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ASIAN AFFAIRS

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FAX TRANSMITTAL SHEET

**THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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REMARKS:

I want to put your thoughts on this issue into your own words, so please focus on giving you facts. Should you desire more, please give me a call.

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FOR ADM. ZUMWALT

FROM KENT WIEDEMANN, NSC

Subject: Vietnam Policy: Progress in Achieving POW/MIA Accounting

Following our conversation of this morning, I have prepared the following information and comment for you. I hope you find it useful. Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me at 202-395-5746, or Nancy Soderberg at 202-456-2224.

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Background: More than 2200 remain unaccounted for in SE Asia, 1600 of whom in Vietnam. Over half of this number is classified as KIA, body not recovered -- based on eye witness accounts of their death at the time of incident. Most others believed dead. 196 cases of servicemen known to be alive after loss incident (discrepancy cases) have been the priority object of investigations for the past several years and constitute the universe of known cases where there is a possibility the servicemen could still be alive.

President Clinton's commitment to achieving the fullest possible accounting for our prisoners of war and missing in action in Vietnam -- and in other wars -- has shown the strong personal attention and dedication to results that marked his campaign statements. This is a matter of honor -- for those who sacrificed fighting for their country and for those family members bereft of a husband, son or brother. With respect to Vietnam, POW/MIA accounting has been the priority objective. He made clear last spring and summer that only tangible results on this important issue would determine whether the U.S. would agree to improve relations with Vietnam. He followed up his words with action: he mobilized an intensive diplomatic effort to persuade the Vietnamese to produce results in accounting for POW/MIA's; he devoted the most resources of any President to the task: more than 500 skilled and devoted men and women, military and civilian, with a combined budget of over \$100 million, to pursue the nation's objective.

In July, the President announced four main areas in which he sought further tangible progress by the Vietnamese in POW/MIA accounting:

- Remains: Concrete results from efforts by Vietnam to recover and repatriate American remains
- Discrepancy Cases: (Last-known-alive cases) Continued resolution of discrepancy cases, and continued investigations including unfettered field activities related to any and all live sighting reports.
- Cooperation with Laos: Further assistance in implementing trilateral field investigations with the Lao, in the Vietnamese-Lao border area where a particularly large number of missing are unaccounted for POW/MIA-

related documents that will contribute to the fullest possible accounting.

Archives: Accelerated efforts to provide all POW/MIA-related documents that will help lead to genuine accounting.

Results achieved in these areas, and overall accomplishments in POW/MIA accounting during the Clinton Administration as well as since establishment of the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting in a year earlier:

1. Remains:

- In the six months since the July announcement of the President, we brought home the remains of 39 American servicemen, more than were repatriated in all of 1992. In all of 1993 we brought home the remains of 67 servicemen. This was the third highest number repatriated in any one year since the end of the War. In the last two years, 99 remains were repatriated with Vietnam's help. (we have forensic medical specialists and anthropologists in the field to ensure that the remains are not Vietnamese or animal remains; the remains are also associated with crash sites and other battle incidents which helps verify they are American; ultimately, however, positive identification (correlation with a name) comes as a result of painstaking lab work by U.S. specialists -- using DNA analysis in many cases).

2. Discrepancy Cases:

- Since July, 1993, we have confirmed the deaths of 19 individuals on the discrepancy list; in all of 1993, the Administration confirmed the deaths of 62 such cases, reducing the list of remaining discrepancy cases to 73.
- Hundreds of reported sightings of live American prisoners have been investigated on the ground in Vietnam since 1991, continuing through today -- including in prisons. None have produced evidence that an American POW is today held captive in Vietnam. We have and will continue to pursue any report of a live prisoner, with all resources at our disposal.

3. Assistance in Arranging Trilateral Border Cooperation with the Lao

- In August, the Vietnamese and Lao agreed to our requests to conduct trilateral investigations with us along their common border, including along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The first such operation took place in December and located remains as well as crash sites to be excavated in coming months. Trilateral investigations will continue until complete

4. Accelerated Efforts to Provide Documents Related to POW/MIA'S:

- Since July, 1993, we received for the first time records from Vietnam's wartime anti-aircraft units along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, related to hundreds of U.S. airmen who were shot down and are listed as POW/MIA. This information should help us locate aircraft crash sites in Vietnam and Laos, leading to the recovery of remains.
- Since July, we also received for the first time documents from a wartime military-political unit that should also help in locating aircraft crash sites. We have also received documents which should help us locate remains of American servicemen who were buried by North Vietnamese forces during the War.
- Since July, we received for the first time written reports from Hanoi on unilateral investigations they conducted to attempt to locate American remains. This will assist in our efforts to recover those remains.
- We have received 24,000 POW/MIA-related documents and artifacts which have been correlated to more than 600 unresolved cases. This is more POW/MIA documentation from Vietnam than previously received during the entire post War period.

The President's commitment has borne significant, measurable, tangible results. Vietnam has shown a strong new commitment to help us achieve results on accounting for POW/MIA's. A program has been put solidly in place, including more than a hundred American servicemen in the field every two months for a month at time, which will in time produce the fullest possible accounting.

This is a difficult effort. Our people engaged in this work must endure hardships in the jungle -- including encounters with unexploded bombs, mines and other munitions from the War, landslides, floods, insect and snake bites; they do it without complaint. They and this President will stay the course in pursuit of the fullest possible accounting. But fullest possible accounting will not be achieved overnight; indeed it will likely take years. Just as today we are still recovering remains from World War II battlefields, decades from now we may still be recovering remains in the jungles and mountains of Southeast Asia.

Vietnam's continued assistance in our efforts is of course essential. They give us free access, without prior notification, to virtually anyplace in Vietnam, except for military installations and some sensitive border areas -- and permission to go to those places can usually be had in a day. We freely interview former Vietnamese soldiers and officers who may have information about the fates of Americans. We dig through military archives all around the country. Vietnam has assigned counterparts to work alongside, to help us find the witnesses to events of a quarter of a century ago. They broadcast appeals over the radio for citizens to provide any information they might have on the fates of Americans.

It is right that Vietnam's assistance be recognized; it has pledged to assist us as a humanitarian matter. But to encourage

sustained efforts and assistance by Vietnam, it is also right that the U.S. take a step forward to improve relations with Vietnam. Twenty years have passed since U.S. forces were withdrawn from Vietnam. Both countries lost much and saw a generation of its youth deeply affected by the Vietnam War. Now that President Clinton has built a program, with Vietnam's vigorous help, that works to bring about the fullest possible accounting of our POW/MIA's, it is time to begin to seek to heal our relations with the Vietnamese people, just as we heal our own nation's wounds through fullest possible accounting. It is time to lift our trade embargo against the Vietnamese and normalize relations. With more Americans traveling the width and breadth of Vietnam and with a permanent diplomatic presence there we can pursue our POW/MIA accounting efforts even more effectively than now.