



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

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**AMERICANS ACCOUNTED FOR:** There are still 1,636 personnel listed by the Department of Defense as missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War. The remains of **Capt Richard D. Chorlins, USAF**, lost January 11, 1970, in Laos were identified on December 17, 2014. Unilaterally repatriated by Vietnam on June 21, 1989, the remains of **MSG James William Holt, USA**, were identified on January 10, 2015. MSG Holt had been listed as MIA in South Vietnam since February 6, 1968. This ID provides another example of how remains repatriated many years ago can now 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 identified before the end of the war, bring the total of US personnel accounted for from the Vietnam War to 1,009. Of the 1,636 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-305; 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 letter signed by the major national Veterans Service Organizations and the League was sent to then Secretary of Defense Hagel on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 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 9, 2015, 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, was named Interim Director of the new Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency and former JPAC Commander Maj Gen Kelly K. McKeague, USAF, was named the Interim Deputy Director. In addition, and as promised by Secretary Hagel, LTG Michael Linnington, USA, currently serving as Military Deputy to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, was named as Special Advisor to Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Christine Wormuth.

The role of the Personnel Accounting Consolidation Task Force (PACT) was reportedly terminated, as were the Working Groups, directed by senior civilian Alisa Stack, aided by Ross Brown and Scott Schless. The PACT strategy to "transform" the accounting mission was facilitated by The Clearing, a consulting firm hired for over \$8 million dollars by Ms. Stack; however, she, her PACT colleagues and The Clearing continue to be involved, despite earlier assurances to the contrary.

Senior DoD officials pledged to the League and other "family groups," Military Service Organizations (MSOs) and Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) that the reign of secrecy is over, full transparency would prevail, and a working partnership with the families would be formed. As an initial step in that direction, the League and others were offered an opportunity to provide input to the requirements under which the new Agency Director will be hired. Also, reportedly, the new Director is to be in place by June 1<sup>st</sup>, to take over the new Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency that, hopefully, will include Major General McKeague, now named on an interim basis, as the permanent Deputy Director. It is crucial that there be continuity and knowledge at the top of the new agency, despite the complete restructure from three DoD elements into one agency.

**Chairman's Comment:** Former 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 has left, the outcome is somewhat uncertain; however, reinforcing the positive was selection of the senior military officers to restructure into one efficient, effective agency with higher priority and sustained budget and support. 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 resisted direction to build on existing strengths and look for ways to improve the process. While that seemed simple enough, the PACT neither sought nor welcomed educated insights from experienced, dedicated professionals, seeking instead to create a new agency from zero, refusing to recognize, much less appreciate, the 40 years of struggle and effort that to date has brought answers to over 1,000 families. We urged Under Secretary Wormuth to proceed thoughtfully, and it is obvious that she did so by rejecting the PACT and its proposals, supported throughout by Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD/SOLIC) Michael Lumpkin and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Community Outreach René Bardorf. We'll know the results soon!

**LEAGUE DELEGATION TO SOUTHEAST ASIA:** League Chairman of the Board Ann Mills-Griffiths led a delegation to Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam from January 20<sup>th</sup> until February 10<sup>th</sup>. Senior Policy Advisor Richard Childress and Vice Chairman of the Board Mark Stephensen traveled separately to Bangkok where the three-member delegation united. Elli Childress and Doneta Stephensen accompanied their husbands and, as has been the case for years, all paid their own expenses for travel, accommodations and meals. The schedule was very full, with senior level appointments in the three Indochina countries and field visits to ongoing recovery operations at three sites in Laos and one in Cambodia. No operations were taking place in Vietnam. .

The Delegation met with US Ambassadors Dan Clune (Laos), Bill Todd (Cambodia) and Ted Osius (Vietnam), and Chargé d'Affaires Patrick Murphy (Thailand), all of whom were very helpful and supportive. The group also had briefings by each Embassy's Country Team, JPAC (now DPAA) and DIA's Stony Beach specialists to get updates before meeting with foreign officials. The League sincerely appreciates the assistance and support provided by now former JPAC Headquarters and Detachment personnel, analysts at DPMO, officials at State Department, DIA and, lastly, the Washington, DC-based 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 upcoming League Newsletter and a full report at the **46<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, June 24-27<sup>th</sup>**.

In the interim, it is important that all recognize the changes that have occurred and are occurring in all of these countries, including the positive, responsive attitudes with which the League Delegation was met. The changes are striking and welcome, though responses to specific requests related to continuing field operations and greater acceptance of and flexibility for DIA's Stony Beach Team to operate most effectively and efficiently will come through future government-to-government discussions, as is appropriate. As in all of the many League Delegations since 1981, the primary objective was to propose initiatives that could bring greater accounting results more rapidly, efficiently and effectively, to reinforce the existing strengths of the accounting process that has evolved (with the League's help and support) over the past 4+ decades, and convey the strong support of the American people, especially Congress, the POW/MIA families and our nation's veterans. Also critical was to clearly signal the priority we place on standing behind those serving our nation, military and civilian, should they be captured or listed as missing and unaccounted-for during wars and conflicts.

**FIELD OPERATIONS:** The 134<sup>th</sup> Joint Field Activity (JFA) in **Laos** was conducted October 21 – December 7<sup>th</sup> in Xepon 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 135<sup>th</sup> JFA began January 10<sup>th</sup> and continued through February 15<sup>th</sup>, with four recovery teams. The League Delegation flew commercial aircraft from Vientiane to Savannakhet, drove from there to the Xiengxai Hotel in Xepon. We flew by helicopter early the next morning to 3 of the 4 field recovery sites, but were unable to land in a safe landing zone at the fourth. We spent an interesting, educational and inspirational evening with that recovery team at their base camp, the Somsanit Guest House in Vilabouli. DPAA Interim Deputy Director Major General Kelly K. McKeague, USAF, just led POW/MIA Consultations in Vientiane, receiving positive responses on several specific issues raised earlier by the League Delegation and US Ambassador to Laos Dan Clune, an effective advocate for the mission.

Operations in **Cambodia** have been sporadic at best, with only one JFA in 2014, postponed twice in 2013. The 50<sup>th</sup> JFA began January 14<sup>th</sup> and will continue through March 23<sup>rd</sup>; however, due to border disputes in Stung Treng Province and concern for team safety, the JFA was reduced to a single, but expanded recovery team conducting operations on Koh Tang. The League Delegation flew by helicopter with then JPAC/now DPAA Detachment 1 Commander Lt Col Rob Culpepper, USAF, to Koh Tang, location of those still unaccounted-for from the tragic USS Mayaguez incident in 1975, in which three Marines were inadvertently left behind alive, killed by the Khmer Rouge, then buried on the island. The recovery team was given approval to extend time to complete the one site and move to others in close proximity. Maj Gen McKeague is now in Cambodia to meet with the Cambodian POW/MIA Committee Chairman and visit US teams on Koh Tang.

On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 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 117<sup>th</sup> JFA from October 30<sup>th</sup> to December 7<sup>th</sup>, 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, and again to the 2015 League Delegation, to expand the pace and scope of field operations. The 118<sup>th</sup> JFA is scheduled to begin March 8<sup>th</sup> and continue through April 14<sup>th</sup>, with Recovery Teams scheduled to excavate sites in Kontum, Khanh Hoa, Tra Vinh, Quang Ngai and Gia Lai Provinces.