



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

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SPECIAL REPORT FROM THE 48TH ANNUAL MEETING

June 21-25, 2017

48TH ANNUAL MEETING: Despite unwarranted challenges imposed by the DPAA “leadership” then in place, the annual meeting was the largest and most productive in a very long time. Opening Session included the accustomed formalities, Color Guard conducted by our Sergeants-at-Arms, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance, Invocation and “*America the Beautiful*,” sung by Wendy Coble, former League Administrator, now with DPAA. A brief “In Memory and Honor” ceremony recognized those accounted for since the 47th Annual Meeting in 2016.

The principal Opening Session speaker was **League Senior Policy Advisor Richard T. Childress**, a highly trained Army officer and Vietnam Veteran who served as Director of Asian Affairs for eight years on the National Security Council (NSC) staff. He was the chief architect of policy developed by the POW/MIA Interagency Group, approved at the highest level, and pursued as a matter of highest national priority during the two terms of President Ronald Reagan. He has served as the League’s Senior Policy Advisor since February, 1989, and has participated in all League Delegations since 1999.

Under the umbrella title of “**Competence, Comprehension & Caring**,” his prescient remarks cited specific examples of faulty thinking and failed efforts by US officials, while noting serious commitment over the years by many frustrated specialists. He also provided constructive recommendations to what all hoped would be seriously considered by the (then) soon-to-be selected DPAA Director, a position already vacant for a year and counting. (Note: Thankfully, Director McKeague was named September 5, 2017.)

- Provide newly assigned personnel in middle and upper management – civilian and military – the same advantages others in government have. Establish an informal training period that involves a mandatory reading of the issue’s history and what was effective and not effective in the past. Supplement that with visits to the League office, veteran leaders, and sessions with long-time veterans in this issue, both current and former US Government employees. These new employees deserve no less, and it sure beats being thrust into the issue with competence, but no comprehension.
- Immediately remove the gag rule. Instead, urge close consultation with the League and other responsible organizations – encourage an attitude of asking these groups possessing real comprehension, “*What do you think?*” before a policy decision. Or, simply say, “*I have a problem, and can you help?*” This is true transparency, not what is now the practice.
- Identify those in the organization, at any level, with real comprehension and seek their views on policy formulation; then reinforce, recognize and reward them.
- Clear up any ambiguity on the mission – it is the return of a live prisoner, his remains or convincing evidence as to why neither is possible, sharing the full record of effort with the next-of-kin.
- Evaluate and develop the budget in the context of the challenges enumerated earlier that relate to the Vietnam War effort. First, build the Vietnam War budget for a surge of investigations and excavations to meaningfully meet Vietnam’s constant requests to increase the pace and scope of operations.
- Look at an all-wars approach that gives priority to Last Known Alive (LKA) cases and incidents with remains in danger – whether Vietnam War, Cold War or WWII – those in acidic soil, threatened by development or other compelling reasons. Then, look at what is left in assets and resources to apply to remaining WWII cases and form a contingency plan for additional funding if North Korea opens up again, a dim prospect in the near term.

- Sensitize senior policy personnel, as well as Congress, to the need for budget and policy reorientation. The current body-count mentality is counterproductive, and a shift is logical, consistent and publicly defensible. If Congress is still insistent on the unintended consequence of the random number of 200 IDs per year, ask them to make up any budgetary shortfall, as the above is the path the Executive Branch is going to follow for all the right reasons.
- Review and implement the proposal that the League and I furnished to begin a bilateral comprehensive review of the joint and unilateral mission areas in Vietnam which was received positively by the last Director, but never raised in meetings. Sadly, a similar, personal request to the White House National Security Adviser for President Obama to do so was ignored. Further, even the President's (Obama's) speech in Hanoi to the Vietnamese people did not mention the issue.
- Given the differences between Vietnam and Laos, consider a similar approach to Laos with complementary, but somewhat different provisions. After years of requests, the Lao government's recent agreement for base-camping near excavation sites is a hopeful sign to build upon.
- Vigorously reinforce the new, positive signs of life in the USRJC, a vital supplement to the issue that was almost destroyed in the past. Their presence (Russian and American) and participation in the 48th Annual Meeting is a significant step in the right direction.
- Reinforce and expand the public-private partnership initiative under Tom Holland that is demonstrating effectiveness on WWII cases, with cautions to the partners that DoD-conducted excavations will not take precedence over cases where remains are in jeopardy.
- Finally, use the proven competence of DPAA employees to focus on remains recovery of those in danger of being lost forever.

In addition to up-to-date briefings by qualified professionals representing all aspects of the accounting mission, there were presentations by senior DPAA officials. Principal Director Fern Sumpter Winbush, then DPAA Deputy Director BG Mark Spindler, USA, Policy & Plans Director John Hamilton, Outreach & Communications Director Todd Livick and Asia Pacific Regional Director Col Mike Gann, USMC, outlined DPAA's policy approach and operational direction, focused primarily on Vietnam War areas of interest. Specialists dealing with all aspects of in-country activities, from investigations, including Stony Beach Team members from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and larger-scale DPAA Investigation Teams (ITs), to surveys, recoveries, underwater recoveries (both US and Vietnamese), and processes utilized within the three separate DPAA Laboratories in HI, NE & OH.

Those gathered also listened attentively to presentations on specific assets that can be incorporated to augment field operations, such as Army mortuary affairs personnel with specialized training uniquely qualifying them to support field recovery teams and help reduce deployment of highly trained anthropologists. Such augmentation would help focus their time and scientific skill for identifying remains recovered, whether by DPAA, private contractors or unilaterally turned over, as well as remains being disinterred from US cemeteries around the world. The latter now incorporates exhuming remains not earlier identified to attempt individual identification, including the known dead from the USS Oklahoma, sunk in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Russian Delegation Participates in 48th Annual Meeting: A highlight of the annual meeting was the first-ever attendance by a Russian Delegation. They participated throughout, observed Opening Session, made an official presentation that afternoon, joined by **USRJC Co-Chairman General Doc Foglesong, USAF (Ret)**, and attended the 48th Annual Meeting Dinner that same evening, June 22nd, as League VIP Guests. Very importantly, **Russian Delegation Chairman Colonel Andrey Taranov** openly and effectively participated in the Q & A Session on Saturday, June 24th, and was forthcoming and responsive.

Chairman's Comments: This was a unique first for the League and for Russian officials on the **US-Russia Joint Commission (USRJC) on POW/MIA Affairs**. Their visit, plenary session, and working group talks just prior to our 48th Annual Meeting, were initiated by COL Chris Forbes, USA, DPAA's Europe-Mediterranean Regional Director, with full support from General Foglesong, and made possible by Mr. Maxim Alexeyev, Chief of the Russian Embassy's Commission Support Office. The League deeply appreciates the contributions and commitments made on behalf of the Russian side of the USRJC.

Participation in the Q & A Session on Saturday, June 24th, by **Colonel Andrey Taranov** was unprecedented, and he was responsive to questions raised by the League Chairman. Following are examples:

Q1: Last Known Alive (LKA) reports are the US #1 priority. How many POW debriefs are in Russian archives that you can provide?

Answer: It is difficult to determine the amount of information because the information is classified. We are working to declassify the information and provide it, including, if found, information on LKAs.

Q2: Soviet pilots flew missions early in the war. Will you provide that and related information?

Answer: We have not discovered any documents concerning Soviet actions against US aircraft (in Vietnam). As we have said, when we find any documents, we will work to declassify them.

Q3: Russia has established an office at the Russian Embassy in Washington to support the USRJC. What can be done to speed archival access to information on Russian (Soviet) advisors in SEA?

Answer: We opened our US office to support archival research from WWII forward. We are working with the US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). We are digitizing information (from the German Trophy Documents) and will make it available to the public. With respect to Soviet advisors in Vietnam, we are working in the archival collections which contain documents, including NVA (North Vietnamese) intelligence reports. All relevant information we find will be declassified and provided to the US side. We will work on facilitating interviews with former Soviet advisors.

Q4: Will Russia release the pictures taken by the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS) during the Vietnam War?

Answer: It will be up to the journalists if they wish to release the pictures.

Q5: What NVA Air Defense Units were Soviet Advisors assigned to? Did Soviet personnel capture any US personnel?

Answer: There is no information in our documents attesting to Soviet advisors capturing US pilots. The documents we have are the documents of the North Vietnamese Ministry of National Defense's intelligence on interrogation of US pilots. We will continue this work to review and declassify documents. All documents which concern US personnel will be transferred to the United States.

Q6: What is included in Russian archival holdings?

Answer: The Russian (Soviet) documents we hold are in the Russian language and include Vietnamese documents translated into Russian.

Q7: What types of reports did the Soviet advisors send back to Moscow?

Answer: There were no special templates or requirements.

Q8: Have you consulted with the Vietnamese in their efforts to account for their dead? Have you discovered any information on US MIAs?

Answer: We have received no requests for assistance from the Vietnamese.

Q9: What are your recommendations for moving forward? Three-party discussions? US, Russia and Vietnam/Laos?

Answer: We are ready to participate in any efforts to progress forward.

Q10: Are the Russian people/government supporting this effort? That is, cooperation with the US Government for this mission?

Answer: Our technical talks are filling up the Internet with positive comments. Russian leadership and government have already published reports on these technical talks. The government is supportive. The Russian Delegation's presence speaks to Russian Government support.

RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY LEAGUE MEMBERS: 6-24-17

#1

RESOLVED, that the League recommends that DPAA re-look at resource allocation and place priority on Vietnam War cases at risk due to acidic soil, development, or other compelling reasons that would prevent future accountability. (Resolution #1 passed by overwhelming majority, with no abstentions, and one nay vote.)

#2

RESOLVED, that the League rejects a DPAA's laboratory-related policy of "first in-first out" and urges that first priority be given to remains recovered during field operations; and further

RESOLVED, that the League urges DPAA to shift its policy from trying to achieve an arbitrary number of 200 identifications per year to first priority on identifications from field recoveries from endangered sites related to unaccounted-for US personnel. (Resolution #2 passed by overwhelming majority, with five abstentions and no nay votes.)

#3

RESOLVED, that the League recommends the DoD establish contingency plans for additive funding, personnel and resources for DPRK operations should they re-start, and not be drawn from the existing DPAA budget. (Resolution #3 passed overwhelmingly, with two abstentions.)

#4

RESOLVED, that the League commends the Russian Members of the US-Russia Commission on POW/MIA Affairs (USRJC) for commitments made during the 48th Annual Meeting and looks forward to expedited implementation; and further

RESOLVED, that the League commends the Russian Federation leadership for its support for the work of this bipartisan humanitarian effort. (Resolution #4 passed unanimously.)

#5

RESOLVED, that the League commends DPAA leadership for commitment at the 48th Annual Meeting to ensuring that DIA's Stony Beach specialists are fully utilized and integrated into the in-country investigation process, including participation in as many JFAs as possible, dependent upon Stony Beach's availability. (Resolution #5 passed unanimously.)

#6

RESOLVED, that the League appreciates and fully supports initiatives by Dr. Holland's Partnership Directorate to seek out all potential opportunities in the public and private sector to expand the accounting process and expedite results. (Resolution #6 passed unanimously.)

#7

RESOLVED, that the League urges DPAA to concentrate its efforts to locate, recover, identify and repatriate our heroes still unaccounted for on foreign soil. (Resolution #7 passed unanimously.)

Chairman's Comment: Since formation of DPAA, requirements on the League and, in particular, your allegedly "retired" Chairman of the Board, have been unceasing and increasingly demanding. The largest organization in the world focused solely on accounting for military and designated civilians missing from the Vietnam War and wars and conflicts further past, DPAA is recognized as the premier organization, with an admirable reputation in the scientific community. At the time of last year's 48th Annual Meeting, there was complete turmoil. The first DPAA Director resigned after only six months, reneging on pledges of long-term commitment. To say DPAA was dysfunctional was an understatement, and this view was shared by those in DPAA who were truly committed to the accounting mission. It was a very long two-plus years until an honorable, principled, intelligent Director was named. Thankfully, that horrendous time is over, but challenges internal to the US Government bureaucracy still exist and must be resolved. Kelly McKeague has the capability and the commitment to do the job. Time will tell.