

Office wasn't aware of POW data order

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WASHINGTON — President Clinton ordered nearly all records about Americans missing in Vietnam released by last week, but word apparently never reached Army Intelligence, which wrote a researcher last month that it was not aware of the order.

In his speech at Arlington National Cemetery on Thursday, Mr. Clinton said the government had declassified "all the relevant documents" related to POWs and MIAs from the Vietnam War. "That promise has been fulfilled," Mr. Clinton said.

But one government office that holds Vietnam documents, the Army Intelligence and Security Command, told a researcher last month it had not even heard of Mr. Clinton's order, issued May 31 at Memorial Day ceremonies at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

In an Oct. 8 letter to author Mark Sauter, an official at Army Intelligence's Freedom of Information Office referred to Mr. Sauter's previous conversation with another official, "informing you that this office is not aware of any executive order issued by President Clinton regarding declassification of POW-MIA records."

Mr. Sauter is co-author of two books on missing American POWs.

"Certainly, the bureaucrats have ignored the intent of" Mr. Clinton's order, Mr. Sauter said in an interview. He said he did not believe all relevant documents had been released under the order.

Jane B. Sealock, the director of Army Intelligence's Central Security Facility at Fort Meade, Md., who wrote the letter to Mr. Sauter, and Barbara Blanton, the official who spoke to Mr. Sauter by telephone, were on holiday leave late last week and unavailable for comment.

Spokesmen at Army Intelligence's public affairs office at Fort Belvoir, Va., also were absent according to an

employee answering the telephone there. Beverly Baker, a Defense Department spokeswoman, declined to comment on the matter.

Jo Ann Williamson, chief of the National Archives' military reference branch, said Friday that about 90 percent of the declassified documents received by the archives are now available to the public.

But some researchers and POW activists are skeptical.

"Those files are still locked up," said Ted Sampley, executive director of a Vietnam veterans archives project.

Dolores Apodaca Alford, who heads the POW activist group National Alliance of Families, said she had been told of numerous instances in which family members and researchers were unable to gain access to files.