



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

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

**POW/MIA BRIEFING**

In the years since official US involvement in the Vietnam War came to an end and nearly 600 American prisoners of war were returned, the Indochinese governments have been less than cooperative in accounting for prisoners who did not return and providing information on the missing. Within the last two years, cooperation has increased significantly; yet there are 2,404 American servicemen and civilians still missing and unaccounted for in Indochina.

For almost 8 years after the war, the US government made minimal effort to collect and analyze intelligence data indicating some Americans may still be captive; however, in recent years, Vietnamese and Lao refugees fleeing their countries have brought hundreds of such reports. There is no question that the Indochinese governments have additional information on Americans still missing. The US Government has very credible intelligence data that the remains of over 400 US servicemen were recovered and withheld by the Vietnamese. The Reagan Administration acknowledged these facts and established policy to resolve the POW/MIA issue on a priority basis.

**Current US Government Policy**

The President has assigned the highest national priority to obtaining as full as possible an accounting of Americans still prisoner, missing or unaccounted for in Indochina. He pledged to the National League of Families that "the full resources of the United States Government are committed to this effort and the United States will take decisive action on any report which can be confirmed of an American serviceman still held prisoner in Indochina." This increase in attention and resources is overwhelmingly supported by the National League of Families, Members of Congress on a bi-partisan basis and all national veterans organizations.

First priority is to obtain the release of Americans who may still be held. Serious efforts are also being made to achieve the fullest possible accounting for the missing and the return of the remains of those who died. All three Indochina countries have denied knowledge of any Americans still held; however, the governments of Vietnam and Laos discuss the live POW issue directly with US officials and have acknowledged the possibility that some Americans might be alive in remote areas, outside their governments' control or authority. Vietnam and Laos have now agreed that accounting for the missing is a humanitarian issue and that they will cooperate in resolving it. Up to now, their cooperation has been less than it should be; however, August 1987 commitments by Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Co Thach to Presidential emissary General John Vessey, Jr., offer encouragement that progress can be made.

- Vietnam: In 1973, Hanoi released 591 American prisoners (nine of them captured in Laos). An additional 68 Americans, stranded in Vietnam after April 1975, left in the following year. To date, the Vietnamese have returned 152 remains which were identified as Americans previously missing and provided a list of names of men reported to have died in captivity in southern Vietnam, 40 of whom were American. The remains of 6 of these 40 have been returned.
- Laos: Of the 2,404 total, 549 are missing in Laos. In August 1978, the Lao Government returned four remains; 2 were local people, 1 has been identified as a missing American and the last is as yet unidentified. Americans accounted for from the 1985 excavation of a US crash site numbered 13. A second excavation took place in February 1986 at a site where 14 men were listed as missing, 8 of whom have been accounted for, and other remains recovered are still being processed by the Central Identification Laboratory (CIL).
- Cambodia: Americans listed as unaccounted for in Cambodia number 82, primarily lost in areas controlled by the Vietnamese. Political and military conditions have thus far precluded accounting for them; however, efforts to obtain information are being pursued directly and through international humanitarian organizations.

#### \*Firsthand Sighting Reports from Indochina

As of March 1, 1988, there have been 1,030 firsthand live sighting reports in Indochina, received since 1975. Of these reports, 911 have been resolved; 688 through correlation to individuals who have since left Indochina (returned-POW's, known missionaries, civilians detained after Saigon fell and later released); 223 are judged to be untrue. The remaining 119 sightings are as yet unresolved and under investigation using all available intelligence assets. This figure of 119 can be further divided into 68 dealing with reported Americans seen in a prisoner situation and 51 of apparent Americans in non-prisoner situations. The 68 "prisoner" reports can be separated into 62 active cases, 6 where the information is too vague to be of any use. The year during which the 119 unresolved live sightings took place is outlined below.

Pre-75	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	Total	
POW	23	8	3	6	9	8	0	5	3	0	0	2	0	1	68
Non-POW	2	7	2	2	7	9	3	2	3	2	5	3	1	3	51

\* Statistics from Defense Intelligence Agency.

#### Diplomatic Initiatives: Vietnam

Successive diplomatic approaches have taken place since February 1982, when then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage held talks in Hanoi that resulted in Vietnamese agreement to hold four technical meetings a year between the US Joint Casualty Resolution Center (JCRC) and the Vietnamese Office for Seeking Missing Persons. In the fall of 1983, Richard Childress, Director of

Asian Affairs, National Security Council, and League Executive Director Ann Mills Griffiths met with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach in New York to discuss a higher level of cooperation.

In February 1984, a delegation led by Assistant Secretary of Defense Armitage and including Mrs. Griffiths, Mr. Childress and State Department representatives held discussions with Foreign Minister Thach during which agreement was reached to accelerate cooperation. Both governments agreed that resolution of this issue should not be linked to other American-Vietnamese differences. Hanoi also agreed it would focus initial efforts on the most accessible cases and those listed as having died in captivity in the south. In July 1984, Vietnam turned over 8 remains; 6 were subsequently identified as American. The JCRC held meetings in Hanoi with their Vietnamese counterparts in August and October 1984 and in February 1985.

In March 1985, Mr. Childress and Mrs. Griffiths met again with Foreign Minister Thach in Hanoi. The Vietnamese agreed to increase the number of technical meetings from four to at least six a year. Later that month, Vietnam turned over the remains of 6 American servicemen, all of which were identified. In August 1985, the Vietnamese turned over 26 remains reported to be those of Americans and material evidence and information on 6 others. This was the largest number repatriated since the end of active American involvement in the Vietnam War. Of the 26 returned, 24 have been identified.

In July 1985, Hanoi announced their intention to resolve the POW/MIA issue within two years. To pursue that pledge, a meeting took place in Hanoi on August 28-29. Mr. Childress, Mrs. Griffiths and Lyall Breckon, Director of the State Department's Office of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia Affairs, represented the United States and met with Acting Foreign Minister Vo Dong Giang. A follow-up meeting with the same participants took place in New York in September. The discussions were constructive and brought increased cooperation on the issue. The Vietnamese provided a two-year work plan, and the US specified supplementary actions they would take. One result of this series of meetings was Vietnamese agreement to the joint excavation of a US crash site in November and an additional turnover of remains which occurred in early December, resulting in the identification of 7 more Americans.

In January of 1986, Mr. Armitage led the highest level delegation yet to go to Hanoi on the issue, this time including Assistant Secretary of State Paul Wolfowitz as well as Mr. Childress, Mrs. Griffiths and Mr. Breckon. The Vietnamese reaffirmed their pledge to resolve the issue within two years and announced that their accelerated efforts had resulted in information on 50 missing Americans. That number was increased to 70 following two Congressional delegations led by Senator Frank Murkowski (R-AK), Chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, and Representative Gerald B.H. Solomon (R-NY), Chairman of the House Task Force on POW/MIA's. The February technical meeting was followed on April 10th by the return of 21 remains reported to be those of Americans, 10 of which have thus far been identified.

Following a brief delay by the Vietnamese government, technical level meetings were held in June and again in August. On July 1-2, a US policy-level delegation met in Hanoi with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, Deputy Foreign Minister Hoang Bich Son and other officials for productive discussions. Responding to published Vietnamese statements that the US lacked commitment to Vietnam's two-year plan, White House representative Mr. Childress, accompanied

by Mrs. Griffiths, Mr. Breckon and Department of Defense representative Colonel Howard Hill, USAF, delivered an official letter with attachment from Assistant Secretary of Defense Armitage which outlined oral and written agreements previously reached. Specific results were as follows: Technical level meetings between US and Vietnamese officials would be held in August and October, reaffirming the pattern of at least six such meetings per year; the Vietnamese indicated these meetings would be especially productive; Vietnamese and American forensic specialists would consult in Vietnam; Vietnam would provide the US government with written results of their investigations into reports of live prisoner sightings; Vietnam would permit American experts to accompany its officials on investigations in accessible areas; specific crash sites for excavation would be discussed at the next technical meeting; Vietnam accepted the US invitation to again visit the CIL and JCRC facilities in Hawaii, date to be determined.

Policy-level discussions between US and Vietnamese officials again took place in New York on October 3rd. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State John Monjo, Mr. Childress, Mrs. Griffiths, State Department Director for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia Shep Lowman and Colonel Hill met with Vietnamese Minister of State Vo Dong Giang and other senior officials for discussions on the live prisoner issue, means of accelerating progress in line with Vietnam's two-year plan and the need for fulfillment of their pledges made in July. Minister Giang again stated clearly Vietnam's position that cooperation is not linked to any political considerations. Technical level meetings were also held in October in Hanoi, followed in November by repatriation of 3 remains subsequently identified as American. From the end of 1986 until late August 1987, Vietnam was unwilling to schedule technical talks with the US.

In mid-April of 1987, press reports revealed that President Reagan had decided the previous October to name a special POW/MIA emissary to Hanoi, based upon earlier increases in cooperation which had since slackened. In February 1987, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John W. Vessey, Jr., was appointed to the position, and the US requested that Vietnam receive an advance, policy level delegation to establish the agenda and terms of reference for the Vessey mission. On May 26-28th, the advance team met in Hanoi with Vietnamese officials, including Dinh Nho Liem, First Deputy Foreign Minister. US representatives Mr. Childress, Mrs. Griffiths and Mr. Lowman reported that more work was required to ensure a successful Vessey mission. After additional exchanges through the US and SRV embassies in Bangkok, General Vessey's mission was scheduled for August 1-3rd, and Vietnam agreed to the separate humanitarian agenda proposed.

In addition to General Vessey, the delegation included General Robert Kingston, USA-retired, first Commanding Officer of JCRC, Mr. Childress, Mrs. Griffiths, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Lambertson, General Vessey's military assistant and an interpreter. Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach agreed to resume cooperation with the US, focusing first on discrepancy cases and those listed as having died in captivity in the south. The US agreed to address certain humanitarian concerns of the Vietnamese people. POW/MIA technical meetings have been held August 25-28, October 28-31, January 22-25, and March 12-15; the other humanitarian team, comprised of orthopedic and prosthetics experts, held discussions August 25-28, November 9-12, January 15-18

and March 2-5. On September 25th, a follow-up meeting was held in New York between General Vessey and Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien. Vietnam repatriated 3 remains on September 24th, 5 remains on November 25th and 17 remains on March 2nd. The next few months will be critical in evaluating Vietnam's intentions regarding their agreements.

### Diplomatic Initiatives: Laos

Following a League delegation to Laos in 1982, the US and Laos met at a high level and agreed to move toward improved relations based on concrete actions by each side. The US noted that progress on the POW/MIA issue would be viewed as the principal measure of Lao sincerity. In 1983 and 1984, officials from the Departments of State and Defense, the National Security Council and the National League of Families met frequently for policy discussions with prominent Lao officials. In February 1985, Laos and the US excavated the crash site of an American aircraft, resulting in an accounting for 13 Air Force crewmembers.

Assistant Secretary of State Wolfowitz and Mr. Childress traveled to Vientiane in December 1985 and discussed the POW/MIA issue with Foreign Minister Phoun Sipaseut and others. Postponement of another joint excavation was attributed to the early onset of the rainy season. In September 1985, a Lao delegation visited JCRC and the Central Identification Laboratory (CIL) in Hawaii to discuss technical questions with US experts in these two organizations. A second joint excavation was successfully carried out in February 1986, and 8 Americans missing in that incident have thus far been accounted for; other remains are still being processed by the CIL.

Policy-level discussions with Laos were again held in Vientiane, July 4, 1986. The delegation, led by Mr. Childress and including Mrs. Griffiths, Mr. Breckon and Colonel Hill, obtained Lao agreement to: Provide written reports on noted discrepancy cases of Americans missing in Laos; seriously consider a unilateral survey during the rainy season, possibly accompanied by an American official; undertake additional unilateral efforts; and resume joint excavations as soon as possible, before the end of 1986.

In an October 3, 1986 meeting in New York, Deputy Assistant Secretary Monjo, Mr. Childress, Mrs. Griffiths, Mr. Lowman and Colonel Hill met with Lao Vice Foreign Minister Soubanh and other Lao officials to discuss serious US concerns on the live prisoner issue, including written reports on discrepancy cases raised earlier; joint crash site excavations as pledged and unilateral actions to investigate incidents known to the Lao government.

A US delegation, led by Mr. Childress and including Mrs. Griffiths and Mr. Lowman, met in Vientiane August 10-12, 1987 with Lao Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers/Foreign Minister Phoun Sipaseut and other officials for three days of frank discussions. Laos agreed to renew POW/MIA cooperation, reaffirmed prior agreements, and Vice Foreign Minister Soubanh accepted the US invitation to visit Washington. During his October 5-9 visit, Minister Soubanh announced agreement for a meeting in Vientiane which was held November 11-13th. Concrete POW/MIA actions for the 1987-88 dry season were discussed and specific commitments were reaffirmed. On February 17th, the Lao returned remains recovered unilaterally, the first such turnover since 1978.

## Other Diplomatic Initiatives

In meetings with officials of friendly foreign governments which have diplomatic relations with Vietnam, the US emphasizes the need to raise the POW/MIA issue in contacts with Hanoi. During meetings since 1983 with foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Secretary of State has asked for assistance on the POW/MIA issue and has been assured that they will continue to help in whatever way possible. In May of 1986, President Reagan again raised the need for increased Lao and Vietnamese cooperation to resolve the issue during meetings with the ASEAN foreign ministers, all of whom were responsive to his request for support.

## Prognosis

The results of General Vessey's mission give reason for cautious optimism. Current priority and policy have generated progress, but greater cooperation from the Indochinese governments is necessary. Intelligence priorities are at a very high level. Members of Congress on a bi-partisan basis and all major veterans organizations strongly support US Government policy to resolve this issue as a matter of highest national priority. There is need for continued vigilance to urge the Vietnamese and Lao governments which hold the answers to recognize their interests are best served by responding seriously, without linkage to other matters, encouraged by the American people through responsible actions and unity.

The fullest possible accounting can be achieved only through government-to-government efforts, and cooperation of the Indochinese governments is essential. Irresponsible private, cross-border forays, attempts to intervene in the process and unfounded claims that discredit the issue all combine to jeopardize legitimate efforts and are not supported by the National League of Families.

### \*Remains Returned/Identified Since 1973

1974	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	TOTAL
23	5	2	33	12	0	1	3	5	9	6	50	21	2	7	179

-----74-75-----76-78-----79-80-----81-88-----  
Related to end US/SRV attempts Normalization Reagan priority  
of VN War to normalize talks breakdown humanitarian  
issue

28 remains      47 remains      1 remains      103 remains

Note: The numbers given above do not include remains reported to be those of Americans, repatriated by Vietnam, or others recovered during the Savannakhet excavation which are still being processed for identification by the GIL.

\*Statistics from Department of Defense



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia was incorporated in the District of Columbia on May 28, 1970. Membership is comprised of close relatives of Americans who were or are listed as prisoners of war, missing in action or killed in action/body not recovered in Southeast Asia, and returned Vietnam POWs. It is a non-profit, non-political organization financed by contributions from the families themselves and donations from concerned citizens and organizations. The sole purpose of the League is to obtain the release of all prisoners, the fullest possible accounting for the missing and the repatriation of remains of those who died serving our nation in Southeast Asia.

The League had its origin on the west coast in the late 1960's. At that time the wife of a ranking POW, believing that the U.S. Government's policy of keeping a low profile on the POW/MIA issue was not justified and that the encouragement given to the families to refrain from discussing the problem publicly was wrong, initiated a loosely organized movement which subsequently developed into the National League of Families.

In October 1968, the first POW/MIA story was released and published. As a result of that publicity, the families started communicating with each other. The group grew in strength from 50 to 100, to 300, and kept growing. As these developments were taking place, small POW/MIA family groups organized to flood the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris with telegraphic inquiries about the prisoners and missing men. This was the first major activity in which hundreds of families participated.

Eventually, it was recognized that the organization needed to be established on a more formal basis. In May 1970, a special ADHOC meeting of families was called in Washington, D.C., during which the charter and by-laws of the organization were drafted.

The League's national headquarters opened on June 1, 1970. For the past fourteen years, the League office has been located in rent-free space in The American Legion Building, 1608 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

The organization is governed by a nine-member board of directors, elected yearly by the membership which now stands at nearly 3,600. The board meets regularly to determine policy and direction. In addition, there are five regional coordinators responsible for activities in multi-state areas and state coordinators in most of the fifty states.

Activities and programs of the organization are implemented by seven full-time employees. This includes the executive director, an MIA sister, who is the organization's chief executive officer, responsible for management of the League and implementation of League policies established by the membership and the board of directors.



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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/MIA's 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.