

**Timeline of Failure
Defense Prisoner and Missing Personnel Office (DPMO)
Failures on the POW/MIA Issue
July 31, 2013**

This White Paper details a thirty (30) year pattern of failure of government efforts in matters relating to American service members unaccounted for from past wars and listed as Prisoners of War or Missing in Action (POW/MIAs).

Historically, two entities within the Executive Branch handled intelligence matters relating to POW/MIAs from Southeast Asia. They are the Defense Intelligence Agency (war years – 1993) and the Defense Prisoner and Missing Personnel Office (1993 – present.)

Throughout the years, DIA, and DPMO were the targets of both formal Inspector General and in house investigations for their failures and mishandling of the POW/MIA issue. Each investigation found both agencies deficient. Recommended corrective action was rarely implemented. When implemented it rarely lasted as the office slipped back into familiar patterns. Indeed subsequent investigations found many of the same deficiencies. Beyond the official investigation are the memos and comments from analysts within the DPMO.

The timeline presented here evidences a clear pattern of failure, first on the part of the POW/MIA section at DIA and then within DPMO.

In order to get a clear picture of todays systemic and ongoing failures one must go back in time to review early evaluations of DIA/DPMO's handling of the POW/MIA issue. This review will prove the old adage; "the more things change, the more they stay the same."

DIA/DPMO

1983 – Inspector General Investigation in POW/MIA Office at DIA

"The branch was overexposed to external pressures and the present internal organization as well as current management of old voluminous files did not allow for an efficient operation. Morale and intelligence analysis suffered as a result..."¹

1983 – 1884 – Review by Ken deGraffenried, member of the National Security Council -

Memorandum for Record - written by Robert Taylor an investigator for the Senate Select Committee, in 1992. Mr. Taylor reported his interview with Mr. deGraffenried and his involvement with POW/MIA matters this way.

"To quote Mr. deGraffenreid precisely, the "people working that issue, could not find a POW, if a POW dropped on their head." He went on to say that no one working the problem "was willing to suspend their belief that the Vietnamese had no rational reason for holding POWs, in order to do objective analysis." As a result, he said, "This did not lead to an intellectually honest judgment. He concluded the problem in the intelligence community was deeper than a cover-up, which would be fairly easy to resolve by firing those involved. He termed it a "systemic bias in the process" that inhibited any creative ideas and led to their "trying to explain away anomalies."²

1985 – Inspector General Investigation

“PW/MIA office did not have a formal set of standard operating procedures... There were misperceptions within the PW/MIA office concerning the mission and functions of the office... There can be no improvement to the worsening situation until a policy and public relations interface is inserted between the DIA and the rest of the world. The situation cannot be remedied from within the Agency.”³

1985 - Memorandum written by then Commodore Thomas Brooks, DIA’s Assistant Deputy Director of Collection Management handling POW/MIA matters.

Addressed to Brig. General Shufelt, head of DIA, the September 25 1985 memorandum states, in part,

1. (C) I was not at all pleased with the situation I found when I took over responsibility for the POW/MIA issue. The deeper I looked, the less professional the operation appeared. It appeared to be particularly sloppy in the late seventies, but it is by no means a squared-away operation today...

Brooks when on to outline a laundry list of failures. Among them

“Case files were incomplete, sloppy (all mixed-up, loose papers, undated scribbled analyst notes, misfiled papers, etc.) and generally unprofessional... No action logs in the cases or where there were logs; entries had not been made in long time.... In some cases, obvious follow-up actions were called for but were never taken and years had passed.... Efforts to re-contact sources in the U.S. were perfunctory at best and normally amounted to merely trying to contact them by telephone rather than using local DOD or law enforcement agencies to track them down and then calling on them in person.”⁴

Addressing the “mindset to debunk,” Brooks concluded,

“...There is an element of truth to this as well.... The analysts have seen so many fabrications for so long that their first subconscious reaction is "this is just more of the same garbage." And most of it is. But some may not be. Frustrating as it all is, they have got to run all the leads to the ground. They have not been doing this as faithfully as they should.... thus, the "mindset to debunk" charge and the "sloppy analysis" charge are closely related.”⁵

Brooks concluded his critique with this ominous warning.

“I am afraid we are in for some troubled times. We have not done our job as well as we should have in days passed and we will not withstand scrutiny very well. Yet we will receive plenty of scrutiny in days to come. We must make all preparations to minimize the criticism this scrutiny will bring.”⁶

1986 – The Gaines Task Force

In February of 1986, General Leonard Perroots, head of DIA directed Lt. Col. Kimble Gaines to conduct “a hardnosed objective examination of PW/MIA substantive issues and procedures.”⁷

The Results - The Gaines Task Force found “serious shortcomings in every important area: attitudes, management procedure, organization and leadership.”⁸ The report cited “17 major issues which derived from these findings...”⁹ Heading the list of major issues is the “mindset to debunk.”

“Unhealthy attitudes are evident in the deeply defensive mindset which promotes a rigid inflexibility towards criticism and an adversarial approach to those with strong dissenting views. There also tends to be a strong moralistic bias at work, which manifests as a preoccupation with everybody’s motives and unrealistic expectations with regard to source accuracy. This could also be termed the “Mindset to debunk...”¹⁰

1991 – Resignation Letter of Col. Millard “Mike Peck, Chief of DIA’s Special Office for Prisoners of War and Missing in Action.

On February 12, 1991 Col. Millard “Mike” Peck submitted his letter of resignation as DIA’s Chief of the Special Office for Prisoners of War and Missing in Action. The four page missive paints quite a dismal picture. The critical portion echoing the charges of Commodore Brooks and Col. Gaines more than five years earlier states:

“The Mindset to Debunk. The mindset to “debunk” is alive and well. It is held at all levels, and continues to pervade the POW-MIA Office, which is not necessarily the fault of DIA. Practically all analysis is directed to finding fault with the Source. Rarely has there been any effective, active follow through on any of the sightings, nor is there a responsive “action arm” to routinely and aggressively pursue leads. The latter was a moot point, anyway, since the Office was continuously buried in an avalanche of “ad hoc” taskings from every quarter, all of which required an immediate response. It was impossible to plan ahead or prioritize course of action. Any real effort to pursue live sighting reports or exercise initiative was diminished by the plethora of “busy work” projects, directed by high authority outside of DIA. A number of these grandiose endeavors bordered on the ridiculous, and – quite significantly – there was never an audit trail. None of these taskings was ever requested formally. There was, and still is refusal by any of the players to follow normal intelligence channels in dealing with the POW-MIA Office.”¹¹

1993 – Finding of the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs

“The U.S. government process for accounting for American’s missing in Southeast Asia has been flawed by a lack of organization clarity, coordination and consistency.”¹²

1993 – The Formation of DPMO

Sadly, the solution to the problems within DIA’s POW/MIA Office was the formation of DPMO. Why didn’t this new agency solve the problems identified by the Senate report? The answer is simple. The individuals working the POW/MIA issue at DIA simply moved to the newly formed DPMO. Nothing changed but the name of the organization. The leadership failures and mindset to debunk that permeated DIA, took root in the new DPMO.

1995 – Inspector General Report, Review of DPMO

“Like building a ship while under sail it is not easy to meld disparate organizational entities together while faced with multiple operational demands. However, that is the challenge faced by the DPMO. Our initial research at DPMO led us to conclude that the organization lacked; (1) Well defined missions and tasks, (2) A planning system to see that major goals were accomplished, and (3) A stable organizational structure that supported effective Management.”

"To assist the office in tackling these areas, we outlined methods that we believe will help the organizations define its mission, establish a planning system, and structure its organization. We recognize the difficulty in setting aside time for such process building. However, without the strong leadership that such actions require, the organization will continue to experience difficulty in justifying its resources requirements and completing the assigned mission."¹³

1997 – A Voice from Within

On April 28, 1997, Dr. Timothy Castle, the Chief of DPMO's Southeast Asia Archival Research, addressed a detailed twelve-page memo to Lt. Col Man, of DPMO's Plans and Policy chronicling the mishandling of Case 2052 within DPMO. Case 2052 involves eleven men missing from a then top secret radar base located on a mountain top in Laos.

While Dr. Castle never uses the term “mindset to debunk” the following clearly paints the picture and illustrates similar points made six years earlier by Col. Peck and twelve years earlier by Commodore Brooks. In his memo, Dr. Castle wrote:

“As a two-tour combat veteran of the Vietnam war, school-trained intelligence officer with a doctorate in Southeast Asian history, over two decades of unique travel throughout Southeast Asia (including the location of REFNO 2052), and the author of numerous book reviews, articles, and an internationally recognized book on the war in Laos, I will frame this case within its correct political/military historical setting. Why is this necessary? Because DPMO needs to produce unimpeachable analytical recommendations based on the very best available information. While we would never accept less than state-of-the-art computers to perform our work, LtCol Schiff and Mr. Destatte continue to base their conclusions regarding REFNO 2052 on outdated information. In an effort to protect their faulty conclusions, they have concealed and misrepresented any information which does not fit their perspective. Moreover, they are predisposed to give greater credence to the “recollections” of communist officials than to contemporaneous U.S. records and the memory of American witnesses. The result - a corrupt analytical determination which is factually, intellectually, and morally indefensible.”¹⁴

Dr. Castle went on to say:

“More trouble is the lack of intellectual honesty and integrity shown by LtCol. Schiff and Mr. Destatte. Apparently unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the importance of rigorous oral argument and proper documentation, LtCol Schiff and Mr. Destatte regularly justify their “analysis” with misrepresentations and falsehoods... Mr. Destatte had the important responsibility of providing the assigned analysts with all available information. Surely the presence of this important cadre and his pervasive involvement in the interview would need to be considered by the analysts in their judgment of Mr. Muc's credibility? Mr. Destatte, for reasons best known to himself and the Vietnamese, concealed this information and then lied to cover-up his omission.”¹⁵

Dr. Castle ended his memo saying;

“REFNO 2052 must be assigned to a qualified analyst and all of the information developed over the past three years must be included in the comprehensive review. LtCol Schiff and Mr. Destatte, lacking the ethics and analytical capabilities to perform work in DPMO, should show the good grace to resign. Since this is unlikely to occur, however, DPMO leadership should strongly consider their continuing impact on case resolution. How many other cases will suffer, and never be correctly resolved, due to their actions? Strongly recommend that this memo, along with those prepared by Mr. Rosenau, LtCol Schiff, and Mr. Destatte be provided to the families; they deserve to know the full story.”¹⁶

It should be noted that Mr. Robert Destatte was among the staff that transitioned from DIA’s POW/MIA branch to DPMO.

2004 – Another Voice from Within

Former intelligence analyst Warren Gray wrote the note, reproduced below. During his approximately 20 years of service, he worked for both the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the Defense POW/MIA Office (DPMO.) The note written just prior to Mr. Gray’s retirement is a stinging indictment of the failures within DPMO. Although the note is dated, now almost 9 years old, we believe the problems cited, including the lack of will to follow-up on investigative leads continues to this day.

Gentlemen: This being my last day in DPMO, I wanted to say so long to each of you since you are truly representative of the few good people left in DPMO. As of today I have 19 years and 8 months as a civilian. Since I was denied access to work the POW issue (regarding Southeast Asia) by Joe Harvey when I returned on 2 February 2002 from the position of Collection Manager with the DIA POW/MIA Analytic Cell, and since I have done essentially little or nothing since then, I figured it was time to go of my own free will.

I remain extremely disappointed regarding many aspects of the POW issue, but this is neither the time nor place to go into detail about those many issues. I do plan to sit at home and write and may publish details of the listing later. I anticipate it will include at a minimum the fact that the military personnel in DPMO have effectively been “reorganized” out of this military issue; failure of this organization to respond to a report of live Americans in SEA; the 185 report; POWs moved from Laos to Vietnam; the Schederov report about Hrdlicka; why I feel the Lao have not and never will cooperate in the issue; Lao retention of a file cabinet containing POW information that we never requested; my proposal to approach Lao doctors in Beijing who worked previously with American POWs in NE Laos; the DPMO attitude towards Stony Beach; my position on the Spelcher case, my position on the Deferred and No Further Pursuit cases, and as you can see, this would be a long listing since these few topics are but the tip of the iceberg. I was never introduced to the DASD during the two year back which was probably a good thing, since I would have taken him through several of the topics listed above.

Although my plans were to go into full retirement and help my wife with our seven grandchildren, after I decided I would retire, and announced my plans, I was offered two jobs with security firms that specialize in conducting background investigations. I have 20-years experience as a counterintelligence special agent in the Army conducting those type investigations, so I have accepted the position of Consultant / Investigator with the ManTech Corporation, and will conduct background investigations from home.

My hat is off to each of you; good luck in this issue. I am sure I left off a few names above that I wanted to say good-bye to and if I remember later, will call them.

Warren

When Mr. Gray's letter came into our possession, we contacted him and he expanded on the points made in his letter. Mr. Gray provided detailed information on each of his points and that information is available upon request. Due to space constraints, we will focus on two significant items from Mr. Gray's laundry list.

"DPMO has no interest in using Stony Beach personnel for collection purposes, debriefings, investigations or any other type activity, and has shown that inclination time and again. In 2001, when the DIA POW/MIA Analytic Cell proposed Stony Beach operations to pursue information relative to Phou Pha Thi (Note: Phou Pha Thi is also known as Lima Site 85 REFNO 2052. See Dr. Castle's memo above) and other areas of high interest, DPMO stated it was not interested, and would not issue the collection requirements...

In February 1993 during hearings before Congressman Dornan's committee, Dana Rohrabacher from California opined that it was his opinion that the Vietnamese kept about 200 American POWs behind as bargaining chips. That may have happened.

In November 1993 DPMO received a report that American POWs had been held in SEA after Homecoming, possibly as late as 1976, and that the number was 185. An immediate effort was made to go back to the original source to obtain further information, without success. The report was deemed to be so important and possibly credible that the collection representative was directed to follow the situation and to conduct frequent follow-ups which did not happen.

In January 1998 members of the Joint Commission Support Directorate (JCSD) within DPMO decided to investigate the report and asked the collection representative for access. The collection representative stated that she had no idea which report they were talking about, therefore could not furnish it.

Only after JCSD personnel threatened to demand an Inspector General investigation into the loss was the report "found." Later in 1998 JCSD did what it could with limited resources to investigate the report; that was the last action to check out the possible credible information. Details of the report have never been taken to any country within SEA to demand an explanation, perhaps because the implications of the report were that the country in question could never have been deemed to be cooperating in the POW issue if the report was true.

The same collection representative that received the report in 1993, that lost the report in 1998 and who would have been responsible for any follow-up since its receipt, remains in place, and the report remains unresolved. During the mid 1990's a Russian geologist was interviewed and reported that he was told in 1976 by Vietnamese counterparts that the Vietnamese Government at that time was holding live American POWs.

Does this report substantiate the earlier reporting? No one knows since neither report has been investigated further or in-depth."¹⁷

2005 – General Accounting Office Report August 25

Mandated by the 2005 Defense Authorization Act, this report concluded:

“DOD has not clarified the precise scope of DPMO's roles and missions. Moreover, the recently issued strategic plan lacks key elements, such as performance metrics and linkages between resources and performance goals. As a result, neither the Secretary of Defense nor the Congress have sufficient knowledge about how DPMO intends to accomplish its current missions or, if it is assigned new missions, how the office intends to apportion its resources. Until a formal needs assessment for DPMO's workload is conducted, Congress and DOD cannot make informed decisions about what level of resources to assign to DPMO or encourage it to assume additional responsibilities, nor can the Secretary of Defense fulfill his statutory responsibility to ensure that DPMO has adequate resources.”¹⁸

2013 – Leak of the Cole Report and Release of GAO Study

Commodore Brooks wrote in 1985, “I am afraid we are in for some troubled times. We have not done our job as well as we should have in days passed and we will not withstand scrutiny very well.”

As it was beginning 1983, in 2013 those charged with POW/MIA matters do not “withstand scrutiny very well.”

For Additional Information Contact

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1 Defense Intelligence Agency Inspector General Investigation Report dated March 24, 1983

2 Memo for the Record Prepared by Bob Taylor, 10 August 1992 – Subject: Phone interview with ken deGraffenreid August 7, 1992

3 Defense Intelligence Agency Inspector General Investigation Report dated February 27, 1985

4 Memorandum for BGen Shufelt from Commodore Thomas Brooks dated 25 September 1985, Subject: The POW/MIA Issue

5 Memorandum for BGen Shufelt from Commodore Thomas Brooks dated 25 September 1985, Subject: The POW/MIA Issue

6 Memorandum for BGen Shufelt from Commodore Thomas Brooks dated 25 September 1985, Subject: The POW/MIA Issue

7 “Director’s PW/MIA Task Force Report” – Lt. Col. Kimble Gaines dated 18 March 1986

8 “Director’s PW/MIA Task Force Report” – Lt. Col. Kimble Gaines dated 18 March 1986

9 “Director’s PW/MIA Task Force Report” – Lt. Col. Kimble Gaines dated 18 March 1986

10 “Director’s PW/MIA Task Force Report” – Lt. Col. Kimble Gaines dated 18 March 1986

11 Resignation Letter of Col. Millard Peck 12 February 1991

12 Final Report Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs 13 January 1993

13 Inspector General – “A White Paper The Defense Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Office August 1995

14 Memo of Dr. Timothy Castle 28 April 1997

15 Memo of Dr. Timothy Castle 28 April 1997

16 Memo of Dr. Timothy Castle 28 April 1997

17 Email from Warren Gray

18 GAO Report August 25 2005