

- DRAFT -

HOW TO PURSUE AN INDIVIDUAL CASE

Introduction: Pursuing an individual case will probably take a significant amount of time, energy and money. Be prepared to spend many hours on the telephone, writing letters, reading documents and visiting government officials in their local offices. While your work will inevitably be frustrating and painful at times, if your loved one's case indicates a possibility that his fate might be learned, or if the case has been clearly mishandled by the U.S. Government, your efforts to pursue it individually may be well-rewarded. There is most likely a small window of opportunity - not longer than a few years - during which the U.S. Government will devote manpower or technology toward resolving the fates of our missing relatives. If you think you might later regret not pursuing your individual case, now is the time to work on it. Enclosed are suggestions, contacts and documents that may prove helpful.

Suggestions

1. **Get help if you need it.** If you are unable or unprepared to do the necessary research, enlist the help of a friend or relative. If you can find someone who actually enjoys looking at maps, reading declassified documents and investigating, all the better.
2. **Call your Service Casualty office regularly.** Casualty offices have a toll free number (see attached). If you present your questions clearly and concisely, they may be transmitted without your being required to put them in writing. Do, however, keep track of the questions you ask and answers you receive. Be organized; date the documents and letters you receive and make notes of all related phone conversations.
3. **Learn the facts of the incident and all follow-up actions on the case.** Request a copy of your relative's military records and his declassified service file or Brite Lite file from your Service Casualty office. Also, request a meeting with a casualty officer to review all classified material regarding the case. By familiarizing yourself with the case, you may be able to offer productive insights or recommendations and augment US Government efforts.
4. **Ask Questions. Trust your gut.** If the Joint Task Force - Full Accounting (JTF-FA) has investigated your case, read the follow-up reports carefully and ask questions (see sample questions). If something doesn't seem right to you, it probably isn't. Be courteous but persistent. Follow up with a phone call or letter if you do not receive a response in a reasonable period of time.
5. **Involve your Congressman and Senator.** Contact the military or veterans service representative on their staff, introduce yourself and ask for their help in expediting investigations or in declassifying specific documents. Members of Congress can request a summary of your relative's case from the Defense POW/MIA Office (DPMO), which they can then share with you -- and the turn-around time is much quicker.

6. Learn the roles of key government agencies. Read and learn the Defense POW/MIA Office (DPMO) acronym list. Knowing the responsibilities of each of the involved government agencies can give you invaluable insight and leverage. If you don't even know an agency exists, you can't determine whether it might help you in pursuing your loved one's case.
7. Contact the League office. When you hit a stumbling block, contact the League office or the National Vietnam Veterans Research Center/Bill Bell. While the League cannot get involved with specific cases, our Executive Director may be able to provide insight or direction and might be able to use your case-specific problems to benefit broader POW/MIA policy matters. Remember that your annual dues are key to sustaining the League office, which is working for results on all our cases.
8. Consider visiting the country of incident. This will be difficult and expensive, but may move the case forward. The US has embassies in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. To travel to Southeast Asia, you need a current passport, an entry visa from the country you intend to visit and, depending on individual circumstances, necessary shots. The Vietnamese Office for Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP) will usually accommodate family member visits to relevant crash and reported burial sites; however, you will have to pay accommodations and transportation, at least, for your Vietnamese government escorts. If you plan such a trip, please notify the League office, as the Vietnamese government often attempts to use such visits to their political advantage. Keep your expectations for real results low.

Enclosures:

1. Address/Telephone Lists: Casualty Officers
JTF-FA
DPMO
U.S. Embassies in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia
State Department VLC Desk (Travel Advisories, Country Reports)
Bill Bell
2. Sample Questions for Related U.S. Government Agencies
3. Acronym List (DPMO)
4. Library of Congress On Line Research Packet (Jay Veith)
5. Copy of Lao, Vietnam and Cambodia Visa Forms

Note: In order to gain access to related documents and assistance from various U.S. Government agencies, you must be the legal Primary Next Of Kin (PNOK), or designated in writing to represent the PNOK in this matter. Such letters of authorization should be forwarded to your service's Casualty Office.