

# The Last Fifteen Years of JPAC in Vietnam



**“Never before in the history of mankind has any nation done what we are doing. The effort of JTF-FA to honor the U.S. commitment to our unaccounted-for comrades, their families, and the nation is unprecedented.”**

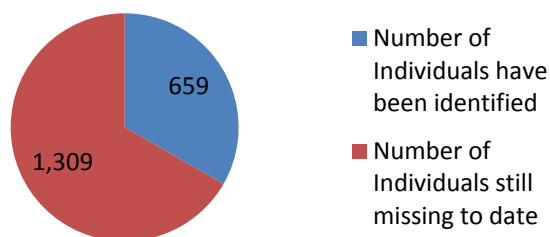
**- U.S. Ambassador Peter Peterson -**

*659 individuals have been identified, and 1,309 Americans remain unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War. Since 1991, JPAC has held 113 repatriation ceremonies in Vietnam.*

By the time of the establishment of U.S.-Vietnam relations and the establishment of the American Embassy in Hanoi, the Joint POW-MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), or more correctly, its predecessor the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (JTF-FA), had already been in Hanoi for a number of years. **Based on the need to account for missing Americans from the Vietnam War, in January 1992 the U.S. government established JTF-FA, whose task was to systematically seek out information related to the more than 2,000 Americans missing in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and China.** JTF-FA’s Det 2 in Hanoi, which was actually established in late 1991, was the only American government agency in Vietnam at that time.

The MIA Office’s first official location<sup>1</sup> was at 8 Doc Ngu Street. The facility was reportedly a former Cuban Embassy compound with a high surrounding wall and separate office and living quarters. In the years from 1992 until 2003, most permanent Det 2 personnel lived in quarters at the office, which was unofficially dubbed “the Ranch.” The Ranch was spacious, with basketball and volleyball courts, and parking for the detachment’s vehicle fleet. During the early years of Det 2, accounting operations in Vietnam accelerated from four major search and recovery missions conducted in 1992, followed by six missions each in 1993 and 1994. **By the end of 1994, cooperative U.S.-Vietnam efforts had resulted in more than 150 instances of remains being repatriated from excavation sites.**<sup>2</sup> Cooperation by Vietnam on the POW/MIA issue was increasing.

## JPAC has held 113 Repatriation Ceremonies since 1991



<sup>1</sup> The first location of the U.S. MIA Office in Hanoi under JTF-FA’s predecessor, the Joint Casualty Resolution Center (JCRC) was located at 60 Nguyen Du Street.

<sup>2</sup> This number is based on historical JTF-FA Public Affairs Office data, and represents individual instances of remains repatriated, not identified Americans. Although it was assumed based on analysis and circumstantial evidence that the remains were those of the missing Americans being sought, the identities were not official until positively confirmed by the CILHI.

In January 1994, the PACOM Commander, Admiral Charles Larson, made a historic trip to Hanoi, the highest ranking U.S. military official to visit Vietnam since its establishment. In his appraisal, improved trade relations with Vietnam would help the POW/MIA accounting effort. Members of Congress agreed with Admiral Larson's assessment and with broad bipartisan support, President Clinton announced the lifting of the trade embargo against Vietnam in February 1994, and the normalization of diplomatic relations with the Vietnam in June 1995. In August, Secretary of State Warren Christopher presided over the opening of the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi. Military personnel from JTF-FA composed the detail that raised the American flag over 7 Lang Ha for the first time.

Meanwhile, JTF-FA operations in Vietnam continued on a large scale, with up to five major search missions each year between 1995 and 2001. **Cooperation between the U.S. teams and their Vietnamese government counterparts, the Vietnam Office for Seeking Missing Persons (VNOSMP), developed and solidified into a mature relationship.** The progress made by JTF-FA during these years was impressive, and a testament to America's resolve to bring home its fallen.

**It was also during the late 1990s and early 2000s that those undertaking the accounting effort began to realize the monumental difficulty and danger of their task.** On April 7th, 2001, while preparing sites for the 65th scheduled search mission in Vietnam, the worst possible scenario occurred. **An Mi-17, carrying seven JTF-FA, U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii (CILHI), and augmented U.S. personnel, crashed in the hilly coastal terrain of the central region, killing everyone onboard.** The detachment's commander, his replacement, the deputy commander, the operations NCO, a linguist/investigator, a mortuary affairs specialist, and a medic all perished. Nine Vietnamese government officials and aircrew also died in the crash. After a 121 day hiatus, during which JTF-FA, CILHI, and PACOM undertook a stringent review of operating procedures and implemented additional risk mitigation measures, the accounting mission in Vietnam continued at its previous pace, with the 66th scheduled search mission occurring in July 2001.

In 2002, the Department of Defense decided that accounting efforts for all past conflicts would be best served by combining JTF-FA and CILHI into a single, cohesive organization. Thus, on October 1st, 2003, JPAC was established and headquartered on Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii. The laboratory's infrastructure remained intact, and the specialized capabilities of the former JTF-FA meshed with the expertise of the laboratory under a single chain of command.

Det 2 events since the establishment of JPAC have included moving the office to its current location at Number 53 Tran Phu Street, in Hanoi's diplomatic zone, near the SRV Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **From this location, JPAC currently commands four major search missions a year, which take place in all areas of Vietnam.** Significantly, in July 2009, the USNS Heezen joined the search for missing aircrews off the coast of Vietnam, coordinating with JPAC as a new initiative in the array of efforts JPAC utilizes to account for America's missing from the war. **Those efforts continue to be successful, with the 98th scheduled search mission, in March 2010, resulting in the repatriation of seven sets of remains believed to be American, the largest number in recent history.**

JPAC's mission is a vital one to the United States and is an important part of the bilateral U.S.-Vietnam relationship. Det 2 continues to work with the U.S. Embassy as an honorary country team member to build that relationship and to bring America's fallen home.