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Status of the POW MIA Issue

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

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STATUS OF THE POW/MIA ISSUE: June 7, 2018

1,597 Americans are now listed by DoD as missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War: Vietnam - 1,251 (VN-456, VS-795); Laos-291; Cambodia-48; Peoples Republic of China territorial waters-7. (These 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. Highest priority is accounting for Americans last known alive. US intelligence indicates some Americans known to be in captivity in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were not returned at the end of the war. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it must be assumed that these Americans could still be alive, and the US Government should not rule out that possibility.

Vietnam established comprehensive wartime and post-war processes to collect and retain information and remains; thus, unilateral efforts by them offered significant potential. Vietnam has since taken many unilateral actions that are welcome and appreciated, plus announced that there are no obstacles to full cooperation. Recently, Vietnam has increased implementation of commitments to provide long-sought archival records with relevant, case-related information, thanks in part to improvement of working-level efforts, but primarily due to increased bilateral relations across the board. The January 2018 League Delegation brought commitments that offered real promise for increased success. First undertaken in northern Vietnam in 1985, joint field operations have dramatically changed and are now much more effective. Vietnamese officials are participating with greater seriousness and professionalism, achieving increased results, including both US-led Joint Excavation Teams and Vietnamese Recovery Teams (VRTs), led by Vietnamese and supported by a few US personnel. This formula allows a greater number of teams to "increase the pace and scope of field operations," as requested by Vietnam since 2009, unless budget reductions interfere. Due to increased military-to-military cooperation, US Navy assets are now allowed to participate in underwater survey and recovery operations, when requested. These steps, long advocated by the League, are now coming to fruition and reportedly are raised by US officials at all levels.

After a rough period, joint field operations in Laos are now increasingly productive, even though more difficult than elsewhere. Accounting efforts had slowed due to Lao Government inflexibility, attempting to over-price payment for helicopter support and denying permission for ground transport to accessible incident sites. Recently, Laos is showing much greater flexibility, having again authorized an increased number of US personnel in-country simultaneously, allowing ground transportation to accessible sites, and reaching agreement for contracting a private company to provide reliable, smaller-scale helicopter support to access remote sites. When helpful, Vietnamese witnesses are also allowed to participate in joint US-Lao operations. DIA's Stony Beach POW/MIA specialist is assigned full time in-country, and Lao officials are now approving field investigations outside the confines of scheduled DPAA field operations. A border dispute with Cambodia that was ongoing when the League Delegation visited earlier this year continues to impede recovery operations in that area. The League urges officials in Laos and Cambodia to at least temporarily set aside their political disagreement and work trilaterally with the US to proceed on this humanitarian recovery, to end the uncertainty of the families.

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. Two Stony Beach personnel for years rotated on temporary duty in and out of Vietnam, collecting information via archival research and interviews of potential witnesses. DIA has now decided to permanently station one Stony Beach Vietnam specialist in Hawaii and one in Hanoi, to which Vietnam has agreed. Successive US Ambassadors have strongly supported this important move, and increases in bilateral military relations clearly contributed to overcoming past reluctance. New US Ambassador to Laos Rena Bitter reportedly supports full use of DIA's Lao specialist. It is hoped that ever-expanding bilateral relationships with Laos and Vietnam will mean positive decisions and greater flexibility to expand. Stony Beach specialists are sorely needed to augment the investigation process while witnesses are still living and able to facilitate locating incident sites for follow-up.

The greatest obstacles to increased Vietnam War accounting efforts are too few qualified scientists, and unreliable funding that has caused US cancellation of scheduled operations, thus sending negative signals to foreign counterpart officials, especially in Vietnam. Since over 80% of US losses in Laos and 90% in Cambodia occurred in areas where Vietnamese forces operated during the war, Vietnam's expanded provision of helpful records, improved and increased archival research, interviews and field operations are the core means to increase accounting results for Vietnam War missing personnel, America's UNRETURNED VETERANS.

POW/MIA STATISTICS, as of May 31, 2018
Live Sighting statistics provided by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA)

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 years in which these 55 first hand sightings occurred are listed below:

Pre-1976	1976-1985	1986-1995	1996-2005	2006-2013	Total
36	3	1	14	1	55

Accountability: At the end of the Vietnam War, there reportedly were 2,583 unaccounted-for American prisoners, missing or killed in action/body not recovered. **As of May 31, 2018, the Department of Defense lists 1,597 Americans as missing and unaccounted-for, 90% of them in Vietnam or in areas of Cambodia and Laos where Vietnamese operated during the war.** A breakdown by year of recovery for the 986 Americans accounted for from Vietnam War-related losses post April 30, 1975 follows:

1965-1974	War years: (recently identified)	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	168
1989-1993	George H.W. Bush Administration	128
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	1st Obama Administration	51
2012-2016	2nd Obama Administration	27
2016-2020	1st Trump Administration	1

According to the DPAA Lab, unilateral SRV repatriations of remains with scientific evidence of storage have accounted for less than 200 of the 667 from Vietnam; two were mistakenly listed as KIA/BNR in Vietnam in 1968, but remains were actually recovered at that time. All but seven of the 274 Americans accounted for in Laos since the end of the war have been the result of joint recoveries. Six were recovered and turned over by indigenous personnel from Laos and one from Vietnam. In addition, three persons identified were recovered in Vietnam before the end of the war. There follows a breakdown by country of the 986 Americans accounted for since the April 30, 1975 end of the Vietnam War: Vietnam, 667; Laos, 274; Cambodia, 42 and the PRC, 3.

An additional 63 US personnel were accounted for between 1973 and 1975, for a grand total of 1,049. Of the 63, 9 were from Laos, 53 from Vietnam, and 1 from Cambodia. These Americans were accounted for by unilateral US effort in areas where access was possible, not due to cooperation with post-war governments of Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia. Added to results from government-to-government humanitarian cooperation post-war, a total of 282 have been recovered and identified from Laos, 722 from Vietnam, 42 from Cambodia and 3 from the PRC.

**For the latest information, call the League's Office (703) 465-7432 or
 check the League website: www.pow-miafamilies.org**

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