

United States Helping Vietnam Find Its MIAs

By Rudi Williams
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – Four senior Vietnamese government researchers spent a week here recently gathering information that might help them find the remains of up to 400,000 of their missing countrymen.

The team returned to Hanoi Aug. 29 with more than 390,000 Marine Corps images from the war on 42 CD-ROMs as well as hundreds of copies of documents from the National Archives facility in College Park, Md., according to Bob Jones, deputy assistant secretary of defense for POW/missing personnel affairs. The Marine Corps History and Museum Division, Washington Navy Yard, D.C., produced the discs.

"We hope to provide them with more than 700,000 images from other archival holdings by the end of this year," Jones said. "They were extremely pleased with the success of their mission and overwhelmed by the amount of material we gave them access to."

Over the years, the United States has provided the Vietnamese access to more than 3 million pages of documents to help them locate and recover their missing servicemen, he noted. When Jones visited Hanoi last November, the Vietnamese told him the documents helped them recover remains of about 1,000 missing personnel. Those remarks, he said, prompted him to work toward allowing their researchers to search through archives here for information that might help them locate burial sites for their missing personnel.

"This was their first visit and we provided them untethered access to the National Archives facility at College Park, Md., as well as the Naval Historical Center at the Washington Navy Yard," Jones said. The Vietnamese also visited the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory in Rockville, Md., where they were briefed on the use of mitochondrial DNA testing in the identification process of U.S. servicemen's remains.

In addition their research duties, the visitors toured historical sites around the Washington area and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Members of Jones' staff opened their homes for informal social gatherings to show their Vietnamese guests a bit of American lifestyle, he said.

The cooperation of the Vietnamese government has evolved into a partnership where U.S. and Vietnamese researchers work closely together to try to resolve the question of MIAs on both sides, Jones said. "They have worked very closely with the young men and women in the Joint Task Force - Full Accounting and the Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii," he noted. "They recently expressed an increased desire to do more on their own to help us resolve our MIA question.

As another example of cooperation, he said, U.S. investigative teams help recover Vietnamese remains at burial sites if their schedules allow, Jones said.

An independent veteran-to-veteran outreach initiative of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Vietnam Veterans of America plays a major role in bettering relationships between the former enemies. The initiative asks American Vietnam veterans to return memorabilia that may assist in the recovery of missing Vietnamese personnel, Jones said. He encouraged veterans who might have such relevant material to contact his office's Research and Analysis Directorate at 703 602-2202, extension 238, or the VFW or Vietnam Veterans of America.

He said the Vietnamese researchers expressed gratitude and appreciation for the opportunity to visit the United States and for the degree of cooperation and access to material they received.

"They said they hope we will continue to provide access in the future," Jones said.