

**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**STATEMENT OF SECRETARY RUMSFELD ON ACCIDENT IN VIETNAM**

Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld today released the following statement:

"Americans are saddened by today's tragic loss of life of both U.S. and Vietnamese service personnel in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Those of us in the Department of Defense, and the families of our missing, are keenly aware of the dedication of both the American and Vietnamese team members who were, on this very day, searching for servicemen who have been missing in action since the end of the war.

"Since 1985, American teams, with the full support of their Vietnamese counterparts, have conducted investigations and excavations in that country. As a result of this sustained cooperation, we have recovered and identified the remains of more than 600 Americans and continue to search for those still missing in Southeast Asia. Led by the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting and the U.S. Army's Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii, this recovery work is truly a noble calling.

"These joint teams have maintained a truly remarkable safety record, particularly given the dangerous and difficult terrain in which they work. Today's tragedy represents the first loss of life either side has suffered in the 65 joint field activities that have been completed in Vietnam. To the families of those whose loved ones have yet to be accounted-for, be assured that our mission will continue, even in the face of this tragedy. Our hearts go to the families and friends of those who today made the ultimate sacrifice in carrying out this humanitarian mission. They gave their lives so that others might come home. May God bless and be with them."