



National League of POW/MIA Families
FAMILY DELEGATION
3/16/07 - 4/1/07



League Organized Family Delegation

Four people. One mission.



Above: Karoni Forrester Gonzales, Jo Anne Shirley, Pam Cain and Sue Scott

The League organized family delegation was comprised of four very different people with different backgrounds. They are all from different states, work professionally in different industries and have different hobbies. These four have a few very important things in common - each have a loved one Missing in Action in Southeast Asia and each have a very deep commitment to this issue, to the fullest possible accounting and to the National League of POW/MIA Families.

The delegation consisted of two sisters and two daughters, two with loved ones missing in Vietnam and two with loved ones missing in Laos, two who had participated in past League delegations to Southeast Asia and two who had not. Participants were Jo Anne Shirley, Chairman of the Board and MIA sister, Pam Cain, Virginia State Coordinator, MIA daughter and Sue Scott, Board of Directors and MIA sister and Karoni Forrester Gonzales, Texas State Co-Coordinator and MIA daughter.

The goal of this trip was to continue the momentum created with trips to Vietnam by top US officials last summer, the League Delegation (Ann Mills Griffiths and Dick Childress) last fall, the visit to Vietnam by President Bush in November and the trip made in January by Ambassador Charles Ray.

This group met with members of the governments of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia as well as the US Ambassadors to all three countries. In no meeting with any foreign government official did any of the delegation participants raise questions about their missing loved one's case. Delegation members were approved by the Board for participation based on their level of participation in the League, attendance at League meetings and their willingness and ability to fund the trip themselves. The cost of the trip averaged \$10,000 per person.

Delegation Schedule

March 16/17 - Travel

March 18 - Thailand

March 19-21 - Vietnam

March 22 - 24 - Laos

March 25 - 27 - Cambodia

March 28 - Thailand

March 29 - Travel

March 29 - 31 - Hawaii

March 31 - April 1 - Travel

Vietnam



Left: Delegation members with Directors of the VNOSMP (Vietnam Office Seeking Missing Personnel). Left to right: Sue Scott, Nguyen Ba Hung, Jo Anne Shirley, Karoni Forrester Gonzales, Pam Cain, Dinh Cong Chinh

The delegation was greeted at the airport in Hanoi by members of JPAC Detachment 2 and taken to their hotel. The first day was spent receiving a briefing from Stony Beach, getting acquainted with the Detachment commander and purchasing items for the League's silent auction.

The following day was a whirlwind of meetings, beginning with the US Ambassador to Vietnam, moving on to foreign officials and ending with an extensive briefing by JPAC's Detachment 2 Commander, LTC Jim Saenz, USA. In all meetings, Jo Anne began by expressing that this delegation of family members was there to represent ALL POW/MIA families. Key talking points in all meetings in Vietnam included our LKA (Last Known Alive) and discrepancy cases, increased unilateral actions by Vietnam to provide relevant archives including Vietnam's wartime records related to Laos and Cambodia. The group emphasized to all they met with that the families are not going away. When meeting with the VNOSMP, specific points were raised about the use of US Navy ship to conduct underwater investigations and excavations. Jo Anne also presented VNOSMP Deputy Director Nguyen Ba Hung with petitions expressing ongoing support for this issue that contained over 3,000 signatures.

The third day in Vietnam, the delegation split into two parts. Pam and Sue stayed in Hanoi to call on the Russian Ambassador to Vietnam. They specifically asked for increased access to Russian archives and requested Presidential support from Russia for the US - Russia Joint Commission.

Jo Anne and Karoni left Hanoi early on that third day and flew to Hue, Vietnam where they jumped onto a helicopter heading north of Dong Hoi into Quang Binh Province to visit an excavation site. They were greeted warmly when they arrived at the site and taken to the US team's tent for a briefing on the excavation. Both delegation members were touched to see a picture of the missing American on a large board in the briefing area. The JPAC team members working this site know they are looking for a fallen comrade, not

just looking for remains and wreckage. The team members explained that a picture is displayed at ALL excavations. After walking through the excavation site and meeting all members of the US team, Jo Anne and Karoni were invited to have lunch on site with the Vietnamese team members working there. The Vietnamese were sincerely interested in getting to know the family members. The field visit was emotional, but most importantly, it allowed the delegation members to see first hand the hard work and dedication of the JPAC teams.



Left: Jo Anne Shirley and Karoni Forrester Gonzales board a helicopter on their way to visit an excavation site in Quang Binh province, Vietnam

Meeting Agenda in Vietnam

- US Ambassador
- JPAC - Detachment 2
- Stony Beach
- VNOSMP
- Chinese Ambassador to Vietnam
- Russian Ambassador to Vietnam
- Excavation site visit

Laos

Laos was a breath of fresh air on the journey. It is a beautiful place and the people are incredible. The delegation was met at the airport in Vientiane by members from JPAC and Embassy staff.

Meeting Agenda in Laos

- US Ambassador
- JPAC - Detachment 3
- Stony Beach
- Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Director General of Foreign Affairs
- Cambodian Ambassador to Laos
- Excavation site visit

Arriving early in the morning, the delegation was in for a long day of meetings starting with Ambassador Pat Haslach, moving on to JPAC and Stony Beach, then off to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Points raised in the meetings were similar to those raised in Hanoi with a focus on access to Lao wartime records and a repeated emphasis that LKA and discrepancy cases should be a top priority. When told by the Lao that LKA and discrepancy cases are the hardest to resolve, Jo Anne countered that the families believe these to be the easiest cases as it is known that their government, or the Vietnamese government, has information regarding these incidents.

The delegation finished their first day in Laos by attending a dinner at the Ambassador's residence. Also in attendance were US Embassy officials, Stony Beach and JPAC personnel.

Delegation members departed from each other on days two and three. Pam and Sue boarded a helicopter and headed to Xieng Khoang Province to visit three different excavation sites. Back in Vientiane, Jo Anne and Karoni met with the Cambodian Ambassador to Laos.

Right: Pam Cain and Sue Scott with US and Lao team at excavation site



Cambodia

Cambodia really touched the hearts of the delegation members. It is a country where all have experienced true loss and visitors cannot help but feel the sadness and grief at the destruction the Khmer Rouge left in its wake. It was amazing to the delegation members that people who had lost so much were so willing to spend time and energy ensuring the visit was a success. Special thanks is given to Sar Sithan with the Cambodian-American Community for Development. His assistance with this delegation in Cambodia was above and beyond what was expected.

Meeting Agenda in Cambodia

- US Ambassador
- JPAC - Detachment 1
- Cambodian POW/MIA Committee
- DC - CAM
- CACD

The high level Cambodian POW/MIA Committee was very eager to talk with the family delegation. Members emphasized to the group their strong commitment to the POW/MIA issue. They were very interested in learning how our organization is structured as they feel a similar organization could help families in Cambodia. The delegation stressed the sense of urgency in getting accountability for our missing loved ones and pressed the Committee to urge Vietnam for increased access to wartime records. As in the other two countries, LKA and discrepancy cases were raised as a priority.

Left: Delegation with Committee members



What we really thought....



Leading the League organized spring '07 delegation trip to SE Asia was quite an honor. Though this was my fourth League delegation trip, this opportunity was a very different experience for me. I felt great pressure early on as I was the spokes-person during our meetings, though it was lightened due to my having met some of the foreign officials before, and by the support of the three delegation members. Each member of this team sacrificed their time at work, family time, and financially to represent every American Missing and Unaccounted for and to represent every family who waits for closure. Our hours were long, intense and exhausting. Our experiences were fun, exciting and challenging. Our mission was rewarding and well worth the effort, time and money invested.

We could not have made this trip without coordination by Ann Mills Griffiths and JPAC. I am grateful to our American personnel and friends in each country who welcomed us, grateful to the SE Asian officials who met with us and listened, and to those who supported my participation in this delegation through their prayers and donations. I truly believe in my heart that this trip had an impact on the future success of accountability and I was proud of this group that represented each of our Missing loved ones.

- Jo Anne Shirley

It was such an honor and privilege to represent all of you as part of the League organized Family Delegation to Southeast Asia. I was humbled by all those we saw working on our behalf - their commitment and their sacrifices. In Vietnam and Laos I appreciated the opportunity to thank the teams in the field and the detachments. In all of the countries, it was reassuring to see the US teams working in concert, including the Ambassadors, the Defense Attaché Offices, Stony Beach and JPAC. I am grateful for the chance to communicate appreciation for what has been accomplished and to reinforce with the governments of each country the need to keep commitments made to earlier League and USG delegations. In Cambodia, it was inspiring to see Sar Sithran and Youk Chhang, who have suffered such personal tragedies and yet risk everything to help their countrymen. Their passion is amazing and is making a huge impact. Last, I want to thank Ann Mills Griffiths whose creativity, knowledge, insight and tireless dedication maximized every opportunity for a positive impact from this trip - including the opportunities to meet with the Russians and the Chinese during our time in Vietnam.



- Sue Scott



Traveling as part of this family delegation was truly a journey for me, on many levels, and one that has left a permanent imprint. I will cherish these experiences in addition to coming away with a heightened sense of what our military and government personnel are doing in SE Asia on behalf of the POW/MIA issue. The trip renewed my resolve to work on behalf of my dad - and all of our missing - and definitely made me re-prioritize what's important in my life. I also came away with an even deeper respect and gratitude for those who work in SE Asia. I only hope our leaders and policy-makers in D.C., truly understand the worth and value of this mission, the personnel assigned to carry it out, and the urgent need for these efforts to continue. I'm grateful to so many who made this trip happen for me, including the League Executive Director and JPAC for arranging the trip; my mother, who helped back me financially and is always there for me emotionally; and my daughter, who is a steady source of encouragement and support!

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- Pam Cain

Taking this trip was an incredible opportunity and truly life changing for me. Meeting the JPAC team members who sacrifice on many levels to help find our missing family members made quite an impact on me. From the Detachment personnel to the anthropologists and teams in the field - I was overwhelmed with gratitude. Having the opportunity to meet with foreign officials, and look them in the eye as we said "The families are not going away" was empowering. There is no doubt that they left our meetings knowing that the families will continue to push for increased cooperation and access to information that we know the foreign governments have. I am also thankful for the relationships built during this journey. We met so many fantastic people. Meeting many children in poor villages in Cambodia gave me a sense of purpose as well - we can do so much to help them. I am filled with appreciation for Ann and JPAC staff who organized our trip. I will cherish the memories and lessons learned.

- Karoni Forrester Gonzales

