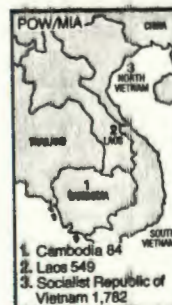




PRISONERS OF WAR AND MISSING IN ACTION **33**



By the end of March 1973, Operation 'Homecoming' was over and 591 American prisoners-of-war had returned home from North Vietnam. Only nine came home from Laos, and these few had been captured by the North Vietnamese in Laos and passed on to Hanoi.

With America finally out of the war and President Nixon claiming that all POWs had been brought home, little thought was given to the almost 2,500 men still missing in action. The only people who still cared were the families and friends of the MIAs, and as the Nixon administration began to sink into the mire of Watergate little attention was paid to their plight. The intelligence community, namely the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency, kept quiet. This was despite the fact that the NSA, who had monitored enemy radio traffic throughout the war, was aware that almost 300 men on its list of 'captured alive' pilots had not been repatriated. General Eugene W. Tamm, the former head of the DIA, put the number of those who expected to return, but did not, to be around 400-500.

At the time of writing 2,413 men are still missing. The majority belong to the Air Force (899), followed by the Army (702), Navy (480), Marines (269), civilians (42) and Coast Guard (1). Over half are believed to have been 'killed in action - remains not recovered'; the others are listed as 'prisoners of war/missing in action.'

As the last Operation Homecoming POW stepped on to American soil back in 1973, he was unaware that none of his comrades captured in Laos or Cambodia had been released. To date, 549 are still missing in Laos and 82 in Cambodia. The figure for Laos may be slightly higher, in view of the doubts expressed recently over the return of thirteen remains from one crash site. The majority of those missing are aviators, and most were lost over territory controlled by the North Vietnamese, in particular in the vicinity of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. From the remaining 1,782 men missing in North and South Vietnam, the majority of the Army and Marines MIA were lost in the South and those from the Navy and Air Force in the North.

Left: Operation 'Homecoming' - Captain Anshus, US Army, (right) with escort in March 1973 at Hanoi's Gia Lam Airport. (US Army)