

Coalition of Families of Korean and Cold War POW/MIAs

2010 Government Annual Briefing

(Overview)

The 2010 government annual briefing stormed in and out with waves of insights, information, critique and camaraderie. None of the missing men came home, but their stories were shared, their families met, and stronger directions toward finding them were set in motion.

The hottest issue was resuming search and recovery operations into North Korea (DPRK).

These Joint Field Activities (JFAs) have been boycotted by the U.S since 2005, despite invitations by North Korea to return. Earlier this year, the U.S. was advised by the DPRK that remains of fallen American servicemen were being exposed to the elements during routine agricultural operations. A photograph of dogtags belonging to one missing man, Philip Ackley, was shared as evidence. The U.S. has still not responded with a yes or no; is still withholding search teams from the North. The exposed remains are in danger of being washed away. Interviews with aging North Korean eyewitnesses are not being taken. If our teams don't return soon, vital information about the missing men will be lost forever.

The Coalition proposed an alternate approach: Outsource the eyewitness interviews to a third party, neutral nation, having good relations with both the U.S. and North Korea. The plan drew strong family support, was discussed at great lengths with the panel, and was acknowledged by state department representatives as a direction to consider. While there are other factors, outsourcing the interviews will circumvent security concerns cited by the U.S. as reasons for boycotting the JFAs.

A side message stood out in the discussion: ***The family members want government officials to think out-of-the-box when issues get stuck and need new direction.***

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Other issues discussed and information learned:

* ***Live Sightings*** – The questions were raised, and the government continues to assert that there is no *credible* evidence that American's are still being held in any of the former Korean/Cold War nations.

* ***Circumstantial evidence*** – A family member raised a strong argument that families need to be informed when vital information is learned, not just about their own missing man's case, but when new reports arise in related cases.

* ***Joint Commission Support Directorate (JCSD)*** – The new Russian co-chair has been appointed but not officially announced. Research into old Soviet archives may resume full scale.

* ***Korean War Working Group (JCSD)***- During the Korean War, the Soviet Union had advisors at every level of military in *both* the Chinese and North Korean armies. This was in addition to anti-aircraft batteries and the 64th Air Fighter Group. Reports from these advisors went to Moscow. The best records went to the general staff of the Soviet army.

* ***Cold War Working Group (JCSD)*** –Naval archives housed in Gavina, Russia, are a valued source of information.

* ***Moo Hak School POWs*** – *If a name was on the blackboard, the man is considered POW and the families have been told.* That's the word. Please let us know if anyone has been informed.

* ***Wartime Aerial Photos*** – Canisters of Korean War reconnaissance photographs have been found and turned over to DPMO for analysis.

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* **Air Losses** – Chinese archivists have been given all air loss cases. There are 300 air loss cases over water.

* **Research** – DPMO research analysts will meet with Chinese archivists this month.

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Visiting Government Officials included:

* **Michele Flournoy** - Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (Featured speaker)

* **David F. Helvey** – Principal Director for East Asia, Department of Defense

* **Dan Larsen** – Deputy Director, Office of Korean Affairs, Department of State

* **Aloysius O'Neill** – Foreign Affairs Officer, Office of Korean Affairs, Department of State

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Family members' stories were as provocative as the mysteries surrounding the missing men. These histories show the life changing impact missing a loved one to war can bring.

* A brother marries his sister-in-law only to learn that their missing loved one might be alive.

* A woman, adopted at birth, learns later in life that her birth father is missing in action during the Korean War, then finds and bonds with his family.

* A young girl grows up enamored by the photograph of a soldier mounted on the wall, only to be told at an older age that it was her father, missing in action in Korea.

* Two families of missing flyers from the same crew came together for the first time.

Getting to know these stories is an honor.

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The hotel was comfortable, with shades of luxury. The staff was friendly and helpful. Meals were good but expensive. The government's representatives were accessible and knowledgeable, although one wishes that the frankness prevailing by the end of the briefing was prevalent throughout the meeting. Better still, that it reached into the highest offices of the administration.

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In the end, no missing men came home. Hopefully we moved closer to that end. Whether we have heard the presentations many times before or are there for the first time, government briefings are a tool in that quest. By attending, the government knows we care; knows we are paying attention and must respond to our ideas. The missing men's legacy is a responsibility for all of us left in charge. It feels good to use that tool.

Please join the Coalition's *Facebook* page. It is another tool.