

2015 LEAGUE MEETING WITH FAMILIES OF VIETNAM WAR MIAs

By Elaine Zimmer Davis

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League Chairman Anne Mills Griffiths and DPAA Director Michael Linnington kicked off the 2015 National League Meeting of POW/MIA Families. The meeting attracted one of the largest groups in recent years. The atmosphere was upbeat throughout the three-day event.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Families with MIAs still unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War met in D.C., June 24-27, 2015, for the 46th annual League meeting. With the recent reorganization nearly complete, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) got down to business and, by all accounts, did an excellent job. In no small way, credit goes to League Chairman Ann Mills Griffiths and DPAA Director Michael Linnington, both of whom were front and center daily, from early morning to evening.

Mills-Griffiths, the heart and soul of the League, chaired the meeting that drew approximately 300-plus family members and officials. The annual dinner attracted several special guests of families, along with many from military, government and diplomatic circles.

The crux of the meeting each year is informational with DPAA subject-matter experts delivering presentations, serving on informational panels and participating in Q&A sessions. Questions are not submitted in advance, and the only no-no is that they are not about individual cases. Otherwise, family members direct their questions to specific participants.



Ron Ward, Casualty Resolution Specialist, Det. 2, Hanoi, responds to questions about field operations in Vietnam. Ward, fluent in Vietnamese, is also involved in investigations & interfaces with Vietnamese partners.



DPAA Archaeologist Brad Sturm participates in field operations on a global level. Seated is Deputy Director of External Communications Johnie Webb. Both men have been instrumental in recovery efforts for decades.

In the line of fire, leadership and staff delivered thought-provoking responses that frequently generated input from multiple experts. The Q&A session is my favorite. It is truly an opportunity to learn more about the accounting system, and this year's session was exceptionally good.

A partial list of participants, who traveled from overseas, included Ron Ward, Casualty Resolution Specialist, Det 2, Hanoi; LTC Marcus Ferrara, USA, Chief, Detachment 3, Laos; Pete Laverde, Stony Beach Specialist, DIA, Cambodia; Jared Elison, Stony Beach Specialist, DIA, Thailand, and many others.

FOCUS ON THE MISSION

What made the overall event more meaningful than usual was Linnington's presence and willingness to take a shot at every question posed to him, and there were several. His style was appealing to family members, as noted by frequent applause for his candid responses that often highlighted DPAA's primary mission to bring home as many of our MIAs as humanly possible. In my opinion, communication – internal and external – is at the top of his list, but don't expect to see the agency baring its soul to the world. This is a man who understands that transparency is a good thing, but not to the extent that everything within the accounting community is up for grabs. While wanting to bring a quality computer program to serve the accounting community – including families, Linnington admitted that it will be difficult but hopefully doable.



Gen. Robert "Doc" Foglesong, USAF (Ret) is Chairman, US-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs. Created in 1992 during the Reagan and Yeltsin administrations, the intent has been to learn the fate of US and Russian service members from past wars, dating back to WWII through Afghanistan (Russian side).



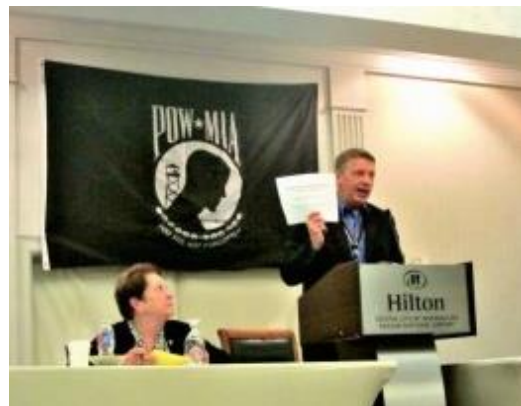
Eldon Robinson, a member of the League's Board of Directors, and his wife, are dedicated to MIA recovery efforts. Robinson's brother, a Marine, was killed in Vietnam and is still unaccounted-for.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Tom Holland, Ph.D., former scientific director of the Central Identification Laboratory at Hickam AFB, is now heading up DPAA's new Public/Private Partnership initiative. Holland will connect with outside sources to assist the MIA humanitarian program on a global level, as in serving all past wars, not just the Vietnam War.



Tom Holland, Ph.D., is heading up the new Public-Private Partnership initiative. The intent is to help DPAA expand its outside resources to assist the agency in achieving its global mission.



Jay Veith moderated a panel, discussing the role of the League, private researchers and members of the U.S. Government accounting team. Veith is an author, historian and a knowledgeable, fun moderator.

Although the League has not been eager in the past to support this type of activity in Vietnam for political reasons, Holland may have come up with something of interest to the League and hundreds of families whose loved ones went missing over water. Research organizations like Scripps Oceanographic Institute in La Jolla, CA, and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Woods Hole, MA, are world-class and would have the technology, equipment and expertise to help with underwater recoveries in waters off Vietnam. With both organizations dedicated to scientific research and education, they would make ideal partners and probably be welcomed by the Vietnamese government; however, this is all hypothetical at this point in the process.

As always, money is a problem. Holland mentioned grants and, of course, volunteerism, but logically knows the latter is less likely to attract too much attention. No doubt, the ins and outs will ultimately be sorted out, and there will be viable options to attract good partners. This program could present an amazing opportunity for involvement with a humanitarian effort unlike anything most have ever

encountered. I will provide updates as information becomes available, but I encourage anyone interested to stay connected to www.dpaa.mil/.



L-R: LTC Marcus Ferrara, Det. 3, Laos; Jennifer Nasarenko, Policy; Maj Gen Kelly McKeague, DPAA Deputy Director; Capt. Edward Reedy, MD, DPAA Science Director.



(L-R) Brett Davis & fiancé Jessica Tavasti attended the annual dinner with Elaine Zimmer Davis and met Marine Corps Assistant Casualty Officer Ron (Chuck) Williams, USMC (Ret). The PNOK's point-of-contact is their Casualty officer.

OWNERSHIP TIPS – REACHING OUT

Time -- or lack thereof -- is perhaps equally important as money, when it comes to Vietnam War recoveries. Most families understand that acidic soil is destroying our loved one's remains, but in recent years, there are other issues making the situation more complicated -- in-country witnesses are dying; and development related to infrastructure and overall progress are potentially problematic in areas where remains are thought to exist.

With urgency on everyone's mind in light of the size of the MIA global humanitarian effort, the League and DPAA are encouraging families to take ownership of their loved one's case -- to the extent that they feel comfortable. Remember, cases are never closed in the classic sense, but at some point they will become dormant for lack of new information -- as was the situation in my first husband's case, until our family's research efforts turned things around. Presenting solid, new leads to DPAA, derived from credible sources, can turn things around for other family members, too.



MIA family member Fran Kilgore with LTC Marcus Ferrara, Laos. Kilgore is conducting online research, hoping to produce new leads that might help locate her husband who was with USASOF in Vietnam when killed in a helicopter crash.



L-R: David White, Stony Beach/DIA; Johnie Webb, DPAA, External Communications and Maj. Gen. Kelly McKeague, DPAA Deputy Director were among the presenters at the meeting..



The POW/MIA Elko (NV), Boise Valley & Pocatello (ID) Awareness Association raises money for the League, travels to the annual meetings and presents colors at the opening and much more. (Several members not pictured).



Ron Ward, John Goines, Dr. Reedy & Jennifer Nasarenko all contribute to DPAA's mission of bringing home MIAs from the Vietnam War.

There are a lot of ways to energize your MIAs case. Most important, try to attend the annual League meetings, where face-to-face communication with the experts is available, as is the possibility of learning how to generate new leads in a loved one's case – just ask!. All family members can participate in the Q&A session; attend break-out workshops; and request a case review with their casualty officer – ahead of time, since appointments are necessary. Case reviews are important, and I believe will become more so in the future. NOTE: If the Primary-Next-of-Kin (PNOK) is no longer able to serve as the lead on a loved one's case, he/she can appoint another family member or someone else to assume that responsibility. The PNOK should contact their casualty officer to learn how to officially make that change.

Online research is often the path of least resistance for the PNOK, since he/she has been given custody of their loved one's military records. If someone reading this is a PNOK but does not have military records, you need to contact the casualty officer within your loved one's branch of service. Each branch has its own casualty officer for MIAs – check DPAA for contact information, or the League.

In addition to all the military files, there may be other paperwork received over the years from the Department of Defense. Re-read all the data pertaining to his loss, along with any case reviews or government correspondence. The picture will become apparent as to why his remains have not been recovered. This information will help whoever is doing the online research to create targeted questions that could eventually result in new information for DPAA investigators.

Although computer technology intimidates a lot of us, getting help conducting online research can come from a variety of sources -- computer savvy family members; friends; church groups; and senior citizen organizations. Veteran groups are excellent research sources -- most Vietnam era veterans have stayed in touch with buddies from their unit in country, through email communication and reunions. An MIAs records should include his last unit, and this is a good place to kick off new research. Try not to get frustrated -- think of your research as part of the overall humanitarian effort. It might open new doors. I live by that creed!



Bob Wallace, Executive Director, VFW, represents an organization that proactively supports the League and our veterans. The VFW is important to our efforts.

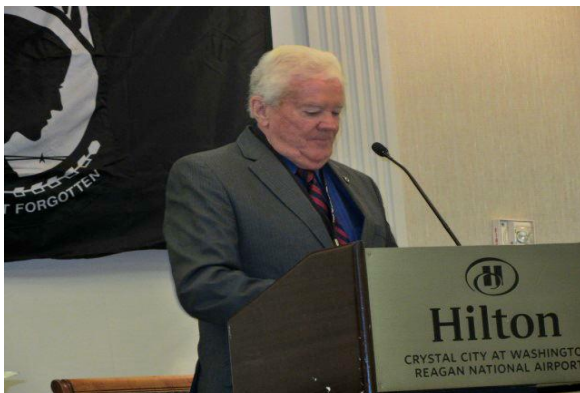


G. Michael Schlee, Chairman, National Security Commission, American Legion, is another important partner for the League and our veterans.

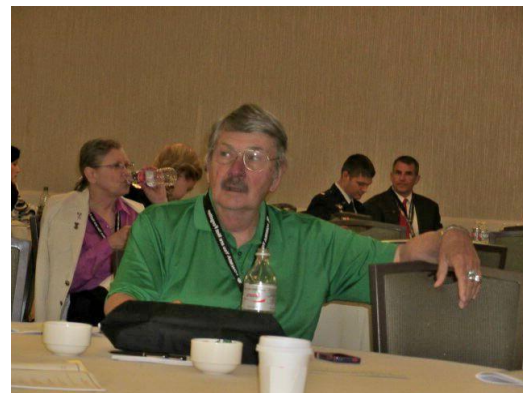
If you are unable to get involved with your loved one's case on a research level or to attend a League meeting, no one will think any less of you. Do what is right for your personal situation. In some ways, the psychological part can be more difficult for some of us than the time it takes to conduct viable research.

Although I was unable to attend Susie Stephens-Harvey's workshop, "Pursuing an MIA Case – Your Role," I am certain attendees received valuable information. Family members interested in knowing more about Susie's approach for re-energizing your loved one's case should contact the League at www.pow-miafamilies.org/, and ask if they have a handout available from her workshop. If so, request a copy.

**Much of the information in "OWNERSHIP TIPS" is based on my opinion and personal experience with case research on behalf of my first husband, whose remains have not been recovered at this point. Always remember, there are no guarantees of success.*



Richard Childress, Senior League Advisor & Director of Asian Affairs, is one of the most influential people within League ranks. He and Mills-Griffiths have dedicated decades to resolving Vietnam War POW/MIA issues.



Former Vietnam War POW (1967-73), Capt. David Gray's F-4C aircraft was shot down over the North – he and his RIO survived. Gray was transferred to 10 different prisons, until his release – he doesn't believe any POWs were left behind. He was a League Board member for 20 yrs. and continues supporting its advocacy role.



LTC Marcus Ferrara; family members; Maj Gen Kelly and Mrs. McKeague; and John Goines. McKeague is serving as Deputy Director of DPAA.



Dr. Reedy, DPAA Scientific Director, is now based in Hawaii, where he and other DPAA staff members will share work space in the lab's new facility at Hickam AFB in Honolulu.

OUT-TAKES (Edited)

Building a Database: On a DoD network, it's really hard. I'm telling you this is really hard – we'll give it our best shot. Use the best technology with partners. I like to under-promise and over-deliver. **(Linnington)**

DNA Request: 75% has been collected among families with MIAs in Southeast Asia. There's still work to be done, especially getting swabs from brothers and sisters. **(Dr. Reedy)**

Vietnam Recovery Teams (VRT): I do trust them to do certain things. If things don't seem right in a certain report, we check. Advance work prep – we can't confirm everything they do, but we can confirm that it gets things ready for an excavation. **(Ward)**

Outlook for Laos . I wish we could keep Marcos in Laos for another 5 or 6 years – he has helped build the trust we have achieved because of what he has done. Laos will be in the spotlight, serving as chairman of ASEAN in 2016 – this can bring greater cooperation. [Ferrera's tour has been extended for one more year]. **(Jennifer Nasarenko)**



Mills-Griffiths and Linnington did a great job. We're looking forward to next year's League meeting.

Communication & Civility: I will never lie to anyone – I will tell you what I know, and if I'm wrong, I'll correct myself. I'm going to welcome everybody – two way street. I'm going to give, and they have to be reasonable partners. Reasonable professionals can have different opinions. Dialogue before decision. **(Linnington)**