



## **Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office**

### **Last Known Alive (LKA) Cases in Southeast Asia**

Gen. John W. Vessey, the Special Presidential Emissary to Hanoi on the POW-MIA issue, began negotiations with the Vietnamese Government in August 1987. One of his priorities was to address concerns raised by the public of the possibility that live American prisoners had been left in Southeast Asia. Vessey directed accounting community analysts to look closely at and select from all Americans, missing from the Vietnam War, those who could have become prisoners. He stated that he wished to investigate these cases in order to “illuminate the live prisoner issue.” Those selected as *possibles* became known as the Last Known Alive (LKA) cases. The conditions considered for adding a missing service member to the LKA list included loss incidents in which the individual was last seen alive, not gravely wounded, and in proximity to enemy forces. The total list included 296 LKAs—196 in Vietnam, 81 in Laos and 19 in Cambodia. Over more than 20 years, analysts have found clear and convincing evidence to confirm the wartime deaths of 245 LKA individuals, leaving 51 who remain on priority investigation status in Southeast Asia.

In 1993, Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (now Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command or JPAC) established a field team dedicated to LKA case investigations. This team was known as the Priority Case Investigation Team (PCIT) but was later changed to the Research Investigation Team (RIT). The RIT, made up of both U.S. and Vietnamese research analysts, meets annually to establish future investigation requirements, as well as identify cases which require unilateral assistance from the Vietnamese side to resolve.

The process used to confirm the fates of individuals Last Known Alive is very thorough. Analyst must first receive solid evidence of death. The results from the RIT and Joint field investigations, surveys, and excavations provide the majority of the evidence. There is no formula or checklist used to assess an individual’s fate. Recommendations are based on analysis using all available information and sources. Reports from credible first-hand witnesses, especially if independently corroborated, provide the most compelling information. Much of the RIT team’s focus is finding first-hand witnesses to the incident. Wartime reporting, Vietnamese archives and material evidence discovered during recovery efforts may also provide supporting evidence of death. Analysts examine all information from all sources (to include contradictory reporting) before making a recommendation.

Analysts from both DPMO and JPAC independently analyze LKA cases. If an analyst from one organization, say JPAC, believes there is clear evidence of death on a particular LKA case, he will present his position to the DPMO Southeast Asia analyst for that case. The DPMO analyst will review the case, and if there is agreement, DPMO and JPAC will jointly prepare the final analysis and presentation for a “Fate Determination” panel. This panel is comprised of three flag officers, independent of the accounting community. One analyst briefs the case to the panel detailing the incident, analysis and evidence. The panel will often ask specific questions. Based on all the information, the panel will make the final decision as to whether they agree with the analyst’s recommendation to confirm the fate as deceased. If the panel agrees with the recommendation, the fate of the Last Known Alive serviceman is confirmed as deceased.

It is important to clarify that confirming the fates of those Last Known Alive does not end our efforts to account for these missing servicemen. DPMO, JPAC, and the entire accounting community will continue to pursue leads to recover the remains of those missing through research, analysis, and/or investigative field work.