

NEWS RELEASE  
JOINT TASK FORCE-FULL ACCOUNTING PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
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LEGION COMMANDER AND AUXILIARY PRESIDENT VISIT MIA SEARCH  
ORGANIZATION

The recent Pacific trip by American Legion National Commander Harold "Butch" Miller and Auxiliary President Virginia Mae Hobbs also included a stopover in Hawaii where they received a briefing on the search for missing Americans from the war in Southeast Asia by the organization tasked with the full accounting mission.

Accompanied by eight other National and local Hawaii Legion and Auxiliary members, Mr. Miller and Mrs. Hobbs were presented the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (JTF-FA) command briefing on Dec. 11 by Army Brig. Gen. Terry L. Tucker, who has commanded the Camp H.M. Smith-based organization since September 1997.

JTF-FA was created in January 1992 in response to Presidential, Congressional and public interest, as well as increased opportunities for case resolution within the countries of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The opportunities included an increased willingness by those governments to share information they have regarding unaccounted-for Americans, as well as increased access to files, records and witnesses within their respective countries. JTF-FA's predecessor was the Joint Casualty Resolution Center, which initiated accounting efforts in 1973.

There were 2,583 Americans listed as unaccounted-for, either missing in action or killed in action/body not recovered, following the end of hostilities in 1973 and the final pullout of U.S. forces in 1975. Of that number, 507 Americans have been recovered, identified, and returned to their families, 191 of them since 1992.

According to General Tucker, the task force conducts 11 Joint Field Activities per year in Southeast Asia, five each in Vietnam and Laos, and one in Cambodia. Each Joint Field Activity varies from 40 to 100 U.S. military and civilian personnel from JTF-FA, the Army's Central Identification Laboratory-Hawaii, and augmentees from various U.S. Pacific Command organizations who provide additional medical, linguistics, explosive ordnance disposal, and wreckage analysis support. Host country personnel, who facilitate operational requirements, such as local labor hires with village and province officials, also augment the joint investigation and recovery teams.

The briefing also helped dispel rumors about the fullest possible accounting mission, the biggest being the rumor about paying for remains.

"We do not and will not pay for remains or information about remains sites," said General Tucker. "This policy has been in effect since the end of the war and continues today to counter potential fraud and profiteering," he explained, "and all three governments support and have informed their citizens of this policy."

General Tucker also told the delegation that safety was his number one concern.

"We conduct operations 11 months out of the year in some of the most isolated, austere and dangerous areas in the world," he said. "Disease, insects, snakes, and unexploded ordnance at virtually every site makes safety of paramount importance. Finding and recovering unaccounted-for Americans is our mission, but safety is our primary concern for mission accomplishment."

Traveling with Mr. Miller and Mrs. Hobbs were Bill Moriarty, aide-de-camp to the National Commander, and Bill Hobbs, Virginia's husband and Past Department Commander from Kentucky. The purpose of their three-week trip was to gain firsthand knowledge of U.S. military and diplomatic activities in the Pacific region. The delegation visited South Korea from Nov. 29 to Dec. 3, Taiwan from Dec. 3-6, and the Philippines from Dec. 6-10, before arriving in Hawaii for briefings and tours of U.S. Pacific Command, Tripler Army Medical Center, and Schofield Barracks, among others.

Joining them for the JTF-FA briefing and tour of the Central Identification Lab were Hawaii Department Commander Donald J. Raven, Department Adjutant Bernard K.Y. Lee, National Executive Committee member LeRoy Pulawa, Hawaii Department Auxiliary President Georgia Lee, National Executive Committee member Tsugi

Takemoto, and Cathy Carruthers, the commander's guest.