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23 MAY 1975

### FAMILY EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF UNITED STATES PRISONERS OF WAR AND MISSING IN ACTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

BY

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US ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA 17013

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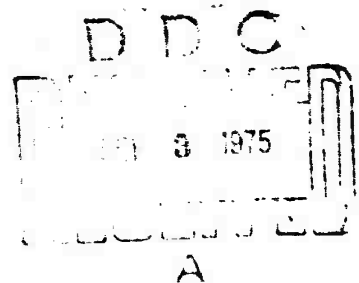
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FAMILY EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF UNITED STATES PRISONERS  
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Military Police Corps

US Army War College  
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△ The basic problem examined in this paper is the refusal by North Vietnam and its Communist allies to abide fully with the humanitarian principles of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War and their refusal to properly account for the missing in action and dead. A descriptive chronology is developed to highlight the significant efforts put forth by family members of Americans who were either held captive and subsequently released or who remain unaccounted for in Southeast Asia. The period 1964 to present is examined and family initiatives are described as they occurred. The initiatives took many forms, including: meetings with high level government officials; numerous appearances before the Congress; letter writing campaigns; use of the mass media; dedication ceremonies; and travel abroad. No attempt is made to draw conclusions or make recommendations with respect to family success or failure during their involvement in the PW/MIA issue.

△

## PREFACE

The prisoner of war and missing in action problem associated with the Vietnam War in Southeast Asia was perhaps the most politically sensitive issue confronting President Nixon and his Administration. Never before in the history of this Nation have military servicemen's wives and family members been given such personalized consideration and assistance by, and continuous access to, our highest ranking government officials, including the President of the United States. In addition, the plight of United States servicemen held captive and missing in Southeast Asia was shared through the news media by a vast majority of the American as well as the international general public who universally shared a common belief in the need to gain their release and accountability for the missing as quickly as possible.

The author's four consecutive years of military duties directly associated with the prisoner/missing issue contributed significantly to the content of this individual research project. His assignments included two years with the Office of the Provost Marshal General, Headquarters, Department of the Army (1971-1972) and two years with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs (1973-1974).

In order to honor the privacy of the many family members whose activities are referred to in this paper, only descriptive titles will be utilized as identifiers when individual efforts are involved. This procedure will also be followed when footnoting these individual sources of data.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This individual research paper concentrates on the significant highlights of family efforts on behalf of those United States servicemen who were prisoners of war and those who remain missing in action or unaccounted for in Southeast Asia.

The paper encompasses four readily identifiable time periods which are chronologically examined. The first is a period entitled "The Years of Silence" when families were advised by federal government officials to retain a "low profile" and to refrain from publicly addressing the prisoner of war and missing in action (hereafter referred to as PW/MIA) issue. The second period, entitled "The Years of Action" examines the multitude of initiatives put forth by family members subsequent to their uniting into one of the most powerful and effective, for its size, lobbying groups this Nation has ever known. The third period examined is entitled "The Years of Frustration" which refers to the post prisoner of war repatriation era and the fourth period, "The Year of Decision," commences with activities of calendar year 1975 and proceeds to the current dilemma being experienced by the families of US servicemen who were not repatriated from Southeast Asia at the conclusion of the US forces involvement and who remain in either a missing or unaccounted for status.

Finally, it should be recognized that the efforts and initiatives on behalf of our prisoners and missing discussed in this

paper are limited to only those put forth by family members and do not include the countless thousands of efforts and initiatives that could be attributed to the Departments of State and Defense, the Congress, and literally hundreds of private organizations and private citizens, unless these efforts were prompted by family initiatives. Hence, it is this author's sincere hope that future research will be forthcoming to document for posterity a comprehensive analysis of all the efforts and initiatives by so many for so few.

## CHAPTER II

### THE YEARS OF SILENCE (1964-1969)

The prisoner of war and missing in action issue had its genesis in 1964 when the Defense Department listed three servicemen captured and four missing during that year. Interest in the issue gradually increased during calendar year 1965 when an additional 128 military personnel were reported missing or captured (54 missing and 74 captured). Although family interest in the welfare of their loved ones during these two years was intense, the first sign of family unity regarding the PW/MIA issue appeared during calendar year 1966 when an additional 301 servicemen were listed in the category of PW/MIA (204 missing and 97 prisoners). This unity would not formally be recognized for several more years, mainly due to the geographical dispersion of those lost and the inability of these families to comprehend the fact that the fate of their loved ones may not be known for many years in the future, if ever.

This period was also characterized by an attitude of uncertainty on the part of government officials. They advised families of the PW/MIA to avoid public utterances critical of the Communist captors based upon the belief that if hope remained for the welfare and subsequent release of US prisoners of war, this would have to be accomplished through diplomatic channels instead of through the Hanoi government's sensitivity to world public opinion. Although

the vast majority of family members complied with their government official's guidance regarding a policy of silence, the passage of time slowly resulted in anxiety and doubt being expressed by many. This dichotomy among families existed throughout the Vietnam conflict and intensified as time passed. Perhaps the mother of an Army pilot who was missing in action best summarized the frustrations of the family members during the silent years when she wrote:

The circumstances of being a POW or MIA next of kin was, therefore, complicated not only by the anxieties and fears for the captured or missing man, but by the concomitant frustration of having no normal outlet through which to voice these concerns. During this early period, it seemed to the families that there was limited personal contact with Government representatives, and little, if any, opportunity to raise questions about either personal family problems arising from the difficult situation, or questions about specific actions being taken by the Government to resolve the issue. On the other hand, some of the families made the assumption that everything possible was being done.<sup>1</sup>

The first signs of family organization concerning the PW/MIA issue can be attributed to the wives of two servicemen believed held prisoner by the North Vietnamese. These women met while residing in a military community in California and began, in late 1966, to search for other families in that area. Subsequently, over 30 additional families were identified and informal group meetings were arranged. These meetings continued for almost two years as the number of servicemen captured or missing in Southeast

Asia continued to mount. These women formed the nucleus for an organization which was later to become known as the League of Wives of American Vietnam Prisoners of War, and still later as the League of Families of American Prisoners in Southeast Asia (hereafter referred to as the League of Families).

It is significant to note at this point that not all family members were enchanted by the idea of organizing on behalf of their loved ones. To illustrate, the wife of an Air Force colonel made her personal position on family involvement quite clear in a letter to the Department of Defense when she wrote:

Today's New York Times carried an article regarding prisoners of war being held in North Vietnam and some of the projects being undertaken by the wives in an effort to assist their prisoner husbands. I was included in that article by name.

The way in which the article was written groups all of the wives and blankets them in the name of the organization known as the National League of Families of American Prisoners in Southeast Asia.

I would like to make it officially known that I am not and do not intend to be affiliated with this group. I personally believe that group efforts are being handled efficiently and professionally by our Department of Defense, Department of State and the diplomatic colony in the area of the prisoners' plight.

My husband being a career officer and one who believes in the unwritten and certainly worthwhile law that wives should not move in areas as a group where officialdom belongs and he would not condone this type of action.<sup>2</sup>

Another independent organization dedicated to work for the release of the prisoners in Indochina was an international group

named Rescue Line, Inc. This group, headed by an Air Force wife, began operating in May of 1967; however, due to the low profile it maintained, little is known as to its overall effectiveness concerning the PW/MIA issue.

One of the first overt attempts by a family organization to solicit assistance at the Defense Department level occurred late in the year 1968. A letter was sent to invite Defense Department representatives to meet with the group in San Diego:

It is our understanding that a few ex-prisoners of war are members of the Warnke Committee. An invitation is extended to one or more of these members to meet our League. It is felt a meeting would give us more insight towards more constructive activity now and in the future.<sup>3</sup>

The Warnke Committee referred to in the letter was a small nucleus of three or four individuals (military and civilian) who were dedicated full-time to the PW/MIA issue. Mr. Warnke was the Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) for PW/MIA affairs. The ex-prisoner referred to was a Navy captain who had been held prisoner in the Korean War. The visit request was subsequently honored and three representatives from the Department of Defense visited with this family group in San Diego on 26 March 1969.

Although documentation could not be found to substantiate it, the author believes that the meeting in San Diego contributed significantly in convincing government officials that the time had come to end the "years of silence" and begin the "years of action." Chapter III is devoted to this period of time.

## CHAPTER II

### FOOTNOTES

1. Mother of Army Serviceman, "The National League of Families and the Development of Family Services," Family Separation and Reunion: Families of Prisoners of War and Servicemen Missing in Action, ed. by McCubben, Dahl, Metres, and Hunter, p. 3.

2. Wife of Air Force Serviceman, letter to the Chairman, Department of Defense Prisoner of War Policy Committee, 31 July 1969.

3. League of Wives of American Prisoners of War, letter to the Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs), Department of Defense, 9 October 1968.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE YEARS OF ACTION (1969-1972)

##### EVENTS OF 1969

As the list of US servicemen missing and captured in Southeast Asia continued to grow (1230 at the end of CY 1968), the growing impatience on the part of the families of these men became more intense. The first overt organized sign of unrest took the form of a campaign, early in 1969, by a group of families to inundate the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris with cablegrams expressing concern over the fate of their loved ones.

At about the same time, the Defense and State Departments sent officials to visit numerous metropolitan areas of the country for the purpose of meeting personally with over 1400 wives, parents and other relatives of captured and missing servicemen. In addition, the Secretary of Defense (Melvin Laird) personally met with a representative group of wives and parents at the Pentagon late in July of 1969.

The official announcement of a shift in policy by the United States government from one of silence to one of action occurred during May 1969 when Secretary of Defense Laird announced through the news media that the prisoner of war issue should be placed before world opinion. The basis for this action was Communist maltreatment of those they held captive and the refusal of the Communist side to identify their captives. As will be seen, this

decision to "go public" triggered an avalanche of activity never before experienced by the general public of this nation. This resulted in an ever-increasing number of contacts by family members with various government officials, members of Congress and the news media, and private organizations.

The year 1969 also marked the beginning of massive letter writing campaigns, ceremonials and dedications, and worldwide travel on behalf of the PW/MIA.

#### Travel to Paris

During September, a group of six family members traveled to Paris where they were granted audience with the North Vietnamese delegation to the Paris peace talks on 4 October. The family members carried letters of proxy and mail for men listed as missing and captured in North Vietnam; pleaded for a freer and more frequent exchange of mail; and requested that they be permitted to send more packages to the men.

The North Vietnamese delegation accepted the letters and mail, however, they discouraged further family travel to Paris and encouraged written inquiries about the PW/MIA. In addition, they indicated that inquiries received by them would be transmitted to Hanoi.<sup>1</sup>

#### Dedication of Days of Prayer and Concern

Late in the year, the League of Families undertook efforts to designate the weekend of 8-9 November as days of prayer and concern

for PW/MIA all over the world. The membership was encouraged to send letters and telegrams to the President and to the Pope asking that 9 November be declared a National and World Day of Prayer and Concern for the PW/MIA and to the Senate Judiciary Committee urging the Senate to pass a resolution asking for Presidential recognition of this date.<sup>2</sup>

#### Family Visit to the White House

The year 1969 ended on a high note when the President of the United States (President Nixon) invited 25 wives and mothers of prisoners of war and missing, representing all four services, to visit him at the White House on 12 December 1969. In addition, a reception for the families was held the evening before at Bolling Air Force Base and was attended by the Secretary of Defense, the Service Secretaries and their Chiefs of Staff, or their representatives.

The end of 1969 saw an additional 189 US servicemen join the roles of the captured or missing and raised the grand total to 1419.

#### EVENTS OF 1970

##### Paris Peace Talks

Early in the year, the plight of the families of the PW/MIA was focused through diplomatic channels, particularly the Paris Peace Talks on Ending the War in Vietnam. During the 5 March 1970,

session, the United States senior delegate concentrated on the issue of mail when he stated:

Families have for years sent letters to American military personnel and civilians captured in South Vietnam, using addresses of National Liberation Front offices in Algiers, Prague, and mainly Phnom Penh. Your side has never confirmed that the letters reached the prisoners and the families have never received any replies from their loved ones.<sup>3</sup>

The issue of family frustration over lack of information was surfaced by Ambassador Habib on 12 March 1970, in remarks directed to the Communist side:

In recent months you have indicated that if families of American prisoners of war came to Paris, they would learn about their men. Yet in most cases, when they came you had no information for them. You promised that you would write to let them know; that, too, has turned out to be an empty promise.

You then announced that families need not come to Paris but could write your offices here to obtain information. Families still await responses.

You refuse to take the simple, humanitarian step of telling all families concerned, without delay, whether their loved ones are alive or not. For political and propaganda purposes, you exploit families' anxieties and doubts about the fate of their men by providing information through slow, indirect piecemeal and often unreliable methods. This does not meet your international responsibility. It is in fact evidence that your so called "humanitarian policy" is a sham. A humane policy demands that all families be informed immediately and officially about the fate of their men--both those who are prisoners and those whom you know to be dead.<sup>4</sup>

### Incorporation of National League of Families

On 30 June 1970, family unity on behalf of the PW/MIA issue reached its pinnacle when a newly incorporated organization, the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia (hereafter referred to as the League or National League of Families), formally opened at 1 Constitution Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C., in office space donated free-of-charge by the Reserve Officers Association. The need for formalizing family efforts was summarized in remarks by a Navy wife in her capacity as Chairman of the Board of Directors in her opening ceremony remarks:

For almost four years now, the families of men imprisoned or missing in Southeast Asia, have been seeking through various means to obtain information about their husbands and sons, and to focus public attention on the cruel manner in which these men have been used and abused by their captors.

Much of this effort on behalf of the families has been ill-coordinated and disorganized for the simple reason that we have been working out of our living rooms and kitchens. We are not professionals. We are merely wives and parents. We have had no national headquarters or full-time staff, easily accessible to family members, to the press, or to concerned citizens and other organizations who have expressed the desire to help us.

About two months ago, we finally acknowledged to ourselves that if we were ever to become a truly effective organization, we should have a formally incorporated group, headquartered in Washington and manned by a permanent staff. As each day passes, we feel that time is running out for our men.<sup>5</sup>

The opening ceremony was attended by ranking members of the Administration, leaders of both political parties in the Congress, guests from a number of foreign countries, top military officials, members of PW/MIA families, and other invited guests.

Although not personally present, the President of the United States sent a message to the League which, in part, read:

As you know, our government has repeatedly urged that the enemy consider the prisoner problem as a humanitarian issue separate from our differences on the war. There has been no response from our offer. It is as difficult to comprehend the enemy's total disregard for human dignity as it is heartening to praise the sincere desire for your organization to shorten the anguish and end the heartache of those who await the return of their loved ones.<sup>6</sup>

The Secretary of Defense also was unable to attend the opening ceremony but sent a message via his representative, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Dr.

G. Warren Nutter. An excerpt of his message follows:

I regret that I cannot be with you today at the opening of the Office of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, but I would like to take this means of extending my greetings and best wishes. I shall continue to hope with you that all our men will soon return and that the need for such an office will serve the important and necessary function of helping to focus public attention on the treatment of American prisoners.<sup>7</sup>

Membership in the League was confined to family members of US servicemen and civilians who were prisoners of war or missing in action and believed to be prisoners in Southeast Asia. The

League advertised itself to be a non-profit, non-partisan organization financed by the families themselves and by contributions from concerned citizens and organizations.

In its initial charter,<sup>8</sup> the League stated its intention to be of assistance to all Americans who were missing or captured in Southeast Asia by:

--Securing humane treatment in accordance with the requirements of the 1949 Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, and as recognized by general humanitarian standards.

--Obtaining identification of all those who are being held captive by the North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong, the Pathet Lao and other hostile forces.

--Assuring proper medical care for all.

--Continuing to direct the attention of the American people and other peoples of the world to the unconscionable plight of the captured and missing men and their families.

--Facilitating and promoting improved communication of information on the prisoner of war issue among the news media, the families of those who are captured and missing, agencies of the US government, and the world at large.

--Facilitating and developing activities with other private or public groups or organizations and governmental agencies which are working to achieve the same humanitarian objectives.

--Maintaining and supporting the morale of all captured and missing Americans and their families, and

--Working to obtain the earliest possible release of, and a complete accounting for, all captured and missing Americans in Southeast Asia.

Immediately after its corporation, the League's Board of Directors launched numerous aggressive actions on behalf of the PW/MIA issue. These included meetings with national and international political figures, advertising initiatives, speaking engagements, and letter writing campaigns.

#### Meetings With Political Representatives

In mid-1970, the Board of Directors met in Washington with the Prime Minister of Sweden and made a strong plea for him to try to reinforce his contacts with North Vietnam and its allies, in order to obtain humanitarian treatment for US prisoners of war. In addition, upon learning of an around-the-world trip by the Mayor of the District of Columbia, the Board asked that he and his wife raise the prisoner issue whenever possible in their meetings with foreign officials, news media, and business and womens' groups.<sup>9</sup>

#### Congressional Initiatives

With regard to Congressional initiatives, members of the League met with House Speaker John McCormack on 10 July 1970, to seek his assistance in obtaining a joint meeting of Congress devoted to the PW/MIA issue, and again on 24 July 1970, League members met with House Majority and Minority Leaders, Representatives



Carl Albert and Gerald Ford, to also solicit their support for a joint meeting. They both agreed to endorse the meeting. In addition, the Board urged the League membership to write letters to their representatives in Congress in support of the joint meeting of Congress.<sup>10</sup>

#### News Media Initiatives

Other League members devoted their energies to the news media in New York where they talked with editors of magazines and representatives of the television networks. As a result of their efforts, ABC agreed to present a "PW/MIA Special" on 14 September 1970; NBC considered doing a spot on its First Monday program; Ladies Home Journal promised an article with a tear-out letter for readers to mail in expressing concern; and National Review agreed to do an editorial.<sup>11</sup>

#### Donations

Probably one of the most unusual acts of financial assistance rendered the League in 1970 was a donation of \$12,500 by then, Vice President Spiro Agnew, representing the royalties from the sale of Agnew wrist watches and sweatshirts. The League was also to receive 50 cents from the sale of each additional watch, and 50,000 watches were reported to be on back order. League representatives were invited to the White House to receive the donation.<sup>12</sup>

### Visits to Foreign Embassies

A program was initiated wherein members of the Board of Directors visited foreign embassies in Washington with publicity being focused on the country the embassy represented. The initial meetings were with the Ambassadors from India and Great Britain.<sup>13</sup>

### Visits With Wives Groups

League representatives initially met with Mrs. William P. Rogers, wife of the Secretary of State to explore ways in which wives of members of the President's Cabinet might be helpful to the League. In addition, meetings were planned with the Congressional Women's Club (wives of House and Senate members) and for similar meetings with the wives of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and senior enlisted men in each of the armed forces.

### Liaison With DOD Officials

The month of August culminated in a visit to the League headquarters by the Secretary of the Navy (Mr. Chafee) and a meeting with the Secretary of the Army (Mr. Resor) at the Pentagon. Both officials assured their continued support of the League's efforts.

### League Convention

The close of calendar year 1970 witnessed the first annual League convention held in Washington, D.C. during the period 2-5 October 1970.

Significant resolutions passed during this convention included the following:

--A call upon the President to initiate negotiations with the Communists to secure compliance with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and to negotiate immediately with the Communist authorities for the release of US prisoners of war and a full accounting of the missing or captured who did not survive.

--Strongly urged the President to include specific provisions for the release of prisoners of war and a full accounting of the missing in any and all plans or announcements concerning withdrawal of United States forces from Vietnam.<sup>15</sup>

#### Operation 100 Tons

Another project undertaken by the League at the close of the year was entitled "Operation 100 Tons." This campaign entailed the delivery of 100 tons of mail (supported by the Teamsters and Longshoremen Unions) to Paris during the Christmas week.

#### PW/MIA Postage Stamp

A special highlight of the year was the commemoration of a PW/MIA postage stamp which was unveiled in the reception room of the Office of the Postmaster General, Washington, D.C., on 21 October 1970. The ceremony was attended by high ranking government officials and was afforded comprehensive coverage by the news media.

#### Committee of Liaison

The year 1970 would not be complete without mentioning an unusual private organization that became affiliated, in a controversial way, with the League membership as well as those family

members who were not League members. Formed in December 1969 by several members of prominent dissident groups in New York City, the stated purpose of the organization was to act as liaison between families of PW/MIA and the Vietnam Committee of Solidarity With the American People (an agent of the North Vietnamese), towards normalizing communication between prisoners of war and their families.

This organization, called the Committee of Liaison with Families of Servicemen Detained in North Vietnam was co-chaired by Mrs. Cora Weiss, who first visited Hanoi in December 1969. Mrs. Weiss offered the North Vietnamese facilities of the anti-war movement in the United States as a channel to guarantee improved communication between detained US servicemen and their families. The organization provided escorts for several prisoners of war released from North Vietnam, however, it was unable to influence releases outside North Vietnam.

The Committee of Liaison claimed to handle mail for approximately 300 families of PW/MIA. Although seemingly helpful, numerous family members resented the obvious anti-war propaganda theme espoused by this organization. This disenchantment was apparent when the League addressed the motives of the Committee of Liaison in 1971 as follows:

The Committee of Liaison says that it is intended to serve as a private mail courier between US prisoners of war and their families. An obvious purpose of the "Committee" is to further its own anti-war position. The Committee's self-interest, as contrasted with a purely humanitarian motive, is revealed by its press conferences which accompany every release of mail.<sup>16</sup>

## EVENTS OF 1971

Early in the year, the National League of Families organization moved its headquarters to three large offices (provided free-of-charge by the American Legion) on the sixth floor of a building located at 1608 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

### Lutheran Church Initiative

On 1 February 1971, the President of the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church (Dr. Preus) held a press conference at the League's headquarters. Among other things, Dr. Preus stated that he had asked church leaders and Christians throughout the world to join him in a Day of Prayer for prisoners of war on 14 March and to sustain a program of education and prayer throughout the nation. He also urged all religious TV programmers and religious newspaper editors to spotlight the PW/MIA issue and indicated a desire to organize a team of world church leaders for the purpose of inspecting Communist POW camps in Southeast Asia.<sup>17</sup>

On 7 February 1971, League officials and office staff attended church services at the White House where Dr. Preus addressed the President and members of the Cabinet, Supreme Court and Congress on the plight of prisoners of war.<sup>18</sup>

### Travel to Europe<sup>19</sup>

Travel abroad by family members was undertaken on at least three separate occasions during the year 1971.

During the period 13-17 May, two League members and the League's Counsel visited the World Peace Council convention in Budapest to meet with as many Indo-Chinese and Chinese Communists as possible to ask for a commitment to release all prisoners of war and account for all missing. It was in Budapest where these family members held what was believed to be the first meeting with a Chinese Communist official, First Secretary Chan of the People's Republic of China.

Also during May, 140 family members travelled to Paris and Geneva. Upon arriving in Paris, League representatives noted at a press conference that the group had come in order to encourage the Communist delegation to the Paris Meetings on Vietnam to declare its willingness to free prisoners in exchange for the US government setting a date for total withdrawal from South Vietnam. While in Paris, family members called upon various foreign embassies to plead their case and on 27 May, held a silent vigil outside the Hotel Majestic during the 114th Plenary Session of the Paris Meetings on Vietnam. Although the group received sympathetic press coverage, they were not received officially by either Communist delegation to the Paris meetings.

While in Geneva, family members attempted to demonstrate the need for each country signatory to the Geneva Conventions to adhere to its provisions. Telegrams were sent and open letters were distributed to delegates attending the International Committee of the Red Cross conference. In addition, family members made

personal visits to the missions of each delegate's country to highlight concern for the PW/MIA issue.

#### Prisoner of War Mail

The issue of mail continued to frustrate family members during the year 1971. This was aggravated by the fact that the volume of letter mail from captives held in North Vietnam was significantly less than what it had been during calendar year 1970. The wife of one prisoner of war directed her frustrations at the Defense Department via letter to the Secretary of Defense. In part, she wrote:

I am the wife of one of the 95 unknown prisoners of war who has not received a letter from her husband during the entire ten months of this year. I am writing to you in order to inquire about our government's silence in this matter.

If you feel as strongly about this matter as most believe you do, it appears it would be humanely impossible for you to let it continue without comment.<sup>20</sup>

The intense interest and concern shown by numerous family members over the mail issue was subsequently passed through diplomatic channels to the United States Delegation in Paris where Ambassador Porter surfaced the issue and demanded an explanation from the Communist side. Pertinent portions of the Ambassador's statement follow:

In the past half year (May-October 1971) a total of only 170 letters have been received from US prisoners of war in North Vietnam. In the same period last year (May-October 1970) some 1300 letters were received, almost eight times as many as this year.

The Geneva Convention minimum requirement (two letters and four cards per month) calls for over 4000 letters and 8000 cards from this number of prisoners per half year. In the past six months, letters have been received from fewer than 50.

I demand that you provide the families of these men with an explanation, through this or other convenient channel. You are making a tremendous mistake if you think that silence on this subject will assist you in any way.<sup>21</sup>

#### Code of Conduct

Although mail, or the lack thereof, continued to be an extremely important issue throughout the year, another concern, which was related to mail, was expressed by the National Coordinator for the League in a letter to the Secretary of Defense. In this letter, she spoke for family members concerning the potential prosecution of those military personnel who upon return from captivity in Southeast Asia, might be confronted with prosecution for actions or statements made by them while in captivity. Specifically, she made the following observations:

As you are aware, many of the prisoners in the Indochina conflict who have been permitted to write their families have had to include phrases of a propaganda nature in some of their letters. In addition, some have made propaganda broadcasts. We also have reason to believe that some may have had to sign various documents, as did the Pueblo crew, to survive. We do not know what other concessions they have had to make to survive these years of captivity, some as long as seven years.



It seems to us that with the changing attitudes of this entire country, the Code of Conduct should be carefully studied. Our concerns are:

--That any actions of these men be evaluated carefully in the light of the changes in this country regarding the Vietnam War;

--That the length of their imprisonment, the rigors of isolation and strain of lack of communication, and the suffering of the families be considered; and

--That whatever the standards of judgement, they be the same among the services.<sup>22</sup>

#### Second Annual League Convention

The League held its second annual convention in Washington, D.C., during the period 26-29 September 1971. Although numerous resolutions were passed by the membership, the following three are noteworthy for mention in that they differed significantly from previous League initiatives:

1. That the efforts of the League be directed toward the transfer of all captured Americans in Southeast Asia to neutral countries as provided in Part IV, Articles 109 and 110 of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.

2. That the League petition all members of the Congress to sponsor as an amendment to all Bills concerning the termination of the Southeast Asia conflict the following provisions: "All aspects of this Bill shall be null and void unless the government of North Vietnam and its allies agree to first, allow and insure

a complete identification of all captured Americans in Southeast Asia prior to the implementation of the provisions of the Bill," and secondly, the release or internment in a neutral country of all detained Americans prior to the completion of the terms of the Bill.

3. That the League organize a delegation of interested members to go to the United Nations personally to impress upon each signer of the Geneva Conventions its obligation in enforcing the rules of the Conventions.

Although the first two of the above resolutions did not materialize, the third one did when League representatives visited the United Nations on 29 November 1971, where they attended a General Assembly session. During the session, the United States Alternative Representative to the United Nations reaffirmed a resolution on behalf of the PW/MIA which had previously been passed by the General Assembly in 1970.

#### POW/MIA Families for Immediate Release (FFIR)

The year 1971 also witnessed the beginning of erosion in family unity regarding the PW/MIA issue and how it should be resolved. In May, two wives co-founded an organization that they called the POW/MIA Families for Immediate Release whose membership was estimated at 350 family members or prisoners of war or missing in action.

The basic difference between this organization and the National League of Families centered on the issue of government policy

regarding the establishment of a firm date for the withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam. In this respect, the FFIR became politically oriented and highly critical of the President's foreign policy pertaining to "Peace with Honor" in Vietnam. The organization's leadership and membership was convinced that the only way the prisoners of war would be freed was to set a date for complete withdrawal of all American forces from South Vietnam and that there was no solution to the prisoner problem within the framework of Vietnamization. Further, that the prisoners had become political hostages. More will be said about this organization's activities in the next section devoted to the events of calendar year 1972.

#### EVENTS OF 1972

Although the National League of Families original charter was predicated on non-political, non-partisan principles, more and more League members expressed interest in entering the political arena to oppose the Administration's announced objectives in Southeast Asia. This was particularly true during the election year of 1972.

#### POW/MIA Families for Immediate Release

On 24 January 1972, the POW/MIA Families for Immediate Release opened a political headquarters in Washington, D.C. The stated purpose of the office was to organize an all out effort to support for election, only those political candidates whose platform included

support for an American troop withdrawal date from Vietnam contingent only on the release of all prisoners of war and an accounting of the missing.

Although this family organization was quite active during the early months of 1972, its overall impact on the political elections was, at best, minimal.

#### Nonpartisan Political Action Committee

The National League of Families may have diluted the political motives of the Families for Immediate Release organization through the formation of a Nonpartisan Political Action Committee in January 1972.

This committee consisted of League representatives throughout the country who would elicit a clear statement from each political candidate of what he or she intended to do, if elected, to secure the release of prisoners and an accounting of the missing in all areas of Southeast Asia. The principal objectives of this committee were to keep the PW/MIA issues before the country during the 1972 election campaign and to motivate all political candidates to comprehensive positions concerning all aspects of the problem. The activities of this committee were not to involve the endorsement or opposition of any particular candidates.

#### National Week of Concern

During the early months of 1972, League officials devoted their time and energies to a nation-wide dedication of one week

to the PW/MIA issue. Their efforts successfully culminated in a Presidential proclamation on 10 March which designated the period of 26 March through 1 April as National Week of Concern for Prisoners of War/Missing in Action and designated 26 March as a National Day of Prayer for the lives and safety of these men. Extracts from the Presidential proclamation follow:

As we set aside a special week of national concern for this continuing tragedy, and a special day of prayer for its resolution, we do so with a determination to persist in this effort--for principle, for peace, for the sake of these brave men and their parents and brothers and sisters and wives and the children some have never seen.

I call upon all the people of the United States to observe this week with such appropriate ceremonies and activities as will stir and sustain widespread concern for the missing men and prisoners, nourish the patient courage of their loved ones, and --above all--hasten the day of their safe return to home and freedom.<sup>25</sup>

#### Family Members Visit United Nations<sup>26</sup>

During the month of March, family attention once again shifted to the United Nations.

On 24 March, ten League members met with Secretary General Waldheim and discussed the background of the League and its two petitions previously submitted to the United Nations on behalf of the PW/MIA issue. During the meeting, the brother of a prisoner of war gave a moving presentation concerning discrepancies noted to exist on lists of missing and captured men provided by the

Communist side, and the wife of a missing serviceman presented a request for information about her husband who was lost over mainland China.

#### Special Meeting of the National League of Families<sup>27</sup>

During the annual League Convention of 1971, it was decided that a special meeting would be held by the League's National Headquarters during May 1972. This meeting was scheduled as a result of a growing concern among some of the membership over the fact that no proposal, up to that time, had been successful in freeing the prisoners or providing an accounting of the missing and that rather than wait another 12 months, until the next annual convention, the League should hold a special interim meeting to assess whatever developments had taken place.

It is significant to note that, despite the tendency of some family members to encourage a more militant, political stance, the League retained its humanitarian charter and goals. No demand, formal or otherwise, was made at the meeting to press for adoption of a more politically-oriented organization.

Although numerous resolutions were passed at the May meeting, some of which were similar to resolutions adopted at previous meetings, the following subject areas are considered by the author to be the most indicative of the membership's concerns:

--POW Camp Inspections. The League resolved to compile a list of willing doctors from neutral countries to be presented

to the Paris Talks (or other suitable place) for selection of a medical team to inspect all POW camps in Southeast Asia.

--Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. The League questioned the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations' failure to hold hearings on the PW/MIA issue in over eight years. (Author's note: This Committee did subsequently hold a hearing on the issue on 28 January 1974.)

--Economic Pressure Committee. Every candidate for the office of President or Congress was asked to sign a public pledge indicating that if the Vietnam conflict was not resolved at the time of the election, the candidate would actively support a trade embargo against all countries supplying goods or services to North Vietnam.

--Prisoner of War Lists. The League urged the government to make a stronger public issue of known discrepancies in the so-called "complete and official list" of American prisoners of war furnished by Hanoi in December 1970.

--Prisoners of War in Laos. Efforts were encouraged to secure information about, and to instigate exchange of mail for, those men missing or believed captured in Laos. In addition, concern was expressed to develop contingency plans for the possible release of men held in Laos in the event they would not be released at the same time as those held in Vietnam.

#### Travel to Europe<sup>28</sup>

The month of June again witnessed travel by League members on behalf of the PW/MIA issue when a five-member delegation

completed a two-week trip to a number of Western European capitals and Romania where they met with various officials as well as Red Cross leaders in each country visited. In addition, the family members visited with delegates to an international conference in Geneva and with representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The purpose of the trip was twofold: First, to encourage delegates to the Geneva meeting to find some method of ensuring better enforcement of the Geneva Convention, and secondly, to call to the attention of world leaders and Red Cross organizations, the discrepancies, inconsistencies and omissions that existed on Hanoi's so-called "complete list" of prisoners held in North Vietnam as well as those who were missing in Laos, South Vietnam, and Cambodia.

#### Meetings with Government Officials

The last six months of 1972 marked a period of increased visitations between League representatives and high-level government officials. This was prompted by, among other things, gradual progress being made in the Paris negotiations which gave most family members a feeling of optimism not previously experienced.

On 27 July 1972, League officials met with the Secretary of State (then Secretary Rogers) and voiced numerous concerns related to the PW/MIA issue. The more pertinent subject matter discussed with Secretary Rogers included:<sup>29</sup>



--An observation that Americans may be prohibited from serving on graves registration and inspection teams when the war ended, thus creating problems involving proper accounting of the missing.

--A presentation pointing out existing discrepancies and inconsistencies and the need to develop greater press interest in the fate of the missing.

--An observation that the US Embassies abroad were not adequately informed on the PW/MIA issue and a plea that this be corrected.

--A discussion of civilian captives and missing.

--An observation that practically no information is obtainable about men captured or missing in Laos and a recommendation that the State Department take all necessary steps to assure that this fact be repeated constantly in all diplomatic channels.

In December, League representatives met with Dr. Kissinger (Principal Advisor to the President), the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health and Environment), the Director of the DOD PW/MIA Task Force, and numerous other senior officials of the Departments of State and Defense.<sup>30</sup>

#### Third Annual League Convention

The National League of Families Third Annual Convention was again held in Washington, D.C., during the period 14-17 October 1972. Both Presidential candidates were invited to attend and address the membership; however, only President Nixon appeared.

The League's membership had steadily increased since its incorporation in 1970, and at this Convention it was noted that it had reached an all-time high of just under 3,000 family members and approximately 500 non-family members.

During the Convention, the League acted on 50 resolutions and approved 36. As was the case in the past, the League reemphasized its humanitarian non-political, non-profit charter and goals and reaffirmed that the organization would take no political stand nor endorse any political candidate for any office. Among the more significant areas of concern expressed by the League membership through resolutions at the Third Annual Convention included the following:

- Impartial inspection of all POW detention facilities.
- Package and mail delivery for Americans held in Laos, Cambodia, South Vietnam and the People's Republic of China.
- Discrepancies in lists of US prisoners of war provided by Hanoi.
- Need for increased intelligence gathering effort by all governmental intelligence agencies.
- The establishment of a central agency to consolidate all information and material in any way related to the possible identification of PW/MIA in Southeast Asia and China.

#### Triple-R Committee<sup>32</sup>

The year 1972 would not be complete without a brief discussion of one of the National League of Families most dedicated and active

committees, the Committee on Repatriation, Rehabilitation, and Readjustment (hereafter referred to as the Triple-R Committee), which was formed early in the year.

This committee was chaired by the mother of an Army pilot missing in action. She also served in the dual capacity as a consultant to both the Army and the Navy. Its purpose was to examine potential problem areas that could be expected to arise during the repatriation and readjustment period for returning prisoners of war and their families. The committee also addressed readjustment problems to be faced by the families of those who would not return home.

The Triple-R committee's membership consisted of 33 family members representing all services and all geographical areas of the United States. Numerous professions were represented on the committee, including a psychiatrist, a lawyer, a psychiatric social worker, several registered nurses, two teachers with advanced degrees, and a school administrator.

After some 2,000 man-hours of meetings with Defense Department officials, former prisoners of the Vietnam War, doctors, and other professionals of the arts and sciences, the Triple-R committee developed over 40 recommendations which were forwarded to the Department of Defense for consideration and action deemed appropriate. Although many of the recommendations submitted had been, or would be, adopted in varying degrees, three of the recommendations considered to be of major importance to the

committee were not favorably received by Defense Department officials.

First, the committee wanted a new, long-range and continuing health-care program for the returning prisoners, to assure that all of their physical and psychological needs received timely and proper attention and that this program should not be lumped into existing Veterans' Administration programs.

The Defense Department's position regarding this proposal was that a continuing health care program for those men who did not elect to remain in the service was already provided for by law through the services of the Veterans Administration. Further, that active consultation with the Veterans Administration had been initiated to assure the specialized care these men might require for as long as necessary.<sup>33</sup>

A related proposal by the Triple-R committee involved the Navy's Center for Prisoner of War Studies located in San Diego, California. The committee felt that this facility could serve as a nerve center for the overall health-care program. Specifically, it was proposed that this Center should be expanded into an Armed Forces Center for POW Studies with all-service participation, all-service staffing, and all-service funding.

The Defense Department's position regarding this proposal was to defer a decision pending further consideration. The official response to the Triple-R committee was as follows:

As to your specific recommendation regarding the designation of an Armed Forces Center for

POW Studies, we have not yet determined what action might be taken concerning this proposal. We are considering this matter and in coordination with all concerned elements within the Department of Defense will determine a course of action best suited to meet requirements.<sup>34</sup>

The third major recommendation by the Triple-R committee involved the production of a film. The committee believed that it would be of tremendous value to returning prisoners of war (and their families) if a film could be made and shown to the men upon their return, outlining in general terms the problems the families had faced in coping with, and adjusting to, their loved ones absence.

The Defense Department was in disagreement with this proposal based on the position that each returnee would have highly individualized needs and that family situations were similarly individual and unique, therefore, a more flexible, personalized approach to the problem was more advisable.<sup>35</sup>

As the year 1972 drew to a close, the war in Vietnam continued to rage and the anxieties of the families continued to grow. Little did they know that within several weeks, American involvement in Southeast Asia would terminate and at long last, the mystery of the PW/MIA issue would finally be resolved. However, for many, fate was not to be kind and the "Years of Frustration" were about to begin.

### CHAPTER III

#### FOOTNOTES

1. National League of Families of Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia (hereafter referred to as National League of Families), letter to membership, 11 October 1969.

2. National League of Families, letter to membership, 25 October 1969.

3. Philip C. Habib, "Remarks at 57th Plenary Session of Paris Meetings on Vietnam," Department of State Bulletin, 23 March 1970, p. 388.

4. Philip C. Habib, "Remarks at 58th Plenary Session of Paris Meetings on Vietnam," Department of State Bulletin, 30 March 1970, p. 423.

5. Wife of Navy Serviceman, Chairman, Board of Directors of National League of Families, letter to membership, undated.

6. "Wives of Missing Men in SEA Open Offices Here, Set Objectives," Commanders Digest, 11 July 1970, pp. 1 and 6.

7. Ibid., p. 6.

8. National League of Families, Fact Sheet--Prisoner of War Organization.

9. National League of Families, letter to membership, July 1970.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. National League of Families, letter to membership, August 1970.

14. Ibid.

15. National League of Families, letter to membership, 4 November 1970.

16. National League of Families, letter to membership, 11 January 1971.

17. National League of Families, letter to membership, 22 February 1971.

18. Ibid.

19. National League of Families, letter to membership, 14 June 1971.

20. Wife of Prisoner of War, letter to the Secretary of Defense, November 1971.

21. Philip C. Habib, "Remarks at 135th Plenary Session of Paris Meetings on Vietnam," Department of State Bulletin, 22 November 1971, p. 587.

22. National Coordination, National League of Families, letter to the Secretary of Defense, 23 August 1971.

23. National League of Families, letter to membership, 13 October 1971.

24. National League of Families, letter to membership, 9 February 1972.

25. "National Week of Concern for Americans Who Are Prisoners of War or Missing in Action," Commanders Digest, 26 March 1972, p. 1.

26. National League of Families, letter to membership, April 1972.

27. National League of Families, letter to membership, May 1972.

28. National League of Families, letter to membership, June 1972.

29. National League of Families, letter to membership, August 1972.

30. National League of Families, letter to membership, December 1972.

31. National League of Families, letter to membership, October 1972.

32. Statement of the Chairwoman, National League of Families Committees on Repatriation, Rehabilitation, and Readjustment before the House Committee on Armed Services, 10 October 1972, pp. 16676-16680.

33. Roger E. Shields, Office of the Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs), letter to the Chairman, Committee on Repatriation, Rehabilitation and Readjustment, National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, 22 September 1972.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE YEARS OF FRUSTRATION (1973-1974)

#### EVENTS OF 1973

The Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam was signed at Paris on 27 January 1973. Articles 8(a) and 8(b) of the Agreement stipulated what the family members of over 1600 US prisoners of war and missing in action had been awaiting for years. Specifically, these Articles read:

Article 8(a):

The return of captured military personnel and foreign civilians of the parties shall be carried out simultaneously with and completed not later than the same day as the troop withdrawal mentioned in Article 5 (within sixty days of the signing of the Agreement). The parties shall exchange complete lists of the above-mentioned military personnel and foreign civilians on the day of the signing of this Agreement.

Article 8(b):

The parties shall help each other to get information about these military personnel and foreign civilians of the parties missing in action, to determine the location and take care of the graves of the dead so as to facilitate the exhumation and repatriation of the remains, and to take any such other measures as may be required to get information about those still considered missing in action.

During the period 12 February to 1 April 1973, a total of 566 military and 25 civilian Americans were repatriated by the Communist side under the terms of the Paris Agreement. This total included 122 captured in South Vietnam, 9 captured in Laos, and 3 detained in Red China.



Although the Nation united in a massive display of exuberance over the release from captivity and return home of Americans from Southeast Asia, this joy was tainted by the stark realization that over 1200 Americans still had not been satisfactorily accounted for. This concern was expressed to the Congress by a Defense Department representative in May 1973 as follows:

As I have indicated, only part of our work is finished. About 1,300 men still remain unaccounted for, and their families continue the seemingly endless vigil in their behalf.

While we are grateful for the return of these men, our joy and sense of accomplishment are tempered by the fact that others, listed by our Government as missing and captured, did not return.

A full accounting for these men is not yet available to us. Some fear that in the wake of Homecoming, we will forget those who are unaccounted for and ignore the plight of their families.

I want to assure you that this will not happen. The Department of Defense will continue to seek the fullest possible accounting for these men and to provide their families with every possible assistance just as we have in the past.<sup>2</sup>

#### M-Day Campaign

The final release of US prisoners of war had not been completed before the League's Board of Directors began mobilizing for a campaign on behalf of the missing and unaccounted for. This campaign was referred to as "M-Day."

The M-Day campaign consisted of five programs to focus attention on the plight of the missing. These programs were as follows:

First: Slide presentations were prepared for Regional and State Coordinators to be used in talks by them to point up major discrepancies that still existed with respect to the missing men.

Second: A new register of missing men was established at the League headquarters, along with a separate file on each man not yet accounted for. These records were to be constantly updated and supplemented with all of the materials the League could collect on each individual.

Third: A nationwide poster campaign that focused on the missing men was developed and tailored to specific individuals on a State-by-State basis. The posters were displayed in the windows of business establishments.

Fourth: A major advertising program was launched in major newspapers throughout the country.

Fifth: A new MIA-Awareness campaign was developed.

#### Statement of Concern

The final release of US prisoners of war took place on 1 April 1973. Approximately two months later, the League of Families became impatient as to what the US government was doing to require the Communist side to honor their responsibilities under the terms of the Paris Agreement regarding the fullest possible accounting for the missing. Subsequently, a statement of concern was dispatched to the Secretary of State which read:

We, the Board of Directors of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia wish to express our deep concern over the excessive delay in following through on those agreements relating to the fullest possible accounting of over 1300 still listed as missing in action in Southeast Asia. We are distressed that the State Department and its members have failed to express the displeasure of our Government that the procedures of the accounting are not progressing satisfactorily. We strongly urge you to make and constantly repeat the strongest possible statement of policy concerning our dissatisfaction in this area, and reiterate this position at every opportunity.<sup>4</sup>

Congressional Hearings (May 1973)

On 23 May 1973, the first of three days of Congressional Hearings on the status of the PW/MIA issue was convened by the House Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments. The Subcommittee Chairman's opening remarks set the stage for the hearings and the uncertainty of the MIA issue was highlighted when he stated:

The hearings which we open this afternoon are, in part at least, the culmination of an ongoing effort which started on November 13, 1969. It was on that date that this subcommittee began its inquiry into the question of American POW's and

MIA's in Southeast Asia. Since that time the subcommittee has heard numerous witnesses during many hours of hearings--all in the interest of gaining humane treatment for our POW's and a full and accurate accounting of our MIA's.

With the series which opens today, we can happily and at long last close out at least one aspect of our concern--at least to some degree--that of the POW's. However, on the basis of the understandings which we are able to achieve through this exploratory review of the MIA issue, we may find it necessary and desirable to conduct a separate set of hearings exclusively on the MIA issue.<sup>5</sup>

The mood of the family members was presented to the subcommittee by the National Coordinator of the National League of Families. In part, she stated:

Now four months have elapsed since the peace agreement was signed, and contrary to what most Americans may believe, the prisoner/missing issue has not been resolved, and our patience is wearing thin. We want the facts out in the open. And here are some of the facts:

1. North Vietnam has claimed to capture men who were not returned, not listed as dead, not accounted for.
2. Despite the provisions of the peace agreement, no national Red Cross Society ever got to see the places where our men were held.
3. The ICCS (International Commission for Control and Supervision) inspections in Hanoi were only perfunctory; the teams did not see camps in which the vast majority of our men had actually been held. None of the places of "last detention" in South Vietnam were ever inspected.

4. North Vietnam has violated the release agreement by retaining two Thai prisoners.

5. No arrangements have been worked out for the return of the remains of the 55 men North Vietnam claims died in captivity. (Author's note: The remains of 23 Americans were eventually repatriated during the first two weeks of March 1974.)

6. All nine Americans on the so-called "Laos List" were actually held captive in Hanoi, and we are asked to believe that more than 300 Americans still missing in Laos have disappeared into thin air.

We do not believe them (the Communists) when they say they have released all of our men. We know they have not accounted for all of our men about whom they have information. We know they have not returned the remains of any of those who died in captivity.

We want this accounting now; we want our dead returned; we want our search teams to be allowed to go into all areas of Southeast Asia where our men were last seen alive. And we want North Vietnam, the Vietcong, and the Pathet Lao, and our own Government to know that these needs must be met--not 3 months from now--not 6 months from now--but now!<sup>6</sup>

The array of witnesses that testified before the subcommittee included returned prisoners of war, numerous Congressmen and representatives of the Departments of State and Defense. Unfortunately, these hearings produced no immediate noticeable change in the Communist side's policy of noncompliance with the terms of the Paris Agreement relative to the accountability for the missing and the return of the dead. In the absence of Communist cooperation, the families continued their struggle amid growing unrest among their ranks.

### Request for Soviet Assistance<sup>7</sup>

Leaving nothing to chance, the League, upon learning of the visit to the United States by Soviet Union Secretary General Brezhnev, solicited his assistance with respect to the unaccounted for Americans in Southeast Asia. A telegram was dispatched on 19 June 1973, which stated:

We extend a welcome to you as you visit our country and we hope your visit may strengthen the prospect for peace, prosperity and goodwill among men.

We believe that if you would encourage other Governments to assure the most rapid and the fullest possible accounting of these men, it would ease the anxiety of the families.<sup>7</sup>

### Fourth Annual Convention<sup>8</sup>

The League's annual convention was again held in Washington, D.C., during the period 27-29 July 1973. Over 600 families were in attendance.

A total of 31 resolutions were passed by the membership. Although many of the resolutions passed were similar to those passed in previous years, it was obvious that the League was now striving desperately to convince the US government that the MIA issue was as equally important as the POW issue had been in the past. The following resolutions demonstrate this point:

--The League shall use every means at its disposal to prevent the changing of status of any missing-in-action personnel until Article 8(b) of the Paris Agreement is fully implemented.

- The League shall pursue a vigorous policy of opposing any US aid for reconstruction of North Vietnam until the North Vietnamese have assisted in obtaining the return of all living prisoners of war and provided the fullest possible accounting of all MIA in Southeast Asia.
- The League requests that President Nixon appoint an individual at the White House Executive Staff level whose primary responsibility will be to carry out the President's pledge for the complete accounting of the missing men.
- The League requests an open hearing by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee before 15 August so that the Committee and public may be made aware of the number of men still unaccounted for.

#### Run for Freedom Project<sup>9</sup>

On 15 November 1973, the League sponsored a national project to focus attention on the plight of missing Americans which was entitled "Run for Freedom." Participants in the run formed relay teams and each run in each city and town, in all states, took place at high noon (local time) and was completed one hour later.

The starting runners carried an American flag and the official MIA/POW flag of the League of Families. The final runner presented both flags to top officials in the city or town, in the state capitol, and in the federal government in Washington, D.C. Each of these officials, at the same time, was given an MIA bracelet and a fact sheet on the missing men. Additionally, city officials

were given a copy of a telegram highlighting the MIA issue which they were urged to forward through their state governor to the President of the United States and the particular state's Congressional representatives in Washington.

The "Freedom Run" project was given considerable coverage by the news media and was personally acknowledged by the President of the United States. The President dispatched a letter to be delivered at the Capitol, Washington, D.C., in recognition of the project. Pertinent extracts from the letter include the following:

My thoughts will be with you and all who participate in today's ceremony in honor of those still missing in action in Southeast Asia.

I welcome this opportunity to reiterate my firm determination to press on for a full accounting of the fate of these brave fellow citizens and to pursue this propriety task vigorously until it is achieved.<sup>10</sup>

#### Letter to the Editor Campaign<sup>11</sup>

The "Run for Freedom" project was closely followed by another League initiative aimed primarily at the news media. Referred to as a "Campaign of Enlightenment," the campaign encompassed three distinct actions to draw national attention to the MIA issue.

To initiate the project, the League drafted an editorial which was placed with a national organization for distribution to more than 1,000 weekly newspapers throughout the country.

The next two steps in the campaign involved letter writing by League members and concerned citizens to editors of daily



newspapers and to radio and television commentators and newspaper columnists.

#### Travel to Laos<sup>12</sup>

Late in 1973, the lack of information about over 300 servicemen still unaccounted for in Laos prompted 53 family members to embark on a fact finding mission in Laos. During the period 8-22 October 1973, the family members received an extensive briefing by the US Ambassador to Laos and his staff and visited with representatives of foreign governments including North Vietnam, South Vietnam, China, Sweden, Russia, Thailand and the Pathet Lao. In addition, some family members were permitted to talk with refugees from areas where US aircraft were known or suspected to have crashed in southern Laos.

#### Congressional Hearings (December 1973)

The close of Calendar year 1973 was highlighted by another Congressional hearing concerning the MIA issue of 5 December. The Chairman of the House Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments opened the hearing with the following selected remarks:

The hearings which follow relate to 19 identical or similar resolutions sponsored or cosponsored by 133 members of Congress. Although varying moderately in approach, these resolutions are unanimous in expressing the concern of the Congress regarding the fate of some 1,300 American servicemen still listed as missing in action in Southeast Asia.

Primarily, the resolutions cite the failure of the North Vietnamese and Vietcong to live up to the Paris Peace Agreement provisions providing for a full and accurate accounting of the MIA's.

While these various lines of inquiry are important, the sad reality of the MIA remains. Only the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong, as humane and responsible members of the world community, can unlock the mystery and uncertainty surrounding these men.

While Congressional resolutions may help in achieving that end, it remains the primary responsibility of the executive branch to exert every possible effort in learning the final fate of the MIA's.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the foregoing, the subcommittee pursued other related issues during this hearing. Specifically, an attempt was made to clarify the US government's policy regarding presumptive findings of death for the missing in action and its policy relative to various MIA public awareness campaigns.

As was true in previous Congressional hearings, numerous legislative and executive branch witnesses appeared to testify and to submit material for the record. Testimony on behalf of the families of the missing in action was provided by the National League of Families Co-Chairman and its Executive Director, both fathers of pilots missing in Southeast Asia.

The League's Co-Chairman expressed concern over the apparent acceptance by many of the Communist assertion that all POWs had been returned and the complacency about the MIAs. In addition, he suggested five initiatives on behalf of the missing or unaccounted for servicemen. Extracts of his testimony follow:<sup>14</sup>

The return of the prisoners of war, the accounting of the missing in action--living and dead--has been spelled out in well-chosen words in the Geneva Conventions and the various cease-fire agreements signed after many arduous hours of negotiations.

Beyond those words, there has been absolutely no action taken to secure compliance by the other side; while we, I have been assured, have complied swiftly and completely.

The new theme which we hear more and more frequently is: "It has been the other side that has been completely intransigent in furnishing assistance; the fault for lack of progress lies with the other side for not cooperating."

That, gentlemen, in today's vernacular, is a "cop-out" and you know it. We cannot accept that type of weakness by the greatest nation on earth in the matter of American servicemen.

We search the newspapers and listen to every newscast daily, hoping to hear of some progress toward accounting and returning of our 1,200 sons, husbands, fathers, and brothers. What we hear is, "We have ended the war in Vietnam and all our prisoners of war are home."

Regarding the statement that "all of the prisoners of war are home," we again have a conflict between fact and fantasy. Besides the fact that all the living prisoners are not home, the dead prisoners, those who died in captivity, are not home--and there is no one in our government who can tell you when or if they will ever be repatriated.

If you believe as I do, Mr. Chairman, and members of this committee, that 9 years--it has been that for some of our families--is long enough to wait, then please help these men.

There has to be a way to secure compliance with the cease-fire agreement. After more than 10 months of note exchanges, a more firm attitude must be adopted.

Public awareness of the plight of the men must be again generated. Some recent attempts to inform America and the world have not been supported by our government, but in fact, were suppressed. (Author's note: The suppression referred to here was the initial refusal by Department of Defense to provide color guards and banners in support of the League's Run for Freedom project in November 1973.)

A meeting must be arranged between our organization (the League) and the President of the United States. It is quite obvious that his advisors, whoever they may be, have not attempted to keep him apprised of all the facts.

There is not now, nor has there been, any one person assigned specifically to the responsibility of POW/MIA affairs. Various persons in various departments, some of whom have worked very diligently, devote some time to the subject but there seems to be no overall director. This must be corrected now.

Last, but certainly not the least of these suggestions is action on House Joint Resolution 741, introduced by Congressman Benjamin A. Gilman and 12 colleagues. The Congressional investigation called for should be instituted immediately. (Author's note: This resolution called for a full-scale, on-the-scene, congressional investigation into the status of the missing men.)

The League's Executive Director expressed concern over the silence on the part of government officials over North Vietnam's failure to account for the missing and suggested restrictions be imposed against the Communist side until they fully honored their obligations. Extracts from his testimony follow:

For some time our organization has been gravely distressed that neither the President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, nor the leaders of Congress have seen fit to publicly condemn the North Vietnamese and Vietcong for their failure to return our dead and for their refusal to cooperate--as promised in the Paris Agreement--in the accounting of our missing. We do not understand this silence on the part of our elected and appointed officials.

A resolution expressing the sense of Congress that no trade, no aid, no other form of commerce, and no diplomatic recognition will be extended to the other side until the terms of the Paris Agreement are fulfilled, may help to focus new attention on the plight of our missing men. And for that reason the League of Families favors such a resolution.

Under no circumstances must the other side receive any favored treatment from the United States until they have lived up to their commitments, but neither must their continuing perfidy be allowed to go unobserved and unchallenged in the courts of public opinion. We hope you gentlemen will help to rectify this situation.<sup>15</sup>

#### EVENTS OF 1974

##### National MIA Awareness Day

The year 1974 was ushered in by a Presidential proclamation declaring January 25th to be National MIA Awareness Day. The substance of the proclamation was as follows:

Now, therefore, I, Richard Nixon, President of the United States of America do hereby designate Sunday, January 27, 1974, as National MIA Awareness Day, a day dedicated

to the many Americans who remain missing and unaccounted for in Indochina, and to their families. I call upon all Americans to join on this occasion in expressing the clear, continuing commitment of the American people and their Government to seek the fullest possible accounting for Americans missing in Southeast Asia and the return of the remains of those who died. I also call upon State and local officials and private organizations to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.<sup>16</sup>

#### Family Dissention

Conflict among the families continued to exist at the beginning of calendar year 1974 and in fact, reached a critical stage necessitating the National League of Families Executive Director to dispatch a letter of concern to the League membership in which he stated:

Most of you are aware of the incredible series of events that have plagued this League recently--events that have threatened to divide the League and spread dissention and confusion among us. A small minority of the Board of Directors (four in number) has refused to abide by the majority principle under which this League has operated since its inception. In clear violation of the Articles of Incorporation and bylaws, they have attempted to over-ride the majority, usurp the authority of the League, and in fact, take over the League.

We have had groups within the League in the past who determined that their own intentions and wishes would not be accomplished within the framework of the League--a non-partisan, non-political organization--thus they have broken away and formed their own group. It is patently impossible for an elected Board to represent

in exact detail the wishes of each and every individual in the League. Those who cannot go along with League policy should break away and do whatever it is that they must do. It is equally imperative that they not destroy the League in the process.<sup>17</sup>

#### Congressional Hearing (January 1974)

The League's previous criticism of the Senate for their apparent lack of interest in the PW/MIA issue apparently influenced the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to hold its first hearing on the issue on 28 January 1974.

Senator J. W. Fulbright, then the Chairman of the Committee expressed a rather grim view when he opened the hearing with the following remarks:

It may ultimately be beyond the power of anyone in our Government to give you what you want. The circumstances surrounding the disappearance of many of the missing may never be known. What we can do here today, however, is to listen to your experiences and to hear your views and then to consult with representatives of the executive branch about what more can be done to resolve the agonizing uncertainties with which you have lived for so long.<sup>18</sup>

Three National League of families were allowed to testify before the committee, and as had been the case with previous House hearings on the issue, testimony was furnished by representatives of both the State and Defense Departments.

The League's Executive Director stressed the need for increased emphasis on the MIA issue when he stated:

The American public is certainly not well-informed on the issue, and the rest of the world is probably more in the dark.

If our problem is, indeed, a matter of highest priority, it is being handled in a very different way--no visible bureaucracy, no public outcry, no publicity, not even the identification of who is in charge of the Government machinery set up to solve the problem. In fact, the reverse is true in the MIA situation: the responsibility is fragmented throughout several executive agencies; no overall chief has been identified; and, most of those involved in MIA issues have other, demanding responsibilities which take away from their effectiveness.<sup>19</sup>

The Acting National Coordinator of the National League of Families was highly critical of the Congress in her testimony before the committee when she stated:

I am beginning to feel, as do most family members, and many concerned citizens in your respective states, that our problem has been Watergated, Agnewed, Richardsonsed, Energy Crisised and Mideasted out of existence. A strong conviction, yes, but one that was arrived at only after watching and listening to the inaction of the Congress since the signing of the Paris Agreement.

I am sorry, but you gentlemen, as elected officials of this country, must assume the responsibility for these men. Members of the Senate are elected to serve and defend this country and its citizens, and I must tell you in all candor neither I nor the families in this room of the men missing in Vietnam feel that you are living up to this obligation.<sup>20</sup>



The final witness to testify on behalf of the families, a member of the Board of Directors, suggested that additional pressure should be placed on the North Vietnamese, initially by a worldwide awareness campaign and subsequently by denial of reconstruction aid and opposition to liberalized trade with the Soviet Union until they assisted the United States in getting the fullest possible accounting for the missing in action.<sup>21</sup>

#### Meeting With the Secretary of State<sup>22</sup>

The League of Families Board of Directors continued to meet on a recurring basis with Dr. Kissinger, even after he assumed his additional responsibility as Secretary of State. One such meeting occurred on 9 February 1974, at the White House. The following are excerpts of Dr. Kissinger's conversation with the family members in attendance:

- He was generally very pessimistic about the possibility of additional American prisoners being alive in North Vietnam.
- He believed that there is a possibility but a remote one, that Americans could be alive in Laos, Cambodia, or South Vietnam.
- He expressed growing concern about the future of negotiations with North Vietnam on the accounting for the missing issue.
- The Administration would continue to press for a full accounting and for the return of remains of the dead.
- The Secretary was pessimistic regarding the usefulness of public awareness campaigns; however, he did not attempt to discourage League ambitions in this regard.

### The Issue of Status Changes Emerges<sup>23</sup>

The recording and changing of status of the missing has traditionally been governed by sections 551-558, title 36, United States Code. Under this Public Law, the Service Secretaries are given responsibility for making status changes. In making status determinations, two options exist in addition to that of retaining the individual in a missing status. In those cases where information is received which conclusively establishes that the member is dead, a report of death may be issued. A finding of death, commonly known as a "presumptive finding" could be made in those cases wherein the circumstances were such that the missing individual cannot reasonably be presumed to be living.

Early in 1973, a segment of family membership of the National League of Families became disenchanted with the military services' handling of status changes and subsequently five next of kin of MIA servicemen, legally represented by the brother of an MIA filed a class action suit against the Secretaries of the Military Departments on 20 July 1973. (McDonald v. McLucas, 73 Civ. 3190). The thrust of this action attacked the Constitutionality of Title 37, US Code, Sections 555 and 556 which govern review of any changes to the status of missing servicemen.

On 6 August 1973, the court handed down a Temporary Restraining Order permitting Secretarial reviews to be conducted only in those cases where the primary next of kin requested the appropriate Secretary, in writing, that he initiate action to change

the serviceman's status from POW or MIA to a presumptive finding of death based on information in his possession.

Subsequently, on 11 March 1974, the Court entered its final decree which enjoined the Service Secretaries from conducting any change of status reviews unless next of kin currently receiving governmental financial benefits that could be terminated by a status review are given a notice of a status review; afforded a reasonable opportunity to attend a hearing, with a lawyer if they so choose; allowed reasonable access to the information upon which the status review will be based; and given permission to present any information which they consider relevant to the proceeding. This decision was affirmed by the Supreme Court on 11 November 1974.

#### Fifth Annual Convention

The National League of Families fifth annual convention was held in Omaha, Nebraska, in June of 1974. A new Board of Directors was elected and the major business conducted involved the methods to be adopted to stop presumptive finding of death for American servicemen who remained unaccounted for in Southeast Asia.

The National League's second Executive Director described his reaction to the Omaha Convention as follows:

At this fifth annual meeting, we certainly do not want a sixth annual meeting, we sensed the urgency there and wanted to get this over as quickly as possible.

At this meeting, with the business session, we took this up (stopping status changes) and this is the reason legislation is there now, House Resolution 16520 and a companion bill in the Senate by Senator Thurmond.<sup>24</sup> (Author's note: House Resolution 16520 was a Bill to prohibit any change in the status of any member of the uniformed services who is in a missing status under Title 37, of the United States Code, until the provisions of the Paris Peace Accord of January 27, 1973, have been fully complied with. It is interesting to note that missing American civilians were not addressed by H. R. 16520. The reason for this omission is that only military personnel are affected by Chapter 10, Title 37, of the United States Code.)

Although officials of the Department of Defense were sympathetic to the intent of the League's leadership with regard to status changes, the Department's official position opposed any legislation that would result in the cessation of all status changes. Specifically, their position was as follows:

The Department of Defense has gone on record in opposing the cessation of all status changes or modifying or attaching contingencies to Sections 555 or 556 of Title 37, United States Code. These two sections of the code as modified by the Federal Court decree, give the Secretaries of the Military Departments the responsibility of making decisions on all missing military personnel, including those who have become or will hereafter become missing through circumstances not associated with any conflict. Existing law is applicable to all missing cases wherever they originate. If this responsibility is reduced or nullified, service members could conceivably be retained in a missing status indefinitely. The resultant constraints would affect administration of the Missing Persons Act on a worldwide basis whether in peacetime or in combat.<sup>25</sup>

With regard to family involvement in the status change issue, the Department of Defense position was as follows:

Many families of missing members have unofficially expressed their desire for a presumed finding of death in the case of their loved one. However, they cannot bring themselves formally to ask for it--and they should not have to bear the burden of making that decision. Even a change in the law which would allow the next of kin to stop a status change would not alter the nature of this heavy burden for those families who felt that they personally cannot become involved in making a decision concerning the status determination of their loved one. At the same time, passive acquiescence by the primary next of kin on the matter of possible status change, in many cases, could cause friction with other family members who oppose the status change. There have already been cases in which one family member requested review of the missing member's case while other members of the family objected to any action that would result in a status change.<sup>26</sup>

Congressional Hearing (October/November 1974)

Late in calendar year 1974, Congressional hearings were held on legislation concerning the changing of status of military personnel missing in action (previously identified as House Resolution 16520).

Considerable testimony was received from numerous congressmen in support of House Resolution 16520 or similar resolutions drafted to accomplish the same purpose. In addition, many others submitted written statements for the record in which they acknowledged

their support of the resolutions restricting further status changes until the United States secured the full cooperation of the Communist side in ascertaining the actual fate of the missing.

Family reaction to the proposed resolutions was split with the majority of those supporting the resolutions being fathers and mothers and majority opposed being wives. (Author's note: At the time of these hearings, 428 status changes had been made by the military services from missing to dead, the majority to presumptive finding of death, since the signing of the Paris Agreements on 27 January 1973.)

The National League of Families position was presented to the hearing by its Executive Director who stated:

The League's position is that:

(a) We are opposed to any status change unless there is hard information available that would warrant such change;

(b) There be no change in status to PFOD (presumptive finding of death) until all the provisions of Articles 8a and 8b of the Paris Agreements have been carried out; and

(c) There should be a new law enforced that will completely protect the individual rights and liberties of the POW/MIA personnel.<sup>27</sup>

Other family members, some League members, some not, did not agree with the League's position outlined above. One, the wife of a Navy pilot who was the longest missing in action Navy man of the Vietnam War, expressed her views as follows:

The only reasonable way to determine status is for the service involved to review all known facts and make a logical premise as to whether the man can be assumed live or dead.

Due to the very nature of the war, there are many missing men on whom we shall never have any evidence. A man who is dead has no interest in a big debate over his condition. Ultimately, you are proposing to keep a man missing in action forever; that is inhumane.

It is time to let the services proceed with determinations. The families have endured enough. I would hope that no primary next of kin ever has to ask for a review as I did. That was the cruelest blow of all.<sup>28</sup>

The League's position was challenged by numerous other family members. Excerpts of selected reactions follow:

We would like to add our voices to those who are opposing the stand taken by the League of Families under its new Board of Directors (June 1974) regarding status changes. At this point in time the League is not speaking for its entire membership but only its vocal minority; that the League would make a commitment to stop all status changes is impertinent.<sup>29</sup>

The position of the primary next of kin in relation to a status change is a delicate one. As a mother, I would not ask to have my son declared dead. I know of wives who cannot bring themselves to write that letter. It is the responsibility of the Department of Defense to abide by the statutes of the Missing Persons Act in effect now.<sup>30</sup>

I think what it all boils down to, as I see it, is the fact that if there are no status changes made, you are placing a terrible responsibility upon the wives that would willingly accept the status change but under no circumstances would they want to sign their name to a letter, which in effect psychologically is very unsound, that they are signing the death warrant.<sup>31</sup>

As calendar year 1974 drew to a close, the National League of Families organization remained intact despite the dispute among its membership and other family members over the status change issue. Meanwhile, status changes from missing in action to presumptive finding of death continued to be made on a selective basis by the Service Secretaries.

The disappearance of US influence in Cambodia and South Vietnam, along with the uncertainty of future US diplomatic ties in Laos added to the frustrations of the families of the missing or unaccounted for servicemen in Southeast Asia. For many, it was readily apparent that calendar year 1975 would be the "Year of Decision."



## CHAPTER IV

### FOOTNOTES

1. US Treaties, etc., 1973 (Nixon), Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam, pp. 4-5.
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3. National League of Families newsletter to membership, February 1973.
4. National League of Families, letter to the Secretary of State, 28 May 1973.
5. Clement J. Zablocki, Opening Statement of the Chairman of the Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 23 May 1973, p. 1.
6. National Coordinator, National League of Families, Statement before the Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 23 May 1973, pp. 36-37.
7. National League of Families, telegram to Soviet Secretary General Brezhnev, 19 June 1973.
8. National League of Families newsletter to membership, 3 August 1973.
9. National League of Families newsletters to membership, 21 September 1973 and 13 November 1973.
10. Richard Nixon, President of the United States, letter to family members of missing in action, 15 November 1973.
11. National League of Families newsletter to membership, 13 November 1973.
12. Ibid.
13. Clement J. Zablocki, Forward to the Opening Statement of the Chairman of the Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 5 December 1973, p. (v).

14. Co-Chairman, National League of Families, Statement before the Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 5 December 1973, pp. 32-35.

15. Executive Director, National League of Families, Statement before the Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 5 December 1973, pp. 41-43.

16. US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Insertions for the Record, 28 January 1974.

17. Executive Director, National League of Families, letter to League membership, 21 January 1974.

18. Senator J. W. Fulbright, Opening Statement before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, p. 1.

19. Executive Director, National League of Families, Statement before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, p. 11.

20. Acting National Coordinator, National League of Families, Statement before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, p. 13.

21. Member of the Board of Directors, National League of Families, Statement before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, pp. 19-20.

22. National League of Families newsletter to membership, 26 February 1974.

23. John M. Maury, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Legislative Affairs), Memorandum to Senators and Members of the House of Representatives, 7 October 1974.

24. Executive Director of National League of Families, Statement before Subcommittee No. 2 of the House Committee on Armed Services, p. 80.

25. Maury, pp. 10-11.

26. Ibid., p. 11.

27. Executive Director, National League of Families, Statement before Subcommittee No. 2 of the House Committee on Armed Services, pp. 25-26.

28. Wife of Navy Serviceman, Statement before Subcommittee No. 2 of the House Committee on Armed Services, pp. 61 and 63.

29. Parents of Navy Serviceman, letter to the Secretary of Defense, 20 July 1974.

30. Mother of Navy Serviceman, Statement before Subcommittee No. 2 of the House Committee on Armed Services, p. 69.

31. Mother of Army Serviceman, Statement before Subcommittee No. 2 of the House Committee on Armed Services, pp. 75-76.

## CHAPTER V

### THE YEAR OF DECISION--1975

#### NATIONAL MEETING OF LEAGUE OF FAMILIES

The year 1975 dawned with a National level meeting of the League of Families in Washington, D.C., during the period 25-27 January 1975.

On 26 January, family members participated in a "Display of Concern" at the Chinese and Russian embassies. Although petitions and letters were prepared and offered, the Chinese and Russian officials would neither accept the documents nor talk to the family members.

The 27th of January was spent on Capitol Hill where family members of the missing in action delivered carnations and bumper stickers to each Representative and Senator. In addition, a bouquet of 50 carnations (one for each state's missing in action) were delivered to the State Department and placed on the Secretary of State's desk. Still another highlight was a Presidential declaration designating this day as National MIA Awareness Day. An extract of the President's dedication remarks follows:

Now, therefore, I, Gerald R. Ford, President of the United States of America, do hereby designate, Monday, January 27, 1975, as National MIA Awareness Day, dedicated to the many Americans who remain missing or unaccounted for in Indochina, and to their families. I call upon all Americans to join in voicing once again the clear, continuing commitment of the American people

and their Government to seek the fullest possible accounting for Americans missing in Southeast Asia and the return of the remains of those who died.<sup>1</sup>

National League of Families Board Meeting<sup>2</sup>

The League's Board of Directors met at Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C., during the period 7-8 March 1975, to develop issues to be pursued during the remainder of calendar year 1975. The most significant issues resolved by the Board were as follows:

--Annual Convention: The Board decided that the sixth annual League convention would be held in Washington, D.C., during the period 18-20 July 1975.

--Congressional Investigation: The Board agreed to concentrate on Congressional Investigation Committees to examine the entire PW/MIA issue. Of specific interest would be the inaction of the President of the United States to appoint a Task Force to address the issue in its entirety. It was further noted that the League had been successful in gaining Congressional support and support of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars for such a task force; however, six months had passed since success in this endeavor.

--Public Service Announcements: The Board approved a series of public service announcements relating to the PW/MIA issue which would be handled by Capitol Recording of Springfield, Virginia. The announcements were programmed for approximately 1,000 radio stations throughout the United States, including NBS, CBS, ABC and Mutual as well as independent stations.

### Epilogue

Although time restrictions dictate that this research project be concluded, the efforts by family members on behalf of their loved ones who remain missing in action or unaccounted for in Southeast Asia continue.

As of 30 April 1975, a total of 896 American servicemen were listed by their respective services as either in a prisoner of war or missing in action status. When compared with the figure of 1,363 American servicemen who remained in a PW/MIA status in Southeast Asia, including China, after the repatriation of 566 military prisoners of war by the Communist side in 1973, it can readily be noted that status changes have continued to be made during the two year period.

How long it will take to resolve this issue to the satisfaction of the families of the missing is unknown. Perhaps this dilemma was best described by Senator Edward Kennedy in a recent address to a conference on public administration sponsored by Suffolk University. In remarks following the address, he stated:

The United States has every right to demand really the full explanation and accountability of those that have been missing in action and I hope that will be a matter of high priority in any relationship between the new government in Vietnam and the United States. Until we get the full accountability, the final chapter is not completed in Vietnam.<sup>3</sup>

And so, the families continue to relentlessly pursue their goal of the fullest possible accounting for their missing in

South East Asia. For many, calendar year 1975 will be a year of frustration and action; for others, it will be a year of decision.

## CHAPTER V

### FOOTNOTES

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2. National League of Families, newsletter to membership, 18 March 1975.

3. "Kennedy Asks Accounting," The Evening Sentinel (Carlisle, Pennsylvania), 3 May 1975, p. 1.



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