 20 years, technical level talks were not held with Cambodia in 2014, but plans are being considered for senior level, operational discussions with Cambodia's POW/MIA Committee leaders in the near future. 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 are now operating in **Vietnam**, the largest deployment ever, finally responding to Vietnam's offer to the League in 2009, repeated often to US officials, to expand the pace and scope of field operations.

**DIA'S STONY BEACH:** While Acting Director David Shedd and his team at Headquarters continue to strongly support DIA's specialized, highly trained and motivated team, only in Cambodia are Stony Beach specialists allowed to perform their assigned tasks as intended. In Laos, despite long overdue agreement to allow PCS (permanent change of station) for the one SB specialist, there are continuing challenges to his being allowed freedom to conduct small-scale investigations and interviews that best serve the mission. We hope for better when his replacement arrives, hopefully before the end of this year. Vietnamese leaders have thus far failed to approve PCS for two Vietnam specialists, but this should soon occur due to ever-increasing, broadening military-to-military cooperation.

**46TH ANNUAL MEETING IS CRUCIAL:** The 46th Annual Meeting will be held June 24-27th at the Hilton Crystal City Hotel. This national convention will be the first opportunity to receive an In-Process Review (IPR) on complete reorganization of the POW/MIA accounting process. **The Secretary of Defense will be invited as Keynote Speaker at the Opening Session** on Thursday, **June 24th**, 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. **IT IS CRUCIAL THAT ALL 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 from the Vietnam War 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.