

FAMILIES WITH MIAs UNACCOUNTED-FOR FROM THE VIETNAM WAR

PREPARE FOR THEIR ANNUAL MEETING IN WASHINGTON, D.C.



L-R: Interim DPAA Director Fern Sumpter Winbush & Todd S. Livick, DPAA Director of Outreach & Communications; BG Mark Spindler, USA, Deputy Director, DPAA; League Board Chairman & CEO Ann Mills Griffiths. With the exception of BG Spindler, who is based in Hawaii, the other leaders reside in Washington, D.C.

ANNOUNCING

THE 48TH ANNUAL MEETING

OF

THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF POW/MIA FAMILIES

&

THE US GOVERNMENT'S SOUTHEAST ASIA BRIEFINGS

JUNE 21 – 25, 2017

HILTON CRYSTAL CITY HOTEL

ARLINGTON, VA 22202

Registration for the event must be postmarked BY FRIDAY, JUNE 1, 2017. *

CHECKS MADE PAYABLE TO

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF POW/MIA FAMILIES

5673 COLUMBIA PIKE, SUITE 100

FALLS CHURCH, VA 22041

WEBSITE: <http://www.pow-miafamilies.org/annual-meeting.html>

*Families choosing to attend the government briefings but not other events, the deadline for registration is June 9, 2017, but sooner is better in my opinion. Contact your respective service casualty office for assistance with credentials and questions related to the briefings.



Each armed service has a casualty office that handles their own KIAs/BNRs, MIAs and POWs. L-R: Marine Corps Casualty Specialists Michael Ryba and Ronald (Chuck) Williams. (Not pictured is Hattie Johnson, USMCs Head of POW/MIA Casualty).

MIA FAMILY SERVICE CASUALTY OFFICES

CONTACT NUMBERS

Army: 1-800-892-2490

Navy: 1-800-443-9298

Air Force: 1-800-531-5501

Marine Corps: 1-800-847-1597

State Department: 1- 202-647-5470

CIA: 1-703-874-4270

WHY ATTEND THE LEAGUE & DoD MEETING?

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS



The Arizona DPAA Regional Meeting in January 2017, attracted a huge attendance of families with MIAs from WWII; Korean War/Cold War; and Vietnam War.

Vietnam War MIA families are the heart & soul of efforts to bring home the remains of loved ones from Southeast Asia and/or to pressure officials for answers to tough questions. Marking its 48th year, the family League has a long track record as the main source of advocacy for the return of Vietnam War POWs and MIAs. Although still going strong, the League – namely Ann Mills Griffiths -- cannot do it alone. If you haven't visited the League website and want to learn more about its nearly 50 years of advocacy, visit <http://www.pow-miafamilies.org/>.

Our presence at the annual meeting is proof positive that we're not giving up – nothing says we care like an audience full of wives, daughters, sons, uncles, brothers, sisters, so please know that we need you to attend, if possible, or send a surrogate – check with your casualty officer and ask about the procedure for sending an extended family member or veteran who has been involved in your loved one's case.

With a much leaner military in last year's drawdown and tensions building in areas of concern – in the Mideast and Asia, we need to ensure our government that DPAA's mission in Southeast Asia is building bridges and more during these difficult times.

Remember, the annual meeting is the only function, strictly devoted to Vietnam War losses.

SUPPORT THE TEAM



Panels, such as the one above, which features experts from DPAA, DIA, and the latter's special division, Stony Beach, are among the groups that present at each meeting. For the most part, if selected to present, you can bet that groups and/or individuals are critical to the mission. This group is critical and knows its stuff.

Dedicated to Vietnam War recovery efforts, these men are among the DPAA and DIA/Stony Beach brain-trust. They don't generally rotate to other areas, such as WWII and Korean War locations but work in Southeast Asia. Undoubtedly, most will be attending this year's meeting once again. They live in countries – either full- or part-time, such as Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand, searching for answers, often combing archives in locations where linguistic expertise is definitely not in the “romantic language” category.” They communicate with locals, most of whom speak a variety of dialects; establish relationships with officials that often lead to better cooperation between our country and theirs; and try to locate sites where the remains of our MIAs may exist and much more. They have my respect, and I hope yours, too.



L-R: USMC Capt. Jim Prial; DPAA Interim Director Fern Sumpter Winbush; and Lt. Col. Michael J. Gann, USMC, Director, Asia & Pacific Region DPAA, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Inerim-Director Fern Winbush has been leading DPAA, since Director Mike Linnington resigned in 2016 to become CEO of the Wounded Warrior Project. Winbush is keeping DPAA afloat, working hard to fulfill the agency's goals – despite all the adjustment that goes with a turnover of administration on Capitol Hill; budget shortfall; temporary hiring freeze; and shortage of specialized talent at many levels of the program, in part due to the drawdown of our military in the recent past.

Winbush understands how the military's challenges impact other sectors of the DoD, such as DPAA, as does her Deputy Director BG Mark Spindler, USA, who is highly admired by colleagues. Winbush and Spindler are doing their best to get the job done and always looking at alternative solutions. They have my support and undoubtedly the League's, too, and I'm sure their presentations will be excellent.

Another key team member is Marine Lt. Col. Gann, who understands the necessity of speeding up Vietnam War field operations because of the degrading acidic soil and other factors, rapidly destroying the remains of our loved ones. During a DPAA regional meeting in Phoenix, AZ, earlier this year, Gann discussed ways that are being explored to include some contract labor with specific specialties to augment field operations in Southeast Asia. Unlike areas in Europe where DPAA has worked with a handful of recovery organizations for a long time, Vietnam War locations have been basically closed to "outsiders." I am certain whatever is being discussed, the Vietnamese are very much a part of any proposed changes. My understanding is that a limited number of contractors would work alongside Vietnamese and Americans during field operations. I'm looking forward to Gann's presentation on the "Asia & Pacific Region Operational Update."



L-R: Dr. Thomas Holland, Director Strategic Initiatives, DPAA, Washington, D.C.;
Ron Ward, Casualty Resolution Specialist, DPAA, Detachment 2, Hanoi, Vietnam.

Dr. Tom Holland is a man on a mission to help DPAA find new ways of speeding up efforts to account for our MIAs on a global level. I spoke briefly with Holland after the 2016 League meeting about what he was looking for in terms of partners/talent. As we spoke, it was apparent that Holland was open-minded about the type of organizations and/or individuals that would be of interest to him and to DPAA's mission. Translation: Do your homework before sending a proposal

to Holland (DPAA's contact info), and be sure to include your expertise, credentials and "what exactly you want in return from DPAA," was a point Holland stressed.

During the DPAA regional meeting in Phoenix, I learned that partnering opportunities could be available for private researchers; non-DoD organizations; non-government organizations; universities; foreign government organizations; volunteers; investigations & recoveries; scientific analysis; training forensic technicians; and involvement in underwater recoveries – a big deal in Vietnam. I will learn more at the upcoming League meeting and be sure to cover it in my wrap-up post.

Ron Ward is the Detachment 2, Casualty Resolution Specialist, and much more. You've heard people say, "he's the go-to guy," and anyone involved in field operations in Vietnam will probably agree with my assessment. I first met Ward on a visit to Hanoi in 2009, which is where Det-2 is located. I was so impressed with his willingness to talk with me and my travel partner, retired Marine Lt. Col. Gene Mares, about Jerry's case. The treatment that we received on that first visit set the tone for my future relationship with JPAC, the predecessor to DPAA.

Having returned to Vietnam a few times, I always make a point of visiting Ron and others in the detachment. Ward will be attending this year's League meeting, and I encourage family members who haven't met him to thank him for caring about our loved ones. We have a lot of good ones, and he's right up there. Ron will be a speaker, and I look forward to hearing what he has in store for us.

3. LEARN ABOUT COMPLEX TOPICS



Dr. Timothy McMahon, Deputy Director of Forensic Services, Contractor with the American Registry of Pathology Sciences LLC; Lt. Col. Alice Briones, MD, USAF, Chief Deputy Medical Examiner & Director of the DoD, DNA Registry.

Dr. McMahon and Dr. Briones work in the same circles, as noted by their very prestigious titles. Both are very approachable and demonstrate the type of talent that is affiliated with DPAA. Despite being one of the most important links to the identification process at this point in history, DNA is perhaps one of the least understood by many in the general public.

Dr. Briones makes every effort to simplify the idiosyncrasies of DNA. She has a great sense of humor and injects a little of it when discussing her favorite topic – DNA, of course. I copied the above slide at the 2016 DPAA Regional Meeting in Los Angeles. Since that time, it's quite possible that Briones' League presentation, "Technological Advances in the ID Process," will reveal even more breakthroughs.

Remember: A successful conclusion to a loved one's case is the lab's ability to make a positive identification. The next-of-kin (NOK) is a very important link in making it happen. If you have not given a DNA sample, there will be a table setup at the meeting, and it only takes a swab with a Q Tip of sorts inside your mouth – 1 minute, no pain – there will be people available to answer your questions.

CONNECT WITH FAMILY OUTREACH



Johnie Webb, Deputy Director of Outreach & Communication, DPAA with one of "his MIA families"

Mingling or comforting family members, who have lost a loved one in the Vietnam War, Korean War and even WWII, is not always as easy as it looks, but for Johnie Webb it is part of his life. He travels to all the meetings, and when families spot him in the crowd, they immediately run in his direction. Like Ann Mills Griffiths, Webb has been involved with the POW/MIA issue nearly a half century, since serving in Vietnam as an Army officer. When I met Johnie for the first time, my son, Brett, was with me, and I remember Johnie saying something like, "I'm sorry we haven't brought your husband home yet." Similar to my initial meeting with Ron Ward, I appreciated Johnie's kindness and still do. He is an excellent speaker and like Ann, knows everything about the accounting process, dating back decades. Also, you won't find a better friend to veterans than Johnie. He always takes time to attend their meetings when invited. Webb is one of the presenters, and you can bet it will be good.