



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

5673 COLUMBIA PIKE, SUITE 100, FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA 22041

PH ---703/465-7432

www.pow-miafamilies.org

FAX ---703/465-7433

UPDATE: December 16, 2013

AMERICANS ACCOUNTED FOR: There are still **1,643** personnel listed by the Department of Defense (DoD) as missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War. DoD recently posted the identification of **SSG Lawrence Woods, USA/SF**, of TN, listed as KIA/BNR in South Vietnam on October 24, 1964. His remains were recovered on April 13, 2010 and identified September 4, 2013. Earlier, DoD posted the identification of **Colonel Francis J. McGouldrick, Jr., USAF**, of CT, listed as MIA in Laos on December 13, 1968. His remains were repatriated May 22, 2012 and identified August 28, 2013. The number of Americans announced by DoD as returned and identified since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is now 940. Another 63 US personnel, recovered by the US and ID'd before the end of the war, bring the official total of US personnel accounted for from the Vietnam War to 1,003. Of the 1,643 unaccounted-for personnel, 90% were lost in Vietnam or in areas of Cambodia and Laos under Vietnam's wartime control: Vietnam-1,275 (VN-469, VS-806); Laos-308; Cambodia-53; PRC territorial waters-7; over-water losses on DoD's list of No Further Pursuit cases number well over 600.

LEAGUE CHAIRMAN MEETS WITH SECRETARY OF DEFENSE: Chairman of the Board Ann Mills-Griffiths met on December 4th with Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel to discuss the way ahead for the entire accounting community. Recognizing the growing negative impact on Vietnam War accounting being caused by the US bureaucracy's internal dysfunction and bias in pursuing accounting objectives, the League leadership, supported by League Advisors, determined the need to develop a cohesive structure to reorganize the entire effort. Critical hearings held on August 1st in the House and Senate reinforced the urgency of moving quickly due to investigations and assessments demanded by Congress, the usual outcome of lawmakers frustrated in seeking answers to questions based on unverified, misleading accusations from biased, relatively uninformed individuals. Rather than awaiting results from further internal investigations and assessments, and based on decades of experience dealing with successive organizations and administrations, Mills-Griffiths sought suggestions from former and current US officials known to be firmly committed to the mission. The task was made more critical by negative media focused on the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC). The Secretary pledged to carefully review the background memo and proposed reorganization and respond directly to the League.

US-RUSSIA JOINT COMMISSION ON POW/MIA AFFAIRS (USRJC) FINALLY POISED FOR ACTION: On December 11th, US Co-Chairman of the USRJC called a meeting of US Commissioners and staff to update the Commissioners and discuss the way ahead. VFW Executive Director Bob Wallace, former USRJC Executive Secretary, now League Advisor on Russia and the former USSR, Norm Kass, and League Chairman of the Board Ann Mills-Griffiths were also invited to attend. This was the first USRJC meeting in over two years, and the first since US Co-Chairman General Robert "Doc" Foglesong, USAF (Ret), was formally re-named by the President and reinforced in his position by the Secretary of Defense, who also designated him a special employee of the Defense Department, primarily for logistical support.

The newly named, long overdue replacement for former Senate Democrat, now Secretary of State, John Kerry, is a very welcome addition; however, the Honorable Joe Manchin (D-W.VA) was unable to get away from Senate business to get for the discussions, despite holding the session in the Russell Senate Office Building. Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) and Representative Tim Walz (D-NE) were present and contributed significantly; however the Honorable Sam Johnson (R-TX), a returned Vietnam War POW, was unable to make it due to hearing conflicts. The State Department's Commissioner, Ambassador Paul W. Jones, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, was present and promises to be actively engaged. He has prior service at US Embassy Moscow, as well as in Southeast Asia, most recently serving as US Ambassador to Malaysia. The night before the meeting, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) Montague Winfield was formally named the DoD Commissioner, as was the Defense Intelligence Agency's Mark Handy. Dr. Tim Nenninger, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), will continue serving as Commissioner, another positive.

Mr. Stephen Aldridge, National Security Staff, and Acting USRJC Executive Secretary Dr. James Connell, DPMO, put things together, with active support and assistance of congressional staff, additional DPMO staff and the Joint Commission Support Directorate (JCSD), now cut to only four positions in DPMO, led by Rich Lyda, previously Deputy Chief of JCSD-Moscow. The current Moscow Chief is Major Rob Patterson, USA, ably assisted by four Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs). The very talented linguist and capable Foreign Affairs Specialist, Svetlana Shevchenko, was illogically removed from her JCSD position by DASD Winfield and assigned to DPMO's External Affairs Directorate, focusing on liaison with Congress, family members and veterans.

As to future USRJC direction, the immediate need is for Russian President Vladimir Putin to name a Russian Co-Chairman as counterpart to General Foglesong. Reportedly, President Putin intends to name someone soon and the delay is simply bureaucratic; however, that remains to be seen. The US and Russia have serious and substantive differences at present; however, this issue is one on which both countries should be able to work together toward achieving humanitarian objectives despite other political challenges. It is hoped that all senior US officials will note to their Russian counterparts that it is time to resume this humanitarian channel for cooperation.

Chairman's Comment: We commend General Foglesong for his extraordinary patience over the last few years, during which little action occurred. The League is hopeful that, at long last, the USRJC will resume its important mission. Other USRJC Congressional members who have shown extraordinary patience are Representatives Sam Johnson (R-TX) and Tim Walz (D-MN) and Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-GA). The League appreciates the patience these Commissioners also have shown and is grateful for their tenacity and determination to help. If President Putin can quickly name a Russian Co-Chair, and with the significant addition of Senator Joe Manchin (D-W.VA), the USRJC may finally be sufficiently restored to contribute as intended. Sadly, that will be without skilled, principled former officials who spent years supporting and fighting for the USRJC's mission, dedicated professionals such as Norm Kass, Roger Schumaker and Dave Martin – all forced out of their positions by a former DPMO Director.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE & JOINT CHIEFS CHAIRMAN PLEDGE SUPPORT: On September 20th, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, in remarks at the Pentagon's ceremony commemorating National POW/MIA Recognition day, stated in part, *"Words and promises cannot make the lingering uncertainty, the headache, and the heartache go away. But I hope it provides comfort to know that as long as members of our Armed Forces remain unaccounted for, the Department of Defense will do everything – whatever we can to find them and bring them home....we will not rest until we fulfill this pledge – no matter how long it takes.....Today, as the POW/MIA flag is raised in communities across America, we pledge to live by its creed, 'You are not Forgotten.'"*

Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Martin E. Dempsey, USA, speaking at the Pentagon, stated in part, *".....a special welcome to the families of those still missing in action and all who remain dedicated to bringing them home. It's a great honor to share this day with you... I am also inspired by the efforts of the countless individuals and organizations that are dedicated to honor American prisoners of war and who continue the search for those missing in action....Their efforts reach deep into the four corners of the globe, into foreign lands far from home..... Today, as we fly the familiar black and white flag across our country, it's not only a symbol to remember the POW and MIA community, it's a charge – to keep faith with every prisoner of war, those still missing in action, their families, and our military community ... to remain undaunted by time and undeterred by challenges... wherever our missing lie, wherever a prisoner waits, we will remain committed to freeing them....to not rest... to not call our mission complete ... not until our family is whole again."*

VIETNAM: US-Vietnam POW/MIA Consultations were held September 26th, led by JPAC Commander Maj Gen Kelly McKeague, USAF, with DPMO, DIA's Stony Beach and Embassy-Hanoi participation. A commemorative dinner was held the night before to celebrate recent years of steadily improving POW/MIA cooperation. Although invited to attend, the League's Chairman of the Board regretted and sent a letter that was read aloud and well-received, according to the JPAC Commander. The Joint Field Activity (JFA) in Vietnam, scheduled for November, was initially postponed due to lack of funding. Once agreement was reached on a Continuing Resolution to temporarily fund the government, the Vietnam JFA was back on, though significantly reduced in scope. It is now concluded, and the team has returned to Hawaii.

In a very important development, **Vietnamese Deputy Minister of National Defense LTG Nguyen Chi Vinh** was in Washington, DC, for October 29th bilateral Defense Policy Dialogue. In response to a League request, Minister Vinh and his delegation met with **Chairman of the Board Ann Mills-Griffiths** on Sunday, October 27th. Mills-Griffiths thanked Minister Vinh for taking the time to meet and for significant improvements in cooperation, particularly since 2009, including increased provision of archival documents, access to previously restricted areas, and improved quality and professionalism of SRV participants working with US counterparts. Mills-Griffiths then highlighted two areas on which support is needed: 1) agreement for the US to field additional teams in the central highlands where most of the remaining unresolved losses occurred; and 2) agreement for the two DIA Stony Beach POW/MIA investigation specialists to be permanently assigned at the US Embassy in Hanoi.

Minister Vinh stated 1) he had brought more documents sought by the US to turn over to DoD officials, 2) agreed to additional US personnel operating in the central provinces, and 3) saw no problem with permanent stationing of the two DIA specialists, providing their mission was clear, i.e. focused solely on POW/MIA-related information, indicating it should simply be handled as other such requests through the US Embassy.

Minister Vinh asked for additional US emphasis on and support for addressing “war legacy issues,” including de-mining and humanitarian assistance for the disabled and their families, and for information that might help locate Vietnamese who died and whose remains are not yet recovered. He suggested that bilateral US-Vietnam cooperation on the humanitarian accounting mission should be publicized to serve as an example to the world of what can be accomplished by working together on such matters. In a post-DoD meeting wrap-up, observers reported that Minister Vinh indicated there were no barriers to his government’s willingness to assist and again suggested publicizing the success of bilateral US-Vietnam cooperation on the humanitarian accounting mission.

Chairman’s Comment: There was noticeable warmth and responsiveness during discussions with the Deputy Defense Minister, a willingness to cooperate that has been evident to the League since 2009 and, along with the improved level of cooperation, there have also been significant improvements in the professionalism of working level officials, clearly having received authorization and encouragement from senior officials. These welcome developments, especially a commitment that there are “no barriers” to POW/MIA accounting cooperation by such a senior MND official as Senior LTG Nguyen Chi Vinh, bode well for achieving greater success on Vietnam War accounting, so long as US Government funding and personnel levels meet long-established expectations.

CAMBODIA: Consultations were held September 30th in Phnom Penh, led by JPAC Commander Maj Gen Kelly McKeague, USAF, with DPMO, DIA’s Stony Beach and Embassy-Phnom Penh participation. It is hoped the legal obstacles raised earlier by the US bureaucracy will not recur to pose further difficulties for JPAC teams and counterpart Cambodian officials who, though puzzled, have been most patient. The long-delayed JFA in Cambodia was scheduled to take place from October 23 – December 6th but was again postponed, as noted above. Operations in Cambodia by two Recovery Teams (RTs) and one Underwater Recovery Team (URT) have been postponed twice this year, but are now scheduled for January 28 – April 2, 2014..

LAOS: On August 16th, US-Lao Bilateral POW/MIA Consultations, also led by the JPAC Commander, with DPMO and Embassy-Vientiane representatives participating, were held in Vientiane, Laos. The talks were the most productive such discussions in quite some time. At long last, the Lao Government agreed to allow the Defense Intelligence Agency’s (DIA’s) Stony Beach POW/MIA specialist to pursue field investigations year-round, on an as-needed basis. Though the details have yet to be worked out, the League welcomes Lao responsiveness to specific appeals, including approval of year-round Stony Beach investigations, contracting the use of smaller helicopters, and on-site base-camping. These Lao Government decisions are in keeping with the improved political, economic and military relationship. The agreement on base-camping was to have been tested during the October 16 – November 29th JFA that was postponed due to lack of funding. **With budget agreement reached, JPAC is now planning a JFA in Laos January 14 – February 17th.**

JPAC PUBLIC AFFAIRS PRACTICE: Investigative journalist Bill Dedman recently published a story on what he touts as JPAC’s “fake” arrival ceremonies. JPAC’s attempt to honor those recovered by re-creating a formal arrival ceremony should be viewed for what it was – a well-intentioned effort to honor deserving US personnel missing and unaccounted-for from our nation’s past wars and conflicts.

Comment: JPAC was re-enacting what used to be real-time ceremonies, inviting the media and local veterans, and holding the “arrival ceremony” with all the tradition and formality earned. In reality, the remains had arrived earlier and the timing was staged. Was it smart? Not really! Was it well-intended? Yes, but in the current poisonous environment of unproven accusations, investigations, legal actions and EEO complaints, the timing further undercut JPAC, the command at the heart of the accounting process. It is very sad, but this relative “hiccup” in the process should not be allowed to destroy confidence in the quality of in-country investigations, interviews, and surveys based on responsible analysis, nor in the end-result, the identification processes.