

Progress in Vietnam

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 1,246 Americans still unaccounted for in Vietnam, 470 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 four Joint Field Activities (JFAs) this fiscal year in Vietnam. Each JFA involves approximately 95 U.S. personnel plus their Vietnamese counterparts. Together, they work on investigations and excavations throughout the country for a period of approximately 30 days per JFA. The COVID-19 (corona virus) pandemic forced the cancellation of two DPAA-led JFA, but in its place, all-Vietnamese teams executed the 139th and 140th field activities.
- 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 139th field activity began May 5 and continued through June 23, 2020. Three all-Vietnamese teams excavated sites in Vinh Phuc, Thanh Hoa, and Quang Binh Provinces; Vietnamese investigation teams worked throughout the country.
- The 140th field activity began July 24 and continued through September 6, 2020. Three all-Vietnamese teams excavated sites in Vinh Phuc, Thanh Hoa, and Yen Bai Provinces; Vietnamese investigation teams worked throughout the country.

Resolving “Last Known Alive” Cases

- Of the original 196 individuals “Last Known Alive” in Vietnam (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 177, with 19 still unresolved.
- Of the 177 whose deaths have been confirmed, the remains of 51 have been located and identified; efforts continue to recover the remaining 126.
- U.S. and Vietnamese specialists met in Hanoi last year to discuss Last Known Alive cases in Vietnam, as well as in Cambodia and Laos.

Research and Investigations

- U.S. POW/MIA investigators rotate into Hanoi on a continuous basis to pursue leads associated with the remaining 1,246 Americans still unaccounted for in Vietnam.
- A research effort continues in the Ministry of National Defense (MND) central archives. Since May 2012, Vietnam has turned over policy, strategic, and tactical level archival documents regarding unaccounted for Americans.
- In addition to the interviews conducted during JFAs, U.S. and Vietnamese investigators have conducted nearly 300 oral history interviews of former and current Vietnamese government and military officials. This program is ongoing.
- Since Vietnamese troops occupied large portions of Cambodia and Laos where Americans went missing during the War, the U.S. asks Vietnamese veterans and civilians to cooperate in our operations in the two countries. Vietnamese veterans have actively supported DPAA investigation and recovery operations in both Cambodia and Laos; many of these veterans have participated more than once.

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