



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
BUREAU OF NAVAL PERSONNEL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20370

IN REPLY REFER TO
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- 71Eb -

Dear Family Member:

As we enter 1976 it is my hope, as I know it must be yours, that this will be the year in which great progress will be made in determining the fate of those still missing in Southeast Asia.

In this newsletter I will discuss progress already made and provide you with a summary of action taken by the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia. As you know, President Ford declared 25 January 1976 as a National Day of Prayer for Americans Missing in Action in Southeast Asia. A copy of his prayer proclamation is enclosed.

I hope you will find this information helpful.

Sincerely,

J. D. Watkins
JAMES D. WATKINS
Vice Admiral, U. S. Navy

Encl:

- (1) Rpt on US military remains from Southeast Asia
- (2) House Select Committee
- (3) National Day of Prayer for Americans MIA

Return of the Remains of Five
U. S. Military Personnel from Southeast Asia

As a result of President Ford's visit to China in December 1975, the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) returned the cremated remains of two U. S. Navy personnel. They were Lieutenant Commander Jimmy L. Buckley, USN, an A-6 (Intruder) pilot shot down on 21 August 1967. His Bombardier Navigator, Commander (select) Robert Flynn, USN, was captured by the Chinese and repatriated to the United States in 1973. The other set of remains were those of Senior Chief Petty Officer Kenneth W. Pugh, USN, a crewmember aboard an A-3 aircraft shot down on 12 April 1966 by the PRC when the aircraft intruded into China's airspace.

On 21 December 1975, Congressmen Montgomery, McCloskey, Ottinger and Gilman visited Hanoi, North Vietnam. North Vietnamese officials turned over the remains of three American servicemen to these gentlemen. The servicemen returned were Commander Jesse J. Taylor, USN, who was shot down and declared killed in action on 17 November 1965; Major Crosley J. Fitton, USAF, shot down 29 February 1968; and Captain Ronald D. Perry, USAF, shot down on 21 December 1972. The Congressmen also met with the Chief of Cabinet Mr. Suban in Vientiane, Laos, and discussed Americans missing in that country. Our Congressmen said "they will continue to follow up on what we have been working on this last few days."

Enclosure (1)

Progress Report on the Select Committee
On Missing Persons in Southeast Asia

The following pages furnish up-to-date information on the activities during November and December 1975, of the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia. During that period, the Select Committee broadened and deepened its investigation. As in September and October, expert witnesses were called to testify at hearings on different aspects of the problems connected with Americans missing in Indochina.

The Select Committee was also able to discuss its concerns with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Further, in early December, Committee members met with Vietnamese officials in Paris to discuss MIA, Communist and other outstanding issues. A report on that meeting was made to President Ford. At the same time, a professional staff assistant continued on from Paris to Indochina to make contact with various officials there. Later in December, several Committee members traveled to Indochina to receive the remains of three American servicemen, which the Vietnamese had promised at the Paris meeting to return, and to continue the discussions begun in Paris. The results of these meetings and hearings are reported in some detail in the pages to follow.

November 5 -- Richard R. Fernandez, consultant to the Middle East Working Group of the National Council on Assumptions and Strategy for the Select Committee to reach a consensus on assumptions and strategy if it was going to be successful. He insisted that the Vietnamese were not interested in discussing the MIA issue in isolation from other outstanding problems connected with the Paris Agreements. The Ford Administration, he thought, was disinterested in Vietnam; insofar as there was any interest at all among the American people, this interest supported a policy of reconciliation with Vietnam, not retribution. Of the possible strategies available to the Select Committee, the best would aim at changing U. S. policy toward the Paris Agreements. Mr. Fernandez drew attention to the assets the Committee had at its disposal to effect such a change.

November 11 -- Mr. Paul Struharik, an AID official in South Vietnam captured in March 1975 and released by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on October 30 with eight other Americans, recounted the circumstances of his capture and the treatment he received during his period of captivity. The Vietnamese policy seemed to be to keep him and the other captives in as good a condition as possible, though local conditions sometimes interfered with that policy. Conditions at the camps were primitive, principally in the south. He saw no other foreign or American prisoners, and the Vietnamese, when questioned, continually repeated that they had released all POW's.

November 12 -- Ms. Iris Powers, former National Coordinator and Board Member of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, appeared as witness at a Committee hearing. Ms. Powers' son is missing in Vietnam. She was accompanied by Mrs. Bobby Vinson and Mrs. Wilmer Grubb, both of whom lost husbands in the war and who were associated with the National League of Families in an official capacity.

Ms. Powers spoke of the difficulty of the Committee's work. She recounted the early history of the Government's policy toward the MIA's and POW's and the early history of the League. In her opinion, the primary next of kin had generally been given excellent service by governmental agencies. Ms. Powers thought it unlikely that Americans are still being held captive in Southeast Asia. She expressed the view that a status change from "missing" to "presumed dead" is a logical sequence to the aftermath of war.

She believed that the North Vietnamese did indeed have information on MIA's, but would release it at their own time for their own purposes. A second witness, Mr. Jay Scarborough, another American captured in March 1975, and released October 30, 1975, answered questions about his treatment. He emphasized the treatment he and the other captives received, and the apparent Vietnamese desire for better relations with the United States. He concurred with Mr. Struharik's statement, and stated that the Vietnamese frequently insisted that all live Americans held by them had been released in 1973.

November 14 -- All ten Committee members attended an hour and a half working breakfast meetings with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The Secretary indicated that the U. S. Government was willing to talk with the governments of Indochina on a wide range of issues, including the MIA issue, in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. He approved of the Select Committee's plan to proceed with discussions on its own with representatives of the Indochinese governments.

Chairman G. V. Montgomery (D-Miss) stated, "Secretary Kissinger pointed out to us that he saw no obstacle to the principle to reciprocate on the basis of gestures made by the Southeast Asian nations. In fact, Dr. Kissinger pointed out that the American Government is in the process of making one such reciprocal move. In the interest of making a goodwill gesture in response to the recent release of nine Americans from Hanoi, the administration is licensing broader categories of assistance to the people of Vietnam by American church and humanitarian groups." Secretary Kissinger noted that in response to the Select Committee's request, President Ford has agreed to include in his agenda during his trip to China a discussion of the MIA issue. "The members of the Select Committee were encouraged that Secretary Kissinger has shown a very sincere desire to proceed on a basis of partnership with the legislative branch to resolve all the problems surrounding persons still missing in Southeast Asia," Chairman Montgomery concluded.

November 20 -- Maj. Gen. Robert C. Kingston, the first Director of the Joint Casualty Resolution Center (JCRC) in Thailand, described the origins and operations of the JCRC at a Committee hearing. Using slides and a short movie, he explained the structure of the JCRC, the personnel engaged in investigating crash sites and grave sites, and methods of identifying any remains that were recovered. He described the activities of investigating teams in some detail. In its attempt to gain information from local Vietnamese about missing American personnel, the JCRC engaged in an extensive publicity program aimed at the indigenous population.

A year's efforts by his teams resulted in the recovery of eight American remains. Investigation and correlation of other available information helped in resolving an additional 124 cases. No remains were recovered in the course of JCRC search operations involving crashes at sea. Because of local conditions, General Kingston said, American JCRC teams were able to investigate only ten crash sites, all in South Vietnam. He estimated that some 200 crash sites could be located, but even with the fullest cooperation, several years would be required to complete the field investigations. He also pointed out that remains deteriorate rapidly in such a climate.

December 4 -- Speaking on behalf of the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia, Chairman G. V. Montgomery (D-Miss) expressed appreciation to President Ford for the efforts he made on behalf of the MIA's during his recent trip to China. Secretary of State Kissinger announced at a press conference in Peking that officials of the Peoples' Republic of China had given President Ford detailed information on several deceased U. S. personnel missing in Asia. Chairman Montgomery explained that he had written President Ford on behalf of the Select Committee requesting that he seek information on Americans missing in Southeast Asia during his talks with Chinese officials. "The release of this information is the result of initiatives taken by our committee and indicates the very sincere interest Mr. Ford has in resolving the MIA matter," he said.

The Chairman noted that this new information gained by the House Select Committee, plus the Committee's trip to Paris in early December to begin discussions with North and South Vietnamese officials, indicates that the problems surrounding the MIA's are at least moving off dead center. He commented, "there is no doubt in my mind that the formation of the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia has had a very beneficial effect on American efforts to determine factual information on the MIA's. We look forward to discussing this issue further with North and South Vietnamese officials in Paris, as well as other matters of extreme interest to them."

December 8 -- Representative G. V. Montgomery reported on the Select Committee's meeting with officials from North and South Vietnam in Paris on December 6th. He noted that the talks resulted from a cablegram he had sent on behalf of the Select Committee to DRV and PRG officials in Paris suggesting an informal meeting. This report was included in a letter to all Congressmen in order to apprise them of the nature of the discussion and the results achieved.

"Marking the first time that an official American delegation met with the Vietnamese since the cessation of hostilities," the Chairman said, "twelve Members of Congress, including eight of the ten members of the House Select Committee on Missing Persons, met in an historic all day session on Saturday, December 6, with North Vietnamese Ambassador Vo Van Sung, PRG Charge d'Affaires Huynh Thanh and several North Vietnamese officials. The Vietnamese, in emphasizing their desire to reestablish not only normal, but friendly relations

with the United States, cited the positive actions they had made toward the United States as evidence of good relations if each side helps to build it plank by plank."

The Vietnamese made three commitments: (1) They promised to release to the families the remains of three American pilots. (2) They announced for the first time that they have an agency actively researching the problem of American missing in action. They also agreed to continue to search for American MIA's in Vietnam and to report to their governments the Committee's request that they assist in obtaining information about MIA's from the Lao and Cambodian governments. (3) The Vietnamese also agreed to take all steps necessary to permit American civilians remaining in South Vietnam the opportunity voluntarily to leave the country.

Chairman Montgomery reflected the views of the entire congressional delegation in stating that the discussions were friendly, forthright, and constructive. "The Vietnamese emphasize the importance that the United States take positive bridge-building actions now, such as lifting the present trade embargo and helping to heal the wounds of war. The Committee stressed America's interest in resolving the MIA question and its concern about the return of the bodies of the two Marines killed in Saigon on April 30, 1975, and the repatriation of such remains as can be identified in the continuing search promised by the Vietnamese. Also discussed were the questions of the emigration from Vietnam of Vietnamese wives and children of American personnel, the 82 'hard evidence files' on individual MIA's turned over to Prime Minister Le Duc Tho by Secretary Kissinger in 1973, various forms of potential aid and trade with Vietnam, and the recent veto of the Vietnamese admission to the United Nations." Ambassador Vo Van Sung agreed the Paris talks were successful, said Chairman Montgomery.

On Sunday, December 7, the Committee traveled to Geneva to meet officials of the International Red Cross. Chairman Montgomery commented, "they confirmed that they were assisting in the departure of foreign civilians from South Vietnam and were assisting in determining the needs for humanitarian assistance to both North and South Vietnam. They further indicated that identification and repatriation of MIA's was well within their mandate and that they were prepared to assist in such activities if agreeable to the Vietnamese." Chairman Montgomery noted that "while the Paris-Geneva trip was fast-moving and intensive, its accomplishments are significant."

Taking part in the MIA Paris-Geneva mission were the following Select Committee members: Chairman Montgomery, Representatives Moakley, Schroeder, Ottinger, Harkin, McCloskey, Gilman, and Guyer. Also participating in the MIA meetings were Congressmen Dante Fascell and Jonathan Bingham, both of the International Relations Committee; Robert Duncan of the Appropriations Committee; and Ken Holland, Veterans Affairs Committee.

December 17 -- Members of the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia reported to President Ford on the results of their talks with North and South Vietnamese officials in Paris. Meeting with the President

were Chairman Montgomery and Congressmen McCloskey and Gilman. Chairman Montgomery explained that the Select Committee wanted to bring the President up-to-date on Committee activities. "We also relayed to President Ford ideas expressed to us by North Vietnamese Ambassador Vo Van Sung regarding normalization of relations, lifting of the trade embargo, and humanitarian aid," Representative Montgomery said.

Dr. Henry J. Kenny, Committee staff assistant, traveled to Southeast Asia from November 25 to December 14, 1975. The trip included discussions with Mr. Jean Sainteny, a Frenchman experienced in Indochinese matters, and with Mr. Alan Dawson, UPI correspondent in Bangkok.

Dr. Kenny visited the Joint Casualty Resolution Center in Thailand and held discussions with Embassy officials in Paris, Bangkok, Vientiane and Hong Kong. While in Laos, Dr. Kenny held discussions with Lao Foreign Ministry officials and with the Lao Patriotic Front Representatives in Vientiane. These officials stressed that recent Pathet Lao preoccupation with consolidation of its administration had precluded attention to the MIA question, but that they knew of no living Americans held in Laos. Dr. Kenny broached the possibility of crash-site investigations and that now that peace was restored and the Pathet Lao administration was in power, that further searching of MIA's could commence. Subsequent visits by the Select Committee were agreed upon.

December 24 -- In a news release published today, Chairman Montgomery reported on the recent trip to Indochina by members of the Select Committee as follows:

"Congressmen McCloskey, Ottinger, and Gilman participated with Chairman Montgomery on Sunday, December 21st, in a ceremony at Hanoi's Gia Lam airport, during which North Vietnamese officials returned the remains of Capt. Ronald Dwight Perry (Tenn.), Maj. Crosley James Fitton (Conn.), and Commander Jesse J. Taylor (Calif.). The remains were promptly escorted to Samae San, Thailand, where personnel of the American Central Identification Laboratory will conduct a detailed examination for positive identification before returning them to the United States."

"Meanwhile, members of the House Select Committee on MIA's stayed in Hanoi for two days of meetings with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hien, Nguyen Manh Cuong, chairman of the DRV authorities in charge of seeking information about missing personnel, and other officials of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. 'We expressed our concern for those Americans still missing or unaccounted for in Vietnam, and asked for as full an expeditious an accounting as possible for these men,' Rep. Montgomery said."

"The Vietnamese officials replied that all live Americans were returned in 1973, but that they would fully carry out their responsibilities regarding the search for MIA's and repatriation of remains. They stated that the United States also has an obligation to help heal the wounds of war, and that both sides should proceed together. Rep. Montgomery states that all Americans,

especially the families of those still unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, appreciated any efforts that are being made to resolve this issue. He noted that the Committee was pleased to learn of the work of a DRV agency which is searching for missing persons in Vietnam."

The Chairman also stressed the Committee's concern for those American civilians still in Saigon, as well as those missing elsewhere in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The Mississippi lawmaker received a message from President Ford just prior to this trip, expressing support for the Committee's work and which read in part:

"Our attitude toward the new regimes in Indochina is open-minded. We are prepared to look to the future, not the past, in our dealings with them, and we are prepared to reciprocate gestures of goodwill. This will be particularly true if they deal constructively with the problem of our dead and missing."

The Congressmen pointed out the improbability of any grant aid for Indochina, but discussed conditions in which normalization of relations could proceed, stressing the importance of the MIA issue to this process.

The Congressional delegation then proceeded to Vientiane, Laos, where on December 23rd, it met with Soubanh Srithirath, Chef de Cabinet of the Foreign Ministry of the Peoples Democratic Republic of Laos. In a frank exchange of views, the Committee members requested the assistance of the new Lao Government in obtaining as full an accounting of missing Americans as possible. The Laotian Chief of Cabinet, who set forth specific needs of his people, stated that all American prisoners had been returned in 1973. He then said: "As we continue to look for our own war dead, we are looking for your missing . . . and as we gather information, we will provide you with that information." After leaving Laos, the House Select Committee traveled to Camp Samae San in Thailand to meet and confer with officials of the U. S. Joint Casualty Resolution Center which has the responsibility of seeking, recovering and identifying the MIA's.

Chairman Montgomery stated that "The House Select Committee is particularly appreciative of the wholehearted cooperation and assistance rendered by the U. N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadruddin Aga Khan, whose agency helped in making arrangements for meeting Vietnamese and Laotian officials and for the repatriation of the remains of those three American flyers."

National Day of Prayer for Americans
Missing in Action in Southeast Asia

By the President of the United States of America -

A Proclamation

Three years have passed since the signing of the Paris Agreement ending United States combat involvement in the Vietnam War.

That agreement contained specific provisions for the accounting of combatants designated as missing in action, and for the return of the remains of American war dead.

Despite this long passage of time, and despite the fact the war is now over, a satisfactory accounting still has not been completed. A cruel shadow of doubt hangs over hundreds of American families who have no knowledge of the whereabouts of their loved ones.

This Nation continues to explore every avenue of potential progress toward a resolution of this painful and frustrating situation. The recent Presidential visit to the People's Republic of China brought forth some hope for progress in this matter. The efforts of a Select Committee of the Congress to account for missing persons also have met with some success.

As we continue these efforts, it is essential for the Nation to be always mindful of the plight of the men whose circumstances are unknown and of the families whose sorrow we know only too well.

Further, it is important that all of us recall that the watchful eye of our Creator is upon us and upon those we love. We take comfort in the fact that each of us, in our own way, may call upon our God for guidance, for solace, and for strength to endure.

It is thus fitting for the entire country to join in one voice to declare our unalterable commitment to seek the fullest possible accounting for those lost in combat.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GERALD R. FORD, President of the United States of America, do hereby designate Sunday, January 25, 1976, as a National Day of Prayer for Americans Missing in Action in Southeast Asia.

I call upon all Americans and all churches throughout the Nation to mark this day with prayers for these brave men and for their families.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-first day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred seventy-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundredth.

s/ Gerald R. Ford

Enclosure (3)

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20330



16 January 1975

REPLY TO
ATTN OF:

DPMSC
AFMPC:
RANDOLPH AFB TEXAS 78148

HQ. DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
CASUALTY DIVISION, TAGO
ATTN - AGPC-S
FORRESTAL BUILDING, ROOM GA 172
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20314

As we start off this new year, I want to reaffirm our desire to serve you to the best of our ability.

RELOCATION OF JCRC: The Joint Casualty Resolution Center has moved from Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand, to be collocated with the Central Identification Laboratory at U-Tapao/Samae San, Thailand. The relocation makes possible more efficient use of all JCRC records, data and assets. Concurrent with the move, JCRC reduced its personnel strength somewhat but the JCRC mission remains unchanged. The reduction and relocation of the JCRC does not in any way signify a reduction in the efforts of the Department of Defense to account for those personnel who are missing in action or whose bodies have not been recovered.

LAOS PW EXCHANGE: The fifth and final scheduled Laos PW exchange occurred on 7 November 1974. A total of 214 Thai and 138 Royal Lao Government personnel were released during the entire exchange period. Appropriate procedures were utilized to insure that the releasees were queried for any information they may have had on unaccounted for American personnel. The debriefings, now completed, determined that the Thai and Lao releasees had very limited U.S. casualty resolution information. A small number of these releasees were able to provide fragmentary information on aircraft crash sites, but generally this information did not include any knowledge of the fate of the crews. The very limited casualty information has been furnished to the families concerned. All data obtained from the debriefings has been incorporated into the files of the JCRC.

SPECIAL REGARDING LEGISLATION: The Senate has passed the Bill HR 8214, which modifies tax treatment of members of military forces and of civilian personnel who were involved in the Vietnam conflict, thus clearing the measure for the White House. The provision of HR 8214 is to provide relief for military and civilian personnel returning from the