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FOR OUR ABANDONED
PRISONERS OF WAR

A history of the POW/MIA bracelets
and the issue that made them necessary

Genesis of the POW/MIA bracelets

In 1970, long before the Vietnam War ended, Americans were introduced to the first bracelets bearing the name, rank and incident date of an American serviceman who was listed as a Prisoner of War or Missing in Action.

These bracelets were the brainchild of former Congressman Robert K. "Bob" Dornan of California. Mr. Dornan, a former Air Force fighter pilot, had a good friend who was a confirmed prisoner who had been captured in Laos by communist Pathet Lao forces. Colonel David Hrdlicka was a well documented POW being held in the massive cave complex near Sam Neua, Laos.

During a meeting of POW/MIA family members and concerned citizens in California, Bob Dornan put forward an idea to modify the Montagnard friendship bracelet to one bearing the name of a missing American that would be used to publicize the plight of the Prisoners of War and Missing in Action. Representatives of VIVA (Voices in Vital America), an early POW/MIA organization located in Los Angeles, California, saw the benefit in Bob Dornan's idea. They arranged for the bracelets to be produced and agreed to handle the distribution of them.

The American public, hungry for a way to demonstrate their unwavering support for the prisoners and missing, found the bracelets an ideal way to recognize, honor and support them. Meanwhile, word of these bracelets and the message they conveyed, circulated throughout the prison camps of Southeast Asia as new prisoners entered the system. In a few cases, new prisoners met men in captivity whose POW/MIA bracelet they wore.

By the time the Paris Peace Accords were signed on 27 January 1973, over five million bracelets were being worn by Americans all over the world. These bracelets, with the name of the man whose name was starkly engraved into the band, inexplicably bound the wearer to the man in a way no one could have foreseen. In many cases, the bond that was formed between the wearer and the missing man or woman was stronger and more enduring than blood ties.

Since the first POW/MIA bracelets were introduced over 27 years ago, they have evolved into a symbol of the POW/MIA issue in general, and the men and women they represent in particular. Like the POW/MIA flag, the bracelets are a visible sign to everyone who sees them that this issue is not going to go away until we have a full, fair and real accounting for our fellow countrymen and women.

The bracelets are now found in a variety of materials, styles and colors. Some even have the missing man's picture on it. And like the POW/MIA flag, the bracelets have expanded to represent anyone from any timeframe who vanished in a war or conflict. There are bracelets available for men missing in World War II, the Korean War and the Persian Gulf War as well as in the Vietnam War. There are also "In Memory" bracelets available for those men and women who were killed and whose remains have been returned so that each one can continue to be honored in a similar, yet different way.

Above and beyond all else, these bracelets convey the history and importance of the POW/MIA issue to the American people on a one-to-one ratio.

THE ISSUE

There ARE Live American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia and Our Government Knows It!

A brief look at the well documented chronology of the POW/MIA issue as we know it today speaks volumes as to why the men and women - military personnel and civilians alike - listed herein are much more than the sum total of their numbers. The burning question of how to "resolve" this issue has always been a thorny one for our government to deal with. It has never known how to move any Communist government into a

position where it will return our people. The issue is, and always has been, **THE RETURN OF AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR, BOTH ALIVE AND DEAD**, not a nondescript cloaking of the issue in the shadowy classification of *Missing in Action*. This issue is about the Communist countries in Southeast Asia holding POWs hostage in one form of captivity or another. For example from the public record:

1954-1976: After the French government pays an unspecified sum of money to the Vietnamese for the “maintenance of French cemeteries,” the Communists respond by releasing between 1,000 and 1,500 Legionnaires *alive*. They are returned in small groups on an irregular schedule over this 22-year span. Even today live sighting reports surface about prison camps holding French Legionnaires from the First Indochina War.

3 April 1973: Laotian Communist forces declare they are holding more than 100 American POWs and are prepared to give a full accounting. The US government responds 9 days later by declaring all POWs are dead – without ever talking to the Laotians about the prisoners they *admit* holding!

25 June 1981: Defense Intelligence Agency Director Eugene Tighe testifies before the House Subcommittee on Asian/Pacific Affairs that live American POWs remain in Southeast Asia.

7 December 1984: *The Washington Times* reports that Bobby Garwood, released by Vietnam in 1979, saw up to 70 live captive Americans long after the war ended.

28 June 1985: *The Washington Times* reports DIA Director Lt. Gen. Eugene Tighe testified Hanoi is still holding at least 50-60 live American POWs.

15 October 1985: *The Wall Street Journal* reports that National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane says live American POWs remain in Southeast Asia.

19 August 1986: *The Wall Street Journal* reports the White House knew in 1981 Vietnam wanted to sell 57 live POWs for \$4 billion. The White House determined the offer was genuine – and ignored it!

30 September 1986: *The New York Times* reports a Pentagon panel estimates up to 100 live American POWs are held in Vietnam alone.

7 October 1986: CIA Director William Casey says: “*Look, the nation knows they (the POWs) are there, everybody knows they are there, but there’s no groundswell of support for getting them out. Certainly you are not suggesting we pay for them, surely not saying we could do anything like that with no public support.*”

January 1988: A cable from the Joint Casualty Resolution Center in Thailand states that during Gen. Vessey’s visit to Hanoi, “*The Vietnamese people were prepared to turn over 7 or 8 live American POWs if Vessey told them what they wanted to hear. All the prospective returnees were allegedly held in a location on the Lao side of the border.*”

10 June 1989: *The Washington Post* reports a Japanese monk released after 13 years in a Vietnamese prison had American cellmates who nursed him to health.

September 1990: The Senate Foreign Relations *Committee’s Interim Report on POW/MIAs in Southeast Asia* concludes that despite public assurances in 1973 that no POWs remained in the region, the Defense Department “*...in April 1974 concluded beyond a doubt that several hundred American POWs remained in captivity in Southeast Asia.*”

September 1990: Senator Jesse Helms: “*The deeper story may be that there was a deliberate effort by certain people in the government to disregard all information or reports about living MIA-POWs. If there could be even one American over there and forgotten by his country, it would be worth it if we could find him and bring him back home.*”

October 1990: Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach admits Vietnam still holds American POWs, and will release “*as many as 10 live American POWs.*” His offer, like others before it, is ignored by Secretary of State James Baker III.

February 1991: Colonel Millard Peck, Chief of the Pentagon's Special Office for Prisoners of War and Missing in Action, resigns in protest of being ordered by policy makers in the POW/MIA Inter-Agency Group *not* to investigate live-sighting reports of American POWs!

25 April 1991: Senator Bob Smith addresses the Senate and reveals that, of more than 1400 eyewitness sightings of live POWs, NONE has ever received an on-site investigation!

23 May 1991: The Senate Foreign Relations Committee's *Examination of US Policy Toward POW/MIAs* concludes that the US has ignored thousands of American POWs, and left them to rot in Soviet slave labor camps, and North Korean and Vietnamese prisons. *"Any evidence that suggests an MIA might be alive was uniformly and arbitrarily rejected."*

Summer 1991: A flood of new evidence of live POWs pours from Southeast Asia: pictures, handwriting samples, hair samples, blood samples, fingerprints, footprints, maps and other physical proof. The Bush administration disregards the evidence, and attempts to discredit it by rumor and innuendo. Some of the photos are scientifically validated by nationally recognized experts, but none of them has ever been scientifically disproved!

2 August 1991: President Bush says, *"Until we can account for every person missing, we have to run down these leads to **prove that nobody is held.**"* The President of the United States sees his duty to prove the Vietnamese hold none of our nation's citizens rather than to gain their freedom by whatever means are at his disposal.

1 January 1992: Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman David Boren: *"I think we're going to see, potentially, that a lot more (POWs) were left in Laos...it's been true in administrations of both parties – when the agreements were made, and they were anxious to get agreements at the time – there were people involved that simply wanted to get the agreements and didn't want to have all the questions raised at that time...it was too embarrassing. The longer it went, the more embarrassing it got to be...A lot more information is going to come on Laos...It's things that happened over time. Then, once when somebody found out how bad it was, nobody wanted to take the blow. They always thought, well, I'll hand this on to the next guy to admit that we really made a big mess...Those who knew the truth kept handing it on. There are people, obviously, in the military and otherwise, in the foreign policy establishment, who feel they're going to be embarrassed, now if this comes out. And so, they keep the secret...It has to come out and it will."*

5 June 1992: Lt. Peter R. Matthes, USAF, puts his secret authenticator code – **GX2527** – outside his prison camp in North Vietnam.

June 1992: Maj. Henry M. Serex, USAF, puts his last name and secret authenticator code –**72TA88** – right outside the prison wall of a second prison camp where he was being held in North Vietnam.

Both locations were photographed because of solid live-sighting reports of US POWs being held at these locations. Furthermore, these are just the latest satellite photographs made public of LIVE AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR held captive in Southeast Asia since the mid-1970's. There is no doubt there are more.

9 June 1995: US GOVERNMENT OFFERS REWARD FOR RETURN OF POW/MIAs: Per DPMO Policy Memorandum, *"Consistent with existing policy and commitments, such as those extended in service personnel blood chits, DoD will monetarily reward an individual or group who directly liberates an American service member detained against his or her will in a foreign country as a result of his or her status as a US combatant. To receive such a reward, the individual must be returned to US custody and identified as an actual POW or MIA from a recognized conflict."*

February 1996: MSgt. Meteo Sabog, 24-year US Army veteran who vanished 25 February 1970 in South Vietnam after out-processing from his second tour of duty in Vietnam, surfaces in Northern Georgia where he has lived since 1985. How and when did he leave Southeast Asia? Where was he from 1970 to 1985? Was he in Southeast Asia or the United States? Was he a deserter who found his way out of Southeast Asia or a *secretly returned POW/MIA* brought back by our government? These and many other questions need to be answered.

11 January 2001: Secretary of the Navy Danzig announced “the Department of the Navy is changing the status of Cmdr. Michael Scott “Spike” Speicher, the first American shot down on 17 January 1991 over land during the Persian Gulf War, from Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered under a Presumptive Finding of Death (KIA/PFOD) to Missing in Action.” ***This unprecedented action to change a military man’s status from a living category (POW or MIA) to dead by a legal status change, then reverse that action and return him to a living status of Prisoner of War or Missing in Action, has never before been allowed to happen by our government!*** Up until now, once a POW/MIA was removed from a living status and declared dead under a legal status change, the USG emphatically refused to return him/her to a living status no matter what. The legal ramifications of this action are immense. First, it points to the reality that *Capt. Speicher is alive today and our government knows it.* There is nothing else that would have forced the USG to take such a monumental action. Second, it kicks open the legal door for families of other POW/MIAs from all wars who have undergone KIA/PFOD status changes to request that those status changes also be rescinded and their man reclassified accordingly.

9 April 2004: US Army PFC Keith M. “Matt” Maupin of Batavia, OH is captured when his unit and the fuel truck convey they are providing security for is ambushed while traveling from Camp Anaconda, Iraq to coalition forces located near Baghdad’s International Airport. Several civilian truck drivers are also captured at the same time including Timothy E. “Tim” Bell from Mobile, AL. Hard US military intelligence confirming both men’s capture is received within a week by our government. In addition, video tape footage of Matt Maupin alive and uninjured was aired on Iraqi television. With confirmation of capture in hand, the Army classifies PFC Maupin from DUSTWUN (Duty Station Whereabouts Unknown) to Missing/Captured. 3 August 2006: The US Army conducts its standard annual review of Matt Maupin’s casualty data. Based on an examination of all information in its possession, the Army determines he should remain listed as Missing/Captured and promote him to Staff Sergeant.

There is no civilian review process in place similar to the military’s. Unlike Matt Maupin, Tim Bell’s status is a bit more tenuous and unsure. Likewise, so is his future. At the conclusion of hostilities, Tim Bell could easily fall through the political cracks as so many Americans have from other wars if we fail in our responsibility to him.

23 October 2006: US Army Reserve Specialist Ahmed Kousay Altaie, an Iraqi-born American citizen from Ann Arbor, MI; is kidnapped in Baghdad’s heavily fortified International Zone. SPC Altaie, a linguist and translator for the US Army, was on his way to visit relatives living in Baghdad when he was ceased by enemy forces. Like Matt Maupin and Tim Bell, the US military received hard intelligence that Ahmed Altaie was in fact alive and in captivity, and changed his status from DUSTWUN to Missing/Captured on 11 December 2006.

12 May 2007: The Islamic State of Iraq, a front organization for al-Qaeda, ambushed a US Army patrol assigned to the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division near Yussufiyah, south of Baghdad. In the ensuing firefight, 4 American soldiers and an Iraqi translator were killed and 3 other soldiers listed as DUSTWUN. On 23 May, the body of PFC Joseph Anzack, Jr. was found floating in the Euphrates River. PFC Anzack had been shot in the head and chest before he was dumped into the river.

16 June 2007: The US military disclosed that it had found the identification cards for PVT Byron W. Fouty of Waterford, MI and SPC Alex R. Jimenez of Lawrence, MA in an al-Qaeda safe house near Samarra, more than 100 miles north of the area in which they disappeared. In addition to the ID cards, the military found video production equipment, computers and weapons; but no people. On 29 June 2007, the status of PVT Fouty and SPC Jimenez was changed from DUSTWUN to Missing/Captured. On 1 Dec 2007, Alex Jimenez is promoted to Staff Sergeant and on 8 March 2008, Byron Fouty is promoted to Private First Class.

20 March 2008: A tip provided by local Iraqis led to the recovery of remains of SSgt Matt Maupin on the outskirts of Baghdad, approximately 12 miles from the convoy’s ambush site. On 30 March 2008, those remains were positively identified through DNA analysis and on 27 April 2008, Matt Maupin was buried with full military honors in Gate of Heaven Cemetery, Montgomery, OH.

1 July 2008: Coalition forces capture a leader of multiple AQI cells responsible for facilitating suicide attacks in Baghdad. On 3 July 2008, the AQI leader discloses the burial site location of PFC Fouty and SSgt Jimenez. However, no remains were located at that site. On 8 July 2008, a second AQI leader is

apprehended and questioned about the American POWs' burial site. He leads the coalition force from the original burial site to a nearby area where their remains were re-buried by him. Coalition forces excavate the area, which was located nearly 20 kilometers south of the ambush site, and recovered both men's remains along with various pieces of equipment and clothing. Both Alex Jimenez's and Byron Fouty's remains were positively identified through DNA analysis. On 25 July 2008: PFC Byron Fouty is buried with full military honors in Ft Sam Houston National Cemetery, San Antonio, TX. On 2 August 2008: SSgt Alex Jimenez is buried with full military honors in Long Island National Cemetery, Farmingdale, NY.

30 June 2009: Five months into his tour of duty in Afghanistan, US Army PFC Bowe R. Bergdahl of Hailey, ID is captured by the Taliban while on patrol in a contested area near the border with Pakistan. Initially listed as DUSTWUN, his status was upgraded to Missing/Captured on 18 July 2009 when the Taliban released the first of several videos confirming his status as a Prisoner of War. Additional evidence indicates PFC Bergdahl was moved deeper into Taliban-held territory in Ghazni Province, Afghanistan. There is also intelligence information suggesting he has been moved across the Afghan/Pakistan border. Further, since his capture, the Taliban has offered to return him to US control for a \$1 million dollar ransom. On occasion the Taliban has also tried to exchange him for various groups of high profile and ranking enemy combatants under US control. They have also threatened to execute Bowe Bergdahl if the US does not agree to a prisoner exchange or other bargain proposed by the Taliban.

26 February 2012: The US Army announced the remains of now SSGT Ahmed K. Altaie, which had been returned to American control earlier in the week, were positively identified through DNA analysis. On 2 March 2012, he was buried near his family in Dearborn, MI with full military honors.

Just as we have the responsibility to fight for the return of POW/MIAs from our nation's past wars, we have the responsibility to Tim Bell, Bowe Bergdahl and all other Americans who find themselves in the hands of an unscrupulous, vicious enemy.

Since the dissolution of the USSR, a treasure trove of evidence has turned up in communist files. In spite of the best efforts of the United States Government, the truth is coming out. For instance, in 1993, Steven Morris, a scholar from Harvard University's Russian Research Center, discovered a Top Secret document in the files of the Central Committee, Communist Party Soviet Union, International Department (formerly known as COMINTERN). General Tran Van Quang, Deputy Chief of Staff of the North Vietnamese Army, authored a report dated 15 September 1972 to the North Vietnamese Politburo, which ended up in Russian Intelligence archives. This document provided a detailed accounting of **1,205 live American POWs** then held in 11 North Vietnamese prisons. The General's statements are quite revealing:

"1,205 American prisoners of war located in the prisons of Vietnam – this is a big number. Officially, until now, we published a list of only 368 prisoners of war, the rest we have not revealed. The government of the U. S. A. knows this well, but it does not know the exact number of prisoners of war, and can only make guesses based on its losses."

Note that this report is dated 4 months **before** the war ended. It only includes POWs held by North Vietnam in North Vietnam up to that point. However, it does **not** include Prisoners of War held in South Vietnam by the Viet Cong, those POWs held in Laos by the Pathet Lao, or those POWs held in Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge.

The Senate Armed Services Committee provides supporting evidence. From a Committee Memo for Record dated 8 April 1993: "A member of the DRV (*Democratic Republic of Vietnam*) Politburo, Mr. Le Dinh, defected in 1979. He was debriefed (unprofessionally) by DIA, and he revealed that as of 1975, the Vietnamese possessed about 700 American POWs." The memo goes on to state: "Again, Le Dinh's statement that about 700 American POWs were kept back is authoritative. It is consistent with the Russian document, and it corroborates it."

Former National Security Advisors Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, for the Nixon and Carter Administrations respectively, have publicly and frequently stated that, based on their knowledge and expertise, they believe the Vietnamese document found in the Russian archives to be **authentic and accurate** in its numbers of living POWs held back by Vietnam. Further, a number of well placed Pentagon

military officials, administration bureaucrats, and Washington insiders, have agreed with Kissinger and Brzezinski's appraisal of the validity of the report.

Why would the Vietnamese and Laotians still hold American POWs this long after the war? One reason: *money*. On 27 January 1973, the Paris Peace Accords were signed with the knowledge some POWs were retained by the Vietnamese as collateral.

On 1 February 1973, President Nixon secretly agreed to pay \$3.25 billion to the North Vietnamese in reconstruction aid. This agreement was sweetened by an additional \$1 to \$1.5 billion in medical assistance. He resigned soon thereafter, and Congress, unaware of the deal, never appropriated the money.

The Laotians also wanted reconstruction money. However, the United States refused to even talk to them. Under these circumstances, why should we expect them to release the POWs they were holding?

Credible, documented evidence has been presented that some American POWs were sold or bartered to the Soviet Union in exchange for weapons and other badly needed supplies. American POWs with "*Special Talents*" – such as electronics, communications, state of the art weapons systems, etc. – are said to have been especially in demand. At least six Prisoners of War also ended up in the hands of the Chinese; possibly others given to the North Koreans.

Why hasn't the American government done more to obtain the release of Live POWs? What motive could there possibly be NOT to bring them home? Very few in our government are willing to say much about it, but theories abound. One theory made plausible both by credible evidence and by recent events, holds that some of the POWs held by the Vietnamese and Laotians were actually captured years after the war in Southeast Asia supposedly ended.

According to this theory, our intelligence agencies were unable to convince Congress to fund covert activities in that area following the end of the war. Though these activities were for the most part legitimate and reasonable, Congress was glad to be out of the morass of the war and did not want to hear anything more about that part of the world.

Some believe the CIA used its "properties" – private businesses such as *Air America* and *Nugan Hand Bank* that provided "covers" for their agents – to smuggle arms and drugs throughout the "golden triangle" and "launder" the profits for diversion to covert activities.

It is only reasonable to assume that some of the pilots and support crew would inevitably fall into the hands of our enemies. There is evidence that some of these latest "POWs" are being held in the same prison camps as the military POWs. If any of those original captives came home talking about others who had joined them as recently as 1982 or 1983, it would be the end of any number of reputations and political careers. This includes members of both major political parties and all Administrations since 1973.

Fact or fiction? Our government knows the answers – and it isn't talking!

Those Living American Prisoners of War will continue to survive until one of four things happens: They die of illness, they die of old age, they are murdered or we get them out. It is that simple. They have no other options.

Other Wars

Vietnam was not the first war in which the United States Government abandoned its citizens for political expediency. Likewise, it is not the last.

World War I

At the conclusion of World War I, thousands of American, British and French troops stationed on the Eastern Front with the Allied Expeditionary Force were sent to Siberia to protect the rear. As a result of the fighting

against Soviet Bolshevik forces around Archangel in 1918-1919, there were many casualties, and eyewitness accounts of hundreds of allied soldiers who disappeared.

At the conclusion of hostilities, negotiations with the Bolsheviks for the repatriation of the prisoners was begun, than terminated by orders from General Pershing, the commander of the American Expeditionary Force in Russia. These negotiations were delayed because the Bolshevik commander was unable to obtain authority from Moscow to conduct them.

In an 18 April 1921, the *New York Times* article entitled "Captives' Release Repeatedly Sought" reported that "...the American prisoners held by the Soviet Government have been told by the Bolsheviks that they are held because the United States government has not made vigorous demands for their release..."

While the USG did not publicly admit that American military personnel remained in the custody of the Red Army in Russia upon the return of the American Expeditionary Force in Russia, the *New York Times* article continued: "It has been demonstrated that the Soviet government is holding Americans in the hope that the United States will agree to recognize the Soviet (government) or enter into trade relations with it or release communists from prison in this country..."

Further, during this time it was widely known that the Bolsheviks held many American POWs and other US citizens against their will. In fact, the new Soviet Government attempted to barter the Americans they held in their prisons for US diplomatic recognition and trade relations with their regime. The United States refused, even though the Soviets had at one time threatened "...that Americans held by the Soviets government would be put to death..."

President Harding's Secretary of State, Charles Evans Hughes, responded to the Soviet demand for recognition and trade relations in return for prisoners by saying: "...the United States will not consider any suggestions of any character from that government until the Americans now held as prisoners are permitted to leave the country."

On 20 August 1921, the United States concluded the Riga Agreement with the Soviet government to provide humanitarian aid to starving and sick Russian children. Among the conditions imposed by the US on the Soviets for this aid was the following: "The Soviet Authorities having previously agreed as the absolute sine qua non of any assistance on the part of the American people to release all Americans detained in Russia and to facilitate the departure from Russia of all Americans so desiring, the A. R. A. (American Relief Administration) reserves the right to suspend temporarily or terminate all of its relief work in Russia in case of failure on the part of the Soviet Authorities to fully comply with this *primary condition*..."

Because of this agreement, the USG expected 20 prisoners to be released, and were surprised when 100 Americans were turned over to US authorities. In reality, history has shown not all American prisoners were released. The Soviets held some back presumably for leverage in any future negotiations with the United States.

Public outcry throughout the US over The Soviet's behavior resulted in the formation of the 1929 Veterans of Foreign Wars/US Graves Registration Expedition which was allowed to travel into the Soviet Union. The team was able to recover and later identify 86 set of remains. Many others that were also recovered were never identified. Given the technical and scientific limitations of the day, as well as the length of time and the number of nationalities involved, officials believe now that some of the remains thought to be positively identified, in reality may have been misidentified.

American Expeditionary Force in Russia personnel who were listed as either Missing in Action or Killed In Action/Body Not Recovered are the first men to face arbitrary status changes. As detailed in a 12 November 1930 memorandum from the Acting Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2 (intelligence) entitled: *Alleged confinement of American Officers and Soldiers in Russian prisons*, the author writes: "An administrative determination has been placed on each of their records that they were killed in action on the date they were reported missing." In other words, all of the men who were MIA were determined to be KIA/BNR on the date they were reported missing.

In 1933 Franklin D. Roosevelt officially recognized the Soviet government. As a result of this formal recognition, the Soviets returned just 19 sets of remains in 1934 who were then “identified” by Graves Registration. However, none of the live prisoners were returned. Since an administrative determination of death had been placed in each missing man’s records, as far as the United States government and the laws of this country were concerned, these men were legally dead. A handful of USG officials with access to the intelligence about living POWs and the Soviet concentration camps and prisons they were in knew about their existence, but the American public was kept in the dark.

The manner in which those abandoned Americans were treated following World War I illustrates succinctly the major problems faced by this nation in recovering its citizens – both alive and dead. These problems, which can be directly linked to the aftermath of World War I, still affect attempts to account for and repatriate both military personnel and civilians when captured by any Communist regime today. These problems include:

- 1 The bureaucratic and legal assertion by the USG that the men who were POW/MIA were killed in action on the date they were reported as missing or sometime thereafter.
- 2 The attempts by Communist regimes to use prisoners as barter for economic and diplomatic benefits.
- 3 The dissemination and lies of the Communists about the existence and location of prisoners.
- 4 The on-again, off-again return of remains.
- 5 Where there is an unclear military victory over a Communist enemy, the American POW/MIAs are at the mercy of the reluctance of that enemy to return them and the weakness of the USG to pursue a clear, open policy for their repatriation.

World War I set the precedent by the USG of abandoning its fighting servicemen and women, as well as civilians; and knowingly leaving them in the barbaric hands of its enemies.

World War II

World War II was a great military victory on all fronts for the Armed Forces of the United States. However, there were 78,751 men and women – mostly military personnel – who were POW/MIAs at the conclusion of that war.

These losses included people whose ships were lost at sea with all hands disappearing with the ship, aircraft lost both over water and land, beach landings where thousands of men died in the surf and whose remains were carried out to sea, massive land battles and small unit firefights. It was a war we won. We had full access to crash sites, battle sites, and grave sites. There are many cemeteries on all fronts with headstones that read: “American Soldier (Sailor – Airman – Marine), died during a certain battle, on a given date, identity unknown.”

As victors, we also had access to all the enemy prison camps. However, as in World War I, the United States did not realize the duplicity with which the Soviet Union would conduct itself in the closing days of World War II. Despite the total victory in Europe, USG documents now verify that 23,500 American prisoners of war, along with other Allied POWs, held by the Nazis were never repatriated. These POW camps were overrun by the Red Army in large part because General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, decided to stop the US and British drive eastward into Germany in order to wait for Soviet forces driving west. The primary reason for this move was so that US and Soviet forces could meet in Berlin. The end result was hundreds of thousands of Allied POWs, as well as millions of Western European citizens, came under Soviet control.

One such American GI was Martin Siegel, a prisoner in Stalag IV-B, Muhlberg – a Nazi camp in eastern Germany overrun by a Red Army tank battalion. Because he spoke Russian, he was assigned the American POWs’ intermediary and translator with Major Vasilli Vershenko, the officer in command of the tank battalion. The first question Martin Siegal asked Major Vershenko was: “When were the US POWs to be repatriated?” To that, the Major replied that his primary concern was with the “Russian prisoners held in a separate compound at Stalag IV-B” as “they had to be interviewed individually since they felt that there were many ‘cowards, traitors and deserters among them and they had to be dealt with expeditiously.’” Major Vershenko added that with regard to the repatriation of US and Allied POWs now under Red Army control, “the

Russians and the Americans had agreed to a pact wherein the Russians would receive 'credits' for each American POW returned," and that the process would be a "complex logistical matter."

The Russian Major's view of the Russian repatriation process for financial and economic "credits" accurately reflected Soviet policy. This view was upheld by American Major General R. W. Barker, the Allied Chief Negotiator for the repatriation of Allied POWs under Red Army control. General Barker wrote in a report to the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Allied Headquarters that after more than four hours of discussions with his Red Army counterpart: "...the SHAEF (Supreme Headquarter of the Allied European Forces) representatives came to the firm conviction that British and American prisoners of war were, in effect, being held hostage by the Russians until deemed expedient by them to permit their release. This latter point was further borne out by subsequent events."

Major Vershenko's comments about economic "credits" were not wholly inaccurate. Weeks before V-E Day the Soviets had requested a \$6 billion line of credit from the United States (equivalent to \$59.8 billion in 1991 dollars). In fact, those "credits" were an active Soviet consideration throughout the repatriation period.

The Soviet rationale for not repatriating Allied soldiers and citizens was motivated by more complex and repugnant reason than merely money. In the memoirs of former Secretary of State under President Truman, James F. Byrnes, there appears an illuminating conversation between himself and Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs Molotov: "Mr. Molotov came to see me, on instructions from Moscow...(Molotov) wanted to complain of the way in which the surrender terms (with Japan) were being carried out. He complained particularly about the way the Japanese Army was being demobilized. It was dangerous, he said, merely to disarm the Japanese and send them home; they should be held as prisoners of war. We should do what the Red Army was doing with the Japanese it had taken in Manchuria – make them work...No one can say accurately how many Japanese prisoners have been taken to the Soviet Union. In mid-1947, the best guess was that approximately 500,000 were still there."

The problems of accounting for POW/MIAs was complicated by the fact that the Soviets were just as uncooperative in the repatriation of the millions of displaced civilians. In Europe, as well as in the Far East, the Russians guarded a sea of prisoners whom they considered to be "human capital and slave labor" in their view. This included not only Allied POWs along with Nazi and Japanese troops, but also civilians from every country the Red Army passed through.

A window through which a glimpse of the fate of these citizens – in this case French POWs – can be seen in the following cable from the Allied Command's Mission in France to the Supreme Allied Headquarters for all of Europe, dated 30 May 1945 (V-E day was 7 May 1945). The cable read: "Accordance your telephone request, cable from Fifteenth Army French Detachment to General CHERRIERE MMFA Hotel CONTINENTAL PARIS of 25 May is paraphrased for your information. Report of Lt. D. HAVERNAS, according to *confirmed* reports, Russians still do not release thousands of French ex-PWs and civilians, forcing them to work. Many transferred eastwards to unknown destination. Please inform high authority. 700 ex-PWs are evacuated daily from this area to UDINE. Civilians held under difficult food and accommodation conditions."

The next day a cable detailing the magnitude of the masses of Allied prisoners of war and displaced citizens held in Soviet territory was sent from Supreme Allied Headquarters, signed by General Eisenhower, to the US Military Mission in Moscow. The General wanted an explanation from the Soviets for the slow pace of repatriation of the citizens. The discrepancies between the Allies' most up to date figures and the number actually repatriated were outlined in writing. More than two weeks later, General Eisenhower sent another cable to the US military Mission in Moscow with more detail discrepancies.

Once again he requested a detailed Soviet response to his concerns over these unrepatriated prisoners of war and other Allied citizens in Red Army occupied territory. The cable dated 19 June 1945 stated: "A further approach to the Soviets regarding numbers of western Europeans in Soviet occupied area of Eastern Europe is urgently necessary. About 1,200,000 French have been repatriated. Less than 100,000 remain in SHAEF-occupied area. French insist total POW and displaced persons is 2,300,000. Even allowing for several hundred thousand unaccounted for trekkers, discrepancy is still very great. About 170,000 Dutch have been repatriated, with less than 25,000 in the SHAEF area. Total Dutch estimate of deportees is

340,000.” In other words, the number of men and women released by the Russians was far less than what the Russians claimed they released, and much less than the total number of people they held hostage.

These figures are truly astonishing. Hundreds of thousands of human beings of all ages and nationalities were swallowed up by the communists while the rest of the world stood by helplessly. The Soviet’s claimed they “cannot say much about” the hundreds of thousands of Western European soldiers and citizens who apparently disappeared in Red Army occupied territory.

On 22 May 1945, an Allied-Soviet meeting was held in Halle, Germany to discuss the most expeditious overland delivery of Allied and Soviet ex-prisoners of war and displaced persons liberated by the Allied Expeditionary Force and the Red Army. This meeting, more than any other, determined the fate of hundreds of thousands of people trapped in the Red Army occupied territory of Eastern Europe. The Soviets agreed to give American and British POWs preferential release treatment; however, in regard to any political prisoners – the Soviets firmly and flatly stated all persons in this category had already been released and there were no more in their possession – period.

Months before the end of the war, the Western Allies and Soviets met at the Yalta Conference on 11 February 1945 to establish a mechanism to expedite the movement of the hundreds of thousands prisoners of war and displaced persons expected at the conclusion of hostilities. These provisions allowed their respective military officers into Allied and Soviet controlled territory at various collection points in each country throughout Europe in order to process, arrange for transportation and otherwise oversee the registration, care and feeding of the soldiers who were repatriated. The locations where these repatriation officers were to be sent was agreed to. Further, these officers would be assigned liaison officers to assist them in the repatriation process.

Less than a month after the Yalta agreement was signed, Ambassador W. Averell Harriman dispatched an URGENT TOP SECRET personal message to President Roosevelt. In part the cable said: “Since the Yalta Conference General Deane and I have been making constant efforts to get the Soviets to carry out this agreement in full. We have been baffled by promises which have not been fulfilled...”

Specifically, Mr. Harriman stated in the same cable “I am outraged” that “the Soviet Government has declined to carry out the agreement signed at Yalta in its other aspects, namely, that our contact officers be permitted to go immediately to points where our prisoners are first collected, to evaluate our prisoners, particularly the sick, (and transported) in our own airplanes, or to send our supplies to points other than Odessa, which is 1,000 miles from point of liberation, where they are urgently needed.”

Mr. Harriman continued: “For the past ten days the Soviets have made the same statement that Stalin has made to you (FDR), namely, that all prisoners are in Odessa or entrained thereto, whereas I have now positive proof that this was not repeat not true on 26 February, the date on which the statement was first made. This supports my belief that Stalin’s statement to you is inaccurate.....There appear to be hundreds of our prisoners wandering about Poland trying to locate American contact officers for protection. I am told that our men don’t like the idea of getting into a Russian camp. The Polish people and the Polish Red Cross are being extremely hospitable, whereas food and living conditions in Russian camps are poor. In addition we have reports that there are a number of sick or wounded who are too ill to move. These Stalin does not mention in his cable. Only a small percentage of those reported sick or wounded arrive at Odessa.”

Odessa was a Black Sea port in the Ukraine through which some 2,900 American soldiers were processed and repatriated. It is the only camp in the entire Soviet occupied zone in Europe in which US contact personnel were allowed and was the source of much of Ambassador Harriman’s outrage.

Six days later Mr. Harriman sent a very lengthy and blistering cable to Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius, Jr. He spelled out in no uncertain terms the Soviet Government’s blatant disregard for the Yalta Agreement, as well as their bald-faced lies regarding the implementation of the agreement. Further, he went into detail about the conditions under which our prisoners of war were subjected to exist at the hands of the communists.

He ended the cable with the following list of recommendations for the Secretary of State to consider:

- 1 That General Eisenhower issue orders to restrict the movements of Soviet contact officers in France to several camps or points of concentration of their citizens far removed from the points of liberation, comparable to Lwow and Odessa.
- 2 That Lend-Lease refuse to consider requests of Soviet Government (additional to our fourth protocol commitments) for such items as sugar, industrial equipment or other items that are not immediately essential for the Red Army and the Russian war effort.
- 3 That consideration be given to allowing our prisoners of war en route to Naples to give stories to the newspapers of the hardships they have been subjected to between point of liberation and arrival at Odessa and that in answer to questions of correspondents, the War Department explain the provisions of our agreement and the Soviet Government's failure to carry out the provisions of our agreement according to any reasonable interpretation.

Mr. Harriman concluded the cable by saying: "I request urgent consideration of this question and the Department's preliminary reaction. General Deane requests that this cable be shown to General Marshall (General Eisenhower's second in command at Supreme Allied Headquarters)."

Cables were exchanged between President Roosevelt and Marshall Stalin regarding every aspect of the Yalta Agreement relating to prisoners of war. The Americans pressed the Russians, the Russian leader continued to lie about the number of prisoners under Soviet control as well as the treatment of the few he did acknowledge stating "it concerned him deeply" that President Roosevelt would think that the Soviets would in any way mistreat prisoners. Marshall Stalin added: "I must also say that US ex-prisoners of war liberated by the Red Army have been treated to good conditions in Soviet camps – better conditions than those afforded Soviet ex-prisoners of war in US camps, where some of them were lodged with German war prisoners and were subjected to unfair treatment and unlawful persecutions, including beating, as has been communicated to the US Government on more than one occasion."

In the end, the USG backed down allowing the Soviets to run roughshod over all captives under their control. The USG issued a new policy of censoring all stories of Russian mistreatment of US POWs effectively ensuring that the public perception of the Soviet Union as a stout ally of the United States would continue. Despite the fact that Moscow was clearing the release of every US prisoner held in Red Army territory – literally releasing them one at a time – the American forces were ordered: "...that no repeat no retaliatory action will be taken by US forces at this time for Soviet refusal to meet our desires with regard to American contact teams and aid for American personnel liberated by Russian forces."

At the same time the Soviets were attempting to blackmail the allies into giving them additional aid and recognition for their puppet states, they were forcibly repatriating Red Army soldiers who desperately did not want to return to Mother Russia. However, the United States was fully committed to the policy of forcible repatriation, the concept of which was included in the Yalta Agreement. The Allies believed this agreement would result in the repatriation of all of their soldiers and citizens. Unfortunately, nothing was farther from the truth. Hundreds of thousands of Russians citizens forcibly returned to the communists were either shot or sent to forced labor camps.

On 19 May 1945, four days before the start of the Halle meeting, General Eisenhower signed a cable stating: "Numbers of US prisoners estimated in Russian control 25,000." Other cables between various US personnel and agencies, and cables between the Americans and Russians quoting large numbers of US and other Allied POWs still unrepatriated have been declassified over the last few years. One of these cables dated 30 May 1945 and authored by General Kenner, General Eisenhower's Surgeon General at SHAEF Headquarters, detailed the number of Allied ex-PWs and Displaced Persons reported being held captive in Red Army territory as follows:

	<u>PW</u>	<u>DP</u>
Belgian	50,000	115,000
Dutch	4,000	140,000
British	20,000	
American	20,000	
French	250,000	850,000

On 1 June 1945, General Eisenhower sent another cable following the new official USG line regarding the number of American POW/MIAs saying that “only small numbers of US prisoners of war still remain in Russian hands.” On the same day as the cable, the *New York Times* reported the War Department had announced that “...’substantially all’ of the American soldiers taken prisoner in Europe are accounted for. Under-Secretary Robert P. Patterson said ‘This means it is not expected that many of those who are still being carried as missing in action will appear later as having been prisoners of war.’”

While the Soviet Union transferred hundreds of thousands of people into their slave labor system in Siberia, the United States was faced with cleaning up the residue of the war – those men still listed as Prisoners of War and Missing in Action. This was accomplished through the arbitrary status change system established after World War I. The Office of the Chief of Staff of the War Department, whose main function was to resolve each outstanding case by determining – as soon as enough time elapsed to make it legally possible – that each man is “permanently lost,” and therefore, dead.

In a classified “Memorandum For The President,” dated 18 July 1955, John Foster Dullas wrote then President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a short report, the subject of which was “*Americans Detained in the Soviet Union.*” This document was not declassified until 30 July 1991 and strikes at the heart the duplicity that developed on both side of the Iron Curtain in regard to POW/MIAs. It bears printing in its entirety:

“The American people share with other peoples of the world a real concern about the imprisonment of some of their countrymen in the Soviet Union. Most of these persons have been held since World War II. It is time to liquidate problems rising out of that War so that we may proceed with greater mutual trust to the solution of major issues facing the world today.”

“Of greatest concern to American people are reports reaching the United States about Americans still being held in Soviet prison camps. The American embassy in Moscow had made many representations on this subject. While we appreciate the recent release of several Americans, others still remain in Soviet custody. On 16 July the American Embassy in Moscow gave the Foreign Office a list of eight American citizens about whose detention in the Soviet Union we have information from returning prisoners of war. Any action you would take to bring about the early release of these particular persons would help relations between our countries.”

“We have also received a number of reports from returning European prisoners of war that members of the crew of the US Navy Privateer, shot down over the Baltic Sea on 18 April 1950, are alive and in Soviet prison camps. We are asking for their repatriation and that of other American citizens being held in the Soviet Union not only because of general humanitarian principles, but also because such action is called for under the Litvinov-Roosevelt Agreement of 1933.”

The Korean War

Unlike the end result of being victorious in World War II, Allied forces were not allowed to achieve a military victory in Korea. The Korean War ended at the negotiating table between communist North Korean representatives and United Nations representatives. Likewise, there were no victors to dictate terms, and no losers to comply to those terms.

With Regard to prisoner of war repatriation, the North Koreans initially demanded an “all-for-all” prisoner exchange. The United States was reluctant to agree to this formula based on its World War II experience with the Yalta Agreement and mandatory repatriation, knowing that thousands of those forced to return to the Soviet Union were either shot or interned in slave labor camps, where most of them died. After two long years of negotiating, the North Koreans agreed to the principle of voluntary, “non-forcible repatriation.” This agreement stated that each side would release only those prisoners who wished to return to their respective countries. That agreement continues to come back to haunt the USG.

In early 1953, the first exchange of prisoners of war from the Korean War, named Operation Little Switch, allowed for the repatriation of sick or wounded prisoners from both sides. This exchange was in large part for humanitarian reasons, and returned approximately 600 Americans plus an undisclosed number of other UN personnel to United Nations control.

Operation Big Switch was the name given to the largest and final exchange of prisoners between the North Koreans and UN forces. It occurred over a one-month period from 5 August to 6 September 1953. Approximately 14,200 communist Chinese POWs elected not to return to the Peoples Republic of China; while 21 American POWs elected to stay with the communist forces, and likely went to China. These 21 Americans were defectors, and should not to be confused with unrepatriated US POWs.

However, USG documents state that the our government knew that nearly 1,000 confirmed prisoners of war, along with an undetermined number of men listed missing in action, were still held captive by the communists after Operation Big Switch. Some documents state that at least 3,000 additional prisoners were never repatriated out of the 8,177 POW/MIA who remain unaccounted for.

Three days after the start of Operation Big Switch, the *New York Times* reported that: "General James A. Van Fleet, retired commander of the United States Eighth Army in Korea, estimated tonight that a large percentage of the 8,000 American soldiers listed as missing in Korean were alive."

A report by the UN Combined Command for Reconnaissance Activity, Korea, reported five days into the major prisoner exchange that: "Figures show that the total number of MIAs, plus known captives, less those to be repatriated, leaves a balance of 8,000 unaccounted for (Americans)." This report goes on to reference numerous reports of UN POWs, including a sizable number of Americans, transferred to Manchuria, China, and the USSR since the beginning of hostilities in Korea, specifically it states: "...many POWs transferred have been technicians and factory workers. Other POWs transferred had a knowledge of Cantonese and are reportedly used for propaganda purposes."

Two and a half weeks after Operation Big Switch, General Mark Clark refused to sign the armistice agreement, thus verifying that "all POWs were exchanged." He pointed out that the communists had committed themselves to full repatriation of prisoners before the agreement would be signed and this obligation was binding upon them regardless of where captured or held in custody. Finally, after being ordered to sign the armistice agreement twice by President Truman, General Clark reluctantly signed the agreement.

On 17 June 1955, almost two years after the end of Operation Big Switch, the office of the Secretary of Defense issued an internal report titled "Recovery of Unrepatriated Prisoners of War." This report admitted that: "After the official repatriation efforts were completed, the UN Command found that it still had slightly less than 1,000 US PWs (not MIAs) 'unaccounted for' by the communists."

This report was both frank and forthright. It went on to state: "At the time of the official repatriation, some of our repatriates stated that they had been informed by the communists that they (the communists) were holding 'some' US flyers as 'political prisoners' rather than as prisoners of war and that *these people would have to be 'negotiated for' through political or diplomatic channels.*

Due to the fact that the United States did not recognize the communist Chinese government, no direct political negotiations were instituted. The US State Department, however, conducted some exploratory discussions with the British in an attempt to get at the problem. The situation remained relatively dominant until 23 November 1954 when the Peking radio announced that 13 of these "political prisoners" had been sentenced for "spying." This announcement caused a public uproar and a demand from US citizens, Congressional leaders and various organizations demanding the USG take action to affect their release.

Likewise, numerous reports of other American POWs in captivity were brought out of North Korea and China by UN POWs from other nations who were released after the Peking radio broadcast was made and filtered into the USG.

Despite the political inconvenience to the Department of Defense, the USG felt that the issue and controversy had been controlled. The conclusion of the report, "Recovery of Unrepatriated Prisoners of War," stated: "Such as they are, our current efforts in the political field, plus the 'stand-by' alternatives developed by the military, represent the full range of possible additional efforts to recover personnel now in custody of foreign powers. One hand, we are bound at present by the President's 'peaceful means' decree. The military course of action apparently cannot be taken unilaterally, and we are possessed of some rather 'reluctant' allies in this respect. The problem becomes a philosophical one. If we are 'at war,' cold, hot or

otherwise, casualties and losses must be expected and perhaps we must learn to live with this type of thing. If we are in for fifty years of peripheral 'fire fights' we may be forced to adopt a rather cynical attitude on this for political course of action something like General Erskine outlined which would (1) instill in the soldier a much more effective 'don't get captured' attitude, and (2) we should also push to get the military commander more discretionary authority to retaliate, fast and hard against these communist tactics."

Additional information was found in intelligence channels that reported the transfer of large numbers of Americans. One such report, a Foreign Service Dispatch (cable) dated 23 March 1954 was delivered by Air Pouch from the US diplomatic post in Hong Kong to the State Department in Washington. This report chronicles the late 1951 and spring of 1952 movements of hundreds of American POWs captured during the war who were seen en route to Siberia. These first-hand sightings came from both refugees and local residents who saw several hundred American prisoners of war being transferred from Chinese trains to Russian trains at Manchou-li near the border of Manchuria and Siberia. Further, these eye witness reports were very detailed and specific as to numbers, descriptions, location and condition of the American POWs.

US intelligence had developed information on how the communists separated the POWs into three types of POW camps out of North Korea. Camps termed "peace camps" were for persons who exhibited pro-Communist leanings, were characterized by considerate treatment of the prisoners and the staging within the camps of communist rallies and meetings. The largest peace camp, which held 2,000 prisoners, was located at Chungchun, China. Two others were located at K'aiyuan Ksien and Pench'I, China.

Reform camps, all of which were in Manchuria, detained anti-communist prisoners possessing certain technical skills. Emphasis at these camps was on re-indoctrination of the prisoners.

Normal prisoner of war camps, which were located in North Korea, detained prisoners whom the communists would later exchange. According to intelligence reports, the prisoners in the peace and reform camps were not going to be exchanged.

Further, officials in control of the North Korean POW camps sent reports on individual prisoners to the War Prisoner Administrative Office. Cooperative prisoners were being transferred to peace camps. ROK (Republic of Korea) officers were being shot; ROK army soldiers were being reindoctrinated and assimilated into the North Korean army.

In an attempt to resolve the unrepatriated US POW problem from the Korean War by diplomacy, the United States officially communicated with the Soviet Government on 5 May 1954. The communiqué read in part: "...The United States government has recently received reports which support earlier indications that American prisoners of war who had seen action in Korea have been transported to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and that they are now in Soviet custody. The United States Government desires to receive urgently all information available to the Soviet Government concerning these American personnel and to arrange their repatriation at the earliest possible time."

On 12 May 1954, the Soviet Union replied: "The assertion contained in the indicated note that American prisoners of war who participated in military actions in Korea have allegedly been transferred to the Soviet Union and at the present time are being kept under Soviet guard is devoid of any foundation whatsoever and is clearly far-fetched, since there are not and have not been any such persons in the Soviet Union."

The Soviet response predicates denial of access to the men on its refusal to acknowledge them as prisoners of war. In fact, the Soviets made it standard practice to refuse to recognize US citizenship of the American soldier. Therefore, from the Soviet standpoint, their denial was accurate.

Unfortunately for American POWs, the USG never learned the Soviet's lesson in semantics of not acknowledging a person's citizenship. According to a 15 April 1991 press advisory issued by the US State Department, in which the United States once again requested that the Soviets "provide us with any additional information on any other US citizens who may have been detained as a result of World War II, the Korean conflict or the Vietnam War," - a request that continued to repeat the same mistake in language the State Department made 37 years earlier.

Over the years the US State Department frequently alluded to its declared intention to follow “every credible lead in providing families of US service members with information about their loved ones.” A 21 January 1980 memorandum from Michael Oksenberg, a White House staffer, to Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Advisor under President Carter, reveals the cynical view and attitude of at least one USG official with regard to the non-repatriation issue. In part the memo reads: “...a letter from you is important to indicate that you take recent refugee reports of sightings of live Americans ‘seriously.’ This is simply good politics; DIA and State are playing this game, and you should not be the whistle blower. The idea is to say that the President (Carter) is determined to pursue any lead concerning possible live MIAs.”

The People’s Republic of China did release some POWs later over an extended period of time after Operation Big Switch. In 1973, Chinese communists repatriated two American POWs who had been *captured* during the Korean War, along with a pilot, Philip Smith, who was shot down over the Gulf of Tonkin during the Vietnam War. During communist interrogation sessions conducted during his seven years of solitary confinement in a PRC jail, these two US POWs from the Korean War were paraded before him. Philip Smith reported the Chinese told him: “...they wouldn’t release me, and would hold me like they’d done these other guys until I recanted.”

(The above American POWs from the Korean War were Richard Fecteau, released on 13 December 1971, and John T. Downey, released on 12 March 1973. They comprised a CIA aircrew shot down over China on 29 November 1952.)

Most Americans would find it incomprehensible that the communists would hold US POWs against their will for 20 years, then release them. The rationale to this policy does have foundation. At the conclusion of Operation Big Switch, the USG abandoned American POWs held against their will in the custody of the North Koreans, the mainland Chinese and the Soviet Union. In all the communications over the years regarding the repatriation of these men, the USG continued to use diplomatic language – either by intent or stupidity – designed not to illicit their release. What better way to embarrass the USG, and get the attention of the American public, than to surface long-held American prisoners of war without explanation?

This pattern of knowingly abandoning American prisoners of war and its citizens to the communists had by now quietly become political and diplomatic policy in the highest offices of our government.

Korean POWs from another Repatriation Experience

In 1975, after the successful invasion into South Vietnam by the communist North Vietnamese forces, the North Vietnamese captured two high-ranking South Korean officials who were assisting the South Vietnamese in the defense of their country. The North Vietnamese promptly imprisoned the two South Koreans. During their imprisonment, the South Korean government negotiated continually with the Vietnamese for their countrymen’s release.

The two South Koreans remained in captivity throughout the years of negotiation. During this time, the Vietnamese never once admitted holding the South Korean officials. Even after the South Korean government presented the Vietnamese Government incontrovertible photographic evidence that showed that the two men incarcerated POWs in Vietnam, the Vietnamese Government continued to deny holding the men.

In 1980, five years after the South Koreans were captured, the Vietnamese Government repatriated the two prisoners to South Korea. Further, to this day, the Vietnamese continue to deny ever holding those two men.

The French Indochina War

In 1946, after a series of armed clashes with Ho Chi Minh’s forces in North Vietnam, France agreed to allow his group to establish an autonomous state of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) as a somewhat independent state within French Indochina.

Problems persisted between the French colonial government and the DRV. As various other political factions and nationalist forces within Indochina collectively resisted French rule, armed conflicts intensified.

Finally, in late 1946, the Vietnamese communists and other nationalist forces combined into a revolutionary army, now commonly referred to as the Viet Minh. A full scale “war of liberation” commenced throughout Southeast Asia to remove the French colonial government from Indochina and continued from 1946 to 1954.

On 21 July 1954, the French Indochina War ended with France’s defeat at Dien Bien Phu, and with more than 22,000 French troops unaccounted for. The French believed that 9,537 of them were being held prisoner and asked specifically for their return. Even though there was ample evidence that these men were in enemy hands, the Vietnamese response was that “they were not holding prisoners, but that they did need humanitarian aid.”

By the deadline of 9 September 1954 for the release of all prisoners of war, only about one-third of them had actually been repatriated; and this included many men who had been listed as missing in action. And by May 1955, when the French forces pulled out of North Vietnam, the number of men from the French Expeditionary Corps listed as “failed to return from captivity” totaled 8,746; and of these unrepatriated POWs, 2,995 were French Nationals.

None of France’s war dead from Dien Bien Phu or other battle sites in North Vietnam, and none of its war dead from Viet Minh prison camps or military hospitals were repatriated. By contrast, all French prisoners held by nationalist or communist forces in Laos and Cambodia were returned or accounted for, as were many of the remains of French war dead in those two countries.

The Hanoi government responded to charges of withholding prisoners by asserting that it had release all of them in accordance with the terms of the Geneva Agreement, and that any missing personnel whom they had not listed as having “rallied” to their side should be considered killed in action or dead as a result of combat wounds.

The French, being subtle diplomats, took the hint for humanitarian aid and began funneling money into Vietnam under cover of reconstruction aid for the return of their war dead, and for the upkeep of French military cemeteries – and low and behold, live men started coming home! Also these men were emerging from throughout Southeast Asia. The French went along with the Vietnamese premise that they were ralliers, not POWs, and they kept coming out while the French kept paying. They paid for French Nationals, and they paid for Legionnaires: for non-French members from Central and Eastern Europe, throughout Africa and North Africa, and French soldiers of mixed blood – those who were half French and half Vietnamese, as well as local forces from Laos and Cambodia.

Over the next 16 years more than 1,000 Frenchmen and French Legionnaires came back from the dead. The French Government was paying \$6 million a year, possibly more, via Hungarian banks and the Asians somehow managed to find more and more men.

In 1962, about forty “Metropolitan” French POWs were returned to France. After their return, the French government charged these former POWs with desertion, calling them “ralliers,” and court martialed them. Some of them received prison sentences up to five years and no back pay for the period they were in North Vietnamese captivity. Another group of approximately twenty Metropolitan French POWs chose to remain in North Vietnam. This latter group was court martialed in absentia for capital crimes committed during the war and elected to remain in North Vietnam rather than return to France to face execution.

One French soldier of mixed blood was repatriated to France in the mid-1970s. When he arrived in Paris, he asked for his back pay as a prisoner of war would naturally do. The French Army refused to pay it to him charging that he was saying that he was a rallier and that he would have to prove that he was not a traitor. He insisted that he had been a prisoner of war for all these years serving his country on active duty, and the French Army would have to prove otherwise. Ultimately he sued, and he won.

Just as the Soviets did at the conclusion of World War II in the Pacific and Europe in 1945, after the signing of the 1954 Geneva Accords, the Soviets sent a delegation to North Vietnam to forcibly repatriate French Foreign Legion POWs identified as former nationals of Soviet bloc nations.

The International Control Commission (ICC) was established shortly after the war ended to monitor the repatriation of the POWs. Within a very short period of time, the system proved unworkable when reliable western observers in Vietnam reported that hundreds of Legionnaires, primarily those from eastern-bloc

countries, were released via China without notifying the ICC or the French Command, which was a requirement of the peace agreement.

This process continued through the 1960s and early 1970s when the Hanoi regime returned hundreds of non-French personnel to their native countries as a direct result of actions taken by their embassies on the men's' behalf. This again was accomplished without officially informing the French authorities or the ICC. It is interesting to note that some of the men who were repatriated in the 1960s reported undergoing political training in North Vietnam before being released. Further, many of these non-French Legionnaires had been listed by the Vietnamese as "unknown" and by the French as "missing," but they were, in reality, righteous prisoners of war.

For the French, dealing with the subtle ploys of the Vietnamese was easier than it was for the Americans. The French had enjoyed long colonial ties with Vietnam and Laos, and they understood how the Asian mind worked. Colonial guilt also made it easier and more acceptable for the French to pay up, for whatever reason. Also, given the nature of France's rather closed society, it was easier for prisoners to return home quietly long after the war's conclusion without raising political havoc.

On 1 February 1955, the High Command of the French Union Forces and the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) signed a graves agreement to establish protocols for both the regroupment and the repatriation of remains for those who had died on both sides of the war. They were to take "all necessary measures" to complete the task by 1 July 1956 – a mere 17 months. In the following 21 years, less than 1,500 sets of remains of the 22,000 believed dead were returned by the Vietnamese.

It must be noted that all of the remains released by Hanoi had been buried by the French in military cemeteries in North Vietnam. Hanoi did not return the remains of any of the men listed by the French as missing in action or as having died in captivity. In contrast, in South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia where the host governments cooperated with the French, the remains of all but two French military personnel who had died in those countries and that had not been claimed by their families, had been collected and reentered in the French cemetery at Tan Son Nhut, near Saigon. The two exceptions were men whose remains had been buried in a region of Laos controlled by the communist Pathet Lao and PAVN.

In the initial stages of the graves agreement, the North Vietnamese used it as a cover to permit its political and intelligence cadre to circulate in South Vietnam. During the following years, it became painfully clear that the program to recover French military personnel had become a long-term source of income for the Hanoi Government. Conditions attached to the program, and the related expenses, continued to escalate over the years in an unpredictable and unreasonable fashion, and it continues to this day.

The last sizable group of Legionnaires, all formerly from the African country of Senegal, was returned to France in 1976. The last two Frenchmen to return to France by any means did so in 1982. One was a Frenchman held in an isolated area of northern North Vietnam and repatriated in early 1982.

The second was a French pilot, named Jacque LeGay. He was captured in the northern-most Province of Laos and managed to escape from captivity in early September 1982. Further, he made his own way into the French Legation office in Vientiane, Laos and request to be returned to France.

These last documented incidents occurred 22 and 28 years respectively after all of the POWs were supposed to have been repatriated. France continues to pay, and one cannot help but wonder how many more of their countrymen have yet to be freed?

In spite of the substantial economic and political concessions made by France to North Vietnam since 1954, they have never received a full accounting for their prisoners, missing and dead even though for the Vietnamese to do so would be a reasonably simple task.

In 1971, in order to resolve the lingering problem over the unaccounted for POW/MIAs from the First Indochina War, the French Foreign Minister declared all unaccounted for in Indochina dead. According to author/historian Bernard Fall, the actual number of French casualties in that war was never made public. In 1973, France resumed diplomatic relations with North Vietnam.

The Cold War

Following World War II, a “Cold War” developed between communist countries and the free world that was specifically and primarily a war of intelligence. Each side employed various methods to collect data, including aircraft with highly sophisticated electronic equipment aboard.

In this intelligence war, each side would patrol the fringes of the airspace of the other side listening to voice communications, collecting radio and radar patterns and any other useful communications they could receive. Although each side attempted to stay within their own boundaries, it was only natural that mistakes in navigation and aircraft guidance systems could cause an aircraft to stray into the restricted airspace of the other side. “Eavesdropping” became a new style of warfare to be employed on this new intelligence battlefield.

Because highly sophisticated missiles and rockets were being developed by the Soviet Union and its allies, an intensive program was initiated by the United States as a form of self defense. This activity intensified, and was most active, from the early 1950s, through the 1960s and 1970s. It continued in Europe until the fall of the Soviet Union, and it continues today around the periphery of those nations viewed adversarial to the United States.

There have been several dozen of non-war incidents wherein US aircraft were fired upon by the Soviet Union and other communist bloc nations since 1950. Intelligence reports have verified that several dozens of American aircraft crewmen were known to have survived their loss incident and were captured alive by the communists. They have never been accounted for. In fact, only minimal effort had been made by the USG to recover these US servicemen in spite of considerable evidence that they were captured, became prisoners and were still alive years after they were shot down.

All Presidents from Harry S. Truman through Richard M. Nixon have experienced Cold War incidents and the capture and imprisonment of “their” servicemen during the time of their administrations. Unfortunately, very little could be done to force the communists to return these men, or even acknowledge their capture and imprisonment since these missions were classified. Further, no details as to the fate of these men were given to their families and little, if any, was provided to the American public. Officially and quietly they were declared dead by the military services and written off for political expediency.

Undoubtedly, some of these men are alive today, living in communist prisons under very harsh and barbaric conditions. Some, possibly, could have accepted a parole after a new name and change of nationality was imposed upon them.

The Persian Gulf War

The Persian Gulf War is now a part of history. During the brief span of fighting, several examples of the inability of the USG to cope with the problems of accounting for the missing occurred. Because of our government’s highly exaggerated claims of being capable of maintaining precise, accurate and up to the minute data on all personnel – military and civilian alike - in the war zone; these examples become even more important.

Inaccurate battle casualties reporting resulted in the next-of-kin of Daniel J. Stomaris and Troy A. Dunlap being officially notified by DOD that the soldiers had been Killed in Action when, in fact, both men had been slightly wounded or taken prisoner by the enemy. Several other soldiers, including Army Major Rhonda L. Corum, were taken prisoner by the enemy, but were not listed as Prisoners of War, Missing in Action or Killed in Action. Their subsequent release by the Iraqis came as a surprise to the American public and the national media.

The most bizarre case was that of Specialist Melissa Rathbun-Nealy. She and Specialist David Locket were co-drivers of a HET (Heavy Equipment Transport), captured by Iraqi soldiers after their vehicle and another one became separated from a convoy. As the two HETs proceeded north, they came under enemy fire. The

second vehicle managed to escape, but Melissa Rathbun-Nealy and David Locket were surrounded and captured.

After her capture, Specialist Rathbun-Nealy's duty status was initially listed as "unknown," then changed to "missing." However, she was never listed as "missing in action" or "prisoner of war." This distinction is critical since US Army regulations specify that "missing" is reserved for personnel unaccounted for in non-combat operations. From the US Army's standpoint, the convoy was on a non-combat operation, even though it was under heavy enemy fire. By listing both members of the HET crew as missing, even though both were known to have been captured under fire, the US Army and DOD used a technical distinction to avoid a finding of POW/MIA.

When Specialist Rathbun-Nealy's father asked the Army Casualty Officer why his daughter was not listed Missing in Action, he was told that because DOD could not "positively identify" her as having disappeared under hostile conditions, she could only be listed as missing.

Had there been an extended war and extended negotiations to secure the return of prisoners, neither Specialists Rathbun-Nealy nor Locket would have appeared on any list of POW/MIAs being sought. They were listed only "missing," meaning they were considered unaccounted for, but not known to be in enemy hands. Had a difficult negotiation been required to secure the return of listed POW/MIAs, Iraq need never have returned Melissa Rathbun-Nealy or David Locket because they were not on the list.

The case of Specialists Rathbun-Nealy and Locket is a valid illustration to keep in mind when considering the bureaucratic mindset that refuses to go outside of artificial restrictions in order to find real people. If this case had been prolonged, and if reports of both crew members being captured had been received months or even years later, if the vivid memories of the event had gather dust in DOD files, the same facts would have been true.

In order not to have a POW/MIA crisis at the conclusion of the Persian Gulf War, the USG/DOD developed a hybrid category. Those men unaccounted for in the Gulf War are listed "**Missing – Not Returned.**"

For 16 American servicemen known by name, branch of service, date of loss and loss incident data; who vanished in that war, the political gamesmanship has sentenced them to a bureaucratic void. This includes Navy pilot Lieutenant Commander Michael Speicher who was known to safely eject his damaged jet and who placed escape and evasion panels on the ground days after his loss incident indicating his was alive, free and awaiting rescue.

POW/MIA REPORT: AMERICAN POWs TAKEN TO USSR FROM KOREAN AND VIETNAM WARS

On Friday, 17 September 1996, Congressman Bob Dornan, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Military Personnel of the House National Security Committee, held another hearing on the POW/MIA issue. Testifying under oath were Colonel (Ret.) Phillip Corso, former National Security Council aid and POW issue specialist to President Dwight D. Eisenhower; and Czechoslovakian Major General Jan Sejna, the highest ranking defector ever to come to the US from behind the Iron Curtain. Both men testified from personal, first-hand knowledge they possess about American and allied Prisoners of War taken to the Soviet Union after the Korean and the Vietnam Wars, and what the Russians used them for.

Their testimony was also given to the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIAs in 1992; however, those Committee members, including Senator John McCain, chose to ignore it.

Colonel Corso was the head of the Special Project Branch, Intelligence Division, Far East Command. His duties included being responsible for intelligence and communist activities by the Chinese, North Koreans and Soviets within our prisoner of war camps in South Korea and the enemy camps in North Korea. In 1953, he was a staff member of the truce delegation at Panmunjom and participated in the exchange of sick and wounded prisoners. Further, he was present, met and talked with our returning sick and wounded military men.

During the course of his duties, he learned that the entire operation concerning the treatment and handling of our POWs was supervised and controlled by the Soviet Union. Because the information gathered was so vital, Colonel Corso authored a study entitled: "WAR IN THE POW CAMPS." The crux of this paper was that it was Soviet policy, which they conveyed to their allies, that a soldier taken prisoner is still at war and a combatant. They trained soldiers to be taken as prisoners and then agitate in the camps to keep the POWs in our custody under their control.

According to Colonel Corso's sworn testimony: "The brainwashing and atrocities against American prisoners were conscious acts of Soviet policy. It was used not only on our prisoners, but also on their own people and others under their control." Colonel Corso's information was provided directly to him by our returning POWs. Their testimony documents communist medical experiments (Nazi style) on our prisoners. The most devilish and cunning of these were the techniques used to alter the POWs mind. It was just as deadly as brain surgery and many US POWs died under such treatment. Because of these experiments, many POWs willed themselves to death.

Further, Colonel Corso's findings revealed that the Soviets taught their allies a detailed scientific process aimed at molding prisoners of war into forms in which they could be exploited. Returning POWs who underwent this experience reported the experts assigned to mold them were highly trained, efficient and well educated. They were specialists in applying a deadly psychological treatment which often ended in physical torment. The Soviet approach was a deliberate act of their overall policy which actively rejects, subverts and destroys decent standards of conduct and the whole structure of human values.

After the Korean War ended, Colonel Corso was assigned to the National Security Council to handle virtually all projects relating to US prisoners of war. As part of his duties, he tried to tell Congress the fact that in 1953, 500 sick and wounded American prisoners were within ten miles of the prisoner exchange point at Panmunjom, but were never exchanged. Ironically, he was not asked even one question regarding this event!

The intelligence reports he gathered while the Chief of the Special Projects Section relating to US personnel being taken to the Soviet Union were compiled from many sources: Chinese and North Korean POWs, agent reports, Nationalist Chinese reports, our guerrillas, NSA intercepts, defectors and from our own returning POWs. The most compelling reports dealt with trainloads of 450 POWs each. Two of these trainloads were confirmed over and over, the third was not as certain. The final figure of POWs shipped to the USSR was "confirmed 900, and another 450 possibly." The bulk of these sightings were at Manchu-li, on the border of Manchuria and the USSR. This is where the rail gauge changed and the US POWs had to be transferred across a platform to a waiting train going into the Soviet Union. He, in point of fact, discussed all this information, including the number of POWs transferred, directly with President Eisenhower while he was a member of his NSC.

Colonel Corso closed his testimony by saying: "By some flashback in time, I wish you could be present with me at the prisoner exchanges in Korea in 1953 and looking into the faces of those sick and wounded prisoners – Americans and allied soldiers – as they came across in the exchange. If you had witnessed their sacrifices and what they had suffered by the communist hands, you would not be a critic or skeptic today."

Major General Sejna, by reason of his long-standing position as the First Secretary of the Party at the Ministry of Defense and Chief of Staff to the Ministry of Defense, was privy to all information pertaining to those US and Allied POWs who fell onto Communist hands.

In 1968, the General was forced to choose between following instructions from Moscow and doing what he felt was best for his country. The Soviet Union was preparing to invade Czechoslovakia, and he chose to alert the Czech leadership of their plan. After learning arrest was imminent, he fled to the US consulate in Trieste where he requested political asylum. Two days later he arrived in the United States.

General Sejna testified that to understand event of interest today, it is essential to understand that back then the main mission of all organizations in the Soviet empire was to destroy democracy and bring people everywhere under the yoke of communism. To this end, the Soviets wages political and intelligence war upon the free world. These were waged according to a very detailed and complex strategic plan which involved infiltration of government and press, sabotage, subversion, deception, narcotics trafficking, and

many other activities all designed to destroy competing social systems. The primary targets were all industrialized countries, and the most important enemy was the United States.

General Sejna said: "I know, because I was there. In the 1950s and early 1960s I was in charge of the Defense Council secretariat. From 1964 on I was first secretariat at the Ministry of Defense. In my various official capacities I was constantly meeting with Soviet Officials, receiving instructions, and relaying those instructions on to various Czech agencies and departments. I was in the process of responding to Soviet directions in about 1956 that I first became aware of the use of American and South Korean POWs by Soviet and Czech doctors."

He went on to testify: "I certainly would not pretend to know what happened to all the missing POWs, but I do know what happened to many of them. In brief, hundreds were used in Korea and Vietnam as human guinea pigs. The POWs were used as bodies for training military doctors in field medicine – for example, treating serious wounds and conducting amputations. The POWs were used to test the effects of chemical and biological warfare agents and to test the effects of atomic radiation. The Soviets also used the American GIs to test the physiological and psychological endurance of American soldiers. They were also used to test various mind control drugs. All of this was to ascertain different drugs, chemicals and biological agents, as well as radiation, affected different races and cultures differently."

The General continued: "While what I have just said describes what happened in Korea, I want to point out that the same things happened in Vietnam and Laos during the Vietnam War. The only difference is the operation in Vietnam was better planned and more American POWs were used, both in Vietnam and Laos and the Soviet Union. On several occasions my office was responsible for organizing the shipments of POWs and their housing in Prague before they were shipped to the Soviet Union. I personally was present when American POWs were unloaded from planes, put on buses whose windows were painted black, and then driven to Prague where they were placed in various military intelligence barracks and other secure buildings until they were shipped to the Soviet Union."

Between 1961 and 1968 when he defected to the US, General Sejna estimates at least 200 Americans were shipped to the Soviet Union through Czechoslovakia. Further, it is his strong belief that others were shipped to the USSR through North Korea and East Germany. In addition to POWs going to the Soviet Union, he knows that many were given to the Chinese by the North Koreans during the Korean War and by the North Vietnamese during the Vietnam War.

General Sejna concluded by saying I will never forget the written directions on the original Soviet order that started the operation in 1951. It said that the operation was to be conducted in such a way that "no one would ever know about it."

At the conclusion of the hearing, Colonel Corso responded to a question about the fate of those POWs who were taken to the USSR, aptly and forcefully when he emphatically stated: "Congressman, I am 81 years old and I am alive. Our POWs from Korea and Vietnam are still alive. What are you going to do to bring them home?"

DECEIT AND DISHONESTY IN THE USG REMAINS IDENTIFICATION PROCESS OF AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR AND MISSING IN ACTION

In the remains identification process of American POW/MIAs, the Department of Defense basis its findings more on assumptions than facts. Further, the USG has lost sight of what is important in obtaining a real, factual and honest accounting for those men and women. They have confused the APPEARANCE of an accounting with the REALITY of one. In its headlong rush to get the numbers down, the USG has forgotten these are real people with names, faces, families, and friends who loved them, who laughed with them, cried with them, and who miss them. Families and friends who need, require – and will continue to demand – complete, honest and truthful answers to their questions.

Quite succinctly, what the families, as well as veterans and concerned citizens, want from the USG in the accounting process is very simple and straight forward: **TRUTH AND HONESTY.**

1. If remains reportedly belonging to a specific American are returned/recovered in sufficient type and quantity to determine the man or woman died; if these remains can be positively, scientifically identified as being that person, than wonderful. Getting honest answers is what we all want.
2. If remains are recovered, such as a tooth or portions of a body a person can live without, and those remains are passed off as the total remains of a missing person, that constitutes deception, and we have a problem.
3. Further, if small fragments of remains which can only be identified as human are declared to be the mortal and complete remains of a specific person, then we have a greater deception and problem.

From our standpoint, gaining a righteous accounting by our government means:

1. Above all else, the return of living Americans, regardless of their status and/or physical/mental condition, by whatever means necessary. If that means paying for them, then do it. What price do you place on a human life?
2. The return of properly, scientifically identifiable remains when possible.
3. The ability to know if unidentifiable remains are recovered from a specific crash site, that may or may not be all we ever find of those people.
4. If a family requests an independent examination of remains, they should not be forced to accept those remains *before* such an examination can be conducted.
5. Do not force a family to accept unidentifiable remains as their loved one just to get the numbers down.
6. When unidentifiable remains, or a tooth, are refused as the total remains of their loved one by a family, do not bury those remains in a federal cemetery under a headstone bearing that person's name against their desires.
7. Do not lie to the American public by telling them remains have been positively identified when, in fact, they have not.
8. If there is live sighting information pertaining to a specific person or incident, that information is followed up on *correctly*. Witnesses should not be threatened, harassed or intimidated by USG officials as they have been in the past in an attempt to force them to recant their information just because it is politically inconvenient.
9. Above all else, *TELL THE TRUTH*. We all can live with the truth no matter how ugly and unsettling it may be. We cannot – and will not – live with lies or distortions. In the end, for those men and women whose remains can never be recovered or positively identified, we will have the comfort of knowing everything that honestly could be done was done thereby providing a realistic conclusion to this issue. That in itself provides peace of mind.

Frankly, what we get from the highly convoluted USG system of investigation and analysis depends more upon procedure and methodology than upon practical results. For example, in announcing what amounts to mock burials, the Department of Defense proudly talked about “remains” and cases “accounted for.”

Clearly, the implication is that physical remains have been recovered and returned to their families. Yet that is not what the bureaucratic systems means. DOD has its own language, its own definitions of ordinary words, and its own purposes to be served.

When DOD says “*accounted for*,” it means only that DOD has gone through a stereotyped process that allows it to close the files on a case. It means that all reports of sightings of specific individuals by eyewitnesses have been “checked out,” and either dismissed or investigated. The USG learned early on it is easier to dismiss any reports out of hand by discrediting the witnesses, or by insisting that the reports meet specific bureaucratic criteria the parameters of which are impossible to meet, than it is to actually check them out.

DOD's use of the term “remains” does not meet the ordinary definition of the word. *For DOD, the word “remains” refers not to the actual physical remains, but to an abstract concept deduced from circumstances.*

Anyone reading the following standard USG press release would assume that the remains of each on of those crewmen was found, that forensic experts were able to positively identify each one of those sets of remains, and that the families of each one of those men will at least be comforted by the knowledge that they know where the bodies of their loved ones lie. Unfortunately, that may not be the case.

“Remains recovered during a joint excavation effort by the US and Lao (or Vietnamese) governments have resulted in accounted for the four servicemen. The remains of these Americans will depart Hickam AFB, HI in a full military honors ceremony and will travel to Travis AFB, CA for the final journey home.”

In practice, DOD works by a process of deduction. Records of an incident show the duty position of each crewman. Any remains found in the appropriate place in the wreckage for a given crew position are arbitrarily assigned to the case of that crewman. For an initial step, that is reasonable. In some cases teeth and dental work can be identified, but in many cases human bone fragments are too small to be positively identified. Ultimately, the beginning step becomes also their final one, and the case is stamped “resolved,” tentative and unverified though the identification may be.

For example, in reality there may only be minuscule bone fragments and a tooth or two recovered, none of which could be identified by any objective forensic analysis as being anything other than human. Yet all men who were aboard the aircraft, which was excavated by a joint recovery team, are now **recovered and accounted for** by our government. Further, near empty to empty caskets are buried in a national cemetery under headstones bearing the names of each one of the crewmen whose remains were supposedly recovered. Any visitor to the cemetery seeing that headstone would wrongly assume the man’s mortal remains were interred there.

By in large, the families were thrilled when they first received the news that their sons had been found; but they were shocked when, upon further inquiry, they learned no actual remains were being returned – just empty coffins.

Many families would prefer to know simply that the aircraft/vehicle had been found at their man’s crash site location, and that unidentifiable remains were recovered inside. Under these circumstances, they would be happy to join in a ceremony commemorating anyone who may have died in the crash, knowing that it may or may not include their loved one. Further, such action on the part of a family should not be construed by our government as their acceptance of fraudulent, unidentifiable remains.

DOD goes even further. When no actual human remains are found, or not enough remains are found to account for each crewman, DOD declares that the whole crew has been accounted for, and frequently those few, if any, unidentifiable fragments are buried in a mass grave. In this manner empty caskets are returned as **symbolic remains** and the families of these men are left alone, isolated and even more vulnerable than before.

The problem with this method, although bureaucratically convenient for closing cases, is that it is dishonest. The missing servicemen may well have escaped by jumping in the last moments before the crash, something not impossible, particularly from a helicopter. If that is the case, the man may have survived his loss incident only to disappear as a prisoner of war. This fact is very inconvenient for closing cases, particularly if there are live sighting reports of the missing man for the USG to contend with.

The question remains as to why such efforts are made to resolve cases instead of vigorously prosecuting any reasonable leads on POW/MIAs. Part of the answer lies within another USG press release statement: “The serious cooperation of the Lao (or Vietnamese) Government was instrumental in achieving productive results from this joint operation and is deeply appreciated by the US Government. The most important measure by which to judge success of agreements reached between Washington and Vientiane (or Hanoi) to broader cooperation on the POW/MIA issue is obtaining final answers for the families of Americans missing in action in Southeast Asia.”

DOD had not obtained final answers for the families, nor can the results be described as truly productive when nothing has been produced. This fawning appreciation lavished upon a government that may well be concealing the fate of many other American POW/MIAs suggests that politics has been placed before the essence of the American family. And sadly, in our government’s eyes, any quantity of real, fictitious or imagined remains equal success.

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