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**PRESS BRIEFING BY
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
FOR POW AND MISSING PERSONNEL BOB JONES;
AND LIEUTENANT COLONEL FRANKLIN CHILDRESS
ON JOINT TASK FORCE-FULL ACCOUNTING
EXCAVATION SITE**

Hilton Hanoi Opera Hotel
Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam

6:05 P.M. (L)

MR. CROWLEY: To help set up the day for tomorrow, where the President will have the opportunity to visit an excavation site not far from here and then tomorrow evening, participate in a repatriation ceremony before leaving for Ho Chi Minh City, we thought it would be very helpful to give you a better sense of the total scope of our government's commitment to the families for the fullest possible accounting of our missing.

So, first, we have -- we have two briefers. One to kind of give you a broader sense of, particularly at the Department of Defense, how we approach not only issues regarding Vietnam, but also as we've seen, we're learning more recently about those who are still missing from World War II. Last week, for example, we had the return of remains of servicemen who died during the Korean War.

So to first give you a broader sense of the commitment that we have on behalf of the families, veterans organizations to continue this pursuit, we have the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for POW and Missing Personnel, Bob Jones. He will be followed by Frank Childress, an Army Lieutenant Colonel, who will give you a briefing on what we call Joint Task Force-Full Accounting and the work that they're doing, particularly here in Vietnam.

But to start off, we have Bob Jones.

MR. JONES: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, I am Bob Jones, and I want to tell you that I probably have the best job in the Department of Defense. I have the responsibility to assist the President in fulfilling our moral obligations to the men and women in uniform. And that moral obligation is to do everything that we as a nation can possibly do to ensure that if they become isolated as a result of their service to the nation, that we will do everything that we possibly can to ensure that they're returned to their loved ones.

Having said that, the mission in my office is a very broad mission. It encompasses the basic code of conduct training that the initial -- training that the soldier gets when they go into the service. It carries through high risk of capture training to combat search and rescue policy responsibilities. It goes to the accounting responsibilities, such as you all will see tomorrow at the Joint Task Force operation on Case 0897.

Our operations are global in nature. As was stated earlier, we do, in fact, have an obligation to conduct recovery operations, World War II, Korea, the Cold War, Vietnam and any future wars that may occur.

And having said that, as you can imagine, as we look at the numbers here in Vietnam and we start looking at the global numbers, I am seeking to locate, recover and return to their loved ones some 88,000, almost 90,000 missing Americans -- 78,000 from World War II, some 8,200 from Korea and so on.

So we do, in fact, have a tremendous obligation. The President, when he took office in 1993, established four criteria that we measure our successes by. First and foremost is the recovery and repatriation of remains. Secondly, resolving discrepancy cases, the last known alive cases. Conducting trilateral investigations with other countries. And then, of course, the recovery and access to archives and documents which will facilitate the other operational areas.

We have been extremely successful in dealing with the Vietnamese during this administration. We have recovered and returned over 283 missing Americans since President Clinton took office, and that's a very significant number when you look at the fact that we have identified 591 individuals from the Vietnam War that have been missing over the years.

We've been very, very successful. The Vietnamese have, in fact, been very cooperative. We would not enjoy the successes that we have today if it had not been for the cooperation of the Vietnamese government and the Vietnamese people. I can assure you that we have had very candid talks during my tenure with the Vietnamese; they have been most willing to assist us in any way they can. They have provided us access to their population to do oral history interviews. They have provided us access throughout their country to conduct our joint operations anywhere from the breadth of their country.

I'm very pleased and very proud of the accomplishments and I could not say enough about the successes of the DOD accounting team. And this is the young men and women, both military and civilian, who work out here in some very arduous conditions, around the clock, trying to recover missing Americans somewhere around this globe. Anywhere that we have served, we have Americans out looking for missing Americans.

I do have a few moments, so if anyone would like to fire a few questions at me, I'd be most happy to take them.

Q How long does this -- do you anticipate this program going on? What's the length of commitment you have?

MR. JONES: Sir, our commitment is a moral obligation, I do not see any closure to it. As long as we have sufficient leads to pursue a missing American, we will follow those leads until we either recover that individual or have sufficient evidence that individual is not recoverable.

Q What percentage of cases do you find that there are some remains to recover or, you know, that there is no trace of anybody?

MR. JONES: Sir, we have 602 cases here in Southeast Asia, which are called no further pursuit cases. Those are cases in which we believe that neither the United States government nor the Vietnamese government can provide any further information that will lead to a recovery of that missing individual.

Q Sir, are those cases mostly lost at sea?

MR. JONES: A significant number of them are, yes, sir.

Q Sir, last week the President signed a bill, the "Bring 'Em Home Alive" bill. Does DOD have any reason to believe that there are any MIAs out there that are still alive?

MR. JONES: Sir, the number one priority for my office is to ensure that we do everything possible to follow up on any reports of live Americans who may be held against their will anywhere around the

globe. We have had over 21,000 reports -- reports -- of Americans, live-sighting reports. We've investigated all of those. None of those have borne fruit. We have no evidence that any American is being held anywhere against their will at this time.

Q When was the last one of those reports that you got?

MR. JONES: That's why I carried this book with me. If you'll bear with me for just a moment. We've noticed that there has been a significant drop-off in those as it relates to Southeast Asia. The last live sighting report that my office -- unresolved live sighting report was in '97, sir.

Q Is that from Vietnam?

MR. JONES: It was from Southeast Asia.

Q Is that Vietnam?

MR. JONES: I can't say the specific country right -- the information I have doesn't have it broke out by country, sir.

Q And a follow up to the question, if there has been three years since the last report, none have proven -- have been found out of the 21,000, what's the purpose of the "Bring 'Em Home Alive" act?

MR. JONES: The "Bring 'Em Home Alive" act is an act which is all-encompassing. It talks in terms of bringing them home alive from Russia, from China, from Korea, from Southeast Asia and any future wars. So it provides the opportunity for an individual in a country to assist an American who may be held against their will to return to America and thus gain immigration status.

So if, by chance, there is some individual out there and, hypothetically, that person is brought out by an indigenous person, then that person then would be given immigration status and, of course, we would return that live American.

Q Sir, what can you tell us about -- I think you referred to Case 0897, which I presume is Captain Evert?

MR. JONES: I believe that the JTF is going to give a detailed briefing on that when I leave, sir. If you will just wait a few moments, I think we can give you a good briefing on that.

Q One quick question. Can you tell us exactly what is the location that the President will visit tomorrow? Is it technically part of Hanoi or is it outside and in a township?

MR. JONES: Sir, I think that question would be best answered by the JTF.

No further questions, ladies and gentlemen? Thank you so very much. I think you will enjoy the briefing provided by the Joint Task Force. These are the -- the operators out here are doing the job. Thank you.

COLONEL CHILDRESS: Thank you, Mr. Jones. And he has answered a number of questions that will probably be asked of me. He has the policy making responsibility for the full accounting mission.

Joint Task Force-Full Accounting -- and I am Lieutenant Colonel Franklin Childress. I am the public affairs officer for Joint Task Force Accounting. Our mission is to basically achieve the fullest possible accounting of Americans who are unaccounted for from the war in Southeast Asia.

Now, the fullest possible accounting has been used by presidential administrations since the end of the war to express the commitment of the nation to bring home and bring answers to all those who did not return from the war. This specifically is detachment two, which is in Hanoi as a permanent fixture. It

resides in a compound that we call "The Ranch" in Hanoi. We have three detachments. One is in Bangkok, Thailand, at the United States Embassy, one is in Vientian, Laos -- that's detachment three. And detachment two is in Hanoi. And this is their mission statement.

The methods of accounting we use are two. First is return live Americans. Not since 1973, in Operation Homecoming, when 591 Americans were returned from Vietnamese captivity, has an American serviceman held against his will returned from Southeast Asia. But we don't rule that possibility out; because we cannot prove that there are no service members held against their will from the war in Southeast Asia, the official policy is we don't rule that possibility out.

The second way is return identifiable remains. The biological and legal requirements of identifying someone are necessitated by actually bringing home identifiable remains. On some cases -- and I'll explain this later, if you like -- there are circumstantial identification. When we go to a crash site and we find identification media, such as dog tags or name tags or other indications that the pilot was in that aircraft when it crashed, but we can't find biological evidence such as remains in sufficient quantity to actually biologically identify someone, that would be a circumstantial identification.

However, we shoot and our prime goal is to biologically identify someone and that is the job of a central identification laboratory, who is our partners in this business here in Southeast Asia.

The unaccounted for perspective: from World War II, 78,000. In the two weeks surrounding D-Day, almost 8,000 are unaccounted for from that period. From the Korean War, 8,100. And, today, in Southeast Asia after the Mayaguez incident, the number stood at 2,583.

This is what it looks like from Southeast Asia, specifically. And, by the way, Joint Task Force-Full Accounting has a mission to account for unaccounted for Americans, specifically from the Vietnam War area in Southeast Asia, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

In 1975, after the Mayaguez incident, the number stood at 2,583. When Joint Task Force-Full Accounting was formed in January 1992, the number stood at 2,267. And today the number is 1,992 Americans unaccounted for from the war in Southeast Asia.

This is what it looks like by service. There are 58,000 names, approximately, on the Wall in Washington, D.C., the Vietnam Memorial Wall. Of that number, approximately 48,000 were combat-related casualties, death. Of that number, a vast majority of them are Army and Marines. However, the nature of ground combat allowed us to recover our wounded and dead. Therefore, a high percentage are Air Force and Navy aviators.

Also of note, many of our unaccounted for were lost in aviation-related incidents. In the Army's perspective, many of these are helicopter losses, where soldiers were on board and they perished when the aircraft went down. Also the Marines, helicopters and high-performance aircraft. And in the Air Force and the Navy's perspective, some of these were lost over water, some of them were lost in the part of Northern Vietnam where we cannot recover the remains, we couldn't mount search and rescue operations because of enemy activity or the nature of the loss.

This is by country of loss. As you can see, there are 1,498 unaccounted for Americans in the country of Vietnam; eight in the country of China or over Chinese territorial waters; 421 in the area of Laos; and 65 in Cambodia. Now, this is significant to note: about 80 percent are in the area just below what was then the DMZ and along the eastern portions of Laos and Cambodia, along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

We have a program set up with the Vietnamese government and the Laotian government that allows us to bring in Vietnamese military personnel who were in the Ho Chi Minh Trail and have firsthand knowledge of that loss -- that's called the Trilateral Witness Program. We bring these witnesses in to help us find locations where these Americans were lost in these areas.

Okay, again, this breaks it down for Vietnam, specifically. And this is today, there are 1,498 Americans unaccounted for in the country of Vietnam. Now, the no further pursuit, as Mr. Jones said, this is in the country of Vietnam, the no further pursuit means -- and I'll give you two examples -- one is an American aircraft, A-6, goes off the carrier Kitty Hawk in 1966. The engines flameout about a mile off the carrier, it goes down in deep water, there's no evidence of ejection, no evidence of parachutes on the surface. The only thing we can surmise is those two Naval aviators perished in deep water and we'll probably never be able to find them.

Another example is our Marines in a fighting position in a fire base in 1969. An artillery round comes directly on that individual and explodes, there are no remains to be found today; there's no remains to be found back then.

This just gives you a perspective of our counterpart organization, the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons. We have a very cordial and very close relationship with this office. Again, they work for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Americas and their director is a man by the name of Mr. Bah Hung, and he works very closely with the Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Public Security.

We have provincial specialists in each province of Vietnam, and they have people that work in this activity, all the way down to the district and the village level. So we work very closely with these individuals and whenever we go to the field, they go with us and they're our counterparts. Also, in Vietnam specifically, two times a year they conduct unilateral investigations, and that's important as well.

This is what a joint field activity looks like in Vietnam. Four to five times a year we come into Vietnam. The operations are planned for approximately 30 to 32 days; approximately 95 individuals are on this investigation recovery team. And then we have what's called a research and investigation team which focuses on the last known alive and priority cases. We also have two investigative elements, and six recovery elements.

This is what a recovery element -- specifically, tomorrow you'll be looking at a recovery site, and the recovery team that is going to be out there is made up of these individuals. We have under our operational control of the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting an organization called the central identification laboratory, which is some of the premier forensic analysts and investigators, specialists in the world. And as you can see, a large number of this organization has the makeup of this recovery element.

The team leader is an Army captain who has had a successful career in the Army. We also have an anthropologist, and this anthropologist is the scientific team leader. He or she tells us where to dig, how deep to dig -- all the science is in control of that, and so the science and legal requirements out at the site is under the control of that anthropologist.

We have a team sergeant who acts as a foreman of the site, working with the Vietnamese workers, working with the American workers, and they do a very good job. The mortuary technicians, photographer -- we have linguists out on site from the Joint Task Force. We have life support technicians out on the site, and they are the ones that actually identify whether it's an American aircraft, whether there was someone in that aircraft, and actually help the scientists determine where to dig and where to excavate on the site.

We have EOD specialists, explosive ordnance specialists that go out and do mine sweeps to make sure that there's no unexploded ordnance or any other mine fields out in the area. That is a very important aspect of our job because there's a lot of unexploded ordnance in the area, a lot of mines still left over from the French colonial period, as well as the Vietnam War.

This is what our operation looks like. Four times a year into Vietnam, five times a year into Laos, and

one time a year into Cambodia. We use strategic airlift from Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii, and deploy to U Tapao Naval Air Base in Thailand. When we deploy to Thailand, we have an agreement with the Thai air base commander to allow us to use ramp space and warehouse space at U Tapao Naval Air Base. We reconfigure the loads using C-130s and actually fly into the countries.

In Vietnam, specifically, we land in Hanoi, Denang and Ho Chi Minh City, and this is based on where we're going to be digging. Specifically, from April to August is the dry period in the central region where many of our unaccounted for are. Therefore, we have to get in that central region during that period. The other times, during August to April, is the rainy season in the central region, so we have to focus our operations in the north or the south. This specific operation we're working primarily in the north. This is what this operation looks like, the 63rd Joint Field Activity. It's from the 30th of October to the 28th of November.

We have one research investigation team. They're working on an oral history program, finding war veterans who have knowledge of unaccounted for Americans and getting their oral histories. We're having two investigation elements. They're focusing down in the southern and central region. And then the recovery elements, as you can see by the yellow dots, are focused primarily in the north.

Tomorrow, as Mr. Jones mentioned, we're going to Vin Phuc province. And this is the case of one unaccounted for American who was flying an F-105D aircraft. And as you probably have been aware by the papers, the individual we're looking for is Captain Lawrence G. Evert. Captain Evert was on the MIA status and he was posthumously promoted to lieutenant colonel.

The crash occurred on the 8th of November, 1967, and it's in a rice paddy area adjacent to a railroad embankment, and I'll show you a photo of this site in just a moment. This is what it looks like. The railroad embankment is very close to the site. The target that Captain Evert and his other three F-105 Deltas were going after was the Phuc Yen bridge, which is in the distance over here. They were bombing this, coming from the direction -- from here, across. Captain Evert's was the fourth aircraft in a flight of four. He was hit by anti-aircraft -- according to witnesses, he was hit by anti-aircraft artillery in the left rear fuselage of his aircraft.

None of the three pilots that were flying with him saw him go down or had any knowledge that he went down until he failed to report in after the strike. However, other aircraft that were in the area saw his aircraft crash and, before he crashed, they heard a radio transmission, "I'm hit hard," and that was the last transmission from Captain Evert.

Again, we will be -- the ones of you that are going out tomorrow will be going to the site. And this is what's called a wet screening operation, where we employ Vietnamese workers into this area of a crash crater. Again, the anthropologist decides where it is and they start in the center area, in this particular case, and try to define the edges of this crash crater. And, apparently, the aircraft went down fairly deep.

We use what's called cheese cutters, which are angle iron and wire mesh, to actually cut the mud. We put it in these buckets, pass the buckets along the Vietnamese workers and then put it in quarter-inch mesh screening. We use a water source, using pumps, to come in and force the mud through high-pressure water hoses through this quarter-inch mesh screen and the resulting remains that are in there are either human remains, personal effects or wreckage. And we found a lot of wreckage at this particular site. So this is the basic scene-setter for tomorrow's operation.

These are some of the challenges. In Vietnam, Southeast Asia, specifically, we have a lot of challenges. It's a high-risk environment. As I said, there's a lot of unexploded ordnance in the area, both mine fields, unexploded ordnance from aircraft, bomblets from B-52s in some cases. You also have artillery rounds in some cases that are very volatile in high temperatures.

Also, there is wildlife. In one case that I was actually on in July, the workers and the team actually

heard tigers in the area, because it was in a very remote area. There is also many snakes in the area. There is one snake called the bamboo viper, that is particularly dangerous. The terrain in some cases is very hazardous. On very steep terrain that it takes a long time to get up to, in some cases over boulders; in some cases, we have to actually land aircraft on top of mountains and repel down to get to sites.

Additionally, we operate in a high-risk environment in terms of disease. There's a lot of disease endemic in the region, from cholera, Japanese encephalitis, plague in some cases, and other diseases. And malaria, as well. So we have to be very careful.

Province and district coordination: we have to make sure we work very closely with our counterparts at the province, district and central government, and central government representatives from the Vietnam Office of Seeking Missing Persons to facilitate this. Every time we come to Vietnam, before we go in, we have what's called a technical meeting or technical talks where we coordinate each case very closely with the Vietnamese and we work out all the problems or bugs before they occur, so that's a very important process.

The difficult and complex cases. There are many difficult and complex cases in Southeast Asia, specifically in Vietnam. This case that we're going to tomorrow, there was a communications cable right near the area. There was also the railroad embankment. The Vietnamese wanted to make sure that we had a joint team of U.S.-Vietnamese engineers go to the site to actually make sure that we could do the excavation of the site safely and without damaging the integrity of that railroad embankment. So that was very important, as well.

And time. Time is somewhat of an enemy in our case. We are talking to witnesses and sometimes the memories fail. In some cases, the witnesses are no longer with us, they've passed away. So we're really trying to go out and find these witnesses who have firsthand knowledge of the sites. In one case, we went to a site. We were looking for five witnesses, that I was on, and we only found one still living in that particular village. So it is a sense of urgency. Also, the acidity of the soil in some cases degrades the remains so that they're not as much remains to be found, in some cases. So, again, that is one of the challenges we face.

Again, Ambassador Peterson had a great quote, and this is something I want to share with you. "Never before in the history of mankind has any nation done what we're doing. The effort of Joint Task Force-Full Accounting to Honor the U.S. commitment to our unaccounted for comrades, their family and the nation is unprecedented."

And for me, working as a public affairs officer in this mission, it is a sacred honor. For the military tradition, we have a tradition that we don't leave our dead on the battlefield. Unfortunately, in the Vietnam War, we were forced to by circumstances. But I think if you ask the soldiers and the men and women who are out there on the site, why do they do it? They say they do it for the families; they do it for the unaccounted for families who cannot close that chapter in the book of their lives and the lives of their loved ones until they actually get remains back and are able to bury them with honors. Also they do it for the families that they leave back in Hawaii or wherever they come from. They would want the government to do the same thing for them as we're doing now for their unaccounted for servicemen and women.

So it's very important that we do this mission. It is a sacred honor, and I'm very glad to be a part of and I'm very proud to be a part of the military, and I'm very proud that the President has now come to Vietnam to affirm this commitment of achieving the fullest possible accounting. And I'll be glad to take a couple of questions.

Q Can you name the village, the location of this site? How would you describe it?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: I don't want to pronounce it. I have the spelling of it, and I would obviously butcher it. I think I have it that I can give it to you after the briefing. But I certainly don't

want to offend anybody by mispronouncing that name.

Q Sir, as I gather it, when we come out there tomorrow, we'll sort of be coming upon the activity as it's going on on a day by day basis. Nothing special will happen tomorrow that didn't happen the day before or will happen the next day when the President and all of us leave. Is that correct?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: Well, the activity will be ongoing. Obviously there are certain security precautions that will happen and there are certain things that the President, because he's coming, will interrupt the normal flow. But that is, I think, offset by the fact that the President is actually coming to Vietnam and will see a site for himself. For his eight years in office he's been affirming that this is the highest national priority. And by actually being there, I think he's affirming that commitment to the nation. So I think it's great that he'll be there.

But, again, the workers will be out there working; the dig will be continuing as it is in the normal process. And, again, there are certain considerations that I'm sure everyone will understand of a President coming to that particular site.

Q You mentioned the dangers from unexploded ordnance and from nature. Has anybody ever been killed or injured during this process?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: Not since Joint Task Force-Full Accounting was formed. Back in 1973, there was a U.S. Army captain who was conducting search and recovery operations as part of the Joint Casualty Resolution Center, who was ambushed near Saigon and he was killed. But that is the only individual who has actually been killed during this whole mission.

Q What can you tell us about what has been recovered so far at this particular site we're going to?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: That's a very good question. There's a lot of wreckage that has been actually recovered, a lot of wreckage that supports that we're looking for an F-105D. There was a data plate that actually was found that we're analyzing right now to determine if it's in that data plate range, or in that range of numbers that supports this particular aircraft. So it's like a jigsaw puzzle, and as we find pieces of wreckage, it's like the jigsaw puzzle pieces are coming together. So it's a great question.

Q Could you explain a little bit why you're only getting to this site now? This would seem to be one of the easier sites because it's a -- crater, it's in a fairly flat place, it's populated, easy access. Why wasn't this site higher up on the priority list?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: Well, until the joint team of U.S.- Vietnamese engineers came out to basically survey the site and certify that it could be done safely, without damaging the integrity of this railroad embankment, the Vietnamese wouldn't let us dig, quite frankly. And that's reasonable because we certainly don't want to do something that would cause that embankment to cave in and cause a train crash or something. So that is the reason.

Q To follow, so this has been on the list for quite some time as a very good possibility site?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: Well, I don't know exactly how long it's been on there. It's been investigated three times, and each time you investigate, if you find correlating data that suggests this aircraft at this time, this individual. So there are witnesses that we go to, and each case is analyzed on its merit. But this case has been on the excavation list for a couple of years, I think, and we've just been waiting to get out and do the survey.

Q Can you tell us a little more about Captain Evert, how old he was, when he disappeared, where he's from, anything like that?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: He was from Cody, Wyoming. I think he was born in 1938. That seems to

be the -- but I'll be able to tell you specifically what day tomorrow, but that seems to be the time that he was actually born, in my opinion. He has two sons that are visiting Vietnam and will actually be out at the site tomorrow. They were able to go to the site today and basically, without any interference, walk around the site. It was very touching, very moving, and very emotional for the brothers to actually go to that site and talk to the soldiers. And I think it was part of their healing process, and I think that was important.

Q Sons or brothers?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: They are sons.

Q Is that very unusual, that relatives get to do that?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: This is one of the first times that this has actually happened, where relatives come out. We don't necessarily encourage it all the time, but this was a unique situation, and I think they came at the invitation of the President.

Q You mentioned one of the challenges, the acidic soil and how it tends to work by supposedly decomposing the human remains. Has it been your experience that oftentimes you find aircraft or military remains and less of the human remains because of this acidic soil?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: It varies from place to place in Vietnam. Some places, like a rice paddy, for instance, where the clay is very thick and there is not a lot of oxygen to get to it, we've actually found a large number of human remains at the particular site. And some other places, where there is acidic soil and the burial is shallow, for instance, you might have less remains there because they've deteriorated over time. So it varies from place to place and it's not something you can generalize and say the acidic soil breaks down all remains.

Q What's the soil like at this particular site?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: It is very thick. In actuality, they have to use that cheese cutter to actually cut the clay, put it in buckets and it has to actually be in the buckets with water to soften it before it can actually be sifted in those quarter-inch mesh screens.

Q If I understand your briefing correctly, you can only do the background research, finding witnesses, you know, the soft research -- from digging, when you come in the four or five times a year; is that right? You cannot have an ongoing people on the ground continually trying to gather background --

COLONEL CHILDRESS: We have a detachment here that has basically got six military and civilian individuals who are all the time gathering information. We have a gentleman by the name of Gary Flannagan who has been here in Vietnam working this mission since 1991 when the organization -- before the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting stood up, it was then called the U.S. MIA Office. And this office, this effort is one of the key bilateral issues, as you heard Mr. Jones and President Clinton say, that actually cemented the relations with the government.

So Mr. Flannagan is working on a full-time basis working on each case. So we have people back in Hawaii, here in Vietnam, with our Vietnamese counterparts that are always collecting leads, trying to find new witnesses. So it is an ongoing effort.

Q How many sites are currently under excavation, as this one is?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: There are six sites that are currently being excavated in Vietnam. One site was actually closed, and we moved to another site. So this is the seventh site. We started with six, we closed one, and we moved to another one, so this joint field activity we've had work on seven sites.

Q Why did you close the other one?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: The anthropologist apparently decided that it was actually a site that had been excavated before and for whatever reason, I'm not sure, I don't have all the details, but he apparently closed that particular site because he deemed that there was no longer remains or any other cause to continue. So, again, that is the anthropologist's recommendation, and our commander makes the final determination.

Q How optimistic are you in this particular case that you'll have a successful conclusion, be able to repatriate the remains?

COLONEL CHILDRESS: In Captain Evert's case?

Q Yes.

COLONEL CHILDRESS: What happens is if we do find remains out of the site, at the conclusion of the joint field activity we have what's called a joint forensic review, with a Vietnamese anthropologist, an American anthropologist sit down, examine the remains we find to determine if they're probably American. If they're deemed to be probably American, then they're repatriated in a ceremony similar to what you'll see tomorrow night.

And we have found one piece of remains so far at this particular site. And that is a very positive development, but again, we cannot say for sure until its gone through forensic analysis that that is remains of Captain Evert or even if it's human. Again, we don't even try to do that when we're out there. The Central Identification Laboratory actually does that forensic analysis. So they are some of the most qualified people to do it and they do a wonderful job.

Q Just to understand, you pull everything out of the site that you can and at the end you take it for this forensic examination? You don't take something that looks or may be a human remain and rush it off to the --

COLONEL CHILDRESS: That's correct. They are under secured control of anthropologists, the remains that we find. Also personal effects. If you find a watch or some other item that probably is from that individual, we'll keep that under control and actually take it to that joint forensic review at the conclusion of the joint field activity.

If there are no other questions, thank you very much. And I appreciate your time.

END 6:42 P.M. (L)