

Progress in Laos

Oct. 12, 2020

Current Status of Unaccounted-for Americans Lost in the Vietnam War

	Vietnam	Laos	Cambodia	China	Total
Original Missing	1,973	573	90	10	2,646
Repatriated and Identified	728	288	42	3	1,061[1]
Remaining Missing	1,245	285	48	7	1,585

Of the remaining 285 Americans still unaccounted for in Laos, 11 are in a “non-recoverable” category. This means that as a result of rigorous investigation, we have conclusive evidence the individual perished, but do not believe it possible to recover his remains. On rare occasions, new leads can arise that bring a case back to an active status.

Field Operations

- The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) planned to conduct five Joint Field Activities (JFAs) this fiscal year in Laos. The COVID-19 (corona virus) pandemic has forced the cancellation of two JFAs and may impact the remaining mission. Each JFA can involve up to 65 U.S. personnel plus their Lao counterparts. Together, they will work on investigations and excavations throughout the country for periods of between 30 - 45 days per JFA.
- Recovered remains believed to be those of Americans are transferred to DPAA’s laboratory in Hawaii for further analysis and identification by forensic anthropologists.
- The 160th and 161st JFAs were canceled due to health and safety concerns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Future JFAs remain dependent upon resolution of health, safety, and travel concerns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Resolving “Last Known Alive” Cases

- Of the original 81 individuals “Last Known Alive” in Laos (those who survived or may have survived their loss incident and were either alive on the ground, in

captivity, or in immediate proximity to capture, but did not return), DOD has confirmed the death of 65, with 16 still unresolved.

- Of the 65 whose deaths have been confirmed, the remains of 20 have been located and identified; efforts continue to recover the remaining 45.
- U.S. and Vietnamese specialists met in Hanoi last year to discuss Last Known Alive cases in areas of Laos controlled by Vietnamese forces during the war.

Research and Investigations

- A U.S. POW/MIA investigator is stationed in Vientiane full-time. He pursues leads associated with the remaining 285 individuals still unaccounted for in Laos.
- The Lao have allowed approximately 80 Vietnamese witnesses to participate in investigating 50 cases in trilateral operations during JFAs in Laos. These witnesses have provided significant information that has led to the excavation of several sites and recoveries associated with as many as 20 individuals.
- The U.S. completed an archival research arrangement with the Lao in 2007. The initiative, begun in June 2004, did not uncover any information regarding Americans missing in Laos during the war, but the U.S. continues to seek relevant archival records that may still exist.
- A Joint Archival Research Team (ART) accessed the Lao National Film Archives and Video Center from 1994 - 1999. The ART reviewed over 18,000 photographs, with 8 depicting U.S. POWs and 9 depicting aircraft wreckage.

¹This number now includes the 63 Americans who were returned and/or identified from 1973 – 1975.