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## **POWs and MIAs: Status and Accounting Issues**

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# POWs and MIAs: Status and Accounting Issues

## Summary

There has been a long-running controversy about the fate of certain U.S. prisoners of war (POWs) and servicemembers missing in action (MIAs) as a result of various U.S. military operations. While few people familiar with the issue feel that any Americans are still being held against their will in communist countries associated with the Cold War, more feel that some may have been so held in the past in the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, or North Vietnam. Similarly, few believe there has been a “conspiracy” to cover up the existence of live POWs, but many would maintain that there was, at least during the 1970s, U.S. government mismanagement of the issue.

Normalization of relations with Vietnam exacerbated this longstanding debate. Normalization’s supporters contend that Vietnamese cooperation on the POW/MIA issue has greatly increased. Opponents argue that cooperation has in fact been much less than supporters say, and that the Vietnamese can only be induced to cooperate by firmness rather than conciliation. Those who believe Americans are now held, or were after the war ended, feel that even if no specific report of live Americans has thus far met rigorous proofs, the mass of information about live Americans is compelling. Those who doubt live Americans are still held, or were after the war ended, argue that despite vast efforts, only one live American military prisoner remained in Indochina after the war (a defector who returned in 1979). The U.S. government indicates the possibility that Americans are still being held in Indochina cannot be ruled out. Some say Americans may have been kept by the Vietnamese after the war but killed later. Increased U.S. access to Vietnam has not yet led to a large reduction in the number of Americans still listed as unaccounted for, although this may be due to some U.S. policies as well as the level of Vietnamese cooperation.

There is considerable evidence that prisoners from the end of World War II, the Korean War, and “Cold War shootdowns” of U.S. military aircraft may have been taken to the USSR and not returned. The evidence about POWs from Vietnam being taken to the Soviet Union is more questionable. There is evidence that Navy pilot Scott Speicher, shot down on the first night of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, and until recently listed as “killed in action” rather than “missing in action,” was almost certainly captured by the Iraqis. Information about his fate has not yet been discovered by U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq. All American POWs captured by the Iraqis during the initial stage of the current war were returned to U.S. control; the remains of all others listed as MIA have been recovered. One U.S. Army soldier, captured by Iraqi insurgents, on April 9, 2004, is currently listed as a POW; there has been no word about his fate since his POW status was confirmed by DOD on April 23, 2004.

This report replaces Issue Brief IB92101 of the same name. This report will be updated as needed.

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# POWs and MIAs: Status and Accounting Issues

## Most Recent Developments

In early September 2005, another Navy report on the status of 1991 Gulf War Navy pilot Lt. Cdr. Michael Scott Speicher was completed. It reiterated conclusions reached in earlier studies that he could well have been captured; that there was no specific evidence of his death; and that some former members — they were not identified, if known — of the Saddam Hussein government of Iraq were knowledgeable about his fate. Accordingly, it recommended that Speicher's status be maintained as missing, rather than killed.

## Areas of Congressional Interest

This report summarizes numbers of U.S. prisoners of war (POWs) and servicemembers missing in action (MIAs) lost during the Vietnam War (1961-1973) and the Korean War (1950-1953), compares these losses to other 20<sup>th</sup> century American wars, and describes the POW/MIA investigation and policy process. It discusses reports asserting that some POWs from these wars were not returned to U.S. control when the wars ended, and that some of these individuals may still be alive. Further, it discusses Americans possibly captured by communist countries during Cold War incidents, or after being liberated from German POW camps at the end of World War II, and whether any such Americans could still be alive. It also summarizes POW/MIA matters and controversies related to post-Cold War U.S. military operations, particularly the 1991 Persian Gulf War; the ongoing Operation Enduring Freedom that began on October 7, 2001, when the United States began combat operations against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan; and Operation Iraqi Freedom that began on March 19, 2003. Finally, the report describes legislation and congressional oversight concerning the POW/MIA issue. For information on other aspects of U.S.-Vietnam relations and on the current controversy over the attempt by some American former POWs held by the Japanese during World War II to obtain compensation from Japanese corporations, see the *For Additional Reading* section at the end of this report.

## Definition of Terms

The following terms are frequently encountered in analyses of the POW/MIA issue:

- **POW** (Prisoner Of War): Persons known to be, or to have been, held by the enemy as a live prisoner or last seen under enemy control.
- **MIA** (Missing In Action): Persons removed from control of U.S. forces due to enemy action, but not known to either be a prisoner of war or dead.

- **KIA-BNR** (Killed In Action-Body Not Recovered): Persons known to have been killed in action, but body or remains not recovered by U.S. forces, such as an aircraft exploding in midair or crashing or a body lost at sea.
- **PFOD** (Presumptive Finding Of Death): An administrative finding by the appropriate military service Secretary, after statutory review procedures, that there is no current evidence to indicate that a person previously listed as MIA or POW could still be alive.
- **Unaccounted For**: An all-inclusive term — not a legal status — used to indicate Americans initially listed as POW, MIA, KIA-BNR, or PFOD, but about whom no further information is yet known.

Names are shifted, usually from the most uncertain status, MIA, to more certain categories, during and after hostilities based on new information, or, in the case of a PFOD, lack of any new information over time that indicates an individual is still living.

## U.S. POWs and MIAs in 20th Century Wars: Statistics

Statistics on U.S. POWs and MIAs in Vietnam and past wars are often mutually irreconcilable. **Tables 1, 2, and 3**, below, as with all such material, are not always compatible in detail, but they do provide some basis for comparison.

**Table 1. U.S. POWs, World War I (1917-1918)  
through the Iraq War (2003-Present)**

|                                       | Total   | WWI<br>1917-<br>1918 | WWII<br>1941-<br>1945 | Korea<br>1950-<br>1953 | Vietnam<br>1961<br>-1973 | Persian<br>Gulf<br>1991 | Somalia<br>1992-<br>1994 | Bosnia<br>1995-<br>Present | Kosovo<br>1999-<br>Present | Afghan-<br>istan<br>2001-<br>Present | Iraq<br>2003-<br>Present |
|---------------------------------------|---------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Captured & Interned)                  | 142,233 | 4,120                | 130,201               | 7,140                  | 725                      | 23                      | 1                        | 0                          | 3                          | 0                                    | 10                       |
| Returned to U.S. Military Control     | 125,208 | 3,973                | 116,129               | 4,418                  | 661                      | 23                      | 1                        | 0                          | 3                          | 0                                    | 9                        |
| Refused Repatriation                  | 21      | 0                    | 0                     | 21                     | 0                        | 0                       | 0                        | 0                          | 0                          | 0                                    | 0                        |
| Died while POW                        | 17,004  | 147                  | 14,072                | 2,701                  | 64                       | 0                       | 0                        | 0                          | 0                          | 0                                    | 0                        |
| Still officially held by enemy forces | 0       | 0                    | 0                     | 0                      | 0                        | 0                       | 0                        | 0                          | 0                          | 0                                    | 1*                       |

**Sources:** All data except for Iraq from Stenger, Charles A., Ph.D. *American Prisoners of War in WWI, WWII, Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan: Statistical Data Concerning Numbers Captured, Repatriated, and Still Alive as of January 1, 2003*. Prepared for the DVA [Department of Veterans Affairs] Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War. Mental Health Strategic Care Group, VHA [Veterans Health Administration], [by] the American Ex-Prisoners of War Association. Iraq data obtained from Department of Defense (DOD) documents and press releases, and regular press reports.

\*Reports of the death of this POW, first listed as missing on April 9, 2004, and confirmed as a POW on April 23, 2004, have not been confirmed; he is still listed as captured by U.S. military authorities.

**Table 2. Americans Unaccounted For, World War I through the Korean War**

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| <b>World War I (1917-18) <sup>a</sup></b>  |                     |
| Unidentified remains                       | 1,648               |
| <b>World War II (1941-45) <sup>b</sup></b> |                     |
| Remains not recovered                      | 78,794 <sup>c</sup> |
| <b>Korean War (1950-53) <sup>d</sup></b>   |                     |
| Unaccounted for                            | 8,100               |

**Source:** a. Bruce Callender, “The History of Arlington’s Silent Soldiers,” *Air Force Times*, June 19, 1984: 23.

b. U.S. Congress, House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia, *Americans Missing in Southeast Asia, Final Report*, 94<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., H.Rept. 94-1764, (Washington: GPO, 1976), pp. 73-74.

c. An estimated 9,000-17,000 were subject to the equivalent of a PFOD. Ibid: 74.

d. Current DPMO figure is always stated as “approximately 8,100.” Korean War POW/MIA statistics are a mass of inconsistencies. The *Final Report of the 1976 House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia*: 75, listed a total of 5,866 total Korean War MIA, of which 4,735 had been subjected to a PFOD; 1,107 listed as KIA-BNR; and 24 known to be in Chinese prisons as of Sept. 30, 1954; of which all were either eventually released or subject to a PFOD. A Rand Corp. study prepared for DPMO itemizes Korean War unaccounted-for Americans somewhat differently, but along lines that are broadly similar to the current DPMO figure of about 8,100- 8,140 KIA-BNR, of which the deaths of 5,945 were witnessed or otherwise well-documented, leaving 2,195 whose death cannot be explicitly established, although many were undoubtedly killed. Cole, Paul M. *POW/MIA Issues: Volume 1, The Korean War*, Rand, MR-351/1-USDP, 1994: xv-xvi.

## Vietnam War POWs and MIAs

North Vietnamese and Viet Cong (South Vietnamese Communist; termed the “National Liberation Front”) authorities returned 591 POWs to U.S. control within the specified two-month period after the signing of the Vietnam War peace treaty on January 27, 1973. 67 U.S. civilians, not part of the official list of Americans unaccounted for, were trapped or stayed voluntarily after South Vietnam fell in April 1975. All were released by late 1976. Since 1976, some Americans have been imprisoned in Vietnam (almost all for civilian offenses) and eventually released. Most Americans now in Vietnamese prisons for criminal offenses (some of which would be characterized as “political” crimes by the Vietnamese authorities) are naturalized Americans of Vietnamese birth or ancestry. Since 1973, only one U.S. military member has returned alive from Vietnam. Marine Corps PFC Robert Garwood was listed as a POW by U.S. authorities — but never by the Vietnamese — in 1965 and returned voluntarily to the U.S. in 1979. He was convicted of collaboration with the enemy, but his light sentence included no prison term.

After the return of the 591 POWs, 2,583 Americans were unaccounted for (not counting civilians trapped in Vietnam after the South fell, or who later visited Vietnam). Identified remains of 768 Americans have been returned from Vietnam (540), Laos (197), Cambodia (28), and China (3) since the war ended on January 27, 1973. Of the 1,815 still listed as unaccounted for as of August 5, 2005, the Department of Defense (DOD) is still actively seeking to account as fully as possible for the 1,148. DOD believes that, based on currently available information and its analysis, it will be unable to ever recover the remains of the other 667. Examples of the latter would include the 468 men lost over water, as stated in the

note to **Table 3**, which summarizes data on Americans currently unaccounted for in Southeast Asia. Another example would be those crewmen of aircraft that, at the time, were observed by both Vietnamese and Americans to have exploded without any sign of the crew ejecting; and similar situations.

**Vietnam POW/MIAs: U.S. Government Policy and Organization.** Since 1982, the official U.S. position regarding live Americans has been as follows: “Although we have thus far been unable to prove that Americans are still being held against their will, the information available to us precludes ruling out that possibility. Actions to investigate live-sighting reports receive and will continue to receive necessary priority and resources based on the assumption that at least some Americans are still held captive. Should any report prove true, we will take appropriate action to ensure the return of those involved.”

**Table 3. Americans Unaccounted for in Southeast Asia**  
(as of August 5, 2005)

| Service      | Country of Loss |            |            |           |          | Total        |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|------------|-----------|----------|--------------|
|              | N. Vietnam      | S. Vietnam | Laos       | Cambodia  | China    |              |
| Army         | 9               | 450        | 95         | 24        | 0        | 578          |
| Navy         | 263             | 89         | 19         | 0         | 7        | 378          |
| Marine Corps | 22              | 174        | 16         | 8         | 0        | 220          |
| Air Force    | 193             | 160        | 234        | 18        | 0        | 605          |
| Coast Guard  | 0               | 0          | 0          | 0         | 0        | 0            |
| Civilians    | 1               | 20         | 8          | 5         | 0        | 34           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>488</b>      | <b>893</b> | <b>372</b> | <b>55</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>1,815</b> |

**Source:** Department of Defense. All U.S. servicemembers are currently listed by DOD as KIA-BNR or, if formerly listed as a POW or MIA, a PFOD has been made. Until 1994, one POW, a pilot whose capture and POW status were verified, remained listed as a POW for symbolic reasons. His status was changed to KIA-BNR at the request of his family. The total of 1,815 personnel includes 468 lost at sea or over water.

The Director of the DOD Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), who also serves as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs (DASD POW/MIA), provides overall direction and control of DOD POW/MIA matters, both for previous conflicts and the formulation of policies and procedures for future circumstances in which U.S. military personnel could become POWs or MIA. Field activities in Indochina and elsewhere around the world related to POW/MIA accounting is supervised by DOD’s Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), headquartered in Hawaii. JPAC maintains POW/MIA files, conducts research and interviews in Indochina and elsewhere in Asia with refugees and others, and staffs U.S. POW/MIA operations in Indochina. JPAC’s Central Identification Laboratory-Hawaii (CIL-HI) identifies returned remains from around the world. (JPAC was formerly called Joint Task Force — Full Accounting, or JTF-FA.) (Some identifications have little or no current foreign policy relevance. World War II-related recovery of remains, or researches, have taken place in Hungary, China, New Guinea, Betio Island in Tarawa atoll in the Pacific, and Libya.)

POW/MIA information comes from refugees and other human contacts and assets, physical evidence (such as “dog tags” worn by U.S. military personnel, photographs, and



aircraft debris), communications intelligence and aerial reconnaissance, and open sources. According to DOD, between April 1975 (the fall of South Vietnam) and August 5, 2005, 22,677 reports “possibly pertaining to Americans in Southeast Asia” have been acquired by the U.S. government, including 1,976 alleged first-hand sightings. Of the 1,976, fully 1,942 (98.28%) have, according to DPMO, been resolved. More specifically, 67.86% (1,341) correlate with persons since accounted for (i.e., returned live or known dead); another 28.14% (556) have been determined to be fabrications; and 2.28% (45) correlate to wartime (pre-mid-1975) sightings of Americans, either military or civilian. The remaining 34, or 1.72%, involve sightings of Americans in either a captive (31) or non-captive (3) environment, and “represent the focus of DPMO analytical and collection efforts.” Of the 34, 24 were reported to have occurred prior to 1976; 4 between 1976 and 1995; and 6 during the period 1996-present.

**U.S.-Vietnamese Interaction on POW/MIA Issues: Recent Developments and Issues.** Since 1991, the U.S. has gained substantial access to aircraft crash sites, Vietnamese records, and Vietnamese civilians, and has established a substantial permanent presence of military and civilian personnel. For several years, the Vietnamese have allowed U.S. personnel some access to their government archives and permitted some interviews with senior Vietnamese military leaders from the war. This increased access, however, has not yet led to large numbers of Americans being removed *en masse* from the rolls of people who are unaccounted for; between 1991 and 2005, the total number has generally dropped by 30-35 cases per year. However, much information or material or information obtained in Vietnam does not assist in remains identification; upon close study it turns out to be redundant, already in U.S. hands, or pertaining to resolved cases. In addition, DPMO has stated that a “Vietnamese Government disinformation program has been associated with recent reporting on missing Americans. Those reports all pertain to the alleged recovery of remains and identifying data (i.e., dog tags) by Vietnamese citizens.” [Cited in recent editions of the *Vietnam-Era Unaccounted For Statistical Report of the DPMO*, located at the DPMO website.]

Some involved with the POW/MIA issue argue that Vietnamese cooperation on the POW/MIA issue has actually been spotty and uneven at best, arguing that the U.S. government has tended to equate activity with results and resource inputs with true outputs in terms of the fate of unaccounted-for Americans. They suggest that the true cost of *all* U.S. military and diplomatic activities associated with post-Vietnam War POW/MIA-related activities is much higher than stated DPMO budget outlays of approximately \$15 million yearly, perhaps as much as \$50-100 million yearly. They allege that Vietnam and North Korea charge extraordinarily high fees for providing support to DPMO/JPAC operations, such as logistical support, aviation costs, food and lodging, and the like, and that the services received are by no means as lavish as the bills presented indicate.

**U.S. Policy and the Remains Issue.** As noted above, DPMO believes of the 1,815 Americans listed as unaccounted for as of August 5, 2005, that 667 are definitely dead and that further investigation could result in no more evidence or remains being found. Such cases include those that resulted from aircraft explosions, drowning, or simple disappearance. Some believe that the Vietnamese have documentary evidence about the fate of at least some of them. Others argue that concerns over public reaction, more than disagreements on the part of American analysts that the individuals concerned really are dead, are holding up the decision to close these cases. The question may be as follows: if evidence other than remains is not conclusive, what use is it, if no remains are available? The number of cases listed for

“No Further Pursuit” by DPMO does fluctuate, based on new evidence — cases hitherto thought unresolvable are made active by more information; those in which leads were being pursued can turn out to be apparently unresolvable.

### **Congress and the POW/MIA Issue, 1993-2005 (FY1994-FY2006).**

**2005 (FY2006) Congressional Action.** No relevant matters concerning POW/MIA issues were in the FY2006 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 109-163).

On June 20, 2005, in House floor debate on the FY2006 Department of Defense (DOD) Appropriation Act (H.R. 2863, 109<sup>th</sup> Congress; passed House June 20, 2005), a colloquy on POW/MIA matters took place between Representative Nathan Deal and Representative C.W. Bill Young, chairman of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee (see *Congressional Record*, June 20, 2005: H4767). At Mr. Deal’s request, Mr. Young agreed that a report should be prepared about allegations that the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) has recently been arbitrary, uncooperative, and hostile with POW/MIA organizations and families, and that this report should be published in the eventual conference report on the act. Mr. Deal was further concerned about “compliance with all applicable provisions of law,” with particular reference to allegations about attempts to use military air transportation for MIA families to coerce them into supporting DPMO initiatives, and said that “this report must reflect a comprehensive study of DPMO’s guidance and policy initiatives.” The National League of Families of American Prisoners of War and Missing in Southeast Asia has stated these allegations in detail in its *Newsletter/Review of 2004*, available online at [<http://www.pow-miafamilies.org/3-22-05%20Newsletter.pdf>].

**2004 (FY2005) Congressional Action.** The FY2005 NDAA, P.L. 108-375, October 28, 2004; 118 Stat. 1811, included a provision (Sec. 582) which required DOD to maintain the number of military and civilian personnel in the DPMO at 46 and 69, respectively, and the FY2005 budget at \$16.0 million, the levels of FY2003. It also required GAO to study the adequacy of DPMO funding and personnel levels in relation to the missions it has to perform. This provision appears to have been engendered by congressional concern over DOD efforts to decrease the resources allocated to the DPMO, both personnel and funding. This provision essentially incorporated the House version of the bill, with some minor changes; the Senate version included no similar provision.

**2003 (FY2004) Congressional Action.** Section 588 of the FY2004 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 108-136, November 24, 2003; 117 Stat. 1392) expressed the sense of the Congress that the United States should aggressively pursue the case of MIAs, with particular reference to Speicher, and authorized a \$1 million reward to individuals who provide information leading to the resolution of the Speicher case and others (see below, “A Persian Gulf War POW/MIA Case”).

**2002 (FY2003) Congressional Action.** The FY2003 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 107-314, December 2, 2002; 116 Stat. 2458), included two provisions related to POW/MIA matters. Section 551 prohibited DOD from reducing personnel or budget levels of the DPMO (this appears to have resulted from planned reductions of at least 15% in the size of the DPMO staff as part of a general effort to reduce headquarters staffs). Section 583 required the Secretary of Defense to submit a comprehensive report on the Speicher case (see below, “A Persian Gulf War POW/MIA Case”) to Congress within 60 days after the bill became law.

**1993-2001 (FY1994-FY2002) Congressional Action.** From 1993 through 1997 (FY1994-FY1998 legislation), the annual defense authorization bill included POW/MIA-related sections with considerable policy significance and, frequently, political controversy. However, during 1998-2001 (FY1999-FY2002 legislation), Congress was less active on POW/MIA matters. None of the National Defense Authorization or Intelligence Authorization Acts of the latter period contained significant POW/MIA-related provisions or report language with broad policy implications.

### **Vietnam POW/MIAs: Were Americans Left Behind? Are Any Still Alive?**

Those who believe Americans are still held, or were held after the war ended, feel that even if no specific report has thus far been proved, the numbers unaccounted for, and the cumulative mass of information about live Americans is compelling. Frequently, people holding this view suggest that throughout the 1970s, in the bitter and sour aftermath of the Vietnam War, there was a lack of will in the government, which reflected that of the country as a whole, to continue investigating the POW/MIA issue. They posit that this contributed to “a mindset to debunk” reports of live Americans, as well as a desire on the part of successive Administrations to wash their hands of the issue.

Those who doubt Americans are still held, or were when the war ended, argue that despite numerous reports, exhaustive interrogations, and formidable technical means used by U.S. intelligence agencies, no report of an unaccounted-for live American (with the exception of Garwood) has been validated as to who, when, and where the individual is or was. They believe that much of the “evidence” cited relates to already accounted-for Americans, wishful thinking, or fabrication.

Most U.S. government analysts have come to believe that it is extremely unlikely that the North Vietnamese kept U.S. prisoners after the end of the war, or transferred any to the USSR. They appear to acknowledge the repressive nature of totalitarian communist regimes — that the Vietnamese *could* have opted to keep some Americans. They just feel that their examination of the evidence indicates that they did not. Significantly, the progressively increasing penetration of Vietnam by a large American official presence, American business interests, and tens of thousands of American and European tourists, has failed to disclose any indications that American POWs were kept behind in the early 1970s, let alone are still being held.

**The “Coverup” Issue.** Some say the U.S. government has engaged in a “coverup” of evidence about live Americans still being held in Indochina; they attach greater credence to some sources than does the government, and suggest that the criteria set by the government for validating reports of live Americans are unreasonably, and perhaps deliberately, high. The government responds by stating that such assertions are based on data that is inaccurate or fraudulent. It also asserts that numerous investigations have cleared DIA of coverup charges and that the ability to maintain a coverup strains credulity in an era of press leaks and openness. Since 1982, it has been U.S. policy to provide intelligence to families of unaccounted-for Americans that pertains or may pertain to their missing men.

**Have Americans Remained in Indochina Voluntarily?** Some Americans stayed in Indochina voluntarily, Garwood being the best known. Another defected to the Viet Cong in 1967 and was killed by the Khmer Rouge (Cambodian communists) in 1975 or 1976. Ideology, collaboration with the enemy and a fear of punishment upon return to the U.S., personal problems, a home, a local wife and children, “brainwashing” by captors, or

a combination of these factors, all could have played a role in other Americans remaining in Indochina voluntarily. The Vietnamese have always left room for such by denying Americans are living in areas “under their control.” In addition, the U.S. government policy cited above on live Americans is careful to refer to “Americans ... still being held against their will.”

**Are the Vietnamese, Laotians, or Cambodians Still Holding the Remains of Dead Americans?** There is a widely-held belief that for many years the Vietnamese had a collection of remains from which they released remains as they saw fit. The DPMO believes that this collection may have been exhausted by August 1990. Whether the Vietnamese hold other remains is not known. Some suggest the Vietnamese have not released remains that would indicate mistreatment of POWs and/or that some were alive when the war ended but died in Vietnamese custody thereafter (although such mistreatment is well known).

The large number of Americans lost in or over Laos, the number of known discrepancy cases, and the few Americans returned who had been captured in Laos suggest that the Laotians know more about the fate of unaccounted-for Americans than they have yet stated. On the other hand, most Lao governments, communist or not, have exercised little control over large parts of their country, due to Vietnamese occupation and their own lack of resources. This suggests the Laotians may not have the ability to provide many answers about missing Americans, and such answers may be better found from the Vietnamese. Laos is, however, one area where searches of aircraft crash sites have resulted in the recent identification of some unaccounted-for Americans. Recently, for example in March 2005, a U.S. POW/MIA-related delegation held talks with Lao officials to discuss ways to improve U.S. access to information and aircraft crash sites related to U.S. Vietnam War POWs.

## **Korean War POWs/MIAs**

Since the Korean War ended in 1953, there have been rumors Americans captured by the North Koreans or Chinese were, or still are, held against their will in North Korea, China, or Russia/the former USSR. It is generally accepted that the communist powers involved in the war withheld significant amounts of information on POW/MIA from the United States, probably with more withholding by North Korea and China than Russia.

DPMO states that although there is no first-hand, direct evidence of Korean War POWs being transferred to the Soviet Union, the cumulative weight of circumstantial evidence is so compelling that they believe that at least small numbers of Americans were in fact so transferred. There are indications that some sightings of Caucasians by foreign nationals in North Korea may be of several American soldiers who defected to North Korea in the post-Korean War era. In addition, some U.S. POWs were not released by China until 1955, two years after the war ended. Two civilian CIA aircrew members shot down over North Korea during the war, in 1952, were imprisoned for 20 years and not released until 1972. Declassified U.S. documents indicate that the U.S. government maintained an intensive interest in live POWs from the Korean War throughout the 1950s. The end of the Korean War in 1953 was followed by intensely bitter relations between the U.S., the North Koreans, and the Chinese. This suggests that the two communist enemies of the United States during the Korean War, as well as a Stalinist Soviet Union, might be inclined to hold live Americans — perhaps more so than Vietnam in the 1970s.

During the mid-1950s, the U.S. demanded the North Koreans and Chinese account for missing Americans. After 1955, due to the lack of response (except for the return of 1,868 remains in 1954), the issue abated, although the United States periodically raised the issue. In 1957, House Foreign Affairs Committee hearings on the Korean MIA issue aired frustrations similar to those raised since 1973 on Indochina MIAs. Although the issue of Korean MIAs began to get more attention in the early 1980s, concrete results of contact with the North Koreans were minimal until 1996. Between mid-1996 and mid-1997, negotiations took place in which United States and North Korea agreed on parameters for conducting field investigations and archival research for U.S. MIAs. Between 1996 and 2004, U.S. personnel completed 36 “joint field activities” (JFAs) — searches for American remains — in North Korea. These teams recovered 224 remains, of which 20 have been identified as those of Americans. Agreement was reached in late 2004 for five more JFAs to be conducted in 2005; the first took place between mid-April and mid-May 2005.

However, on May 25, 2005, DOD suspended the operations of U.S. POW/MIA personnel operating in North Korea, citing heightened concerns about their safety in the context of rising tensions between the United States and North Korea. “The teams operate in North Korea under terms that effectively cut off their ability to communicate with anyone outside the country....The only message permitted is a daily situation report sent from a liaison officer in Pyongyang [the North Korean capital]. ... Although acceptable to U.S. commanders in the past, this restrictive condition would clearly hamper any effort by other U.S. forces to protect the recovery teams should an emergency arise. Such a consideration, [a U.S. military spokesman said] played a part in the decision to suspend the missions.”<sup>1</sup>

The most recent identification of remains returned from North Korea took place on July 22, 2005, when DOD announced that the remains of a U.S. Army soldier MIA from the Korean War had been identified. The remains had first been returned to the United States from North Korea in 1993.

There has been some controversy about the payments the U.S. has made to North Korea for POW/MIA-related search activity. Since 1993, DPMO has paid North Korea about \$15 million for recovery operations; “as with joint recovery operations in Vietnam, Laos, and other countries, the payments are calculated by negotiating the compensation provided for the workers, materials, facilities, and equipment provided by” the North Koreans. Some have alleged that the sums are a form of disguised subsidy and provide little benefit, in terms of remains found, although it may be that the extremely austere conditions in North Korea make any sort of operations there difficult and expensive by American standards. For further information, see CRS Report RL31785, *Foreign Assistance to North Korea*, by Mark E. Manyin.

## **POWs and MIAs from Cold War Incidents**

During the Cold War (1946-1991), some U.S. military aircraft were shot down by the USSR, Eastern European countries, China, and North Korea. Some of these aircraft were performing intelligence missions near or actually inside Soviet airspace; others were

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<sup>1</sup> Bradley Graham, “U.S. Halts Missions To Recover Remains in N. Korea,” *Washington Post*, May 26, 2005, p. A-19.

definitely in international airspace and/or were not involved in intelligence operations. While virtually all such aircraft losses were acknowledged at the time, often with considerable publicity, their intelligence functions were not.

Between 1946 and 1977, according to a DOD list released in 1992, there were at least 38 such aircraft shootdowns and one involving a ship (the seizure of the U.S.S. Pueblo, by the North Koreans in early 1968). Of the 364 crewmembers, 187 were eventually returned to U.S. custody, the remains of 34 were recovered, 11 were known to be dead from eyewitness reports but remains were not recovered, and 132 were “not recovered, fate unknown.” Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, intelligence (mostly apparently obtained from German and Japanese POWs from World War II, several hundred thousands of whom were not released by the Soviets until 1954-1955) provided considerable evidence that some crewmembers of these aircraft had been seen and spoken to in Soviet concentration camps. After the Cold War ended in 1989-1991, the United States began to receive substantial Russian cooperation about Soviet involvements in Cold War shootdowns. However, there is little doubt that the Russians have not released all available information, due to varying levels of obstructionism and the often-disorganized nature of government in post-Soviet Russia.

A second type of “Cold War incident” involves kidnapping of U.S. personnel in or near Soviet-occupied territory in Europe after the end of World War II, by Soviet intelligence agents. Most, however, were defectors, or had wandered into Soviet-occupied areas for nonpolitical reasons (romantic entanglements, drunkenness, and the like). The full story of such kidnappings may well not have been told and may never be. There is no question that numerous West Germans were kidnapped by Soviet and East German intelligence agencies in the late 1940s and early and mid-1950s.<sup>2</sup>

## **Post-Cold War POW/MIAs**

The Iraq war that began on March 19, 2003, provides the most recent illustration that the POW/MIA issue is not merely one of historical interest. Congressional concerns over Americans unaccounted for during the Cold War have been an integral component of the discussion about how to account for Americans missing or captured since then. The largest conflicts since the Cold War began to end in 1989 were the two wars with, or in, Iraq.

### **The Persian Gulf War of 1991 (Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm)**

A total of 49 American military personnel were initially listed as missing in action during the Persian Gulf War. Of these, 23 were captured by the Iraqis and released after the war ended, the remains of 13 were recovered, and another 13 were eventually determined to be KIA-BNR. However, the status of one of the latter 13 was changed back to MIA in January 2001, based on evidence that he may have survived and been captured, as discussed below.

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<sup>2</sup> See Smith, Arthur L., Jr. *Kidnap City: Cold War Berlin*. Westport, CN, Greenwood Press, 2002.

**The Speicher Case.** On January 10, 2001, the Navy changed the status of Lt. Cdr. Michael Scott Speicher from KIA to MIA. Speicher was the first U.S. pilot shot down during the Persian Gulf War, on the night of January 17, 1991. His body was never recovered. There is no doubt his aircraft was shot down and crashed in Iraq about 150 miles southwest of Baghdad. Issues include the lack of remains, resultant questions about whether he was in fact killed upon impact, and some evidence, from a variety of sources, that he was taken prisoner by the Iraqis when in relatively good physical condition. A joint DOD/CIA report prepared at the request of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and first publicized in 2001, stated that *“We assess that Iraq can account for LCDR Speicher but that Baghdad is concealing information about his fate. LCDR Speicher probably survived the loss of his aircraft, and if he survived, he almost certainly was captured by the Iraqis”* (CRS italics). Significantly, the occupation of Iraq by U.S. and other coalition forces since March 2003, and extensive investigation of possible leads about Speicher, has not, so far, led to more substantive information about his fate, although some leads could not be pursued due to the security threat posed by the Iraqi insurgency.<sup>3</sup> In early September 2005 another Navy report on Speicher’s status was completed. It reiterated conclusions reached in earlier studies that he could well have been captured; that there was no specific evidence of his death; and that some former members — they were not identified, if known — of the Saddam Hussein government of Iraq were knowledgeable about his fate. Accordingly, it recommended that Speicher’s status be maintained as missing, rather than killed, and U.S. military and civilian agencies in Iraq, and the new Iraqi government, “increase the level of attention and effort inside Iraq” devoted to the case.<sup>4</sup>

## **The Ongoing Iraq War, 2003-Present: POW/MIA Matters**

On April 13, 2003, the seven remaining American POWs known to have been captured by the Iraqis since the war began on March 19, 2003, were recovered by U.S. troops. An eighth had already been rescued by U.S. special operations forces on April 1 (this was the widely reported case of Army PFC Jessica Lynch). A maximum of 21 U.S. military personnel were listed as POW or MIA during the initial stages of the war. On April 28, 2003, DOD announced that the remains of the last remaining American listed as MIA at that time had been positively identified.

On April 9, 2004, one American soldier was captured by Iraqi insurgents. He was the first POW taken by the enemy in Iraq since the eight captured in the early part of the war were liberated by U.S. forces in April 2003. Although there were rumors in late June, 2004 that he had been killed, these reports were not confirmed and have since died down; U.S. officials say they have no reason to think he is not still a POW, and he is listed as such.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Scarborough, Rowan. “U.S. team concludes Navy pilot died in Gulf war,” *Washington Times*, July 22, 2004: A3; and “No Clues to Fate of Missing Pilot,” AP Story from [[http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,FL\\_pilot\\_100704.00html?ESRC=eb.nl](http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,FL_pilot_100704.00html?ESRC=eb.nl)] on Oct. 8, 2004. This is an unofficial, commercial military news website oriented toward concerns of military personnel.

<sup>4</sup> Burns, Robert. “Navy: Members of old Iraqi regime know pilot’s whereabouts.” Associated Press story retrieved online, Sept. 9, 2005.

It is not clear whether or not a U.S. Marine of Lebanese extraction — who was first declared missing from his unit in Iraq in June 2004, returned to U.S. custody a month later, and then gone absent without leave (AWOL) in January 2005 — was ever a POW: that is, held against his will.

## **World War II POWs and MIAs: Soviet Imprisonment of U.S. POWs Liberated from the Germans**

There are allegations that the USSR failed to repatriate up to 25,000 American POWs liberated from the Germans after World War II ended in Europe on May 8, 1945. This appears to have no foundation in fact and to result in large part from an apparent lack of rigor and care in analyzing the issue. Archival research in the United States and Russia, combined with interviews in Russia, appears to establish conclusively that virtually all such prisoners were returned. In addition, the large flow of information on Soviet concentration camps of the Stalin era, beginning in the early 1960s, both in writing and from emigre accounts, has provided no indication of mass imprisonment of Americans.

Some U.S. citizens of German birth who served in the German armed forces or lived in Germany were taken prisoner by the Red Army as it advanced into Central Europe; in addition, the Soviet secret police singled out Americans with German, Russian, or Jewish names for special attention. Both figures are consonant with other knowledge of the arbitrary and brutal nature of the Stalinist USSR. Accounts of U.S. dealings with the USSR during and immediately after World War II on the POW issue are replete with accounts of Soviet obfuscation, truculence, and reluctant cooperation. The Joint U.S.-Russian Commission on POWs/MIAs investigating these issues has obtained a good deal of information. However, as was noted above in the section on Cold War shootdowns and similar incidents, there has been considerable hesitancy and obstruction of the Commission's work by Russian officials still sympathetic to the former Soviet regime.



## For Additional Reading

Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office. Extensive statistical breakdowns, lists of individuals, and studies and analyses on POW/MIA matters from World War II to the present. [<http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo>]

Nenninger, Timothy K. "United States Prisoners of War and the Red Army, 1944-45: Myths and Realities." *The Journal of Military History*, July 2002: 761-82.

Sledge, Michael. *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor Our Military Fallen*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2005. 376 p.

Swift, Earl. *Where They Lay: Searching for America's Lost Soldiers*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 2003. 307 p.

U.S. Congress. Senate. Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs. *POW/MIA's. Report*. January 13, 1993. Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993 (103rd Congress, 1st session. S.Rept. 103-1). 1223 p.