

Remarks of Fern Sumpter Winbush

Acting Director, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency

48th Annual Meeting

National League of POW/MIA Families

June 22, 2017

Good afternoon everyone and thank you Ann for allowing me a few moments to introduce everyone to DPAA – the newest defense agency in the department of defense – and to this awesome team I have been so honored to lead as the Acting Director since July of last summer.

Before I begin however, I'd like to take a moment to recognize the Vietnam War Veterans in the room and all of the Veterans of our nation's foreign wars. Our nation owes you a debt we can never repay for your service. If able please stand, and if unable, just raise your hand.

Since reaching our official -- fully operational status in January 2016 -- we have been working very hard to implement our chartered authorities as directed by the Secretary of Defense, identify our mission requirements and pursue resourcing through the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, and most importantly, improve our communications and outreach to you the families of our nation's missing and unaccounted for while achieving the fullest possible accounting. Of course none of the accomplishments would have been possible, nor will we be able to overcome the challenges we will face without a workforce of talented and extremely dedicated professionals working together under a unified purpose. The DPAA team includes over 600 highly technical and uniquely qualified personnel from a variety of backgrounds and specialties and you will meet and hear from only a few of them over the next couple of days. In

addition to filling vacancies across the agency, I have made it a priority to match unique skills & talents with requirements internally. Recently, I elevated Ms Jennifer Nasarenko to the Deputy for Policy & Plans position and reassigned Ms Wendy Coble to the Disinterments Manager position.

New DPAA leaders who have joined the team and will address you for the first time are Mr. Todd Livick, Director of Outreach & Communications and Mr. John Hamilton, Director of Policy & Plans. Not here today, but filling a critical position in Hawaii is our newly assigned Medical Examiner, LTC Phillip Berran. Representing the lab during tomorrow's session will be Dr. Debra Zinni. Across the Asia Pacific mission, the agency's Deputy Director for Operations, Brigadier General Mark Spindler –who will speak to you about our global priorities and initiatives -- and the Asia Pacific Regional Director Col Mike Gann – who will discuss our Asia Pacific Regional mission requirements and priorities – have restructured & realigned the Asia Pacific directorate to meet current mission requirements, as well as worked to fill critical vacancies. To address Vietnam research and investigation more succinctly, I have with me Mr. Ron Ward who will be followed by Capt Thomas Walker to present his field operational perspective. Lastly, you will hear about our strategic partnering initiatives from Dr. Tom Holland; how we continue to facilitate family and veteran engagement from Mr. Johnie Webb; our progress made in case management presented by Mr. Chris McDermott; the agency plan for our Public Portal by Ms Cheryl Holm; and Colonel Chris Forbes will discuss how -- through our Joint Commission Support Detachment -- we have provided support to the US/Russia Joint Commission or U – S – R – J – C under the joint leadership of our U.S. Commissioner, General Robert “Doc” Fogelsong and Russian Commissioner COL GEN Vostrotin. It is a very special treat to have General Fogelsong and the Russian representative – Senator Didigov on the agenda

this year. From my experience observing the commission from a distance when I first arrived, to now serving as the DoD Commissioner, I can say that there has been level of unmatched emphasis and productivity over the last 18 months.

The DPAA team is prepared to discuss results, initiatives, and challenges. We have streamlined processes necessary to better conduct operations across the globe and we have put the necessary policies in place to ensure consistency throughout our many layers of operational support functions. We are working even closer with our government partners such as – DIA’s Stoney Beach Team, who participated in our analyst coordination conference here in D.C. this month to exchange ideas about Southeast Asia missing and unaccounted for personnel; the Armed Forces Medical Examiner and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory, and the Department of State and Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy desk officers just to name a few.

Our Operations Plan for fiscal years (or FY) 2018 and 2019 is set and we are very motivated about being able to meet our priorities for the next two years with Vietnam as the agency priority through FY19. The operations plan incorporates a deliberate two year time horizon designed to bring our plans into alignment with the Department of Defense’s resourcing cycle as well as synchronize our requirements with other supporting DoD organizations and partners as well. As a result, our OSD/Policy leadership supports our funding request based upon mission requirements, and our budget request of \$131.2M is included in the President’s budget request for FY18.

In 2016, we achieved a record number of identifications – to be more specific, we brought home 164 husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, uncles, nephews, cousins to their loved ones who have

waited so long. Some of these family members knew of our pursuit and were given – a gift as some have referred to the return of their loved one - while others had no idea the U.S. government still searched for answers. Whatever the individual family circumstance, it has been our honor and we are privileged to have been but a small part of these families' lives for a short while.

In closing, I am committed to the families, the fallen, and to the success of the DPAA Team. I will remain focused, driven, and I will continue to do everything I can to sustain a level of energy required to ensure the DPAA team can successfully accomplish our nation's mission – to provide the fullest possible accounting of personnel missing from past conflicts to the families and the nation.