

# CRS Issue Brief for Congress

---

Received through the CRS Web

## **POWs and MIAs: Status and Accounting Issues**

**Updated May 12, 2003**

Robert L. Goldich  
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

# **CONTENTS**

SUMMARY

MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Areas of Congressional Interest

Definition of Terms

Vietnam War POWs and MIAs

Vietnam POW/MIAs: U.S. Government Policy and Organization

U.S.-Vietnamese Interaction on POW/MIA Issues: Recent Developments and Issues

U.S. Policy and the Remains Issue

Congress and the POW/MIA Issue, 1993-2003 (FY1994-FY2004)

Vietnam POW/MIAs: Were Americans Left Behind? Are Any Still Alive?

The “Coverup” Issue

Have Americans Remained in Indochina Voluntarily?

Are the Vietnamese, Laotians, or Cambodians Still Holding the Remains of Dead Americans?

Korean War POWs/MIAs

POWs and MIAs from Cold War Incidents

Post-Cold War POW/MIAs

The Persian Gulf War of 1991 (Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm)

The Speicher Case

Possible Consequences of the Speicher Case

The 2003 Iraq War: POW/MIA Issues

POW/MIAs in Other Post-Cold War U.S. Military Operations

World War II POWs and MIAs: Soviet Imprisonment of U.S. POWs Liberated from the Germans

FOR ADDITIONAL READING

CRS Products

## POWs and MIAs: Status and Accounting Issues

### SUMMARY

There has been great controversy about U.S. prisoners of war (POWs) and those missing in action (MIAs) during the Cold War. While few people familiar with the issue feel that any Americans are still being held against their will in the remaining Communist countries, more feel that some may have been so held in the past in the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, or North Vietnam. Similarly, few believe there was a “conspiracy” to cover up live POWs, but few would disagree with the statement that there was, at least during the 1970s and 1980s, U.S. government mismanagement of the issue.

Normalization of relations with Vietnam exacerbated this longstanding debate. Normalization’s supporters contend that Vietnamese cooperation on the POW/MIA issue has greatly increased. Opponents argue that cooperation has in fact been much less than supporters say, and that the Vietnamese can only be induced to cooperate by firmness rather than conciliation. Those who believe Americans are now held, or were after the war ended, feel that even if no specific report of live Americans has thus far met rigorous proofs, the mass of information about live Americans is compelling. Those who doubt live Americans are still held, or were after the war ended, argue that despite vast efforts, only one live American military prisoner remained in Indochina after the war (a defector who returned in 1979). The U.S. government says

the possibility of Americans still being held in Indochina cannot be ruled out. Some say Americans may have been kept by the Vietnamese after the war but killed later. Increased U.S. access to Vietnam has not yet led to a large reduction *en masse* in the number of Americans still listed as unaccounted for, although this may be due to some U.S. policies as well as Vietnamese non-cooperation.

There is considerable evidence that prisoners from the end of World War II, the Korean War, and “Cold War shootdowns” of U.S. military aircraft may have been taken to the USSR and not returned. The evidence about POWs from Vietnam being taken to the Soviet Union is more questionable. There is also considerable evidence that Navy pilot Scott Speicher, shot down on the first night of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, and until recently listed as “killed in action” rather than “missing in action,” was almost certainly captured by the Iraqis. Evidence of his fate has not yet been discovered by U.S. and British forces in Iraq. All eight American soldiers captured by the Iraqis during the war that began March 19, 2003, and in which most combat action had ended by mid-April, have been returned to U.S. control; all others ever listed as MIA have been redesignated as killed in action due to recovery of their remains.

## **MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

On April 28, 2003, the status of the only remaining American soldier still listed as missing in action in the Iraq War was changed to killed in action, due to identification of his remains. All Americans known to have been captured in the Iraq War have now been returned to U.S. control; the remains of all Americans at one time listed as MIA have been positively identified.

## **BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS**

### **Areas of Congressional Interest**

This issue brief summarizes numbers of U.S. POWs and MIAs lost during the Vietnam War (1961-1975) and the Korean War (1950-1953), compares these losses to other 20th century American wars, and describes the POW/MIA investigation and policy process. It discusses whether some POWs from these wars were not returned to U.S. control when the wars ended, and whether some may still be alive. Further, it discusses whether Americans were captured by Communist countries during Cold War incidents, or after being liberated from German POW camps at the end of World War II, and whether any such Americans are still alive. It also summarizes POW/MIA matters and controversies related to post-Cold War U.S. military operations, particularly the 1991 Persian Gulf War and the Iraq war that began on March 19, 2003, and in which “major combat action” had ended by mid-April. Finally, the issue brief describes legislation and congressional oversight concerning the POW/MIA issue. For information on other aspects of U.S.-Vietnam relations, and on the current controversy over the attempt by some American former POWs held by the Japanese during World War II to obtain compensation from Japanese corporations, see the *For Additional Reading* section at the end of this issue brief.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are frequently encountered in analyses of the POW/MIA issue:

- **POW** (Prisoner Of War): Persons known to be, or to have been, held by the enemy as a live prisoner or last seen under enemy control.
- **MIA** (Missing In Action): Persons removed from control of U.S. forces due to enemy action, but not known to either be a prisoner of war or dead.
- **KIA-BNR** (Killed In Action-Body Not Recovered): Persons known to have been killed in action, but body or remains not recovered by U.S. forces — i.e., an aircraft exploding in midair or crashing; or a body lost at sea.
- **PFOD** (Presumptive Finding Of Death): An administrative finding by the appropriate military service Secretary, after statutory review procedures, that there is no current evidence to indicate that a person previously listed as MIA or POW could still be alive.
- **Unaccounted For**: An all-inclusive term — not a legal status — used to indicate Americans initially listed as POW, MIA, KIA-BNR, or PFOD, but about whom no further information is yet known.

Names are shifted, usually from the most uncertain status, MIA, to more certain categories, during and after hostilities, based on new information, or, in the case of a PFOD, lack of new information over time that indicates an individual is still living.

## U.S. POWs and MIAs in 20th Century Wars: Statistics

Statistics on U.S. POWs and MIAs in Vietnam and past wars are often mutually irreconcilable. The procedures and terminology used for classifying what we would now refer to as POW, MIA, KIA-BNR, and PFOD were different — or did not exist — for previous wars. However, data in the following tables provide a basis for some generalizations. It should be noted that the data in both tables, and that in Table 3, also below, are not necessarily compatible in detail; such statistical comparisons always include mutually irreconcilable figures that preclude precise interchangeability of data.

**Table 1. U.S. POWs, World War I (1917-1918) through the Iraq War (2003)**

	Total	WWI 1917- 1918	WWII 1941- 1945	Korea 1950- 1953	Vietnam 1961 -1973	Persian Gulf 1991	Somalia 1992- 1994	Bosnia 1995-	Kosovo 1999-	Afghan- istan 2001-	Iraq 2003
Captured & Interned)	142,233	4,120	130,201	7,140	725	23	1	0	3	0	8
Returned to U.S. Military Control	125,208	3,973	116,129	4,418	661	23	1	0	3	0	8
Refused Repatriation	21	0	0	21	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Died while POW	17,004	147	14,072	2,701	64	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Sources:** All data except for Iraq from Stenger, Charles A., Ph.D. *American Prisoners of War in WWI, WWII, Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan: Statistical Data Concerning Numbers Captured, Repatriated, and Still Alive as of January 1, 2003*. Prepared for the DVA [Department of Veterans Affairs] Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War. Mental Health Strategic Care Group, VHA [Veterans Health Administration], [by] the American Ex-Prisoners of War Association. Iraq data obtained from DOD documents and press releases.

**Table 2. Americans Unaccounted For, World War I through the Korean War**

<b>World War I (1917-18) <sup>a</sup></b>	
Unidentified remains	1,648
<b>World War II (1941-45) <sup>b</sup></b>	
Remains not recovered	78,794 <sup>c</sup>
<b>Korean War (1950-53) <sup>d</sup></b>	
PFOD	4,735
KIA-BNR	1,107
MIA	24 <sup>e</sup>
<b>Total Korean War MIA</b>	<b>5,866</b>
<b>Total Korean War Unaccounted For</b>	<b>f</b>

- a. Bruce Callender, “The History of Arlington’s Silent Soldiers.” *Air Force Times*, June 19, 1984: 23.
- b. Source: U.S. Congress, House, Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia. *Americans Missing in Southeast Asia, Final Report*, December 13, 1976. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1976 (94th Congress, 2nd session. H.Rept. 94-1764): 73-74.
- c. An estimated 9,000-17,000 were subject to the equivalent of a PFOD. See *ibid*: 74.
- d. *Ibid*: 75.
- e. Still carried as MIA as of Sept. 30, 1954; known to be in Chinese prisons; all later either released alive or subject to a PFOD.
- f. Current DOD statistic; breakdown not available and does not correlate with any other statistics in **Tables 1 and 2**. As stated above (note c, **Table 1**), Korean War POW/MIA statistics are a mass of inconsistencies. A Rand Corp. study prepared for DOD itemizes Korean War unaccounted-for Americans somewhat differently, but along lines that are broadly similar to those stated here: 8,140 KIA-BNR, of which the deaths of 5,945 were witnessed or otherwise well-documented, leaving 2,195 whose death cannot be explicitly established, although many were undoubtedly killed. Cole, Paul M. *POW/MIA Issues: Volume I, The Korean War*. Report no. MR-351/1-USDP. Santa Monica, CA, National Defense Research Institute, The Rand Corporation, 1994: xv-xvi.

## Vietnam War POWs and MIAs

North Vietnamese and Viet Cong authorities returned 591 POWs to U.S. control within the specified 2-month period after the signing of the Vietnam War peace treaty on January 27, 1973. 67 U.S. civilians, not part of the official list of Americans unaccounted for, were trapped or stayed voluntarily after South Vietnam fell in April 1975. All were released by late 1976. Since 1976, some Americans have been imprisoned in Vietnam (almost all for civilian offenses) and eventually released. Most Americans now in Vietnamese prisons for criminal offenses (some of which would be characterized as “political” crimes by the Vietnamese authorities) are naturalized Americans of Vietnamese birth or ancestry. Since 1973, only one U.S. military member has returned alive from Vietnam. Marine Corps PFC Robert Garwood was listed as a POW by U.S. authorities — but never by the Vietnamese — in 1965 and returned voluntarily to the U.S. in 1979. He was convicted of collaboration with the enemy, but his light sentence included no prison term.

After the return of the 591 POWs, 2,583 Americans were unaccounted for (not counting civilians trapped in Vietnam after the South fell, or who later visited Vietnam). Identified remains of 681 Americans have been returned from Vietnam (487), Laos (167), Cambodia (25), and China (2) since the war ended on January 27, 1973. Of the 1,902 still listed as unaccounted for, DOD is still actively seeking to recover the remains of 1,243. DOD believes that, based on currently available information and its analysis, it will be unable to ever recover the remains of the other 659. Examples of the latter would include the 468 men lost over water, as stated in the note to **Table 3**, which summarizes data on Americans currently unaccounted for in Southeast Asia. Another example would be those crewmen of aircraft that, at the time, were observed by both Vietnamese and Americans to have exploded without any sign of the crew ejecting; and similar situations.

**Table 3. Americans Unaccounted for in Southeast Asia**  
(as of March 17, 2003)

Service	Country of Loss					Total
	N. Viet.	S. Viet.	Laos	Cambodia	China	
Army	9	462	99	26	0	596
Navy	269	90	28	1	8	396
Marine Corps	22	194	16	8	0	240
Air Force	208	167	240	18	0	633
Coast Guard	0	1	0	0	0	1
Civilians	1	20	10	5	0	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>509</b>	<b>934</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1,902</b>

**Source:** Department of Defense. All U.S. servicemembers are currently listed by DOD as KIA-BNR or, if formerly listed as a POW or MIA, a PFOD has been made. Until 1994, one POW, a pilot whose capture and POW status were verified, remained listed as a POW for symbolic reasons. His status was changed to KIA-BNR at the request of his family. The total of 1,900 personnel includes 468 lost at sea or over water.

**Vietnam POW/MIAs: U.S. Government Policy and Organization.** Since 1982, the official U.S. position regarding live Americans in Indochina has been as follows: “Although we have thus far been unable to prove that Americans are still being held against their will, the information available to us precludes ruling out that possibility. Actions to investigate live-sighting reports receive and will continue to receive necessary priority and resources based on the assumption that at least some Americans are still held captive. Should any report prove true, we will take appropriate action to ensure the return of those involved.”

The Director of the DOD Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), who also serves as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs (DASD POW/MIA), provides overall direction and control of DOD POW/MIA matters, both for previous conflicts and the formulation of policies and procedures for future circumstances in which U.S. military personnel could become POWs or MIA. Indochina activities are supervised by DOD’s Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (JTF-FA), headquartered in Hawaii, which maintains POW/MIA files, conducts research and interviews in Indochina and elsewhere in Asia with refugees and others, and staffs U.S. POW/MIA operations in Indochina. The U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii (CIL-HI) identifies returned remains from around the world. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) also has its own POW/MIA-related intelligence organization, established totally separate from the DPMO at congressional direction.

POW/MIA information comes from refugees and other human contacts and assets, physical evidence (such as “dog tags” worn by U.S. military personnel, photographs, and aircraft debris), communications intelligence and aerial reconnaissance, and open sources. Between the fall of South Vietnam in April 1975 and March 17, 2003, according to DOD, 22,107 reports of all kinds regarding the POW/MIA issue have been acquired by the U.S. government about alleged live Americans in Indochina, including 1,929 alleged first-hand sightings. Of the 1,929, fully 1,903 (98.65%) have, according to DPMO, been resolved. More specifically, 68.74% (1,326) correlate with persons since accounted for (i.e., returned

live or known dead); another 27.58% (532) have been determined to be fabrications; and 2.33% (45) correlate to wartime sightings of Americans. The remaining 26, or 1.35%, involve sightings of Americans in either a captive (22) or non-captive (4) environment, and “represent the focus of DPMO analytical and collection efforts.” Of the 26, 14 were reported to have occurred prior to 1976; one between 1976 and 1980; one between 1986 and 1990; three between 1991 and 1995, and the remaining seven, perhaps surprisingly, as recently as sometime during the period 2001-present.

**U.S.-Vietnamese Interaction on POW/MIA Issues: Recent Developments and Issues.** Since 1991, the U.S. has gained substantial access to aircraft crash sites, Vietnamese records, and Vietnamese civilians, and has established a substantial permanent presence of military and civilian personnel. Most recently, the Vietnamese have agreed to expand access to their government archives with materials related to the issue, and to interview senior Vietnamese military leaders from the war for possible relevant data. This increased access over the past decade, however, has not yet led to large numbers of Americans being removed *en masse* from the rolls of 1,902 people who are unaccounted for (between September 3, 1991 and March 17, 2003, the total number dropped by 369—from 2,271 to 1,902—or about 32 per year). Much of the material has turned out to be redundant, already in U.S. hands, or pertaining to resolved cases; and there continues to be evidence that the Vietnamese retain some unreleased data. Normalization has exacerbated the debate over Vietnamese cooperation on the issue.

Proponents of normalization contend that Vietnamese cooperation on the POW/MIA issue has been greatly enhanced by normalization; opponents argue that cooperation has in fact been much less than supporters say, and that the Vietnamese can only be induced to cooperate by firmness rather than conciliation. For example, they note that a “Vietnamese Government disinformation program has been associated with recent reporting on missing Americans. Those reports all pertain to the alleged recovery of remains and identifying data (i.e., dog tags) by Vietnamese citizens.” [Cited in recent editions of the *Vietnam-Era Unaccounted For Statistical Report of the DPMO*, located at the DPMO web site.] If, in the midst of alleged cooperation with the United States on POW/MIA matters, the Vietnamese government is engaging in such tactics, some argue, how can it be said that they are truly forthcoming on the issue? Further relevant documents, studies, and analyses are available online at the DPMO web site [<http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo>].

Others suggest that the DPMO and the Administration are equating activity with results and resource inputs with true outputs in terms of the fate of unaccounted-for Americans. They claim that the true monetary costs of all U.S. military and diplomatic activities associated with DPMO operations relevant to post-1945 POW/MIAs is much higher than the stated DPMO outlays of approximately \$15 million yearly, perhaps in the \$50-100 million range. They allege that Vietnam and North Korea charge extraordinarily high fees for providing support to DPMO/JTF-FA operations – logistical support, aviation costs, food and lodging, and the like – and that the services received are by no means as lavish as the bills presented indicate.

**U.S. Policy and the Remains Issue.** As noted above, DPMO believes that of the 1,900 Americans listed as unaccounted for as of March 11, 2003, 659 are definitely dead, and that further investigation could result in no more evidence or remains being found. Such cases include those resulted from aircraft explosions, drowning, or simple disappearance.



Some believe that the Vietnamese have documentary evidence about the fate of at least some of them. It appears that concerns over public reaction, more than disagreements on the part of American analysts that the individuals concerned really are dead, are holding up the decision to close these cases. The question may be as follows: if evidence other than remains is not conclusive, what use is it, if no remains are available?

### **Congress and the POW/MIA Issue, 1993-2003 (FY1994-FY2004).**

**1993-2001 (FY1994-FY2002) Congressional Action.** From 1993 through 1997 (FY1994-FY1998 legislation), the annual defense authorization bill included POW/MIA-related sections with considerable policy significance and, frequently, political controversy. However, during 1998-2001 (FY1999-FY2002 legislation), Congress arguably “took a breather” on POW/MIA matters. None of the National Defense Authorization or Intelligence Authorization Acts of the latter period contained significant POW/MIA-related provisions or report language with broad policy implications.

**2002 (FY2003) Congressional Action.** The FY2003 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 107-314, December 2, 2002; 116 Stat. 2458), included two provisions related to POW/MIA matters. Section 551 prohibited DOD from reducing personnel or budget levels of the DPMO (this appears to have resulted from planned reductions of at least 15% in the size of the DPMO staff as part of a general effort to reduce headquarters staffs). Section 583 required the Secretary of Defense to submit a comprehensive report on the Speicher case (see below, “A Persian Gulf War POW/MIA Case”) to Congress within 60 days after the bill became law.

**2003 (FY2004) Congressional Action.** None yet in the first session of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress.

### **Vietnam POW/MIAs: Were Americans Left Behind? Are Any Still Alive?**

Those who believe Americans are still held, or were held after the war ended, feel that even if no specific report has thus far been proved, the numbers unaccounted for, and the cumulative mass of information about live Americans is compelling. Those who doubt Americans are still held, or were when the war ended, argue that despite numerous reports, exhaustive interrogations, and formidable technical means used by U.S. intelligence agencies, no report of an unaccounted-for live American (with the exception of Garwood) has been validated as to who, when, and where the individual is or was. They believe that much of the “evidence” cited relates to already accounted-for Americans, wishful thinking, or fabrication.

For many years, a huge gulf separated those who argued about whether live Americans were kept behind in Vietnam after the end of the war in 1973. Those who argued live Americans were, or had been, kept in Indochina after the war concentrated on factors including, but not limited to, the following: (1) the excellent physical condition of the mostly officer aircrew taken prisoner; (2) the habit of Communist governments holding prisoners for many years, up to several decades; (3) the apparent unwillingness of the Vietnamese to release records they almost certainly have; and (4) the fact that many Americans were shot down over Laos but few came home. Those who argued it was unlikely that live Americans were still in Indochina noted the following factors: (1) the very high cumulative death rates due to the ordeals of shootdown, poor medical care from the enemy, and systematic

Vietnamese Communist abuse and torture; (2) the apparent lack of use, by Vietnam, of Americans who could have been held as “negotiating chips”; and (3) the fact that, 42 years after American military personnel were first committed to Vietnam, 30 years after U.S. forces left the country, and roughly 15 years after Vietnam started becoming a much more open society, what has become a large foreign, including a substantial American, presence in Vietnam has not uncovered any evidence of any live Americans held after the end of the war. (Except, as noted above, for Garwood.)

Most U.S. government analysts, many of whom have worked on the issue for several decades and have access to the huge amounts of information that the intelligence community and other agencies have amassed on POW/MIA matters, have come to believe that it is extremely unlikely that the North Vietnamese kept U.S. prisoners after the end of the war, or transferred any to the USSR. They fully appreciate the repressive nature of totalitarian Communist regimes — that the Vietnamese Communists *could* have opted to keep some Americans. They just feel that their examination of the evidence indicates that they did not.

Many analysts have posited that a lack of will to continue investigating the issue in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, on the part of both DOD and political leadership in successive Administrations in the 1970s, contributed to what observers have called “a mindset to debunk” reports of live Americans as well as a desire on the part of successive Administrations to wash their hands of the issue. This attitude may have contributed to the less vigorous effort on the issue that characterized not only the Nixon and Ford Administrations but that of President Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) as well. The Carter Administration’s unwillingness to elevate the issue to a higher profile, some have argued, also resulted from President Carter and members of his Administration having been opposed to the Vietnam War in the first place and being desirous of expediting the normalization of relations with Vietnam until that country invaded Cambodia in late 1978. These problems have been held responsible by many for the lack of attention, and the loss of fresher information, regarding POW/MIAs in the 1970s.

Significantly, the progressively increasing penetration of Vietnam by a large American official presence (JTF-FA and full diplomatic representation), as well as commercial interests, American tourists, and many Europeans, has failed to disclose any indications that American POWs were kept behind in the early 1970s, let alone are still being held. It would seem unlikely that a secret of such magnitude could have continued to be concealed throughout the 1990s and into this decade, as thousands of Americans have visited Vietnam and some have taken up extended residence there.

**The “Coverup” Issue.** Some say the U.S. government has engaged in a “coverup” of evidence about live Americans still being held in Indochina; they attach greater credence to some sources than does the government, and suggest that the criteria set by the government for validating reports of live Americans are unreasonably, and perhaps deliberately, high. The government responds by stating that such assertions are based on data that is inaccurate or fraudulent. It also asserts that numerous investigations have cleared DIA of coverup charges and that the ability to maintain a coverup strains credulity in an era of press leaks and openness. Since 1982, it has been U.S. policy to provide intelligence to families of unaccounted-for Americans that pertains or may pertain to their missing men.

**Have Americans Remained in Indochina Voluntarily?** Some Americans stayed in Indochina voluntarily, Garwood being the best known. Another, Army PFC McKinley Nolan, defected to the Viet Cong in 1967 and was killed by the Khmer Rouge (Cambodian Communists) in 1975 or 1976. Ideology, collaboration with the enemy and a fear of punishment upon return to the U.S., personal problems, a home, a local wife and children, “brainwashing” by captors — or a combination of these factors — all could have played a role in other Americans remaining in Indochina voluntarily. The Vietnamese have always left room for such by denying Americans are living in areas “under their control.” In addition, the U.S. government policy cited above on live Americans is careful to refer to “Americans ... still being held against their will.”

**Are the Vietnamese, Laotians, or Cambodians Still Holding the Remains of Dead Americans?** Few question the proposition that for many years the Vietnamese had a stockpile from which they released remains as they saw fit. The DPMO believes that this stockpile may have been exhausted by August 1990; after that month, none of the returned remains identified as Americans had the chemical characteristics that would indicate prolonged storage. Whether the Vietnamese hold other remains that, for whatever reason, they have not returned is not known. In general, while the intelligence community is convinced that a stockpile did exist, there is no consensus on more specific characteristics of this stockpile. Vietnamese officials say they have provided detailed records to the U.S. that we have not released. Others suggest the Vietnamese have not released remains that would indicate mistreatment of POWs and/or that some were alive when the war ended but died in Vietnamese custody thereafter (although such mistreatment is well known).

The large number of Americans lost in or over Laos, the number of known discrepancy cases, and the few Americans returned who had been captured in Laos suggest that the Laotians know more about the fate of unaccounted-for Americans than they have yet stated. On the other hand, most Lao governments, Communist or not, have exercised little control over large parts of their country, due to Vietnamese occupation and their own lack of resources. This suggests the Laotians may not have the ability to provide many answers about missing Americans, and such answers may be better found from the Vietnamese. Laos is, however, one area where searches of aircraft crash sites have resulted in the recent identification of some unaccounted-for Americans.

Until 1990, U.S. efforts to obtain Cambodian cooperation met with no response. However, during 1990-1992, U.S. personnel received 11 sets of remains at Phnom Penh, the Cambodian capital; three have been identified as American. In addition, just recently the remains of several Americans who were unaccounted for after the operations connected with the recovery of the ship Mayaguez in Cambodian waters in May 1975, shortly after the fall of South Vietnam, have been identified.

## **Korean War POWs/MIAs**

Since the Korean War ended in 1953, there have been rumors Americans captured by the North Koreans or Chinese were, or still are, held against their will in North Korea, China, or the former USSR. There is little doubt that the Communist powers involved in the war have withheld much information on POW/MIA from the United States.

DPMO states that although there is no first-hand, direct evidence of Korean War POWs being transferred to the Soviet Union, the cumulative weight of circumstantial evidence is so compelling that they believe that at least small numbers of Americans were in fact so transferred. There are indications that some sightings of Caucasians by foreign nationals in North Korea may be of American soldiers who defected to North Korea in the post-Korean War era. At least four such Americans who defected in the 1960s are known to be alive. Assertions of very large numbers of Americans (several hundred or more) being transferred, and/or their use as “guinea pigs” for Soviet and Soviet-bloc chemical and biological warfare experiments, has not yet been validated to any appreciable degree.

Some U.S. POWs were not released by China until 1955, 2 years after the war ended. Two civilian CIA aircrew members shot down over North Korea during the war, in 1952, were imprisoned for 20 years and not released until 1972. Declassified U.S. documents indicate that the U.S. government maintained an intensive interest in live POWs from the Korean War throughout the 1950s. The documents are more explicit than anything yet released regarding the Vietnam War. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the Soviets, Chinese, and North Koreans maintained labor camps containing millions of political prisoners. The end of the Korean War in 1953 was followed by intensely bitter relations between the U.S., the North Koreans, and the Chinese. This suggests that the two Communist enemies of the United States during the Korean War, as well as a Stalinist Soviet Union, were inclined to hold live Americans — perhaps more so than Vietnam in the 1970s.

During the mid-1950s, the U.S. demanded the North Koreans and Chinese account for missing Americans. After 1955, due to the lack of response by the Communists (except for the return of 1,868 remains in 1954), the issue abated, although the United States periodically raised the issue. In 1957, House Foreign Affairs Committee hearings on the Korean MIA issue aired frustrations similar to those raised since 1973 on Indochina MIAs. Although the issue of Korean MIAs began to get more attention in the early 1980s, concrete results of contact with the North Koreans were minimal until 1996. Between mid-1996 and mid-1997, negotiations took place in which United States and North Korea agreed on parameters for conducting field investigations and archival research for U.S. MIAs. Since 1996, U.S. personnel have completed 24 visits to North Korea that have resulted in some additional information and the return of 167 remains, of which 13 have been identified positively as Americans.

The most recent actual transfer of remains took place on October 29, 2002, when 11 remains that are possibly of Americans killed in ground combat in North Korea were repatriated to U.S. custody. Talks with North Korea completed on June 10, 2002, provided for three further operations in 2002, involving 28-person U.S. teams and lasting about a month each. The first began July 20; the last began September 28 and ended October 29. On March 29, 2003, a DPMO delegation left China after a five-day visit to increase U.S.-China cooperation on Korean War POW/MIA matters; it was not clear what, if any, specific results were obtained.

There has been some controversy about the payments the U.S. has made to North Korea for POW/MIA-related search activity. Since 1993, DPMO has paid North Korea about \$15 million for recovery operations; “as with joint recovery operations in Vietnam, Laos, and other countries, the payments are calculated by negotiating the compensation provided for the workers, materials, facilities, and equipment provided by” the North Koreans. Payment

is made in cash – literally, containers of U.S. paper currency – throughout the year, as the joint recovery operations take place. Some have alleged that the sums are a form of disguised subsidy and provide little benefit, in terms of remains found, for the amount North Korea charges, although it may be that the extremely austere conditions in North Korea make any sort of operations there difficult and expensive by American standards. See CRS Report RL31785, *U.S. Assistance to North Korea*, for further information.

## **POWs and MIAs from Cold War Incidents**

During the Cold War (1946-1991), some U.S. military aircraft were shot down by the USSR, Eastern European countries, China, and North Korea. Some of these aircraft were performing intelligence missions near or actually inside Soviet airspace; others were definitely in international airspace and/or were not involved in intelligence operations. While virtually all such aircraft losses were acknowledged at the time, often with considerable publicity, their intelligence functions were not.

Between 1946 and 1977, according to a DOD list released in 1992, there were at least 38 such incidents and one involving a ship (the seizure of the U.S.S. *Pueblo*, by the North Koreans in early 1968). Of the 364 crewmembers, 187 were eventually returned to U.S. custody, the remains of 34 were recovered, 11 were known to be dead from eyewitness reports but remains were not recovered, and 132 were “not recovered, fate unknown.” In 1956, the U.S. asked the USSR about the crews of two aircraft shot down by Soviet forces in 1950 and 1952, citing intelligence reports (apparently obtained from German and Japanese POWs from World War II, several hundred thousands of whom were not released by the Soviets until 1954-1955) that some crewmembers of these aircraft had been seen and spoken to in Soviet concentration camps. In a 1992 letter to the U.S. Senate, Russian then-President Boris Yeltsin acknowledged the shooting down of some U.S. aircraft by the Soviets and the recovery of some surviving crewmen.

The first tangible evidence of such incidents from Soviet soil came in 1994, when U.S. and Russian investigators found the remains of a U.S. Air Force officer who had been a crewmember of a U.S. plane shot down by the Soviets while performing an intelligence mission near Soviet territory in 1952. The 1993 report of the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, a 1994 Rand Corporation study, and DPMO analysis all suggest strongly that some Cold War shootdown crewmen survived and were taken prisoner by the Soviets. In September 1998, the final remains from a U.S. plane shot down by the Soviets over Soviet Armenia in 1958 were buried in Arlington National Cemetery; some remains had been returned in 1958, and others had been gathered during U.S. POW/MIA recovery operations in Armenia in 1993.

A second type of “Cold War incident” involves kidnapping of U.S. personnel in or near Soviet-occupied territory in Europe after the end of World War II, by Soviet intelligence agents. Some were allegedly identified as Americans in the late 1940s and early 1950s by German POWs who were kept by the Soviets until 1954-1955. Most, however, were defectors, or had wandered into Soviet-occupied areas for nonpolitical reasons (romantic entanglements, drunkenness, and the like). The full story of such kidnappings may well not have been told and may never be. DPMO staff is aware of some such kidnappings, but has

not yet acquired any evidence about the permanent abduction of any Americans who were never returned.

## Post-Cold War POW/MIAs

The Iraq war that began on March 19, 2003, and in which major combat operations had ended by mid-April, is the most recent illustration that the POW/MIA issue is not merely one of historical interest. The congressional concerns over Americans unaccounted for at the end of World War II and during the Cold War have been an integral component of the discussion about how to account for Americans missing or captured since then. The largest conflicts since the Cold War began to end in 1989 were the two wars with Iraq.

### The Persian Gulf War of 1991 (Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm)

A total of 49 American military personnel were initially listed as missing in action during the Persian Gulf War. Of these, 23 were captured by the Iraqis and released after the war ended, the remains of 13 were recovered, and another 13 were eventually determined to be KIA-BNR. However, the status of one of the latter 13 was changed back to MIA in January 2001, based on evidence that he may have survived and been captured, as discussed below.

**The Speicher Case.** On January 10, 2001, the Navy changed the status of Lt. Cdr. Michael Scott Speicher, shot down over Iraq during the Persian Gulf War, from killed in action to MIA. This was a major development in a complicated and lengthy case involving Lt. Cdr. Speicher's exact fate. Several members of Congress have expressed interest in the circumstances surrounding the loss of Lt. Cdr. Speicher, who was the first U.S. pilot shot down during the Persian Gulf War, on the night of January 17, 1991. Lt. Cdr. Speicher's body was never recovered. There is no doubt his aircraft was shot down and crashed in Iraq about 150 miles southwest of Baghdad. The issue is the lack of remains, resultant questions about whether he was in fact killed upon impact, and some evidence, from a variety of sources, that he was taken prisoner by the Iraqis when in relatively good physical condition.

Several members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence requested in mid-1999 that the Director of Central Intelligence and the President ensure that a more thorough investigation of the matter be made. This report received wide publicity in the press and media during the second week of March 2002, although its contents and basic findings had been known, on an unclassified basis, since its completion in March 2001. This report stated, "*We assess that Iraq can account for LCDR Speicher but that Baghdad is concealing information about his fate. LCDR Speicher probably survived the loss of his aircraft, and if he survived, he almost certainly was captured by the Iraqis*" (CRS italics). The report did not explicitly address the likelihood of his still being alive and imprisoned by Iraq at the time the report was completed. It merely suggested the strong possibility that he could have survived the crash of his aircraft and been captured alive at that time. It also stated that technical analysis of many of the objects found at the crash site, as well as the site itself, indicates that the Iraqis had been at the site, recovered a great many things, and then returned

to “plant” some of them – including the flight suit – in an attempt to mislead U.S. investigations.

Since early 2002, coverage of the Speicher case in the media has been steadily increasing, which has raised its profile among the American public and Congress. Indicative of this is that the FY2003 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 107-314, December 2, 2002; 116 Stat. 2458) requires the Secretary of Defense to begin submitting periodic reports on the Speicher case to Congress within 90 days after the bill becomes law. Most recently, a January 2003 *Washington Times* article reported that DIA had been told by an Iraqi defector that he had seen an American pilot being held in Iraq (see Bill Gertz, “New Reports Say Iraq Holding U.S. Pilot,” *Washington Times*, January 10, 2003: 1A). DIA, while stating that all such reports are investigated, also noted that it received such alleged eyewitness accounts several times a year. On January 19, it was announced that the Kuwaiti government had included the Speicher case in its negotiations with Iraq over the return of about 600 Kuwaiti citizens abducted during the 1990-1991 Iraqi occupation.

The defeat and occupation of Iraq by U.S. and British forces in March-April 2003 has not, so far, led to more information about the Speicher case, either records or knowledgeable people. At some point, U.S. and British military operations may lead to people or records who can definitively answer the question of Speicher’s fate. On the other hand, those Iraqis who know — or knew — of his status, if he was in fact captured in 1991, may themselves be dead, may have fled Iraq, or may have doffed their uniforms literally and figuratively and blended back into the postwar civilian population. In addition, efforts may have been made to destroy any evidence about the Speicher case, particularly that which could be used against them if captured by U.S. or British forces.

**Possible Consequences of the Speicher Case.** Controversies and concerns voiced about Speicher’s fate, and the U.S. government’s management of his case, may well inform discussion and policies related to any U.S. military personnel captured by enemy forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, or elsewhere. In particular, the persistence, or revival, of a “mindset to debunk,” first raised regarding Americans unaccounted for from the Vietnam War but arguably present in some echelons of the U.S. government regarding Speicher, may be a cautionary tale for those making policy on Americans taken prisoner or missing in ongoing hostilities.

## **The 2003 Iraq War: POW/MIA Issues**

On April 13, 2003, the seven remaining American soldiers known to have been captured by the Iraqis since the war began on March 19 were recovered by U.S. troops. An eighth was rescued by U.S. special operations forces in Baghdad on April 1 before the city fell to U.S. troops. A maximum of 21 U.S. military personnel have been listed as MIA since the war began; on April 28, DOD announced that the remains of the last remaining American listed as MIA had been positively identified. The appearance of some of the POWs shown on Iraqi television, evidence of their treatment found by U.S. troops who seized a hospital where they appear to have been held after capture, and the POWs own statements after being recovered on April 13 indicate some mistreatment and abuse. It is not yet clear if this mistreatment was as bad as the systematic and brutal torture inflicted on virtually all U.S. and coalition POWs by Iraq during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. In addition, it has been reported that the bodies

of five American soldiers, and Iraqi TV images of the bodies of two British POWs, suggest that they had been killed after capture.

## **POW/MIAs in Other Post-Cold War U.S. Military Operations**

Other U.S. overseas deployments and combat operations have led to smaller numbers of U.S. military personnel being captured by hostile forces and held for varying lengths of time or being rescued while evading enemy forces in enemy-held territory. These include the following.

- **1993:** one American soldier, a helicopter pilot shot down in the middle of the heavy fighting between U.S. and Somali forces on October 3-4, 1993 (that depicted in the motion picture *Black Hawk Down*), was held captive in Somalia for almost two weeks.
- **1995:** one Air Force pilot, Captain Scott O'Grady, was shot down and recovered after six days of evading enemy forces during air operations against Serb forces in Bosnia.
- **1999:** three American soldiers in Macedonia were held by the Serbs for a month; two Air Force pilots were shot down and recovered during the air war against Serbian forces over Serbia and Kosovo.
- **2002:** a U.S. Navy SEAL fell from a helicopter during combat in Afghanistan and was captured by enemy forces. His body was recovered the next day. At the time, however, other American troops saw him survive the original fall from the helicopter as the aircraft was only a few feet off the ground; he apparently was tortured and then killed. Had his captors been less brutal, he could have been a POW.

## **World War II POWs and MIAs: Soviet Imprisonment of U.S. POWs Liberated from the Germans**

There are allegations that the USSR failed to repatriate up to 25,000 American POWs liberated from the Germans after World War II ended in Europe on May 8, 1945. This appears to have no foundation in fact and results in large part from an apparent lack of rigor and care in analyzing the issue. Archival research in the United States and Russia, combined with interviews in Russia, appears to establish conclusively that virtually all such prisoners were returned. In addition, the large flow of information on Soviet concentration camps of the Stalin era, beginning in the early 1960s, both in writing and from emigre accounts, has provided no indication of mass imprisonment of Americans.

A Rand Corporation study does, however, state that 191 Americans are known not to have been repatriated by the Soviets. In addition, in 1992 Russian President Yeltsin stated that about 450 Americans were not returned, sometimes on the basis of ethnic origin. It is clear that some U.S. citizens of German birth who served in the German armed forces or lived in Germany were taken prisoner by the Red Army as it advanced into Central Europe;



in addition, the Soviet secret police singled out Americans with German, Russian, or Jewish names for special attention. Both figures are consonant with other knowledge of the arbitrary and brutal nature of the Stalinist USSR. Accounts of U.S. dealings with the USSR during and immediately after World War II on the POW issue are replete with accounts of Soviet obfuscation, truculence, and reluctant cooperation. The Joint U.S.-Russian Commission on POWs/MIAs set up by both countries to investigate these matters and Soviet involvement with U.S. POWs in other post-World War II conflicts has been operating since mid-1992 with mixed results. A good deal of information has been obtained. However, there has been considerable obstruction of the Commission's work by officials still sympathetic to Communist ideology and the former Soviet regime. See also the DPMO Web site [[http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/special/gulag\\_study.htm](http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/special/gulag_study.htm)].

## FOR ADDITIONAL READING

Cole, Paul M. POW/MIA Issues. *Volume 1, The Korean War; Volume 2, World War II and the Early Cold War; Volume 3, Appendixes*. Reports no. MR-351/1, 2, and 3-USDP. Santa Monica, CA, Rand Corporation, 1994. 284, 182, and 302 p.

Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office. Extensive statistical breakdowns, lists of individuals, and studies and analyses on POW/MIA matters from World War II to the present. [<http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo>]

Keating, Susan Katz. *Prisoners of Hope*. New York, Random House, 1994. 276 p.

Nenninger, Timothy K. "United States Prisoners of War and the Red Army, 1944-45: Myths and Realities." *The Journal of Military History*, July 2002: 761-82.

U.S. Congress. Senate. Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs. *POW/MIA's. Report*. January 13, 1993. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1993 (103rd Congress, 1st session. S.Rept. 103-1). 1223 p.

Yarsinske, Amy Waters. *No One Left Behind: The Lt. Comdr. Michael Scott Speicher Story*. New York, Dutton/Penguin Putnam, Inc., July 2002. 292 p.

## CRS Products

CRS Report RL30606. *U.S. Prisoners of War and Civilian American Citizens Captured and Interned by Japan in World War II: The Issue of Compensation by Japan*.

CRS Issue Brief IB98033. *The Vietnam-U.S. Normalization Process*.