

Joint Special Operations Association/Special Forces Association POW/MIA Committee

July 10, 17~~July 6, 2017~~

Subject: After Action Report, 48th Annual Meeting, National League of POW/MIA Families

1. The 48th Annual Meeting of the National League of POW/MIA Families (the League) was held in Crystal City, Virginia, June 21-24, 2017. The SOA/SFA POW/MIA Committee was represented by Michael Taylor and Wade Ishimoto.
2. General impressions:
 - a. The League continues to be the preeminent interest group in the POW/MIA accounting arena. Their annual meeting is the most important accounting-related gathering of the year, as they bring together all the players, especially from the US Government (USG), offering an unmatched opportunity to learn, update one's understanding of the issues and network with important actors in the field.
 - b. The League fought hard to get speakers from the USG above the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA)-level. On the first day, neither the White House nor the State Department provided invited speakers. Ann Mills Griffiths, MIA Sister and Chairman of the League Board, attributed this lack of responsiveness, though frustrating, to the lack of confirmed DoD officials in positions of responsibility, plus all new, uninformed people at the NSC and on the WH staff. The Department of Defense (DOD) did provide the Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Paul Selva, USAF, for the banquet speaker, but no one from DOD above DPAA participated in substantive discussions.
 - c. Ann mentioned SOA/SFA activities several times throughout the meeting. Mike and Wade were seated and introduced as special guests. This is an outstanding relationship, paying dividends to both organizations.
 - d. A personal highlight was meeting with several SF and SOG MIA family members, especially the brother and sister of Fred Gassman, a CCN Recon MIA with whom I served. I was not able to add loss-specific information to what they already knew, but they were interested in hearing about what life was like in CCN at the time, what it was like to run recon in Laos, what Fred's team leader (SSG Donald "Babysan" Davidson) was like and other scene-setting information that provided a backdrop for the case specifics they already knew. Wade and Jack, Matt and Steve of DPAA sat in on the discussion and I think all of us benefitted from the exchange. I know I did.
3. On Day 1, Mr. Richard Childress, Senior League Policy Advisor and Director of Asian Affairs of the National Security Council from 1981-1989, delivered his usual first-rate opening remarks, this year entitled "Competence, Comprehension and Caring". (Text attached as Enclosure 1.) He took great pains to point out to DPAA that his constructive criticism flows from friendship, not enmity. "Your friends will offer constructive criticism, your enemies will never help you." His main points included:
 - a. "Competence" - none of DPAA's leadership is experienced or trained in POW/MIA affairs. There is a requirement for education and experience for DPAA leadership.

- b. “Comprehension” exists among the long-term civilian staff, but not among the rotating military leadership. On occasion, those with comprehension have been forced out, while the military continue to transfer from assignment to assignment.
- c. “Caring” is lacking as we see a “reverse body count”, “dollar cost per investigation” and “rate of return” mentality prevailing.
- d. DPAA is currently in need of a strong leader with comprehension of the mission.

Ann Mills Griffiths added that the abolition of the POW/MIA Interagency Working Group, largely due to the efforts of Senator John Kerry, was particularly unfortunate. If the President and his chosen leaders say, “This will happen”, then things get done, otherwise not. Support at senior levels matters, otherwise everything is empty rhetoric. The USG needs a cohesive POW/MIA policy from the top.

4. Speakers from DPAA at the senior policy level included Acting Director Fern Sumpter Winbush; Director of Plans and Policy John Hamilton; Director of Outreach and Communications Todd Livick; Director of Strategic Partnerships Initiative Dr. Tom Holland and Deputy Director of Outreach and Communications Johnie Webb - none of whom added anything much to what we have known and discussed among ourselves over the last year. Both Livick and Webb mentioned SOA and SFA, highlighting our interest, support and activities. The only really noteworthy points were:

- a. Todd Livick’s “Public Diplomacy” presentation:
 - 1. The one audience that DPAA continues to do well with is their work with the families. That is because most of those who meet with the families LISTEN.
 - 2. Much of the DPAA Public Diplomacy effort is ONE WAY ... they tout what they do (which is okay to a point, but not exclusively). Accordingly, they are missing the need to communicate better with:
 - a. Host Nations
 - b. Congress
 - c. Providers of information, i.e., eyewitnesses, whether indigenous or others, including knowledgeable people outside the USG bureaucracy..
- b. Dr. Holland’s “Strategic Partnerships” presentation:
 - 1. The overall mission of the effort is still unclear.
 - 2. The priorities are not clearly defined.
 - 3. There appear to be “new starts” that are being funded that could well have taken funds away from Southeast Asia (SEA) investigative and/or recovery efforts, such as cutting an LZ required for further investigation of case 1706, the site investigation Cliff Newman is standing by to accompany.

5. Dr. Joyce White, Archaeologist and Director of the Middle Mekong Archaeological Project and the Ban Chiang Project, discussed “Working with the Lao on Sensitive Projects” based on her years of experience in Laos since 1982.

6. There were several presentations, by both Russian and US representatives, regarding progress being made recently by the US-Russian Joint Commission (USRJC) on POW/MIA Affairs.

7. “The Defense Intelligence Agency’s Role in the Accounting Mission” was discussed by Mr. Frank Miller, Chief, Asia-Pacific Regional Center, DIA. Miller is a former Special Forces officer who served in the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne). Successes: Seven highly-qualified regional specialists are assigned to Stony Beach (see below). There have been at least 201 Stony Beach HUMINT reports so far this year, twice the number produced last year. Disappointments: No approval yet for a permanent change of station (PCS) Stony Beach billet in Vietnam (VN) - temporary duty (TDY) presence only. Lack of timely redaction and release of Stony Beach reports. Freedom of Information Act requests are not responded to in a timely manner - too slow. DIA would like to get information to DPAA and the families faster. “DIA pledges strong and unwavering support to sustaining the Stony Beach program.” (The text of Miller’s remarks is at enclosure 2.)

8. In 1986, DIA established the group named Stony Beach, a DIA element that provides both PCS and TDY presence in SEA, as well as personnel at DPAA in Hawaii and at DIA Headquarters in Washington, DC. **Stony Beach is the ONLY USG entity solely and entirely tasked with investigating, interviewing sources and otherwise following up VN War MIA cases.** Stony Beach personnel are well-trained “strategic debriefers”, linguists all, who search out eye-witnesses, attend Vietnamese veterans’ reunions, research archives and museum exhibits, etc. They are one of the most important weapons in our arsenal for searching for clues. Each and every one of the gentlemen currently serving with Stony Beach was recognized at this meeting with the League Award for their excellent service. Stony Beach specialists updated meeting attendees on the current situation in Cambodia, Laos, VN and Thailand and their work in Hawaii and Washington. I will not duplicate their presentations here, as we will have two Stony Beach representatives, including Stony Beach Program Chief Brad Taylor, at SOAR 41 to provide us this information first hand.

9. A very impressive presentation was presented by Dr. Stephen Maxner, Director of the Texas Tech University Vietnam Center and Archive. Anyone interested in researching the VN War should certainly take advantage of this amazing archive at <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu>.

10. The League Archival Research Committee, headed by Jay Veith, described their four-man, one-year research into one MIA case. Extremely impressive and interesting, but, too labor-intensive and time-consuming to make much of a dent in the 1607 cases still outstanding. This impressive committee was also presented the League Award for their contributions. However, at the rate of four man-years per case to come up with some “possible conclusions”, this committee won’t be much contribution to resolving the 1607 cases now outstanding.

11. BG Mark Spindler, Deputy Director, DPAA, Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, spoke on “Establishing Global Priorities and Initiatives”. BG Spindler directs DPAA’s global operations and plans to retire at the end of the year. He will depart DPAA about September 2017. He confirmed, once again, our fears about the “numbers game” being played to convince Congress that DPAA has developed the capability to achieve 200 identifications per year. His main points:

- a. “Disinterments are cheap and produce lots of numbers. This allows us to apply budget and work elsewhere.”

- b. Many budget cuts last year had serious impacts on our operations. 28% of investigation teams and 37% of recovery teams had to be cancelled or “descoped” (scaled back). Budget cuts had almost no impact on disinterments.
- c. Disinterment identification percentages: WWII = 67%, Korea = 21%, VN = 13%
- d. Another reason operations were slowed was a delay waiting for the new medical examiner in charge of authorizing IDs established by the labs. “We wanted to get the right guy.”
- e. “Our huge goal is a higher number of identifications than last year.”
- f. For FY18, 67% of our operational budget is oriented toward the VN War, about \$37M.
- g. If diplomatic relations with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) ever allow DPAA operations, teams and resources will be diverted there ASAP. He quickly added, “Hopefully, not from SEA.” (My question - if most teams are prioritized to go to SEA, where else would they be diverted from?)
- h. He showed a pie chart entitled “Investment versus Return” (a detestable new term, along with “rate of return”, being openly and frequently tossed about by DPAA leadership). But, he said, “Yet, VN remains our main effort.”
- i. DPAA assumes a \$131M budget next year.
- j. Mission prioritization for FY18 and 19 will remain VN. Priorities, in order of importance, are recoveries, disinterments, lab operations.
- k. The Master Excavation List (MEL) process - i.e., deciding who gets dug when - has changed. It used to be a Board of senior, experienced officials who heard analysts’ recommendations and ranked excavation priorities. It is now lab personnel making recommendations, Col Mike Gann, USMC, (Director, Asia-Pacific Directorate, DPAA) and BG Spindler making the decisions, then BG Spindler resourcing those cases he can afford to accomplish within the existing budget.
- l. A huge improvement was the authorization by the Lao Government to establish base camps near excavation/recovery sites, rather than teams having to commute daily, often by very expensive helicopters. The Lao also agreed to increase allowable team strength from 53 to 65.
- m. He tried to explain away the “numbers game” of disinterments as a temporary phenomenon which would allow a return to field recoveries after they have proved a point to Congress. “We want to prove we can do the 200 annually that Congress specified over the next 2-3 years, then return to letting our accounting priorities drive operations, not a random number.”
- n. “We need more Strategic Partners to share ‘access costs’ to do things ‘on the cheap’ for the USG.”
- o. “We will succeed because of our young field teams.”

12. COL Mike Gann (USMC), Director, Asia-Pacific Directorate, DPAA, briefed on “Mission Requirements and Planning Priorities”.

- a. 75% of all US personnel missing and unaccounted for from prior conflicts are in the Asia-Pacific area of operations.
- b. For FY17, he planned on getting \$50M, actually got \$25M. Forty Joint Field Activities (JFAs) were planned, 27 actually deployed. Planned to deploy 91 teams, 53 went. For the VN War, they planned nine JFAs and all nine deployed, but only 49 of 53 planned teams. 77% of all Asia-Pacific teams were connected to the VN War.

- c. POTUS trip to SEA contributed to approval for teams to base camp near sites and the allowable team strength being increased from 53 to 65.
- d. A number of knowledgeable veterans have deployed with JFAs this year. (SOA member Jim Shorten will brief at SOAR about his experiences with a team in Cambodia. His participation was HIGHLY praised by numerous officials at this meeting.)
- e. We closed seven sites this year.
- f. We increased collaboration with Stony Beach and also enhanced the capabilities of the Vietnamese Office for Seeking Missing Persons.
- g. Renewed underwater recovery operations in VN, will do eight this year.
- h. Challenges: budgetary restraints; hiring freeze (since lifted); lost the use of AS350 helicopters (not safety certified) in Laos and must use expensive, less-capable Mi-17s; unexploded ordnance concerns (stopped operations at three sites this year).
- i. FY18 Plan = \$36.5M, 30 JFAs with 75 teams. VN War share = \$27.85M (he says 78% of total, my math says 76.3%), 9 JFAs with 46 teams (61% of all Assia-Pacific teams).

13. COL (Dr) Louis Finelli, Armed Forces Medical Examiner, discussed “The Medical Examiner’s Role in the ID Process”.

14. MSG Robert Bryson, Joint Mortuary Affairs Center, discussed possible contributions MOS 92M personnel can make to accounting operations. Their mission in combat is to recover, make a tentative ID and return fallen personnel.

15. Dr Tim McMahon, Director, DOD DNA Registry and Armed Forces DNA Laboratory discussed “Technical Advances in DNA Identifications”. They have about 700 samples in process at any given time, each takes 55 to 85 days to process. They reported 3142 cases to DPAA in FY16. They have new techniques for processing damaged samples, such as those being disinterred after having been embalmed with formaldehyde, etc. The lab has added 39 new scientists to their staff.

16. Dr. Debra Zinni, Laboratory Manager, DPAA, discussed “Operational Integration of DPAA Laboratories”. She is a Field Anthropologist serving as a lab manager in Hawaii.

- a. Problems: soil acidity, termite damage, burnt remains, scavenging activity, difficult sites (terrain)
- b. Time from accession of remains to ID in SEA cases is usually within one year, but some cases have taken up to 10+ years.
- c. In FY16, many more missions than accessions. Mostly non-biological material recovered lately (life-support equipment, etc.).
- d. FY16 = 11 VN IDs
- e. Mission to ID ratio is very low, not many remains recovered.
- f. FY17 = 45 accessions, 12 were material evidence only, 24 possible US remains, 11 IDs
- g. Most of FY17 accessions have been through unilateral turnovers from residents of host countries.

17. Mr Chris McDermott, Chief Data Office, DPAA, discussed “Data Analysis and Transparency”. He discussed the “public portal” DPAA is trying to develop to put as much as they can

from each case folder on the internet. It seems to be a long way from happening. One interesting factoid in his speech was that there have been 1,329 excavations in VN from 1986-2016.

18. On the last morning, we heard the most interesting presentation, of significant interest to SOA/SFA members, of the entire meeting. Mr Ron Ward, Casualty Resolution Specialist, DPAA Detachment 2, Hanoi, VN, presented "Inside Accounting Operations in VN". His talk was so informative, I have attached the entire text as Enclosure 3. I have highlighted significant points from our perspective in bold. They include:

- a. Recovery and identification of Don "Butch" Carr (CCS, MACV-SOG OP35 and NKP) and Danny Thomas (NKP Prairie Fire FAC).
- b. Discussion of long-rumored "anti-SOG" units.
- c. Three good leads for SOG MIAs, names withheld to protect families from premature raised expectations.
- d. Participation of SOA/SFA members on DPAA field operations.

19. We also heard an interesting presentation and "went" on a photographic virtual field mission led by CPT Thomas Walker, USAF, Team Leader, Expeditionary Support Directorate, DPAA.

- a. Normal team composition (usually 12-15 US personnel):
 1. Team leader
 2. Scientific Recovery Expert (boss of the dig)
 3. Life support equipment investigator
 4. Medic
 5. Linguists (usually 2)
 6. Communications
 7. Photographer
 8. Recovery NCOs (volunteer diggers - our members fit this category)
 9. Up to 100 local hire indigenous workers

20. Question and Answer Session

- a. Q - What is the issue with affordable, mission-capable, safety-certified helicopter support in Laos? A - The smaller AS-350s (better for getting into small landing zones at higher elevations) available in Laos have not been certified for safe operation, which is required before we can transport USG personnel on them. There is a short-term fix proposed to the Lao government that we hope might be in place before the next JFA. (This would use certified AS-350s that belong to a private firm, cutting off part of the Lao governments' "take". This would be huge change to contract with a non-government helicopter contractor and would break someone's rice bowl. I doubt this will fly.) The long-term fix of certifying Lao Airways (government) birds will take between a year and two years to accomplish because documented maintenance records must be accumulated over that period. The Mi-17s are too big for small LZs and too expensive. DPAA is helped out greatly by recent Lao Government approval of base camps near work sites.
- b. Q - Barbara Bircham, MACV-SOG MIA Wife, asked: When will we begin investigating reports/rumors of Cuban interrogators in VN War now that we have increased relations

with Cuba? A - Fern Sumpter Winbush discussed the fact that any such investigations/inquiries would be handled by Defense Attache Office personnel, not DPAA. Ann Mills Griffiths said the League could develop a list of questions they would like to have asked and answered. Barbara Bircham stated that 19 returned US POWs said they were interrogated and tortured by Cubans while in captivity.

- c. A discussion ensued regarding Last Known Alive (LKA) cases. Jack Kull, DPAA Regional Policy Chief/SEA, stated that there is no viable evidence of any living person still being held, but, we (DPAA) still focus on those listed as LKAs. BG Spindler stated that if evidence of a live POW surfaces, control of that case immediately passes to the unified command (in our case, USPACOM). Background: From 1987-1991, there were 296 Americans on the LKA list (19 in Cambodia, 81 in Laos). CJCS Vessey had analysts study these cases looking for clear and convincing evidence that individuals had died. This process reduced the LKA list to 36 incidents involving 44 individuals. Ann Mills Griffiths asked if any remains were recovered from the individuals removed from the list. Jack Kull: remains were recovered for 78 of the 260 removed from the LKA list.

21. Mike Taylor's personal observations and conclusions.

- a. There are between 600 and 700 land cases in VN. DPAA needs many more capable VN War analysts. There are FAR too many cases per analyst at present.
- b. I queried Dr Holland about the potential for Strategic Partners (meaning us) to provide funding to support DPAA field activities. (I had in mind the cutting of an LZ that failed to materialize for case 1706.) He said, "There is potential. Send me an email." I will.
- c. We must be very vigilant to resist apparent movement toward a "sunset" for accounting

operations in SEA. The current “rate of return”/“return on investment” mindset seems to be



moving inexorably in that totally unsatisfactory direction.

L to R: Jack Kull, Steve Thompson and Matt Kristoff (DPAA), Wade Ishimoto (SOA/SFA), Linda and Don Gassman (MIA Brother), Ken and Penelope Glassman Gray (MIA Sister) and Mike Taylor (SOA/SFA). We learned Ken was an OV-10 Forward Air Controller out of Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, while I was running SOG operations out of the CCN launch site at NKP. Small world! Wade and I also talked with family members of SF MIAs Roger Hallberg and Stephen Geist. All the families were invited to attend this or future SOARs. All seemed interested.

Enclosure 1

Competence, Comprehension, and Caring
Remarks of Richard T. Childress
Senior Policy Advisor & Director of Asian Affairs, National Security Council, 1981-89
48th Annual Meeting
National League of POW/MIA Families June 22, 2017

“Past is Prologue” was the original assignment I was given by Ann to address. In searching my archives, I found patterns with which we are all familiar, such as between Administrations – Post War. There were the familiar write-offs, then priority, bureaucratic reorganizations that failed, but maintained over time to attain further failure. But I noted a theme throughout that caused me to change the subject to “Competence, Comprehension, and Caring,” all overarching factors in the history of the POW/MIA issue that are inextricably linked.

Within this issue, as William Faulkner observed, “The past is never dead, it’s not even past”, and government officials who hear or read this should know the difference between a critic and an enemy. Critics will tell you perceived failings, but enemies will never tell you what they believe you are doing wrong.

First, competence. Yes, there are instances of incompetence, but they are much rarer than some believe. We should praise our competent specialists – scientists at AFDIL; highly trained Stony Beach Team members; casualty officers from each of the Services; and within DPAA, a wealth of diverse talent, including anthropologists and archaeologists, archivists and historians, research and analysis personnel, casualty resolution specialists at the detachment level, explosive ordnance and medical personnel, life support equipment analysts, negotiators pursuing public-private partnerships, computer technicians, soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen at excavation sites, logisticians, procurement personnel, and more. This multi-disciplined collection of specialists demonstrates the current complexity of the mission, and they all have one thing in common: they have been trained in their respective specialties.

Those in leadership positions possess an acceptable level of competence compiled from previous assignments, military or civilian. None, however, have been educated on the overall POW-MIA issue – their knowledge has come from on-the-job training. At the same time, we should also recognize there are some military leaders who have been genuine heroes in this effort, learned this mission in record time, and pursued it with diligence and passion. Further, many of the civilian leaders have honed their long-term experience because of valuable knowledge.

What distinguishes these personnel and their requirement to succeed is to recognize that to be most effective in their new role, they need education or experience that provides an overall foundation in the issue. This is the only solid basis on which to make policy decisions and transmit an informed view to the team of specialists under them.

This shortfall needs attention. We drop our specialists into this complex pool with no training in the overall issue history and current dynamics, but expect a smooth running operation with a

common orientation and understanding. Something as elementary as reading the reports of past League Annual Meetings would provide good context.

Which introduces comprehension. To comprehend the complexities of this issue requires detailed knowledge of the history of the issue – previous negotiations, agreements reached, and motivations of host countries; views of the families, vets groups, and other concerned citizens; and what worked in the past, what didn't, but might now. The result is that too frequently, those working the issue for years possess much greater issue-related comprehension than the ever-changing leadership.

During the period of my responsibilities on the National Security Council Staff, the policy makers came with a comprehensive view of what needed to be done, the key players, the past write-offs and, for the most part, they were Vietnam Veterans – with senior policy-level backing. Unfortunately, over the years, as the number of personnel grew, changes in national policy occurred, as did Congressional and public pressure. Decisions were made that minimized the bureaucratic need for comprehension that was replaced with internal bickering between operations and policy, and a succession of temporary leadership personnel reacting without a coherent understanding of the mission.

They began to focus on statistics, business models along with innumerable charts, measurements and goals that further reduced personal understanding of the overall issue.

As a result, defensiveness grew and legitimate critics were shunned, instead of consulted. Further, this approach was contrary to what the most successful businessman in this country, Jeff Bezos of Amazon, espoused. He said the emphasis should not be on models, but the customer, the customer, the customer. And who is the POW/MIA customer? The families of our missing. Lack of comprehension leads one down Yogi Berra's famous road where he said "When you run into a fork in the road, take it."

One outcome was an unfortunate number of resignations and early retirement of seasoned, long-term employees who actually comprehended the issue – and some were even forced out. As the new statistical models became established with fewer to challenge the flawed assumptions, comprehension of the overall issue, to include differences in the wars, receded further until it has become the boiling frog problem--his life is in danger, but he's unaware of what's happening. Over the years, many seasoned employees felt they could not find common sense without a search warrant.

Ironically, besides the veteran POW/MIA personnel at DoD, much of the overall comprehension of the issue was maintained by State Department personnel. They were not only attuned to the cultural and political environment of the countries concerned, they knew that the history preceding them was critical to developing and implementing policy. This led them to stay in touch with their predecessors, including embassy staffers, Ambassadors, and desk officers who rose through the ranks over the years and had been exposed to the issue early in their careers. Over time, they passed on their knowledge and stayed in contact with the League.

Unfortunately, military officers connected to the issue go from assignment to assignment, and their replacements lack the historic base of the issue. DoD civilians, like State officials, retain comprehension, but all are subject to both negative and positive broader policy approaches. Consider comprehension from veteran casualty resolution specialists at the detachment level. They have visibility on all aspects of accounting, from cultural sensitivity to maintaining close relations with foreign counterparts. They participate in policy level negotiations and technical meetings, investigations, forensic reviews, excavations and are a frequent contact point in archival pursuits – yet these valuable resources are seldom consulted on broader DPAA policy matters. Too often, they are reduced to making last minute pleas before talks are conducted or a policy is adopted; yet, historically some of the best ideas have come from them.

Complicating comprehension further has been the budget battles. The basic dysfunction of continuing resolutions, budget cuts, sequestration, personnel cutbacks and hiring freezes have been significant obstacles. My sympathy was high for our management personnel to overcome these challenges, in many cases with inadequate policy backing at the top.

These are major obstacles to success, whether comprehension of the issue exists or not. Unfortunately, in the face of these challenges, when resources are restored, the cancelled operations are simply reinstated, not doubled to compensate, which reduces progress considerably, but are publicly praised as an example of priority.

A review of the history of this issue relegates the origins of comprehension degradation to the early 1990's. Most critical was the abolishment of the POW/MIA Interagency Group that regularly kept the issue on policy-makers' radar screens, and the 1992 formation of DPMO. The latter removed responsibility from DoD policy to a field operating agency, thus providing the excuses with flawed statistics that allowed President Clinton to declare Vietnam was cooperating in full faith and for policy-makers to say, "It's not my job, call DPMO."

Over time, the movement of DIA's analytical branch under DPMO destroyed an independent analytic element separate from political pressures, and unseemly battles between DPMO policy personnel and operational elements ensued. This battle raged for years and even included DPMO attempting to take over all operational matters.

At least one JTF-FA commander ignored DPMO and existing national policy, stating he would roll through Vietnam, solve the issue in a few years, and advocated lifting the trade embargo – contrary to the President's public statements at the same time that he was awaiting greater POW/MIA accounting cooperation.

The battle for bureaucratic power submerged any real look at the issue from a comprehensive standpoint, as much energy was diverted to power plays. This, of course, caught the attention of policy-makers who couldn't understand why their best laid plans were going awry.

Thus, more million dollar studies from think tanks, GAO investigations, hearings, and the Senate Select Committee. Then the legislation expanding the mission to all wars and a directive to develop the capability and capacity to identify at least 200 remains per year, from all wars back to WWII. And, finally, another reorganization that formed DPAA.

This latest reorganization has structural strengths, but the lack of overall mission comprehension and the reemergence of bureaucratic conflict between operations and policy could doom it like previous efforts. The history of this issue is replete with unintended consequences which reminds me of John Jacob Astor's comment on the Titanic: "I sent for ice, but this is ridiculous." A strong leader with comprehensive knowledge of the issue is sorely needed and, even then, I don't envy the challenges he or she will face.

The appointment of the DPAA Director who suddenly left last year was a severe blow to those who hoped for continuity and an increase in comprehension over a lengthy promised tour. He had followed, at my count, at least 12 previous directors with an average of less than two years' service in the position and only two with prior POW/MIA experience. To top this off, the first candidate selected – who later withdrew – to succeed LTG Linnington after his departure had no known experience in the issue.

This mission cannot afford another on-the-job training director who will be assaulted by those with a stake in the current approach. He or she should be someone with comprehension and experience on the issue and be well-teamed with some of the new DPAA leaders who have shown a willingness to reach out, learn and aren't hyper-sensitive to critiques.

I join the League, **the Special Forces Association, Special Operations Association, VVA** and many others in strongly recommending a candidate who can hit the ground running with demonstrated, admirable comprehension of the issue.

The recent reorganization was supposed to end the policy versus operational tension but, unfortunately, with the absence of the DPAA Director for a year, old tensions are again rising, and a comprehensive policy approach is being eroded by an operational focus on numbers and disdain for valid policy proposals.

After the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act was passed asserting a random goal of 200 IDs a year, the initial policy guidance was hopeful and stated "There will be no decrease in the level of effort for any region on any war. We will increase, not shift, effort and capacity. We will increase efforts in Vietnam and be prepared to operate in North Korea. Every war from WWII onward must have an appropriate level of effort. We will not do dumb things just to chase the numerical goal. Further, the priority for new identifications will come from battlefield recoveries and remote unknown gravesites, rather than exhuming unknowns from National and other cemeteries."

Thus, the potential existed to meet Vietnamese requests to increase the pace and scope, as well as increase resources to rationally meet Congressional intent. DPMO and JPAC had different interpretations of the law. DPMO accurately maintained the law required establishing the capacity and capability to identify 200 remains, while JPAC maintained that it required 200 actual identifications, regardless of the source.

In 2010, JPAC Detachments in Southeast Asia were told not to expect an increase in pace and scope due to WWII funding requirements. Of all things, JPAC cited as their authority conversations with Congressional staffers.

The 200 IDs figure was arbitrary, unrealistic and counterproductive to pursuing answers based on realities of the differences in the wars, versus strictly data-driven forensic and science-based operations. Seemingly, no one in decision-making policy positions had either the comprehension or interest in challenging this distortion.

A quote in a recent article from the Economist is applicable to this situation. “Too often policy-makers try to tame complicated systems using simple targets and inadvertently create nasty, unintended consequences – more detailed targets are no solution, they can be gamed too and risk tidying smaller problems out of sight while more catastrophic ones await.”

The 200 ID marker is a short term measurement that provides no insight as to whether it will lead to ultimate success. Likely, it will lead to tactical success, then strategic failure. Reviewing the history to prepare my remarks made me feel I was reading the longest suicide note in history. It was clearly time – then and now – for policy level officials to make rational decisions and bring some comprehension to a well-intentioned Congress. How to implement their law was and is an Executive Branch decision. The initial opportunity was lost, and the body-count, or in this case the ID- count, started.

In 2013, some hope for rationality surfaced when a proposal was floated to surge Vietnam War accounting efforts for two years and for all the right reasons, but it was not to be. A spending freeze cut back operations, and there was no policy decision to reprogram funds.

Similarly, the November 2013 policy guidance for FY 2015-19 stipulated that the majority of recoveries and identifications were to come from field operations, not disinterment, and attention to sites on the Master Excavation List longer than five years was imperative. The stated goal was to complete recovery operations at identified sites in Cambodia no later than FY2016, Vietnam by FY2019 and Laos by FY2021.

In addition, a robust and dedicated investigative effort increase in each country was to be maintained, along with increasing the scope and depth of research and analysis to create viable field leads.

Again, even a casual observer can see these noble sentiments have not been met and, instead, have actually regressed in several instances. By October 2015, DPAA Strategic Instructions provided for additional focus on disinterment, an updated policy on “unknowns” interred, and noted that disinterment would now be a mission priority.

The POW/MIA issue is not a Tinker-Toy for planners to pull apart and reassemble at will, without a severe loss of confidence in original judgments based on comprehension, and leads to doubts about the seriousness of those in charge. The unintended effects of ambitious plans of re-organization can become more important than the intended objectives.

In the 1980's to early 1990's, the Vietnamese used every imaginable excuse to halt, then renew, cooperation. We felt then it was one damned thing after another. They have now been ready for years, and the new situation changes the source of excuses to our own government – the same damned thing over and over.

History, indeed rhetoric still in DPAA documents, demonstrates that industrial development, aging witnesses, acidic soil, immediate family members still alive, discrepancy and last known alive cases, no access to the battlefields post-war, and a new relationship between the US and Vietnam make the call for a priority of effort in Southeast Asia.

In 2009, Vietnam called for an increase in the pace and scope of operations and cited many of these same reasons. They developed a 13-page, detailed proposal on such increases and provided it to us and, in 2011, resumed archival turnovers based on a League request during a trip to Hanoi.

Despite Vietnam's positive movement, a body-count mentality to reach an annual 200 ID goal continues to be the priority. How does DPAA defend this? They complain about dry holes which their policy continues to create. They assert "bang for the buck" and cite dollars spent per identification.

It is as if no one knew that exhuming remains from a cemetery or excavating a crash site in industrialized Europe is cheaper than research, investigations, surveys, and excavations in remote jungles of Southeast Asia, resulting in more complex identifications.

Such thinking also ignores the fact that increasing the number of operations each year in Vietnam resolves the issue more rapidly and saves years of recovery expenses with greater results. At one time, JPAC even advocated cutting the SE Asia budget portion from 65% of the total to only 25%. At least DPMO rightfully rejected this body-count mentality at that time, but it would return.

Even with evidence to the contrary, DPAA maintains Vietnam War accounting is the overwhelming priority, but has cautioned the League not to advertise it. There is nothing to advertise; the priorities are skewed.

Thus far, DPAA has not made a compelling case to the public or Congress why the priority should be on Vietnam War accounting in a real, not rhetorical, sense. Neanderthal and other ancient remains have been found in Europe, with DNA still available for testing. WWII remains are overwhelmingly not in danger, and immediate recovery is not required to preserve them. Those in imminent danger deserve priority, but the same category for WWII is miniscule, as compared to remains from the Vietnam War.

Meanwhile, in the background, a lack of comprehension is evident about the value of collection efforts by Stony Beach and research and analysis.

A senior leader was unaware of numerous cases that Stony Beach and other language-capable specialists have helped resolve and questioned what cases senior research and analysis personnel have solved. There appears an unbelievable lack of comprehension that it was their collective

work that provided leads and brought evidence-based evaluations of Vietnamese knowledgeability. Very importantly, evaluation of their collective efforts gave substance to negotiations that led to solving many cases, both unilaterally and jointly.

To add insult to injury, new justifications have arisen, as if policy is taking the moral high ground, by asserting that all MIAs are equal regardless of the war. Further, and contrary to non-existent assertions, some are stating that exhumation and identification of “unknowns” is accounting as well. Yet, despite their limited charter, the League has fully supported efforts on all wars. Their stated policy has consistently supported increased efforts on all wars, so long as they were additive, not at the expense of Vietnam War accounting.

The fact is that no one in the League or the veteran groups has ever stated that MIAs are not equal and that exhumations are not an accounting. This trumped up rhetoric is to mask a flawed policy with moral arguments that are not based on facts.

This mythology has recently been transmitted to policy level officials. They operate as if evidence falls into place when you begin with a conclusion and a hammer. DPAA went from trying to answer questions to answers that couldn't be questioned.

Historians have noted that frequently, when we have made our fellow men our interest, we go on to make them objects of pity then, and in our wisdom, turn to coercing them. Are we on this path?

There has been increasing media coverage of WWII identifications which are moving to us all, but the media, Congress and the general public do not know the cost of failing to prioritize recoveries that are in danger.

The publicity is motivating those pursuing a body-count to do more of the same. If there was a national poll that asked if the priority should be on recovering remains in danger of destruction before all others, does anyone doubt the results? Remembrance without understanding is betrayal.

Let's turn to caring. When I entered this issue as a staff member at the White House I had no idea the complexities and hard work this part of my duties would entail, but I learned fast. I had very limited contact with any family members prior to this time. We had a neighbor in Colorado Springs in the mid-1970s whose husband was missing in Laos and, during this same period, Elli had been to a couple of Officers Wives Club meetings with presentations that we believe were by League officials.

We cared, weren't sure how we could help, and had a naïve faith our government would do the right thing for the families. Some contact with JCRC when I was stationed in Thailand, and limited exposure for the Army staff all in the 1970's, began to sow doubts in my mind about governmental priority.

Fast forward to 1981 when I arrived at the White House and, shortly thereafter, was tasked with responsibility for POW/MIA Affairs. I spent over a year to gain overall comprehension of the issue. My background as a Vietnam veteran and Asian Specialist helped, but was inadequate.

Research in prior Presidential archives and draining the brains of veterans at DIA and JCRC advanced my knowledge, but the real eye-opener was my multiple visits to the League office and brain- storming with Ann who was a member of the then-existing POW/MIA Interagency Group. This exposure later expanded to meeting many families over the years at League annual meetings and Board meetings. Hearing their individual stories and collective concerns put caring on overdrive. My colleagues in these earlier years had many of the same interactions and most were Vietnam veterans, both military and civilian.

Many of these contacts were with fathers and mothers of the missing men and, sadly, many have passed without answers, but they have been succeeded by sisters, brothers, sons and daughters and other relatives, including grandchildren. This was an educational experience that will remain with me forever.

Fortunately, with the welcome addition over time of personnel, and as host nation cooperation has increased, we now have hundreds of competent specialists working on your behalf. Unfortunately, given the nature of their duties and the bureaucratic models channeling contact with the families, they have been robbed of this experience and the opportunity to be more effective. This has led to an unintended insensitivity on how policy decisions influence the families' judgments as to whether they really care. Abstract intentions and goals result in treating families as abstractions.

In the push for normalization, the Clinton Administration reported the return of unidentified remains before identification to inflate numbers and change perceptions of Vietnamese cooperation, a practice that was finally reversed. Would a family member conclude such a policy had greater priority than caring?

Does anyone believe that stamping unclassified documents pre-decisional or "For Official Use Only" to prevent critiques by the League, or gag orders to not to communicate with or speak to Ann, demonstrate caring to the families? Does a DPMO order to a JPAC commander not to meet with the League Board demonstrate caring?

Does it show caring to hold policy discussions behind closed doors that would change decades old policy defining the fullest possible accounting – from the return of a live prisoner, his remains, or convincing evidence as to why neither is possible, to only the return of a live prisoner or his remains as the definition?

Such a policy would eliminate a family's knowledge of what happened and any assurance that our government did all it could to achieve the fullest possible accounting. Over time, such a proposal would lead inevitably to a unilateral write-off of hundreds of cases, not the intention of federal law.

Discussions have even been held on the possibility of removing names from the list of unaccounted-for without remains and, further, even eliminating priority on the Last Known Alive cases of missing Americans. Do these nonsensical discussions to save resources to meet an arbitrary goal of 200 IDs a year demonstrate caring to the families?

Does it lead to a perception of caring for lab-led Tiger Teams in 2012 to demand no discussions outside of the Team, exclude directors, include many as Team Members who had no issue-related comprehension, and the organizers had reached conclusions before deliberations began?

What about the JPAC study that defined the “customer” as the Service Casualty Officers, not the families? Great confidence builder. Does a DoD Directive as recent as 2017 that defines an outreach program including Veteran Service Organizations and not the League inspire confidence that our government cares?

Do self-protective internal directives that ask all requests for information first go through management – even for routine data – raise suspicion and affect perceptions of caring? At times, getting information is like frisking a seal.

I could cite many more instances, but you have the flavor. Does this mean, the government doesn’t care? In most instances, no, it does not mean that. Rather, it demonstrates the lack of issue comprehension that leads to dumb decisions and builds the perception among families that those in government do not actually care.

It also renews unpleasant memories of periods when the issue was being written off. These unthinking blunders erode trust, increase suspicion and inhibit development of rational policy. Despite this, there are countless DPAA employees who genuinely care, interact with family members and roll their eyes with you concerning some of the thinking that comes from isolated cubicles.

Frankly, those who are pursuing destructive paths also care, at least for the most part, but they lack real comprehension, and their limited exposure to the families’ rational approach, despite the families’ desire to trust their government, causes them to see the families as a danger or threat to their policy proposals. They haven’t had the opportunity to see how close consultation with the League leads to effective policy, which then becomes staunchly aligned in dealing with Congress, veterans, other concerned citizens and foreign governments.

An uninformed listener could hear or read this speech and be so depressed that they feel there is no hope. I don’t feel that way, nor do I believe that most of the families who have been through so much feel this way. But, surely we are on the cusp of great opportunity or a historical tragedy that history will record.

The new DPAA Director can take actions, some immediate, some over time, that will reorient the effort and lead to a history in which all can take pride.

This change at the top can empower the new and seasoned cadre of DPAA leaders who have demonstrated competence, a desire to build comprehension, and caring and we should hope for the new Director to be fully backed at senior policy levels in the new Administration.

Toward these ends, I have some recommendations that I believe should be given careful consideration, and I have shared them with Ann who agrees with them. These can be accomplished in-house, without million dollar studies from outside experts with no comprehension of the issue.

- Provide newly assigned personnel in middle and upper management – civilian and military – the same advantages others in government have. Establish an informal training period that involves a mandatory reading list of the issue’s history and what was effective and not effective in the past. Supplement it with visits to the League office, veteran leaders, and sessions with long-time veterans in this issue, both current and former US Government employees. These new employees deserve no less and it sure beats being thrust into the issue with competence, but no comprehension.
- Immediately remove the gag rule. Instead, urge close consultation with the League and other responsible organizations – encourage an attitude of asking these groups, possessing real comprehension, “What do you think?” before a policy decision. Or, simply say, “I have a problem, and can you help?” This is true transparency, not what is now the practice.
- Identify those in the organization, at any level, with real comprehension and seek their views on policy formulation; then reinforce, recognize and reward them.
- Clear up any ambiguity on the mission – it is the return of a live prisoner, his remains or convincing evidence as to why neither is not possible, sharing the full record of effort with the next-of-kin.
- Evaluate and develop the budget in the context of the challenges enumerated earlier that relate to the Vietnam War effort. First, build the Vietnam War budget for a surge of investigations and excavations to meaningfully meet Vietnam’s constant requests to increase the pace and scope of operations. Look at the all-war approach that gives priority to last known alive cases and remains in danger – whether Vietnam War, Cold War or WWII – those in acidic soil, threatened by development, or other compelling reasons. Then, look at what is left to apply to remaining WWII cases and a contingency for additional funding if North Korea opens up again, a dim prospect in the near term.
- Sensitize senior policy personnel, as well as Congress, to the need for budget and policy reorientation. The current body-count mentality is counterproductive and a shift is logical, consistent and publicly defensible. If Congress is still insistent on the unintended consequence of the random number of 200 IDs per year, ask them to make up any budgetary shortfall, as this is the path the Executive Branch is going to follow for all the right reasons.
- Review and implement the proposal that the League and I furnished to begin a bilateral comprehensive review of the joint and unilateral mission areas in Vietnam which was received positively by the last Director, but never raised in meetings. Sadly, a similar, personal request to the White House National Security Advisor for President Obama to do so was ignored. Further, even the President’s speech in Hanoi to the Vietnamese people did not mention the issue.
- Given the differences between Vietnam and Laos, consider a similar approach to Laos with complementary, but somewhat different provisions. After years of requests, the Lao government’s recent agreement for base-camping near excavation sites is a hopeful sign to build

upon.

- Vigorously reinforce the new, positive signs of life in the USRJC, a vital supplement to the issue that was almost destroyed in the past. Their presence in this meeting is a significant step in the right direction.
- Reinforce and expand the public-private partnership initiative under Tom Holland that is demonstrating effectiveness on WWII cases, with cautions to the partners that DoD-conducted excavations will not take precedence over cases where remains are in jeopardy.
- Finally, use the proven competence of DPAA employees to focus on remains recovery of those in danger of being lost forever.

While this initial plate is full, it is doable. In implementation, remember there are hordes of government lawyers to tell you something can't be done, and those who tell you it can be done are hiding under their desks.

Look under the desks and to the families for advice. If our government begins down this path, be both supportive and patient as implementation begins.

To summarize, there are two potential political outcomes in front of us that history will record. The first is that the new administration reviewed the overall policy of the POW/MIA issue and, recognizing the differences in the wars and the need for immediate actions to accelerate the effort in Southeast Asia, put forth a major effort to achieve the fullest possible accounting for missing Vietnam War personnel.

This will renew trust with the families and recognize them once again as reliable partners who only ask for best efforts. In the past, the results were evident as families received answers who earlier were doomed to have none.

On the other hand, a lack of action will result in a different historical record.

It will note that despite years of warnings of aging witnesses, acidic soil, infrastructure development and a government in Vietnam appealing for years to increase the pace and scope of operations, the US Government pursued a policy that did not recognize these facts.

Instead, it pursued a policy that divided resources and efforts across all wars to meet a randomly established number of identifications, mostly from exhumations of US servicemen interred in American cemeteries abroad and on US soil or isolated WWII battle sites.

As they clinked glasses in celebration in a location resembling the ballroom on the Titanic, the Vietnam War families once again found themselves praying in the lifeboats and the concept of leaving no man behind was given an irreversible tarnish.

We can hope for the first outcome, and your determination and courage through all of the years will be needed in the future. I and many others in and out of government are with you.

As George Will, one of your noted dinner speakers in the 1980's, wrote in a 1983 Washington Post column about the missing in Vietnam having not been abandoned, "Ann Griffiths and the other Winter Soldiers of the League of Families have demonstrated the stirring beauty of fidelity painfully maintained in the blank face of facts that promise no proximate relief" and referred to the families gathered for the annual meeting as the gallant last battalion in the Vietnam War's last battle. My friends, you are the last gallant battalion of the Vietnam War and, like battalions in the war, formed from all over our nation, regardless of ethnicity or socio-economic status.....and the League does not need GPS to know where it stands. Hold the line, and stay the course. Thank you.

Enclosure 2

Remarks of Frank Miller
Chief, Asia Pacific Regional Center Defense Intelligence Agency
48th Annual Meeting
National League of POW/MIA Families

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, It is an honor to be here with so many dedicated people, committed to such an important mission! Thank you to Ann for allowing me to speak to you all, and for your service and leadership over the years.

A little personal background here, if I may.

Although never directly assigned to the POW/MIA recovery mission, I have a long history of support, starting with my Dad, who as a civilian attaché in South Vietnam '74-'75, was responsible for several crash site finds. Recovery in those days was by JCRC.

Later I supported interviews of Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong as a Chinese linguist in the early '90's. This is when I first encountered DIA's STONY BEACH program.

Most widely known is my time as Defense Attaché in Hanoi 1999-2002, during which I worked closely with Det 2 JTFFA to identify potential leads and encourage them to cooperate. Not always an easy task, but you should know that our efforts to recover and identify our missing inspired the Vietnamese families to pressure their government to do the same. So your work here serves more than just ourselves.

I was also the senior U.S. military officer in country when the helicopter crash took the lives of 7 Americans and 9 Vietnamese in 2001. That was a rough time and I am very appreciative that the League honored their families last year at your annual dinner.

What brings us all here today is one of the most righteous causes in human history: showing our respect— not just our respect, but our duty—to those who have sacrificed so much for our liberty. The poem “Those Now Gone” by Roger Hancock, written in 2004, partially captures this duty very well. Allow me to present an excerpt...

Those Now Gone

Fallen Servicemen,
For our country fought; Liberty, freedom,
The primary reason.
...Veterans who served, And lived to tell;
The horrors, and risks, now sleep in peace.
...Unknown soldier, MIA, remembrance our way,
to honor you as well, victims of a warrior's hell.
...Sleep now sleep tight, Rest now, duty done,
Price paid in life or death, The vigilance now be ours.

The final line of this poem, “The vigilance now be ours,” really captures the essence of DIA’s commitment to the mission of accounting for our missing. The STONY BEACH team has been solely committed to this mission since the team’s inception, now over thirty years ago, and DIA’s commitment to this mission is unwavering.

Most of you know the STONY BEACH members well, as they have been a fixture at your annual meetings for many years, but for those who don’t know them or are here for the first time, let me capture a few important points about the value the STONY BEACH team brings to our shared accounting mission.

STONY BEACH’s mission is to provide human intelligence support to the US efforts to account as fully as possible for Americans missing from the Vietnam War. I emphasize that last part, “missing from the Vietnam War.” We, in DIA, are proud of the fact that STONY BEACH is the ONLY Department of Defense organization dedicated exclusively to Vietnam War accounting. DIA’s STONY BEACH Team is comprised of seven highly qualified, trained, and dedicated experts. We have two specialists in Bangkok, Thailand (David White and Dustin Roses), one in Vientiane, Laos (Leo Spivey), one in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (Eric Phillips), two Vietnam specialists; one in Washington, D.C. (Hugh Mullaly) and one in Hawaii (Mike Najim), and our Program Manager here in our Washington, D.C. Headquarters (Brad Taylor).

Let me talk a little bit about the qualifications and training required of our STONY BEACH members. DIA requires each team member to speak at least one Southeast Asian language at a professional level, but our current STONY BEACH team is so good that every single member speaks more than one language. DIA’s stringent language requirement allows team members to directly interview foreign witnesses, interact with partner-nation government officials, and scour foreign language documents for reportable information pertaining to POW/MIA cases.

Other training required of our team includes strategic debriefing (or interview) training. This is a demanding flagship training requirement for STONY BEACH that focuses on planning for interviews, applying appropriate techniques, and properly reporting information derived from interviews. This training allows our STONY BEACH team to obtain the maximum amount of information from interviews and, at times, note inconsistencies and detect deception.

Other training our STONY BEACH team members have undergone pertinent to this mission include attaché training, counterintelligence training, interrogation training, and analyst training, and five of our team of seven are former or retired military.

Now that you know who we are, I’d like to talk about what we do and what we’ve accomplished this past year. If you recall, last year, Ms. Melissa Drisko, the Deputy Director of DIA, spoke to you about two areas of focus for our STONY BEACH team: improving coordination and collaboration with DPAA operators and refocusing operational efforts in Vietnam. As we engaged in this effort this past year, we encountered some successes and some disappointments.

Let me start with the successes. I’m pleased to announce that DIA has finally moved one STONY BEACH Vietnam specialist from Washington, D.C. to Hawaii. This STONY BEACH

specialist will continue to conduct rotational assignments in Vietnam, but he will also be able to coordinate and de-conflict STONY BEACH operations and reporting with Hawaii-based DPAA operators. This already has and will continue to significantly streamline our ability to increase both level of effort and access to Vietnam and obtain necessary reporting feedback to analysts that will help guide future STONY BEACH operations.

Another success we encountered this past year is participation in the first Vietnam DPAA Joint Field Activity in approximately 10 years. Joint Field Activities provide us with invaluable access to the field and partner nation officials that we otherwise would not have. We look forward to continuing this effort in the coming year.

STONY BEACH is also engaged in many other new initiatives involving groups of foreign nationals and U.S. citizens that I am unable to discuss in detail, but please know that we continue to innovate and develop projects and processes that result in valuable reporting.

The result of our new initiatives and refining our focus has been the release of 201 reports so far this year. This is twice the number of reports published when compared to this time last year. Our reporting included information on POW sightings, crash sites, burial sites, remains traders, and other Vietnamese order-of-battle information.

As just one example of the importance of this body of reporting, in a recent DPAA-hosted POW/MIA Case Coordination Conference, 70 STONY BEACH reports provided information and leads on cases that were under review.

Those are some of our successes, but we've also had a few disappointments requiring attention and persistence this coming year. First, we have not yet been successful in our attempts to obtain a permanent presence in Vietnam, but our resolve continues.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention the strong advocacy and support - over many years - that the League has provided in this aspect of our mission, both with senior US and foreign officials. That advocacy has significantly helped create a favorable environment for us to submit a new proposal currently being staffed at the State Department to place one Vietnam STONY BEACH specialist in the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi. We are hopeful that with the support of our Ambassador and the improving bilateral relationship with Vietnam, this proposal will be approved, and we hope to report good news to you next year.

DIA has also had an issue with the timely redaction and public release of STONY BEACH reports. The review process is too long and DIA's FOIA Office is not turning these reports around in the agreed timeframe. We understand how important this information is to you, the families, and let me assure you that this is on our radar, and we are taking steps to fix this problem.

Let me conclude by reaffirming what every DIA leader has told the families in years past. DIA is committed to sustaining the STONY BEACH Program and has a long-term commitment to this mission. That commitment is strong and unwavering and "vigilance" will continue to be ours!

Enclosure 2

POW/MIA Investigations in Vietnam
Vietnam Research and Investigation Update
Presented by Ron Ward, DPAA Casualty Resolution Specialist
48th Annual League of Families Meeting
Saturday, June 24th, 2017

Greetings ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, and members of the League. It's been a few years since I've had the chance to address this group and I must say I've missed being here with you, since in the end it is you, along with those who gave their last full measure of devotion, who are the reason for our efforts every year, day in and day out, to account for the missing. I'm honored to again stand before you and though today is the final day of this annual meeting, during which many of you have received updates on your cases and we hope gained useful information, my task this morning is to provide you with an update on accounting operations in Vietnam, primarily on investigation programs and our efforts and initiatives to collect information within Vietnam to help account for your absent loved ones.

For the past decade I've worked and lived in Hanoi as DPAA's Casualty Resolution Specialist at Detachment number 2 in Vietnam. It's rewarding work, since we often get to see firsthand the successful results of our search and recovery operations, as well as coordinating with the government of Vietnam to ensure we gain access to the sites and witnesses we need. Every year has proven to be literally packed with events related to this business and this year was no different. In addition to the scheduled investigations and excavations inherent to DPAA's annual operations plan, this year saw the advent of new initiatives between the U.S. Embassy and Detachment 2, the continued successful collection of information by our Research and Investigation Teams, and increased assistance by the Vietnamese government in underwater investigations within Vietnamese coastal waters.

First, as I mentioned, here is an update on the scheduled investigation and recovery operations in Vietnam over the past year. These operations are aligned with the U.S. government fiscal quarters as missions we call Joint Field Activities – or JFAs. In Vietnam, since the last League meeting, we have conducted four JFAs with participation by a number of types of teams: Research and Investigation Teams, Field Forensic Review Teams, Trilateral Investigation Teams, Recovery Teams, Vietnam Recovery Teams, Unilateral Excavation Teams, and Underwater Investigation Teams. The two RIT teams – RIT-A and RIT-B – investigated 137 cases, which consisted of site surveys and witness interviews. I'll give specific examples of those later. The recovery teams excavated a total of 21 cases, resulting in four repatriations of remains. Five more remains repatriations were the result of Field Forensic Reviews, for a total of nine repatriations this year. Please keep in mind these numbers are just for missions since the last League meeting, not for the fiscal year. These operations included the participation of hundreds of American service members and civilians and an even greater number of Vietnamese workers and government officials, representing a substantial portion of DPAA's annual worldwide effort and a huge amount of work accomplished for the furtherance of the accounting mission in Vietnam, though admittedly only a fraction of the remaining work still to be accomplished there.

To begin addressing examples of specific investigative events this year, I'd like to highlight the Detachment 2 Call Center. This is a program by which we collect potential POW/MIA-related information from Vietnamese citizens and visiting Americans through walk-ins, telephone calls, emails, and from social media sites such as Facebook. Over the many years since DPAA's POW/MIA Office – officially named Detachment 2 – was established in Hanoi, it has become generally known among Vietnamese citizens that the Detachment is the office to contact to report information on Americans missing from the Vietnam War. The detachment's efforts started in the early 1990s, mainly with Vietnamese citizens visiting our office or calling to report information they believed related to U.S. MIAs. More recently, with the development of the internet and social media, we've seen a greater influx of information from Vietnamese citizens, and sometimes visiting Americans. This has given us the opportunity to organize this collection mechanism into a more coordinated effort. In addition to our phone number, which is readily available through the Vietnamese telephone information service, we now have a special email address designed specifically to collect information from Vietnamese citizens. The email address is posted on the U.S. Embassy's Vietnam-language Facebook site, which has become a frequent source of information for us. In the last year, we've received potentially POW/MIA-related information from 72 sources through the Call Center, a number of which have provided lucrative leads on unresolved cases.

Here is an example of one instance in which the Call Center helped lead to the recovery and identification of two long unaccounted-for service members, First Lieutenant Daniel W. Thomas and Captain Donald G. Carr. On July 6th, 1971, first Lieutenant Thomas and Captain Carr were the crew of an OV-10 aircraft conducting a reconnaissance mission over southern Laos when they failed to return to base. Search and rescue forces at the time of the incident were unable to locate any trace of the missing aircraft or crew and the case was put into the category of an “off-the-scope” loss, meaning the plane had disappeared from friendly radar scopes and the U.S. government did not know where it had crashed. We could only assume the crash site was somewhere in southern Laos, where it was last known to have operated.

For many years, DPAA and its predecessors searched for the aircraft in Laos, but with negative results. Then on April 25th, 2014, a man from Saigon walked in the front gate of Detachment 2's office at 53 Tran Phu Street in Hanoi. He told our investigators he was acquainted with a group of tribal people – ethnic minorities we used to call Montagnards – in Kon Tum Province, Vietnam, who had found a crash site with human remains. He showed us a photograph of a U.S. military identification tag – commonly known as a “dogtag” – with the name Carr, Donald G. After quickly checking our databases, we knew we were onto something. We asked our counterparts in the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons – or VNOSMP – to help us contact the individuals who had found the crash site and were holding the dogtag and possibly associated remains.

On August 24th of that year, a joint Field Forensic Review team comprised of Dr. John Byrd, DPAA's Laboratory Director, and I traveled to Kon Tum Province to conduct the investigation. The items present for examination were Captain Carr's original identification tag, his blood chit, leather pistol holster, some uniform items, and a number of human remains. We sent the remains and personal items to DPAA's Lab for further analysis.

The Montagnards had discovered the crash site and associated items while scavenging for scrap metal in the forest and they reported that the aircraft wreckage, which was near the Vietnam-Laos border, was virtually intact. After a Vietnamese team located the crash site, DPAA scheduled the site for priority excavation.

Our first attempt at excavation, using a U.S. excavation team, was unsuccessful because the altitude at which the site was located was too high for Vietnam's helicopters to safely reach. Without helicopter support for a medical evacuation contingency, DPAA's U.S. teams were not able to conduct the excavation. After careful consideration, we asked the VNOSMP to organize a team to excavate the site. They had been the only ones to reach the site in the past and they volunteered to base camp at the site and conduct the excavation. We conferred with the Vietnamese team to ensure they understood the standard to which we expected the site to be excavated. After two unilateral excavations and the successful recovery of remains, Captain Carr and First Lieutenant Thomas were identified on September 4th, 2015, and February 25th, 2017, respectively.

This example not only illustrates how the Call Center can help solve POW/MIA cases, but also the efficacy of our Field Forensic Review Program and the VNOSMP's increasing capacity to assist us with the unilateral recovery of remains. There are many such examples from the past year, including a recent message to the special email address that tipped us off to a group of Vietnamese veterans who are aware of the death and burial of a U.S. soldier currently listed in the Last-Know-Alive category. We are in the process of investigating that information and hope the results will be as good as the Carr and Thomas cases.

The next area related to investigations in Vietnam that continues to provide answers is the Research and Investigation Team – or RIT. There are two types of RITs in Vietnam. The first team – which we call the RIT-A – conducts case-related archival research and witness interviews and the second – which we call the RIT-B – conducts case-related site surveys. These are the teams that do the in-country research on cases and identify sites for excavation. Perhaps just as importantly, these teams collect new information which adds to the narrative on each case – in essence clarifying what happened to each individual in his or her final days and minutes, both in an attempt to recover identifiable remains and to provide that story to the family.

This year the RIT-A had quite a few significant breakthroughs, but one in particular has captured a great amount of attention, both within DPAA and among the U.S. Special Forces veterans community. The RIT-A team gains the majority of its investigative leads through archival documents and interviews with Vietnamese veterans who participated in U.S. loss incidents. To obtain these archival documents and access to witnesses, the RIT-A, which is permanently stationed at Detachment 2 in Hanoi, coordinates closely with researchers and investigators from the VNOSMP. As I have explained to you in past years, the new generation of the VNOSMP increasingly utilizes professional military police investigators for POW/MIA investigations, as opposed to the more conservative political officers assigned in the past. The new VNOSMP investigators take advantage of Vietnam's comprehensive security apparatus at all levels of the country, including public security police and local informants, to collect information for the RIT-A.

When our RIT-A analysts identify wartime Vietnamese units we believe could have been involved in unresolved cases, Detachment 2 requests that the VNOSMP search for members of these units. The VNOSMP investigators then begin exhaustive country-wide searches for knowledgeable witnesses, using rosters of veterans provided by Vietnamese veterans liaison committees. This process can be lengthy, but it has the potential to locate new witnesses for groups of unresolved POW/MIA cases in the areas where the wartime Vietnamese units operated.

This method proved particularly effective this past year when the RIT-A asked its VNOSMP counterparts to locate a Vietnamese unit, designated “C75,” which we believed could have been involved in a group of MAC-SOG Special Forces losses in southern Laos. These cases had long been problematic for DPAA researchers and investigators, because the losses occurred in an area of Laos where there was no indigenous Laotian population during the war, only People’s Army of Vietnam units operating on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. American Special Forces veterans had repeatedly asked us about the existence of Vietnamese “Counter-SOG teams” units, which they had encountered during their wartime long-range reconnaissance patrols in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Our searches for such units had always come up empty, until this year when the VNOSMP discovered members of the relatively small C75 Company, whose mission had been to guard warehouses and transportation routes along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in extreme southern Laos. One by one, over a series of lengthy interviews, the C75 veterans began to recount to our RIT-A investigators a succession of encounters with U.S. Special Forces patrols in southern Laos in late 1970 and early 1971. We asked the C75 veterans, all of whom are now quite elderly, if they were in fact “Counter-SOG teams.” They replied that their primary duty was to protect the Trail from all enemies, including U.S. Special Forces Patrols, which were their most frequent and formidable foe. So in effect, while they considered themselves to be the protectors of the Vietnamese strategic transportation routes, they were in fact one of the groups of “Counter-SOG teams” we had been hearing about.

Another twist to this particular story is that, while canvassing for C75 veterans with knowledge of U.S. losses, the VNOSMP discovered that the historian of the unit had used his wartime notes and witness interviews to compile an official history of the unit, complete with the dates and circumstances of significant battles. The RIT obtained this document and used it to help us correlate the information from the witness statements with specific unresolved Special Forces cases in southern Laos. The information we have gathered so far points to three unaccounted-for Special Forces individuals lost while on long-range reconnaissance patrols deep in enemy territory. Since these cases have not yet been completely resolved, I’ll not get into the specifics of each case out of respect for the families, but I will say that the next logical step for this investigation is to take members of the Vietnamese C75 Company to Laos at some point for a trilateral investigation with a view towards locating the isolated graves sites of these brave Special Forces recon men.

The mission of our second type of investigation team, the RIT-B, is to follow up on information provided by witnesses, often those first interviewed by the RIT-A, and survey sites to identify them for subsequent excavation. This team also includes a mechanism for the

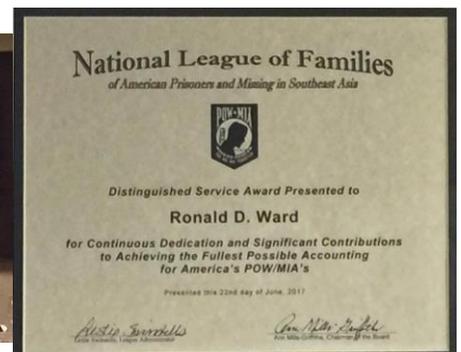
VNOSMP to canvass new witnesses, similar to the RIT-A mechanism, so there is always potentially new information being considered. I can't emphasize enough how important the Vietnamese contribution to these investigations is, because without that constant input of new witnesses and other sources of information, the investigations would stagnate, as has happened at times over the years, due to lack of information. **Another trend with this team is the participation of U.S. veterans on investigations as witnesses to incidents.** Researchers and analysts in Hawaii and here in Washington D.C. contact veterans with potential knowledge of burial sites and DPAA coordinates with the Vietnamese government to have the American witnesses accompany the RIT-B to the sites. A Stony Beach strategic debriefer participated in one JFA this year on the RIT-B, enhancing the team's linguistic and interviewing capabilities for that JFA. The RIT-B conducted 57 investigations in the past year, tentatively recommending seven sites for excavation and those recommendations are being reviewed at DPAA.

The Field Forensic Review Program, which we use to investigate possible American remains in the hands of Vietnamese citizens, was again productive, with 14 forensic examinations conducted, resulting in five of the eight remains repatriations from Vietnam this year. The information which generated these forensic examinations came from Call Center sources, information provided by the VNOSMP, and investigative work by the RIT-B. In one case, we were able to obtain the remains of Lieutenant Junior Grade Charles B. Goodwin from Vietnamese citizens in Quang Binh Province who had obtained the remains from a crash site. On September 8th, 1965, LTJG Goodwin was flying an RF-8A aircraft on an early morning photo reconnaissance mission over North Vietnam in a heavy thunderstorm and did not return to his ship, the USS Coral Sea. Because his last known position was overwater, the U.S. government initially believed he had crashed at sea. Then in 1988, a Vietnamese refugee in Thailand showed U.S. investigators data from LTJG Goodwin's identification card, which the refugee said an acquaintance had taken from a crash site in Hoa Son Village, Quang Binh Province. Unfortunately, that man had died while attempting to escape Vietnam by boat, so we had no way of determining the crash site location or confirming the validity of the information. After multiple attempts at finding witnesses in Hoa Son Village with knowledge of the crash site, the VNOSMP located a man whose father had been holding remains from a reported crash site since the 1980s. Dr. Paul Emanovsky of DPAA's Laboratory and I interviewed the man and examined the remains, which were chosen for repatriation and subsequently identified as those of LTJG Goodwin on 1 June 2017. In this instance, persistence, analysis, and cooperation paid off again and we will continue to look to the Field Forensic Review Program to account for more remains when Vietnamese citizens have come into possession of those remains.

An area that experienced significant progress this year was Vietnamese assistance with underwater investigations in their coastal waters. Beginning in 2009, we began a project to determine how many of the losses off the Vietnamese coast might be recoverable. Underwater recovery operations in Vietnam had historically been passive, that is, based on information from fishermen and local scrap hunters instead of active investigations by our teams. Since new technology is continually being developed, we decided to enlist the assistance of U.S. Navy hydrographic research ships in 2009 and 2011 in an attempt to locate underwater crash sites that offered the possibility of recovering remains. Using state-of-the art sonar and magnetometer equipment, those two missions identified dozens of items on the ocean's floor which believed could be U.S. aircraft. Having identified those so-called "anomalies," we still needed to

"ground-truth" the items to determine if they were, in fact, the aircraft for which we were searching. After considering several courses of action, we decided to ask the VNOSMP's assistance in finding a Vietnamese diving company to support these underwater investigations. They have introduced DPAA to a professional Vietnamese diving outfit with the equipment and experience to support U.S. teams in ground-truthing items off the coast of Danang which we believe could be U.S. aircraft. This arrangement with the Vietnamese will expand our underwater search capabilities, reduce the U.S. "footprint" on the joint field activities, and could potentially provide an avenue to help us investigate underwater cases currently considered sensitive at-sea sites affected by the political geographic environment. But the most immediate result will be to determine whether we can effectively use the technology employed in 2009 and 2011 to locate and excavate underwater crash sites off the coast of Vietnam. If the results are positive, we could see more progress in the area of Vietnam underwater recoveries in the future. The next underwater investigation operation, a U.S. investigation team supported by the Vietnamese diving company, is scheduled for Joint Field Activity 17-4VM in August of this year.

As I said, it's been a busy year and the items I've mentioned this morning are just a few examples of investigation work accomplished in Vietnam. It's worth mentioning that we also spent time enhancing and professionalizing our investigation skills, with two of our RIT members completing a Public Training Council interrogation training course at the Denver, Colorado, Sherriff's Department. Also of note, we continued the program to provide specialized training to the VNOSMP's investigators, as in December, Dr. William Belcher of DPAA's Laboratory conducted site survey training in Danang for a dozen Vietnamese specialists. With the extremely complex nature of the investigation environment for POW/MIA cases in Vietnam, it is important for us to stay abreast of the latest investigation techniques, as well as reinforcing basic investigative skills, as DPAA continues with investigations in Vietnam



and elsewhere around the world.

Ann Mills Griffiths presented Ron Ward with the League's highest award for continuous dedication and significant contributions, the Distinguished Service Award. Ron is retiring this year and will be sorely missed. SOA & SFA wish him well.