

## not forgotten

### Marshall woman still searching for answers about missing husband

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News Messenger

MARSHALL — Twenty six and a half years since Jim Lewis was shot down over northern Laos have not diminished his wife Barbara's hopes and dreams of some day finding the answers to his disappearance.

Lewis, 35 at the time, was piloting a B-57 bomber when he went down on April 7, 1965, during the height of the U.S. escalation of the Viet Nam war.

In 1973, Mrs. Lewis, now a Marshall resident, traveled by plane, jeep and helicopter to remote villages in northern Laos to try to find her husband.

She even had the opportunity to speak with an official of the Laotian government, but after the two-week trip she came back with more questions than answers.

"I'd like to go back again," said Lewis.

Friday was National POW-MIA Recognition Day, and the Pentagon announced that it would be assigning 250 more personnel toward resolving the POW-MIA issue.

Lewis welcomed the announcement, saying that

progress has recently been made in negotiations with the governments of Southeast Asia.

A board member of the National League of Families, Lewis said one of the most promising recent developments has been the establishment of a POW-MIA office in Hanoi.

A comforting thought to Lewis is the fact that the office is headed by former Marshall resident Bill Bell, she said.

"If I'd trust anybody, I'd trust Bill," said Lewis.

Another promising development, according to Lewis, is that the government of Vietnam has opened up the country and its war records to inspection by American teams.

"They can go anywhere in the country they want now," she said.

Despite the new willingness of the governments of southeast Asia to cooperate in resolving the POW-MIA issue, Lewis said she's only seen one report that had anything to do with her husband.

The item was in the form of a news brief from a Memphis newspaper of a report originating in Tokyo that said an American plane was shot down on April 7, 1965.

Lewis, who said her husband's plane was the only one shot down



James W. Lewis  
...missing in action



**WE REMEMBER** — Barbara Lewis of Marshall looks over photos of her husband, Air Force 1st Lt. James W. Lewis, shot down over northern Laos on April 7, 1965. See related story and photo on page 5A. (Photo/Miga)

over Laos that day, said the report indicated that someone knew the plane was down and could give that information.

Though government to government negotiations have recently held promise, Lewis said she didn't know what to think of the new POW photos that have come to light this year.

"If it's a hoax, it's the cruelest hoax anyone could possibly perpetrate," she said.

So far, she said the most promising of the photos seemed to be the one taken of a man supposed to be Army Capt. Don-

ald G. Carr. The photo was published in Friday's issue of the *News Messenger*.

Despite the question of the photos' reliability, Lewis said their dissemination has at least caused the POW-MIA issue to "wake people up."

Lewis is involved in ongoing efforts to keep bring the POW-MIA issue to the forefront of America's consciousness. On Friday, she gave a number of presentations to students at Sam Houston Middle School.

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Very few students were aware of American servicemen missing in action, but she said most adults are likewise ill-informed on the issue.

"I'm always amazed how little people know — it seems like I have to go through a re-education program with people every time I talk to them about this (issue)," she said.

But public awareness, she said, is the key to the resolution of Americans missing in action.

"We need to pressure the U.S. government to do everything they can to pressure the governments of Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos," she said.

According to Lewis, the government of Vietnam has always been attuned to public opinion in

the U.S. and has made concessions only when public interest in the POW-MIA issue has been high.

In the meantime, Lewis will continue to travel to Washington for regular board meetings of the National League of Families, and hope and pray that she and other families may finally discover word about their loved ones.