



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

5673 Columbia Pike, Suite 100, Falls Church, VA 22041

PH ---703/465-7432

www.pow-miafamilies.org

FAX ---703/465-7433

UPDATE: October 20, 2016

AMERICANS ACCOUNTED FOR: The number of US personnel missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War is still **1,618**, unchanged since June 9th. The total accounted for since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is **965**. Another 63 US personnel, recovered by the US and identified before the end of the war, bring the total of US personnel accounted for from the Vietnam War to **1,028**. Of the 1,618 still missing (POW/MIA) and unaccounted-for (KIA/BNR), 90% were lost in Vietnam or in areas of Cambodia and Laos under Vietnam's wartime control: Vietnam-1,261 (VN-463, VS-798); Laos-301; Cambodia-49; PRC territorial waters-7. These country-specific numbers can and do fluctuate when investigations result in changes to loss locations. Since formation in 1970, the League has sought the return of all POWs, the fullest possible accounting for those still missing, and repatriation of all recoverable remains.

NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY – 2016: Countless ceremonies were held across the United States and around the world, including US Embassies in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. Many of the international commemorations were held under the auspices of the Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA) at military installations. The national ceremony was again held at the Pentagon, as has been the case since 1984 at the White House and 1988 at the US Capitol. The speakers this year were Senator John Cornyn (R-TX), Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Paul Selva, USAF, and Captain Gerald Coffee, USN, held as a POW in Vietnam for over seven years, until his release in February, 1973.

In his remarks, Secretary Carter stated in part, *"We gather here together today to recognize our nation's former prisoners of war and those still missing....and recommit ourselves to fulfilling our solemn pledge: to make every effort to bring all – all – our men and women home to their families."* He went on to say, *"And to all the families here today and around the world – whether you've been reunited or are still waiting for your loved one – thank you for your patriotism and courage in the face of uncertainty, and thank you for all you've given to this country."* In reference to DoD's efforts, and his own commitment, he stated, *"....we won't stop – I won't stop – until we achieve the fullest possible accounting for all our missing. And right now, far too many families still have to wonder about the fates of their fathers, grandfathers, their husbands and daughters, their brothers and sisters. We work hard to meet our commitment to yesterday's personnel to honor their service and their families. But there's another reason we do so: we know what it means to the men and women serving today, those who will serve in the future and their families. As they see everything we're doing to provide the fullest possible accounting of those who served before....they know we'll do the same for them."* He closed his remarks by noting, *"Committed family advocacy groups, veteran service organizations, and other non-governmental groups support our work. Friends and allies around the world serve as critical partners in helping us reach, account for, and bring home our fallen. And the men and women of DPAA – the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency – work day in and day out, in remote field sites and high-tech laboratories alike, across the United States and around the world to meet that promise and to give hope and solace to our families."*

Vice Chairman General Selva's remarks were inspirational, stating *"Your sacrifice is humbling and we thank you for your faith and your perseverance as we work to keep our promise to you. You are for us a beacon of hope. And welcome to the many of you who are committed to trying to bring every fallen American home from foreign shores. We are grateful for your continued determination."* He ended by stating, *"The motto on the POW/MIA flag is one we have internalized to our very core. 'We will never forget.' It is emblazoned on our hearts as is the memory of every member we have lost in battle."* The impressive national ceremony concluded with the Missing Man Flyover of Cobra Gunships, symbolism appreciated by all present.

PRESIDENT VISITS LAOS FOR ASEAN LEADERS CONFERENCE: On September 6th, President Obama met with Lao President Bounnhang Vorachit on the margins of the East Asia Summit. Laos is the 2016 Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and it is customary for leaders of nations to meet for bilateral discussions. In this instance, the portion of the lengthy *"Joint Declaration between the United States of America and the Lao People's Democratic Republic"* included one paragraph related specifically to the POW/MIA accounting mission. It stated, *"President Obama expressed his appreciation for the Lao P.D.R.'s continued cooperation in providing for the fullest possible accounting for U.S. personnel missing from the war, including its recent steps to increase the efficiency of joint search efforts. The two sides would continue to meet semi-annually for technical discussions on mission planning and strive to complete the mission in a timely and efficient manner."*

Chairman's Comment: Since the President's trip, much factually deficient, purported "analysis" has been published, some purposely duplicitous with accusations of US war crimes. Yet, perhaps unintentionally, this distorted view was advanced by President Obama's public statement that America's further humanitarian assistance to help eliminate unexploded ordnance (UXO) came as a "moral obligation."

In reality, President Obama's trip to Laos, the first by a sitting US President, was extremely important, especially to the Lao, but also to those of us who have worked steadily and cooperatively with the Lao Government and people for decades to account as fully as possible for missing US personnel. In that ever-improving process, the US has provided humanitarian assistance for decades, including increasing support to ameliorate UXO, despite the Lao Government having denied there was any problem in the early to mid-1980s, regularly declining US support and assistance.

America is a caring, generous nation, and we have worked to help suffering people after every war, not out of guilt as a moral obligation, but because we care. The truth is that Vietnam used "neutral" Laos for supply routes and, as a result, hundreds of tons of bombs were dropped. War is hell! People suffer, and the Lao people more than most due to its geographical location and long border with Vietnam, but the Vietnamese people also suffered horribly, as did Cambodians, much more than Americans, horrific as were US losses. And, we're still seeking answers on 1,618 listed as missing and unaccounted-for from that long-ago war, with ever-increasing cooperation from these governments in a spirit of humanitarian reciprocity, not from a basis of guilt on the part of any country.

Accounting for prior enemy combatants is a matter of honor among Armed Forces around the world, an international obligation under accepted rules of war, including the Geneva Conventions. It is NOT a "war legacy," as some assert. Such legacies are appropriate for negotiations and dependent on internal policies of each engaged country.

These are facts. Due to personal involvement in countless official USG and League delegations, I know firsthand – and the Lao, Vietnamese and Cambodian leaders also know – this historical reality. Enough of the distorted attempts to persuade newly engaged or uninformed people that the US is guilty of "war crimes." Such charges are unwarranted, insulting and completely false!

US-LAO CONSULTATIONS HELD IN HAWAII: A Lao Delegation was in Hawaii August 3rd-4th, meeting with DPAA and DIA officials on future operations. Deputy Director BG Mark S. Spindler, USA, led the US Delegation, and H. E. Khoanta Phalivong, Director General of Europe & Americas Department, Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led the Lao Delegation. The focus was to seek agreement for US teams to base-camp at incident site locations to reduce travel time and costs for helicopter support, primarily blade hours. This would maximize time in the field to conduct recovery efforts, as would an increase in the number of personnel allowed in-country simultaneously – from 53 to 65, when needed. The Lao agreed to the personnel increase and to consider base-camping at incident sites on a case-by-case basis. These decisions will help meet current budget requirements to do more with less in terms of funding and effectiveness, meaning results.

US-VIETNAM & US-CAMBODIA POW/MIA TALKS HELD: BG Spindler held talks earlier this month with counterpart officials in Vietnam, reportedly geared at generating greater accounting results with few, if any, additional funds or personnel. Col Mike Gann, USMC, DPAA Director for the Asia Pacific Region, and Jack Kull, long-time Southeast Asia policy officer, accompanied BG Spindler in Hanoi, as well as Phnom Penh. In the latter, discussions focused on resolving the purported border conflict that is preventing a recovery mission close to their shared border with Laos.

Chairman's Comment: Political issues, including disagreements over border delineation, should not be permitted to impede humanitarian cooperation, including the mission to account for missing US personnel. The League calls on Lao and Cambodian leaders to settle their differences or set them aside and cooperate constructively to allow the technical specialists to proceed.

JOINT FIELD OPERATIONS: A Joint Field Activity (JFA) recently concluded in Vietnam, wrapping up 45 days during which approximately 100 US personnel, comprised of 5-Recovery Teams (RTs), 2 Vietnamese RTs, and 1 Research Investigation Team (RIT), worked simultaneously. JFAs will resume in Laos in late October, after the beginning of FY17, and in Cambodia after the first of next year. There are also about 100 deployed on WWII accounting operations in PNG, France, Germany, Kwajalein (just concluded) and Hawaii, most of them recovery teams for roughly 6-7 weeks each. In addition, History Flight is continuing recoveries in Tarawa, and universities are engaged through Strategic Partnerships in the Philippines and France.

DPAA OPERATIONAL BUDGET REQUIREMENTS UNCERTAIN: It is increasingly unclear that DPAA will have the funds required to “increase the pace and scope of operations,” as has repeatedly been requested by Vietnam and has been proceeding fairly well since DPAA became fully operational in January of this year. Now, with the lack of a Congressionally-approved DoD budget for FY17, all in DoD, including DPAA, are proceeding on a Continuing Resolution. In brief, that means the first quarter funds are approved, though at the less than required budget of approximately \$130 million for the full year.

YOU CAN HELP! WRITE TO YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS TO REQUEST APPROVAL OF INCREASED FUNDING FROM \$112 TO \$132 MILLION FOR FY17, AND TO EXEMPT DPAA FUNDING FROM ANY REDUCTIONS, INCLUDING POSSIBLE SEQUESTRATION, JUST AS THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS IS EXEMPTED. AMERICA’S POW/MIAs AND OTHERS STILL MISSING ARE UNRETURNED VETERANS TOO!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW FOR JUNE 21-24, 2017: The League’s 48th Annual Meeting will again be held at the Hilton Crystal City Hotel, as it has been the last several years. Anyone with suggestions for inclusion in the three-day program should email League Administrator Leslie Swindells, Leslie.Swindells@pow-miafamilies.org, or call the League office, 703-465-7432.