



## **STATUS OF THE POW/MIA ISSUE: November 13, 2023**

1,578 Americans are now listed by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) as missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War: Vietnam - 1,238; Laos-285; Cambodia-48; Peoples Republic of China territorial waters-7. On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, DPAA posted the accounting for two USAF officers, listed MIA in Vietnam on April 12, 1969. Their identities – Colonel Ernest DeSoto and Captain Frederick Hall – were released on April 7, 2023.

These country numbers fluctuate due to investigations resulting in changed locations of loss. The League seeks the fullest possible accounting for those still missing and repatriation of all recoverable remains, and the highest priority is accounting for Americans last known alive. US intelligence indicates some Americans known to be in captivity in Vietnam (SRV), Laos (LPDR) and Cambodia (KOC) were not returned at the end of the war. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the US Government should not rule out that possibility and should try to account for them as a matter of highest national priority.

**Vietnam** established comprehensive wartime and post-war processes to collect and retain information and remains. Thus, Vietnam's unilateral efforts still offer significant potential, especially when reinforced by December 12, 2022, pledges by H.E. Minister of Public Security To Lam to League Chairman Ann Mills-Griffiths to look into all categories raised as needing unilateral SRV efforts.

Until the pandemic halted in-country operations, Vietnam had increased unilateral provision of long-sought archival records with relevant, case-related information. This was due in part to improved working-level efforts, but also to increased bilateral relations across the board. The January 2018 League Delegation brought commitments that offered real promise for increased success. SRV officials were participating with greater seriousness and professionalism, including Unilateral Recovery Teams (URT), led by Vietnamese, some of whom are US-trained. Budget reductions interfered with planning for FY2023, and only two small Joint Field Activities (JFAs) were scheduled. With a budget plus-up, two additional JFAs were added in an effort to "increase the pace and scope of field operations," as requested by Vietnam since 2009. Due to improved military-to-military cooperation, US Navy assets participated in underwater operations, as did DPAA partner, Scripps Institute of Oceanography.

After an initially tough period, JFAs in **Laos** began to increase productivity. Though more difficult than elsewhere, Laos is now authorizing an increased number of US personnel in-country for JFAs, allowing ground transportation to accessible field sites, and contracting an SRV drone company to provide smaller scale, more capable technology to pursue case-related investigations, recently resulting in trilateral US-LPDR-SRV operations. A Lao/Cambodian border dispute impeded field operations there but now, with no DPAA detachment in **Cambodia**, Stony Beach-led/private partner operations for FY 2023 resumed and are encouraging.

**DIA's Stony Beach Team:** One Cambodia specialist works full time at the US Embassy in Phnom Penh, and research and field operations in Cambodia have received excellent support from US Ambassador Patrick Murphy and Cambodian officials. US Ambassador to Laos, Dr. Peter Haymond, is knowledgeable and supports full use of DIA's Stony Beach (SB) specialist. Importantly, the LPDR authorized two additional Lao officials to work year-round with DIA's Stony Beach POW/MIA specialist, assigned full time in-country. Although Lao officials had approved SB field investigations outside DPAA-scheduled field operations, SB has recently been further restricted. For years, two Stony Beach personnel have rotated on temporary duty in and out of Vietnam, collecting information via archival research and interviewing witnesses. The League and DIA have long sought Vietnam's agreement to permanently station a Vietnam specialist in Hanoi, a proposal to which Vietnam finally agreed. Now, the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP) has indicated that DIA's Stony Beach Vietnam specialists will be restricted to operating in the field only during DPAA-scheduled JFAs, an unacceptable restriction. Three Stony Beach specialists dealing with Vietnam recently participated in larger-scale field operations, but a permanent Stony Beach presence in Hanoi is still unfulfilled, due to the SRV's imposition of varied restrictions.

**Comment:** The greatest obstacles to increased Vietnam War accounting are 1) too few qualified US intelligence analysts; and 2) no current National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) to determine valid accounting expectations. Over 90% of unaccounted-for Vietnam War Veterans were lost in Vietnam and areas of Laos and Cambodia where SRV forces operated. Due to DPAA's refusal to request, much less conduct, an objective analysis, Executive Director Dr. Jay Veith is now finalizing the assessment to determine where the Vietnam War accounting mission stands. In view of international political and policy uncertainties, US-SRV bilateral relations are expected to grow from a comprehensive to a strategic partnership. **NOW IS THE TIME FOR INCREASED RESULTS!**

## POW/MIA STATISTICS

**Statistics provided by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) cannot be verified!**

**Live Sightings:** 1,996 first-hand live sighting reports have been received since 1975, none recently. 1,941 (97.24%) are resolved: 1,340 (67.13%) equated to Americans previously accounted for (i.e. returned POWs, missionaries or civilians detained for violating SRV codes); 45 (2.25%) correlated to wartime sightings of military personnel or pre-1975 sightings of civilians still unaccounted-for; 556 (27.86%) were determined to be fabrications. The remaining 55 (2.76%) unresolved first-hand reports are the focus of continuing analytical and collection efforts: 48 (2.40%) concern Americans reported in a captive environment; 7 (0.35%) are non-captive sightings. The unresolved 55 first hand sightings are listed below:

Pre-1976	1976-1985	1986-1995	1996-2005	2006-2015	Total
36	3	1	14	1	55

**Accountability:** As of today, the Department of Defense lists **1,578** Americans as missing and unaccounted-for, over 90% of them in Vietnam and in areas of Cambodia and Laos where Vietnamese forces operated during the war. A breakdown by year of recovery for Americans accounted for from Vietnam War-related losses after the official end of the war on April 30, 1975 follows:

1965-1974	War years	2
1974-1975	Winding down USG effort	28
1976-1978	US/SRV normalization negotiations	47
1979-1980	US/SRV talks break down	1
1981-1985	1st Reagan Administration	23
1985-1989	2nd Reagan Administration	169
1989-1993	George H.W. Bush Administration	129
1993-1997	1st Clinton Administration	327
1997-2001	2nd Clinton Administration	57
2001-2004	1st George W. Bush Administration	64
2004-2008	2nd George W. Bush Administration	62
2008-2012	1 <sup>st</sup> Obama Administration	51
2012-2016	2 <sup>nd</sup> Obama Administration	27
2016-2020	Trump Administration	21
2020-2024	Biden Administration	6

According to the DPAA Lab, unilateral SRV repatriations of remains with scientific evidence of storage have accounted for less than 200 of the 730 remains from Vietnam; two were mistakenly listed as KIA/BNR in Vietnam in 1968, but remains were actually recovered at that time. All but nine of the 288 Americans accounted for in Laos since the end of the war have been the result of joint recoveries; nine were turned over by indigenous personnel to DIA Stony Beach specialists. In addition, three persons identified were recovered in Vietnam before the end of the war. There follows a breakdown by country of the **1,063 Americans accounted for since the official April 30, 1975, end of the Vietnam War:** Vietnam, 730; Laos, 288, Cambodia, 42 and the PRC, 3. An additional 63 US personnel were accounted for between 1973 and 1975. Of the 63, 9 were from Laos, 53 from Vietnam, and 1 from Cambodia for a **grand total of 1,126.** These Americans were accounted for by unilateral US efforts in areas where access was possible, not post-war cooperation with Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia. Added to results from government- to-government humanitarian cooperation post-war, a total of 297 have been recovered and identified from Laos, 783 from Vietnam, 43 from Cambodia and 3 from the PRC.

**For the latest information, call the League Office (703) 465-7432 or  
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