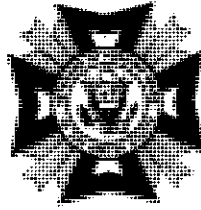


# VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES



THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

October 3, 1995

TO: NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ADMINISTRATION, PAST  
COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF, DEPARTMENT COMMANDERS,  
DEPARTMENT POW/MIA CHAIRMEN

FROM: PAUL A. SPERA, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF  
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE U.S.

I recently wrote the President, in accordance with VFW Resolution No. 435, to express the concerns of our members about the POW/MIA issue. I am providing you with a copy of my letter and the resolution.

# VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES



September 28, 1995

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D. C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As the newly elected Commander-in-Chief of the 2.1 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, I would like to take this opportunity to bring our concerns about the future of the POW/MIA issue to you. With over 700,000 Vietnam combat veterans in our organization, the resolution of the POW/MIA issue has been and will continue to be a major concern to us.

Your still controversial decision to establish relations with Vietnam was debated at our 96th National Convention last month. Afterwards, the delegates resolved that I convey their views to you on this subject.

Since our men were first captured over thirty years ago, the VFW has worked with steadfast determination to bring them home. Our goal over all those years has been to reach the fullest possible accounting of the men still missing.

From time to time, we made strategic changes in direction calculated to help us reach the fullest possible accounting, but we have never wavered from our goal. Such was the reasoning in support of the normalization decision -- if it hastened the accounting then we should support it.

The fullest possible accounting is our goal and now with the decision to normalize, our members expect, as a result, that progress towards our goal will accelerate. We cannot settle, and urge you not to settle, for merely continuing the current level of effort. There should be no status quo. There must be a steady, discernible acceleration of both U.S. and Vietnamese efforts to account for our POW/MIAs and, most importantly, in progress towards the fullest possible accounting.

COPY

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In 1992, you outlined four key areas in which you expected tangible progress. We believe accelerated progress is still required in these same four areas. They are:

- continued efforts to recover and repatriate American remains;
- further assistance in conducting trilateral investigations with Laos;
- continued effort to locate POW/MIA related documents; and
- continued resolution of the discrepancy cases, including investigation of live sightings.

This last area, the discrepancy cases, is of special concern. Two years ago, as a member of your Presidential delegation to Vietnam, I urged the Vietnamese, in the strongest terms, to resolve these cases. Two years later, there is still no resolution of these cases. We expect and there simply must be accelerated progress in these cases.

Our members will be carefully monitoring POW/MIA developments and I will be sending a representative to join your Presidential delegation visiting Vietnam in November, 1995. This will help us assess the levels of government-to-government cooperation and the progress towards our goal.

We are hopeful of the results but I would be less than candid if I did not tell you that our members remain on guard. They remain concerned that the POW/MIA issue might be overtaken by diplomatic or business considerations and relegated to less than the highest national priority and the effort to reach the fullest possible accounting may falter.

If the diplomatic advance does not lead to the expected acceleration of progress or if our efforts should falter, I will demand action to halt and to roll back the normalization decision and to restore our goal of the fullest possible accounting as the highest national priority.

Mr. President, let me close by saying that gaining the fullest possible accounting of our missing comrades from all our wars is an obligation that is keenly felt by America's combat veterans. We hope that with a combined effort we can achieve this goal at the earliest opportunity and bring peace of mind to the families of those still missing. It is, Mr. President, "Our Call to Duty."

Thank you for the opportunity to bring our concerns about this important subject directly to you.

Respectfully,

PAUL E. SPERA  
Commander-in-Chief