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# Newsclipping: Presumed Killed

San Dewayne Francisco

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# Presumed killed: Memories linger for

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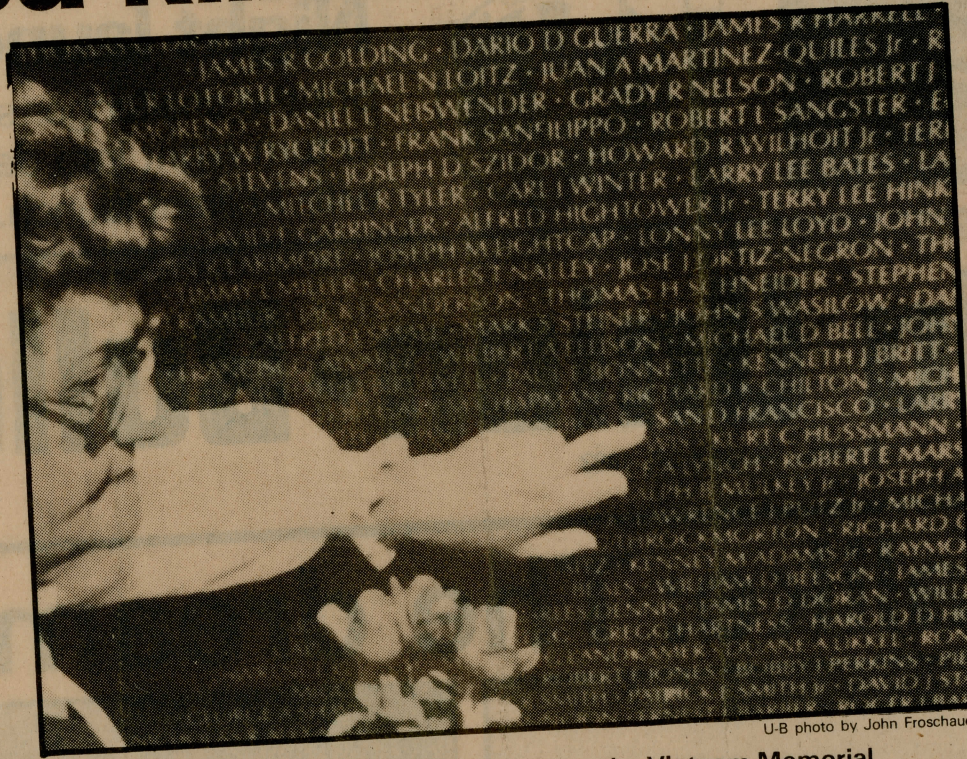
acknowledged as possible live sightings by the U.S. government. She still hears what military personnel monitoring San's flight communications thought they heard him say after he hit the ground: "I'm A-OK." Then, too, Esther says, some French POWs from the Korean War were released after 20 years. Pentagon spokesman Shields says the military, too, has heard reports about the French POWs. The last live release of Americans from Vietnam was in 1973.

The government's official statement on whether any Vietnam War POWs are still alive: "Although we have thus far been unable to prove that Americans are still detained against their will, the information available to us precludes ruling out that possibility. Actions to investigate live-sighting reports receive and will continue to receive necessary priority and resources based on the assumption that at least some Americans are still held captive. Should any report prove true, we will take appropriate action to ensure their return."

"You just don't think about it," Harry says, "or you could go nuts. You just have to live with it."

Part of living with their loss is belonging to the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, formed in 1970. The league's position on the POW/MIA situation is that they want the release of all prisoners held in southeast Asia, the fullest possible accounting for the missing and the return of remains of those who died serving their country.

The Franciscos recently attended the league's 14th national annual meeting in Washington, D.C. The meeting included par-



Esther Francisco points to her son's name on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C.

ticipation in a Congressional hearing by the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, breakfast with Congressional leaders and meetings with representatives of the departments of State and Defense.

While they were in the nation's capital, the Franciscos visited their son's Arlington marker and picked out his name on the Vietnam War Memorial. But the part that

Esther says pricked her conscience the most was to see the children of the missing gathered in Washington.

"They are missing out on what their dads are doing, and their dads are missing out on what their children are doing," Esther says.

One reason they belong to the league is for "moral support," Esther says. It gives them a chance to talk with other families in the same situation.

The government treats league members gingerly, offering families free military transport on occasions such as the annual meeting.

The Franciscos are convinced that President Reagan is doing more than any president so far to help gain information on the POW/MIAs. President Carter, Harry says, was more concerned about pardoning draft evaders from the Vietnam era than taking action on the POW/MIA problem.

League national executive assistant Deborah Marsh agrees that families are finally getting some action.

"The Reagan administration, certainly in comparison with previous administrations, has been supportive," Marsh says. This administration is working under the assumption that prisoners may still be held captive — an assumption not made in the recent past.

While Marsh admits the governments of Southeast Asia hold most of the cards in this nerve-racking game of accounting for missing persons, she believes more progress is being made due to stepped-up efforts by the U.S. government.

The Vietnamese have agreed to accept a U.S. delegation four times a year for talks on the matter, and, so far, a U.S. team has made three visits. In Laos, Marsh says, progress had been even greater until the raids allegedly conducted by former Army Lt. Col. James (Bo) Gritz came to light. In 1982, Gritz allegedly led a group of men on a mission to rescue U.S. servicemen reported to be held in Laos — a move condemned by both the U.S. government and the league of families. The Laotians, Marsh says, find it difficult to "realize the U.S. government is not tied in" with the independent move.

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U-B photo by John Froschauer