



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

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NEWSLETTER: JUNE 5, 2024

Earlier this year, the League Newsletter was entitled: "2024: A Year of Hope!" That was the positive consensus of the Board of Directors coming out of the past three to four years of anger, frustration, heartache and serious disappointment for the Vietnam War POW/MIA families – our voting members. Long-time supporters of our quest for answers – namely our Associate Members and Veteran Service Organization (VSO) members – have also been deeply disappointed in the meager accounting results for our missing Vietnam War Veterans.

According to DPAA-published data, only 11 previously missing Vietnam War Veterans have been accounted for since the beginning of 2020, though three of them were actually recovered years earlier, but their remains were not identifiable at that time. Also, the recovery site for one was located in 1995, but no recovery was attempted until 2021 due to concerns over unexploded ordnance.

These dismal results occurred despite state-of-the-art capacity – including personnel and budget – that the League and our strong VSO supporters fought so hard to obtain. DPAA's recent record of such poor accounting results deserves the criticism frequently expressed by those most directly involved and knowledgeable. Revitalized efforts are needed NOW to reverse the downward trend, as well as excuses for failure that don't meet the common-sense test.

LEAGUE BLESSED & MOVING FORWARD: After struggling to overcome disloyalty, disappointment, the financially responsible, but heart-breaking, January 31, 2023, decision by the Board of Directors to dissolve our small nonprofit, and even an unwarranted, maliciously motivated and time-consuming legal action filed by DC authorities, a miracle occurred!

An anonymous caller read the dissolution notice posted on the League's website and called, explaining his years of observing the League's strong, responsible, accounting efforts and applauding our 50+ year history of reasonably advocating accounting as fully as possible for our missing Vietnam War Veterans. He indicated his late friend, a US Army Ranger, Vietnam War Veteran and 2LT during the noted 1965 Ia Drang Valley battle, had formed a well-endowed foundation to provide assistance to deserving veteran-related causes. He then stated the foundation would provide the League \$2M over five years, or \$400K a year, if I agreed to 1) maintain the anonymity of the donor; 2) remain Board Chair for another year to continue to help guide the way forward; and 3) that the League's Archival Preservation Project with George Mason University would be completed. Follow-up questions to ensure the donor had no ties to any government agency were answered and the generous donation was accepted with great relief.

Further outstanding League-related news was the success of our long search for the right person to assume in-office leadership of the League. Supported by a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors, Ms. Erin Harroun joined the League as Executive Director on February 5th of this year.

Erin had very little time to absorb the extensive history and the scope of the League's role over 50+ years before accompanying Board Member Mark Stephensen, Intelligence & Analysis Adviser Jay Veith and me on a League Delegation to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia February 25th to March 14th. The trip also gave her knowledge that will serve as a solid basis to utilize her talents in developing and implementing new initiatives as the League moves forward.

Contrary to speculation by those who don't really know, Dr. Jay Veith, our short-term (just six months) Executive Director, resigned to accept his publisher's sooner-than-expected offer to write his earlier proposed book. Jay's sixth book will focus on Communist North Vietnam's wartime policy and implementation to achieve "unification" of the entire country. The book is now being written and is planned for release in April, 2025, marking the 50th anniversary of the actual end to the Vietnam War, when the Communist North Vietnamese overran the non-Communist South, no longer being supported by the United States and our allies. As a longtime friend and dedicated League supporter, Jay resumed his role as League Advisor on Intelligence and Analysis, and we wish him every success!

As you may know, the League hired two additional employees to replace the two who moved on due to dissolution, legal requirements and funding challenges. As a result of the initial \$400,000 donation last May, the League was able to rehire Archival Preservation Project Director Darya Barmina Mills as the able professional she has been and is, for which we're most grateful. She located Archival Specialist Aaron Ahlstrom, a well-qualified, gifted young man who is doing an outstanding job, aiming to complete our historically important project by the end of this year. Aaron is not only committed to professional handling of the archives, he is willing to chip-in when and where needed. Finally, we located a very talented young man, Michael Bamarni, our Social Media Coordinator, who also assists administratively when needed.

All these positive steps moved the League forward and enabled us to enter 2024 as the fully staffed, highly motivated, goal-oriented nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization we've been, though with many ups and downs, since formed on May 28, 1970. The Board and Staff are determined to support our Vietnam War POW/MIA families' quests for answers in a difficult, conflicting time in terms of USG policy and its implementation.

This conflicted environment is not new to the League, though it is unwarranted in today's environment, and tragically sad to witness. In fact, we've overcome great challenges in years past, but especially in the last four years. We are again moving forward with a League Board Election now ongoing and a full slate of highly motivated, competent Board candidates, **SO PLEASE VOTE** before the deadline on June 17th.

MEMBERSHIP DUES: If you are a family member and haven't yet paid your dues, reduced to only \$20 each to show seriousness and determination, please do so now! Though too late to participate in this year's Board election and approval of the Bylaws, it is in time to participate fully in the League's 53rd Annual Meeting.

NUMBERS COUNT! DO YOUR PART!

LEAGUE DELEGATION FOLLOW-UP: I'd planned to distribute a more descriptive report after the abbreviated summary sent out March 26th shortly after our return. Unfortunately, far too many urgent requirements diverted my attention and that of our Staff, in part due to unexpected, detrimental actions by DPAA Director Kelly McKeague. He actually accused the League of purposely attempting to undermine him and DPAA, the very organization we fought so hard to build and which is increasingly a world-renowned recovery and identification laboratory.....and is now working to fulfill its bureaucracy-expansion plan for the future!

The League Delegation's trip to Southeast Asia took place from February 25 – March 14, 2024. We deeply appreciated the incredible policy and logistics support provided by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and their Defense Attachés and Stony Beach Specialists in each country. Stony Beach Operations Director & Cambodia Specialist Eric Phillips was with us at every turn in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. On the heels of upgraded bilateral relations with Vietnam to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, our visit to Hanoi was timely, as was the transition within the League Staff and a new generation of leaders in Cambodia.

The atmosphere and environment seemed to fall into place for utilizing the League's Intelligence Assessment, written by League Adviser Dr. Jay Veith, to get the attention of Vietnam and DPAA. It did – positively with Vietnam's then Minister of Public Security (MPS) General To Lam, since named Vietnam's Chief of State/President, and LTG Quang, his MPS Deputy, as well as the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP), with the exception of one controlling Colonel. *(The VNOSMP is the 50+ year old POW/MIA Interagency Group established specifically to prepare for and "manage" anticipated US interest in the return of all POWs and accounting for our MIAs.)*

Not so with DPAA, though the League had requested such a study for many years! In-country DPAA personnel assigned to Detachments 1, 2 and 3 were ordered not to attend any League-arranged meetings with foreign officials in Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia. This DPAA leadership decision undermined longstanding consensus USG policy and priority on the accounting mission, consistently recognized as foundational by the Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodians, and denied our on-the-ground DPAA Detachment personnel the opportunity to meet very high-level foreign officials in all three countries.

In Vietnam, MPS and the VNOSMP pledged cooperation, including on our proposal for a three-man investigation team (Mobile Investigation Unit, or MIU) working year-round to expand in-country DPAA Joint Field Activities (JFAs). This longtime DIA/League objective now has potential. Until MPS's pledge to consider our proposal, cooperation by Vietnam had been disappointing despite their known control of 85-90% of all loss sites of still missing and unaccounted-for Vietnam War Veterans.

In Cambodia, new Prime Minister (PM) Hun Manet, son of former PM Hun Sen, now President of the Senate, indicated full accounting cooperation will continue, as will leadership by long-time POW/MIA Committee Chairman General Pol Saroeun, aided by another old friend and supporter, H.E. Sieng Lapresse. Though there was no mention in the June 4th DoD-directed media coverage from Phnom Penh, it is hoped US Secretary of Defense Austin expressed sincere appreciation to Cambodia's PM, Minister of Defense and Senate President for their country's outstanding humanitarian support.

A cordial, productive meeting with Lao Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith brought his pledge to quickly issue legal diplomatic protections and immunities for our DPAA and DIA/Stony Beach accounting specialists assigned to the US Embassy in Vientiane. Despite this pledge and repeated US official appeals, this legal action has not yet been taken. The League will again urge senior Lao officials to take this necessary legal action before DPAA considers initiating dramatic steps that could seriously undercut their pledges of highest operational priority on Vietnam War accounting.....stay tuned.....

WE NEED TO KNOW NOW: 1) Do you plan to attend the DPAA-hosted Vietnam War AGB? 2) Do you plan to travel by COIN Assist (taxpayer funded) flights? 3) Will you also plan to attend the 53rd Annual Meeting at the Mayflower Hotel, District Ballroom, and the No-Host Reception and 53rd Annual Dinner? 4) Are you able to extend your stay by one day, Saturday, June 29th, to attend the final session of the 53rd Annual Meeting, 9:00 AM until noon, again at The American Legion Building, 7th Floor? Go to the League website, www.pow-miafamilies.org and either download the Registration Form and send a check to the League Office or register and pay online for the dinner, only \$59 a person.

53RD ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULED: The League's 53rd Annual Meeting will begin Wednesday, June 26th, with Registration from 11:00 AM in the District Ballroom Foyer, Mayflower Hotel. The Opening Session will be held in the District Ballroom from 1:00 – 5:00 PM. (*The Mayflower Hotel is the same location DPAA contracted in 2023.*) That same evening at 6:00 PM, the League-sponsored No-Host Reception will be held on the Mayflower Mezzanine, followed by the 53rd Annual Meeting Dinner, 7:00 – 9:00 PM, in the Mayflower District Ballroom. As is customary, those who wish to attend the reception/dinner must pay their own dinner expense, and those of any personal guests at \$59 per person.

This year's annual meeting surrounds DPAA's scheduled Vietnam War Annual Government Briefings (AGB). Per email from the DPAA Director, many who may wish to attend are not eligible nor invited to register for or attend the AGB sessions. According to the DPAA Director's message, families of previously missing, now accounted for personnel, leaders of Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and others interested in and dedicated to the accounting mission are not invited nor eligible to attend. Therefore, the League will host a "Live-Streaming Party" and informal lunch on both days, June 27th & 28th, plus a Happy Hour Reception at 5:00 PM on the 27th, at The American Legion Building 7th Floor, just across the street and around the corner from the Mayflower Hotel.

The Annual Government Briefings are intended to include all aspects of the accounting process, including investigations by DPAA and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) Stony Beach specialists, field recoveries and ID processes from Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL), DPAA Laboratory archeologists, anthropologists and DNA specialists. Those DPAA agrees to register will also be served lunch, believed being held on the 27th.

The League's 53rd Annual Meeting will resume on Saturday morning, June 29th, 9:00 AM, until noon, again at The American Legion Building, 7th Floor. DPAA, AFDIL and DIA specialists who briefed at the AGB will be invited to attend and respond to questions raised by all present, including those who attended the League-hosted "Live-Streaming Party" monitoring the Vietnam War AGB. The official League Business Session will take place immediately thereafter, though voting is restricted to dues-paid League family members.

IN CASE YOU NEED A REMINDER: From the late wartime Joint Personnel Recovery Center (JPRC) to today's Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), the League has fought for expanded US capability to increase answers, including US acceptance of proposals that would visibly reinforce priority on achieving reasonable accounting goals. We have also fought against the tendency of some to get beyond the families' need for answers and move forward bilaterally with Vietnam to advance normalization and expand the lucrative trade and travel agenda.

The 1985 bilateral US-Vietnam agreement was the foundation of a policy of humanitarian reciprocity – actions by both countries, separate from policy and political differences – to address Vietnam's humanitarian concerns – unexploded ordnance removal, dioxin remediation, aid to the disabled, etc. – in exchange for unilateral and bilateral cooperation to account as fully as possible for Americans listed as POW, MIA and, later, Killed-in-Action/Body-Not-Recovered.

This critical change in policy was negotiated at a high level by senior officials at the Departments of State and Defense and the National Security Council, elements of the POW/MIA Interagency Group (IAG) that specifically included one non-government participant – the Executive Director of the National League of POW/MIA Families. In-depth participation in the policy process brought direct interaction with senior US and key Southeast Asian officials, as well as the first (1982) of my many trips to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

League participation in official US Delegations to Southeast Asia took place throughout the two Reagan, one George H.W. Bush and two Clinton Administrations. I also participated in Delegations led by the late General Jack Vessey, USA, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, earlier designated President Reagan's POW/MIA Emissary, Deputy Veterans Administration Chief Hershel Gober, and a US-Russia Joint Commission (USRJC) Delegation, joined by VFW Executive Director Bob Wallace, a noted, invaluable ally and leader in the Veterans Community.

The League has consistently encouraged and supported serious involvement by the major national Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), including the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), The American Legion, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), American Veterans (AMVETS) and Jewish War Veterans (JWV), dating back to well before the first official Veterans Delegation in 1987, also led by the late General Vessey.

The irreplaceable role that these VSOs played in early years to increase visibility and keep pressure on successive US administrations to prioritize Vietnam War accounting was then augmented by the Special Operations Association (SOA) and Special Forces Association (SFA), which formed a combined SOA/SFA POW/MIA Committee. This special joint Committee, initially led by LTC Mike Taylor, USA, has taken a more active role in recent years, focused on their fellow SF warriors, missing from sensitive, highly classified MACV-SOG operations in Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam. *(LTC Taylor and his wonderful wife, Laura, were the first VSO representatives ever invited to be part of a League Delegation, this one in 2018. Sadly, Mike has since passed away, but his report to the SOA Reunion really resonated with the SF attendees.)*

One would think inviting VSO leaders and Associate Members to observe DPAA briefings would be logical, helpful and encouraged, not rejected, as now occurs. Members of both were denied attendance at the DPAA-hosted Vietnam War Annual Government Briefings, held in DC in June, 2023.

It was and is especially ironic that the VSOs are regularly invited to attend and observe DPAA-hosted Family Member Updates (FMUs) held regionally around the country. This contradiction was at least partially justified by DPAA asking the VSOs to donate funds to cover costs of the Continental Breakfast served to POW/MIA and KIA/BNR family members attending the FMUS. *(Some are speculating that this bizarre disconnect may have been the legal interpretation of one or more DoD lawyers now assigned to DPAA.)*

If you are disappointed, or even dismayed, by some negative aspects to the content of this message, you are beginning to grasp the basis for my intense frustration. It is never my intention to be negative, but I must be honest. Criticisms in this message run counter to aspects I hoped I could honestly report as being adopted, pursued and accomplished.

Most disappointing have been recent actions by DPAA Director Kelly McKeague, in not only refusing to request a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) to determine where the issue stands, but citing Vietnam as being fully responsive. In an official response to the League, Director McKeague even confirmed that he views Vietnam's longstanding interagency group, the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP), as DPAA's cooperative counterpart!

In reality, the VNOSMP was formed over 50 years ago. Their task was and still is to manage and control the accounting process for the SRV leadership, both the level and substance of field operations and responsiveness, as well as distribution of US funding in payment for unilateral and joint cooperation. Functioning VNOSMP members are all highly trained, well-informed officials of the SRV's Ministries of Defense, Public Security and Foreign Affairs.

All of the above reflects today's realities. Having said that, and despite some negatives, I'm truly optimistic that much can and will be accomplished this year and beyond. Your active engagement is crucial, both on the overall Vietnam War accounting mission and individual cases of personal interest, whether a family member, friend or military colleague. If necessary, the League will reach out to ask for your assistance in calling on Members of Congress to act or investigate concerns. Should that be necessary, the entire accounting mission may depend on our collective interventions and willingness to step up and assist!

With sincere gratitude for your many years of support and encouragement, you're wished the very best by this grateful former MIA Sister, CA State Coordinator, Western Regional Coordinator, Board Member, Executive Director, Board Member/CEO and, finally, Board Chairman and future Chairman Emeritus.....



Ann Mills Griffiths
Chairman of the Board