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VIETNAMESE POW/MIA RESEARCHERS VISIT THE U.S.

Researchers from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam are visiting U. S. archives this week in an effort to gather information on their casualties from the Vietnam War.

This is a continuation of an effort begun in 1994 when the U. S. returned captured Vietnamese documents to their government, and began providing support to American veterans service organizations in their "vet-to-vet" initiatives. These veteran-to-veteran contacts have led to the exchange of documents and information by soldiers on both sides.

The researchers were invited by Robert L. Jones, deputy assistant secretary of Defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs. Jones' archival research staff discovered some U. S. Army burial records during their work in the National Archives facility at College Park, Md. The records appeared to shed some light on the fate of North Vietnamese soldiers who were casualties during combat with U. S. forces.

"The Vietnamese government cooperates with our teams in Hanoi in seeking the fullest possible accounting of America's MIA," said Jones. "When we discovered these records, it was clear that they may be of great use to our Vietnamese counterparts."

The four Vietnamese researchers arrived Saturday, and have spent most of their time at the National Archives. There, they were assisted by archivists and by staff members of the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office as they reviewed documents, which had been uncovered. They also reviewed Navy and Marine Corps records at other locations. The researchers plan to take the documents back to Vietnam for further analysis.

They were also escorted to 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. They plan to leave the U. S. on Sunday.

U. S. teams operate throughout the country in Vietnam interviewing villagers and government officials, reviewing military collections and archives, and conducting major excavations to recover the remains of American servicemen. While 529 servicemen have been identified and accounted-for since the end of the war, another 2,054 are still unaccounted-for from that war. The support and cooperation of the Vietnamese government and people has enabled U. S. teams to carry out their mission. The most recent identification of three American servicemen from the Vietnam war was announced earlier today.