

9-18-1987

Public Awareness Overview from the League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia

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Francisco, San Dewayne, "Public Awareness Overview from the League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia" (1987). *Documents*. 104.

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

1608 K STREET, N.W., WASHINGTON, D. C. 20006 (202) 223-6846

PUBLIC AWARENESS OVERVIEW

The impact of responsible public awareness continues to be of tremendous importance in efforts to generate unified American support for returning our men - alive and dead - from Southeast Asia.

As reflected in widespread national media coverage, Presidential Emissary General John Vessey's August mission to Hanoi resulted in Vietnamese agreement to accelerate cooperation toward accounting for Americans missing in Vietnam, focusing initially on discrepancy cases and those listed as having died in captivity in the south. A subsequent delegation led by National Security Council Director for Asian Affairs Richard Childress met in Vientiane, Laos, resulting in Lao agreement to resume humanitarian cooperation with the US on the POW/MIA issue. It is with cautious optimism that we look forward to seeing these commitments seriously implemented, hoping that the Indochinese governments now realize it is in their best interest to cooperate fully and quickly with the United States in resolving this national humanitarian concern.

During the past year, League public awareness projects, initiated at the grass roots level and coordinated on a national scale, have proven effective in educating the American people about the plight of our men still prisoner, missing or otherwise unaccounted for in Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, some individuals and organizations have continued to distribute misinformation, fraudulent fundraising appeals, allegations of US Government conspiracy and coverup, and advocating solutions that would totally halt cooperation. Such irresponsible actions interfere with ongoing government-to-government efforts and undermines the serious, factual basis for current priority to resolve the issue.

In keeping with the overall strategy to resolve the POW/MIA issue, establishing necessary flexibility in the negotiating process and a climate conducive to accelerated progress on the part of Indochina, the League must continue to channel public awareness activities to ensure that the American people have factual and current information. Hence, a united America will voice it's continuing determination to achieve the most complete accounting possible for our brave men and for their families who have waited so long for an end to uncertainty.

Attached to this policy overview is an outline of League public awareness plans for the remainder of 1987, through July 1988. Four major projects are planned as nationwide efforts to create the greatest impact in educating the public about the issue and send clear signals that our men are not forgotten.

These projects must focus on the Indochinese governments which hold the answers we seek. They will be planned and implemented as part of the normal operation of the League, with calculated expense and a minimum of additional workload on the national staff. As public awareness escalates,

printing and distributing costs to the League increase. Donations to assist with these costs are encouraged.

In addition to the many ongoing public awareness activities encouraged and supported by the League, four major public awareness projects are slated for the coming year. These include (but are not limited to): placing POW/MIAs flags; contacting state and local officials; seeking passage of resolutions and proclamations by organizations and local governments to be sent to the Vietnamese and Lao; responsible participation in parades, candlelight and ribbon ceremonies; maintaining and strengthening local media contacts by providing current, factual data on the issue; expanding speaking opportunities; and arranging for and staffing POW/MIA information booths as deemed effective at fairs, malls, street festivals, etc.

The direct involvement of League board members, state and regional coordinators, other family members, concerned citizens, veterans groups and civic organizations throughout the country is essential to success in creating widespread, responsible public awareness. League efforts to involve military installations have been very successful; Department of Defense guidelines for active-duty military participation in League POW/MIA public awareness activities is resulting in heightened activity and increased cooperation by military installations with community efforts. Contact should be initiated by League officials with the public affairs offices of all military installations.

PROJECTS

September: Final preparations for National POW/MIA Recognition Week, scheduled September 13-18, 1987, were completed and massive quantities of materials were shipped to ensure factual public education on the issue. An informational packet distributed by the League office provided guidelines for implementing responsible public awareness events in conjunction with this nationwide effort to honor all returned POWs, those still missing and their families. Events included the POW/MIA Race for Freedom and Balloon Release; additional suggested activities and publicity tips were provided.

The 1987 Recognition Day Poster, again designed and distributed by the Veterans Administration (VA), is still available from the League office, as are limited copies of the Presidential Proclamation. Posting of both in local businesses, churches and post offices was and is encouraged. Emphasis was focused on making the poster available throughout the country. The poster was well received and is appropriate for use throughout the year.

November: The national office will distribute League materials to all veterans' organizations, responsible POW/MIA groups and individuals holding Veterans Day ceremonies.

December: POW/MIA greeting cards, designed by Vietnam veteran Tom Nielsen, will be available from the League office at a cost of \$5.00 per box (20 cards and envelopes per box). These beautifully designed cards are suitable for personal use as well as for area businesses, churches and to

send to the Lao and Vietnamese governments in a demonstration of national concern. Efforts to maximize military participation in this project will include working closely with Wives Clubs on all military installations. The tasteful nature of these cards should enable use by all individuals for annual holiday greeting lists.

January: A major letter-writing campaign focused on the Indochinese governments will begin by the forwarding (in November) of a draft letter to all major national veterans organizations, POW/MIA groups, national civic organizations (such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions Club, Jaycees, etc.) and ROTC chapters. The purpose will be to signal the Indochinese governments that the American people want and expect accelerated progress on the POW/MIA issue, noting the humanitarian nature of the issue and recognizing progress and cooperation already in process. These letters, scheduled to be sent in conjunction with the 15th Anniversary of the signing of the Paris Peace Accords on January 27, 1973, can have an immense impact in signaling Indochina of America's continuing determination to resolve this issue. In conjunction with this project, a National Day of Prayer is slated for Sunday, January 31, 1988, the first Sunday following the anniversary date. The national office will attempt to obtain the interdenominational support necessary to ensure nationwide success. While this project will require substantial advance preparation by the national office, a grass roots effort to contact local churches will be instrumental in the overall effectiveness.

May: Mother's Day (May 8, 1988) will again be the focus for the Commemorative Candlelight Ceremony Program. Guidelines will be developed well in advance (early January) and distributed to all veterans organizations, League representatives, military installations and POW/MIA groups in an effort to enlist informed public support and objective media attention. Women's organizations, such as veterans auxiliaries and military Wives Clubs will be contacted for active participation and assistance with this project.

The national office will provide League materials for distribution to all veterans' organizations, military installations, responsible POW/MIA groups and individuals holding Memorial Day services and events.

July: The League will maximize opportunities for heightened public awareness in conjunction with Independence Day celebrations on July 4th and the 19th Annual Meeting, to be held July 29-31, 1988, J.W. Marriott Hotel, Washington, D.C.

September 30, 1987



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YOU CAN HELP

WRITE LETTERS: To Members of Congress, urging them to help in making the American people aware of the POW/MIA issue, to offer bipartisan support for the US Government's current high priority on accounting for over 2,400 missing Americans and to oppose public release of classified live sighting reports.

(Name of Representative)
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

(Name of Senator)
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

To editors of local papers, in an effort to draw responsible public attention to the missing men and counter misinformation with facts.

To the Vietnamese and the Lao, urging them to increase efforts to fulfill their commitments to cooperate fully with the US Government to resolve the POW/MIA issue. Send your letters to:

SRV Mission to the UN
20 Waterside Plaza, J35
New York, New York 10010

LPDR Mission to the UN
820 Second Avenue, Suite 400
New York, New York 10017

PUBLIC AWARENESS: Distribute factual POW/MIA information to friends, co-workers and at meetings of civic, fraternal, business and veterans groups.

Insert current League material in national and local organization publications. Arrange for POW/MIA speakers, particularly at national and state conventions and other large gatherings.

Remember POW/MIAs in appropriate ceremonies - including Veterans Day, Memorial Day, Christmas services and National POW/MIA Recognition Day. Public Awareness Overviews are available for advance planning.

SUPPORT THE LEAGUE: Help raise funds to continue this important work. As suggestions: 1) participate in the Adoption Program; individuals or organizations can adopt a missing man for \$5.00 a month; 2) wear a POW/MIA logo lapel pin (\$3.00 each or two for \$5.00); 3) fly a POW/MIA Flag, available from the League office at \$43.00 each, prepaid.

Fundraising note: Those who sponsor projects to raise funds for the National League of POW/MIA Families should convert any cash to checks before sending to the office. The League is a non-profit organization, tax exempt #23-7071242, incorporated in the District of Columbia.

IMPORTANT NOTE: CALL THE LEAGUE UPDATE LINE: 202/659-0133, FOR CURRENT INFORMATION 24 HOURS A DAY. For more information and assistance in implementing programs, contact the League's national office, address and telephone listed above.

9