

"DOG TAG" REPORTS

Over the past decade, one type of report has been received most often by the Department of Defense Prisoners of War/Missing in Action Office; these reports are referred to as "dog tag" reports. Since 1982, over 8,821 have been received, and more arrive daily. In most dog tag reports, a source--often a resident of Vietnam--believes he/she possesses the remains of one or more Americans. As proof, the source offers data copied from military identification tags (dog tags), tracings or photographs of dog tags, or an ID card. In some instances, we have received the actual tags or other identification materials.

More than 8,821 names of American servicemen have been reported, and while 94 percent of these men served with U.S. forces in Southeast Asia, they returned alive following their tours of duty. Four percent of the names are of servicemen killed in Southeast Asia; however, their remains were recovered by U.S. forces and returned. Only 2 percent of the reports relate to missing Americans. Although this suggests that someone has recovered the remains and/or personal effects of these men, it is unlikely that they are in the hands of private citizens as portrayed in the dog tag reports.

Generally, we find that the reports originate with an unnamed person who persuades an acquaintance in Indochina to act as an intermediary to send the information to a relative or friend residing in another country. In this manner, many honest people may have been induced into acting as unwitting transmitters of information that they believe to be true. Now, with the influx of American tourists in Southeast Asia, it is common for this type of data to be passed to visitors.

Often, several different people claim to have the remains and/or personal effects of each of the named men. Frequently, sources profess to have recovered the same items on a different date or at a different location. In the cases of several missing men, more than 20 different people have claimed to have recovered their remains. This indicates that they did not obtain their data by recovering items from battlefields or crash sites. Further, throughout the war the communists enforced a policy to find and bury Americans killed in action and to send to central authorities a report of the burial site along with the personal effects and identification taken from the body. They continually stressed that this was important to the "political struggle." Thus, the Vietnamese government should have knowledge of the missing men whose names have appeared in dog tag reports.

There are tragic aspects to the dog tag reports. Sources are led to believe that possession of American remains will assist in their re-settlement in the U.S., which has prompted some to pay for dog tag data. In fact, the U.S. offers no rewards or assistance for POW/MIA information.

Taking into consideration the known policy and practice of the Vietnamese Government to collect information concerning U.S. war dead coupled with the patterns in the dog tag reporting, we have concluded that the information on which these reports are based may have been extracted from archives maintained by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Even though only four percent of this dog tag reporting pertains to unaccounted for men each report continues to receive close scrutiny and necessary investigation in order to determine its validity.