



News Release

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S. POW/MIA DELEGATION LEADS TALKS IN LAOS

Vientiane, Laos – Senior officials from Laos and the U.S. concluded talks this week reaffirming close cooperation in the mission to account for missing Americans from the Vietnam War.

Mr. Southam Sakonhninhom, Director, Europe-Americas Department of Laos' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, opened and closed the discussions with officials from the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO). He stated that he considered the U.S. and Laos to be one team with the same vision, working to carry out the same mission.

Of the 1,836 Americans missing from the Vietnam War, the remains of 375 are believed to be in Laos. Since the end of the war, 194 Americans have been accounted-for from Laos.

The discussion with Mr. Southam in Vientiane began a two-day visit to assess Lao cooperation, address the efforts of the Lao government in an archival research initiative begun last year, and to express appreciation for strategies to help accelerate the accounting efforts in Laos. In addition to new levels of assistance in archival research, Laos has worked cooperatively with the U.S. over the past year in areas such as: allowing U.S. teams more flexibility to conduct investigations and excavations; investigating cases requiring close coordination between the U.S., Laos, and Vietnam; refining the Lao unilateral investigation program; and enhancing the safety of American and Lao personnel by streamlining medical evacuation procedures.

While in Laos, the team spent a day and a half in southern Laos where specialists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command are seeking to recover American remains. U.S. officials noted the "one team" concept being put into practice at all levels during their visits to the Ta-oy base camp as well as to several excavation sites. Weather and terrain in the area have made the joint work even more challenging. Workers at one of the aircraft crash sites scaled almost 90 degree slopes in their search for clues for the missing. Six poisonous snakes were found at one site, and various unexploded ordnance, including 500-pound bombs, were scattered throughout the sites. Despite the hardships, morale among the almost 50 Americans and more than 400 Lao was high, and the work in the field was clearly benefiting from the close cooperation and flexibility. The DPMO officials praised the work of both the U.S. specialists and their Lao counterparts.

The U.S. delegation departed Laos on Friday.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans from all conflicts, visit the DPMO web site at www.dtic.mil/dpmo, or call 703-699-1169.

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