

The National Alliance of Families offers recommendations to correct past problems.

The leak of the Cole Report in July 2013, and the release days later of a GAO Report described a mismanaged and dysfunctional effort to locate, recover and identify American Prisoners of War and those listed as Missing in Action worldwide. The uproar from POW/MIA families, veterans, concerned citizens and the media forced Congress and the Department of Defense to act.

On March 31, 2014, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel ordered the total reorganization of the POW/MIA accounting effort, promising POW/MIA families they would have input in the process. The National Alliance of Families offered the following recommendation to correct past problems and regain the trust of POW/MIA families.

1. An immediate review of all Last Known Alive cases now considered "fate determined." In many of these cases DPMO/JPAC ignored, misrepresented or edited evidence to support its conclusion of "fate determined." An analyst and a family member or their authorized representative should meet to discuss and evaluate all evidence on a case with each providing their rationale for the conclusion reached. If this review indicates a premature "fate determination" the case must be returned to the list of unaccounted for, for additional investigation. If the analyst and family member/representative cannot reach an agreed upon conclusion, the case should go to an outside arbitrator for evaluation.

2. A review of all POW/MIA cases using the standards described above.

3. An immediate review of all remains identifications, by an independent board of forensic anthropologists, odontologists, medical examiners and DNA experts. When a review indicates a mis-identification or scientifically unsupportable identification that case must be reviewed and if appropriate returned to the list of unaccounted for, for further investigation.

4. Immediately remove all personnel in upper and mid-level management and analysts currently working the POW/MIA issue. We cannot allow their mindset to contaminate a new organization. The transfer, in 1993, of DIA personnel to the newly formed DPMO proves this.

5. Work with Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) in the recovery and identification of remains worldwide. This would be especially beneficial in the recovery of World War II remains and the exhumation of World War II and Korean War remains buried with name associations in national cemeteries.

6. Suspend the use of the inferior mt-DNA in the remains identification process in favor of the proven and far more accurate Nuclear DNA testing.

7. Establish an independent ombudsman to whom POW/MIA families could address their concerns and complaints.

A new organization cannot expect the trust of POW/MIA families by saying "going forward we will get it right." To gain the trust of POW/MIA families any new organization must address the mistakes of the past, as it moves forward.