

**NEWS RELEASE**  
JOINT TASK FORCE-FULL ACCOUNTING PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
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**VFW COMMANDER IN CHIEF TOURS SOUTHEAST ASIA MIA SEARCH  
ORGANIZATION**

CAMP SMITH, Hawaii - Veterans of Foreign Wars Commander in Chief Thomas A. Pouliot recently made a two-week trip to Southeast Asia to view firsthand America's efforts to account for missing Americans from the war in Southeast Asia.

Accompanied by National Adjutant John Senk and National Security and Foreign Affairs Director Bruce Harder, Mr. Pouliot also visited U.S. embassies in Laos, Vietnam and Thailand, where he received political, economic, drug enforcement, and humanitarian issue updates.

The fact-finding mission began in Hawaii on Pearl Harbor Day, Dec. 7, when Messrs. Senk and Harder received the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting command briefing prior to visiting the U.S. Army's Central Identification Laboratory-Hawaii. Army Brig. Gen. Terry L. Tucker, who has commanded JTF-FA since September 1997, led a candid discussion of search and recovery operations, to include the live sighting investigation process.

The mission of Joint Task Force-Full Accounting is to achieve the fullest possible accounting of Americans still unaccounted-for as a result of the war in Southeast Asia. The task force grew out of the previously established Joint Casualty Resolution Center, an organization that began spearheading U.S. Government accounting efforts in 1973. 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 commander in chief of U.S. Pacific Command established JTF-FA on Jan. 23, 1992.

Following the end of hostilities in 1973 and the final pullout of U.S. troops in 1975, there were 2,583 Americans unaccounted-for in Southeast Asia. Of that number, 510 American (updated as of Dec. 22), have been recovered, identified and returned to their families, 194 since 1992 when JTF-FA was established. Today, JTF-FA is comprised of approximately 160 investigators, analysts, linguists, and other specialists representing all four military services and Department of Defense civilian employees.

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 month-long Joint Field Activity varies from 40 to 100 U.S. military and civilian personnel from JTF-FA, casualty resolution specialists, archeologists and anthropologists from the Central Identification Laboratory-Hawaii, and augmentees from U.S. Pacific Command component organizations who provide additional medical, linguistics, explosive ordnance and wreckage analysis support. Host country personnel, who facilitate operational requirements, such as local hires with village and provincial officials, also augment the joint investigation and recovery teams.

General Tucker also explained the live sightings issue in Southeast Asia. "The investigation of live sightings of personnel believed to be Americans held in a captive situation continues to be our highest priority," he emphasized. "When we receive a live sighting report, it is immediately analyzed by DPMO (Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office) to determine if the report is credible. If credibility is established for the report, it then becomes an investigation.

"Over the years, numerous first-hand reports have surfaced concerning Americans allegedly held in a captive environment in Southeast Asia," he explained. "DPMO has resolved most of those reports through correlation with accounted-for personnel, while others were proven to be fabrications. Although the U.S. Government has thus far been unable to obtain definitive evidence that Americans are still being detained against their will in Southeast Asia, the

information available precludes ruling out that possibility, so all live-sighting reports will continue to receive the highest priority."

Before concluding the briefing, General Tucker thanked the VFW for being a lead agency in getting hazardous duty pay for Joint Task Force and CILHI members written into the McCain Bill. "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. It was largely through the untiring efforts of (former VFW Commander in Chief) John Moon and his delegation, when they visited Vietnam last year, that the McCain Bill was passed," General Tucker said.

Joined in Hawaii by VFW Commander in Chief Pouliot, the delegation traveled briefly through Thailand on to Vientiane, Laos, from Dec. 11-13, where they were greeted by U.S. Ambassador Wendy Chamberlin and the commander of JTF-FA's Detachment 3, Army Lt. Col. Bob Gahagan. Ambassador Chamberlin briefed the delegation on conditions in Laos, especially as it pertained to relations between the U.S. and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. This meeting was followed by a detailed briefing by the embassy "Country Team," which included developments on political, economic, drug enforcement and humanitarian affairs issues.

JTF-FA's Det. 3 briefing focused on the quest to achieve the fullest possible accounting of missing Americans within Laos, which numbers 444 (as of Dec. 22). In addition to the briefing, the delegation watched a videotape of Joint Field Activity 99-1L, which was held Oct. 1-31. The video provided them an opportunity to "be there," without the long helicopter rides and difficult treks that an on-site visit would have entailed. They watched recovery elements excavating two difficult sites in Savannakhet Province, and received an armchair tour of an investigation element's trek up a mountain streambed and through the woods to an aircraft crash site.

By visiting Det. 3 in person, Mr. Pouliot said he gained an important perspective on JTF-FA operations in Laos. He expressed his appreciation on behalf of the entire VFW membership for the perseverance and sacrifices by Det. 3 personnel to help account for our missing comrades.

The VFW delegation arrived in Hanoi on Dec. 13 and were immediately immersed the following day with meetings with the Vietnam Veteran Friendship Association, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the U.S. Embassy Country Team, and with U.S. Ambassador Douglas "Pete" Peterson, a former prisoner of war in Vietnam.

Army Lt. Col. Matt Martin, commander of JTF-FA's Detachment 2 in Hanoi, presented the command briefing during the delegation's visit to Det. 2, affectionately known as "The Ranch." Included in the briefing was a video of a joint field activity that took place in Vietnam from Aug. 25 to Sept. 23, where they viewed four recovery elements and a repatriation ceremony. As of Dec. 22, there are 1,546 unaccounted-for Americans in Vietnam.

Messrs. Pouliot, Senk and Harder arrived back in Bangkok on Dec. 16, and spent most of the next day receiving U.S. Embassy Country Team briefings and visiting JTF-FA's Detachment 1, commanded by Air Force Lt. Col. Jeff Smith.

As the logistical hub for all MIA search efforts within Southeast Asia, the delegation also learned that Det. 1 is operationally responsible for investigation and recovery efforts in Cambodia, where there are 75 unaccounted-for Americans. The delegation also received an in-depth briefing at Stony Beach, a Defense Intelligence Agency asset in Thailand that investigates Southeast Asia live sighting reports. Before leaving for their return trip to the U.S., Mr. Pouliot gave Det. 3 personnel a stack of pre-paid \$10 phone cards for distribution to the next joint field activity members.

"It was an honor to have the VFW commander in chief visit our operations," said General Tucker. "The VFW's support of our mission to account for those who didn't return home from

the war in Southeast Asia is truly appreciated by all those who carry out the mission."