

MEMORANDUM FOR CORRESPONDENTS

No. 126-M
July 25, 1997

The Fiscal Year 1997 National Defense Authorization Act, Section 657 authorizes the Secretary of Defense to make payments to Vietnamese commandos who participated in covert intelligence missions behind enemy lines during the Vietnam War and were incarcerated by the North Vietnamese and held beyond 1973, when nearly all other POW's and internees were repatriated. On June 17, 1997, Congress appropriated \$20 million for the payments to these Vietnamese Commandos. Accordingly, the Department of Defense will begin the process of accepting and adjudicating claims and making payments to the Vietnamese Commandos or their surviving spouse or children.

While these commandos were not members of the U.S. Armed Forces or the Republic of South Vietnam military, civilian officials or employees of either government, they were civilian contractors of the South Vietnamese Government who participated in covert operations directed first by the CIA and later by a U.S. Joint Military Organization, Military Assistance Command (Studies and Observation Group).

The department published detailed regulations in the Federal Register, "Compensation of Former Operatives Incarcerated by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam", on July 25, 1997. The public may comment on these regulations within 60 days from the date of publication. These regulations will include the address to which claimants must write to establish their claims, and, in general, describe the mechanisms by which the Department of Defense will conduct the process.

The department intends to expeditiously process claims and begin to make payments as soon as practical after all regulatory requirements for comments have been received and acted upon.