



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

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ABBREVIATED LEAGUE DELEGATION TRIP REPORT

March 26, 2024

Ann Mills-Griffiths, Chairman of the Board

The League Delegation's recent visit to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia took place from February 25 – March 14, 2024. We deeply appreciated the incredible policy and logistics support provided by the Defense Intelligence Agency and their Defense Attachés and Stony Beach Specialists in each country. Especially commendable is Stony Beach Operations Director & Cambodia Specialist Eric Phillips who 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 and a new generation of leaders in Cambodia. The atmosphere and environment seemed to fall into place for utilizing League Advisor Dr. Jay Veith's Intelligence Assessment to get the attention of Vietnam and DPAA. It did – positively with Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security (MPS), Minister To Lam, his Deputy LTG Quang, and the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP).

Not so with DPAA, though the League had requested such a study for years! Further, in-country DPAA personnel assigned to Detachments 1, 2 and 3 were instructed not to attend any League-scheduled meetings in Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia. This DPAA leadership decision undermined priority and visibility on the accounting mission, consistently recognized as foundational by the Vietnamese, and denied our on-the-ground DPAA personnel the opportunity to meet senior officials.

From MPS and VNOSMP, we obtained specific pledges of cooperation, including on our proposal of a three-man team (one each Stony Beach, VNOSMP and DPAA) working year-round to expand the planned quarterly Joint Field Activities (JFAs). This longtime DIA/League objective now has potential. During our very positive meeting on March 13th with MPS, Minister To Lam arrived unexpectedly and reinforced the positive pledges made. Until MPS's pledge to consider our proposal, cooperation by Vietnam had been disappointing despite their known control of 85-90% of loss sites of all still missing and unaccounted-for Vietnam War Veterans.

In Cambodia, new Prime Minister Hun Manet indicated full cooperation will continue, as will direction by long-time POW/MIA Committee Chairman General Pol Saroeun, aided by another old friend and supporter, H.E. Sieng Lapresse. We couldn't ask for more in Cambodia, including an ongoing underwater partnership recovery. We passed along our best wishes to PM Hun Manet's father, former PM Hun Sen, and the other familiar fathers whose sons are now also designated Ministers.

A cordial, productive meeting on March 4th with Lao Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith brought his pledge to quickly issue a simple legal document to protect our DPAA and DIA/Stony Beach POW/MIA accounting specialists. This small corrective step has yet to be taken, likely due to too low-level staff policy attention, but we're cautiously optimistic about positive results coming soon. New US Ambassador to Laos Heather Variava has meetings this week with Deputy Minister Saleumxay and the Lao Deputy Minister of Defense. Laos already has set ongoing Stony Beach investigations year-round to take advantage of opportunities that arise during DPAA-scheduled Joint Field Activities.

A fuller, more descriptive League Delegation Trip Report will be completed soon, posted online and distributed by USPS mail to all League members.